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Emotional Regulation in Aging: A Comparative Study of Young and Old Elderly in Urban Settings

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how age affects how older people in Ahmedabad, India, regulate their emotions. Specifically, it looks at cognitive reappraisal (CR) and emotional suppression (ES). Data were gathered from a purposive sample of 110 people, divided into two age groups: younger elderly (60–70) and older elderly (71+), using the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire. Independent samples t-tests were used in the quantitative, non-experimental design to evaluate how different groups' approaches to emotional regulation differed. The findings showed no statistically significant age differences in the use of CR and ES, indicating that situational and cultural factors may have a greater influence on emotional regulation than age. The results are consistent with the Selection, Optimization, and Compensation (SOC) Theory, which holds that people modify their emotional tactics in response to social and cognitive resources rather than just age. These findings suggest that to promote emotional well-being in metropolitan senior populations, culturally appropriate mental health treatments are required, such as recreational facilities under medical supervision and psychoeducational initiatives. It is advised that these processes be investigated in various cultural contexts in future studies.

Keywords: *Age differences, Emotional Suppression, Cognitive Reappraisal, Emotional Regulation*

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Introduction

Imagine a scenario in which, one morning, you discover that your body is not functioning as effectively as it previously did. Stiff joints complicate even basic tasks and can hinder comprehension of verbal communication. The true indicators of aging are these colors. The third group of seniors, individuals over the age of 70, exhibits significantly greater cognitive and physical decline compared to the younger cohort, aged 60 to 70, who maintain relatively good mental and physical health. Nonetheless, many elderly individuals maintain cognitive sharpness despite these challenges. Emotional self-regulation, as defined by Gross and John (2003), refers to the ability to manage one's emotional responses across various contexts. John and Gross (2004) identified two significant methods. Emotion

regulation or dysregulation pertains to the management of one's emotional responses. Cognitive reappraisal refers to the process of interpreting stress as a constructive experience. Research by Allen and Windsor (2019) indicates that reappraisal is more effective in younger adults, attributed to their higher cognitive plasticity, while suppression proves more effective in older patients experiencing cognitive decline due to disease progression. Emotional regulation skills significantly decline with age, highlighting the importance of these systems in skill development.

Urban elders adapt fast to new situations, may lack computer and high-tech understanding, and may be socially isolated for many reasons. People in their 60s and 70s may struggle to adjust to retirement, new responsibilities, and financial changes (Nigam & Kar, 2020). However, health problems worsen, mobility declines, and social circle shrinks after 71, therefore older persons use emotional suppression to manage stress (Sachs-Ericsson et al., 2021). Age-related brain changes may explain the preference for suppression over cognitive reappraisal, which requires more mental effort.

Literature & Theories of Emotional Regulation about Age

The Life Course Perspective provides a framework for understanding emotional control methods in this study. This view holds that society and culture impact emotional regulation throughout life (Elder & Giele, 2009). Younger elderly Indians are more likely to experience emotional outbursts and participate in cognitive rehearsal than older ones, who have learned to conceal their emotions (Blanchard Fields, 2007). According to Carstensen (1999) and Allen and Windsor (2019), people repress emotions to cope with cognitive decline and aging, prioritizing emotional well-being. Due to their adaptive brains, younger seniors will continue to use reappraisal to cope (Gross & John, 2003). According to Urry & Gross (2010), older Western, Asian, and European people have similar emotional regulation techniques.

Studies indicate that cultural differences influence emotional regulation strategies. Research conducted by Nolen-Hoeksema and Aldao (2011) demonstrates that older adults in Western societies often suppress emotions by societal norms about emotional restraint. Elderly individuals in Eastern cultures, particularly in collectivist societies, tend to engage in reappraisal more frequently, highlighting the significance of social harmony (Soto et al., 2011). Research, including that of Zimmermann & Iwanski (2014), demonstrates that emotional regulation evolves with age and remains consistent across various cultural contexts, highlighting universal patterns in the use of suppression and reappraisal. Recent research identifies a relationship between cognitive decline and emotional regulation in the elderly, indicating that decreased cognitive flexibility with age results in increased emotional suppression among older adults (Opitz et al., 2012).

Many research has examined emotional control, but few have compared geriatric and other age groups. Despite ignoring non-clinical old persons, age inequalities are known. Researchers may include all seniors, ignoring the gap between 60-70 and 70+. Modern research focuses on high-variability second-level domains including quality of life, well-being, and physical health. Studies

of elder personality types during early retirement, emptiness syndrome, or end-of-life concerns generally ignore social changes. Many researchers haven't investigated age-related psychological issues like self-regulation. Emotional regulation in non-Western cultures is understudied, notably in India (Rajan 2018).

Younger elderly people use cognitive reappraisal more often due to their stronger cognitive ability, whereas older elderly people choose suppression. This observation defines this research's goal. This study claims to have addressed a research gap by identifying age-specific tendencies. This provides crucial insights for urban senior mental health care development. To promote urban people's emotional well-being and quality of life, the study will clarify differences and propose age-appropriate emotional control tools.

Research Objective

This study examines the statistically significant differences in the use of emotional regulation strategies, specifically cognitive reappraisal, and emotional suppression, between younger elderly individuals (aged 60-70) and older elderly individuals (aged 71 and above) within an urban context.

Hypothesis

A statistically significant difference exists in emotional regulation strategies between younger elderly individuals (aged 60-70) and older elderly individuals (aged 71 and above) i.e. younger elderly individuals are more likely to employ cognitive reappraisal as their emotional regulation strategy, whereas older elderly individuals are more likely to depend on emotional suppression as their emotional regulation strategy.

METHODOLOGY:

Procedure & Participants

The study examined metropolitan 60-year-old & above emotional regulation mechanisms using a quantitative, non-experimental methodology. From private housing complexes in Ahmedabad, 110 participants were recruited, 49 of them were 60–70 years old and 61 were above 71. The sample was gender balanced with 55 men and 55 women. The majority of participants (81) were married, whereas 29 were widows or widowers. For data integrity, those with severe cognitive impairments or chronic illnesses were excluded. The University Ethics Committee of Karnavati School of Research, Karnavati University, approved the study after the participants gave informed consent. A structured, self-administered paper-and-pencil survey allowed individuals to share their emotional regulation methods. The questionnaire was explained to some of the participants 'in their native languages to ensure comprehension. Participants were informed of the study's relevance and given any required clarifications.

Instruments:

A standardized questionnaire was employed to gather the data.

A. **Emotional Regulation Questionnaire:** The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) is a 10-item self-report instrument intended to evaluate two strategies: cognitive reappraisal (6 items) and expressive suppression (4 items), by Gross's framework. Responses are evaluated using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) (Gutiérrez-Cobo et al., 2021). Items 2, 4, 6, and 9 evaluate suppression, whereas items 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 10 gauge cognitive reappraisal. The scale has robust reliability, with Cronbach's alpha between 0.73 and 0.79 and test-retest reliability around 0.69 (Saleem et al., 2019). Scores go from 10 to 70, including the complete spectrum of reactions.

Data Analysis:

SPSS was used to summarize participant demographics and Cognitive Reappraisal and Emotional Suppression involvement from the self-administered questionnaire. A t-test for independent samples compared emotional management techniques between age groups. The t-test was chosen to compare mean differences between younger (60-70 years) and older (71+ years) elderly. This study examined the statistical significance of cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression differences across two age groups. A thorough sample emotional regulation profile was obtained by analyzing data at a 0.05 significance level to compare emotional regulation techniques across age groups.

RESULTS:

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Regulation Strategies (Cognitive Reappraisal & Emotional Suppression) Across Age Groups (Young Elderly vs. Old Elderly)

Group Statistics					
	Age Group	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**
Total CR Scores	Young Elderly	49	28.96	7.237	1.034
	Old Elderly	61	29.43	5.804	.743
Total ES Scores	Young Elderly	49	18.49	4.959	.708
	Old Elderly	61	19.05	5.711	.731

Note. CR = Cognitive Reappraisal; ES = Emotional Suppression.

The descriptive statistics include the mean scores and standard deviations for Cognitive Reappraisal (CR) and Emotional Suppression (ES) among the two age cohorts. In terms of Cognitive Reappraisal, the younger elderly cohort (M = 28.96, SD = 7.24) had a somewhat lower mean than the older senior cohort (M = 29.43, SD = 5.80). Regarding Emotional Suppression, the older senior cohort (M = 19.05, SD = 5.71) exhibited a somewhat elevated mean compared to the younger elderly cohort (M = 18.49, SD = 4.96). The standard deviations for both groups were analogous, suggesting equal variability in applying emotional control methods across the two age cohorts.

Table 2 Independent Samples T-test for Cognitive Reappraisal and Emotional Suppression Across Age Groups

Independent Samples Test						
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total CR Score	Equal variances assumed	2.936	.089	-.376	108	.708
	Equal variances are not assumed.			-.367	90.979	.715
Total ES Score	Equal variances assumed	1.911	.170	-.541	108	.590
	Equal variances are not assumed.			-.549	107.315	.584

Note: A p-value larger than.05 indicates that Cognitive Reappraisal (CR) and Emotional Suppression (ES) scores do not differ by age group. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

Table 2 shows the independent samples t-test comparing Cognitive Reappraisal (CR) and Emotional Suppression (ES) scores between younger (60-70) and older (71+) senior people. No significant difference was found between groups for Cognitive Reappraisal, t (108) = -0.376, p =.708, mean difference -0.467. Emotional Suppression showed no significant difference, t (108) = -0.541, p =.590, with a mean difference of -0.559. Age does not appear to affect cognitive reappraisal or emotional suppression in the sample. The findings contradict the idea that younger elderly

persons prefer cognitive reappraisal while older seniors prefer emotional repression.

DISCUSSION:

The objective of this study was to investigate the utilization of two kinds of emotional regulation about age among older individuals in urban India. The results, however, did not demonstrate any significant differences between the two groups of seniors, those aged 71 and older and the younger elderly aged 60–70, suggesting that age alone may not be a sufficient criterion for selecting emotional management strategies. Consequently, Scheibe, Sheppes, and Staudinger (2015) conducted research that corroborates these findings, suggesting that age may not significantly influence the regulation of distinct emotional strategies. The researchers examined emotion regulation across several developmental stages and discovered that both young and elderly individuals employ comparable regulatory strategies based on situational demands rather than age-related disparities. This indicates that emotional control systems are primarily influenced by situational factors rather than age.

Additionally, an alternative comprehensive theory may be derived from the Selection, Optimization, and Compensation (SOC) Theory developed by Baltes and Baltes (1990). This theory asserts that the elderly adjust to age-related losses by selecting and refining emotional regulation strategies that mitigate advancing deficits. This may elucidate the absence of a clear disparity between younger and more elderly individuals in the utilization of major emotional regulation techniques identified in this study, as individuals adapted to the resources available to them rather than exhibiting age-related disparities.

Cultural influences may also contribute to the absence of disparities between the two age groups. Collectivist cultures, such as India, advocate for self-regulation, particularly with emotional management and modulation throughout life. Wierzbicka (1994) asserts that in collectivist societies, emotional repression is a prevalent strategy employed to preserve social stability. Moreover, given the research context in metropolitan areas, it was necessary to presume that participants possessed comparable levels of educational, social, and financial resources for accessing emotional self-regulation assets, potentially reducing heterogeneity in resilient functioning. The insufficient contrast between the experiences of younger and older seniors may account for the overall absence of substantial age disparities.

Thus, the findings of this study substantiate our hypothesis that cultural norms, socialization, and an individual's available resources significantly influence emotional regulation in alignment with the SOC theory, while excluding age as a primary contributing factor.

Limitations & Implications of the study

Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that the study presents substantial data; yet, there are notable disadvantages. A depiction of an idea or truth from a small group differs from its depiction in larger ones, making generalizations difficult. Participants' beliefs of emotional control may have altered self-rated questionnaires. Due to cognitive decline and slower processing speed, elderly respondents may have found the questions difficult. Interviews can explain mixed-

method research methods. Culture, especially commercial culture, may have affected results, ideas, and beliefs. Future research may examine geriatric emotional management in sheltered care to better understand their ways. Second, future research may examine environmental and cultural influences across age groups.

This study may also assist psychiatrists and psychologists diagnose and treat geriatric emotional self-regulation. Public education, mental supervision licensing, and state-funded mental health services may increase mood. Prince et al. (2015) advised integrating mental health services into primary healthcare and upgrading aged care to lessen the senior population's mental healthcare burden by providing age-appropriate care and settings. This may also assist older adults manage their emotions to mitigate cognitive decline, social loss, and new life stage social expectations.

CONCLUSION:

The purpose of this study was to investigate how older adults in metropolitan areas used cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression as two methods of emotional regulation. Additionally, the findings revealed no discernible differences in the usage of the aforementioned techniques between the first and second generations of senior people, who are 60–70 years old and 71 years old, respectively. According to SOC theory, this implies that cultural and environmental factors may have a greater impact on emotional self-regulation tendencies than age. (Viellard, et.al, 2018)

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