

Suppression and reappraisal in relation to dimensions of obsessive-compulsive disorder in persons with OCD

S.Kumar^{1*}, S.Mohanty², R.Kumar³

ABSTRACT

The persons with OCD have increased levels of negative emotions particularly anxiety, fear and sadness. Also they have difficulties in regulating their negative emotions. In the present paper, we explored the association of suppression and re-appraisal emotion regulation strategies in relation to dimensions of OCD. 30 patients with OCD sampled from Institute of Mental Health and Hospital, Agra were individually administered Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John 2003) and Dimensional Obsessive-Compulsive Scale (Abramowitz et al. 2010). The results suggested that re-appraisal strategy was negatively associated with Germs Dimension and positively associated with Thoughts Dimension of OCD. It is suggested that for the use of different types of emotion regulation strategy vary with the nature of psychopathology in the patients with OCD.

Keywords: OCD, CBT, Emotion Regulation, Negative Emotions

Heightened negative emotions specifically anxiety, fear and sadness accompany psychopathology in patients with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) (Yap et al., 2012). Empirical observations suggest bi-directionality in the relationship between OCD psychopathology and negative emotions, i.e. experiences that elicit negative emotions aggravate the symptoms, also the symptoms intensify negative emotions. Many persons with OCD develop secondary depression. The manners in which the distressing emotions are handled can affect the overall psychopathology as well as the sense of control and wellbeing.

Gratz and Roemer (2004) suggested that the emotion regulation difficulties may result from multiple deficits which include poor understanding and awareness of emotions, poor acceptance of negative emotional experiences, difficulties in controlling impulses, lack of flexibility in adopting suitable emotion regulation strategy etc. Studies (Allen & Barlow, 2009; Cristea et al. 2013; Twohig et al., 2010) further suggest that avoidance of emotions plays a key role in psychological disorders.

¹M.D., Director, Institute of Mental Health and Hospital, Agra-282002 India

²Ph.D., Research Officer, Institute of Mental Health and Hospital, Agra-282002 India

³Ph.D., Senior Clinical Psychologist, Institute of Mental Health and Hospital, Agra-282002 India

*Responding Author

Received: August 27, 2019; Revision Received: December 12, 2019; Accepted: December 25, 2019

Suppression And Reappraisal In Relation To Dimensions Of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder In Persons With OCD

Robinson and Freeston (2014) reported presence of alexithymia and anxiety sensitivity and increased level of distress tolerance in persons with OCD. Stern et al. (2014) observed that emotion regulation difficulties were associated with OCD symptoms in non-clinical sample. Smith et al. (2012) reported that the persons with harm OCD felt emotions as threatening and 'not just right' feeling predicted symmetry concern. The work of Allen and Barlow (2009) provided unique evidence in favor of emotion regulation in OCD. They taught OCD patients to reduce avoidance to clinically irrelevant emotional cues which resulted in increased acceptance of thoughts and feelings, decreased suppression of thoughts and reduction in severity of OCD symptoms. Since, their method did not involve exposure to clinically relevant cues, it was not considered as a procedure within exposure technique. Their observations of clinical benefits in OCD symptoms provide evidence of functional relationship between emotional regulation and severity of OCD symptoms.

Yap et al (2018) conducted two studies to examine the role of emotion regulation difficulties in OCD. Their results suggested higher level of emotion regulation difficulties in OCD patients compared to matched control and emotion regulation difficulties as measured by scores on Difficulties' in Emotion Regulation Scale were significantly associated with severity of OCD even when the effects of age, gender, anxiety and depression were accounted for.

In another paper, we (Kumar, Mohanty and Kumar, 2018) reported emotional dysregulation of negative affect in persons with OCD. In the present paper, we were interested in exploring emotion regulation in relation with dimensions of OCD.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

30 Patients with OCD were taken from Institute of Mental Health and Hospital, Agra. Those who had a history of major psychiatric disorder, associated major medical condition or low intellectual functioning were not included.

Instruments

Two measures were used in this study,

- 1. Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ):** ERQ developed by Gross & John (2003) consists of 10 items that assess two strategies of emotion regulation (a) Re-appraisal (b) Suppression. Each item is assessed on 7-point Likert Scale, 1 being strongly disagree, and 7 as strongly agree. 6 items assess re-appraisal strategy and 4 items assess suppression strategy. It has strong psychometric properties (Preece et al. 2019).
- 2. Dimensional Obsessive-Compulsive Scale (DOCS):** DOCS developed by Abramowitz et al. (2010) consists of 20-items which assess the severity of OCD symptoms for four dimensions: (a) contamination, (b) responsibility for harm and mistakes, (c) unacceptable thought (d) incompleteness/symmetry. Each dimension consists of 5 items which are scored in the range of 0-5. The scale has adequate psychometric properties across cultures.

Procedure

Each prospective participant was approached and briefed about the nature of the study and after obtaining the consent, Emotion Regulation Questionnaire and Dimensional Obsessive-Compulsive Scale were individually administered by second author.

Suppression And Reappraisal In Relation To Dimensions Of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder In Persons With OCD

RESULTS

Table No. 1 Sample Characteristics

Characteristics		Mean/Percentage	Std. Deviation
Age in Years		28.36	9.34
Years of Education		13.60	3.46
Duration of Illness in Years		08.03	3.64
Age of Onset of Illness		19.53	6.03
Gender	Male	70%	-
	Female	30%	-
Domicile	Rural	30%	-
	Urban	70%	-
Marital Status	Unmarried	50%	-
	Married	50%	-

Table-1 indicates that the mean age of the participants was 28.36 years with an SD of 9.34 years. The average years of education were 13.60 years with an SD of 3.46 years. The average duration of illness was 8.03 years (SD=3.64 years) and age of onset of illness was 19.53 years (SD 6.03 years). The sample consisted of 70% male and 30% female participants. 30% of the participants hailed from rural area and 70% from urban area. The proportion of married and unmarried patients was equal (50%).

Table No. 2 Correlation Co-efficients between ERQ and DOCS Dimensions in Total Sample

ERQ Dimensions	DOCS: Contamination	DOCS: Responsibility	DOCS: Thoughts	DOCS: Symmetry
ERQ: Suppression	-.203	.154	.055	-.196
ERQ: Reappraisal	-.361*	.283	.386*	-.317

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Table-2 suggests significant association of Reappraisal with contamination and thoughts dimensions. The association with contamination is negative whereas for thoughts it is positive.

DISCUSSION

Cognitive Reappraisal strategy is based on the reinterpretation of situations that elicit emotional responses. The re-assigned meaning to the situation can potentially change the course, experience and impact of an emotion. Reappraisal is an antecedent-focused strategy that acts before activation of full emotion (Gross and John, 2003). The results suggest that reappraisal is negatively associated with contamination dimension of OCD. That means, reappraisal can be helpful in reducing the experience of contamination. Olatunji et al. (2017) based on the observations that conditioned disgust is resistant to extinction, studied the role of cognitive appraisal in attenuating disgust. After conditioning subjects to disgust they implemented cognitive appraisal training and observed that the disgust was reduced after training in cognitive reappraisal. They concluded that cognitive reappraisal may be an effective procedure for attenuation of acquired disgust.

Unacceptable thoughts dimension of DOCS, taps highly distressing repugnant thoughts, images related to violence, immorality, sex, religion, family members etc. Cognitive re-

Suppression And Reappraisal In Relation To Dimensions Of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder In Persons With OCD

appraisal strategy is having high positive correlation with thoughts dimension. Apparently, it may seem counter intuitive because typically cognitive re-appraisal should have corrective effects on the thoughts dimension. But empirical observations show that the persons with OCD having repugnant thoughts keep themselves engaged in endless intellectualization against such thoughts and try to replace unacceptable thoughts and images by neutral ideas and images which largely remain unsuccessful in effectively containing of the distress associated with highly objectionable content of obsession. This may be the reason that their unhealthy pattern of re-appraisal do not lead to reduction in the distress and the obsessions.

The use of thought suppression strategy is widely reported in the context of OCD (Purdon, 2004). But in the present study, thought suppression was not found to be specifically associated with any of the dimensions of OCD. The reasons for this lack of associations are unclear.

CONCLUSION

The patients with OCD do have difficulties in regulation of their emotions. Re-appraisal and suppression are the two important strategies for regulation of emotions. Thought suppression is considered as more maladaptive and re-appraisal as the healthy strategy. The data of the present study suggested lack of association of thought suppression with any of the four dimensions of OCD. But re-appraisal was found to be negatively associated with contamination dimension of OCD and positively associated with thoughts dimension of OCD. These results suggest that the predominant usage of emotion regulation strategy may vary across the psychopathological dimensions and the re-appraisal in thoughts dimension itself may be more maladaptive. Cognitive re-appraisal training may be more beneficial in contamination OCD to attenuate feelings of disgust.

REFERENCES

- Abramowitz JS., Deacon B., Olatunji B., et al (2010) Assessment of obsessive compulsive symptom dimensions: Development and evaluation of the dimensional obsessive-compulsive scale. *Psychological Assessment*; 22:180–198.
- Allen, L. B., & Barlow, D. H. (2009). Relationship of Exposure to Clinically Irrelevant Emotion Cues and Obsessive-Compulsive Symptoms. *Behavior Modification*, 33(6), 743-762
- Cristea, I. A., Montgomery, G. H., Szamoskozi, Ş., & David, D. (2013). Key Constructs in “Classical” and “New Wave” Cognitive Behavioral Psychotherapies: Relationships Among Each Other and With Emotional Distress. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69(6), 584-599.
- Gratz, K. L., & Roemer, L. (2004). Multidimensional Assessment of Emotion Regulation and Dysregulation: Development, Factor Structure, and Initial Validation of the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 26(1), 41-54.
- Gross, J.J., & John, O.P. (2003). Individual differences in two emotion regulation processes: Implications for affect, relationships, and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85, 348-362.
- Olatunji BO, Berg H, Cox RC, Billingsley A.(2017) The effects of cognitive reappraisal on conditioned disgust in contamination-based OCD: An analogue study. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*. 51:86-93
- Kumar, S., Mohanty, S. & Kumar, R. (2018) Emotional Dysregulation of Affect in Persons with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. *Indian Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 45 (2) 28-32.

Suppression And Reappraisal In Relation To Dimensions Of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder In Persons With OCD

- Preece, D., Becerra, R., Robinson, K. & Gross, J. (2019). The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire: Psychometric Properties in General Community Samples. *Journal of Personality Assessment*. 10.1080/00223891.2018.1564319.
- Purdon, C. (2004). Empirical investigations of thought suppression in OCD. *Journal of behavior therapy and experimental psychiatry*, 35 2, 121-36 .
- Robinson, L. J., & Freeston, M. H. (2014). Emotion and internal experience in Obsessive Compulsive Disorder: Reviewing the role of alexithymia, anxiety sensitivity and distress tolerance. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 34(3), 256-271.
- Smith, A. H., Wetterneck, C. T., Hart, J. M., Short, M. B., & Björgvinsson, T. (2012). Differences in obsessional beliefs and emotion appraisal in obsessive compulsive symptom presentation. *Journal of obsessive-compulsive and related disorders*,1(1), 54-61.
- Stern, M. R., Nota, J. A., Heimberg, R. G., Holaway, R. M., & Coles, M. E. (2014). An initial examination of emotion regulation and obsessive compulsive symptoms. *Journal of obsessive-compulsive and related disorders*, 3(2), 109-114.
- Twohig, M. P., Hayes, S. C., Plumb, J. C., Pruitt, L. D., Collins, A. B., Hazlett-Stevens, H., & Woidneck, M. R. (2010). A randomized clinical trial of acceptance and commitment therapy versus progressive relaxation training for obsessive compulsive disorder. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 78(5), 705-716.
- Yap, K., Mogan, C., & Kyrios, M. (2012). Obsessive-compulsive disorder and comorbid depression: The role of OCD-related and non-specific factors. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 26(5), 565-573.
- Yap, K., Mogan C, Moriarty A, Dowling N, Blair-West S, Gelgec C, Moulding R (2018). Emotion regulation difficulties in obsessive-compulsive disorder. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*. 74(4):695-709

Acknowledgements

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interests.

How to cite this article: S Kumar, S Mohanty & R Kumar (2019). Suppression and reappraisal in relation to dimensions of obsessive-compulsive disorder in persons with OCD. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 7(4), 376-380. DIP:18.01.043/20190704, DOI:10.25215/0704.043