

Emotion Regulation During New Normal Situation: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

With the outbreak of Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19), all of us are experiencing a unique situation which is full of uncertainties, anxiety, loneliness, irritability and stress. The obvious consequence is losing control over one's own emotion and expressing negative emotion and consequently, lowering emotional and mental well-being. To maintain mental wellbeing, emotion regulation is important. Emotion regulation can be defined as the ability to regulate one's own emotions and emotional responses. Adaptive emotional regulation is beneficial to mental health and thereby promotes adaptive functioning and sustainability whereas maladaptive emotional regulation (emotional dysregulation) may hamper mental health and thereby decrease competitive advantage. Adulthood is the most challenging phase of an individual's life because adults start taking up different roles and responsibilities and thereby need to modify and control emotions accordingly. **Objectives:** The present study aims at determining the following objectives: 1. To find out the difference between young and mid adult with respect to their emotion regulation. 2. To find out the gender difference with respect to their emotion regulation. **Nature of the study:** the present study is cross-sectional in nature and standardized questionnaire for assessing emotion regulation has been used. **Method and Material:** 150 adults (80 young adults and 70 mid adults) participated in the present study and responded. Participants were selected based on Snowball sampling (non-probability) method. The data were collected using online platform during lockdown period. **Results:** Significant difference exists between male and female with respect to their emotion regulation and young and mid adults also differed significantly with respect their emotion regulation. **Implication:** The study will throw light on the emotion regulation of adults.

Keywords: Adulthood, Emotion Regulation, Mental Health, Snowball Sampling

At the outbreak of COVID-19, people are experiencing uncertainties in their daily life and radical shift from Normal to New normal situation. This radical shift from routine schedule to completely a new schedule has created a lot of challenges in their daily lives. While dealing with these challenges people are confronting new emotional perspectives and sometimes it is going to be very difficult for them to control and regulate emotions in a desired manner. Emotion regulation may be defined as the ability to regulate

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one's own emotions and express emotional responses accordingly. Successful emotion regulation plays a crucial part in mental health (Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010), and emotion regulation problems may lead to affective disorder (Rottenberg et al., 2005), anxiety (Mennin et al., 2007) and substance use (Fox et al., 2007). The current study focuses on two emotion regulation strategies namely, cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.

Cognitive reappraisal or adaptive emotion regulation or antecedent focused strategy uses cognitive resources to modify the thought process and thereby changing the emotional impact and exploring different alternatives in order to perceive emotion provoking situation as positive and benign. It is beneficial to mental health and thereby promotes sustainability in the long run whereas expressive suppression or maladaptive emotion regulation or response focused (suppressing the behavioural expression of emotions) may hamper mental health and thereby decrease competitive advantage. Regulating emotion is a skill which gets changed overtime and these changes are more visible during adulthood because adulthood is a phase of life which is full of challenges and hardships. Behavioral studies (Bebko, Franconeri, Ochsner, & Chiao, 2011; Cheng, Yuan, Yuan-Yuan, & Hong, 2009; Gross, 1998; Gross, 2003; Hofmann, Heering, Sawyer, & Asnaani, 2009; Kalokerinos, Greenaway, & Denson, 2015) have found that reappraisal is more effective than expressive suppression. This provides indirect evidence that antecedent-focused strategies are generally more effective in the regulation of emotion than response-focused strategies (Sheppes, & Gross, 2011; Sheppes, & Gross, 2012). Reappraisal decreases the emotional experience and reduces negative expressive behaviour, but it leaves positive expressive behaviour intact (Richards & Gross, 2000).

Brandtstädter and Renner (1990) suggested that older adults were more likely than younger adults to use reappraisal strategy of emotion regulation. Gross and John (2003) reported that the use of expressive suppression as an emotion regulation is more prevalent among young adults. John and Gross (2004) revealed that older adults reported less use of expressive suppression than participants who were in their 20s. Cheavens, Rosenthal, Banawan and Lynch (2008) reported less use of thought suppression by older, compared to young adults with and without psychiatric co-morbidity.

There are enough researches which indicate that males and females regulate their emotions differently. Young males prefer to use expressive suppression more than young females, whereas no significant difference was evident in the use of reappraisal by young males and females (Gross and John, 2003). Researches also indicated that men have been found to use cognitive reappraisal (reframing the negative event in a less emotional way) less effectively than women (McRae et al., 2008). Men tend to suppress their anger and depressive feelings more often than women (Kwon, Yoon, Joormann, & Kwon, 2013). On the other hand, women are more likely to think repetitively about the situation and consequently, are more prone to heightened feelings of anxiety and inadequacy (Kwon, Yoon, Joormann, & Kwon, 2013).

To the best of researcher's knowledge, there is limited or almost no studies to suggest the difference exists between younger and mid adults. The present study has been undertaken to determine the difference between younger and mid adults' emotion regulation styles especially during lockdown period due to sudden outbreak of COVID-19. Due to outbreak of COVID-19, the physical movement of individual has been restricted and they are compelled to accept New Normal schedules. People especially young and mid adults are

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constantly facing the challenges in this new normal situation as young and mid adulthood is the critical phase of human development. Young adults start taking the responsibilities of their family, new relationship and workplace demands whereas mid adults are sandwiched between domestic and professional responsibilities to a great extent. During lockdown period people belonging to young and mid adulthood are constantly trying to protect their family members as well their own identity and consequently are prone to stress and experiencing negative emotion. If they are not going to regulate their emotions in an adaptive manner, their work-life balance will be at risk. Keeping in mind the relevance of these two age groups and limited number of research findings in mid adults, the present study has been undertaken to determine the following objectives:

1. To compare the emotion regulation strategies between young and mid adults.
2. To compare the emotion regulation strategies between males and females.
3. To determine the interaction effect of age and gender on emotion regulation strategies (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression).

METHOD AND MATERIALS

Sample: The total sample consists of 150 adults (80 young adults and 70 mid adults). The age range of young and mid adults were 20-39 years (mean age 30.03 years and standard deviation- 2.92) and 40- 55 years (mean age 48.12 years and standard deviation – 3.34 years), respectively. All participants were selected from West Bengal, India. They belong to middle socio-economic status. Snowball sampling (non-probability) was used in order to select participants for the present study. The sample descriptive of the participants is given in Table 1.

Table1: Sample Distribution of the present study

Category	Total (N= 150)	
Age	Young Adults	80
	Mid Adults	70
Gender	Male	75
	Female	75

Instrument used:

Following measures were used in the present study:

1. **Demographic Information schedule:** It consists of the basic demographic information schedule such as age, gender, educational qualification, regional information and socio- economic status
2. **Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ):** The ERQ developed by Gross & John (2003) is a 10-item self-report questionnaire based on Gross's (1998) process model of emotion regulation. The ERQ is designed to measure people's usage of two regulation strategies: an antecedent-focused strategy called cognitive reappraisal (6 items, e.g., "When I'm faced with a stressful situation, I make myself think about it in a way that helps me stay calm") where a person attempts to change how he or she thinks about a situation in order to change its emotional impact, and a response-focused strategy called expressive suppression (4 items, e.g., "I keep my emotions to myself") where a person attempts to inhibit the behavioural expression of his or her emotions. Separate scale scores are derived for these two regulation strategies. All items are answered on a 7- point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating higher usage of that strategy. The Cronbach alphas for cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression are 0.75 and 0.71, respectively.

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Procedure

Consent was taken from the participants before the data collection. Detailed instructions were given to the participants and the questionnaire was handed over to them to be filled up properly and carefully. After the collection of data, necessary analysis and calculations were done and the interpretation was made.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The obtained data were analyzed with the help of descriptive (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (t-test). The means and standard deviations (SDs) and t- values of two different dimensions of emotion regulation by age were calculated and presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean, standard deviation and t test of emotion regulation by age-group

Emotion regulation	Young adults (N= 80)		Mid adults (N= 70)		t- test (df= 148)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Cognitive Reappraisal	27.05	4.92	32.13	3.67	7.08**
Expressive Suppression	14.06	4.37	13.98	4.25	0.11

Note: ** significant at 0.01 level

Table 2 suggests that mid adults are significantly higher on cognitive reappraisal compare to their young adult counterparts. No significant difference is evident in case of expressive suppression. Cognitive reappraisal is a strategy that involves exploring more options and avenues in stressful situation and consequently being more positive in a stressful situation. Mid adults are more experienced than young adults and experience makes a person better in regulating their emotion even in a most difficult situation in life.

To determine the significant difference between emotion regulation between male and female, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential (t-test) statistics by gender were calculated and presented in the following table:

Table 3: Mean, standard deviation and t test of emotion regulation by Gender

Emotion regulation	Male (N= 75)		Female (N= 75)		t- test (df= 148)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Cognitive Reappraisal	29.25	4.02	25.78	4.98	4.72**
Expressive Suppression	15.36	3.90	21.73	5.32	8.43**

Note: ** significant at 0.01 level

Above table depicts that males are significantly higher on cognitive reappraisal than females whereas reverse trend is evident in case of expressive suppression. This result is not favoured by Kwon, Yoon, Joormann, & Kwon (2013) which states that men tend to suppress their anger and depressive feelings more often than women. The probable reason is that in our culture females are most of the time bound to suppress their true emotions and consequently experience more stress, anxiety and depression (Costa et al., 1987; Fujita, Diener and Sandvik, 1991).

In order to determine the interaction effect of age and gender on emotion regulation strategies, two way ANOVAs (2X 2) were carried out separately for cognitive reappraisal

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and expressive suppression and the results indicated that for Cognitive reappraisal mid adults males are significantly higher than mid adults females [$F(1,146)= 6.91$; $p<0.01$]. This may be due to the fact that with age people are becoming more experienced and thereby try to appraise the emotion evoking situation rather than suppressing it. In case of expressive suppression, mid adult females are significantly higher compared to their male counterparts [$F(1,146)= 5.13$; $p<0.01$]. The probable reason is that in our culture, women are still taught to maintain cordial relationship by suppressing emotions most of the time and this is true for middle aged women not for young adults who are bit more expressive.

CONCLUSION

The present study aims at determining the emotion regulation of young and mid adults during new normal. The present study investigates the emotional regulation strategies such as cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression among young and mid adults especially during new normal. The findings suggest that mid adults are significantly higher on cognitive reappraisal compared to young adults. Result also reveals that males are significantly higher on cognitive reappraisal compared to their female counterparts whereas reverse trend is evident in case of expressive suppression.

Limitations And Implications

The present study is not above limitations. First, the study is a cross-sectional design, thus preventing us to draw causal inferences from the results. Longitudinal and sequential research design would be helpful. The second limitation is that responses are based on self-report and collected via online mode. Future research should replicate these findings using other offline methodologies (e.g., observations and face to face interview etc). The third limitation of this study is relatively small sample size and location specific (West Bengal district only). Further study based on samples selected from wider regional/cultural backgrounds may also be useful. And the last but not the least, due to time and situation constraint, the study has not included other variables which directly influence emotion regulation such as personality variable, psychological capital and social capital etc.

Despite these limitations the present study has an implication in our day-to-day life. Emotion regulation is a crucial strategy in our day-to-day life especially in the present situation and effective regulation may often result in sound mental health. The study findings highlight different type of emotion regulation by young and mid adults. Younger adults who have just started their family and professional life need to learn cognitive appraisal as an emotion regulation strategy from the elderly members (those who are comparatively more experienced than young adults). The study also highlights the importance of introducing student counselling in academic institutions where different emotion regulation strategies and their pros and cons would be discussed with respect to real life situation so that when students will grow older, they can use emotion regulation strategies effectively in order to deal with stressful life.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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