Introduction: Counterfactual thinking (CT) is defined as a set of mental representations of alternatives to the past actions and, when it focuses on personal decisions, the emotion that results is regret. Regret is defined as an aversive negative emotion, associated to specific cognitive contents and that can be functional or dysfunctional, particularly when associated with perseverative negative thinking (PNT) and certain personality traits, such as perfectionism.

Objectives: To study for the first time the relationship between regret, perfectionism, PNT and psychological distress in the form of negative affect (NA).

Materials and Methods: 87 college students (73.6% girls, mean age 22.74±4.828) completed Portuguese validated versions of the Hewitt & Flett Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, the Multidimensional Perfectionism Cognitions Inventory (MPCI), the Perseverative Thinking Questionnaire (PTQ), the Profile of Mood States, the Perceived Stress Scale and the Regret Scale (RS).

Results: Regret trait was positively correlated with perfectionism, PNT, NA and stress perception; and inversely with positive affect (PA) and support perception. The comparison of the regret trait scores showed overlapping results to correlations. It was found that even perfectionism and PNT are predictors of regret trait and interference and unproductive IU-PTQ is a partial mediator of the relationship between pursuit of perfection (PP-MPCI) and RS. Regret trait proved to be a predictor of stress perception.

Discussion and Conclusions: In this study, using the Portuguese validated version of RS, a correlation between regret trait and perfectionism was shown. Additionally, and for the first time we demonstrated an association between regret and PNT, NA, PA, perception of stress and support. It was found that higher correlations between regret trait, perfectionism and PNT were experienced with their more maladaptive dimensions (Socially-Prescribed Perfectionism and IU). The PNT, especially its more maladaptive dimension (IU), is a mediator of the relationship between perfectionism and regret. Regret also proved to be a predictor of perception of stress. This preliminary study warrants further research of the relationship between regret, perfectionism, PNT and psychological distress.