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THE IMPACT OF SOCIALLY PRESCRIBED PERFECTIONISM ON PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT WITH CONSIDERATION OF GENDER DIFFERENCES: A STUDY AMONG IT SPECIALISTS IN MOLDOVA

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This article examines the relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and professional burnout among IT specialists in Moldova, with a focus on analyzing gender differences in this correlation. The study is based on data collected using standardized surveys, including the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale by Hewitt and Flett and the Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT). The results confirm the hypothesis that socially prescribed perfectionism significantly correlates with the level of professional burnout. Furthermore, it was found that gender differences influence this relationship, with men showing higher correlation rates between perfectionism and burnout. The article discusses both theoretical and practical aspects of the results, highlighting the need to consider gender differences when developing corporate programs aimed at reducing stress and preventing professional burnout. Recommendations are provided for HR departments of IT companies, emphasizing the importance of creating tailored support programs to reduce perfectionistic expectations and enhance employees' psychological well-being.

Keywords: *professional burnout, socially prescribed perfectionism, IT specialists, gender differences, psychological well-being, work-related stress, Moldova.*

IMPACTUL PERFEȚIONISMULUI SOCIAL PRESCRIS ASUPRA EPUIZĂRII PROFESIONALE CU CONSIDERAREA DIFERENȚELOR DE GEN: UN STUDIU PRINTRE SPECIALIȘTII IT DIN MOLDOVA

Acest articol examinează relația dintre perfecționismul social prescris și epuizarea profesională în rândul specialiștilor IT din Moldova, cu un accent pe analiza diferențelor de gen în această corelație. Studiul se bazează pe date colectate folosind chestionare standardizate, inclusiv Scala Multidimensională a Perfecționismului de Hewitt și Flett și Instrumentul de Evaluare a Epuizării (BAT). Rezultatele confirmă ipoteza că perfecționismul social prescris corelează semnificativ cu nivelul de epuizare profesională. În plus, s-a constatat că diferențele de gen influențează această relație, bărbații prezentând rate mai mari de corelație între perfecționism și epuizare. Articolul discută atât aspectele teoretice, cât și cele practice ale rezultatelor, subliniind necesitatea de a lua în considerare diferențele de gen la dezvoltarea programelor corporative destinate reducerii stresului și prevenirii epuizării profesionale. Sunt furnizate recomandări pentru departamentele de resurse umane ale companiilor IT, subliniind importanța creării unor programe de sprijin personalizate pentru a reduce așteptările perfecționiste și a îmbunătăți bunăstarea psihologică a angajaților.

Cuvinte-cheie: *epuizare profesională, perfecționism social prescris, specialiști IT, diferențe de gen, bunăstare psihologică, stres legat de muncă, Moldova.*

Introduction

Professional burnout is a phenomenon actively studied in many professional fields, including the high-tech information technology sector. Research conducted by Flett and Hewitt shows that perfectionism can significantly contribute to the development of stress and burnout, especially when individuals set unjustifiably high demands on themselves [2]. In the Republic of Moldova, where the IT sector is in the stage of intensive development, studying factors such as socially prescribed perfectionism becomes particularly important.

Perfectionism, as defined in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), is the tendency to set excessively high standards for oneself and others, striving for flawlessness [5]. A person experiencing perfectionism often feels the need to present themselves as perfect or at least ideal, believing in their ability to achieve this standard. This striving for an ideal can act as psychological protection, helping to avoid pain, guilt, shame, and judgment. Perfectionism, particularly socially prescribed, is described as an individual's perception of external expectations for their professional performance [3]. Stoeber and colleagues argue that this type of perfectionism correlates with high levels of stress and psychological discomfort. Studies confirm that in environments with constantly increasing demands, such as the IT industry, the pressure on employees significantly increases [9].

In addition to perfectionism, gender differences also influence the level of professional burnout. Research by Purvanova and Muros showed that women in male-dominated fields such as IT often experience higher levels of stress and burnout [6].

These differences may be related to additional social expectations placed on women and the necessity of balancing professional and personal life.

In our study, we analyzed data collected from IT specialists in Moldova to identify the relationship between various forms of perfectionism and professional burnout. The results showed that among all forms of perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionism has the most significant impact on the level of professional burnout. This emphasizes the importance of considering social expectations and pressures that may be imposed on employees in strategies for preventing and reducing burnout.

Understanding that external demands and expectations can significantly affect employees' psychological state requires further study and the development of targeted programs aimed at reducing stress and improving overall well-being in the professional environment. Additionally, it is assumed that gender differences can influence the level of experienced burnout and how perfectionism is perceived and affects individuals. Understanding these differences in the context of the Moldovan IT sector can enrich the academic knowledge base on this issue and provide practical recommendations for local companies and HR specialists.

The aim of this study is to analyze the relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and professional burnout among IT specialists in Moldova, with a particular focus on studying gender differences. We aim to identify how various aspects of perfectionism correlate with burnout and determine whether there are significant differences between men and women in this aspect.

Within the framework of these objectives, we formulated the following *hypotheses*:

1. Socially prescribed perfectionism positively correlates with the level of professional burnout among IT specialists in Moldova.
2. Gender differences influence the relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and the level of professional burnout.

Methodology and Research Strategy

The study was carefully designed to ensure its relevance and reliability. The preparatory stage involved developing a detailed research plan, which included the selection of validated diagnostic tools and clear criteria for participant inclusion.

Participation in the study was restricted to employees of the IT sector in Moldova to guarantee that the findings would address the specific needs and challenges of this professional field. Two standardized tools were used to measure the main variables:

1. The Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale developed by Hewitt and Flett (1991) [4], which evaluates three dimensions of perfectionism: self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism. For this study, the socially prescribed perfectionism subscale was used to assess the perception of external expectations for achieving high standards.
2. The Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT) by Schaufeli, Desart, and De Witte (2020) [8], which measures burnout across dimensions such as emotional exhaustion, internal distancing, cognitive and emotional difficulties, and secondary symptoms.

Data Collection Procedures

All research procedures were conducted anonymously. Participants filled out online questionnaires hosted on the Google Forms platform, allowing data collection without disclosing respondents' personal information. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, with guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality of all responses.

Sample Description

The study included 120 participants from the IT sector of the Republic of Moldova. The composition of the participants was as follows:

Gender: 58% men, 42% women.

Age groups:

18-24 years - 13%;

25-34 years - 39%;

35-44 years - 38%;

45-54 years - 7%;

55 years and older - 3%.

Position type: 78% specialists, 22% managers.

The participants were selected using a targeted sampling method to ensure relevance to the research objectives. The sample reflects the gender disparity in the IT sector, where men traditionally dominate. Age groups were chosen to represent key career stages in IT, ranging from entry-level professionals (18–24 years) to senior-level specialists and managers (35–44 years and above). All participants had at least one year of experience in the IT sector.

This detailed description ensures the representativeness and relevance of the sample to the goals of the study. In our study, particular attention was paid to two main variables: socially prescribed perfectionism and the level of professional burnout.

General Level of Professional Burnout

The general level of professional burnout was measured using the BAT scale developed by Schaufeli and colleagues. This scale assesses burnout through several variables, including emotional exhaustion, internal distancing, cognitive and emotional difficulties, as well as secondary symptoms on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (constantly), including 33 items.

Socially Prescribed Perfectionism

Socially prescribed perfectionism refers to individuals' perception of others' expectations that they should meet high standards of performance and achieve impeccable results. This variable is measured by assessing the degree to which a person feels external pressure to be perfect and responds to this pressure by striving for unattainable standards. The assessment was carried out using the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale by Hewitt and Flett, which measures self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism through 45 items. Participants' responses were recorded using direct statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and reverse statements on a scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree).

Data Collection and Analysis

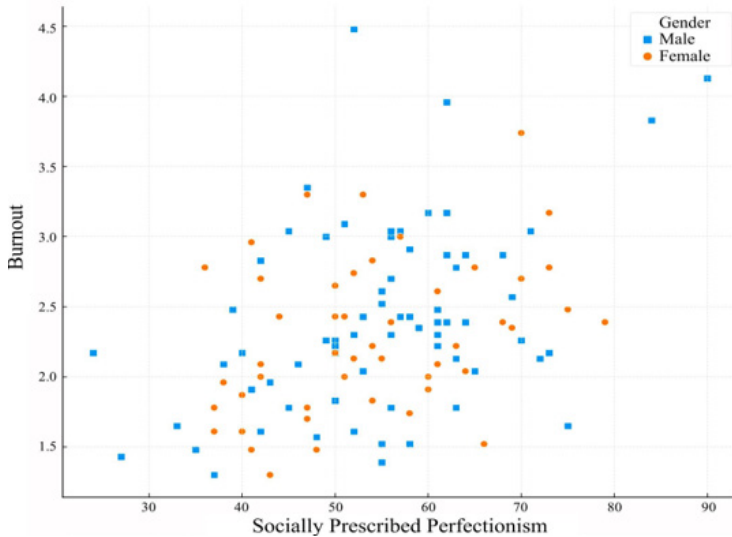
The questionnaires were distributed among IT specialists via email and social networks, ensuring convenient and quick data collection. Statistical methods, including correlation and regression analyses, were used to analyze the data, performed using the SPSS statistical package. These methods allowed us to assess the relationships between perfectionism and burnout and test the study's hypotheses.

Ensuring Reliability of the Study

To ensure the reliability of the results, procedures for checking the completeness and consistency

of the questionnaire responses were applied. The results were analyzed for internal consistency of the scales, confirming their suitability for analyzing the relationships between the studied phenomena.

Figure 1. Relationship between burnout and socially prescribed perfectionism by gender.



Results

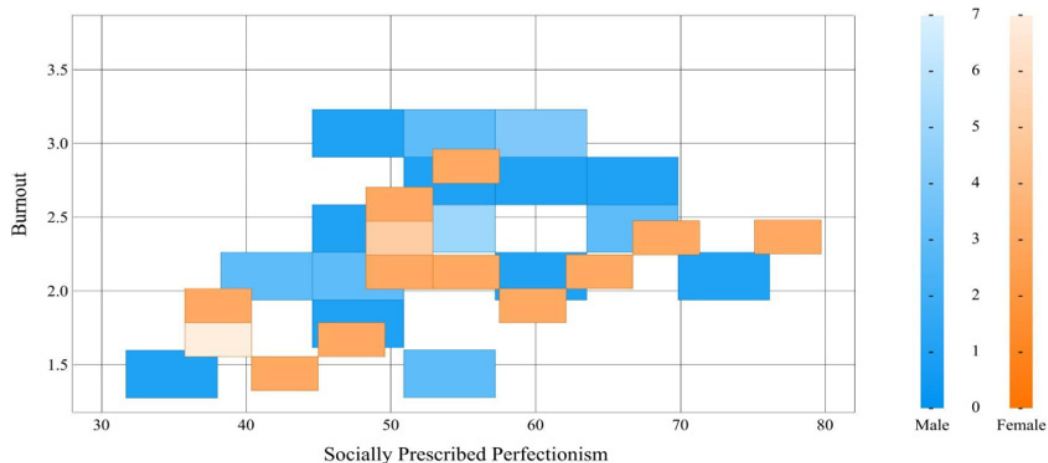
The scatter plot (Fig. 1) visually illustrates the distribution of burnout levels depending on the degree of socially prescribed perfectionism among men and women. The data show higher burnout levels for men compared to women.

Statistical analysis confirmed a significant positive correlation between socially prescribed perfectionism and professional burnout among IT specialists in Moldova. The correlation coefficient for men was 0.42 ($p < 0.01$), indicating a moderate positive relationship, while for women it was slightly lower at 0.37 ($p < 0.05$), also reflecting a positive correlation but less pronounced than for men. These findings highlight the link between

socially prescribed perfectionism and burnout, with notable gender differences.

The regression analysis confirmed that socially prescribed perfectionism explains 18% of the variability in the level of professional burnout among men and 14% among women. The cumulative histogram (Fig. 2) illustrates the distribution of burnout levels depending on the degree of socially prescribed perfectionism for both gender groups.

Figure 2. Distribution of burnout levels depending on the degree of socially prescribed perfectionism for men and women.



These results demonstrate that socially prescribed perfectionism affects professional burnout, with a stronger influence observed in men.

Discussion

The analysis of our study data confirmed the first hypothesis, indicating a significant positive correlation between socially prescribed perfectionism and the level of professional burnout among IT specialists in Moldova. This finding is consistent with the theory suggesting that striving to meet high social expectations can increase stress and contribute to burnout, highlighting the need for strategies to manage perfectionistic tendencies in the workplace [1, 7].

The second hypothesis was also confirmed by identifying gender differences in the degree of influence of socially prescribed perfectionism on professional burnout. Men showed higher correlation coefficients, which may reflect gender-specific expectations in the professional environment and differences in coping strategies for stress. Such data can form the basis for developing targeted programs to prevent burnout, taking into account gender characteristics.

Possible Explanations for the Found Relationships and Differences

Gender differences may be due to cultural and social factors that shape different expectations for men and women in the professional environment. Men may experience increased pressure related to achieving success and demonstrating competence, requiring further research to understand the dynamics of perfectionism in various gender and cultural contexts.

Discussion of Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Our findings are limited to the specific context of the IT industry in Moldova, which may reduce the generalizability of the results to other professions or cultural contexts. It is recommended to conduct similar studies in other countries and sectors to compare burnout and perfectionism levels in different cultural and professional contexts. It would also be useful to study other factors influencing professional burnout, including colleague support and organizational culture.

Conclusion

This study confirmed a significant relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and professional burnout among IT specialists in Moldova, with notable gender differences. The findings highlight the importance of addressing gender-specific experiences with social pressure and perfectionism when designing stress management and burnout prevention strategies.

HR departments in Moldovan IT companies are encouraged to develop tailored programs that address these gender-specific challenges, including targeted training on managing expectations and stress, regular employee surveys to monitor burnout levels, and adaptive workplace support systems to enhance effectiveness.

Future studies in other countries and industries could further explore the universality of these patterns and deepen understanding of the role of corporate culture, organizational support, and socio-psychological factors in professional burnout. Additionally, examining individual coping strategies for perfectionism could aid in designing comprehensive programs to improve employees' psychological well-being.

The results contribute to the literature on professional burnout and offer practical insights for improving workplace well-being in the IT sector.

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