

Impact of Loneliness and Emotional Regulation on Life Satisfaction Among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the impact of loneliness and emotional regulation strategies on life satisfaction of young adults in India. The study has three main objectives to examine relationship between loneliness and emotional regulation strategies, to assess the role these strategies play in predicting loneliness and to analyze their combined impact on life satisfaction. Study uses a quantitative correlational research design. Technique of purposive sampling is used to recruit 205 participants in age range 18 to 25 years. Data is gathered through survey method on UCLA Loneliness Scale, Emotion Regulation Questionnaire and Satisfaction with Life Scale. Results reveal significant positive relationship between loneliness and emotional suppression and a significant negative relationship between loneliness and cognitive reappraisal. Further, only emotional suppression significantly positively predicts loneliness. Loneliness and emotional suppression significantly negatively predict life satisfaction. Cognitive reappraisal significantly positively predicts life satisfaction. In conclusion, study shows negative impact of emotional suppression in predicting loneliness and life satisfaction. Cognitive reappraisal plays a buffering role in mitigating effects of loneliness and enhancing life satisfaction. This holds significant implications for mental health interventions for youth to promote development of adaptive emotional regulation skills and emotional resilience to thrive in life. Future research should include longitudinal design with broader demographics for generalizability of this integrated model of well-being.

Keywords: *Loneliness, Emotional Regulation, Emotional Suppression, Cognitive Reappraisal, Life Satisfaction, Young Adults*

Loneliness is a growing significant public health concern today. While many of its predictors have been explored, little research has been done in Indian context regarding effect of underlying emotional regulation mechanisms in this relation. Holding implications for affecting well-being at large, these also influence how satisfied an individual feels with life. Research has mostly been conducted in western and middle eastern nations. Thus, this study explores this interplay in young adults in India providing culturally relevant insights with regard to collectivistic societies.

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Loneliness

Hawkey & Cacioppo (2010) view loneliness as a negative feeling that stems from unfulfilled social needs and desire for more satisfying relationships). Unlike loneliness traditionally being associated with elderly, young adults today experience unprecedented isolation. They often feel alone even when surrounded by others. Prevalence studies reveal 24% of Indian youth struggle with loneliness (Hossain, 2024) and nearly 60% college goers experience psychosocial issues. This shift is related to increasing individualistic mindsets, professional pressure, internet addiction, digital interactions, changing dynamics of social relationships, social anxiety, and cultural stigma surrounding mental health. This necessitates studying experiences of young adults today.

Emotional regulation

Emotions are an integral part of human existence. Regulation of emotions is considered as an important life skill with its links to healthy psychological and overall improved well-being (Kashdan et al., 2015). As a process, emotional regulation influences one's emotions and how they are experienced & expressed by the individual (Gross, 1998). The classic emotion regulation model by Gross (1998) includes antecedent-focused strategies which occur prior to the emotional response and response-focused strategies that occur after the emotional response. Cognitive reappraisal targets cognitive aspects of emotional stimuli by reframing the meaning for a better experience. Expressive suppression focuses on whether or not a person expresses emotions. Youngster today highly use escapism or substance-based coping to deal with situations of high distress. With increasing burden of poor mental and physical health, this is an area necessary to explore and build awareness on.

Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction is a cognitive evaluation of one's overall quality of life. It is a significant predictor of subjective well-being and involves balance of positive and negative affect in life. It dictates the degree of general contentment an experienced with aspirations and goals being met in various domains of purpose, relationships, career (Diener, 1984). Developmental studies showing its stability during mid-adolescence but decline while transitioning to young adulthood due to increased challenges and responsibilities (Robbins, 2022). Thus, studying this during critical stage of youth holds implications for predicting long-term outcomes of psychological well-being, resilience, career success, relationship stability (Ketav,2022; Buhker, 2021)

Over all, studying loneliness through the lens of emotional regulation is crucial. Loneliness is characterized by distressing feelings of isolation and unmet social needs. Thus related, emotional regulation helps manage how people cope with loneliness. These together have implications for well-being (Preece et al., 2021). Rarely studies have used these mechanisms to predict life satisfaction as an outcome. Thus, present study aims to explore interplay among three constructs together especially in the Indian context, where these have been studied separately.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Talib et al., 2025 studied influence of loneliness on regulatory mechanism of emotional self-efficacy, with life satisfaction and social interaction anxiety as mediating variables. 547 undergraduate students from China participated. Results indicated direct impact of loneliness on emotional self-efficacy, with both significant mediators. Improving emotional regulation skills on adaptive ends can enhance emotional self-efficacy & overall well-being.

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Karababa (2024) studied suppression of positive as well as negative emotions in terms of loneliness and satisfaction with romantic relationships in emerging young adults. 452 university students in Turkey aged 18-25 participated. Results showed relationship satisfaction mediated between suppressing negative emotions and feeling lonely. Gender moderated relationship satisfaction's mediating effect. Suppressing emotions puts females more at risk of feeling poor romantic relation satisfaction and males at more risk of feeling lonely.

Kelek et al., 2024 with a broad perspective aimed to determine whether intrapersonal & interpersonal emotion regulation strategies and difficulties in emotional regulation predict shyness and loneliness levels. Findings indicated difficulties in emotion regulation skills predict both loneliness and shyness. 'Expressive suppression' and 'social modelling' predict loneliness.

Adebesin et al., 2021 explored if emotional regulation strategies and stress predict life satisfaction in young adults. Study consisted of 561 participants from Baltimore. Multiple regression analyses revealed that life satisfaction was positively predicted by cognitive reappraisal ($\beta = .33, p < .001$). Emotional suppression had an inverse relationship with life satisfaction and perceived stress. Practical implications included understanding emotional regulation strategies used by young adults to aid emotional well-being.

Jaleel (2021) examined effects of loneliness in terms of social and emotional aspects on life satisfaction among 396 university students. Independent t-test analysis revealed that gender affects loneliness levels with male reporting greater emotional loneliness. Regression analysis indicated both social and emotional loneliness as significant negative predictors of life satisfaction, with emotional loneliness being a stronger predictor.

Preece et al., 2021 found individual differences in emotion regulation strategy as significant predictors explaining variance in loneliness. 501 adults in United States participated. Results indicated loneliness is positively associated with increased blaming, rumination, catastrophizing and decreased cognitive reappraisal. Loneliness is significantly associated with increased withdrawal, expressive suppression and decreased seeking of social support & active approaching in behavior. Emotional regulation strategies predicted for 52.2% variance in experiencing loneliness feelings.

Rationale

Loneliness is a growing public health concern among today, diverging from a usually studied construct in adolescents and elderly. Young adults navigate internal and external demands of forming intimate relationships, managing career stress, developing identities and adjusting in changing social landscapes, in era of digitalization making it crucial to explore well-being at this stage. Exploring loneliness via underlying mechanisms of how individuals deal with their emotions could highlight role of emotional regulation. Most studies have been conducted in West and Aran nations, leaving scope for undertaking this culturally relevant study with societal aspects of maintaining social harmony, male emotional suppression in collectivistic Indian context. While existing literature has explored loneliness and emotional regulation together, there exists a gap in understanding their combined impact on well-being, particularly life satisfaction, which this study fulfills. Understanding this interplay will help develop mental health interventions enhancing life satisfaction, a key demographic in the country's population structure.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

To study the impact of loneliness and emotional regulation strategies on life satisfaction of young adults in India.

Objectives

1. To understand the relationship between loneliness and emotional regulation strategies being cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression
2. To assess whether emotional regulation strategies used can significantly predict loneliness and explain variance in loneliness
3. To examine the impact of loneliness and emotional regulation strategies used on life satisfaction of young adults

Hypotheses

- **H1:** There will a significant relationship between loneliness and emotional regulation strategies
- **H2:** Emotional regulation strategies used will significantly predict and explain variance in loneliness
- **H3:** There will be a significant impact of loneliness and emotion regulation strategy used on life satisfaction of young adults

Variables

- Dependent variable: Life Satisfaction
- Independent variable: Loneliness, emotional suppression and cognitive reappraisal

Design

The study adopts a quantitative correlational research design. Correlational framework is used to examine direction and strength of associations between variables and to determine predictive significance of loneliness and emotion regulation strategies on life satisfaction. Furthermore, multiple regression is used to examine unique and combined contributions of emotion regulation and loneliness in predicting life satisfaction.

Sample

The total sample size consists of 205 young adults in the age range 18 to 25 years. The mean age of the sample is 22.5 years (SD=1.67). 133 participants are females and 72 are males. Participants are recruited through the technique of purposive sampling. This involves selecting individuals with specific traits relevant to the study's focus by judgement of researcher (Sharma, 2017).

Tools used

- **Personal Information Form** Demographic details were collected from participants including age, gender and occupation for descriptive statics analysis.
- **UCLA Loneliness Scale** Version 3 involves 20 items as self-report measure. It assesses how often person feels disconnected from others. Responses are marked on 4point likert scale. It has good internal consistency ($\alpha =.92$) and test-retest reliability over one year period ($r=0.73$). It also has good convergent validity with other measures of loneliness (Deckx, 2014).
- **Emotion Regulation Questionnaire** by Gross & John is a 10 item self-report measure. It assesses the use of two main emotion regulation strategies of cognitive

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reappraisal and expressive suppression. Items are answered on a 7-point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). It has good validity and reliability with cronbach's α ranging from .73 to .84 (Preece et al., 2020)

- **Satisfaction with Life Scale** by Diener et al. (1985) is a five item scale for assessing the global cognitive evaluation for a person's life satisfaction. Responses are marked on 7point likert scale ranging from1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). It has good reliability with cronbach coefficient α ranging from .78 to .89. It also exhibits positive correlations with several measures of subjective well-being as satisfactory validity.

Procedure

Study began with reviewing the area of research and preparing the survey materials. Participants were recruited through technique of purposive sampling. Participants were briefed about the research. Informed consent was taken prior to ensure voluntary participation. They then filled in responses on standardized measures for loneliness, emotional regulation and life satisfaction. Confidentiality of their identity and responses was maintained throughout. Data was securely gathered and scored as per questionnaires requirements. Results were statistically analyzed using SPSS software using various statistical tests. These were later interpreted in light of the hypothesis framed and supported with existing research.

Analyses

Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were computed for all variables. Pearson correlation helped assess relationship between loneliness and emotional regulation strategies (cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression). Regression analysis examined power of strategies to predict loneliness. Lastly, multiple regression helped assess combined impact of loneliness and emotional regulation on life satisfaction.

RESULTS

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Loneliness	205	44.40	11.699
Cognitive Reappraisal	205	5.00	1.187
Emotional Suppression	205	3.94	1.106
Life Satisfaction	205	30.00	6.986

Table 1 shows Mean and standard deviation calculated based on responses of 205 participants as loneliness (M=44.40, SD=11.699), cognitive reappraisal (M = 5, SD=1.187), emotional suppression (M= 3.94, SD=1.106) and life satisfaction (M = 30, SD=6.986).

Table 2 Pearson Correlation between Loneliness and Emotional Regulation Strategies

Variables	N	Loneliness	Emotional Suppression	Cognitive Reappraisal
Loneliness	205	1		
Emotional Suppression	205	.76***	1	
Cognitive Reappraisal	205	-.23***	-.20***	1

*** $p < .001$

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Table 2 represents that there is a strong positive relationship between loneliness and emotional suppression ($r = .76$) at .001 level of significance. There is a moderate negative relationship between loneliness and cognitive reappraisal ($r = -.23$) at .001 level of significance.

Table 3 Multiple Regression analysis for Emotional Regulation strategies predicting Loneliness

Variables	B	SE	t	p
Constant	16.84	3.27	5.16	<.001
Cognitive Reappraisal	-.78	.45	-1.71	.09
Emotional Suppression	7.96	.48	16.53***	<.001

Dependent variable: Loneliness *** $p < .001$

Table 3 shows that emotional regulation strategies account for 59% variance in loneliness. Emotional suppression predicts loneliness ($\beta = .75$, $p < .001$) in positive direction at .001 level of significance. Cognitive reappraisal predicts loneliness ($\beta = -.07$, $p < .09$) in negative direction but weakly and fails to reach significance level.

Table 4 Multiple Regression analysis for Loneliness and Emotional Regulation strategies predicting Life Satisfaction

Variables	B	SE	t	p
Constant	30.92	2.76	11.20	<.001
Cognitive Reappraisal	.76	.36	2.12	<.05
Emotional Suppression	-1.83	.58	-3.13	<.01
Loneliness	-1.04	.05	-2.48	<.01

Dependent variable: Life satisfaction

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Table 4 shows that emotional regulation strategies and loneliness account for 29% combined variability in life satisfaction. Loneliness ($\beta = -.23$, $p = .014$) and emotional suppression ($\beta = -.29$, $p = .002$) negatively predict life satisfaction with values significant at .01 level. Cognitive reappraisal positively predicts life satisfaction ($\beta = .13$, $p = .035$) being significant at .05 level.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to understand the impact of loneliness and emotional regulation strategies used on life satisfaction in young adults in India. 205 young adults in ages 18-25 participated from different parts of country. Informed consent was ensured and confidentiality of results was maintained. Findings are discussed below in light of research and implications.

As shown in table 2, there exists a positive relation between loneliness and emotional suppression. This suggests that people who experience higher levels of loneliness are more likely to suppress their emotions. Previously Preece et al., 2024 confirmed that habitual suppression of emotions makes one more prone to experiencing loneliness in the long run. Conversely, loneliness and cognitive reappraisal share a significant negative relationship. Individuals who feel less lonely use adaptive emotional regulation strategies, positively enhancing emotional experience. In support, Zawadzki et al. (2013) found that individuals

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who are less lonely tend to use more adaptive regulation due to better social support, emotional clarity and psychological flexibility. Thus, H1 is accepted.

Further H2 which suggested that emotional regulation strategies will significantly predict loneliness is partially accepted. In table 3, emotional suppression positively predicts loneliness. People who suppress their emotions report experiencing higher levels of loneliness. Kelek (2024) found similar predictive effects of emotional suppression on loneliness among university goers in Turkey and Pakistan. Cognitive reappraisal shares a negative direction of prediction but could not reach statistical significance. This highlights that reappraisal can prove beneficial, but its impact in reducing loneliness is less direct in front of suppression's high detrimental effects. Its effect can also be mediated by variables like social cognition, as explored by Cacioppo & Hawkley (2009). Loneliness impairs effective reframing by skewing early perceptions, reducing the adaptive benefits of cognitive reappraisal (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009).

Lastly, H3 is accepted which suggested that loneliness and emotional regulation strategies will have a combined impact of life satisfaction. As experiences of loneliness increase, satisfaction with life decreases as loneliness negatively predicts life satisfaction. Ghosh (2023) and Celik (2018) found lack of social support as significant predictor for diminishing life satisfaction among youngsters. People who habitually suppress emotions tend to feel more lonely. Suppression weakens emotional intimacy and social connections thus increasing social isolation as found by other researches (Kuppens, 2017; Wu, 2020). Cognitive reappraisal predicts life satisfaction in positive direction. Individuals who highly utilize this strategy are better able to cope with negative events, achieve goals and experience positive affect, enhancing their life satisfaction as found in multiple studies (Singh, 2021; Keshky, 2021). This shows that focusing on both social and psychological factors together enhances life satisfaction. This as a result contributes to an integrated model of well being for young adults with adaptive emotional regulation buffering the effects loneliness and thus enhancing life satisfaction.

Certain limitations of self-report measures, most individuals being from urban settings, focus only on two early strategies of emotional regulation in literature need to be taken into account while using these results. Future research is needed which can include longitudinal research design, demographics of non-binary genders, personality traits, socio economic status and multiple emotional regulation strategies like rumination, catastrophizing, positive reframing etc to deepen understand of interplay among these psychological constructs and enhance generalizability.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to understand the impact of loneliness and emotional regulation strategies, majorly emotional suppression and cognitive reappraisal on life satisfaction among young adults in India. The study helps in understanding role of emotional regulation strategies as hidden underlying psychological mechanisms that shape twin experiences of loneliness and satisfaction with life. It provides culturally relevant insights in Indian context. A feedback dynamics is explored where loneliness increases reliance on maladaptive strategies & suppression amplifies feelings of social isolation. These weaken effective use of adaptive regulation and diminish life satisfaction. Cognitive reappraisal serves a buffering role by mitigating negative affect of loneliness and thus enhances life satisfaction. This provides model of well-being in young adults.

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On the whole, study holds important implications. Targeted psychotherapy interventions like cognitive-behavioral therapy can be used for reducing suppression and cultivating adaptive strategies of cognitive reappraisal. As a preventive mental health measure, assessing emotional regulation profiles early can help clinicians tailor interventions preventing chronic loneliness. It informs development of mental health interventions with aim of developing adaptive emotional regulation skills and building emotional resilience in youth thus fostering their ability to thrive in life.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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