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Two Facets of Parenting Perfectionism and Parental Burnout: A Moderated Mediation Model of Parental Stress and Emotion Regulation Difficulties

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the roles of parental stress and emotion regulation difficulties in the association between two distinct forms of parenting perfectionism—self-oriented and perceived partner parenting perfectionism—and parental burnout within the framework of a moderated mediation model. The sample comprised 446 parents with children aged 0–6 years (M_{age} = 34.8, *SD* = 5.84). The analyses were conducted using the PROCESS Macro Model 14. The findings demonstrated a positive association between perceived partner parenting perfectionism and parental burnout, whereas no direct association was identified between self-oriented parenting perfectionism and parental burnout. In addition, parental stress significantly mediated the association between both types of parenting perfectionism and parental burnout. Notably, while perceived partner parenting perfectionism was positively associated with parental stress, self-oriented parenting perfectionism was inversely associated with parental stress. Furthermore, emotion regulation difficulties emerged as a significant moderator of the association between parental stress and parental burnout, such that the strength of this association intensified at higher levels of emotion regulation difficulties. This study extends previous research by delineating the differential effects of two forms of parenting perfectionism and integrating the roles of parental stress and emotion regulation difficulties in the relationship between parental stress and parental burnout within a unified model.

Highlights

• Self-oriented and perceived partner parenting perfectionism show distinct pathways to parental burnout

• Perceived partner parenting perfectionism directly increases both stress and burnout

• Self-oriented parenting perfectionism relates to burnout only indirectly through parental stress

• Parental stress emerged as an important mechanism linking perfectionism to burnout

• Emotion regulation difficulties amplify the stress–burnout association

Introduction

“Parental burnout is characterized by an overwhelming exhaustion related to one’s parental role, an emotional distancing from one’s children, and a sense of parental ineffectiveness” (Mikolajczak et al., 2019). This condition not only affects parents’ mental health but may also negatively influence the quality of the parent–child relationship, family interactions, and children’s developmental outcomes (Mikolajczak et al., 2019). Understanding the conditions under which parental burnout emerges is therefore critical. In this context, examining parental burnout during early childhood (0–6 years) is particularly important, as this developmental period is characterized by heightened caregiving demands and limited child autonomy (Deater-Deckard, 2004; Bornstein, 2002), which may increase parents’

vulnerability to burnout. Within this framework, parents' role-related expectations and perfectionistic tendencies appear to play a central role in this process. Failure to meet high self-imposed or externally driven standards may increase vulnerability to chronic stress and emotional exhaustion. Supporting this, perfectionism has been linked to higher stress levels and an increased risk of parental burnout (Kawamoto et al., 2018; Sorkkila & Aunola, 2020). Parental stress is considered a central mediating mechanism in the process linking perfectionism to burnout. Extensive research has shown that maladaptive perfectionism—particularly socially prescribed perfectionism, doubts about actions, and concern over mistakes—is associated with higher stress levels, maladaptive coping strategies, and psychological distress (Ashby et al., 2011; Chang et al., 2004; Dunkley et al., 2003). In the parenting context, these tendencies may intensify stress by leading parents to perceive caregiving demands as more threatening and difficult to manage. Recent research suggests that the relationship between parental stress and burnout is shaped by multiple psychosocial factors. Factors such as social support, coping strategies, marital satisfaction, and socioeconomic status have been shown to act as mediators or moderators in this association (Aktu, 2024; Xu et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). In the parenting domain, emotion regulation is a key psychological resource that shapes how parents cope with stress. Parents' ability to regulate their emotional responses influences their behavioral and emotional reactions in challenging caregiving situations (Morris et al., 2007). Similarly, adaptive regulatory strategies (e.g., cognitive reappraisal) are associated with lower levels of parental burnout, whereas maladaptive regulation patterns are linked to higher stress and burnout (Lin et al., 2022; Brandão et al., 2024). These findings suggest that emotion regulation plays a critical role in determining how parental stress translates to burnout.

Parental burnout reflects not only elevated stress levels but also an imbalance between parenting-related risks and available resources (Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018), pointing to the importance of understanding this process more comprehensively. Although emerging studies have begun to explore these processes (Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018; Ping et al., 2023), parental burnout is a relatively recent construct, and research integrating perfectionism, stress, and burnout within a single model that incorporates difficulties in emotion regulation remains relatively limited. This gap is particularly relevant in the Turkish context, where parenting is embedded in relational structures characterized by strong social expectations and interdependence. To address this gap, this study tests a moderated mediation model in which parental stress serves as a mediator linking parenting perfectionism to burnout, and emotion regulation difficulties moderate both the stress–burnout association and the indirect effect of perfectionism on burnout. Furthermore, given the potentially adaptive and maladaptive nature of parenting perfectionism, the effects of self-oriented and perceived partner parenting perfectionism on parental burnout were examined separately.

Self-Oriented and Perceived Partner Parenting Perfectionism

Parenting perfectionism is generally defined as a multidimensional construct reflecting both internally driven high standards and externally perceived expectations and criticism within the parenting role (Snell et al., 2005). Building on multidimensional models of perfectionism (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett,

1991), this construct captures both self-oriented and socially prescribed pressure. Self-oriented parenting perfectionism encompasses personal parenting standards, organization in parenting, and doubts about parenting competence, whereas perceived partner parenting perfectionism includes partner's parenting criticism and expectations regarding parenting (Taluy & Maraş, 2021). High personal standards and externally imposed expectations may lead parents to interpret even minor shortcomings as failures, thereby increasing vulnerability to stress and burnout. Consistent with this view, research shows that concerns about mistakes, feelings of inadequacy, and socially prescribed perfectionism are among the most consistent predictors of parental burnout (Lin et al., 2021; Raudasoja et al., 2022; Sorkkila & Aunola, 2020).

Research consistently suggests that maladaptive aspects of perfectionism, characterized by dysfunctional and stress-enhancing tendencies, are associated with higher levels of stress and psychological distress, as well as less adaptive coping strategies (Bieling et al., 2004; Dunkley et al., 2003; Richardson et al., 2014). However, research directly addressing parenting perfectionism remains limited, and findings in this area are mixed. For instance, socially prescribed parenting perfectionism has been associated with lower parenting self-efficacy and higher parental stress, whereas self-oriented perfectionism, especially organization in the parenting dimension, has been linked to lower stress and higher parenting satisfaction, particularly among fathers (Lee et al., 2012). In contrast, both adaptive and maladaptive facets of self-oriented perfectionism have been associated with higher parental stress among Chinese parents (Leung, 2022). Similarly, perfectionistic expectations directed toward children and partners have been related to increased parenting and relationship difficulties (Piotrowski, 2020). Overall, these findings suggest that maladaptive perfectionism is consistently associated with elevated parental stress, whereas more adaptive dimensions may function as neutral or protective factors depending on the context and specific facets. This pattern is consistent with research showing that maladaptive perfectionism is associated with greater vulnerability to depression, anxiety, and stress-related difficulties (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). In contrast, perfectionistic strivings, when not accompanied by elevated evaluative concerns, may be linked to positive functioning and well-being (Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

Parental Stress as a Mediator

Parental stress refers to a persistent state of pressure resulting from an imbalance between parenting demands and the available psychological, social, and economic resources (Berry & Jones, 1995; Deater-Deckard, 2004; Solis & Abidin, 1991). Within this framework, parenting perfectionism can be understood as a significant risk factor that disrupts this balance by elevating expectations related to childcare. High and rigid standards may lead parents to interpret even minor setbacks as failures, intensifying stress and contributing to its chronicity. Chronic parental stress can negatively affect parental well-being, parent–child interactions, and family functioning, and may ultimately lead to parental burnout.

The transformation of parental stress into burnout can be understood through the Balance between Risks and Resources (BR^2) model (Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018), which serves as the primary theoretical

framework of the present study. According to this model, parental burnout arises when parenting-related risk factors chronically exceed the available psychological and interpersonal resources. From this perspective, parental stress is a key process linking risk factors to burnout. The link between parental stress and burnout can also be interpreted through Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping framework, which describes stress as the result of an imbalance between situational demands and available coping resources. Within family dynamics, ongoing caregiving demands may intensify these processes.

Empirical evidence in the literature strongly supports this theoretical framework regarding the relationship between parental stress and parental burnout. Parental stress has been found to be a key predictor of parental burnout across diverse cultural contexts and samples (see Ren et al., 2024). For instance, findings from the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that increased parental stress led to significant elevations in parental burnout (Desimpelaere et al., 2023). Similarly, a longitudinal study in China found that parental stress increased burnout levels, particularly among fathers, and that this process was indirectly associated with children's problematic behaviors (Ping et al., 2023). Thus, parental stress can be considered a key process linking parenting perfectionism to parental burnout and may serve as a central mediating mechanism through which perfectionistic tendencies are translated into burnout.

Emotion Regulation as a Moderator

Emotion regulation has been defined as "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (Gross, 1998). When these processes are ineffective, individuals may become more vulnerable to stress and related psychological difficulties (Gross, 2015). Emotion regulation difficulties, in turn, reflect deficits in recognizing, accepting, and managing emotions, which may intensify negative emotional experiences in stressful contexts (Aldao et al., 2010; Gratz & Roemer, 2004).

Within the context of parenting, emotion regulation is considered a critical psychological resource that shapes how individuals cope with stress and respond emotionally within the parenting role. Parents' capacity to regulate their emotional responses has been shown to significantly influence their behavioral and emotional reactions in stressful parenting situations, suggesting that effective emotion regulation may prevent chronic escalation of parental stress (Morris et al., 2007). Extending this framework to parental burnout, a meta-analysis indicates that maladaptive emotion regulation strategies, including suppression, have been consistently linked to higher levels of stress and burnout, whereas adaptive strategies are associated with lower burnout (Brandão et al., 2024). Further evidence suggests that emotion regulation capacity functions as a protective factor, enabling parents to cope more flexibly with stress and reducing their vulnerability to burnout. This interpretation aligns with prior research demonstrating that emotional competence can buffer—and in some cases even neutralize—the negative effects of perfectionistic concerns on parental burnout (Lin et al., 2021). For example, emotional intelligence has been found to buffer the impact of parenting-related anxieties on parental burnout (Lin

et al., 2025), and strategies such as cognitive reappraisal and mentalization have been identified as protective under high-stress conditions, whereas rumination and suppression are associated with greater parental burnout (Keleynikov, 2025). Similarly, mindfulness and self-compassion have been shown to play protective roles, with longitudinal evidence indicating that their negative associations with parental burnout are partly explained by various forms of rumination (Paucsik et al., 2021). Overall, these findings highlight that emotion regulation operates as both a risk and protective process, depending on the strategies employed, and should be considered a central personal resource for understanding parental burnout. In this context, emotion regulation appears to be an important process shaping how parental stress translates into burnout, and difficulties in emotion regulation can strengthen the stress–burnout link.

The Present Study

In light of the above, the present study aimed to examine the relationships among self-oriented and perceived partner parenting perfectionism, parental stress, emotion regulation difficulties, and parental burnout within a moderated mediation framework (see Fig. 1). Accordingly, the following hypotheses were tested: (1) self-oriented parenting perfectionism is associated with parental burnout; (2) perceived partner parenting perfectionism is positively associated with parental burnout; (3) parental stress is positively associated with parental burnout; (4) parental stress mediates the association between parenting perfectionism and parental burnout; and (5) emotion regulation difficulties moderate the association between parental stress and parental burnout, such that the indirect effect of parenting perfectionism on burnout via stress varies across levels of emotion regulation difficulties.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. An a priori power analysis using G*Power indicated that approximately 450 participants would be required to detect a small effect size. A total of 758 individuals were initially reached for the study. Participants who failed the attention check item, which was included to assess whether respondents carefully read the questions, were excluded. In addition, individuals who did not have a child between the ages of 0 and 6 and those who had more than 70% missing responses on at least one of the study scales were also removed from the dataset. Following the exclusion criteria, 471 participants remained eligible for the study. Because gender was included as a covariate in the analyses, participants who did not report their gender (n = 25) were excluded. Accordingly, the final analytic sample consisted of 446 participants. Of the participants, 69.1% were female (n = 308), 30.9% were male (n = 138). The mean age of the participants was 34.8 years (*SD* = 5.84). The mean age of the smallest children was 36 months (3 years; *SD* = 21.43). Regarding educational attainment, 5.4% of participants had completed primary and middle school education (n = 24), 16.6% high school (n = 74), 58.7% held a college degree (n = 262), 19.1% held a graduate degree (n = 85), and 0.2% did not report their level of education (n = 1). Socioeconomic status (SES) was distributed

as low (4.3%) (n = 19), lower-middle/middle (72.5%) (n = 323), and upper-middle/high (22.7%) (n = 101), 0.7% did not report their SES (n = 3). Regarding marital status, 97.3% were married (n = 434), 1.3% were divorced (n = 6), 0.2% were widowed (n = 1), and 1.1% did not report their marital status (n = 5). In addition, 56.3% had one child (n = 251), 33% had two children (n = 147), 6.5% had three children (n = 29), 3.6% had four children (n = 16), and 0.4% had five children (n = 2), and 0.2% did not report the number of children (n = 1).

Approval for the present study was granted by the Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of …… University (Protocol No. 250107) on August 27, 2025. Data were collected online via SurveyMonkey. Participants were recruited through social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook parenting groups, and WhatsApp groups), as well as various online announcement channels. Participants who agreed to take part first completed an online consent form, which included information about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality. Those who provided consent proceeded to complete the demographic information form and the questionnaire consisting of quantitative measures presented in the second section of the data collection form.

Measures

Demographic Information Form

Sociodemographic information, including participants' age, gender, educational level, marital status, number of children, and children's ages, was collected.

Parenting Perfectionism

The Multidimensional Parenting Perfectionism Questionnaire is a two-form measure (Forms A and B) designed to assess interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of parenting perfectionism (Snell et al., 2005). In the present study, the Turkish adaptation of Form B was used (Taluy & Maraş, 2021). This version demonstrated a four-factor structure comprising personal parenting standards, parenting organization, doubts about parenting competence, and perceived partner expectations and criticism (Taluy & Maraş, 2021). The scale is a 5-point Likert-type measure consisting of 23 items. In the present study, it was operationalized as two dimensions: (a) perceived partner expectations and criticism, conceptualized as perceived partner parenting perfectionism, and (b) self-oriented parenting perfectionism, reflecting the combined scores of parenting organization, personal parenting standards, and doubts about parenting competence. Example items include "My partner expects me to be a perfect parent" (perceived partner expectations) and "I set very high standards for myself as a parent" (self-oriented parenting perfectionism). Higher scores indicate higher levels of parenting perfectionism.

The Turkish adaptation exhibited strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .92, and subscale coefficients ranging from .83 to .93. In the present study, the overall Cronbach's alpha was .88,

and the reliability coefficients for perceived partner expectations and self-oriented parenting perfectionism were both .86.

Parental Stress

Parental stress was measured using the Parental Stress Scale developed by Berry and Jones (1995) and adapted into Turkish by Aslan Gördesli and Aydın Sünbül (2021). The scale consists of 16 items and four subscales: parental rewards, parental stressors, lack of control, and parental satisfaction. It is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating higher levels of parental stress. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Turkish version was .81, with subscale reliabilities ranging from .70 to .76. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .87.

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation

Parents' difficulties in emotion regulation were assessed using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004), adapted into Turkish by Rugancı and Gençöz (2010). The scale consists of 35 items and six subscales (non-acceptance, goals, impulse, awareness, strategies, and clarity) and is rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate greater difficulties in emotion regulation. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Turkish version was .94, with subscale reliabilities ranging from .75 to .90. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .94, with subscale reliabilities ranging from .75 to .88.

Parental Burnout

Parental burnout was assessed using the Parental Burnout Assessment developed by Roskam et al. (2018) and adapted into Turkish by Arıkan et al. (2020). The scale consists of 23 items and four subscales: emotional exhaustion, contrast with previous parental self, feelings of being fed up, and emotional distancing. It is rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating higher levels of parental burnout (e.g., "I feel completely exhausted as a parent"). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Turkish version was .90, with subscale reliabilities ranging from .50 to .84. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .87.

Data Analysis

This study examined the mediating role of parental stress in the relationship between parenting perfectionism and parental burnout, as well as the moderating role of difficulties in emotion regulation in the association between parental stress and parental burnout. Parenting perfectionism was operationalized in two dimensions: (a) self-oriented parenting perfectionism and (b) perceived partner expectations of parenting perfectionism. Analyses were conducted using PROCESS Macro Model 14 (Hayes, 2018). While testing the effect of each dimension, the other dimension was included as a covariate. Gender was also controlled for in all analyses. According to the results of the multicollinearity test conducted for the independent variables, all VIF values were below 5 and all tolerance values were

above .10, indicating that there was no multicollinearity among the independent variables. Prior to the analyses, all predictor variables were mean-centered, and 5,000 bootstrap samples were used to estimate confidence intervals for indirect effects. Unstandardized coefficients (B) are reported for all mediation and moderation analyses.

Results

This study examined the mediating role of parental stress in the relationship between parenting perfectionism and parental burnout, as well as the moderating role of emotion regulation difficulties, while distinguishing between self-oriented and perceived partner parental perfectionism.

Descriptives and Correlations of the Main Variables

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among the main variables are presented in Table 1. Overall, the results indicated several moderate to strong significant associations among the study variables.

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables (N = 446)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
SOPP	45.42	8.88	—				
PPPP	19.23	7.80	.40**	—			
PS	31.08	8.89	-.13*	.10*	—		
DER	72.88	21.03	.03	.20**	.55**	—	
PB	45.62	21.74	-.02	.20**	.69**	.63**	—

Note. SOPP = Self-oriented parenting perfectionism, PPPP = Perceived partner parenting perfectionism, PS = Parental stress, DER = Difficulties in emotion regulation, PB = Parental burnout. * p < .05, ** p < .01.

The Mediating Role of Parental Stress

To examine how parenting perfectionism relates to parental burnout through parental stress, analyses first focused on individuals' own perfectionistic tendencies. Results showed that self-oriented parenting perfectionism had a significant negative effect on parental stress (B = −.20, p < .001). The effect of gender on parental stress was found to be non-significant (B = 1.89, p > .05). Parental stress, in turn, had a significant positive effect on parental burnout (B = 1.18, p < .001). However, the direct effect of self-oriented parenting perfectionism on parental burnout was not significant (B = .01, p > .05). In addition, the effect of gender on parental burnout was found to be significant (B = -5.95, p < .001), with women exhibiting higher levels of burnout (*M* = 46.94, *SD* = 22.00) compared to men (*M* = 42.69, *SD* = 20.91).

Together, these findings demonstrate that parental stress served as a mediator in the association between self-oriented parenting perfectionism and parental burnout.

A second set of analyses focused on perceived partner parenting perfectionism. In this model, perceived partner parenting perfectionism significantly increased parental stress ($B = .24$, $p < .001$). As in the previous analysis, parental stress significantly predicted parental burnout ($B = 1.18$, $p < .001$). In addition, perceived partner parenting perfectionism had a significant direct effect on parental burnout ($B = .39$, $p = .001$). These results suggest that parental stress partially mediated the relationship between perceived partner parenting perfectionism and parental burnout. Regression estimates for the mediation and moderation analyses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Regression Estimates for the Mediation and Moderation Model

Outcome Variable	Predictor	B	SE	t	95% CI
Parental Stress (M)	Self-oriented parenting perfectionism	-0.20	0.05	-3.99***	[-0.30,-0.10]
	Perceived partner parenting perfectionism	0.24	0.07	3.62***	[0.11, 0.38]
	Gender	-1.89	0.97	-1.94	[-3.80, 0.03]
Parental Burnout (Y)	Parental stress	1.18	0.10	11.57***	[0.98, 1.38]
	Self-oriented parenting perfectionism	0.01	0.08	0.20	[-0.14, 0.17]
	Perceived partner parenting perfectionism	0.39	0.12	3.29***	[0.16, 0.62]
	Difficulties in emotion regulation (DER)	0.26	0.04	5.72***	[0.17, 0.35]
	Parental Stress × DER	0.02	0.00	6.54***	[0.02, 0.03]
	Gender	-5.95	1.55	-3.84***	[-9.00, -2.90]

The Moderating Role of Difficulties in Emotion Regulation

Further analyses evaluated whether difficulties in emotion regulation shaped the strength of the association between parental stress and parental burnout. The interaction between parental stress and emotion regulation difficulties was significant (B = .02, p < .001), indicating that the impact of parental

stress on parental burnout differs depending on individuals' capacity to regulate their emotions. Specifically, parental stress significantly predicted parental burnout at low (b = .70, p < .001), moderate (b = 1.18, p < .001), and high (b = 1.66, p < .001) levels of emotion regulation difficulties, with the association intensifying as difficulties in emotion regulation increased. Thus, greater difficulty regulating emotions exacerbated the link between parental stress and parental burnout (Fig. 2).

Finally, moderated mediation indices were examined. The conditional indirect effect of self-oriented perfectionism on parental burnout through parental stress varied significantly across levels of emotion regulation difficulties (B = −.004, SE = .001, 95% CI [−.007, −.002]). A similar pattern emerged for perceived partner parenting perfectionism (B = .005, SE = .002, 95% CI [.002, .009]), demonstrating that the indirect contribution of both forms of parenting perfectionism to burnout through parental stress depends on individuals' emotion regulation capacities (Table 3).

Table 3 Index of Moderated Mediation Model

Predictor	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Self-Oriented Parenting Perfectionism	−.0047	.0013	−.0074	−.0022
Perceived Partner Parenting Perfectionism	.0056	.0018	.0023	.0093

Note. Bootstrapped results are based on 5,000 resamples. Confidence intervals not containing zero indicate a significant moderated mediation effect.

Conditional indirect effects for both independent variables are reported in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4 Conditional Indirect Effects of Self-Oriented Parenting Perfectionism on Parental Burnout Through Parental Stress

Level of DER	Indirect Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Low (-1 SD)	−.1426	.0446	−.2408	−.0647
Mean	−.2407	.0643	−.3758	−.1208
High (+1 SD)	−.3388	.0885	−.5198	−.1723

Note. DER = Difficulties in emotion regulation.

Table 5 Conditional Indirect Effects of Perceived Partner Parenting Perfectionism on Parental Burnout Through Parental Stress

Level of DER	Indirect Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Low (-1 SD)	.1718	.0573	.0715	.2952
Mean	.2899	.0853	.1282	.4674
High (+1 SD)	.4081	.1190	.1806	.6480

Note. DER = Difficulties in emotion regulation.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine how two types of parenting perfectionism (self-oriented and perceived partner expectations) are linked to parental burnout by situating this relationship within a broader process model that includes parental stress and emotion regulation difficulties. Rather than treating these variables as isolated predictors, the findings allow us to understand how they operate together as part of an ongoing psychological process. What emerges from this model is that parental stress appears to function as an important mechanism through which perfectionistic tendencies are associated with burnout, while emotion regulation difficulties shape the strength of this process across individuals.

One notable finding concerns the role of perceived partner expectations. These expectations were directly associated with parental burnout, suggesting that parents' perceptions of others' expectations of them may matter more than their self-demands. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of socially prescribed perfectionism in burnout (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018; Sorkkila & Aunola, 2020); however, the present findings further underscore the relational nature of parental burnout. Parenting appears to be experienced not solely as an individual responsibility but as a role embedded in ongoing evaluation and perceived judgment. When expectations are experienced as externally imposed, the parenting role may gradually shift from a meaningful responsibility to a psychologically taxing performance.

On the other hand, the absence of a direct link between self-oriented parenting perfectionism and burnout calls for a more nuanced interpretation. Rather than assuming that all forms of perfectionism are uniformly maladaptive, the findings suggest that self-oriented tendencies may function differently depending on how they are experienced. Earlier work has shown that self-oriented perfectionism may, under certain conditions, be associated with more adaptive outcomes, such as greater parental satisfaction and, in some cases, lower parental stress (Lee et al., 2012), whereas other research emphasizes that the implications of parenting perfectionism are context-dependent and shaped by broader social and cultural dynamics (Leung et al., 2022). In this respect, the present findings suggest that self-oriented perfectionism may not constitute a direct risk factor for burnout, but rather operates indirectly through stress-related processes.

Consistent with this interpretation, one of the most noteworthy findings was that self-oriented parenting perfectionism was negatively associated with parental stress. This pattern supports the distinction between the adaptive and maladaptive aspects of perfectionism (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). It is possible

that certain components of self-oriented perfectionism—particularly those related to structure, organization, and predictability—help parents manage the demands of caregiving more effectively, thereby reducing their subjective experience of stress. In contrast, perceived partner perfectionism was positively associated with stress, reinforcing the idea that externally imposed standards may intensify perceived demands and psychological pressures.

Second, the findings position parental stress as a potential explanatory mechanism linking perfectionism to burnout, thereby reinforcing and extending the Balance between Risks and Resources (BR²) model (Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018). While previous research has established strong links between parental stress and parental burnout (Mikolajczak et al., 2019; Ping et al., 2023), the present study clarifies how this process unfolds by demonstrating that perfectionistic tendencies contribute to burnout primarily by intensifying parental stress. Emerging evidence also supports this pathway, suggesting that parental stress may mediate the association between perfectionistic tendencies and parental burnout (e.g., Song et al., 2023). In line with this evidence, the present findings go beyond prior work by integrating this mediational pathway within a broader moderated framework, showing that the translation of perfectionistic pressures into burnout is contingent on individual emotional capacities.

Third, the moderating role of emotion regulation difficulties provides an important explanation for why similar levels of parental stress may lead to different burnout outcomes across individuals. The findings suggest that the strength of the stress–burnout association depends on parents' capacity to regulate their emotional responses. For parents with greater emotion regulation difficulties, stress appears to escalate more readily into burnout, highlighting emotion regulation as a key psychological resource within the BR² framework (Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018). This is consistent with prior work on emotion regulation (Gross, 1998, 2001; Gratz & Roemer, 2004). This interpretation aligns with prior research demonstrating that emotional competence can buffer—and in some cases even neutralize—the negative effects of perfectionistic concerns on parental burnout (Lin et al., 2021). Building on this line of work, the present findings suggest that emotional processes do not merely operate as protective factors but also determine how and to what extent perfectionistic tendencies are translated into burnout through stress-related mechanisms. In addition, previous research has highlighted the role of emotion regulation processes and related mechanisms, such as self-compassion and rumination, in shaping parental well-being and burnout outcomes (Brandão et al., 2024; Paucsik et al., 2021). These findings suggest that emotion regulation is not simply a background variable but a key condition determining whether stress remains manageable or develops into burnout.

Gender was also included as a control variable to account for its potential influence. The findings revealed that although gender was not significantly associated with parental stress, it was significantly associated with parental burnout, with mothers reporting higher burnout levels than fathers. Previous research also shows that mothers are generally more exposed to caregiving demands, responsibilities, and intensive mothering expectations (Hochschild & Machung, 1989/2003; Hays, 1996; Mikolajczak et al., 2019). In line with this, the lack of a significant association between gender and parental stress suggests that gender is unlikely to represent a substantive factor within the overall mediation model.

Overall, the present findings offer a more integrated understanding of parental burnout by simultaneously considering perfectionistic tendencies, stress processes, and emotion regulation capacities within a single model. Notably, prior research has not sufficiently examined parental perfectionism by explicitly distinguishing between its self-oriented and partner-perceived dimensions within the same framework, indicating a significant gap in the literature. While previous research has typically examined these variables in isolation or in simpler models, the current study brings them together to show how they operate as part of a dynamic, interdependent process. This study contributes to the literature by showing that parental burnout appears to be associated not only with elevated demands but also with how these demands are psychologically processed and regulated over time.

Limitations and Future Directions

While the findings are informative, several limitations should be considered. First, within the moderated mediation model, the observed effect sizes were relatively small. This indicates that while the relationships were statistically significant, their magnitude was subtle. Small effects may limit the practical implications and generalizability of the findings. Future research should examine whether these relationships can be replicated across different populations and methodological designs. The cross-sectional design limits causal inferences, and future research would benefit from longitudinal or experience-based designs that capture temporal dynamics. The use of self-report measures may also contribute to shared method variance. In addition, the sample was limited to parents of young children, and the observed relationships may differ across developmental stages of parenting.

Future research could examine specific dimensions of parenting perfectionism in greater detail. It would also be valuable to explore how relational variables such as partner support or conflict interact with perfectionistic expectations. Future research could also explore potential variations in these relationships across different developmental stages. Given the role of emotion regulation identified in this study, intervention studies focusing on enhancing parents' emotional skills may help reduce parental burnout.

These findings suggest that efforts to reduce parental burnout may need to go beyond interventions that focus solely on reducing parental stress. Effective intervention strategies should also address how expectations are shaped and negotiated within close relationships, as well as how parents make sense of and respond to emotional demands. In this regard, promoting greater flexibility in parental standards, encouraging open and supportive communication between partners, and enhancing emotion regulation capacities may represent beneficial targets for intervention efforts. Recent experimental evidence indicates that targeted interventions can effectively reduce parental burnout symptoms and improve emotional functioning and stress-related physiological indicators (Brianda et al., 2020). In addition, given the higher levels of parental burnout reported by mothers, intervention efforts may benefit from considering gender-related differences in caregiving burden. Building on these findings, future research may examine the effectiveness of similar interventions for both mothers and fathers and develop programs that not only target parental burnout directly but also address parenting stress as a key

underlying mechanism. Such intervention programs may further benefit from incorporating components that focus on reducing perfectionistic expectations between partners and improving mutual understanding and communication within the parenting relationship.

Finally, the fact that this study was conducted in the Turkish context adds an important layer to the interpretation of the findings. In relationally oriented cultural contexts, where parenting is closely embedded in social expectations and interpersonal evaluations, externally perceived standards may become particularly salient. This may help explain why partner-related expectations emerged as a relatively stronger predictor in the present study and highlights the importance of considering the cultural context in future research.

Conclusion

This study contributes to this line of research in two key ways: First, it conceptualizes parental perfectionism not only as an individual trait but also as a relational construct by distinguishing between self-oriented and perceived partner perfectionism. This distinction highlights that perfectionistic pressures in parenting are not solely internally driven but are also embedded in the interpersonal dynamics. Second, while previous research has typically examined mediation and moderation separately, the current study integrates these processes within a single moderated mediation model, demonstrating that the indirect effect of perfectionism on burnout, via stress, varies depending on parents' emotion regulation capacities.

Declarations

Funding:

No funding was received for this research.

Data Availability Statement

The dataset and all related files presented in this study are available in the OSF repository and can be accessed at:

https://osf.io/wbkh7/overview?view_only=86cee89872714b688bd040f3a016df09

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Social and Human Sciences of ……. University on August 27, 2025 (Protocol No: 250107). All procedures performed in this study were conducted in accordance with the principles of the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained electronically from all participants prior to participation in the study.

Author Contribution

Authors' Contributions:N.T. led the conceptualization of the study and drafted the introduction and discussion sections.C.A. performed the statistical analyses and contributed to writing the results.G.G.K. was responsible for data collection and the methods section.All authors contributed to the study design, critically revised the manuscript, and approved the final version.

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Figures

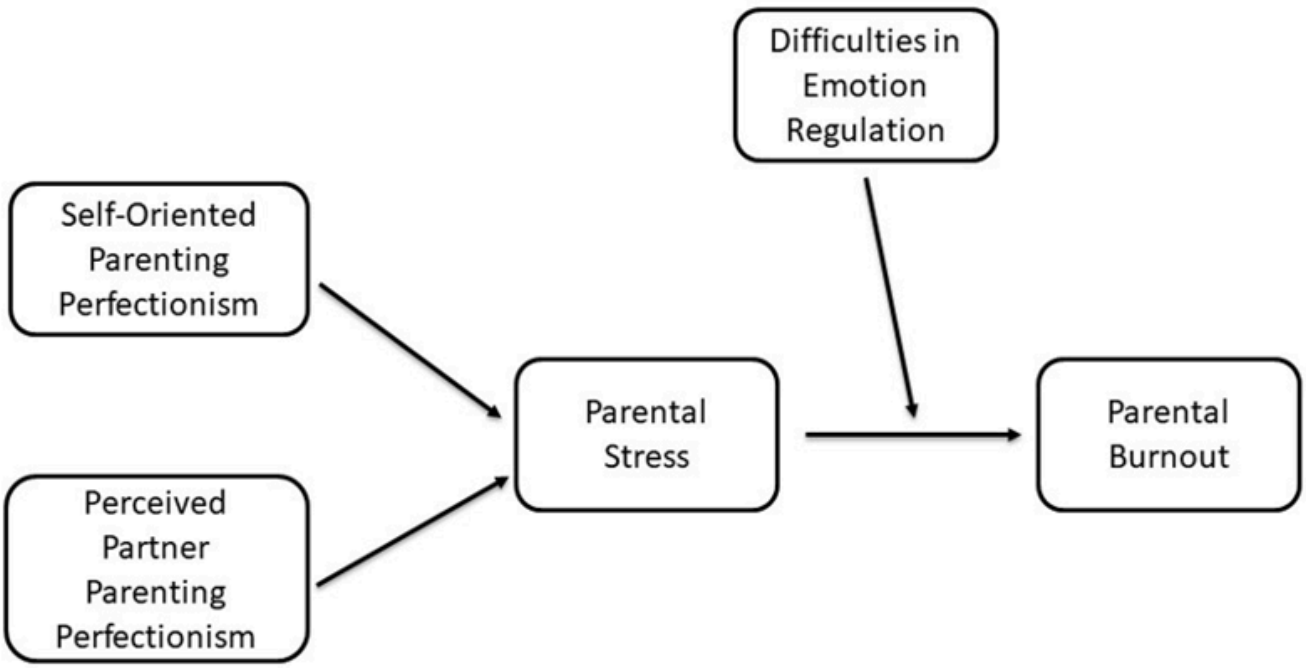


Figure 1

Proposed Moderated Mediation Model Linking Parenting Perfectionism, Parental Stress, Emotion Regulation Difficulties, and Parental Burnout

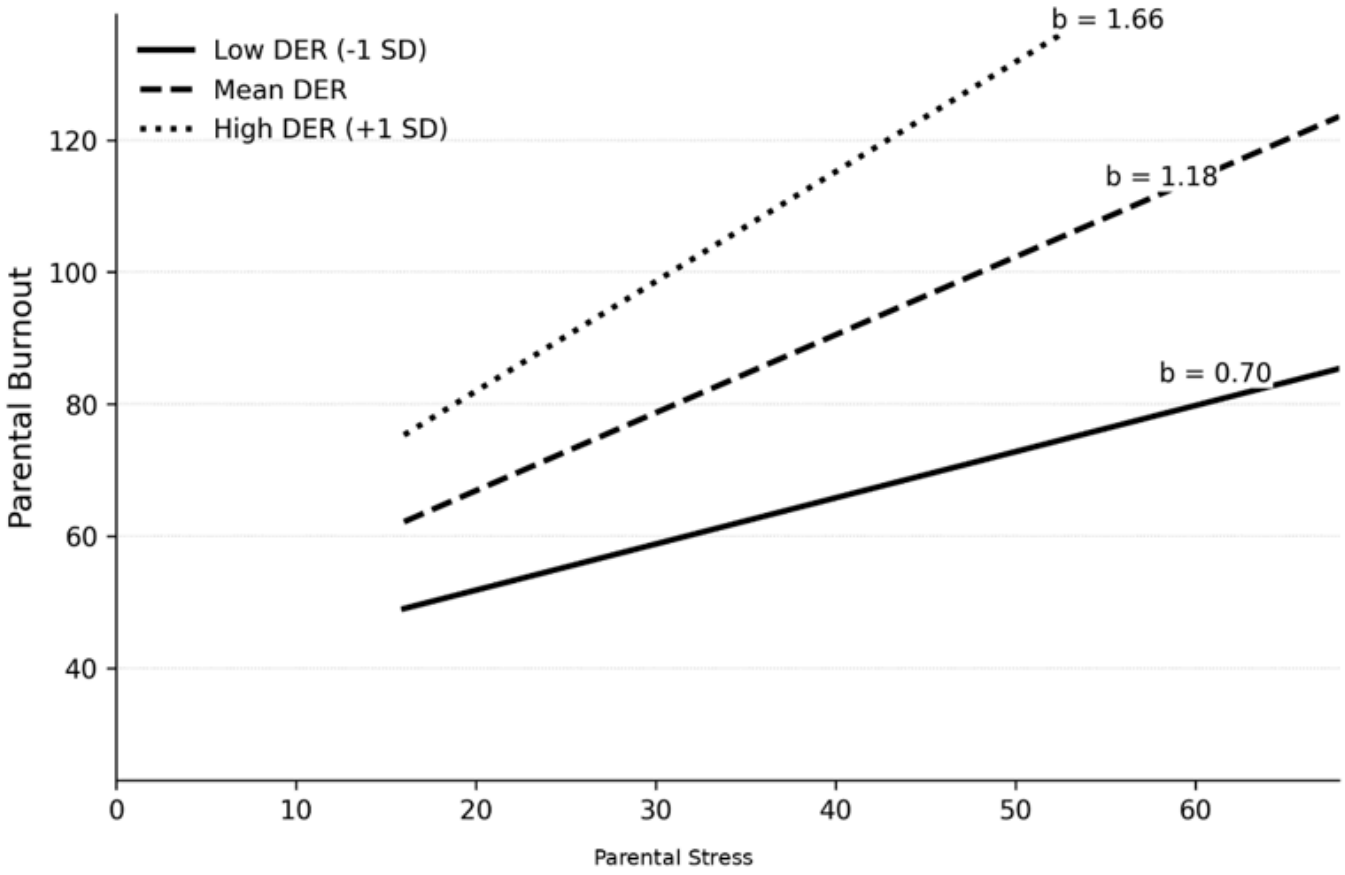


Figure 2

Moderating Effect of Difficulties in Emotion Regulation on the Association Between Parental Stress and Parental Burnout

Note. DER = Difficulties in emotion regulation. Simple slopes are plotted at low (−1 SD), mean, and high (+1 SD) levels of emotion regulation difficulties.