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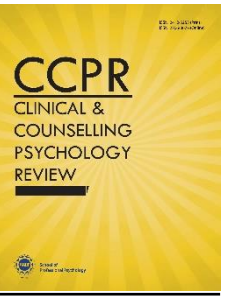

Title: **Emotion Regulation and Self-Concept as Predictors of Interpersonal Problems in Transgender Population of Pakistan**

Author (s): Hibba Noor[1], Sana Rehman[2]

Affiliation (s): [1]University of Sialkot, Sialkot, Pakistan
[2]University of Malaysia, Sarawak, Malaysia

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Emotion Regulation and Self-Concept as Predictors of Interpersonal Problems in Transgender Population of Pakistan

Hibba Noor[1], and Sana Rehman[2*]

[1] Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, GIFT University, Gujranwala, Pakistan

[2]Medicine and Health Science Department, University of Malaysia, Sarawak, Malaysia

Abstract

The current study aimed to investigate the psychosocial predictors of interpersonal problems in transgender people of Pakistan. For this purpose, a sample of (n = 72) transgender individuals were recruited through the snowball sampling technique. The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), Personal Self-Concept Questionnaire (PSQ), and Interpersonal Problems Scale (IPS) were used to find out the predicting role of emotion regulation, self-concept, and interpersonal problems in transgender individuals, respectively. Data was analyzed through SPSS (Version 25). The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between all domains of emotion regulation namely awareness, clarity, goals, strategies, and impulse and two domains of interpersonal problems, namely sociability and involved. Only awareness and clarity domains of emotion regulation were found to be inversely correlated with the supportive domain of interpersonal problems. Furthermore, a significant positive association was observed between self-concept and the two domains of interpersonal problems, that is, sociability and involved. However, the two domains of self-concept, namely self-fulfillment and autonomy were observed to be inversely correlated with the supportive domain of interpersonal problems. These findings indicate that demographics (education) is a negative predictor of interpersonal problems. On the contrary, the two domains of emotion regulation (strategy and impulse) are positive predictors of interpersonal problems. Furthermore, one domain of self-concept (autonomy) is also a positive predictor of interpersonal problems. The study has significant theoretical and practical implications considering the Pakistani cultural context.

*Corresponding Author: sanarehmanpk@gmail.com

***Keywords*:** emotion regulation, interpersonal problems, self-concept, transgender

Introduction

Gender diversity among adults has increased to a considerable extent all over the world. In particular, diverse gender categories are grouped in the literature under the umbrella term transgender, such as transsexuals, drag queens, butches, hermaphrodites, cross-dressers, masculine women, effeminate men, sissies, and tomboys (Irshad et al., 2020: Saleem, & Rizvi, 2017). However, the acceptance for genders other than male and female is not in vogue throughout the world (Shah et al., 2018). Only a few countries provide equal rights to other genders. In Pakistan, the term "transgender" is used to refer to any individual who defies the traditional gender norms set out by the society, such as drag queens, eunuch, real hermaphrodites, transsexuals, and homo/biosexual cross-dressers (Abdullah et al., 2012). The number of transgender people officially registered by the Pakistani government in past were 10,418; however, the true figure is believed to be significantly higher (Wazir & Goujon, 2019).

The life of transgender individuals is not easy in Pakistan and they face substantial challenges. Transgender people encounter social and economic discrimination, lack legal recognition, experience violence, and lack acceptance from the society (Shah et al., 2018). In particular, it becomes more problematic when they experience rejection from significant others, such as family, friends, and parents (Manzoor et al., 2021). The literature is enriched with the studies depicting the interpersonal problems of transgender individuals (Claes et al., 2015; Davey et al., 2015; Gamarel et al., 2019). However, not all transgender people manifest interpersonal problems. According to the literature, emotion regulation is a predictor of interpersonal/interpersonal relationships in a diverse population (Messinger et al., 2022). Emotion regulation refers to the capacity to exercise control over one's emotional state. This includes evaluating stressful situations to reduce anger and anxiety, masking obvious signs of anxiety and sadness, and concentrating on things/the given tasks. Transgender people occasionally depict emotional control, which has beneficial impacts on them but can also have negative ones (Kapatais et al., 2023). Unfortunately, the

multiplicity and poly victimization to the similar issues lead to weak emotional regulations for transgender (Messinger et al., 2022).

The lack of emotional regulation leads to interpersonal difficulties in transgender people. Recent data illustrated that transgender individuals who are aware of their emotions depict fewer emotional problems and strive to form strong relationships with their close ones. However, a lack of familiarity with self-emotions leads to uncertainty (Solbakken et al., 2023). Consequently, such individuals form weak relationships and feel isolated. Furthermore, other dimensions of emotional regulation such as clarity, goals, non-acceptance, distress situations, and strategies also play a significant role in the formation of interpersonal relationships (Victor & Kolinsky, 2016).

The literature is enriched with empirical studies that illustrate the strong relationship between emotion regulation and interpersonal difficulties. A recent study was carried out on adults to investigate the relationship between emotion regulation difficulties and interpersonal difficulties. The findings depicted a significant relationship between these constructs (Solbakken, et al., 2023). Another recent study was carried out to investigate the relationship between emotion regulation difficulties and interpersonal conflict among people with borderline personality disorder. The findings depicted that emotion regulation difficulties are positively correlated with emotional conflict (Haliczer et al., 2021).

Studies based on the combination of emotion regulation and interpersonal problems are not scarce in the literature. However, emotional regulation and interpersonal difficulties of transgender people have been studied separately, worldwide. According to Drescher et al. (2023), transgender individuals experience difficulties in emotional regulation which increases the risk of self-harm tendencies and induces suicide attempts. In short, literature demonstrates a significant research gap in studies about the emotional regulation and interpersonal difficulties of transgender people in Pakistan.

Self-concept is how human beings view their actions, skills, and distinctive qualities (Hisli Şahin et al., 2009). Transgender individuals with a better sense of who they are have a more optimistic outlook on life. On the other hand, transgender individuals who experience criticism and rejection from their families and society have lower self-esteem and

develop negative self-concepts for life. In response to societal rejection, they develop a lack of self-fulfillment, autonomy, and emotional control, which are the dimensions of self-concept (Davey et al., 2015). In response to Due to their weak self-concept, they depict a lack of sociability, assertiveness, supportive attitude, care, and dependent tendencies in their relationships (Kiviruus et al., 2016).

In short, both emotion regulation and interpersonal difficulties were found to be strongly associated with interpersonal difficulties. Similarly, the literature provides for a strong association between self-concept and interpersonal problems. The findings of Kiviruusu et al. (2016) indicate that people who report greater and more frequent interpersonal confrontations experience poorer and slower growth in self-esteem from their youth to mid-adulthood.

Hisli Şahin et al. (2009) concluded that self-concept and locus of control are linked to the actions taken throughout the process of resolving interpersonal disputes. Positive self-concept and internal locus of control are associated with the adoption of more efficient and beneficial interpersonal conflict resolution strategies.

As far as demographic information is concerned, some demographics were observed to be highly interlinked with emotion regulation, self-concept, and interpersonal difficulties. Graziano et al. (2007) showed a favorable correlation between emotion management and early literacy. Literature students depict better emotional regulation as compared to illiterate ones/other students. Peiffer et al. (2020) used German psychology students (N = 1,243) to study the difference of self-concept (SC) and self-efficacy (SE) in higher education. They concluded that higher education leads to greater emotional regulation and control (Hardie et al., 2021).

The literature demonstrates that emotion regulation, self-concept, and interpersonal difficulties have been studied in diverse populations but information regarding the transgender population of Pakistan is still missing. Therefore, the current study aimed to investigate the predictors of interpersonal difficulties in transgender adolescents of Pakistan.

Rationale

According to the above literature, transgender individuals experience substantial interpersonal problems (Claes et al., 2015; Davey et al., 2015; Gamarel et al., 2019). Furthermore, emotion regulation and self-concept were found to be strong predictors of interpersonal problems. However, data regarding the predictors of interpersonal problems among transgender people is scarce in literature in the Pakistani context. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate the predictors of interpersonal problems of transgender individuals keeping in view the Pakistani cultural context.

Aim

The current study aimed at identifying if emotional regulation and self-concept are predictors of interpersonal difficulties.

Objectives

The current study has the following objectives:

1. To investigate the relationship between emotion regulation, self-concept, and interpersonal problems in transgender individuals.
2. To investigate demographical experience of emotional regulation, self-concept and interpersonal problems in transgender

Hypotheses

The current study tests the following hypotheses:

1. There would be a positive relationship between emotion regulation, positive self-concept, and interpersonal problems in transgender individuals.
2. Emotion dysregulation and negative self-concept would act as positive predictors of interpersonal problems in transgender individuals.
3. There would be significant differences among transgender individuals regarding their experience of emotion regulation, self-concept, and interpersonal problems on the basis of their education.

Method

Study Design and Sample

The current study used the cross-sectional survey research design. The sample included 72 transgender 40% were from the community of

Islamabad, and 25% were from the city of Lahore. They were chosen using the snowball sampling method.

Measures

Difficulty in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS-18)

The emotion regulation questionnaire comprises an 18-item scale covering six domains, that is, awareness, clarity, goals, non-acceptance, distress situations, and strategies. Non-acceptance is encoded inversely. The scoring keys range from 1–5-point Likert scale. The age range 19-76 years. Emotional regulation was found to be in acceptable ranges with an alpha coefficient value above .60-80, except for non-acceptance (Victor & Kolinsky, 2016).

Personal Self-Concept Questionnaire (PSCQ)

PSCQ comprises 22 items covering four domains, namely self-fulfillment, honesty, autonomy, and emotional self-concept. It is a 5-point Likert scale which applies to the 15-65 age range (Goñi et al., 2011). In the current study, two domains of self-concept were considered, that is, SF and AU. These domains of self-concept were also found to be in the acceptable range of Cronbach's alpha .79-.80.

Interpersonal Problems (IPP)

The IPP-32 was designed to measure the interpersonal problems of the general and medical population. The age range of the scale is 18-88 years (Barkham et al., 1996). The scale comprises 32 items and covers eight domains namely sociable, assertive, supportive, caring, dependent, aggressive, involved, and open. In the current study, sociable, supportive and involved domains of interpersonal problems have been were taken into account. This scale was used for transgender individuals (Davey, 2015). The coefficient of the domains of interpersonal problems was also found in the acceptable range of .07- .08.

Procedure

The data was collected from different communities of transgender people from Gujranwala, Pakistan. Permission was taken from the respective gurus of these transgender communities. In the consent form, the researcher ensured participants about confidentiality throughout the process. A total of 72 transgender individuals filled in the questionnaire.

However, their majority was uneducated. So, it was challenging to collect the data from the participants. Afterwards, data was analyzed through IBM SPSS Statistics 25.

Results

Descriptive statistics, regression, *t*-test, and ANOVA results are mentioned below.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=72)

Characteristics	*f*	%
Education		
No education	41	56.9
Middle	10	13.9
Matric	21	29.2

Table 1 illustrates the descriptive statistics. In the current study, the participants were categorized into five age groups, that is, 16-20 years [12.5%, *n*=9], 21-25, [34.7%, *n*=25], 26-30 [25.0, *n*=18], 31-35 [11.1%, *n*=8], and 36-40 [16.7%, *n*=12]. The majority (56.9%) reported themselves as illiterate. While, 13.9% claimed their education as middle and 29.2% claimed to have done matric. Approximately, 97.2% of participants were transgender by birth and 2.8% were those who became transgender through medical treatment.

Table 2

Cronbach's Alpha

Variable	*k*	*Alpha*
Awareness	3	.80
Clarity	3	.66
Goal	3	.60
Impulse	3	.66
Non acceptance	3	.93
Strategies	3	.50
SF	6	.79
AU	5	.78
Sociable	4	.80
Supportive	4	.85
Involved	4	.60

According to Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha values of all domains (awareness, clarity, goal, impulse and strategies) of emotion regulation were found to be in acceptable ranges, with an alpha coefficient value above .60-90. The domains of self-concept (SF and AU) were also found to be in the acceptable range of .79-.80. Only the alpha value of one domain of self-concept was below the acceptable range (0.50). The domain of interpersonal problems also lies in the acceptable range of Cronbach alpha for social involved and supportive domains.

Table 3

Correlation between Emotion Regulation, Self-Concept, and Interpersonal Problems (N=72)

Variable	awea	Clarity	goals	Stra	imp	Non	SF	AU	S	SU	IN
Awea	1	.69**	.89**	.67**	.55**	-.24*	.36**	.42**	.37**	-.11	.87**
Clarity		1	.69**	.54**	.71**	-.75**	.77**	.83**	.84**	-.08	.86**
Goals			1	.77**	.49**	-.33**	.40**	.41**	.44**	.10	.87**
Stra				1	.44**	-.16	.24*	.24*	.37**	.42**	.77**
Imp					1	-.63**	.61**	.69**	.72**	.19	.57**
Non						1	-.79**	-.84**	-.89**	.02	-.49**
SF							1	.84**	.86**	-.12	.61**
AU								1	.90**	-.04	.61**
S									1	.13	.63**
SU										1	-.12
IN											1
M	9.53	8.49	9.24	8.67	7.79	9.07	15.19	13.28	10.44	10.19	12.11
SD	3.59	3.40	3.10	2.74	2.52	4.55	6.00	5.35	4.84	4.54	4.51

Note. Awae= Awareness, Stra= Strategies, Non=Non acceptance, SF= Self-Fulfillment, AU= Autonomy, IN=Involved

Table 3 reveals a significant positive relationship between all domains of emotion regulation, namely awareness, clarity, goals, strategies, and impulse with two domains of interpersonal problems, namely sociability (*r*=.36) and involved (*r*=.87). Only awareness (*r*=-.11) and clarity (*r*=-0.77) domains of emotion regulation were found to be inversely correlated with the supportive domains of interpersonal problems. Furthermore, a significant positive association was observed between the two domains of self-concept, that is, self-fulfillment and autonomy and the two domains of interpersonal problems, that is, sociability (*r*=.86: *r*=.90) and involved (*r*=.60: *r*=.61). However, the two domains of self-concept, namely self-fulfillment (*r*=-.12) and autonomy (*r*=-.04) were observed to be inversely correlated with the supportive domain of interpersonal problems.

According to Table 4, statistically significant differences exist in awareness and clarity domains of emotion regulation, self-fulfillment and

autonomy domains of self-concept, and supportive and involved domains of interpersonal problems. However, there is non-significant difference in goals, strategies, impulsiveness and non-acceptance, domains of emotion regulation and sociable, and domain of interpersonal problems.

Table 4

One-Way ANOVA for Education Difference

Variable	*Illiterate*		*Middle*		*Matric*		*F*	*p*
	M	*S.D*	*M*	*S.D*	*M*	*S.D*		
Awareness	8.34	3.46	11.10	3.78	11.09	2.95	5.91	.000
Clarity	7.39	2.76	9.40	3.84	10.19	3.63	5.83	.010
Goals	8.51	3.08	10.10	3.57	10.24	2.62	2.73	.073
Strategies	8.49	2.89	9.20	2.94	8.76	2.41	.28	.751
Imp	7.44	2.59	8.60	2.41	8.09	2.41	1.07	.352
Non	9.90	4.01	8.20	5.98	7.86	4.66	1.65	.200
SF	13.29	4.99	17.50	6.59	17.81	6.42	5.39	.012
AU	11.78	4.73	14.90	6.10	15.43	5.43	4.09	.020
S	9.34	4.07	11.90	5.59	11.90	5.49	2.58	.085
SU	11.83	4.01	9.20	4.59	7.47	4.21	7.99	.002
IN	10.41	3.76	14.00	4.67	14.52	4.51	8.14	.001

Table 5

Predictors of Interpersonal Problems (N=72)

Factors	*B*	*95% CI for B*		*SEB*	β	*R*	ΔR^2
		LL	*UL*				
Step 1						.04	.02
Education	-0.83	-1.73	0.07	0.45	-.20		
Step 2						.58	.54
Constant	6.16	1.62	10.69	2.28			
Education	-0.75	-1.45	-0.04	0.35	-.18		
Stra	0.90	0.56	1.23	0.17	.63		
Impulse	0.30	0.03	0.57	0.14	.24		
Step 3						.78	.75
Education	-0.62	-1.14	-0.10	0.26	-.15		
Clarity	-0.31	-0.61	-0.01	0.15	-.25		
Stra	0.57	0.31	0.83	0.13	.40		
NON	0.21	0.03	0.40	0.09	.29		
AU	0.06	-0.09	0.20	0.07	.82		

Note. Model 1, *F* (3.34), 1, 78, Model 2, *F* (714.65), 7, 72 Model 3, *F* (28.04), 9, .72

According to Table 5, Model 1 shows that education is not a significant positive predictor of interpersonal difficulties. Model 2 shows that education is a negative predictor, whereas strategy and impulse domains of emotion regulation are positive predictors of interpersonal problems. Model 3 shows that the autonomy domain of self-concept is a positive predictor of interpersonal problems.

Discussion

The study sought to examine the predictors of transgender interpersonal problems in the Pakistani context. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between all domains of emotion regulation, namely awareness, clarity, goals, strategies, and impulse and two domains of interpersonal problems, namely sociability and involved. The findings are unique as emotional regulation does not support interpersonal relationships among transgender individuals in Pakistan. Only one domain of *awareness* was observed to be a negative predictor of interpersonal relations. This is significant in view of literature which depicts contradictory findings. A Norwegian study depicted a significant relationship between emotion regulation and interpersonal relationships in Norway's population within the age range 18-65 years (Solbakken, et al., 2023). Another recent study was carried out to investigate the relationship between emotion regulation difficulties and interpersonal conflict among undergraduates with borderline personality disorder in Massachusetts, USA.

The findings depicted that emotion regulation difficulties are positively correlated with emotional conflict (Haliczer et al., 2021). In European countries like Norway, gender types and formation are considered as part and parcel of human rights and transgender experience minimum discrimination. Consequently, their emotional regulation helps them to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships (Gasol et al., 2022). Unlike European countries, in Pakistan, transgender people have not gained a significant or even an acceptable place in the society Reeck et al. (2022). Therefore, despite having emotional regulation traits, they still experience interpersonal difficulties. Hence, it can be concluded that emotion regulation is not a true predictor of interpersonal problems in transgender individuals of Pakistan.

Despite this fact, a significant positive association was found to exist between interpersonal problems and self-concept, except for one interpersonal problem dimension (supportive). In other words, the current study found that self-concept helps to maintain supportive interpersonal relationships in the Pakistani transgender community, as compared to emotion regulation. In Pakistan, the transgender identity is still questionable/remains contentious and only two genders (male and female) are considered for personal and occupational settings. (Saleem & Rizvi, 2017). This discrimination adversely impacts the self-concept of transgender individuals and they start to evaluate their personal traits poorly (Sani et al., 2023). Consequently, they report poor interpersonal relationships and depict a lack of social skills and supportive attitudes towards others. Moreover, their involvement in diverse social events was found to be poor. The literature also depicts that self-concept impacts interpersonal relationships. However, autonomy and SF were observed to have a positive relationship with interpersonal problems.

Notably, it was found that the literature contradicts the current study findings. According to Hisli Şahin et al. (2009), those with positive self-concept and internal locus of control use conflict resolution strategies that are more successful and beneficial to resolve interpersonal problems. However, in Pakistan people are less flexible and more awareness is needed to uplift the status of transgender people in Pakistan. They have poor self-concept despite having emotional regulation which affects their interpersonal relationship. According to the current findings, strategy and impulse domains of emotion regulation and autonomy domain of self-concept are positive predictors of interpersonal problems. The literature supports the findings of the current study, since a substantial number of studies found that emotion regulation and self-esteem are predictors of interpersonal problems in a diverse population (Monell et al., 2015; Solbakken et al., 2023).

According to the current study, education is a negative predictor of interpersonal problems. The education level helps to broaden the individual's perspective. Therefore, a strong relationship between literacy level and study constructs was found. The literature also depicts the same results. Graziano et al. (2007) showed a favorable correlation between emotion management and early literacy. Literature students depict better emotional regulation as compared to illiterate ones/other students. Peiffer

et al. (2020) studied German Psychology students to examine the association between empirical distinction of self-concept and self-efficacy in higher education. They concluded that higher education leads to more emotional regulation and control. Hardie et al. (2021) depicted the current educational practices for fostering interpersonal and communication skills. The study found that educated people experience interpersonal issues the least and solve them with insight.

Limitations and Recommendations

The current study was primarily quantitative. Qualitative research should be carried out to investigate the in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Moreover, the current study was cross-sectional. Therefore, longitudinal research should be carried out as well to investigate emotion regulation, self-concept, and interpersonal problems of transgender individuals throughout/across their lifespan. Furthermore, as the majority of the study population was illiterate, better data collecting strategies should be used in future studies to get more valid and reliable results.

Implications

The research on transgender clearly outlines how they live their lives despite all the prejudice and labels that the society assigns to them. This study can aid in developing transgender-inclusive policies in the future to promote their status in the society. Also, it would help psychologists to design appropriate intervention plans.

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