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CHILDHOOD TRAUMA, SELF-REGULATION AND EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIVITY IN YOUNG ADULTS: A GENDER COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract: The relationship between childhood trauma, self-regulation, and emotional expressivity is complex and can vary from individual to individual. Traumatic experiences can impair the development of neural circuits involved in emotional regulation, leading to difficulties in managing emotions and exhibiting appropriate expression. Individuals may struggle with intense emotions, poor stress management, and impulsive behaviours. This study aims to explore the association between childhood trauma, self-regulation, and emotional expressivity. It utilized a quantitative research design to collect data from two groups: males and females, from the youth population which involve 110 participants aged between 18 to 30 years. The participants were asked to complete the CTQ, SSRQ, and EES questionnaires in a self-administered online survey. After the responses were collected the total score for each individual was calculated. Then a comparative study is made to see the difference between both the groups and observe who is more affected, males or females.

Index Terms: *Childhood trauma, Self-Regulation, Emotional Expressivity*

INTRODUCTION

Childhood trauma can have a significant and enduring impact on a person's emotional growth. Traumatic events during childhood can disrupt the normal course of emotional development and impair one's ability to regulate emotions. Emotional regulation is essential for the healthy expression of emotions and adapting to life's challenges. Having the ability to properly monitor and control one's emotional reactions is referred to as self-regulation. Thus, childhood trauma and self-regulation are critical predictors of emotional expressivity.

Emotional expressivity refers to an individual's tendency to express their emotions openly, honestly, and appropriately. A person's ability to express their emotions can have an impact on their general quality of life, interpersonal connections, and mental and physical health. Due to issues with emotion regulation, those who have suffered childhood trauma are more prone to struggle with emotional expressivity. In contrast, those who have developed self-regulation skills are better equipped to express their emotions in a healthy and productive manner.

Study has shown that childhood trauma is allied with a range of emotive dysregulation difficulties, including difficulty identifying and labelling emotions, difficulty regulating emotions, and heightened emotional reactivity (van der Kolk, 2005). Individuals who have experienced childhood trauma may struggle to understand and manage their emotions, leading to difficulties in expressing them appropriately. They may also experience shame, guilt, and fear associated with their traumatic experiences, further impairing their emotional expressivity.

The development of self-regulation is particularly important during childhood, as this is a critical period for the acquisition of cognitive, emotional, and social skills. Children who struggle with self-regulation may be at increased risk for a array of negative consequences, including academic difficulties, behaviour problems and mental wellbeing issues (Moffitt et al., 2011). In contrast, children who develop effective self-regulation skills are more likely to succeed in school, form positive relationships with peers and adults, and experience better mental and physical health outcomes (Blair & Raver, 2012).

The importance of emotional expressivity in mental health and well-being has also been investigated. Studies have shown that individuals who express their emotions openly and effectively are less likely to experience depression and anxiety and are more likely to have positive self-esteem and social support (King & Emmons, 1990; Rime, Philippot, & Boca, 1992). In contrast, individuals who suppress their emotions or have difficulty expressing them may be at increased risk for mental health problems (Gross & John, 1998; John & Gross, 2004).

OBJECTIVE

1. To examine the relationship between childhood trauma and emotional expressivity.
2. To investigate the relationship between self-regulation and emotional expressivity.
3. To identify the role of gender in the association between childhood trauma, self0regulation and emotional expressivity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a quantitative research design to collect data from two groups: males and females. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire that will gather information on childhood trauma, self-regulation and emotional expressivity. Standardized scales for childhood trauma, self-regulation and emotional expressivity were included in the questionnaire.

Sample size: The intent of the study was to gather data from the youth population which involve 110 participants (55 males and 55 females) aged between 18 to 30 years. The sample size was kept small. It was made sure that all the subjects have relatively same economic, social and cultural background so that it does not interfere with the study as an extraneous variable.

Sampling Technique: The participants were recruited through advertisements in social media on the basis of snowball sampling. A non-probability sampling technique called snowball sampling, also known as chain referral sampling, depends on the referrals of beginning participants to produce additional participants. In snowball sampling, the researcher begins with a small number of participants, usually from a specific population of interest. The initial participants are then asked to refer other individuals who they believe may be relevant for the study.

Inclusion Criteria: The criterions that were included is the age range and gender of the participants. The age of the participants varied between 18 to 30 which included males and females. The responses of the participants were kept confidential. The cultural and social background of the participants were kept to be almost similar.

Exclusion Criteria: The criterions that were excluded were that participants below the age of 18 and above the age of 30 were not included in the research study. The participants who cannot read were also excluded as the researcher acquired questionnaire method. Extraneous variables were minimised as much as possible.

Measures:

1. Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ): The Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) is a self-administering questionnaire designed to assess different types of childhood maltreatment experienced by an individual. The questionnaire was developed by Bernstein and colleagues (1994) and later revised in 2003. CTQ comprises of 28 items that assess the five types of childhood maltreatment. Childhood Trauma Questionnaire is scored by summing the responses to each item within each subscale. The CTQ comprises of 5 subscales:1. emotional abuse 2. physical abuse 3. sexual abuse 4. emotional neglect, and 5. physical neglect. Each subscale includes 5 items, and every item is scored based on 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "never true" to "very often true." The response options are assigned numerical values ranging from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating more severe experiences of childhood maltreatment.

2. Short Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SSRQ): The Short Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SSRQ) is a self-report questionnaire developed by Carey et al. (2004) to measure individual differences in self-regulation. It is the short version of the Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ) established by Brown et al. in 1999 that measure of the ability to regulate behaviour in order to attain desired impending results. The SSRQ is a 31-item scale. The items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

3. Emotional Expressivity Scale (EES): EES (Kring, Smith and Neale, 1994) is based on a 6-point scale which helps to determine expressive nature of an individual. Each item deals with the emotions of an individual and the individual's ability to express the emotions. The response alternatives range from 'never true' to 'always true'. The test consisting of 17 items, is a self-report measure designed to assess the extent to which individual outwardly display their emotions both verbally and nonverbally via body language and facial expression.

Procedure: The participants will be asked to complete the CTQ, SSRQ, and EES questionnaires in a self-administered online survey. The order of the questionnaires will be counterbalanced to minimize order effects. The participants will be instructed to respond honestly and to the best of their ability. The survey took nearly 10 to 15 minutes to be done. After the responses were collected the total score for each individual was calculated. Then a comparative study is made to see the difference between both the groups and observe who is more affected, males or females.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The statistical analysis of the collected and scored data was done using SPSS 29. Descriptive statistics can be used to summarise and characterise the features of the sample and the variables of interest. For the SSRQ, the emotional expressivity scale, and the childhood trauma questionnaire, mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions can be computed. Also, to study the connection between childhood trauma, self-regulation, and emotional expressivity, correlation analysis can be a helpful statistical tool. A quantitative measure of the degree to which two variables are related is provided by correlation analysis, which assesses the strength and direction of the linear relationship between them.

table 1. mean and standard deviation of self-regulation, childhood trauma and emotional expressivity.

	Self Regulation	Emotional Expressivity	Physical Abuse	Emotional Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Physical Neglect	Emotional Neglect	Denial
N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
Mean	109.45	53.95	7.97	9.49	7.41	6.99	10.08	.83
Std. Deviation	15.765	13.795	4.176	4.332	3.957	3.135	4.710	1.003

Interpretation

Table 1 shows that the mean score for self-regulation is 109.45 and standard deviation is 15.76. The mean score for emotional expressivity is 53.95 and the standard deviation is 13.79. Again, in case of childhood trauma, the mean and standard deviation for physical abuse is 7.97 and 4.17 respectively. Similarly, for emotional abuse dimension mean is 9.49 and standard deviation is 4.33. Sexual abuse dimension yielded a mean of 7.41 and standard deviation of 3.95. For dimensions of physical and emotional neglect mean scores are 6.99 and 10.08 whereas the standard deviations are 3.13 and 4.71 respectively. Lastly, the mean score for denial was .83 and standard deviation was 1.003.

table 2. correlation between self-regulation, childhood trauma and emotional expressivity.

		Self-Regulation	Emotional Expressivity	Physical Abuse	Emotional Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Physical Neglect	Emotional Neglect	Denial
Self-Regulation	Pearson Correlation	1	-.231*	-.288**	-.273**	-.336**	-.406**	-.297**	.249**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.015	.002	.004	.000	.000	.002	.009
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
Emotional Expressivity	Pearson Correlation	-.231*	1	-.168	-.088	.011	-.023	-.215*	-.041
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015		.079	.360	.908	.812	.024	.670
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
Physical Abuse	Pearson Correlation	-.288**	-.168	1	.754**	.564**	.603**	.506**	-.262**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.079		.000	.000	.000	.000	.006
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
Emotional Abuse	Pearson Correlation	-.273**	-.088	.754**	1	.486**	.515**	.549**	-.379**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.360	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
Sexual Abuse	Pearson Correlation	-.336**	.011	.564**	.486**	1	.536**	.353**	-.241*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.908	.000	.000		.000	.000	.011
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
Physical Neglect	Pearson Correlation	-.406**	-.023	.603**	.515**	.536**	1	.555**	-.283**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.812	.000	.000	.000		.000	.003
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
Emotional Neglect	Pearson Correlation	-.297**	-.215*	.506**	.549**	.353**	.555**	1	-.511**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.024	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
Denial	Pearson Correlation	.249**	-.041	-.262**	-.379**	-.241*	-.283**	-.511**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.670	.006	.000	.011	.003	.000	
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110	110

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Interpretation

As evident from the second table, there is a significantly negative correlation between self-regulation and emotional expressivity at 0.05 level. There is also a significantly negative correlation between self-regulation and various dimensions of childhood0trauma: physical, emotional0, sexual0abuse, physical neglect and emotional0neglect at both 0.05 and 0.01 levels. Whereas, there is a positive correlation between self-regulation and denial that is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels. On the other hand, correlations between emotional expressivity and physical abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, emotional neglect and denial show nonsignificant negative correlations expect that of emotional neglect which is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels. Although there is a non-significant positive correlation between sexual abuse and emotional expressivity.

Study has shown that childhood trauma is related with a range of expressive dysregulation difficulties, including difficulty identifying and labelling emotions, difficulty regulating emotions, and heightened emotional reactivity (van der Kolk, 2005). Individuals who have experienced childhood trauma may struggle to understand and manage their emotions, leading to difficulties in expressing them appropriately. They may also experience shame, guilt, and fear associated with their traumatic experiences, further impairing their emotional expressivity.

Research on self-regulation has focused on understanding the neural mechanisms underlying the process, as well as the individual and contextual factors that influence its development and functioning (Gross, 2015). Several theories propose that self-regulation is a limited resource that can become depleted over time, leading to impaired performance on consequent tasks which require self0regulation (Baumeister0et0al., 1998; Inzlicht & Schmeichel, 2012). Other theories suggest that self- regulation is a flexible and adaptive process that can be strengthened through training and practice (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

table 3. correlation between self-regulation, childhood trauma and emotional expressivity amongst females.

		Self-Regulation	Emotional Expressivity	Physical Abuse	Emotional Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Physical Neglect	Emotional Neglect	Denial
Self-Regulation	Pearson Correlation	1	-.202	-.383**	-.227	-.398**	-.383**	-.296*	.351**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.139	.004	.096	.003	.004	.028	.009
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
Emotional Expressivity	Pearson Correlation	-.202	1	-.169	-.101	-.099	-.163	-.190	-.124
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.139		.216	.464	.472	.235	.165	.366
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
Physical Abuse	Pearson Correlation	-.383**	-.169	1	.737**	.590**	.625**	.522**	-.371**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.216		.000	.000	.000	.000	.005
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
Emotional Abuse	Pearson Correlation	-.227	-.101	.737**	1	.462**	.439**	.561**	-.482**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.096	.464	.000		.000	.001	.000	.000
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
Sexual Abuse	Pearson Correlation	-.398**	-.099	.590**	.462**	1	.513**	.383**	-.230
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.472	.000	.000		.000	.004	.091
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
Physical Neglect	Pearson Correlation	-.383**	-.163	.625**	.439**	.513**	1	.583**	-.352**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.235	.000	.001	.000		.000	.008
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
Emotional Neglect	Pearson Correlation	-.296*	-.190	.522**	.561**	.383**	.583**	1	-.581**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.028	.165	.000	.000	.004	.000		.000
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
Denial	Pearson Correlation	.351**	-.124	-.371**	-.482**	-.230	-.352**	-.581**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.366	.005	.000	.091	.008	.000	
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

table 4. correlation between self-regulation, childhood trauma and emotional expressivity amongst males.

		Self-Regulation	Emotional Expressivity	Physical Abuse	Emotional Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Physical Neglect	Emotional Neglect	Denial
Self-Regulation	Pearson Correlation	1	-.236	-.246	-.320*	-.253	-.435**	-.284*	.123
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.082	.071	.017	.063	.001	.036	.373
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
Emotional Expressivity	Pearson Correlation	-.236	1	-.114	-.115	.071	.129	-.317*	.080
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.082		.406	.405	.605	.347	.018	.560
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
Physical Abuse	Pearson Correlation	-.246	-.114	1	.823**	.604**	.612**	.552**	-.193
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.071	.406		.000	.000	.000	.000	.158
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
Emotional Abuse	Pearson Correlation	-.320*	-.115	.823**	1	.505**	.599**	.529**	-.259
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	.405	.000		.000	.000	.000	.056
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
Sexual Abuse	Pearson Correlation	-.253	.071	.604**	.505**	1	.563**	.305*	-.245
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.063	.605	.000	.000		.000	.023	.072
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
Physical Neglect	Pearson Correlation	-.435**	.129	.612**	.599**	.563**	1	.525**	-.209
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.347	.000	.000	.000		.000	.126
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
Emotional Neglect	Pearson Correlation	-.284*	-.317*	.552**	.529**	.305*	.525**	1	-.426**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.036	.018	.000	.000	.023	.000		.001
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55
Denial	Pearson Correlation	.123	.080	-.193	-.259	-.245	-.209	-.426**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.373	.560	.158	.056	.072	.126	.001	
	N	55	55	55	55	55	55	55	55

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Interpretation

Comparing table 3 and table 4, it is evident that, females and males both have a negative correlation among self- regulation and emotional expressivity which is non-significant. Both males and females show a negative correlation between various dimensions of childhood trauma like physical, emotional0and0sexual0abuse, emotional and physical0neglect. In case of females, the correlations between self-regulation and physical abuse, sexual abuse and physical neglect is significant at both 0.01 and 0.05 levels and the correlation between self -regulation and emotional neglect is significant at 0.05 level. Whereas, in case of males, emotional abuse and emotional neglect are significant at 0.05 level and correlation between self-regulation and physical neglect is significant at both levels. It was also evident that there is positive correlation between self-regulation and denial amongst males and females only exception being that it is non-significant in case of males and significant in case of females at both levels, 0.05 and 0.01. Finally, the correlation between emotional expressivity and childhood trauma shows that there is a non-significant correlation in females, whilst in males the correlation is negative for physical abuse, emotional abuse and emotional neglect, with only the correlation between emotional expressivity and emotional neglect being significant at 0.05 level. On the other hand, correlation between emotional expressivity and sexual abuse, physical neglect and denial is positive although non-significant.

This was in contrast with the study by Deng, Chang, Yang, Huo, and Zhou (2016) who looked into how emotional experience and expressivity vary by gender. The study monitored participants' heart rates as a measure of emotional experience while watching 16 video clips that elicited eight different types of emotions. They found that emotional experience and emotional expressivity varied between genders and that men frequently feel more severe emotional reactions, while women express emotions more freely, especially when they are unfavourable.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between childhood trauma, self-regulation, and emotional expressivity has important implications for mental health professionals, individuals who have experienced childhood trauma, and those seeking to improve their emotional expressivity. Mental health professionals can use this information to develop targeted interventions to improve emotional expressivity in individuals who have experienced childhood trauma. For example, interventions aimed at improving self-regulation skills may be beneficial for individuals who struggle with emotional expressivity due to childhood trauma. Individuals who have experienced childhood trauma can use this information to understand the impact of their experiences on their emotional development and seek appropriate support and interventions. Understanding the relationship between childhood trauma, self-regulation, and emotional expressivity can help individuals develop insight into their emotional struggles and develop effective coping strategies to improve emotional expressivity.

The limitations of our study must be taken into account when evaluating the results. Firstly, the sample size was somewhat small, which would limit the generalizability of the results. The study, however, had the power to identify moderate to significant between group variations. Second, the questionnaire that was used consisted of close ended questions, so only qualitative data could be obtained and not quantitative data. Third, although there were previous researches on the variables separately, there was limited access to previous studies on same subject. Fourth, there might be a difference in interpreting the questions among the participants based on their levels of education, socio-economic background and culture.

Even though this study has a number of drawbacks, such as a small sample size and a quantitative design, it nonetheless offers insightful information about how self-regulation and childhood trauma can impact emotional expressivity. Our findings should be replicated and expanded upon in subsequent studies using larger populations and other approaches. Understanding the relationship between childhood trauma, self-regulation, and emotional expressivity can help individuals develop insight into their emotional struggles and develop effective coping strategies to improve emotional expressivity.

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