

Research Paper

## A Study of Relationship between Emotional Regulation and Psychological Distress among Undergraduate College Students of Jammu District

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Emerging 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 purpose of the present study is to look at the differences and relationships between emotional regulation and psychological distress among male and female college students in Jammu district, J&K. The study is conducted on 100 students, 50 are males and 50 are females. The data was collected using convenient sampling approach. **Methods:** Independent t-test and Pearson correlation were used to find out differences and relationship respectively. **Results:** The findings of the study have shown significant gender difference between male and female students in all the dimensions of emotional regulation. Correlation analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between emotion regulation and psychological distress. **Conclusion:** Mean score of male students on the variable of emotional regulation is more than female students whereas mean score of female students on the variables of psychological distress is more than male students. This can be suggested that the female students are more prone to psychological distress.

**Keywords:** Emotional Regulation, Psychological Distress, College Students, T-Test, Correlation Analysis

Emerging adulthood is characterized as the intermediate stage from adolescence to adulthood (Fradelos et al., 2019). It is a stage of development that is marked by a lot of changes and difficult tasks like learning making decisions about one's career and personal relationships and preparing for adulthood. It is viewed as a crucial and unstable time in a person's life (Arnett, 2014). Academic and extracurricular pressures experienced during this phase are contributing factors in the student's psychological distress (Alvin, 2020). Emerging adults are more likely to experience severe anxiety, depression and psychological distress (Twenge et al., 2020). In recent years, there has been an alarming rise in the prevalence of common mental health disorders among college students which has a significant impact on their later stages of life (Bruffaerts et al., 2018).

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### ***Emotional Regulation***

The term "emotional regulation" refers to the method people use to control, understand and express their emotions (Wang et al., 2020). Individuals can control their emotions including how they feel and how they express themselves through a dynamic and multiphase process called emotion regulation (Gross, 2015). It is characterized as a process that helps people become more adept at controlling their emotional responses, facial expressions and bodily functions (Aldao, 2013). Emotion regulation involves planning adaptive and acceptable emotional behaviors and reactions to external circumstances by sending signals about one's own internal or external conditions (Blair & Raver, 2012) and failure to do so results in an excessively incorrect and inappropriate reaction to the environmental stimulus, which worsens a person's general well-being (Prices & Hooven, 2018). The ability to use precise strategies to regulate one's emotions in a particular situation as well as awareness and understanding of one's own emotions have all been referred to as emotional regulation (Brackett et al., 2013).

It includes two effective techniques cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, cognitive reappraisal is an antecedent-focused technique that frequently tries to reinterpret the events favorably, whereas expressive suppression tries to suppress, hide or lessen emotional expression (John & Gross, 2004). People use the emotional regulation strategy to control their emotions, which helps them to enhance, maintain or lessen one or more emotional reactions (Dushmore et al., 2013). Effective emotional regulation techniques are crucial for a person's emotional health (Cai et al., 2012). The ability to control one's emotions is crucial for psychological health, academic success, and stable relationships and social interactions (Eisenberg et al., 2010).

### ***Psychological Distress***

Psychological distress is widespread throughout the world (Baxter et al., 2013). Psychological distress is a state of emotional suffering accompanied by severe symptoms of depression and anxiety (Drapeau et al., 2012; Sathyanath & Kundapur, 2020). It is a condition of emotional endurance that is typically characterized by symptoms of misery (such as losing interest, unhappiness, and discouragement) and worry (such as nervousness and uneasiness) (Ryff, 2014). One of the main public health issues affecting society as a whole, it includes somatic symptoms like sleep issues, fatigue, headaches, and backaches as well as mental health issues like anxiety and depression (Dachew et al., 2015; Tariku et al., 2017). It is associated with a lack of zeal, sleep (difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep), sorrow and misery about the future, crying easily, feeling dull, and suicidal thoughts (Zhang et al., 2020). Losing interest in activities, unhappy or problematic situations, upsetting feelings and misery are all signs of psychological distress in students (Li et al., 2020).

People endurance and hopelessness brought by environmental factors are the main components of distress (Ford et al., 2018). Uncomfortable conversation is also a common way to express distress (Wang et al., 2020). Psychological distress may be impacted by elements like gender, living situation and financial frustration (Fradelos et al., 2019). Students are under a lot of pressure because of the high expectations, psychological distress among undergraduates has been linked to a variety of factors across various domains, such as economics, social communication, academic pressure, and coping skills (Chan et al., 2016). One of the most prevalent health issues affecting students today is psychological distress (Siraji et al., 2022). A student's life is filled with stressful situations that can impact his mental health and cause anxiety and depression (Fradelos et al., 2019). Negative

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psychological effects like stress, anxiety, and depression have been reported more frequently in younger people (Conversano et al., 2020; Qiu et al., 2020).

### ***Emotional Regulation and Psychological Distress***

Emotional regulation and psychological distress are directly linked to psychological distress that takes place when an individual has difficulties with regulating their emotions (Majeed et al., 2022). Dysregulated emotions have a positive relationship with stress, depression and anxiety (Price & Hooven, 2018). Life is negatively impacted by psychological distress and issues with emotion control (Shahabi et al., 2017). Emotional control is crucial for reducing psychological distress in college students and acts as a bridge between stress and mental health issues (Kashdan & Farmer, 2014). Keel and Pidegon (2017) found that emotional regulation did not significantly explain variation in psychological distress. Psychological distress is linked to deficiencies in emotional regulation skills and problems with emotion control also predicted decreased sensitivity independent of psychological distress (Carreras et al., 2019).

Recent studies have shown that university students who use effective emotional regulation techniques display lower levels of psychological distress and these students are also more likely to experience lower levels of depression (Keel and Pidegon, 2017). In a study, it was found that college students who reported more psychological distress were more likely to suffer from negative outcomes like significantly impaired cognitive functioning, learning disabilities, poor academic performance, substance abuse, and alcohol abuse, all of which are linked to risk behaviors such as a higher risk of depression and anxiety disorders (Hersi et al., 2017; Tran et al., 2017). Individuals with better emotional regulation have lower rates of psychological distress and emotional regulation deficits are implicated in many types of psychological distress, psychological distress raises the risk of other mental health issues (Mata et al., 2020).

According to recent studies, those who have experienced emotional abuse are more likely to experience psychological distress such as depression and anxiety symptoms in adolescents (Paul & Eckenrode), in adulthood (Dias et al., 2015). Huh et al., (2017) discovered that psychological distress and cognitive emotional strategy were linked by emotion regulation strategy. Induced psychological distress is significantly negatively correlated with both cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression (Zaman et al., 2021).

### ***Gender Differences in Emotional Regulation***

Cognitive reappraisal increased with age and had a more positive impact on mood in male than in female (Masumoto et al., 2016). Previous research has suggested that the use of emotional regulation techniques is influenced by gender (Joorman & Kowan, 2013). For instance, male tend to use suppression more than female (Gross & John, 2003) and female tend to use reappraisal more than male (Spaapen et al., 2014). Gross and John (2003) found that there was no gender difference in the use of cognitive reappraisal, male were found to use suppression more frequently and females significantly use more cognitive reappraisal and fewer expressive suppression strategies than males. According to Zheng (2014) also found that there are significant gender differences in the use of frequency of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression strategies, females significantly use more cognitive reappraisal and less expressive suppression strategies than males.

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Previous research has shown that gender influences the use of emotion regulation strategies (Kwon, et al., 2013), females using reappraisal more frequently than male (Gross & John, 2003; Spaapen et al., 2014). According to Nolen-Hoeksema and Aldao (2011) men were more likely than women to use reappraisal as they aged, which also made them feel better. Only females increased their use of suppression as they aged, demonstrating that there are gender differences in the relationships between age and emotion-regulation techniques.

### ***Gender Differences in Psychological Distress***

Prout et al., (2020) found that females were more likely than males to report experiencing psychological distress. There was more psychological distress in females than in males (Matud et al., 2014). Students who experienced severe distress had higher morbidity and psychological distress was prevalent in 34.8% of students (mild 17.3%, moderate 9.2%, severe 8.3%), with a predominance of females. Additionally, students who were experiencing psychological distress were more likely to report attention deficit hyperactivity disorder symptoms, substance abuse, academic failure, and suicidal thoughts (Jaisooriya et al., 2017). Studies conducted in the past have revealed that female students experience higher levels of distress than male students (Eisenberg et al., 2013; Leahy et al., 2010; Stallman, 2010); depression (Brougham et al., 2009; Ibrahim et al., 2013; Said et al., 2012); & anxiety (Farrer et al., 2016; Said et al., 2012). The level of psychological distress among female students is higher than that of male students (Cullinan et al., 2022). The study found that psychological distress is more common in female students than in male students, though there was no statistically significant difference (Li et al., 2020). It affects females more frequently than males (Bacchi & Licinio, 2017). Gender differences in psychological distress has been reported in numerous studies and research from various nations has shown that females experience more psychological distress than males (Robert et al., 2010; Marchand et al., 2012).

### ***Objectives***

1. To examine the relationship between emotional regulation and psychological distress among undergraduate college students of Jammu district.
2. To find out the gender differences on the various dimensions of emotional regulation, and psychological distress among undergraduate college students of Jammu district.

### ***Hypotheses***

- There is a significant relationship of emotional regulation with psychological distress among undergraduate college students of Jammu district.
- There is a significant gender differences on various dimensions of emotional regulation and psychological distress among undergraduate college students of Jammu district.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section highlights the sample, psychological measures that included in the study as well as statistical technique research that applied in the research process.

### ***Sample***

A total sample of 100 college students was collected for finding out the gender differences and relationship of emotional regulation and psychological distress among college students

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with 50 males and 50 females. Participants were in the age group of 18-21 years with mean age of 19. The convenience sampling technique was applied for collecting data.

### Data Collection

Permission was obtained from college authorities prior to data collection. Participants were given a thorough description of the questionnaire before it was administered, and students were prompted to complete the questionnaire. The participants were asked about data confidentiality.

### Measures

- **Emotional regulation questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003):** Emotional regulation scale is a 10-item scale designed to measure respondent's tendency to regulate their emotions in two ways (1) Cognitive reappraisal scale (six items such as "When I want to feel less negative emotion (such as sadness or anger), I change what I 'm thinking about'", and (2) expressive suppression, assessed using suppression scale (four items such as "I control my emotions by not expressing them"). Respondents answer each item on a 7-point Likert type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).
- **Kessler Psychological Distress scale (Kessler et al., 2003):** It consists of 10 items that evaluate psychological distress. Each item has a five-level response. Minimum score is 10 and Maximum score is 50. Low scores represent low levels of psychological distress and high scores signify high levels of psychological distress.

### Statistical Tools

To find out the gender differences between males and females students on the domain of emotional regulation, cognitive reappraisal expressive suppression and Psychological distress t- test is used. Correlation analysis is used to find out the relationship between emotional regulation, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression and psychological distress.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Table 1 t- ratios of Emotional regulation and Psychological distress among undergraduate College Students*

Variables	Male Students (N=50)		Female Students (N=50)		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t
Expressive Suppression	17.42	3.67	14.72	4.38	3.33**
Cognitive Reappraisal	25.40	6.51	19.08	6.22	4.95**
Total (Emotional Regulation)	42.82	7.65	32.58	6.85	7.04**
Psychological Distress	22.40	5.89	33.46	10.73	6.38**

Results from the table states that t-ratio have been applied to find out the gender differences on the dimensions of emotional regulation and psychological distress among undergraduate college students. Observation from the table shows that the mean scores in emotional regulation were found to be higher in male students (M=42.82, SD=7.65) than in female students (M=32.58, SD=6.85) which shows a significant gender difference in the dimensions of emotional regulation (t= 7.04, p< 0.01).The emotional regulation of students in different dimensions was calculated and the results reported that male students scored higher in the mean value of expressive suppression (M= 17.42, SD=3.67) than female students (M=14.72

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SD=4.38), it also demonstrating significant differences ( $t$  value =3.33,  $p < 0.01$ ). In the dimension of cognitive reappraisal, the mean score ( $M=25.40$ ,  $SD=7.65$ ) of male students higher than the mean score ( $M=19.08$ ,  $SD=6.22$ ) of female students, it also demonstrating significant differences, ( $t = 4.95$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The mean scores in psychological distress were found to be higher in females students ( $M = 33.46$ ,  $SD = 10.73$ ) than male students ( $M= 22.40$ ,  $S. D=5.89$ ), which shows significant differences ( $t=6.38$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 2 Correlation between Emotional regulation and Psychological distress among undergraduate college students**

Variables	Psychological distress
Emotional regulation	-0.73

The association between emotional regulation and psychological distress among undergraduate college students was investigated using correlation analysis. A strong negative correlation was found between emotion regulation and psychological distress ( $r=-0.73$ ). Prior research has shown that emotion regulation strongly predicts psychological distress (Bardeen et al., 2012; Pepping et al., 2014). Males have learnt to develop self-awareness, so they are more responsive to their emotions while expressing their experiences, therefore, males have the tendency to regulate their emotions and the higher ability of males in self-awareness enables them practice cognitive reappraisal (Haga et al., 2009). Regarding expressive suppression, the results suggested that males were more predisposed to expressive suppression for the regulation of their emotions compared to females. The results are consistent with past studies, (Gross & John,2003; Haga et al.,2009; Melka et al.,2011; Wiltink ,2012) suggesting that males generally tend to be socialized by inhibition of their emotional manifestations to others as they learn their gender role compared to females. emotional) y (psychological distress) Loevas et al., (2018). Ineffective emotional regulation leads to an increase in unwanted feelings which further leads the individual into a negative cycle with increasing psychological distress (Barlow et al.,2004). Females students have higher level of psychological distress as compared to males (Cullinan et al.,2022).

**CONCLUSION**

It can be concluded from the results that there is significant gender differences on the variables of emotional regulation and psychological distress. The mean score of female students is less on emotional regulation than male students and significant gender differences has been found between female and male students in both variables. By using correlation analysis significant negative relationship between emotion regulation and psychological distress among male and female students was found. Consistent with prior research the correlation between the emotional regulation and psychological distress, effective emotion regulation has desirable outcomes in mental health, psychological well-being, physical health and interpersonal relationships (Hasani,2011). According to Zanon et al. (2020), college students who do not use emotion regulation techniques have higher levels of psychological distress and symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress. Consequently, college health services should pay more attention to students mental health (Vazquez et al.,2012).

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***Conflict of Interest***

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