

## ROLE OF COGNITIVE EMOTION REGULATION STRATEGIES IN EMOTIONAL DISTRESS OF ADOLESCENTS WHOSE FATHERS ARE EMPLOYED ABROAD

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The present research explored the predictive association between cognitive emotion regulation and emotional distress in adolescents whose fathers are working abroad.

**Design:** Correlational study

**Place & Duration of Study:** University of Gujrat, Sialkot Sub- campus, Pakistan.

**Subjects and Method:** A sample of 327 (152 male, 175 females) adolescents with age range of 12 years to 19 years (Mean age= 15.58; S.D= 2.186) was selected from various government and private educational institutions of Sialkot, Pakistan. Participants assessed on Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire and Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Screening Inventory (RAASI).

**Results and Conclusion:** Regression analysis predicted a significant association between cognitive emotion regulation and emotional distress in teenagers with fathers working overseas. Moreover, gender oriented regression indicated a foretelling linkage between cognitive emotion regulation and emotional distress in 12-14 years female adolescents and 15-17 years female adolescents. However, the results of 18-19 years female adolescents were found insignificant. Additionally, the regression analysis of 12-14 years male adolescents showed a weighty linkage between cognitive emotion regulation and emotional distress, but the results of 15-17 years male adolescents, 18-19 years male adolescents were found insignificant.

The cognitive emotion regulation has a significant effect on the emotional health of the adolescents whose fathers are working abroad. Further, the recognition of

*cognitive coping strategies used by the adolescent can help to better understand the adolescent's problems and psychopathologies.*

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**Keywords:** *Cognitive Emotion Regulation, Emotional Distress, Adolescents*

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## INTRODUCTION

Cognitive emotion regulation is the mind processes that are involved in human's coping with emotionally arousing situations. Having better cognitive emotion regulation signifies that an individual has better coping skills to deal with problematic emotional situations. On exposure to threatening event, people tend to use nine cognitive coping strategies for their emotional regulation. Five of these strategies used as adjusted strategies for emotional regulation, besides, they use four unadjusted emotion regulation strategies too, i.e. self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, other-blame (Garnefski, Kraaij, & Spinhoven, 2001).

Emotion regulation is defined as an effort to preserve, manage and boost experience and demonstrate emotion (Robertson, Daffern, & Bucks, 2012). The emotion regulatory process can be of different types including voluntary or involuntary, conscious or unconscious and might have their consequences at any point in the emotion regulation process. The individuals indicate better coping skills to deal with problematic emotional situations having better cognitive emotion regulation. In challenging situations, people tend to use nine cognitive coping strategies for their emotional regulation. Five of these strategies used as adjusted strategies for emotional regulation, besides, they use four unadjusted emotion regulation strategies too, i.e. self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, other-blame (Garnefski, Kraaij, & Spinhoven, 2001).

Cognitive emotion regulation is illustrated as execution of emotion stimulating knowledge by using mindful cognitive means (Thompson, 1991). Cognitive emotion regulation or intellectual handling is characterized by the conscious, cognitive approach of managing the incoming sentimental information the regulation of emotions by means of cognition is inevitably connected to human being's life. Cognitive methods aid individuals control emotional responses and not besieged through magnitude of these feelings. There are two divisions of cognitive processes, unconscious (e.g. Projection) and conscious (i.e. self-blame). These cognitive approaches are vital for an organization of frightening or traumatic circumstances by means of helping individuals to cope, adjust, and handle emotions (Garnefski et al., 2001). Cognitive regulation of emotion operates on recollecting emotional information and embrace all

cognitive techniques used to increase, decrease or uphold one's emotions (Kevin, Ochsner, & Gross, 2005).

Popular models of cognitive emotion regulation, include Nolen-Hoeksema's (1991), broad investigation on rumination, usually emphasizes on a few approaches, like distraction and rumination (Nolen-Hoeksema, Morrow, & Frederickson, 1993). The most inclusive model of cognitive emotion regulation mechanisms is proposed by Garnefski et al. (2001), Garnefski's model illustrates nine approaches of regulating emotion, self-blame, catastrophizing, other-blame, rumination, acceptance, refocus on planning, positive reappraisal, positive refocusing and putting into perspective. Furthermore, the cognitive coping strategy of self-blame specifies the thoughts of blaming self for that one has bared (Anderson, Miller, Riger, Dill & Sedikides, 1994); Other-blame attributes to thinking of placing the responsibility of your experience on others (Tennen & Affleck, 1990); Rumination signifies the process of thinking constantly regarding the thoughts linked to the depressing incident (Nolen-Hoeksema, Parker & Larson, 1994); Catastrophizing narrates overtly highlighting the fear of the occurrence (Sullivan, Bishop & Pivik, 1995); Putting into Perspective describes the cognitions of deemphasizing the earnestness of experience while contrasting others (Allan & Gilbert, 1995); Positive refocusing relates to others thinking, pleasurable as well as enjoyable affair rather than substantial incident (Endler & Parker, 1990); Positive Reappraisal states that thoughts of connecting an optimistic sense with experience regarding personal development (Spirito, Stark & Williams, 1988); Acceptance describes the thinking of reconciling to incidence that occurred (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989); and Refocus on Planning, focuses on cognitions of what type of measures to seize so as to compact through incident (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988).

Researchers considered that persons with diverse emotional disorders use diverse strategies in managing stressful situations. The cognitive emotion regulation processes modulates symptoms linked with different psychological disorders further, refocusing on planning, acceptance and putting into perspective is defending mechanisms that helps in the avoidance of behavioral and sentimental unease in teenagers (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2006). Further, self-blame is found to link to elevated depression (Anderson et al., 1994). Although, a ruminative thinking approach generally established to associate with reduced depression and psychological well-being (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000; Nolen-Hoeksema, McBride, & Larson, 1997). In broader terms, catastrophizing has found to be associated with depression, emotional distress and maladaptation

(Sullivan et al., 1995). Besides, research on coping exhibits that positive reappraisal, acceptance, positive refocusing, and refocus on planning have fairly positive associations with self-esteem, optimism and pessimistic relations to anxiety and depression (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Furthermore, Gross and John (2003), established that individuals with high level of Reappraisal and low in Suppression faced more optimistic and less unhelpful emotions, shared more emotions with others, were more accepted, had improved social support, had poorer scores on depression, and higher scores on happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, optimism, and well-being

As adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood, and performs a crucial role in the development of a pro social or disruptive individual. According to Oltmans and Emery (1995), it is normal to experience minute amount of emotional distress or misbehavior during adolescence. It turns challenging when it hinders adolescents' performance for a long time. Additionally, epidemiological analysis designated that about 15-20% of adolescents undergo from behavioral and emotional turbulence (Offer & Schonert-Reichl, 1992). Further, maladaptive coping have found to be linked with psychological distress, symptom severity, and depression (Somerfield & McCrae, 2000). Moreover, cognitive theory forecast that people who involve in maladaptive coping bear more stress than few researcher in line found that there was a positive association of cognitive emotion regulation strategies, like self-blame, catastrophizing, and rumination with depression and other measures of ill health, whereas strategies like positive reappraisal are negatively correlated (Anderson et al., 1994). Further, Garnefski, Boon, and Kraaij (2003) established that strategies to regulate emotions such as self-blaming, catastrophizing and rumination exhibited powerful connection with internalizing problem behavior like chaotic mood, withdrawal, anxiety, and depression. Moreover, the cognitive coping theory also forecast that negative thinking about oneself, blaming others, rumination and catastrophizing are linked to experience of negative emotions about oneself and others and experience of emotional distress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Research suggests that boys are more prone to develop behavioral issues such as drug abuse and acting out, while girls are prone to emotional problems like anxiety, depression, irritability and thoughts of suicide (Offer & Schonert-Reichel, 1992). One research indication also showed the use of internal and active coping increases between early and late teenage years (Seiffge-Krenke & Beyers, 2005). In addition, Frydenberg and Lewis (2000) has found that older

adolescents have enhanced propensity to exhibit emotion oriented coping. Moreover, the entire amount of existing coping mechanisms boost up with age. Maladaptive coping strategies have been found to link to psychological distress, symptom severity, and depression (Somerfield & McCrae, 2000). Moreover, cognitive theory forecast that people who involve in maladjusted handling tactics will bear more strains as compared to those whom are involve in adjusted intellectual handling tactics (Lazarus, 1991).

Family is the primary agent of socialization, which aids in appropriate psychological, emotional, cognitive development of the individual. Especially, fathers play significant role in a child's development, particularly during adolescence. Researches also recommended that father absence might merely be damaging when certain features of the father's responsibility left discontented or insufficient, primarily aspects that are vital to family functioning for instance, social, emotional, and economic sustenance (East, Jackson & O'Brien, 2006). Further, father also plays the role of major earning members of the family. Therefore, fathers possess significant importance in a child's life as well as in the family. The role of father is to facilitate the proper upbringing of the children. As adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood, and performs a crucial role in the development of a pro-social or disruptive individual. According to Oltmans and Emery, (1995), it is normal to experience minute amount of emotional distress or misbehavior during adolescence. It turns challenging when it hinders with adolescents' performance for a long time. In countries like Pakistan, the role of father is as the principle authoritative as well as supportive figure. In the absence of father adolescents suffer emotional and social support and experience distress due to which an individual experiences many physiological, emotional, psychological and cognitive transitions.

Keeping in view, the present research was conducted to discover the association between cognitive emotion regulation and emotional distress in adolescents whose fathers are working abroad. There is evidence of research on this topic in Western countries, but concern related to this topic is limited in Pakistan. Further, there is no evidence based study found related to adolescents whose fathers work abroad.

## **METHOD**

The participants of the study were 327 adolescents from 12-19 years (Mean age = 15.58; S.D = 2.18). Out of them 152 were males and 175 were

females. The participants were randomly selected from different academic institutions of Sialkot, Pakistan. Exclusion criteria include the adolescents with some physical disability or injury, adolescents whose fathers reside in Pakistan and those who have single parents. The educational level of participants ranged from 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

### ***Measures***

#### **Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ: Garnefski, Kraaij, & Spinhoven, 2002)**

Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire is a scale comprising of 36 items categorized into nine theoretically diverse subscales. Each subscale comprises of four items and each narrates to what a person thinks following the experience of frightening or traumatic life incidences. The scale is on 5-point Likert format. Research exhibits that subscales encompass good internal consistencies from .68 to .86.

#### **Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Screening Inventory (RAASI: Reynolds, 2001)**

For assessing emotional distress, Emotional distress sub scale of RASSI was used. Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Screening Inventory (Reynolds, 2001) is a 32 items, brief screening measure of adjustment for use with adolescents with ages from 12 to 19 years. RAASI makes an adjustment Total (AdjT) scores on four factorial derived scales. It includes Antisocial Behavior (AB), Anger Control Problems (AC), Emotional Distress (ED), and Positive Self (PS) translated by Ahmad, Khanam and Riaz (2008). It has high internal consistency (.92), two week test-retest reliability (.89) for total developmental samples. High internal consistency coefficients range from (.71-.88) and test-retest reliability coefficient range from .83-.86.

### ***Procedure***

For the present study, the sample was selected from various government and private sector, educational institutes located in different areas of Sialkot, Pakistan. The selection of the institutions was done randomly. After receiving consent from the school authorities, the researcher approached the students in their classes to brief the purpose of the study and took informed consent to take

part in the study. Further, they were guaranteed that the data will merely be used for research purpose and their credentials will not be exposed to anyone. Personal Information Form, CERQ, and RAASI were administered. After data collection, all participants with their school authorities were appreciated and thanked for their cooperation and time to take part in this research.

### **Cognitive Emotion Regulation**

Cognitive emotion regulation is the process involving mindful, mental approaches that an individual utilizes to handle input of emotionally affecting information (Thompson, 1994).

### **Emotional Distress**

Emotional distress defined emotional distress as feelings of excessive worry, apprehension and anxiety, depressed mood, cry spells and common distress. A person who feels excessive distress in general shows anxiety and depression, sometimes exhibit symptoms of a negative effect or features (Clark, & Watson, 1991).

## **RESULTS**

**Table 1**  
*Sample Distribution across Various Stages of Adolescence and Gender*

<b>Variables</b>	<b><i>Frequency</i></b>	<b><i>Percentage %</i></b>
<b>Gender</b>		
<b>Male</b>	152	46.5
<b>Females</b>	175	53.5
<b>Age</b>		
12 years	30	9.2
13 years	40	12.2

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14 years	48	14.7
15 years	37	11.3
16 years	52	15.9
17 years	46	14.1
18 years	33	12.1
19 years	41	12.5
<b>Mean Age for total sample</b>	<b>15.58</b>	
<b>Income Group</b>		
	99	30.3
Low	113	34.6
Middle	115	35.2
High		
<b>Family Structure</b>		
	169	51.7
Nuclear	158	48.0
Joint		

*Note.  $P < 0.01$ , Table shows cognitive emotion regulation as a significant predictor of \emotional distress in adolescent whose fathers are employed abroad.*



**Table 2**

*Summary of Regression Analysis with Cognitive Emotional Regulation as a Significant Predictor of Emotional Distress in Adolescents whose Fathers are Working Abroad*

Variables	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Cognitive emotion regulation	0.420	0.176	0.174	69.636	0.00
Emotional Distress					

**Table 3**

*Pearson Correlation for Relationship between Domains of Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies and Emotional Distress*

Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Self-blame	327	.200**	.000
Acceptance	327	.198**	.000
Rumination	327	.198**	.000
Positive refocusing	327	.197**	.000
Refocus on planning	327	.212**	.000
Positive reappraisal	327	.265**	.000
Catastrophizing	327	.217**	.000
Putting into perspective	327	.339**	.000
Other blame	327	.264**	.000

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

**Table 4**

*Summary of Regression Analysis for Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies as a Significant Predictor of Emotional Distress in Male and Female Adolescents*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>
<b>Early Adolescents (12-14 years)</b>	Male	.425	.181	.167	12.787	.001
	Female	.553	.306	.293	24.655	.000
<b>Middle Adolescents (15-17 years)</b>	Male	.189	.036	.016	1.851	.181
	Female	.671	.450	.0443	64.648	.000
<b>Late Adolescent (18-19 years)</b>	Male	.038	.001	-.025	.054	.818
	Female	.079	.006	-.025	.199	.658

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**P<.05**

## **DISCUSSION**

The outcome of the present research merely explained the part of intellectual coping tactics in emotional distress, particularly in adolescents whose fathers are working abroad. During the previous periods of 40 years, there is a considerable upsurge in investigations stressing on role of father and its influence on kids. Furthermore, the father-hood considered as a moral coach, the chief cause of earnings, guide, and nurturing individual (Lamb, 2010). However, the findings confirm the results of preceding investigations that non-adjusted cognitive tactics, were found interconnected and has a considerable positive association with depression and anxiety. Conversely, adjusted cognitive coping

strategies exhibited a negative relationship with both professed strain and worry (Miklósi, Martos, Szabó, Kocsis-Bogár & Perczel, 2014). Some other researches also support our findings that coping strategies included were significant predictors of adverse sentiments in adolescents. Blaming oneself, blaming others, cognition and catastrophizing found to be positively linked with depression, anxiety and stress. Moreover, a negative correlation between adjusted cognitive handling tactics with depression putting into perspective and optimistic reassessment was negatively associated with stress (Ryan & Eric, 2005).

Current research analysis exhibited a weighty linkage between all the domains of intellectual emotion guidelines and emotional distress in adolescents whose fathers are working abroad (Table 3). Further regarding all domains, there is a noteworthy direct association between adjusted handling tactics and emotional distress. As well as, there has been a positive correlation found between maladjusted cognitive coping strategies with emotional distress. This indicates that whether adjusted or maladjusted, all the cognitive coping strategies are interlinked and affect the emotional states of adolescents.

Regarding gender base analysis, the trends observed in 12-14 years female adolescents [ $R^2 = .306$ ,  $F = 24.655$ ,  $p = .000$ ] and 15-17 years female adolescents [ $R^2 = .450$ ,  $F = 64.648$ ,  $p = .000$ ] are constant with the main findings of this research. However, the findings on 18-19 years female adolescents [ $R^2 = .006$ ,  $F = .199$ ,  $p = .658$ ], were found insignificant. Further, the analysis of early male adolescents [ $R^2 = .181$ ,  $F = 12.787$ ,  $p = .001$ ] exhibited a significant association, but the outcomes of 15-17 years male adolescents [ $R^2 = .036$ ,  $F = 1.851$ ,  $p = .181$ ], 18-19 years male adolescents [ $R^2 = .001$ ,  $F = .054$ ,  $p = .818$ ] are found insignificant. This shows that female adolescents whose fathers work abroad may be more reclined to emotional distress than male adolescents. These findings can be related to the previous outcomes that boys are more prone to develop behavioral issues like drug abuse and acting out, while teenager females are extra prone to emotive problems like worry, despair, irritability and dangerous ideation (Offer & Schonert-Reichel, 1992). In addition, Compas, Malcarne and Fondacaro (1988) has found that older adolescents has enhanced propensity to exhibit emotion oriented coping. Moreover, the entire amount of existing coping mechanisms boosts up with age (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2000).

Teenage is a time of tempest and pressure; it is a stage of lifespan which is complex, extra tough in different conducts as compared to other phases of. This idea, that adolescent years are difficult, includes three standard features,

divergence from paternities, mood trouble and dangerous demeanor (Buchanan et al., 1990). Literature from various researches has suggested that destructive strategies normally speaking, are found to be linked to extra emotive difficulties, whereas reactions like Optimistic reassessment have been revealed to linked with lesser difficulties in teenagers (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2006; Garnefski, Boon, & Kraaij, 2003). Further, there is growing support that (continuing) mental suffering in reaction to a life stressor might be linked with the intellectual sentiment directive approaches that the individual employ to compact with that strain generating source (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2006).

In Pakistan, a universe of different cultures is living under the same umbrella. Joint family system and dependence of adolescents for nurturance, economical support, emotional fostering, and security for parents are commonly observed. Further, the father is regarded as the dominant figure of the family, handling most of the decision-making and rule setting at home. Women and children, mostly rely on the male figure of the family for protection, support and economical facilitation. Thus, to make earning better and for providing better lifestyles for their families a vast majority of Pakistani men prefers to work abroad. Although, this policy helps in economic uplifting of the family but can also result in certain emotional and psychological problems as well. As adolescents are more dependent on their parents and during this period of life and adolescent relates more to his father. The absence of fathers during this stage of life results in emotional, psychological and behavioral deficits. This notion can be supported in line with previous researches that physical absence as well as functional absence, portrayed by a poor presentation in a father and husbands' responsibility, could escort to an enhancement in children's troublesome behaviors (Tanaka & Nakazawa, 2005). Children, whose fathers are living abroad, are incapable to contest well in day-to-day life and have various emotive, psychosocial, hazardous behavioral and academic difficulties (Garcia, 2007).

Therefore, this exploration will add a significant support to the previous findings related to the subject. Moreover, the results from the current exploration will also help for further considerations and outcomes. This research will help the practitioners, clinicians, educationist to better deal with the psychological problems related to adolescents whose fathers are employed abroad

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