



# The Effects of Perfectionism and Dispositional Self-focused Attention of Novice Counselor on Psychological Burnout: Moderated Mediating Effects of Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies

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## Abstract

The current study investigated the mediation effect of self-focused attention on the relationship between South Korean novice counselors' perfectionism and psychological burnout. We also examined whether cognitive emotion regulation strategies moderated the mediation effect of self-focused attention with a sample of 208 South Korean novice counselors. Moderated mediation was tested with the PROCESS 2.16.3 macro for SPSS and the index of moderated mediation. Bootstrapping analyses were used to examine the mediation effect of self-focus on the relationship between perfectionism and psychological burnout. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was also conducted to examine the moderation of emotion regulation strategies. Findings indicate that self-focused attention partially mediated the relationship between perfectionism and psychological burnout. Moreover, the indirect effect of perfectionism on psychological burnout through self-focused attention varied depending on levels of adaptive emotion regulation strategies. We present implications for counseling and suggestions for future research in an international context.

**Keywords** Novice counselor · Perfectionism · Self-focused attention · Psychological burnout · Cognitive emotion regulation strategy

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## Introduction

The essential tool in the counseling process is counselors themselves, and the most powerful techniques that lead to successful counseling are counselors' energetic lifestyle and the ability to face reality (Corey & Corey, 2020). It indicates that counselors should take care of themselves. However, many counselors tend not to take care of themselves while focusing on more helping and supporting others (Corey, 2017). It is crucial to understand counselors' psychological burnout to perform successful counseling; thus, this study aimed to learn about the effects of self-focused attention and perfectionism that lead to counselors' psychological burnout.

Burnout occurs when helping professionals, including counselors, experience physical, psychological, and emotional exhaustion (Maslach, 1976). As the result of burnout, counselors are vulnerable to chronic fatigue, emotional exhaustion, indifference, the sense that their work is meaninglessness, skepticism, decreased interest and concentration in client work, anxiety, low self-esteem, and identity confusion (Choi et al., 2015; Ko & Kim, 2021; Oh & Choi, 2020). Failing to cope appropriately with burnout has negative influences not only on counselors themselves but also their colleagues due to the contagiousness of the burnout symptoms (Yoon & Hong, 2017). Counselors who are psychologically exhausted may not set a good example for their clients. Also, they may feel burdened, anxious, and guilty to their clients, which may lead to poor quality of counseling (Kim & Yun, 2017). Counselors are responsible to obtain supervision when they become aware of personal problems such as psychological burnout that hinders them from performing their duties. This is a counselor ethic that must be observed, and it cannot be overemphasized. Thus, counselors' burnout must be studied and managed for the benefit of clients, counselors, their colleagues, and institutions to which they belong.

According to Rønnestad and Skovholt's Phases of Therapist/Counselor Development (2003), the target group (less than three years of counseling experience) we intend to the study is part of the Advanced Student Phase. Counselors in this phase have greater expectations for themselves and desire to excel in their profession rather than just avoid making mistakes. Moreover, they are under more pressure than ever before to accomplish things perfectly. There is a negative association between counseling experience and burnout (Hyun & Hong, 2018; Kim & Yun, 2017; Yoon & Hong, 2017) and novice counselors with less than three years of counseling experience are more likely to burnout than experienced counselors (Skovholt & Jennings, 2017). Skovholt and Rønnestad(2003) described stressors of the novice counselors as follows: acute performance anxiety, emotional boundaries, and inadequate conceptual maps. While experiencing various difficulties due to lack of professional knowledge and practical experience in terms of counseling performance, it adds to the difficulties with too high expectations that counselors will be able to change the life their clients. According to previous studies, novice counselors lack confidence in their counseling skills (Cho, 2020; Kim & Shin, 2017) and are more likely to experience difficulty and frustration when working with uncooperative and dissatisfied clients, often leading these counselors to request therapeutic termination (Kim & Shin, 2017; Kim & Yun, 2017).

Novice counselors pay more attention to their performance than their clients' responses in counseling sessions; this tendency is linked to negative emotions and thoughts concerning their counseling abilities, including skepticism, anger, embarrassment, and the sense of burden (Kim & Shin, 2017; Kim & Song, 2015; Lee, 2017). In addition, novice counselors are known to have difficulties in cognitive aspects, with their schema of counseling technology which not integrated (Song & Lee, 2014). Other research findings prove that professional incompetence is the most significant cause of novice counselor burnout (Jung, 2017; Kang, 2014). These various factors cause novice counselors to reach the state of exhaustion more frequently than counselors at advanced levels of professional development (Kim & Song, 2015).

### **Perfectionism and Psychological Burnout**

Perfectionism is one challenge that counselors encounter and when their energies are focused on perfect performance in session, less energy is available for immediacy with clients (Corey, 2017). Counselors with perfectionistic tendencies make concerted efforts to lead ideal sessions, which causes them greater stress (Ji & Ju, 2019) and less motivation (Lee, 2016) due to the difficulties of evaluating successful counseling outcomes and the subjective nature of counseling.

Perfectionism is a personality trait in which an individual sets unattainable goals and pursues idealism while critically appraising their individual behaviors ((Jeong and Kim, 2021). Hewitt and Flett (1991) divided perfectionism into three categories: self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, and socially-prescribed perfectionism. Self-oriented perfectionism refers to demanding perfect results from oneself and strictly evaluating and criticizing one's behaviors based on excessively high individual standards (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Other-oriented perfectionism refers to having unrealistically high standards for others and expecting them to be perfect while observing and evaluating others' behaviors (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Lastly, socially-prescribed perfectionism is one's belief that significant others and society impose extremely stringent standards on oneself and inflict the pressure and expectation of reaching these standards (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Socially-prescribed perfectionism consistently has a strong association with maladaptive psychological states; it has been called the most pathological dimension of perfectionism (Jeong & Jang, 2021; Ji & Ju, 2019; Lee, 2016; Lee & Kim, 2018). Psychological burnout is positively associated with socially-prescribed perfectionism and negatively related to self-oriented perfectionism and other-oriented perfectionism (Lee & Ha, 2015). Perfectionism is a crucial factor in psychological burnout, in part because it is a stable personality trait that is difficult to change and conveys some benefits (Lee & Ha, 2015). Therefore, it is necessary to find and study variables directly or indirectly related to perfectionism, causing psychological burnout.

### **Self-Focused Attention**

Counselors need to monitor themselves and strive for personal and professional growth. This requires self-focused attention (Kim & Kim, 2016) in which an individual pays attention to oneself or experiences self-awareness (Carver, 1979) of

feelings, thoughts, appearance, and behaviors (Fenigstein et al., 1975). Ingram (1990) divided self-focused attention into two categories: adaptive and maladaptive. Ingram named maladaptive self-focused attention as self-immersion. While self-focused attention focuses on the inside of oneself, which helps self-understanding and self-awareness, it also has a dysfunctional aspect in that the person cannot divert attention to other people or things due to endless, excessive self-attention (Kim & Lee, 2018a, 2018b; Woo & Lee, 2020). Self-immersion refers to a tendency to pay so much attention to a certain part of oneself that an individual is unable to direct attention elsewhere (Kim & Lee, 2018a, 2018b; Yun & Oh, 2016). Individuals who display greater tendencies towards maladaptive self-focused attention are more likely to harshly criticize themselves which produces negative feelings such as depression, anxiety, or low motivation (Kim & Lee, 2018a, b), resulting in psychological exhaustion (Kim & Kim, 2016). There is a positive correlation between socially-prescribed perfectionism and maladaptive self-focused attention; individuals with tendencies toward socially-prescribed perfectionism develop greater levels of maladaptive self-focused attention (Kim & Lee, 2018a, b).

### **Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies**

Individuals use different strategies to control negative emotions they experience when encountering stressful situations (Kim & Cho, 2020). The ability to effectively solve problems can depend on the ability to control one's emotions (Kim & Cho, 2020). Cognitive emotion regulation strategies are conscious methods of processing information that evoke emotional responses (Garnefski et al., 2001); they help individuals cope with threatening situations and stressful events that cause negative emotions (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2006). There are nine types of cognitive emotion regulation strategies, some of which are more adaptive (Putting into perspective, Positive refocusing, Positive reappraisal, Acceptance, Refocus on planning) and others less adaptive (Self-blame, Other-blame, Rumination or focus on thought, Catastrophizing; Garnefski et al., 2001). Maladaptive emotion regulation strategies are positively correlated with counselors' psychological exhaustion, and refocus on planning is negatively associated with burnout (Choi, 2017; Kim & Shin, 2017; Oh & Choi, 2020). Based on previous findings, it is necessary to study the mediated effects of self-focused attention in the relationship between perfectionism and psychological burnout among novice counselors, and further analyze the moderated mediation effect of cognitive emotional regulation strategies to help prevent, cope with and manage psychological burnout with perfectionism.

### **The Current Study**

There is an increasing need for empirical studies that can provide findings on the effects of perfectionism on psychological burnout of novice counselors. However, there has been limited effort examining the process of how novice counselors' perfectionism directly and indirectly affects psychological burnout. In addition, little

is known about the roles of self-focused attention and cognitive emotion regulation strategies. We conducted this study to determine the relationships among self-focused attention, psychological burnout, and cognitive emotion regulation strategies by analyzing the moderated mediation effect. The study's aim was to help novice counselors prevent and cope with their psychological exhaustion appropriately.

A research model established in the study is presented in Fig. 1. Our study proposed four research questions based on theoretical hypotheses provided in the literature review section.

1. What are the relationships among novice counselors' perfectionism, self-focused attention, psychological burnout, and cognitive emotion regulation strategies?
2. Does self-focused attention have a mediating effect on the relationship between novice counselors' perfectionism and psychological burnout?
3. Do cognitive emotion regulation strategies (adaptive and maladaptive emotion regulation strategies) have moderating effects on the relationship between novice counselors' self-focused attention and psychological burnout?
4. Do adaptive emotion regulation strategies have mediating effects on the relationship between novice counselors' perfectionism, self-focused attention, and psychological burnout?

## Methods

### Participants

The present study included novice counselors in the Seoul, South Korea metropolitan area. Based on previous studies (Cho, 2020; Kim & Shin, 2017), we defined novice counselors as those who have less than three years of counseling experience. We uploaded an introduction to this study to the mobile community with 1,500 Korean

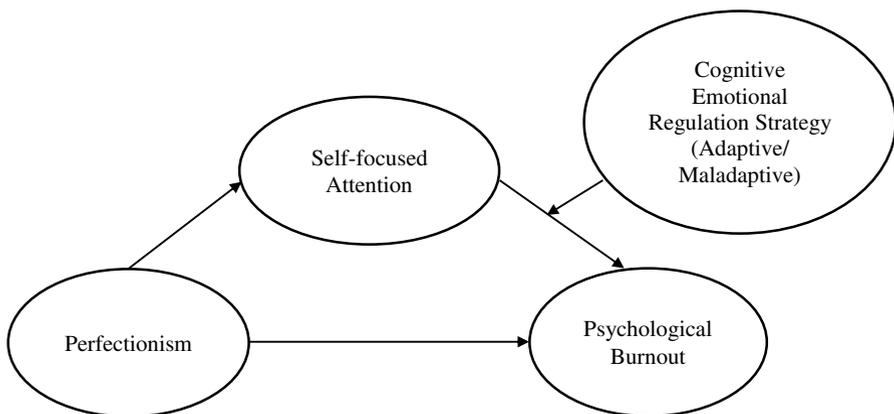


Fig. 1 Hypothesized moderated mediation model

counselors with a hyperlink to a Google's online questionnaire was distributed for participation in the study. Participants completed informed consents and questionnaires (i.e., demographics, perfectionism, self-focused attention, and cognitive emotion regulation strategies) in exchange for entry into a raffle with the opportunity to win a gift card. One hundred forty-six novice counselors responded to the survey online, and 65 participated offline. The offline survey was conducted in an individual space in the counseling center where the participants of the study are currently working. Three of the 211 total questionnaire results were omitted because they were wholly or partially incomplete, leaving 208 responses available for analysis. To calculate enough sample size for the study, we used G\*Power (version 3.1.9.7) with  $\alpha=0.05$ , effect size=0.15, power=0.9, and a number of variables=19. In this study, 187 sample size is necessary to analyze the data. Thus, it was confirmed that the present study has enough sample size for conducting the data analysis ( $N=208$ ).

Most participants identified as women ( $n=176$ , 84.6%) while the rest identified as men ( $n=32$ , 15.4%). Regarding the age range, the largest number of participants ages were within the age range 20–29 and 30–39 (each  $n=75$ , 36.1%), with 21.6% selecting 40–49 ( $n=45$ ), and 6.3% selecting 50–59 ( $n=13$ ). Participants' lengths of counseling experience included *less than three months* ( $n=11$ , 3.3%), *three months to six months* ( $n=15$ , 7.2%), *six months to one year* ( $n=50$ , 24.0%), *one year to two years* ( $n=56$ , 26.9%), and *two years to three years* ( $n=76$ , 36.5%). Participants' academic level was followed by master's degree ( $n=92$ , 44.2%), master's process ( $n=88$ , 42.3%), bachelor's degree ( $n=18$ , 8.7%), doctoral process ( $n=10$ , 4.8%).

## Measures

### Korean multidimensional perfectionism scale

The Korean Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (K-HMPS) is a translation (Han, 1993) of the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (HMPS) developed to assess participants' perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). The HMPS consists of a total of 45 items categorized into self-oriented perfectionism (15 items), other-oriented perfectionism (15 items), and socially-prescribed perfectionism (15 items). The instrument uses a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*. Higher total scores indicate greater levels of perfectionism. In Han's (1993) study conducted in Korea, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.85; in the current study, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.93.

### Korean counselor burnout inventory

The Korean Counselor Burnout Inventory (K-CBI; Yu, 2007) is a translation of the Counselor Burnout Inventory (CBI; Lee et al., 2007) that measures levels of psychological burnout in novice counselors. The CBI (Lee et al., 2007) is the first measure intentionally designed to assess the characteristics of a counselor's job. There are 20 items across five factors: exhaustion (4 items), deterioration in personal life (4 items), incompetency (4 items), devaluing clients (4 items), and negative work

environment (4 items). Participants respond using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Never True* to 5 = *Always True*, with higher total scores indicating greater levels of burnout (Yu, 2007). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.92 in Yu's (2007) study and 0.90 in the current study.

### Scale for dispositional self-focused attention in social situations

The Scale for Dispositional Self-Focused Attention in Social Situations (SDSAS; Lee & Kwon, 2005) measures self-focused attention. The SDSAS is a 30-item measure consisting of general self-focused attention (9 items) and self-immersion (21 items). Participants rate items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*. To aid the current study's purpose, we replaced "in social situations" to "in counseling sessions" for the first 19 items (i.e., I try to pay attention to what I am thinking in counseling sessions). Additionally, we changed "other people" to "clients" on item 6 (i.e., I try to make sure that I understand what my clients are saying). Higher total scores indicate greater levels of self-focused attention (Lee & Kwon, 2005). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in Lee and Kwon's (2005) study was 0.93 and in the current study it was 0.90.

### Cognitive emotion regulation questionnaire

The Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ; Garnefski et al., 2001) assesses two different types of cognitive emotion regulation strategies. Positive emotion regulation strategies include Putting into perspective, Positive refocusing, Positive reappraisal, Acceptance, Refocus on planning; negative emotion regulation strategies include Self-blame, Other-blame, Rumination or focus on thought, Catastrophizing (Garnefski et al., 2001). The present study used a Korean translation of the CERQ (Kim, 2008). Participants respond using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Almost Never* to 5 = *Almost Always*. Higher total scores indicate greater levels of cognitive emotion regulation strategies (Garnefski et al., 2001). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reported in Kim's (2008) study was 0.84 and the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in this study was 0.81.

### Statistical Analysis

The present study utilized SPSS 21.0 and an SPSS macro version 3.3 for the data analysis. First, we tabulated sample means and standard deviations; we calculated Cronbach's  $\alpha$  to verify the reliability of each instrument, and explored Pearson's correlation coefficients among research variables to analyze effects of mediation and moderation. Second, we used an SPSS macro (Hayes, 2013) to determine if novice counselors' perfectionism has significant effects on psychological burnout through self-focused attention. Then, we validated the mediating effect of self-focused attention using bootstrapping. Next, we adopted a hierarchical multiple regression analysis to examine how cognitive emotion regulation strategies impact the relationship between self-focused attention and psychological burnout. All continuous variables

were mean centered to reduce multicollinearity between the main effect and interaction terms (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen et al., 2003). To test the statistical significance of the moderating effect, we confirmed the significance of each conditional indirect effect by dividing the level of the moderating variable (cognitive emotion regulation strategies) into low (one standard deviation below the mean), moderate (at the mean), and high (one standard deviation above the mean). Finally, we used an SPSS macro to confirm a moderated mediation effect of self-focused attention on the relationship between perfectionism and psychological burnout.

## Results

### Preliminary Analysis

We conducted analyses to ascertain the mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, and correlations among the measured variables (see Table 1). All scale items showed small to moderate skewness (from -0.79 to 1.13) and kurtosis (-0.78 to 1.62). All measured variables' absolute values for skewness and kurtosis were less than 2, indicating that the data were normally distributed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2000).

Perfectionism was positively correlated with psychological burnout, self-focused attention, and maladaptive emotional regulation strategies, but showed no significant correlation with adaptive emotional regulation strategies. Psychological burnout had positive correlations with self-focused attention and maladaptive emotional regulation strategies. Self-focused attention showed a positive correlation with maladaptive emotional regulation strategies.

### Test of Mediation

To test the mediation effect of self-focused attention on the relationship between perfectionism and psychological burnout (research question 2), we followed the

**Table 1** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Variables (N = 208)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perfectionism					
2. Psychological burnout	.270**				
3. Self-focused attention	.426**	.279**			
4. Adaptive emotional regulation	-.024	-.111	.128		
5. Maladaptive emotional regulation	.432**	.291**	.567**	.023	
<i>M</i>	3.74	2.46	2.89	3.69	2.88
<i>SD</i>	.68	.64	.58	.44	.49
Skewness	-.10	.27	.57	-.49	.11
Kurtosis	.19	.35	.44	1.48	.11

\*\*  $p < .01$

SPSS macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2013). Perfectionism was positively and significantly associated with self-focused attention tendencies ( $B=0.361$ ,  $t=6.749$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; accounting for 18.1% of variance; see Table 2). After controlling for the effects of perfectionism, self-focused attention tendencies had a significant effect on psychological burnout ( $B=0.219$ ,  $t=2.740$ ,  $p=0.0067$ ). Using the bootstrapping method we found a significant indirect effect of perfectionism on psychological burnout via self-focused attention tendencies (95% confidence interval [CI]=[0.01, 0.16]). Thus, novice counselors' perfectionism is positively related to their psychological burnout, with this relation mediated by self-focused attention tendencies.

## Test of Moderation

We conducted hierarchical regression analyses to determine the influence of both self-focused attention tendencies and adaptive emotional regulation strategies on psychological burnout (research question 3; Aiken & West, 1991). To reduce multicollinearity, we used mean centering to analyze self-focused attention tendencies and adaptive emotional regulation strategies. Both the interaction between the two variables and the proportion of variation in  $R^2$  due to this interaction were statistically significant (see Table 3). Thus, counselors' employment of adaptive emotional regulation strategies moderates the degree of impact that self-focused attention tendencies have on psychological burnout.

Since we found a statistically significant interaction, we conducted simple slopes test at high, medium, and low levels of the moderator (adaptive emotional regulation strategies). Simple effects analysis indicated that the association between self-focused attention tendencies and psychological burnout were significant at low levels ( $B=0.499$ ,  $t=4.830$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and medium levels ( $B=0.325$ ,  $t=4.488$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) of adaptive emotional regulation strategies, but not significant at high levels of adaptive emotional regulation strategies ( $B=0.151$ ,  $t=1.454$ ,  $p=0.1476$ ).

We conducted hierarchical regression analyses to determine the role of maladaptive emotional regulation as a moderator. The interaction of self-focused attention tendencies and maladaptive emotional regulation strategies was not statistically significant ( $t=0.121$ ,  $p=0.904$ ). Thus, maladaptive emotional regulation strategies did not moderate the relationship between self-focused attention tendencies and psychological burnout.

**Table 2** A Mediation Model of Self-focused Attention in the Relationship between Perfectionism and Psychological Burnout

Step	Independent Variable(s)	Dependent Variable	$\beta$	$t$	$R^2$	$F$
1	Perfectionism	Psychological burnout	.270	4.023***	.073	16.185***
2	Perfectionism	Self-focused attention	.426	6.749***	.181	45.547***
3	Perfectionism	Psychological burnout	.185	2.532*	.106	12.101***
	Self-focused attention	Psychological burnout	.200	2.740**		

\*  $p<.05$ , \*\*  $p<.01$ , \*\*\*  $p<.001$

**Table 3** A Moderation Model of Adaptive Emotional Regulation Strategy in the Relationship between Self-focused Attention and Psychological Burnout

Predictor	$\beta$	$t$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				
Self-focused attention	.298	4.456***	.100***	.100***
Adaptive emotional regulation	-.150	-2.238*		
Step 2				
Self-focused attention	.297	4.488***		
Adaptive emotional regulation	-.142	-2.142*	.123***	.024*
Self-focused attention X Adaptive emotional regulation	-.154	-2.345*		

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Test of Moderated Mediation**

We used the moderated mediation analysis (using Hayes’s [2013] PROCESS macro [Model 14]) to establish whether an indirect effect occurred from perfectionism to psychological burnout by the mediation of self-focused attention, and if that effect was conditional on the moderation of emotional regulation strategies (see Fig. 1). Table 4 shows the detailed results of the moderated mediation analyses. Results indicated that perfectionism had a significant effect on self-focused attention tendencies ( $p < 0.001$ ). Next, after controlling perfectionism, we found that the effect of self-focused attention tendencies (mediator) on psychological burnout was statistically significant ( $p = 0.003$ ). Also, we found the interaction effect between self-focused attention tendencies and adaptive emotional regulation strategies to have a statistically significant relation to psychological burnout ( $p = 0.015$ ). Thus, it was confirmed that the level of psychological burnout is varied depending on the use of adaptive emotional regulation strategies when perfectionism affects psychological burnout through self-focused attention strategies (research question 4).

**Table 4** A Moderated Mediation Model of Adaptive Emotional Regulation Strategy

	Dependent Variable: Self-focused attention	Dependent Variable: Psychological burnout		
	$B$	$SE$	$t$	$B$ $SE$ $t$
Perfectionism	.361	.054	6.749***	.165 .067 2.467*
Self-focused attention				.240 .079 3.029**
Adaptive emotional regulation				-.183 .094 -1.938
Self-focused attention X Adaptive emotional regulation				-.406 .166 -2.451*

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Results indicated significant moderated mediation in the case of psychological burnout (index of moderated mediation = -0.147, bootstrapped 95% confidence interval = -0.290 to -0.021). Consistent with the initial analyses, the indirect effect was statistically significant for individuals at low and medium levels of adaptive emotional regulation strategies but not significant at high levels of adaptive emotional regulation strategies. Since the interaction between maladaptive emotional regulation strategies and self-focused attention tendencies was not statistically significant, it was not able to confirm the moderated mediation effect of maladaptive emotional regulation strategies.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of perfectionism on psychological burnout and the mediating role of self-focused attention tendencies among novice counselors in South Korea. Regarding the first question, participants' perfectionism was correlated with self-focused attention, psychological burnout, and cognitive emotional regulation strategies. First, perfectionism was positively correlated with psychological burnout. It indicates that novice counselors who have higher levels of perfectionism are likely to experience more psychological burnout. This result is consistent with previous findings showing that perfectionism is a significant predictor of psychological burnout (Hong & Kim, 2018; Kim, 2020). Second, perfectionism was positively correlated with self-focused attention. Perfectionists are likely to develop great levels of self-focused attention (Kim & Lee, 2018a, b). Likewise, self-focused attention was positively correlated with psychological burnout. This result is consistent with a previous finding showing that self-focused attention is a significant predictor of psychological burnout (Kim, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2016). Lastly, maladaptive emotional regulation strategies were positively correlated with psychological burnout. This result indicates that maladaptive emotional regulation strategies, such as self-criticism or disintegration, are likely to contribute to greater levels of psychological burnout in novice counselors (Kim & Shin, 2017; Oh & Choi, 2020).

Regarding the second question, the results of the mediation analysis showed that the relationship between perfectionism and psychological burnout was partially mediated by self-focused attention. This indicates that perfectionism acts as a predictor of psychological burnout, and also indirectly generates psychological burnout through self-focused attention. Perfectionism leads to greater self-focused attention, which in turn leads to psychological burnout (Kim, 2012; Kim & Lee, 2018a, b). These results suggest that for novice counselors who tend to be perfectionists, psychological burnout can be preventable through a reduction in self-focused attention.

Lastly, the moderation of adaptive emotional regulation strategies was significant in the relationship between self-focused attention and psychological burnout. This which means that adaptive emotional regulation strategies can be protective factors that ease the influence of self-focusing attention on psychological burnout. This finding is in line with a previous study that showed rethinking plans (a subscale of adaptive emotional regulation strategy) reduce psychological burnout (Kim

& Shin, 2017). Furthermore, the moderated mediation effects between perfectionism and psychological burnout via self-focused attention decreased as the levels of adaptive emotional regulation strategies increased. Our finding demonstrates that adaptive emotional regulation strategies may play a protective role in reducing the indirect effect of perfectionism on psychological burnout. Novice counselors with high levels of both perfectionism and self-focused attention have disproportionately negative perceptions about their own counseling skills, which leads to psychological burnout. However, with increasingly higher levels of adaptive emotional regulation strategies, levels of psychological burnout declined. Thus, adaptive emotional regulation strategies are necessary to prevent psychological burnout in novice counselors whose perfectionism leads to increased self-focused attention.

### Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, all participants were identified as South Korean. Thus, it is challenging to generalize the findings to other cultures. Second, since most of the participants were female counselors (84.6%), it limits generalization since the effect of gender characteristics were not excluded. Third, our causal model, while informed by our theory, is not the only model that might fit the data. Fourth, we relied on self-reported data. Participants may have subjectively distorted their responses, perhaps by answering in socially desirable directions. More specifically, counselor-participants may have felt too defensive or ashamed to report their psychological burnout or self-focused attention tendencies. Finally, adaptive emotional regulation strategies were divided into three levels to confirm the significance of the moderated mediational effects. By dividing into three levels, we were able to identify that dispositional self-focused attention was significant at lower and medium levels but not significant at the higher level.

### Implications for Practice

Findings from this study have several implications for professional counselors in counseling and education settings. Considering the moderating effects of adaptive emotional regulation strategies, we identified the need for novice counselors to acquire adaptive emotional regulation strategies and actively utilize them to prevent and reduce psychological burnout of novice counselors with perfectionism. In particular, it is necessary for novice counselors to develop the ability to recognize their own psychological burnout and self-focused attention. Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy is another way to prevent psychological burnout (Ko & Kim, 2021; Yoon & Hong, 2017). Mindfulness-based interventions including psychoeducational and experiential domains (e.g., mediation, the body scan, and self-acceptance) have been proven to be effective ways to deal with psychological burnout (Samios, 2018). In a study of 69 Australian counselors, Samios (2018) found that mindfulness-based intervention served as an effective tool in preventing counselors' psychological burnout. In addition, it is necessary to obtain supervision to develop counseling ethical knowledges and protect their mental health. By doing so, counselors are likely to

be aware of the use of adaptive emotional regulations strategies according to notice their level of self-focused attention and psychological burnout.

## Implications for Research

The current study addressed the importance of utilizing self-focused attention and adaptive emotional regulations strategies in approaching psychological burnout of novice counselors. Based on these results, future studies should focus on how to develop adaptive emotional regulation strategies among novice counselors. This line of research will be valuable for scholars in the field of counseling to understand the effect of adaptive emotional strategies on the indirect effect of perfectionism on psychological burnout through self-focused attention.

## Conclusion

In recent years, the stress patterns of clients have become more various due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation; thus, the roles and tasks of counselors have increased accordingly. Even experienced counselors reported fear and hopelessness in counseling in pandemic situation (Han et al., 2020), and novice counselors may experience greater psychological difficulties. The results of our study address the importance of using the self-focused tendency, psychological burnout, and adaptive emotional regulation strategies among novice counselors. Psychological burnout of novice counselors should be considered in order to maintain their individual well-being and provide quality counseling services to clients.

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The authors declared that they have no conflict of interest.

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