

Emotional Abuse, Emotional Regulation and Mental Health in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: Emotional regulation is a key element in regulating relationship and mental health. However, emotional abuse is a by product of having emotional dysfunctional and low mental health in dating young adults. This study examined associations between emotional abuse, emotion regulation, and mental health in young adults in dating relationships in Pakistan.

Methodology: A quantitative correlational study design was used. A sample of 146 university students (73 females, 73 males) aged 18-25 currently in relationships recruited through purposive sampling technique. They completed the Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse (MMEA), Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21), and Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ).

Findings: The statistical analysis including independent t-tests revealed significant gender differences, with females reporting higher emotional abuse, cognitive reappraisal, and mental health symptoms. Correlational analyses indicated significant positive relationships between emotional abuse, maladaptive emotion regulation, and depression, anxiety, and stress. Hierarchical regression analyses showed hostile withdrawal and denigration emotional abuse behaviors strongly predicting mental health difficulties and significant variance with age and socioeconomic status in relation to emotional abuse, especially in females.

Conclusion: The findings suggest young women in dating relationships in Pakistan face heightened emotional abuse associated with poor mental health, despite using emotional regulation strategies. This highlights the need for greater support and interventions to promote healthy relationships and resilience in this population.

Keywords: Emotional Abuse, Emotional Regulation, Mental Health, Dating Couples, Young Adults.

Introduction

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has created immense disruptions globally, adversely impacting mental health and social relationships (Moreira & Costa, 2020). Isolation measures necessitated by COVID-19 are linked to increased intimate partner violence and emotional abuse, as families spend

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more time together in confined spaces under strain and economic uncertainties (Kaukinen, 2020). Emotional abuse involves nonphysical behaviors like humiliation, ridicule, threats, and domination intended to punish or control a relationship partner (Engel, 2002). Emerging evidence reveals that heightened emotional abuse during COVID-19 may exacerbate mental health issues, especially among young adults in dating relationships who lack experience navigating challenges (Joseph et al., 2020). However, research on associations between emotional abuse, emotion regulation capacities, and mental health among young adults in Pakistan remains scarce.

Emotional abuse is associated with depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress, and suicidality in women experiencing domestic violence globally (Lagdon et al., 2014). In Pakistan, emotional abuse is pervasive, with an estimated 90% of women experiencing psychological victimization from partners (Tinker, 1999). Victims of emotional abuse endure lasting damage to their quality of life and often develop mental illnesses requiring treatment (Engel, 2002; Mazza et al., 2020). Emotion regulation difficulties are also implicated, as early exposure to maltreatment disrupts adaptive regulation capacities (Alink et al., 2009). Effectively managing emotions is vital for relationship functioning and mental well-being (Gross & John, 2003). However, emotion regulation has not been extensively examined regarding experiences of emotional abuse and associated psychopathology for young adults.

The emotional abuse and emotion regulation relationship may also differ across cultural contexts. For instance, collectivistic cultures like Pakistan emphasize emotion suppression more at the interpersonal level (Matsumoto et al., 2008). The cultural tendency to restrict emotional expressions to maintain harmony may shape responses to abusive dynamics. However, the implications of emotional abuse for emotion regulation abilities and mental health among young adults in Pakistan remain underexplored. There are also gender differences in experiences of emotional abuse, with young women at higher risk (Shorey et al., 2008). However, few studies probe gender distinctions regarding emotional abuse, regulation strategies, and psychological outcomes in Pakistan's sociocultural milieu.

This study addressed these gaps by examining associations of emotional abuse and emotion regulation with depression, anxiety, and stress among young adults in dating relationships in Pakistan. They were guided by models linking maltreatment to emotion regulation deficits and psychopathology (Alink et al., 2009, Gross, 1998). We hypothesized that emotional abuse behaviors positively correlate with maladaptive emotion regulation and mental health symptoms. Secondly, we predicted hostile/dominating emotional abuse would most strongly predict depression, anxiety, and stress. Lastly, we anticipated gender differences, with young women reporting more significant emotional abuse, regulation difficulties, and psychological symptoms than men. Assessing these patterns in the understudied Pakistani context elucidates risks facing youth in abusive relationships, informing culturally tailored interventions to promote resilience.

Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to the forefront the significance of maintaining satisfying romantic relationships for individuals' well-being and prosperity (Balzarini et al., 2020). Stressors related to the pandemic, coupled with lower relationship quality and conflicts with partners, have been reported as stress sources (Balzarini et al., 2020). Additionally, research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates that a notable percentage of high-school students experience emotional abuse within dating relationships, with varying victimization rates among genders (Coker et al., 2000).

Emotional regulation is pivotal in navigating relationship conflicts (Robertson et al., 2012). Individuals with practical emotion regulation skills can constructively identify and manage anger during conflicts. Furthermore, healthy emotional regulation fosters empathy, strengthening emotional bonds between partners (Thibert, 2016; Zaki & Williams, 2013). It is imperative to consider cultural variations in emotional regulation; collectivist cultures, such as those in Turkey and Iran, prioritize emotion suppression to maintain social harmony (Balkir, et al., 2013).

Cultural background significantly influences emotion regulation strategies, as evidenced by studies involving Indian, European, and Pakistani students (Savani, Morris, et al., 2011). Collectivist cultures encourage expressive emotion management within familial and social contexts, while individualistic cultures advocate more restrained expressions of negative emotions. Adapting emotional responses to cultural norms is crucial (Ramzan & Amjad, 2017).

Emotion regulation is also pivotal in mitigating partner abuse. Studies have demonstrated that individuals with low emotion regulation are more prone to engage in physical aggression during hostile emotional responses (Shorney et al., 2015). Moreover, an imbalanced power dynamic within relationships often underlies violent tendencies, with perpetrators seeking dominance over their victims (Portwood & Heany, 2007).

Psychological aggression victimization among couples is associated with adverse psychological effects, including distress, anxiety, depression, and physical health symptoms. Notably, females are particularly vulnerable to elevated levels of depression in the context of psychological aggression (Walker, 2022). While domestic abuse against women and spousal abuse have received some attention in Pakistan (Ali et al., 2015; NS et al., 2020), there remains a noticeable dearth of published literature addressing emotional abuse within dating relationships. This research aims to contribute to understanding emotional regulation and its implications in the Pakistani dating context.

Hypotheses

1. There will be significant gender differences in terms of emotional abuse, emotional regulation, and mental health of university students.
2. There will be a significant relationship between emotional abuse, emotional regulation, and mental health (depression, anxiety, and stress) of university students.
3. Emotional abuse and emotional regulation will be significant predict relationship of mental health (depression, anxiety, and stress) of university students.

Method

Sample

The sample size was comprised of university students who had been in a dating relationship. The number of participants were 146 with equal number of males and female students recruited from government and private universities. The sample was recruited through purpose sampling technique and fulfilling the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Moreover, 2 Participants who refused to provide consent, 11 participants, who did not meet the criteria of being in a relationship in the last 6 months were excluded from the main sample of study.

Inclusion criteria

- Males and female college students with an age range of 18 to 25 years.
- Males and female college students in a current relationship with duration of minimum 6 months and maximum 2 years.

Exclusion criteria

- Males and females college students who had never been in a dating/intimate relationship.
- Males and females college students who had been engaged/married/nikkafied/divorced.
- Males and females who did not give consent or fulfilled the inclusion criteria.

Measuring Instruments

Demographic questionnaire: The informal questionnaire was developed to gain the biodata of all participants including gender, age, and sector of university, socio-economic status, relationship status and duration, type of abuse that they thought they had faced.

Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse (MMEA): Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse (Murphy & Hoover, 1999) is a 28-item scale that measures the subscales including restrictive engulfment, denigration, hostile withdrawal, and domination/intimidation. The scale measure emotional abuse on college/university students reporting on current relationships. The reliability of the subscales reported was Restrictive engulfment = .85; Hostile withdrawal = .91; Denigration = .92; Domination/intimidation = .91

Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale - 21 Items (DASS-21): The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) comprises of 21 items which measures emotional states of depression, anxiety and stress. The scale is 4-likert scale measuring the intensity of the depression, anxiety and stress.

Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ): Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) (Gross, 2003) comprises of a 10-item scale designed to tendency to emotionally regulate. It is a short version which measures cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. This is a 7 Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Procedure

After the formal permission from university in-person to conduct the research. The informed consent was obtained from participants at university and using an online survey website to obtain response. Students deemed eligible for participation were first provided with an informed consent that they also completed in university and on e-forms. After giving consent, students were provided with standardized instructions for all measures. The informed consent stated that the proposed study is aimed at assessing the of nature of the relationship with their partners during COVID-19. The ethical guidelines were followed throughout the study. After completion of the form, the responses were gathered and entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 24) for statistical analysis. It took estimated that 15-20 minutes were taken to fill one questionnaire. The in-complete forms were discarded. In the end participants were given contact information in case of knowing their results or any related assistance. The participants were ensured about the confidentiality of data obtained from them. The participants were made aware of their rights in the research.

Results

The results of demographics characteristics of the sample, psychometric properties of the scales, describe the inferential statistics which provide the information about the hypothesis testing.

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistical Characteristics of Participants*

Demographic Variables	Categories	F	%	M	SD
Age	18-20	31	21.2	2.12	.72
	21-23	67	45.9		
	23-25	48	32.9		
	Total	146	100.0		
Gender	Women	73	50.0	1.50	.50
	Men	73	50.0		
	Total	146	100.0		

Socio-economic Status	Lower	66	45.2	2.60	.58
	Middle	73	50.0		
	Upper	7	4.8		
	Total	146	100.0		
Employment	Student	98	67.1	1.51	.83
	Working	28	19.2		
	Both	14	9.6		
	None	6	4.1		
	Total	146	100.0		

Note: n=146, M = mean, SD = Standard Deviation, f = Frequency

Table 1 shows most of the sample was males and females in equal number with age range of 21-23 more next to 23-25, belonging to middle and upper class. There were more students currently enrolled in private universities and had been in a relationship for about one and a year. Most of the participants reported no abuse faced according to their understanding.

Table 2: *Reliability Analysis and Alpha Coefficient of Scales*

	Scales				K	M	SD	α	Range
1	Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Scale (DASS)	21	40.79	15.63	.952	21-83
2	Emotional Regulation (EA)				10	28.63	10.95	.842	15-16
3	Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse (MMEA)				28	93.04	38.69	.916	26-250

Note. K = Number of Items, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation and α = Cronbach Alpha

Table 3: *Independent t-test to Compare Mean Differences of gender on emotional regulation, emotional abuse, and mental health (N=147; Females= 73, Males=73)*

Variable	Female		Male		t	p	Confidence Interval		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Cognitive reappraisal	19.49	7.43	14.42	4.78	4.90**	.000	3.02	7.11	.81
Expressive	14.31	5.74	9.02	5.520	5.67**	.000	3.44	7.14	.93
Suppression	16.42	5.58	11.24	3.86	6.52**	.000	3.60	6.74	1.07
Stress							2.54	5.32	.92
Anxiety	13.30	5.16	9.36	3.07	5.59**	.000	4.49	7.78	1.21
Depression	16.64	5.97	10.50	3.84	7.38	.000	-1.71	3.51	
Restrictive	14.17	9.35	13.27	6.27	.68	.49	1.01	4.98	.49
Engulfment	11.39	7.20	8.39	4.65	2.98	.003	3.06	9.37	.64
Denigration	19.24	11.46	13.02	7.39	3.89	.000	1.67	5.39	.62
Hostile									
Withdrawal									
Dominance	11.65	7.81	8.12	1.91	3.75	.000			

**p<.001, *p<.05

Table 3 shows results of the t-test indicated significant mean difference between females and males in

terms of cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppressive, stress, anxiety, depression, restrictive engulfment, hostile withdrawal, denigration, hostile withdrawal, dominance. Mean difference further indicated that females scored higher on cognitive appraisal, suppressive expression, anxiety, stress, depression, hostile withdrawal, and denigration indicating that they were at the abused end and depressed. The Effect size, Cohen's identifies practical significance of these findings reported as females and males as 0.81% for cognitive reappraisal, 0.93% for suppressive expression, 1.07% for stress, 0.92% for anxiety, 1.21% for depression 0.49% for denigration, 0.64% for hostile/withdrawal and 0.62% for dominance.

Table 4: *Pearson Product Correlation Analysis between Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
CA	-	.434**	.426**	.318**	.463**	.426**	-.050	.337**	.227**	.222**
ES		-	.208*	.207*	.243**	.226**	.047	.281**	.246**	.095
S			-	.877**	.881**	.964**	.224**	.506**	.599**	.356**
A				-	.817**	.942**	.304**	.505**	.627**	.445**
S					-	.946**	.172*	.508**	.598**	.417**
TD						-	.238**	.532**	.636**	.429**
RE							-	.395**	.311**	.570**
DE								-	.539**	.754**
H									-	.448**
Do										-
M	16.95	11.67	13.83	11.33	13.57	40.79	13.73	9.89	16.13	9.89
SD	6.72	6.21	5.44	4.67	5.87	15.63	7.96	6.23	10.10	5.94

Note: IG= CR=Cognitive reappraisal, ES=expressive suppression, S=stress, A=anxiety, D=Depression, TD=totaldass, RE=restrictive engulfment, De=Denigration, H=hostile withdrawal, Do=domination.

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

Table 4 shows results that cognitive appraisal has a weak but positive and significant correlation with denigration, hostile withdrawal, and dominance type of abuse. This indicates that the increase in cognitive appraisal is associated with an increase in these variables. For emotional regulation, findings of the Pearson product moment correlation suggested that cognitive appraisal had moderate, positive significant association with stress, anxiety and depression.

The results also revealed positive significant but weak relationship between expressive suppression and stress, anxiety, and depression while positive, weak but significant relationship with hostile withdrawal and denigration abuse. Total depression anxiety and stress scale score indicates to have weak but positive significant relationship with restrictive engulfment while being moderately, positively significant with dominance. The Pearson product correlation also demonstrates a strong, positive relationship of total score of Depression, anxiety and stress with hostile withdrawal and denigration type of emotional abuse.

Table 5: *Hierarchical Multiple Regression to Predict Relationship of Emotional Abuse and Emotional Regulation (N=146)*

Variable	B	SE	95% CI	β	t	p
Step 1						
(Constant)	77.386	8.530	[60.523-94.248]		9.07	.000
Age	-.319	1.593	[-3.467-2.830]	-.015	-.20	.842
Gender	-15.706	2.316	[-20.285 -11.127]	-.505	-6.78	.000
Past relationship status	-4.387	2.586	[-9.498 .725]	-.127	-1.69	.092
R	.506					

R ²	.256						
F	16.157						
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Step 2							
(Constant)	85.865	9.227	[67.622-104.109]		9.30	.000	
Age	-2.240	1.581	[-5.366-.886]	-.105	-1.42	.159	
Gender	-14.91	2.202	[-19.344 - (-10.637)]	-.482	-6.81	.000	
Past relationship status	-4.565	2.526	[-9.560 - .429]	-.132	-1.81	.073	
socioeconomic status	-4.408	1.927	[-8.218 - (-.597)]	-.165	-2.29	.024	
Restrictive engulfment	.470	.141	[.191-.749]	.240	3.33	.001	
R	.584						
R ²	.341						
F	14.388						
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Step 3							
(Constant)	72.622	7.125	[58.532-86.712]		10.19	.000	
Age	-3.600	1.208	[-5.988 -(-1.211)]	-.169	-2.98	.003	
Gender	-9.153	1.766	[-12.646 - (-5.661)]	-.294	-5.18	.000	
Past relationship status	-5.652	1.924	[-9.455 - (-1.848)]	-.163	-2.93	.004	
socioeconomic status	-4.894	1.482	[-7.824 - (-1.965)]	-.183	-3.30	.001	
Restrictive engulfment	.057	.116	[-.173-.288]	.029	.49	.622	
Denigration	.657	.165	[.332-.982]	.263	3.99	.000	
Hostile withdrawal	.669	.101	[.470 - .868]	.434	6.66	.000	
R	.791						
R ²	.626						
F	32.754						
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Step 4							
(Constant)	65.321	8.047	[49.406-81.237]		8.12	.000	
Age	-2.913	1.257	[-5.399 - (-.427)]	-.136	-2.32	.022	
Gender	-9.321	2.022	[-13.319-5.322]	-.300	-4.61	.000	
Past relationship status	-5.123	1.929	[-8.939 - (-1.307)]	-.148	-2.66	.009	
socioeconomic status	-4.151	1.554	[-7.224-(-1.078)]	-.155	-2.67	.008	
Restrictive engulfment	.144	.133	[-.119 -.407]	.074	1.08	.280	
Denigration	.669	.225	[.223 - 1.114]	.268	2.97	.004	
Hostile withdrawal	.667	.100	[.470 - .864]	.433	6.70	.000	

Dominance		-.185	.259	[-.697 - .328]	-.071	-.71	.477
Cognitive reappraisal		.367	.149	[.071 - .663]	.157	2.46	.015
Expressive suppression		-.258	.170	[-.595 - .078]	-.103	-1.52	.131
R	.802						
R ²	.644						
F	24.227						

Note. **p<.001, *p<.01

The above table of was obtained by Hierarchical Regression through the Enter method which was used to predict the emotional abuse and emotional regulation based on age, gender, past relationship status, socioeconomic status, restrictive engulfment, denigration, hostile withdrawal, dominance, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression. In Step 1, the results of hierarchical multiple regression indicated that demographics variables gender and socioeconomic status significantly contributed to regression model $F_{(3,141)} = 16.157$, $p < .001$. But age past relationship status was insignificant. The value of R^2 indicated 26% variance in emotional abuse counted for by the demographic variables. In Step 2, the value of R^2 indicated 34% variance and regression model $F_{(5,139)} = 14.388$, $p < .001$. The findings revealed significant prediction for gender, socioeconomic status, restrictive engulfment, but insignificant for age and past relationship status. In step 3, the value of R^2 indicated 62% variance and regression model $F_{(7,137)} = 32.754$, $p < .001$. The findings revealed significant prediction for age, gender, past relationship status, socioeconomic status, denigration, and hostile withdrawal but insignificant for restrictive engulfment. In step 4, the value of R^2 indicated 64% variance and regression model $F_{(10,134)} = 24.227$, $p < .001$. The findings revealed significant prediction for age, gender, past relationship status, socioeconomic status, denigration, hostile withdrawal, and cognitive reappraisal but insignificant for restrictive engulfment, dominance, and expressive suppression.

Table 6: *Hierarchical Regression to predict the stress based on cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, restrictive engulfment, denigration, hostile withdrawal, and dominance*

Variable	B	SE	95% CI	β	t	p
Step 1						
(Constant)	7.972	1.185	[5.630 - 10.315]		6.73	.000
Cognitive reappraisal	.328	.069	[.192 - .464]	.404	4.77	.000
Expressive suppression	.027	.074	[-.119 - .173]	.031	.37	.712
R	.419					
R ²	.175					
F	15.099					
Step 2						
(Constant)	4.985	1.143	[2.726 - 7.245]		4.36	.000
Cognitive reappraisal	.254	.059	[.138 - .371]	.313	4.31	.000
Expressive suppression	-.092	.062	[-.215 - .031]	-.106	-1.48	.140
Restrictive engulfment	.061	.053	[-.044 - .165]	.089	1.15	.254
Denigration	.239	.091	[.059 - .418]	.275	2.63	.010
Hostile withdrawal	.242	.040	[.163 - .321]	.451	6.07	.000

Dominance		-.149	.098	[-.342 - .045]	-.163	-1.52	.131
R	.691						
R ²	.478						
F	21.074						

Note. **p<.001, *p<.01

The above table of was obtained by Hierarchical Regression through the Enter method which was used to predict the stress based on cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, restrictive engulfment, denigration, hostile withdrawal, and dominance. In step 1, the value of R² indicated 17% variance and regression model $F_{(2,142)} = 15.099$, $p<.001$. The findings revealed significant prediction for cognitive reappraisal but insignificant for expressive suppression. In step 2, the value of R² indicated 48% variance and regression model $F_{(6,138)} = 21.074$, $p<.001$. The findings revealed significant prediction for cognitive reappraisal, denigration, and hostile withdrawal but insignificant for expressive suppression, restrictive engulfment, and dominance.

Table 7: Hierarchical Regression to predict the anxiety based on cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, restrictive engulfment, denigration, hostile withdrawal, and dominance

Variable	B	SE	95% CI	β	t	p
Step 1						
(Constant)	7.378	1.063	[5.278 - 9.479]		6.94	.000
Cognitive reappraisal	.189	.062	[.067 - .311]	.271	3.06	.003
Expressive suppression	.067	.066	[.067 - .311]	.089	1.00	.316
R	.320					
R ²	.102					
F	8.076					
Step 2						
(Constant)	4.035	1.002	[2.055 - 6.016]		6.94	.000
Cognitive reappraisal	.116	.052	[.014 - .219]	.167	2.25	.026
Expressive suppression	-.020	.054	[-.128 - .087]	-.027	-.37	.709
Restrictive engulfment	.050	.046	[-.042 - .142]	.085	1.08	.283
Denigration	.092	.080	[-.065 - .250]	.123	1.16	.249
Hostile withdrawal	.220	.035	[.151 - .289]	.478	6.30	.000
Dominance	.043	.086	[-.126 - .213]	.055	.502	.616
R	.676					
R ²	.457					
F	19.361					

Note. **p<.001, *p<.01

The above table of was obtained by Hierarchical Regression through the Enter method which was used to predict the anxiety based on cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, restrictive engulfment, denigration, hostile withdrawal, and dominance. In step 1, the value of R² indicated 10% variance and regression model $F_{(2,142)} = 8.076$, $p<.001$. The findings showed significant prediction for cognitive reappraisal but insignificant for expressive suppression. In step 2, the value of R² indicated 46% variance and regression model $F_{(6,138)} = 19.361$, $p<.001$. The results showed significant prediction for cognitive

reappraisal and hostile withdrawal but insignificant for expressive suppression, restrictive engulfment, denigration, and dominance.

Table 8: *Hierarchical Regression to predict depression based on cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, restrictive engulfment, denigration, hostile withdrawal, and dominance.*

Variable	B	SE	95% CI	β	t	p
Step 1						
(Constant)	6.510	1.254	[4.032 - 8.989]		5.19	.000
Cognitive reappraisal	.383	.073	[-.239 - .527]	.435	5.26	.000
Expressive suppression	.050	.078	[-.105 - .204]	.053	.64	.524
R	.461					
R ²	.212					
F	19.146					
Step 2						
(Constant)	3.661	1.221	[1.246 - 6.076]		2.99	.003
Cognitive reappraisal	.279	.063	[-.154 - .403]	.317	4.42	.000
Expressive suppression	-.045	.066	[-.176 - .086]	-.048	-.68	.497
Restrictive engulfment	-.034	.057	[-.145 - .078]	-.045	-.59	.554
Denigration	.126	.097	[-.066 - .318]	.134	1.29	.197
Hostile withdrawal	.259	.043	[-.175 - .343]	.446	6.08	.000
Dominance	.076	.105	[-.131 - .282]	.077	.72	.470
R	.701					
R ²	.491					
F	22.219					

Note. **p<.001, *p<.01

The above table of was obtained by Hierarchical Regression through the Enter method which was used to predict depression based on cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, restrictive engulfment, denigration, hostile withdrawal, and dominance. In step 1, the value of R² indicated 21% variance and regression model $F_{(2,142)} = 19.146$, $p<.001$. The finds revealed significant prediction for cognitive reappraisal but insignificant for expressive suppression. In step 2, the value of R² indicated 49 % variance and regression model $F_{(6,138)} = 22.219$, $p<.001$. The results showed significant cognitive reappraisal and hostile withdrawal but insignificant for expressive suppression, restrictive engulfment, denigration, and dominance.

Discussion

This study examined associations between emotional abuse, regulation, and mental health in young adult dating relationships, revealing three key findings. First, results demonstrated a concerning pattern of emotional abuse against women despite regulation efforts. Females reported substantially higher victimization than males, including hostility, isolation, denigration, and domination. Patriarchal gender norms enabling male control likely to contribute to this disparity. These behaviors may be weaponized to force female dependence and submission (Fulu et al., 2013). Transforming such power dynamics through equitable relationship education and empowerment is critical.

Second, hostile withdrawal and denigration strongly predicted anxiety, depression, and stress. The trauma of chronic degradation in relationships can generate profound and lasting scars. Prioritizing interventions to address destructive communication and foster nonviolent conflict resolution skills is vital to safeguard mental health. Bolstering resilience and support systems for abuse victims could further mitigate risks (Smith, 2022).

Third, an alarming incongruence emerged between self-reported abuse and questionnaire data. Many victims did not label behaviors as abusive, pointing to normalization and lack of awareness. Comprehensive education is needed to counteract stigmas and assist in identification. Platforms encouraging disclosure without judgment could empower victims to speak out (Kaukinen, 2020).

Limitations and Recommendations

Certain limitations provide direction for further research the student sample warrants exploring diverse demographics and relationship configurations. Additionally, incorporating qualitative approaches could offer nuanced insight into regulation practices and gender dynamics. Findings are also specific to cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, calling for examination of other strategies. In summary, this timely study uncovered a troubling prevalence of emotional abuse against young women in relationships associated with psychological harm. Challenging inequitable social norms and fostering healthy relating is essential. Tailored interventions informed by further research could mitigate these issues, helping create a compassionate society where intimacy can thrive without abuse (Simonelli & Ingram, 1998).

Conclusion

This research exposes gender disparities in emotional abuse within dating relationships. Findings reveal women face substantially higher rates of abusive behaviours from male partners, including hostility, isolation, denial of agency, and denigration. Despite utilizing emotional regulation, women remain disproportionately subjected to criticism and humiliation. Such behaviours inflicted severe psychological distress, jeopardizing mental health. Central findings challenge assumptions of mutual mistreatment, signalling deeply entrenched gender role expectations that enable male domination and female subjugation. Transforming these asymmetric power dynamics is imperative through relationship education and modelling healthy behaviours for young men. Concurrently, empowering women and bolstering support systems can alleviate this gender-based violence. Platforms encouraging disclosure without judgment and robust support systems will empower women to speak out. Eliminating stigmas around abuse is equally vital.

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Conflict of Interest


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