

A Predisposition for Perfectionism: Are Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners 'Well-Beings'?



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Abstract

This project investigated the link between perfectionism and burnout in trainee PWP. A convenience sample of trainee PWPs completed validated measures of burnout and perfectionism at the beginning of modules 1 (T1), 2 (T2) and 3 (T3) and the end of the training year (T4). Average study time and clinical, administration and supervision hours they engaged in weekly were collected at T2, T3, and T4. Correlation coefficients showed a significant positive correlation between exhaustion and narcissistic perfectionism ($r=0.812$, $p<0.05$) and supervision and study time ($r=0.658$, $p<0.05$). Supervision and burnout were negatively correlated ($r=-0.658$, $p<0.05$). Self-critical perfectionism decreased between T1 and T4 ($t=5.099$, $p<0.05$). Higher levels of burnout were reported at T4 ($t=-0.373$, $p<0.05$). The findings support previous research that suggest burnout is problematic in the PWP role, which may begin at trainee status, however, supervision may be a protective factor. In contrast to previous research findings self-critical perfectionism and burnout were unrelated, however self-critical perfectionism reduced between T1 and T4, suggesting trainees may relax some perfectionist traits over time.

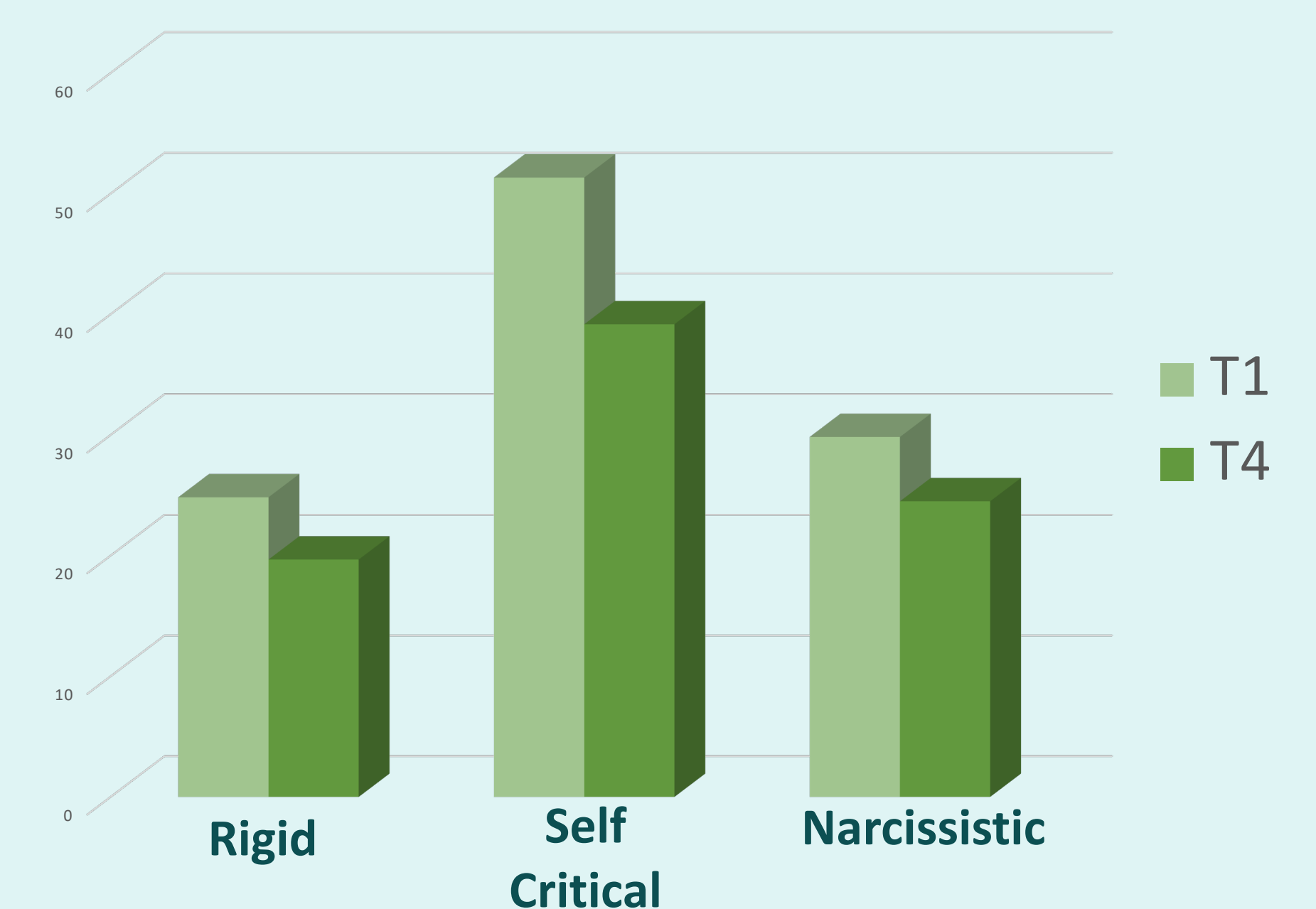
Background

Up to 69% of PWPs report problematic levels of burnout (Westwood et al., 2017) which may begin in the training year (Owen et al., 2021). From their systematic review, Owen et al., tentatively discussed that trainees experience levels of burnout equal or higher to their qualified colleagues. A potential source of this burnout may be perfectionist traits that have been shown to be on the rise over the last two decades (Curran and Hill, 2019). Burnout has also been associated with increased patient contact hours, higher levels of administration hours and fewer hours of supervision (Westwood et al., 2017). Given that PWP retention is problematic (Kell and Baguley, 2018) we aim to investigate associations between burnout and perfectionism and whether trainee PWPs are already burnout at the start of their qualified roles.

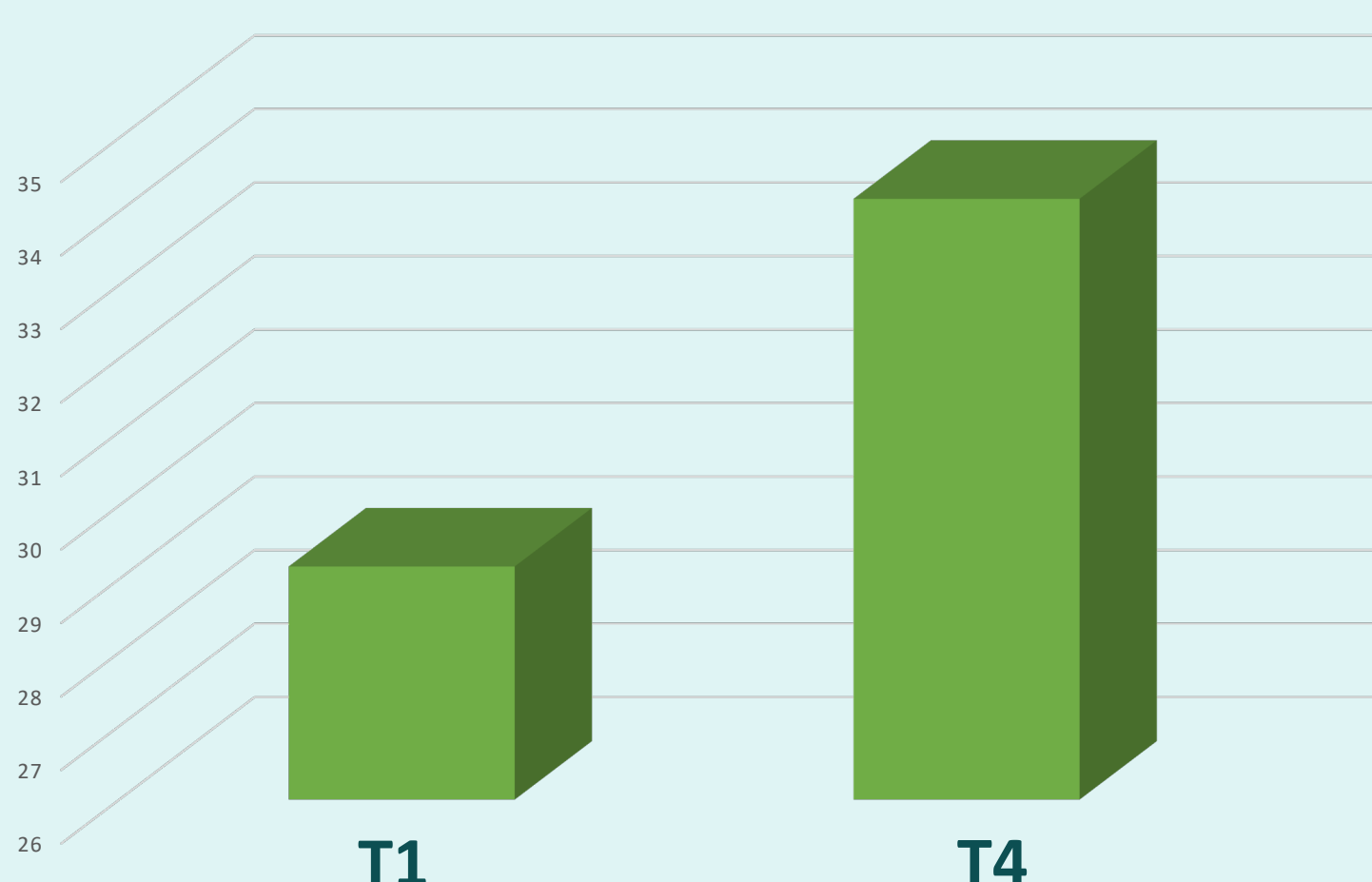
Method

A convenience sample of trainee PWPs ($n=29$) completed repeated measures of burnout and perfectionism at four time points throughout the training year via an online survey. Baseline measures were completed upon commencement of the course (T1), then again following completion of module 1 (T2), module 2 (T3), and module 3 (T4). Burnout was measured using Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti & Bakker, 2008) and consisted of two subscales: exhaustion and disengagement, which could be summed to give an overall total score. Perfectionism was measured using the Big Three Perfectionism Scale (Smith et al., 2016) with higher-order factors measuring: rigid, self-critical and narcissistic perfectionism. In addition, participants reported average amount of study time, patient contact hours, administration, and supervision time in hours per week.

Perfectionism Higher Order Factors



Overall Burnout Scores



Results

Higher levels of overall burnout were reported at T4 compared to T1 ($t = -0.373$, $p < 0.05$). There were no significant differences found between T1 and T4 for rigid and narcissistic perfectionism, however self-critical perfectionism decreased over time ($t = 5.099$, $p < 0.05$). No significant correlations were found between burnout and perfectionist scales, with the exception of exhaustion and narcissistic perfectionism ($r = 0.812$, $p < 0.05$). Supervision and burnout were negatively correlated ($r = -0.658$, $p < 0.05$), and supervision and study time were positively correlated ($r = 0.658$, $p < 0.05$).

Discussion

The findings add to the limited research on the wellbeing of trainee practitioners within the NHS Talking Therapies initiative. In line with previous research (Owen et al., 2021; Westwood et al., 2017), results suggest that burnout is prevalent and increases throughout the training programme. Supervision was identified as a potential protective factor against burnout, in line with previous research (Westwood et al., 2017). Interestingly, those who engaged in more supervision reported more independent study hours, suggesting supervision may promote study engagement. In contrast to previous research findings (Richardson et al., 2018), self-critical perfectionism and burnout were unrelated. Self-critical perfectionism reduced between T1 and T4, suggesting trainees may relax their self-imposed high standards and self-judgment as the course progresses.

Future Implications

The findings highlight that trainee PWPs may be entering their qualified positions with high levels of burnout, which may in turn influence retention within the role.

More research is needed to help inform strategies to support PWP wellbeing during their training year and beyond, to prevent practitioners becoming susceptible to burnout. Ensuring that supervision is prioritized throughout the training and preceptorship years may help to safeguard the wellbeing of our workforce.

References:

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