

# **SOCIALLY-PRESCRIBED PERFECTIONISM, MINDFULNESS AND DEPRESSION: THE MODERATING ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA SELF-CONTROL FAILURE**

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## **Abstract**

In the competitive society of South Korea, the prevalence of depressive symptoms among young adults has been observed to increase. Depression affects the psychological well-being of individuals, and socially-prescribed perfectionism (SPP), characterized by self-criticism and self-doubt, has been identified as a primary predictor of depression. SPP is a difficult personality trait to change. Mindfulness, however, can help individuals view themselves with greater objectivity, which may help reduce negative emotions. The proliferation of social media among young adults has created new avenues for information sharing and communication. However, it has also led to social comparison and idealization, which can have detrimental effects on individuals. It is noteworthy that social media self-control, defined as the ability to control social media use, may enhance internal locus of control and self-regulation, thereby mitigating the negative effects of SPP. The present study examined the mediating effect of mindfulness in the relationship between SPP and depression, moderated by social media self-control failure. The study included 747 South Korean adults who participated in an online survey. The data were analyzed using SPSS 29.0 and Process Macro 4.2. First, the mediating effect of mindfulness in the relationship between SPP and depression was examined. The results indicated that SPP was negatively related to mindfulness and that mindfulness was negatively related to depression. In addition, SPP was positively linked to depression, with the mediation effect being statistically significant. Second, the moderated mediation effect of mindfulness and social media self-control failure was supported. The results indicated that social media self-control failure had a significant influence on the pathway to mindfulness, and the interaction between socially prescribed perfectionism and social media self-control failure also influenced the pathway to mindfulness. This study provides empirical support that social media self-control ability can mitigate the pathway from SPP to depression via mindfulness. Interventions aimed at enhancing this ability may promote psychological well-being and prevent depression among young people in South Korea.

**Keywords:** *Socially-Prescribed Perfectionism, mindfulness, depression, social media self-control, South Korean adults.*

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## **1. Introduction**

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the incidence of depressive symptoms among young adults has increased significantly (Kim, 2023). Particularly in South Korea's achievement-oriented culture, socially prescribed perfectionism (SPP) has emerged as a key personality trait influencing the mental health of young people. SPP exposes individuals to constant pressure to meet the expectations of others, leading to self-criticism and negative emotions, which can lead to depression (Lee, Ham, Bae, & Cheon, 2015).

To address these mental health challenges, mindfulness has received considerable attention in recent years. It helps individuals view themselves with greater objectivity and tranquility, which can reduce negative emotions (Neff, 2003b). However, in today's digital era, young adults spend a substantial amount of time on social media. While social media is an essential tool for communication, excessive use can lead to social comparison and idealization, which may have a detrimental effect on one's self-perception (Qiao & Oh, 2023).

Despite this, there is still a lack of research on how to effectively regulate social media use in South Korea. This study aims to contribute to the development of interventions that promote psychological well-being among young adults by investigating how controlling social media use can help mitigate the negative effects of SPP on depression through mindfulness, thus providing valuable insights for promoting mental health among South Korean youth.

## 2. Design

This study used a cross-sectional design to examine the moderating role of social media self-control failure in the relationship between socially-prescribed perfectionism, mindfulness, and depression.

## 3. Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine the mediating effect of mindfulness in the relationship between socially-prescribed perfectionism and depression among South Korean young adults, with a particular focus on how social media self-control failure moderates this relationship. Specifically, the hypotheses are as follows:

1. Mindfulness will mediate the relationship between SPP and depression.
2. Social media self-control will moderate the relationship between SPP, mindfulness, and depression.
3. Social media self-control will moderate the mediated effect of SPP on depression through mindfulness.

## 4. Methods

The study included 747 South Korean adults, aged 19 to 34 years (370 men and 377 women, mean age: 27.9 years), following the standards of the Basic Youth Act in South Korea. Participants were recruited through an online survey platform. The online survey included the following questionnaires, and Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .77 to .88 for all variables.

- (a) the SPP subscale of the Korean adaptation of Hewitt multidimensional perfectionism scale (Hewitt & Flett, 1991)
- (b) the Social Media Self-Control Failure Scale (Du, van Koningsbruggen, & Kerkhof, 2018)
- (c) the mindfulness subscale of the Korean adaptation of Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003b)
- (d) the depression subscale of the Brief Symptoms Inventory-18 (Park, Woo, & Chang, 2012).

The study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board prior to data collection. The data were analyzed using SPSS 29.0 and Process Macro 4.2 as follows. First, Cronbach's alpha values were calculated for internal consistency and correlation analysis was conducted between the variables. Next, Hayes' models 4 and 7 were applied sequentially to assess both mediation and moderated mediation effects. Statistical significance was determined using a bootstrap procedure with 5,000 resamples and a confidence interval (CI) of 95%. A *p*-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant for all analyses.

## 5. Results

According to the correlation analysis, SPP was positively correlated with social media self-control failure (SMSCF) and depression and negatively correlated with mindfulness. Depression was positively correlated with SMSCF and negatively with mindfulness. SMSCF and mindfulness was the only one that showed no significant correlation. Next, the mediating role of mindfulness between SPP and depression was examined. SPP negatively predicted mindfulness ( $B = -.178, p < .001$ ), and mindfulness negatively predicted depression ( $B = -.167, p < .001$ ), whereas SPP positively predicted depression ( $B = .616, p < .001$ ). The statistical significance of the mediation effect was confirmed by bootstrapping, with the 95% confidence interval (CI [.0108, .0543]) not including 0, thereby supporting the significance of the mediation effect ( $B = .0297$ ). In addition, the moderated mediation effect indicated that the pathway from SMSCF to mindfulness was significant ( $B = -.111, p < .001$ ), and the interaction between SPP and SMSCF negatively predicted mindfulness ( $B = -.380, p < .001$ ). Finally, the bootstrap analysis of the moderated mediation index yielded a value of  $-0.019$ , and the 95% confidence interval (CI [-0.040, -.002]) did not include 0, confirming the statistical significance of the moderated mediation effect.

Overall, the study examined the mediating effect of mindfulness in the relationship between SPP and depression, as well as the moderated mediation effect of SMSCF.

## 6. Discussion

This study examined the relationship between socially-prescribed perfectionism (SPP), mindfulness, and depression, focusing on the moderating effect of social media self-control failure

(SMSCF). The aim was to highlight the importance of improving media self-regulation to increase mindfulness and reduce depression among young adults in South Korea.

The study found that mindfulness mediated the relationship between SPP and depression. SPP, characterized by unrealistic external expectations, may negatively affect mindfulness and make it difficult for individuals to maintain an objective self-view. Previous research has shown that self-compassion promotes psychological well-being, and its absence may contribute to depression (Ku & Jung, 2016). SPP has been strongly associated with depression in numerous studies (Lee et al., 2015; Park & Ahn, 2023). The study also found that SMSCF moderates this process. When SMSCF is high, the relationship between SPP and mindfulness is strengthened, increasing the likelihood of depression. However, when SMSCF is low, individuals better regulate their social media use, which mitigates the negative effects of SPP on mindfulness and depression. This suggests that improving social media self-control may help individuals with high SPP maintain mindfulness and prevent depression.

In conclusion, enhancing media self-control skills can buffer the negative effects of SPP and promote mental health by fostering a more balanced, internal focus.

## 7. Conclusion

This study examined the moderating role of SMSCF in the relationship between SPP, mindfulness, and depression in the competitive Korean society. Results suggest that social media self-control can mitigate the pathway from SPP to depression through mindfulness, highlighting the importance of media self-regulation interventions. These findings align with previous research on SPP, mindfulness, and depression (Lee & Yang, 2018) and support the recent trend of finding one's "sweet spot" in regulating social media use to promote well-being (Brailovskaia, Delveaux, John, Wicker, Noveski, Kim, Schillack, & Margraf, 2022). Future research should focus on developing programs to improve social media self-control, as regulating social media use is crucial to young adults' psychological well-being.

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