

# Emotional Regulation and Well-Being among Elderly

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## ABSTRACT

Well-being entails a complex construct that concerns with optimal experiences, functioning, and existential challenges of life. Emotional Regulation is regarded as a crucial factor in well-being, in the popular literature, and scientific research alike. The aim of the present study was to assess the relationship between perceived well-being and regulation of emotions to develop a greater understanding of how emotion regulation skills tend to play a vital role in old age, and to study the gender differences on the domains of emotional regulation, which are cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. A purposive sample consisting of 200 participants, 100 males and females each, belonging to the age group of 65-80 years, were taken. The measures used in the present study were Psychological General Well-being Index (PGWBI) and Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ). This paper employs a quantitative analysis using correlation method and t-test method. The results point out that the relationship between perceived wellbeing and emotional regulation is comprehended to be bidirectional. Emotional regulation may also have protective role in wellbeing since regulation of emotions is essential for adaptive functioning, whereas suboptimal or dysfunctional.

**Index Terms:** Cognitive Suppression, Emotion Regulation, Expressive Suppression, Well-being

## I. INTRODUCTION

Ageing is a phenomenon which inculcates inevitable development that tends to bring a wide variety of changes in the psychological, physical and social conditions among elderly. As people are expected to live longer, they also look out for continuous healthy conditions and well-being throughout their old age. Well-being is a multifaceted concept which refers to broad interconnected dimensions of physical, psychological, emotional and social well-being, not confining itself to simply health domain. The term 'well-being' can be broken into two facets that will directly point to its meaning. It comprises of 'being' and 'well', that is, living in a state or condition that is considered good in some sense. Well-being is associated with multi-directional benefits related to health, family, work, and financial domains. Age and gender also have been shown to be related to well-being, in that, men and women have similar levels of well-being, but this pattern changes with age. Furthermore, supportive relationships are one of the strongest predictors of well-being, that have notably positive effect. Well-being comprises of different dimensions such as Physical Well-Being, emotional well-being, social well-being, and psychological well-being

### Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being and health are directly proportional, in general and specifically in old age. In old age, the quality of life is greatly affected by the mental state and social status of the individual such as material conditions at different points in

one's life, family and social relationships because these factors are dynamic in nature.

### Emotion Regulation and its Significance

Emotion regulation (ER) is a complex process that encompasses initiation, inhibition, or modulation of one's state or behavior in a given situation, for instance, the cognitive responses (thoughts), subjective experiences (feelings), emotion-affiliated physiological responses (Blood pressure or heart rate), and emotion-affiliated behaviors (bodily expressions). Emotion regulation becomes increasingly important. The more the regulations placed upon individuals, the more they have to be proficient at handling an increasingly wide variety of emotions. Experiencing these changes on a daily basis can make one feel miserable and behave disproportionately. Inappropriate, extreme and rampant emotional responses to potentially arousing stimuli could hamper functional fit within the society and make them emotionally dysregulated.

### Relationship Between Well-Being and Emotional Regulation

Well-being and Emotional Regulation are entangled in our cognitions and behaviour and in turn play a vital role in interpersonal communication and emotions, which are building blocks of our existence. Emotion regulation is considered to be an integral factor in well-being, and regulating the emotions is thought to be essential for adaptive functioning.

### How Elderly Regulate Emotions to Enhance their Well-being

Emotions being a vital part of our everyday lives demands an ability to regulate emotions, to perceive the people around you. An inability to regulate emotions is, according to Gross and Jazaieri (2014), at the root of psychological disorders such as depression and borderline personality disorder. Old age is generally associated with losses in various domains of life but despite that older adults often show high rates of well-being as compared to young adults.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Studies on elderly well-being and emotional regulation, separately and collectively, has been a significant area of research in the field of Psychology. As a result, a wide variety of researches being conducted all over the world based on regulation of emotions among elderly and their well-being, since these are bidirectional. Although psychological well-being has been extensively evaluated (Diener, 1984; Diener & Emmons, 1984), when it comes to articulating the basic structure of psychological wellbeing, the researchers always centre the discussions around the discussion between positive and negative affect and life satisfaction (Diener & Emmons, 1984). Research indicates that high levels of emotional stability and affective well-being are the norm at

least until after adults reach 70 or 80 years of age (e.g., Carstensen et al., 2000, 2009; Charles, Reynolds, & Gatz, 2001; Kessler & Staudinger, 2009; Mroczek & Kolarz, 1998; Teachman, 2006). One research stated that although most people are encountering mounting physical ailments, social losses, psychological stress, and high dependency at the very end of life, most older people are well adjusted emotionally for the bulk of their later years (e.g., Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, & Nesselrode, 2000). Another research has found that variation in *knowledge* of how to best regulate emotions – whether people know the rules of emotion regulation – is associated with well-being, close social relationships, high grades in school, and high job performance (e.g., Côté & Miners, 2006; Lopes, Salovey, Côté, & Beers, 2005; MacCann & Roberts, 2008).

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### Hypotheses

1. There will be a positive relationship between well-being and emotional regulation among elderly.
2. There will be no significant differences among males and females on both the dimensions of Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ).

#### Design

The objective of the present research was to assess the relationship between well-being and emotion regulation among elderly and to investigate gender differences in regulation of emotions. For this, two measures, the psychological general well-being index (PGWBI) and emotion regulation questionnaire (ERQ), were chosen, and administered on a sample of 65+ years of elderly (35 males and females each) in a face-to-face interaction. The data was then compiled, and scoring was done. Afterwards, the results were tabulated, graphically represented, and discussed.

#### Sample

For the present study, a purposive sample of 70 elderly individuals, 35 males and 35 females, were taken. The participants were of 65 and above age group having minimum of matric qualification, belonging to middle socio-economic strata.

#### Measures

- (i) 1. The Psychological General Well-Being Index (PGWBI): It is a 22-item index health-related quality of life (HRQoL) questionnaire that has been developed in U.S. for the evaluation of perceived well-being and distress. The PGWBI has six dimension which are: Anxiety, Depressed Mood, Positive Well-Being, Self-Control, General Health, and Vitality.
- (ii) 2. Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ): It is a 10-item scale designed by Gross & John (2003) used to assess individual differences in the habitual use of two emotion regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal, which is defined as the attempt to reinterpret an emotion-eliciting situation in a way that alters its meaning and changes its emotional impact, and *expressive suppression*, which is defined as the attempt to hide, inhibit or reduce ongoing emotion-expressive behavior.

#### Procedure

The present research aimed to examine the relationship between well-being and emotion regulation among elderly and to investigate gender differences in regulation of emotions. The sample selected was purposive comprising of 70 individuals, belonging to the age group of 65 years and above. The two indices, psychological general well-being index (PGWBI) and emotion regulation questionnaire (ERQ), were administered on each of the participant individually once the rapport formation was done. After the data was collected, quantitative analysis was carried out to obtain the results.

### IV. RESULTS

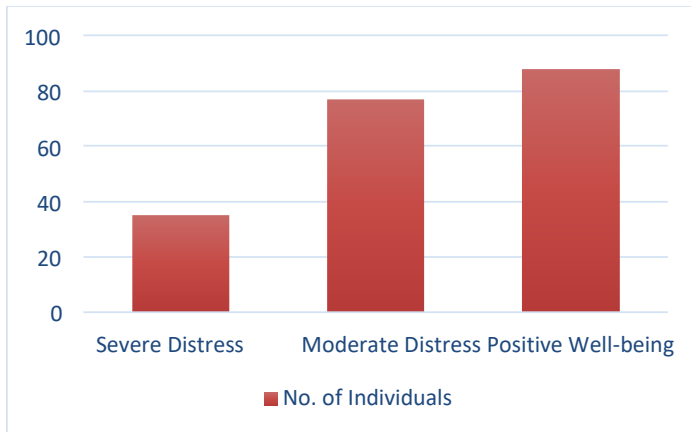
The results were computed by adding the scores of the two measures as per their respective manuals. This was followed by calculation of correlation using Pearson product correlation coefficient between the scores of individuals on both PGWBI and ERQ. After this, the t-ratios were computed between the scores of males and females on the dimensions of ERQ and their significance was tested. Following are the tables and graphs depicting the results.

Table I: Mean values, Standard deviations, correlation value between ERQ and PGWBI

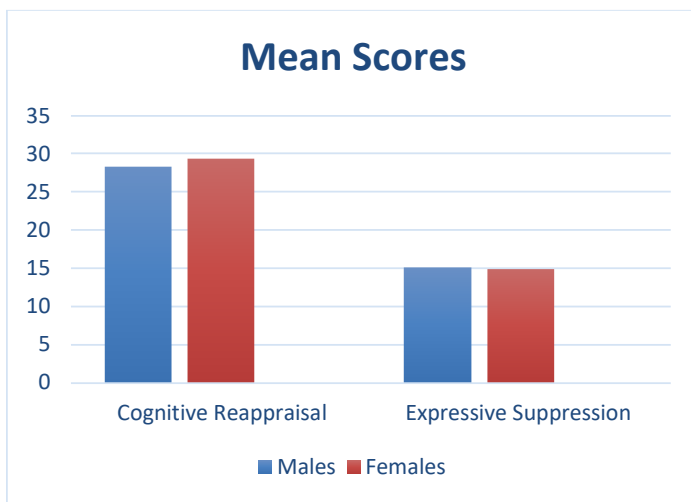
Values	PGWBI	ERQ	Correlation
Mean	76.56	90.26	.127
Std. Deviation	17.02	12.53	

Table II: Mean values, Standard deviations, and T value of ERQ dimensions: Reappraisal and Suppression among males and females

Dimensions	Reappraisal		Suppression	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Values				
Mean	28.34	29.40	15.06	14.88
Std. Deviation	7.4	6.35	5.5	5.44
T Value	1.095		0.233	



Graph 1: Total number of individuals that fall into various categories of emotion regulation



Graph 2: Mean scores of males and females on cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression dimension

## V. DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study is to assess the relationship between perceived well-being and regulation of emotions among elderly. Well-being is a multi-dimensional concept that is comprised of inter-related domains of physical, psychological, emotional and social well-being. Well-being is associated with multi-directional benefits related to health, family, work, and financial domains. Emotion regulation refers to the processes by which individuals respond to, manage, and modify emotional experiences in order to achieve individual goals and meet environmental demands. Both, wellbeing and emotional regulation, are found to be entangled in relationship with cognitions and behavior which are the integral building blocks of human existence.

There were two measures used in the present study, Psychological General Well-being Index and Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. The Psychological General Well-Being Index (PGWBI) is used to investigate perceived well-being and distress. It consists of six dimensions, which are, anxiety, depressed mood, positive well-being, self-control, general health, and vitality. The index was divided into three

categories that are: Severe Distress, Moderate Distress, and Positive Well-Being. The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire is a 10-item scale designed by Gross & John (2003) to assess individual differences in the habitual use of two emotion regulation strategies: Cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.

In the present research, the sample selected consisted of 200 elderly, 100 males and females each, above 65 years of age group, belonging to middle socio-economic strata. Two hypotheses were formulated. The first hypothesis was that there will be a positive relationship between psychological well-being and emotion regulation among elderly. The second hypothesis was that there will be no significant differences among males and females on both the dimensions of Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ). The analysis of the results in the present research can be divided into two parts. The first part consists of the analysis of results of PGWBI and ERQ obtained from the responses given by the participants of the study. The second part comprises of the analysis of the two hypotheses formulated for the present research.

## PART I

### The Psychological General Well-Being Index (PGWBI)

The PGWBI can be sub-categorized into Anxiety, Depressed Mood, Positive Well-Being, Self-Control, General Health, and Vitality dimension. The index was divided into three categories that are: Severe Distress (0-60), Moderate Distress (61-72), and Positive Well-Being (73-110).

It was found that 35 individuals fall under the category of severe distress (0-60). This means that these individuals are low on well-being and characterized by high levels of distress, discomfort, and affliction. As people reach old age, wounds heal more slowly, and colds become harder to shake. The low scores would indicate that these individuals might be bothered by nervousness, and felling of being sad due to which they become discouraged to a point where they think about giving up. There could also be a persistent feeling of being unhappy or unsatisfied, resulting in feeling emotionally unstable and losing control over oneself. They might also be exhausted, worn out and worried about their health conditions with a constant need for assistance.

There were 77 individuals who fall under the category of moderate distress (61-72) indicating that these individuals could be lacking either on social development or adapting to new phase of life. At every age, stress is inevitable. Older people face failing health or dwindling finances, or may be the simple challenges of keeping intact their independence. However, due to unfortunate circumstances, the body's natural defenses against physical well-being deteriorates with age. Many elderly do manage to sail through the later years in life, but there are numerous who fail to stay connected to friends and family.

There were 88 individuals who fall in the positive well-being category (73-110). High levels of positive wellbeing indicate that these individuals tend to be cheerful and lighthearted most of the times. Stress comes in two basic flavors- physical and emotional, both of these can be equally taxing for elderly. But maintaining a positive outlook helps in maintaining well-

being. It seems that these individuals do not hold onto negative affect such as hopelessness, sadness, and so on for long.

### Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire has been developed to assess individual differences in the use of two emotion regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. There could be several reasons for the obtained results (Table II), such as, major changes in lifestyle can be intimidating which could lead to insecurity or loss of self-worth. It is essential for elderly to accept their new challenging roles in life that will change as their former lifestyles are replaced by new routines and relationships.

### PART II

The first hypothesis that was formulated in the present research was that there will be a positive relationship between well-being and emotional regulation among elderly. For this, correlation was done between the scores of Psychological General Well-being Index and Emotion Regulation Questionnaire to assess the relationship between well-being and regulation of emotions among elderly using Pearson-product coefficient of correlation. The correlation which was found to be 0.127. This indicates a positive association between the scores on both the indices implying that the relationship between two variable move in a tandem, i.e., having a direct relationship. People who are

equipped with adjusting their emotional responses to meet current situational demands might be more successful in communicating attitudes, feelings, and intentions in accordance with the situations. This ability to adapt to the situational demands could be in association with well-being. Contented individuals with a broad mindset are open to more novel information about how to regulate emotions. Thus, their abilities to regulate emotions might boost. Hence, it can be stated that the hypothesis has been accepted.

Another hypothesis formulated was that there will be no significant differences among males and females on both the dimensions of Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ). The two dimensions of ERQ are cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Two t-scores were calculated for both the dimensions to investigate statistically significant differences among both the genders. The degrees of freedom (df) came out to be 198. The t-ratio computed were 1.093 on the cognitive reappraisal domain, and 0.233 on the expressive suppression domain. The hypothesis that there will be no statistically significant differences on both the domains among the two genders, has been accepted. When understanding emotional regulation from the eyes of elderly, it is vividly stated that their reappraisal will heighten with age. The elderly are typically more aware about the positive aspects of the situation even though the situations are stressful. Elderly individuals are motivated towards maintaining emotional well-being, suppression generally leads to a sense of self inconsistency which is expected to decrease with the regulation of emotions. Late adulthood is an anxiety-ridden time when people encounter various losses in health, relationships, and social roles, as compared to any other stage of life. Therefore, people tend to engage in emotion regulation strategies evenly, be it males or females, to cope up with new challenges of life.

It is an age-related factor, and as a result, there are no gender specific differences in regulation of emotions.

### VI. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to explore the relationship between well-being and emotional regulation among elderly. The research takes in two hypotheses, firstly, there will be a positive relationship between well-being and emotional regulation among elderly, and secondly, there will be no significant gender differences on emotional regulation. Both the hypotheses were retained. Further, the present knowledge can be integrated to develop interventions that can enhance the quality of life in old age.

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