

## A study on emotional regulation of an individual during COVID-19 lockdown period

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### ABSTRACT

Life as we know came to a halt due to the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. Millions of people are locked inside their homes. Close monitoring of behaviour has shown that the lockdown periods have caused individuals to experience heightened feelings of unrest, fear and anxiety. The psychological impact of confinement, working from home, financial problems due to unemployment, sudden change in lifestyle have caused an increased number of people seeking mental health support. This study evaluates an individual's emotional regulation during lockdown, using the 10-item emotional regulation questionnaire (ERQ). The ERQ is divided into two classes, one class is measuring the individual's use of cognitive reappraisal and the other class is measuring emotional suppression. A random sample of individuals completed the ERQ during the 4th phase of lockdown due to COVID-19 in India. According to the results, the cognitive reappraisal strategy is used more than the expressive suppression strategy by both men and women. It can be interpreted that the individuals have attempted to reinterpret an emotion-eliciting situation in a way that alters its meaning and it changes the emotional impact.

**Keywords:** *Emotional regulation, ERQ scale, Cognitive Reappraisal, Expressive Suppression, Covid-19, Lockdown Period, Unisex Comparison*

**D**ue to the global lockdown for covid-19 pandemic situations, an increased emotional disturbance in individuals can be observed. As the emotional facet of mental health is suppression and reappraisal, to study such facets, emotional regulation questionnaires (ERQ) are taken into consideration. Emotional self-regulation or emotion regulation is the ability to respond to the ongoing demands of experience with the range of emotions in a manner that is socially tolerable and sufficiently flexible to permit spontaneous reactions as well as the ability to delay spontaneous reactions when needed. It can also be defined as extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions. Emotional self-regulation belongs to the broader set of emotion regulation processes, which includes both the regulation of one's own feelings and the regulation of other people's feelings. In this study the Emotional regulation

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questionnaire scale developed by [1] was used. It is a 10-item self-report scale designed to assess habitual use of two commonly used strategies to alter emotion: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Expressive suppression is a type of emotional regulation strategy that is used to try and make uncomfortable thoughts and feelings more manageable. Cognitive reappraisal is a psychological strategy that is useful when the stressful situation at hand cannot be changed. It involves lessening the emotional impact of a stressful situation by reframing or reappraising the initial perception of it [1]. The works done by [3] examined psychometric properties of ERQ in two communities, using confirmatory analysis, and reported depression, gender, anxiety and stress are the only factor associated with reappraisal and suppression. The work done by [4] validated a Chinese adaptation of the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (ERQ-CCA), which is a self-report instrument that evaluates two emotion regulation strategies, based on the process model of emotional regulation. The reports indicated that the ERQ-CCA had satisfactory reliability and validity in investigating the use of two emotional regulation strategies during the middle childhood developmental period. This [5] work demonstrates the use of emotional regulation questionnaires for children and adolescents (ERQ-CA) which was done over a 12 month period. It has been concluded here that both of the 2 strategies of ERQ are applicable and can be used as a valid age appropriate measurement procedure during childhood and adolescence whilst demonstrating sound construct and convergent validity. Here [6] the Persian version of ERQ is taken into account and it was concluded that both the strategies are competent, usable, relevant and applicable in the students of Tehran University and also in research and clinical scenarios. The work here [7] done in France reveals the relativity between emotions and mental health with emotional regulation strategies. The results indicated a relationship between maladaptive emotion cognitive emotional regulation with blaming others and catastrophizing. Positive emotional reappraisal and focusing was in relation with adaptive cognitive emotion regulation. They also found out that cognitive emotion regulation is useful for behavioural interventions. The study [8] was done on 633 Italian adolescents and it was concluded that the well being corresponds to the preferred emotion regulation strategies and mirroring associations are also found in the adult population. It showed a greater reliance on CR was positively associated with well being especially greater satisfaction, social support perception and positive affect whereas Greater preference for ES showed a relationship with negative affect, emotional loneliness and lower satisfaction. The work by [9] was done among a sample of older community-dwelling males and females, to examine the psychometric properties of the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) and to assess gender differences in the association between emotion regulation and positive and negative affect. According to the results, it was shown that the two ERQ subscales ie, reappraisal and suppression were internally consistent. Reappraisal was positively correlated with positive affect among both genders, and negatively correlated with negative affect among older women only whereas, Suppression was positively correlated with negative affect among older men only and unrelated to positive affect for both genders. The study by [10] was to investigate the emotion regulation strategies in parent-child conflicts among Taiwanese teenagers and young adults. The potential contributions of indigenization to psychology of emotion, and the advantages of indigenization over standardization of foreign measures were discussed. The area of emotional regulation strategies used by individuals during the Covid-19 lockdown period is an active area of study. The study done in this work is to inform the use of suppression and reappraisal strategies of individuals of different genders and ages during the covid-19 lockdown in India.

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### Objectives

1. To assess and measure two emotion regulation strategies i.e., the constant tendency to regulate emotions by cognitive reappraisal or expressive suppression.
2. To compare the emotional regulation strategies between men and women during the COVID-19 lockdown.
3. To study the emotional regulation techniques across various age groups.

## METHODOLOGY

### Design

The study was an observational study. Participants were randomly selected from an age group of 17-25 years and were informed about the study. Consenting individuals were assigned to respond to questionnaires via the internet. Participants pool, consist of 70 individuals. The questionnaire consisted of 10 statements and the respondents had to answer each statement on a 7-point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

### Sample

A number of 52 individuals participated in this study (Male - 26, Female - 26). The age range was 17- 25 years. The participating individuals were from the urban region of India.

### Measure

The emotional regulation strategies have been accessed using ERQ in this work for a comparative study across various factors of the participating individual's demographics. Assessment of demographics: The participants were asked to provide the following: their age-group (from 17 years to 25 year), gender (male, female, prefer not to say).

The Emotional Regulation questionnaire (ERQ) scale was administered to find out the emotional regulation of individuals during the Covid-19 lockdown period. It was developed by Gross and John (2003) [1]. It's a 10-item self-report questionnaire that targets the emotion regulatory process and strategies for regulating and managing emotions. The questionnaire consists of 10 statements capturing the cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. The cognitive reappraisal scale has 6 statements while expressive suppression scale has 4 statements in the questionnaire. The scale used is 7-point likert scale where 1 mean "strongly disagree", 4 means "neutral" and 7 mean "strongly agree". Having a higher value in a subscale means that method is more preferred. Earlier studies have shown that ERQ had high internal consistency for expressive subscale and cognitive reappraisal [1]. Several measure [2] reported good convergent validity

### Interpretation

**Table .1 Correlation Table between CRF, ESF and men, women.**

CRF		ESF	
Men Vs Women		Men Vs Women	
<b>Correlation</b>	<b>-0.032</b>	<b>Correlation</b>	<b>0.219</b>
<b>Men</b>		<b>Women</b>	
CRF Vs ESF		CRF Vs ESF	
<b>Correlation</b>	<b>0.494</b>	<b>Correlation</b>	<b>0.075</b>

The table. 1 shows the pearson correlation coefficient between the CRF and ESF of men vs women and the pearson correlation coefficient between CRF vs ESF for men and women.

**Table .2 Mean of CRF and ESF for Men and Women**

	Men	Women	For both men and women
<b>CRF</b>	28.846	28.769	21.18
<b>ESF</b>	16.538	16.423	16.66

Table .2 shows the mean of mean and women for the CRF and ESF subscale of ERQ.

**Table .3 Standard Deviation of CRF for different age group**

Age	18	19	20	21	22
Standard deviation of ESF	6.153	5.449	6.389	5.983	5.570
Standard deviation of CRF	3.710	4.942	5.646	4.828	3.969

Table .3 shows the standard deviation of ESF and CRF for different age.

According to the Table 6.2, the mean of CRF for men is 28.846 and for women is 28.769 and the mean of ESF for men is 16.538 and for women is 16.423. The average score of CRF for both men and women is 21.18 and the average score of ESF for both men and women is 16.66. Based on the results it can be interpreted that as the CRF score is more than the ESF score, people are not suppressing their emotions but they are trying to reinterpret the current situations by modulating emotional responses. This study also observes the pearson correlation coefficient between the CRF and ESF between men versus women and also observes the pearson correlation coefficient between the CRF versus ESF for both men and women. From the calculated coefficients the observations are drawn. From Table 6.1 we see that the correlation coefficient of CRF between men versus women is -0.032 which indicates that there is no correlation between the CRF of men and women. The correlation coefficient of ESF between men versus women is 0.219 indicating that there is negligibly low positive correlation between the ESF of men and women. Now we tried to observe the correlation between the CRF and ESF for men and women respectively. The correlation coefficient of 0.075 for CRF versus ESF for women indicated that there is no correlation between the CRF and ESF for women. The values of 0.494 for CRF versus ESF of men indicates that there is a positive correlation between CRF and ESF for men.

As the data was collected during the lockdown period for Covid-19, the participants were specifically instructed that they are supposed to give their responses to the statements of the questionnaire according to their emotions that they observed during this period. So, for the given circumstance the analysis of the data stuff can be interpreted as that due to change in life-style and work habits, individuals are reinterpreting the situation to regulate emotions rather than suppressing their emotions. From Table 6.3, it can be seen that there is a gradual increase from the age group of 18 years to 20 years following by a decrease in age from 21 years to 22 years. From this observation it can be seen that the age group of 18-19 years shows a very low standard deviation which indicates that the reappraisal strategies of individuals of this age group are clustered. Thereby indicating that, most individuals of this age group are using similar reappraisal techniques to cope up with the lockdown period. The standard deviations of CRF from age group 21 years to 22 years also shows a low standard deviation thereby signifying that the reappraisal techniques followed by the individuals of this age group are similar too, in the lockdown period. However, the standard deviation of the age group of 20 years has shown a sudden peak, identifying the varied range of

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reappraisal techniques followed by these individuals to deal with the lockdown situation. Thus, from these observations the intra-group standard deviation shows the similarity of the reappraisal techniques used by the individuals while the inter-group change shows how an individual's emotional regulation techniques changes with age. It can also be observed from Table 6.3 that individuals of a particular age group are using similar reappraisal strategies whereas they are using a varied range of suppression techniques to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown situation.

### CONCLUSION

Due to the change in the lifestyle and regular habits of an individual for the lockdown enforced to curb the spread of the global pandemic of Covid-19, emotional valence is being affected. In this study the emotional regulation strategies employed are evaluated. Further research should call for preventive methods to deal with the affected emotional regulation strategies. Also, comparative study across various groups of individuals from different professional backgrounds. The comparative analysis can be extended to individuals from different domicile.

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***Conflict of Interest***

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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