

## Emotional regulation and life satisfaction among housewives

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### ABSTRACT

Emotional regulation refers to the extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions towards situations and experiences. The ability to appraise (cognitive reappraisal) situations and the expression of one's emotions (emotional suppression) is defined as emotional regulation skills. Life satisfaction is the subjective evaluation of an individual's own life. This study aimed to study the impact of emotional regulation on life satisfaction among housewives. A purposive sampling of 200 housewives was done belonging to middle socio-economic strata. The measures used in the study were Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). Quantitative analysis using correlation method and z-score was done. The results point out that there was a significant effect of emotional suppression and cognitive reappraisal on life satisfaction. A positive correlation of 0.78 was found between emotional regulation and life satisfaction.

**Keywords:** *Emotional Regulation, Cognitive Reappraisal, Emotional Suppression, Satisfaction with Life*

For ages, women have held the traditional role of being the “homemaker”. Social expectations and desirability have bound women to this role for centuries. A study conducted by Nancy P. Rothbard (2001) found that women experience enrichment from family to work. Financial need is an important reason why working-class women seek jobs, but it should not be seen as either excluding or trivializing the basic social and psychological needs which for many are not met in housework as a fulltime occupation. Housework may not be felt to be menial or degrading, but it also does not lead to a sense of competence, social connectedness, or self-determination equal to that produced by paid employment. (Ferree, M. M. 1976)<sup>(10)</sup>

According to a Government of India report, women should be empowered socially, economically, educationally and politically so that they can take decisions regarding mobility, economic independence, political participation, and public speaking and increase their awareness to exercise rights. However, in the course of being a housewife woman often complain of losing out on being empowered for these roles. It aids one to feel physically and emotionally drained. A study conducted by Choudhary, L. and Ahmad, A, 2017<sup>(5)</sup> on psychological well-being among housewives and working women of Mithila region, North

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Bihar, India reported that elderly housewives have low level of psychological well-being in comparison to elderly working women. The burden of social expectations matched with a lack of sense of accomplishment and competence may turn housewives towards negative thoughts thus preventing them from indulging in emotional regulation skills. As has been pointed out by massive research, emotional regulation if practiced can have an effect on life satisfaction and psychological well-being (Chiara Verzeletti, Vanda Lucia Zammuner, Cristina Galli & Sergio Agnoli, Cornelia Duregger (Reviewing Editor) (2016) <sup>(4)</sup>; Yiğit, A., Özpolat, A. R., & Kandemir, M. (2014) <sup>(23)</sup>; De Castella, K., Goldin, P., Jazaieri, H., Ziv, M., Dweck, C. S., & Gross, J. J. (2013). <sup>(6)</sup>

### ***Emotional Regulation***

Emotional regulation refers to the monitoring, evaluation and modification of emotional reactions by the use of extrinsic and intrinsic processes. To put it simple, emotions are signals within your body that give you cues of your experiences. When a pleasurable situation arises, you feel good; when a distressful situation arises, you feel bad. As has been pointed out by Marsha M. Linehan- the developer of Dialectical Behavior Therapy: emotions are complex, brief, patterned, full- system responses to internal and external stimuli. Emotional responses can be viewed as comprising six transacting subsystems that are practical in both understanding and learning to regulate emotions: (1) emotion vulnerability factors; (2) internal and/or external events that serve as emotional cues; (3) interpretations of cues; (4) emotional response tendencies, including physiological responses, cognitive processing, experiential responses, and action urges; (5) nonverbal-verbal expressive responses and actions; and (6) after effects of the initial emotion, including secondary emotions (Linehan, 1993a) <sup>(14)</sup>

The modal model of emotions that evolved in basic science states that emotions originate from person-situation transactions that are relevant to one's goals and values. Such a situation acts as a cue and draws the individual's attention; in turn the individual gives rise to an appraisal of the event which leads to an emotional response. (Gross & Thompson, 2007) <sup>(13)</sup>.

For human adaptation it is important for one to indulge in control of emotions. Studies have examined (1) controlling attention to (emotional suppression) and (2) cognitively changing the meaning (cognitive reappraisal) of emotionally evocative stimuli. These two forms of emotion regulation have been seen to depend upon activation and interaction between cingulated and prefrontal control systems and subcortical and cortical emotion generative systems. (Ochsner, K. & Gross, J. J. 2003) <sup>(12)</sup>.

The first form of emotional regulation is- controlling attention or emotional suppression of emotion eliciting stimuli. At times, during social interactions people tend to keep their emotions from showing. It has been suggested that expressive suppression can disrupt communication and increase stress levels. Emotional suppression has also been linked to having a negative impact on the individual's emotional experience and increase blood pressure. Suppression also reduces rapport and inhibits relationship formation. (Butler, E. A., Egloff, B., Wilhelm, F. H., Smith, N. C., Erikson, E. A., & Gross, J. J. 2003) <sup>(2)</sup>.

The second form of emotional regulation is- cognitively changing the meaning or cognitive reappraisal of emotional eliciting stimuli. Cognitive reappraisal is the attempt to reinterpret an emotion-eliciting situation in a way that alters its meaning and changes its emotional impact to reduce ongoing emotion-expressive behavior. People differ in their implicit beliefs

about emotions. Some believe emotions are fixed and rigid whereas others believe that everyone can learn to change and modify their emotions (De Castella, K., Goldin, P., Jazaieri, H., Ziv, M., Dweck, C. S., & Gross, J. J. 2013) <sup>(6)</sup>. Studies have pointed out that reappraisers experience and express greater positive emotion and lesser negative emotion, whereas suppressors experience and express lesser positive emotion (Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. (2003) <sup>(12)</sup>.

### *Life Satisfaction*

Life Satisfaction is a concept that has been studied massively in social sciences and psychological research. Neugarten et al. (1961) defined Life Satisfaction as “an operational definition of ‘successful aging’”. For Sumner (1966) Life Satisfaction is “A positive evaluation of the conditions of your life, a judgment that at least on balance, it measures up favorably against your standards or expectations.” Life satisfaction is believed to have its precursor in the work domain, family domain, and personality traits. Ruut Veenhoven (1993) <sup>(20)</sup> has best summarized Life Satisfaction as the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as-a-whole.

According to Diener (1984) it is one of three major indicators of well-being: life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect. As stated by Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin (1985) <sup>(7)</sup> the three components to defining subjective well-being are: negative affect (NA), positive affect (PA) and life satisfaction. Research points out that there are individual differences in how people assess meaning in life as to one’s sense of wellbeing and satisfaction. The determining factors of well-being and life satisfaction are highly individualized and subjective. Depending on their value orientations, it is to each their own. (Oishi, Graessman, 1998; Emmons, 1991).

Whereas the affective part is related and guided by emotions and feelings, the cognitive part is an assessment of one’s life based on experiences and information for which people judge the extent to how their life so far measures up to their expectations and bears a resemblance to their envisioned ‘ideal’ life (Hoorn, 2007). In recent research conducted life satisfaction has been assessed as the degree of the positive emotions experienced (Frish, 2006; as cited in Simsek, 2011).

Ed Diener (2006) <sup>(9)</sup> attempted to understand the components that go into most people’s experience of life satisfaction. One of the most important influences on happiness was found to be social relationships. People who score high on life satisfaction tend to have close and supportive others such as affiliated family and friends, whereas those who do not have such support are more likely to be dissatisfied. Another factor that influences the life satisfaction of most people is their work. It can be differed based on an individual’s occupation be it school, or performance in an important role such as homemaker or grandparent. When the person enjoys his or her work, whether it is paid or unpaid work, and perceives it as meaningful and important, this contributes to life satisfaction. When a person has set important goals for them, and feels as if they are constantly failing to make adequate progress toward them, this too can lead to life dissatisfaction. A third influential factor is personal-satisfaction with the important facets of self, religious or spiritual life, learning and growth, and leisure. For many people these are sources of satisfaction. However, when these sources of personal worth are upset, they can be powerful sources of dissatisfaction.

### *Relationship between Emotional Regulation and Life Satisfaction*

A vast amount of research has suggested that working women are generally more satisfied with their life (Nye, 1963; Gavron, 1966; Hall & Gordon, 1973; Ferree, 1976; Hoffman & Nye, 1974; Holahan & Gilbert, 1979; Warr & Parry, 1982), studies have suggested that housework as in itself can be the reason for this. The work is found to be repetitive and boring and without providing any sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Social isolation and low-status of the work may pose as an additional issue too. Social roles and desirability have implemented the job of a housewife to be menial and dull thus leading them to form a belief of dissatisfaction with their life. Studies conducted point out significantly better marital adjustment and subjective well-being for working women than for housewives. Housewives have reported lower scores on general health, life satisfaction, and self-esteem measures and hopelessness, insecurity, and anxiety. This further leads to marital dissatisfaction (Nathawat, S. S., & Mathur, A. (1993) Emotion regulation is generally thought to be a critical ingredient for successful interpersonal relationships (Bloch, L., Haase, C. M., & Levenson, R. W. 2014) <sup>(2)</sup>. Reappraisal and the ability to express emotions to affective stimuli may reduce stress levels of housewives thus increasing their subjective satisfaction with life.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Extensive research has been done on the daily demands and stressors housewives face. A lot of these researches are comparative studies between housewives and working women. A research conducted by Chen, J. M., & Lin, P. (1992) <sup>(3)</sup> using the "Social Readjustment Rating Scale" and "Daily Hassle Scale" aimed to understand the daily life demands, social support, life satisfaction, and health of housewives and working women. The results showed that housewives report higher levels of satisfaction with life, however, both groups appear to be satisfied with their lives overall. It was also found that working women experience a higher degree of depression, although both the groups reported minor symptoms of somatization, depression, and anxiety. An article published in the Journal of Marriage and Family by James D. Wright (1978) <sup>(22)</sup> compared six large surveys conducted by the University of Michigan and the National Opinion Research Center between 1971 and 1976. The article concluded that both working outside and at home have benefits and costs attached to them, stating that there is no consistent pattern of life satisfaction between the two groups. Another research conducted by Patricia Freudiger (1983) <sup>(11)</sup> examined the life satisfaction among three categories of married woman- those who are presently, were formerly and have never been employed. The study revealed that there was little or no significant difference among the three categories of woman on life satisfaction, however the variables influencing life satisfaction in the three categories are significantly different. A research conducted on Working-Class Jobs: Housework and Paid Work as sources of Satisfaction (Ferree, M. M. 1976) <sup>(10)</sup> ascertained that although it is widely believed that housework is a preferred occupation for most working women, it can be shown that housewives are more dissatisfied with life. Sighting the importance of emotional regulation for satisfaction in life, a study was conducted on Comparing Emotional Regulation Strategies to Predict Satisfaction with Life and Perceived Stress in young adults (Adebesin M., Graydon, M., Knoblach, D., M.A., Crouch, B., M.A., & DiClemente C.) using the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ). Comparison of the population was done on the two Emotional Regulation Strategies. It was found that individuals who use cognitive reappraisal report higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of perceived stress, while those who use emotional suppression report opposite outcomes. Another finding reported was that compared to emotional suppression, cognitive reappraisal has been found to be more adaptive in terms of mental health, well-being, and stress outcomes in young adults. A

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study on individual differences in two emotion regulation processes, cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression: implications for affect, relationships, and well-being (Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. 2003) <sup>(12)</sup> found that reappraisers (people who learn to reappraise a situation) experience and express greater positive emotion and lesser negative emotion, whereas suppressors (those who suppress their emotional responses) experience and express lesser positive emotion, yet experience greater negative emotion. This study also pointed out that using reappraisal is related to well-being positively, whereas using suppression is related to it negatively. Another study conducted on beliefs about emotion: links to emotional regulation, well-being, and psychological distress by De Castella, K., Goldin, P., Jazaieri, H., Ziv, M., Dweck, C. S., & Gross, J. J. (2013) <sup>(6)</sup> suggests that people's implicit beliefs—particularly about their own emotions—might predispose them towards certain emotional regulation techniques that can have important consequences for one's psychological health. A research was conducted on Emotion Regulation Strategies as a Predictor of Life Satisfaction in University Students (Yiğit, A., Özpolat, A. R., & Kandemir, M. 2014) <sup>(23)</sup>. The research concluded that there is a positive relation between life satisfaction and emotion regulation as observed in university students. Gross and Levenson (1997) conducted a research to study the acute effects of inhibiting negative and positive emotion to draw on the effect of emotion regulation on mental health. They reported that there was a decrease in happiness and meaningful behaviors of the group that suppressed their emotions. Another research was conducted by Bloch, L., Haase, C. M., & Levenson, R. W. (2014) to understand the link between how well spouses regulate emotions and how satisfied they are with their marriages. The research reported that greater down regulation of wives' negative experience and behavior predicted greater marital satisfaction for wives and husbands concurrently.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Hypothesis*

1. There will be a significant effect of emotional suppression on life satisfaction of housewives.
2. There will be a significant effect of cognitive reappraisal on life satisfaction of housewives.
3. There will be a positive correlation between emotional regulation and life satisfaction among housewives.

### *Design*

The objective of the conducted study was to assess the effect of emotional regulation on life satisfaction among housewives and to assess the difference between cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression on life satisfaction in the population. For this, two measures of Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) were administered on a sample of 200 housewives. The entire data was then compiled and scoring was done. Results were tabulated and discussed.

### *Sample*

For the present study, a purposive sample of 200 housewives was done belonging to middle socio-economic strata.

### *Measures*

#### **Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) by Gross, J.J., & John, O.P. (2003)**

The Emotional Regulation Questionnaire is a 10-item scale designed by Gross & John (2003) used to measure respondents' tendency to regulate their emotions in two ways: (1)

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Cognitive Reappraisal (6 items) and (2) Expressive Suppression (4 items). Participants have to answer each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

**Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)** by Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction with Life Scale is a 5-item scale designed to assess one's life satisfaction by a measure of their global cognitive judgment. Respondents answer each item on a 7 point Likert-type scale ranging from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

### *Procedure*

The current study aimed to study the impact of emotional regulation on life satisfaction among housewives. Purposive sampling of 200 woman belonging to middle socio-economic strata was done. The two indices, Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) and Satisfaction with life Scale (SWLS) were administered. Quantitative analysis was then done on the collected data and results were secured.

## RESULTS

The results were computed by adding the scores of the two scales as per their respective manuals. This was followed by calculation of correlation using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient between the scores of individuals on both ERQ and SWLS. After this, z-score were computed to test the significance between the computed means.

Scores on the two scales of Cognitive Reappraisal and Emotional Suppression were calculated. Post the computation of Mean and SD, z-score was computed to assess the significance of the means.

Following are the tables and graphs depicting the results.

**Table 1: Showing the, mean value, standard deviation and the correlation value between emotional regulation scale and satisfaction with life scale**

Values	ERQ	Life Satisfaction	Correlation
Mean	34.2	17.03	0.78
Standard Deviation	4.5	5.8	

As it can be seen that the mean value for Emotional Regulation is 34.2 with a standard deviation of 17.03. The mean value for Satisfaction with Life Scale is 17.03 with a standard deviation of 5.8. Correlation coefficient was computed to be 0.78 signifying a positive correlation between the two factors.

**Table 2: Showing the mean value, standard deviation and the z-score value between the computed means of the emotional regulation scale and satisfaction with life scale.**

Scales	Mean	SD	Z-score	One-Tailed Test
ERQ	34.2	4.5	33.019	0.01*
LS	17.03	5.8		0.05*

\* Significance established at 0.01 and 0.05 levels.

It can be seen that emotional regulation has a significant impact on the life satisfaction of housewives with respect to this research sample. The significance for the same can be established at both 0.01 and 0.05 confidence intervals.

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**Table 3: Showing mean value and standard deviation on the subscales of cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression**

Dimensions	Emotional regulation	
	Cognitive reappraisal	Emotional suppression
Mean	21.02	18
Std. Deviation	4.6	3.2

The computed mean values for subscales of Emotional Regulation Scales are: 21.02 with a standard deviation of 4.6 for Cognitive Reappraisal and mean value of 18 with a standard deviation of 3.2 for Emotional Suppression.

**Table 4: Showing the, mean value, standard deviation and the z-score value between the computed means of emotional suppression scale and satisfaction with life scale**

Scale	Mean	SD	z-score	One-tailed Test
Emotional Suppression	18	3.2	2.06	0.01**
Life Satisfaction	17.03	5.8		0.05*

\* Significance established at 0.05 level

\*\* Insignificant at 0.01 level

It can be seen that emotional suppression has a significant impact on the life satisfaction of housewives with respect to this research sample. The significance for the same can be established at 0.05 confidence interval.

**Table 5: Showing the, mean value, standard deviation and the z-score value between the computed means of cognitive reappraisal scale and satisfaction with life scale**

Scale	Mean	SD	z-score	One-tailed Test
Cognitive Reappraisal	21.02	4.6	14.77	0.01*
Life Satisfaction	17.03	5.8		0.05*

\* Significance established at 0.01 and 0.05 levels

It can be seen that Cognitive Reappraisal has a significant impact on the life satisfaction of housewives with respect to this research sample. The significance for the same can be established at both 0.01 and 0.05 confidence intervals.

## **DISCUSSION**

The objective of the present study is to establish the effect of emotional regulation on life satisfaction among housewives and to assess the difference between cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression on life satisfaction among housewives. Emotional regulation refers to the monitoring, evaluation and modification of emotional reactions by the use of extrinsic and intrinsic processes. Emotional Regulation has been defined in two components- ability to reappraise a situation to modify towards positive thinking and emotional suppression of needs in evoking stimuli. Life Satisfaction can be defined as the degree to which a person positively determines the overall quality of his/her life. In the face of daily demands and stressors that housewives go through in relation to unsatisfactory results, the satisfaction with life can be lowered. These results of the study can be taken into consideration to understand how the enhancement of emotional regulation skills can aid housewives in experiencing satisfaction with life in the face of distressful situations.

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There were two measures used in the present study, Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire is a 10-item scale designed to measure the participants' tendency to regulate their emotions in two ways: (1) Cognitive Reappraisal and (2) Expressive Suppression. The Satisfaction with Life Scale is a 5-item scale designed to measure cognitive judgments of one's life satisfaction globally. A purposive sampling of 200 housewives was done belonging to middle socio-economic strata.

There is no single answer to attaining life satisfaction but is a blend of a number of ingredients. For many individuals, it is crucial to feel a connection to something larger than oneself. When a person tends to be chronically dissatisfied, they should look within themselves, be able to introspect and ask whether they need to develop more positive attitudes to life and the world. To understand whether housewives indulge in these regulation skills and how it aids them to have a more satisfactory life, this research was conducted.

Three hypotheses were formulated. The first hypothesis stated that there will be a significant effect of emotional suppression on life satisfaction of housewives. After analysis of data it was found that there was a significant effect of emotional suppression on life satisfaction of housewives (found to be significant at 0.05 level). This finding was supported by a research conducted by Gross and Levenson (1997) who reported that there was a decrease in happiness and meaningful behaviors of the group that suppressed their emotions. It can be understood that as housewives continue to meet the daily demands of their life while harboring the emotions of being stuck in menial work, their stress levels can escalate. In a situation like this if they are not able to express their emotions and are bound to suppress them more, dissatisfaction with their current environment may increase, while if they feel they can express their emotions of unaccomplishment and low-status of the work that is associated with their job as a housewife, they would feel more satisfied.

The second hypothesis stated that there will be a significant effect of cognitive reappraisal on life satisfaction of housewives. After analysis of data it was found that there was a significant effect of cognitive reappraisal on life satisfaction of housewives (found significant at both 0.01 and 0.05 levels). This finding can be supported by a research conducted by Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. (2003) found that reappraisers (people who learn to reappraise a situation) experience and express greater positive emotion and lesser negative emotion, whereas suppressors (those who suppress their emotional responses) experience and express lesser positive emotion and would experience greater negative emotion. Social isolation and low-status of the work of a housewife has been found to lead to the belief of the work being repetitive and boring and without providing any sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. In such distressful times, cognitive reappraisal or the ability to rephrase an emotionally evocative stimuli into a positive one, can lead to an increased sense of satisfaction.

The third hypothesis stated that there will be a positive correlation between emotional regulation and life satisfaction among housewives. After analysis of the data, a positive correlation of 0.78 was found between the two. Further z-score computation of the scores stated a significant relationship between the factors. Therefore, it can be stated that emotional regulation has a significant impact on life satisfaction of housewives. As has been pointed out by research conducted by De Castella, K., Goldin, P., Jazaieri, H., Ziv, M., Dweck, C. S., & Gross, J. J. (2013), emotional regulation if practiced can have an effect on



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life satisfaction and psychological well-being. With a lack of self-competence and feelings of low self-worth that are associated with housework, if emotional regulation strategies are practiced with effect, they can increase satisfaction with life among housewives.

### CONCLUSION

This present study aimed to explore the impact of emotional regulation on life satisfaction among housewives. The research takes place in three hypotheses; firstly, there will be a significant effect of emotional suppression on life satisfaction of housewives. Secondly, there will be a significant effect of cognitive reappraisal on life satisfaction of housewives. Thirdly, there will be a positive correlation between emotional regulation and life satisfaction among housewives. All three hypotheses were retained. These results of the study can be taken into consideration to understand how the enhancement of emotional regulation skills can aid housewives in experiencing satisfaction with life in the face of distressful situations. Incorporating the result of the present study comparisons can be drawn between housewives and working women on these two variables, the duration of marriage can be assessed to explore if it acts as a factor, whether joint or nuclear families have an impact on life satisfaction and whether children and childless marriages affect life satisfaction in housewives.

### Limitations of the Study

All participants of the present study belonged to average or above average strata of socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, the relation between Emotional Regulation and Life Satisfaction among housewives under lower socio-economic background and among different cultures is yet to be explored.

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