

Emotional Regulation in Pakistani Women

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ABSTRACT: A relatively large number of women suffer from mental disorders globally and such disorders tend to disturb their emotional control in stressful situations. There are socio-cultural problems faced by Pakistani women like gender bias, victimization and low autonomy which make it harder for them to emotionally control themselves. The current study is concerned with emotional regulation mechanisms of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression in married and unmarried Pakistani women. The Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) was administered to 220 participants aged between 19-50 years. It was hypothesized that (1) married women would score higher on the mechanism of cognitive reappraisal than unmarried women; and (2) married women would score higher on expressive suppression than unmarried women. The independent samples t-tests revealed that married women scored significantly higher on cognitive reappraisal as compared to unmarried women and hence, the first hypothesis is supported while there were no significant differences on expressive suppression for both groups. The findings highlight the vital importance of the mechanism of reappraisal based on cognitive control in emotional regulation among married women and its future significance in developing coping processes and enhancing well-being.

KEYWORDS: Emotional Regulation, Cognitive Reappraisal, Expressive Suppression, Pakistani

Introduction

The capacity for regulating emotions affects our behavior, social interactions, and managing our feelings in internal and external settings (ER). For guiding our interaction within the social realm, internal stress management, or defense against external injury, emotional regulation is a complex process in which the strength or intensity of the affective state is increased, diminished, or maintained (Gross & Thompson, 2007; Aldao & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012; Gross, 2013). The regulation of emotions, according to Neumann et al. (2010), is crucial for keeping the psychological well-being of an individual in its peak condition. There are several methods that one can use in order to regulate his/her emotions, and by using them, he/she can regulate his/her experiences and behavior as well. Even after two centuries, it is hard to research the topic of emotions. Many scientists agree that emotions are hard to define and study. There are many features that are related to emotions, including physiological changes in state, action tendency, emotion display, and appraisal of the stimulus of the emotion (Frijda, 2005; Scherer et al., 2001). Thus, the whole process is called "emotions". Moreover, the study of the current condition of the individual through emotional regulation can be seen due to its huge capability to regulate the time and intensity of emotions. The representation of Kobylińska et al. (2020) states that there are several areas of our lives which have emotions attached

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to them. It has been pointed out by authors like Smith et al. (2009), Lazarus (1991), Greenberg (2002), and others that the processes, which consist of the primary and secondary evaluation of the emotional stimuli, are known as Emotional Regulation. The primary appraisal is the instinctive reaction which shows how emotionally sensitive the person is, whereas the secondary appraisal is the constrained reaction which shows the emotion regulation.

An emotion is simply mentioned and not examined further in the initial evaluation procedure, as posited by Nezlek et al. (2008). The stage is vital to the subsequent emotion monitoring and control processes (Koole, 2009) since it involves emotion regulation. Following Folkman and Lazarus (1990), when an individual begins to question his ability to manage the situation at hand, secondary appraisal occurs; coping mechanisms are then chosen and implemented. For example, a person will be likely to use problem-focused strategies if he believes that he can change the stressful situation that he is experiencing. But emotion-centered strategies will occur when the individual is powerless to alter the situation, for instance, when one's loved one passes away (Frijda, 2005; Scherer et al., 2001). Therefore, the entire process is referred to as "emotions". In addition, emotional regulation may serve to study the present state of a person since it possesses the significant potential of managing the feelings' time and strength. According to Kobylńska et al. (2020), multiple aspects of our daily life are characterized by emotions too. As argued by Smith et al. (2009), Lazarus (1991), Greenberg (2002), and other scholars, the dynamic operations that consist of primary and secondary evaluation of emotional stimuli are known as Emotional Regulation. Primary appraisal is an instinctive process that reveals one's emotional sensitivity, whereas secondary appraisal is a restrained method indicative of emotion management, as argued by Folkman et al. (1986).

An emotion is simply mentioned and not examined further in the initial evaluation procedure, as posited by Nezlek et al. (2008). The stage is vital to the subsequent emotion monitoring and control processes (Koole, 2009) since it involves emotion regulation. According to Folkman and Lazarus (1990), emotions can be managed by controlling processes that are activated by various events or individual characteristics, such as emotional tendencies or relevance. There are five distinct stages of emotion processing in which emotions can be managed: response modulation, attentional shift, situation alteration, situation selection, and cognitive reappraisal. Emotion regulation can occur at these levels.

These strategies are separated into two groups by Gross (1998): antecedent-oriented (such as reappraisal) and response-oriented (such as suppression) strategies. Response-oriented methods, such as suppression, act later in the process to modify emotional expressions, while antecedent methods, such as reappraisal, modify emotional responses earlier in the process. Regulatory processes, according to Gross (1998), can occur simultaneously, and reappraisal can be utilized to up- or down-regulate emotions. According to Gross (2002), it can also be used to change one emotion into another, for example, turning rage into empathy by considering the viewpoint of another person. The process model provides a deeper comprehension of the emotion regulation (ER) cycle and the factors that contribute to the production of emotions. It enhances emotions to a desirable level as well as providing a thorough description of the ER process.

This method has been supplemented by empirical research findings regarding the causes and consequences of ER. People are found to employ ER methods differently; reappraising and suppressing negative emotions are used in place of happy ones more often (Gross et al., 2006). Regulation is also influenced by the strength of emotions; stronger emotions are likely to be suppressed and withdrawn (Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015; Westen, 1994). Emotional characteristics affect emotion regulation strategies; individuals who want to be happy are more capable of managing negative emotions (Gross & John, 2003; Larsen, 2000). Negative emotions can be suppressed until long-term objectives are met (Parrott, 2001). Human goals and social norms affect emotional experience and expression (Eid & Diener, 2009). While display norms do have a lot of influence on the way positive and negative emotions are felt and expressed, it is not always easy to determine how they connect with each other.

Problem Statement

- ▶ To study the phenomenon of emotional regulation in Pakistani women.

Hypotheses

- ▶ H1= Married women would be more likely to score higher in cognitive reappraisal than unmarried women.
- ▶ H2= Married women would also score higher in expressive suppression than unmarried women.

Literature Review

Emotion regulation is a complex aspect of psychological functioning and refers to the processes by which individuals mold their emotions, the way in which they experience them, and the way they express them outwardly (Gross, 1998). Emotion regulation is fundamental to maintaining good mental health and fostering interpersonal relationships. For women from Pakistan, who are often faced with sociocultural, economic, and family concerns, emotional regulation is of particular importance. This paper reviews the two principal subscales of emotional regulation—cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression—through prior literature, concentrating on the outcomes pertinent to women from Pakistan.

Gross and John (1998) suggested that there are two main emotion regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Cognitive reappraisal is the reappraisal of the occurrence or scenario with a potential to induce an emotion in a way meant to minimize the impact of that emotional activity, typically exhibiting superior psychological consequences (Lazarus & Alfert, 1964; Gross & John, 2003). Cognitive reappraisal is a strategy for emotion regulation that involves changing one's thoughts about an event to alter its emotional value (Gross & John, 2003). This coping strategy has been associated with beneficial outcomes, such as greater psychological health and fewer symptoms of depression (John & Gross, 2004).

In Pakistan, cognitive reappraisal has been investigated primarily within the context of family roles and cultural norms. Pakistani women have been seen to use cognitive reappraisal as a method of coping to manage stress derived from gender-related expectations, e.g., in following patriarchal caregiving patterns and promoting household harmony. Furthermore, cognitive reappraisal has been found to be related to enhanced resilience among women undergoing exposure to sociopolitical and economic adversity (Butt, A. et al., 2020). Women who reframe challenging circumstances in a positive way are reported to show higher life satisfaction and lower anxiety.

Cross-cultural research highlights that the collectivist nature of Pakistani society can motivate the utilization of cognitive reappraisal. In contrast to individualistic cultures where emotional expression is encouraged, Pakistani women can utilize cognitive reappraisal to deal with the complex family relationships without the open manifestation of negative emotions. Such practice is appropriate for the cultural requirement of maintaining group harmony and conflict avoidance.

In contrast, emotion suppression, without changing the subjective experiences of emotion but reducing emotional displays, impairs emotions and relationships (Gross & Levenson, 1993; Gross & John, 2003). Successful emotion regulation relies on the use of adaptive strategies such as cognitive reappraisal in terms of enhancing emotional life. Expressive suppression is the repression of outward emotion expression, particularly negative emotions (Gross & John, 2003). While it might be a transient means of avoiding conflict, suppression is generally found to have undesirable psychological outcomes, such as heightened stress and lower well-being (Butler et al., 2003).

In the sociocultural context of Pakistan, expressive suppression occurs in women due to cultural requirements of emotional restraint and modesty. Women learn to suppress such feelings as anger or frustration to satisfy ideals of obedience and sacrifice, especially in marital and family relationships. While such practice may avoid direct

confrontation in the short run, it may produce long-term psychological outcomes like helplessness and reduced emotional intimacy within relationships.

Evidence further indicates that expressive suppression in Pakistani women is facilitated by patriarchal society and limited channels of emotional expression. Research conducted by Ahmad et al. (2019) revealed that women who often suppress their emotions are more likely to develop somatic symptoms, like headaches and fatigue, which are culturally endorsed ways of expressing emotional distress. In addition, the internalization of such suppression could lead to the onset of depressive and anxiety disorders.

The combination of reappraisal of cognition and suppression of expression says a great deal about Pakistani women's emotional regulation. Although in most cases reappraisal is adaptive, when suppression is over-relied on along with it, its advantage can be reversed (Peña-Sarrionandia, A. et al., 2015). Besides, social pressures typically require the use of these strategies in combination. Pakistani women cognitively redefine experiences in a way that they experience a sense of personal agency while managing their feelings to fit into societal expectations (Malik et al., 2022). The dual strategy captures the intricate balancing act that women adopt to fulfill personal as well as societal demands.

The cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression emotion regulation strategies have varying impacts on the mental well-being and health of Pakistani women. Cognitive reappraisal results in resilience and healthy coping, while expressive suppression is likely to correspond to negative psychological consequences. Understanding the cultural and context-specific determinants of these strategies is important when developing context-sensitive interventions to promote emotional well-being in Pakistani women. Future studies should investigate the intricate interplay between these strategies and their impact on specific mental health outcomes, providing a more complete overall understanding of emotional regulation in this population.

Objectives of the Study

1. To compare married and unmarried women's use of cognitive reappraisal as a strategy for regulating emotions.
2. To investigate differences in expressive suppression (suppressing expression of emotion) among married and unmarried women.
3. To investigate the inter-relationship between cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression among the married women.

Methodology

Sample

A total of 220 women from Karachi are included in this study. For informed participation, all are being given written consent prior to filling out the survey. The age limit of the study is only for women aged 19 to 50 years. Simple random sampling is being employed to pick the participants from the population of Karachi, which will provide a representative and unbiased sample.

Measures

Demographic Information Sheet

A demographic data sheet has been developed to gather age, marital status, employment status, and education level of the participants. Names of the participants are not requested to ensure confidentiality.

Informed Consent Form

Informed consent forms were employed to obtain the consent of the participants. Participants' confidentiality of personal information was guaranteed in return for receiving some study information. In the event of ethical considerations being raised in the questionnaire, it did not include participants' names and surnames.

Emotional Regulation Questionnaire

The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) is a 10-item self-report scale by Gross and John (2003) to assess emotion regulation strategies. Two principal strategies are assessed by this: cognitive reappraisal (restructuring thoughts to change emotions) and expressive suppression (suppressing emotional expressions). ERQ has demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from79 to.73, as well as validity related to psychological well-being, academic performance, and job satisfaction. It is helpful in research and evaluating emotion regulation capacity in varying settings.

Research Design

- ▶ Instruction
- ▶ Administration of demographic sheet
- ▶ Administration of the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire
- ▶ Responses
- ▶ Data analysis

Procedure

220 women were chosen for this research by simple random sampling. The questionnaire was completed: the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (10 items). Participants were approached from various institutions, universities, and offices in Karachi. All participants provided informed consent and volunteered for the research. They were asked to complete the questionnaire carefully and honestly. The data collected were then analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods.

Data Analysis

Inferential statistics, more specifically parametric tests, will be applied to examine correlations among emotional control in Pakistani females. An independent t-test was conducted to examine those correlations. These data were investigated using IBM SPSS Statistics 20, including descriptive statistics such as standard deviation and the mean of the data, and the t-test.

Results

Table 1

Demographic Description of the Participants (N=220)

Demographic Variables	Profile	f	%
Marital Status	Unmarried	110	50.0
	Married	110	50.0
Education	Matriculation	1	0.5
	Intermediate	7	3.2
	Graduate	143	65.0
	Masters	57	25.9
	Post-Masters	12	5.5
Working Status	Working	130	59.1
	Non-working	90	40.9

Table I displays the frequency distribution of the demographics of 220 female participants. It indicates the demographic profile, particularly their educational status, work, and marital status. The participants were 110 unmarried and 110 married females. On the basis of distribution by education level, 1 was matriculation, 7 were intermediate, 143 were graduates, 57 were masters, while 12 were post master's students. Among 220 females, 130 were working, and 90 were non-working females.

Table 2

Psychometric Properties of Scales

Scales	M	SD	Range	Cronbach's α
Emotional Regulation Questionnaire	45.61	9.24	15-66	0.703

Table II indicates the psychometric properties of the scales along with mean and standard deviation. It further explains the range and Cronbach's alpha value of all scales. The value of the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire is 0.703, which reflects a moderately good relationship between the items of the scale.

Table 3

Comparison of Marital Status of Emotion Regulation Strategies (Cognitive Reappraisal, Expressive Suppression)

Variable	Groups				df	t	P	Cohen's d
	Married (N=100)		Unmarried (N=100)					
	M	SD	M	SD				
Cognitive Reappraisal	29.3318	5.838	27.309	7.088	218	2.294	.023	.309
Expressive Suppression	17.636	4.560	16.972	4.888	217	1.041	.299	.140

Table III indicates that a significant difference ($t [218] = 2.294, p = 0.023$) was found between the groups of married ($\bar{x} = 29.318, SD = 5.838$) and unmarried ($\bar{x} = 27.309, SD = 7.088$) on cognitive reappraisal. However, no significant difference was found between marital status and expressive suppression ($t [217] = 1.041, p = 0.299$).

Discussion

The current study examined differences in emotion regulation between married and unmarried individuals, specifically between cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Our results partially confirmed the hypotheses, indicating that cognitive reappraisal was significantly higher for married individuals than it was for unmarried individuals, whereas no significant differences were found for expressive suppression. These findings add to the expanding literature on the dynamic interaction between relational status and emotional regulation, and they point to subtle differences in how marital contexts can influence adaptive and maladaptive regulatory approaches.

Hypothesis I: Married women would be more likely to score higher in cognitive reappraisal than unmarried women.

The prediction that married individuals would endorse more use of cognitive reappraisal was confirmed, consistent with theories suggesting that long-term relationships promote adaptive emotion regulation.

Cognitive reappraisal, or the process of reframing emotional experience to dampen its effect (Gross & John, 2003), can be fostered through marital processes like conflict resolution, joint problem-solving, and mutual emotional support. For example, Bloch et al. (2014) contended that married couples tend to develop co-regulation strategies that emphasize cognitive flexibility, a skill that can generalize to more general reappraisal tendencies. In addition, the everyday pressures of relationship harmony may motivate married couples to use reappraisal as a means

of reducing interpersonal stressors. This result highlights the possible function of marital interdependence in increasing emotional resilience through cognitive restructuring.

Hypothesis II: Married women would also score higher in expressive suppression than unmarried women.

In contrast to predictions, expressive suppression, or the suppression of emotion-expressive behavior, was not significantly different across married and unmarried groups. This null finding contradicts expectations that marital commitments require higher suppression of negative emotion. Although there is evidence that suppression may temporarily stabilize interactions (Butler et al., 2003), its long-term cost (e.g., decreased intimacy) may deter its use in marriage. Alternatively, cultural or cohort-specific norms in the sample may have reduced differences; for example, Hofmann et al. (2012) found that suppression varies widely across demographic groups. The non-significant result could also be due to methodological constraints, such as the cross-sectional nature of the study or self-report methods, which may not accurately assess situational suppression during marital conflicts.

The conflicting results for reappraisal and suppression could arise from their divergent social implications. Cognitive reappraisal involves relational happiness and fewer longer-term cognitive costs and is thus sustainable in long-term relationships (Peña-Sarrionandia, A. et al., 2015). In contrast, the link between suppression and psychological tension (Srivastava et al., 2009) could deter individuals in marriages from using suppression, leading to similar levels for the two groups. Moreover, cultural stories presenting marriage as a site of emotional development (e.g., "working through problems") may subtly promote reappraisal and stigmatize suppression as emotionally dishonest. This is consistent with evidence that adaptive regulation strategies are more predictive of relationship satisfaction than suppressive ones (Levenson et al., 1994).

Limitations and Recommendations of the Study

- ▶ Self-report measures were utilized in this study, which could involve response bias; future studies need to utilize multi-method approaches (e.g., behavioral observation) to corroborate findings.
- ▶ The homogeneous sample restricts generalizability; future research needs to address culturally and demographically diverse populations to mirror global emotional standards.
- ▶ Cross-sectional design rules out causal inferences; longitudinal research is advised to examine how marital experience influences emotion regulation across time.

Conclusion

Findings demonstrate the utility of differentiating emotion regulation approaches in relational study. Marriage predicts cognitive reappraisal but doesn't increase suppression equally, even as popular descriptions of emotional suppression in relationships expect so. Future studies examining contextual factors (e.g., level of conflict, marital duration) could illuminate such processes.

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