

Article history: Received 16 October 2023 Revised 21 December 2023 Accepted 27 December 2023 Published online 01 January 2024

Psychology of Woman Journal

Volume 5, Issue 1, pp 151-158



The Effectiveness of Emotion Regulation Training on Self-Awareness in Female University Students

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Baghdadi, B., & Haghighat, S. (2024). The Effectiveness of Emotion Regulation Training on Self-Awareness in Female University Students. *Psychology of Woman Journal*, *5*(1), 151-158.

http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.pwj.5.1.18



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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to examine the impact of emotion regulation training on the level of self-awareness in female university students.

Methods and Materials: This study is a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-post-test method and a control group. The statistical population consisted of all female students at the Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch, in 2023. Using purposive sampling, 30 students were randomly assigned to two groups: an experimental group and a control group (15 individuals in each group). The data collection tool was the Self-Consciousness Scale by Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss (1975), whose validity and reliability have been previously confirmed. Emotion regulation training was conducted using a package based on Gross's model (2007). Data analysis was performed using covariance analysis through SPSS software.

Findings: The results indicated that emotion regulation training significantly increased the level of self-awareness in female university students.

Conclusion: These findings confirm that educational interventions in the area of emotion regulation can improve self-awareness and, consequently, enhance individuals' psychological abilities in coping with daily life challenges, particularly among female university students. The results also highlight the importance of psychological education in academic environments.

Keywords: emotion regulation training, self-awareness, female university students.



1. Introduction

motion, as the mental awareness of a feeling or motivational state, has a unique function and is somewhat independent of cognitive processes. The distinct function of each emotion and the relative independence of emotions and cognitive systems provide a framework for translating theories and research on emotions into preventive interventions. Emotions play an important role in the evolution of growth and conscious functioning. They stimulate adaptive thought and action, facilitating social behavior and creative problem-solving. Emotions are the foundation of mood and personality (Sohrabi et al., 2022; Yen et al., 2017). Emotion regulation is considered a set of processes that an individual may use to evoke, maintain, control, or modify a positive or negative emotion. In fact, emotion regulation is regarded as the individual's effort to manage emotions in which a specific emotion is used for a particular goal. A simple way to conceptualize emotion regulation is to view it as an action that the individual controls. Emotion regulation essentially relates to behavior, as it organizes behavior and allows the individual to control their actions in a way that enables them to respond flexibly to the things happening around them (Khezri et al., 2022; Sharbaaf et al., 2022).

In the World Health Organization (1996) classification, self-awareness is one of the five main categories of life skills. In this classification, self-awareness includes awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, a realistic self-image, rights and responsibilities, clarification of values, and motivation for self-knowledge (Emami Nia, 2014). Self-awareness is the foundation of successful communication and is, in fact, a prerequisite for effective social and interpersonal relationships. It plays an important role in developing empathy and compassion for others (Alborzi & Khosh Lahjeh Sedgh, 2023; Khezri et al., 2022; Singh, 2006).

Self-awareness means how well an individual knows themselves and has mastery over their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Individuals can respond appropriately to emotional events when they know themselves and are aware of their moods and emotions (Blakemore & Agllias, 2018). Morin (2005) defined self-awareness as the individual's capacity for self-attention. He believes that self-awareness occurs when an individual focuses not only on the external environment but also on their internal self (Morin, 2005). Leary and Baumeister (2014) described self-awareness as the conscious ability to reflect on the "self." Rochat (2003)

stated that humans gain awareness of their traits and states through the process of personality development and gradually realize that others are also aware of them. Along with this mutual awareness, pleasant and unpleasant feelings and emotions emerge. By raising awareness and introducing self-awareness to individuals, they can be made aware of both their positive and negative aspects, as self-awareness is the ability to recognize oneself and to be aware of one's characteristics, strengths, weaknesses, desires, fears, and dislikes. For most people, describing their moral and behavioral traits to others is challenging (Kuntze et al., 2016).

Given the marital problems among couples, psychologists have conducted research that has shown various therapeutic methods for addressing psychological issues. One of these methods is teaching emotion regulation strategies. Emotion regulation refers to the conscious or unconscious cognitive and behavioral methods that help manage and modulate emotions (Yıldız, 2017). Emotion regulation strategies involve developing thoughts and behaviors that help individuals become aware of the type of emotion they have, when these emotions arise, and how to express them (García, 2022). Difficulty in emotion regulation is associated with negative outcomes in various areas of life, as there is a direct relationship between emotion regulation and quality of life and interpersonal relationships (Yen et al., 2017).

Considering the effectiveness of emotion regulation training on self-awareness and conflict resolution skills, the hypothesis arises that it may play a role in self-awareness and conflict resolution skills among female university students. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the effectiveness of emotion regulation training on the selfawareness of female university students, as they often face more problems in conflict resolution with their spouses and reduced self-awareness due to academic studies and marital responsibilities. Examining these factors and components can be helpful for these female students. A review of the research literature shows that the effectiveness of emotion regulation training on self-awareness in female university students has not yet been studied. Therefore, the present study seeks to answer the question: Does emotion regulation training impact self-awareness in female university students?



2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study design and Participant

The research method was quasi-experimental (pre-test and post-test with a control group). The statistical population of the study included all female students of Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch, in 2023. Considering that the minimum sample size in quasi-experimental designs is 30 participants, in this study, purposive sampling was used based on the available fields of study at Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch. A total of 30 students (15 in the experimental group and 15 in the control group) were randomly assigned after obtaining their consent to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria were female gender, students aged 20 to 45, and absence of physical or psychological disorders. The exclusion criteria included lack of consent to participate and absence from more than two intervention sessions.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Self-Awareness

This questionnaire was developed by Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss (1975) and consists of three subscales and 23 items. The subscales include private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, and social anxiety. Some of the items in the self-consciousness scale are reverse-scored, meaning that a lower rating indicates a higher level of selfconsciousness (for the absence of a characteristic at the scale's endpoint). Therefore, when scoring these items, responses must be recoded such that 0=4, 1=3, 3=1, and 4=0. The response to 2 remains the same. Items requiring reverse coding are marked with an asterisk (*). Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss (1975) found that the average scores for university students in private self-consciousness were approximately 26, for public self-consciousness around 19, and for social anxiety around 13. Scores higher than these averages suggest higher levels of that type of self-consciousness, while scores lower than these values indicate lower levels of selfconsciousness. To calculate the private self-consciousness score, sum the responses to the following items (noting reverse scoring for specific items): 1, 3*, 5, 7, 9*, 13, 15, 17, 20, and 22. To calculate the public self-consciousness score, sum the responses to the following items: 2, 6, 11, 14, 16, 19, and 21. To calculate the social anxiety score, sum the responses to the following items: 4, 8, 10, 12*, 18, and 23. Research by Wang, Marchant, and Morris (2004)

demonstrated that the correlation between items in the subscales of private self-consciousness (0.79), public self-consciousness (0.84), and social anxiety (0.73) was sufficiently high and above the threshold of 0.70. The reliability coefficients of the subscales, as reported by Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss, were 0.75, 0.73, and 0.77, respectively (Blakemore & Agllias, 2018; Khezri et al., 2022).

2.3. Intervention

2.3.1. Emotion Regulation Training

Emotion regulation training was conducted using an emotion management strategy intervention based on Gross's (2007) model, consisting of 8 sessions of 90 minutes each (Ahmadian, 2021; Mirzaei et al., 2019).

Session 1: Introduction to Emotion Regulation The first session introduces the participants to the concept of emotion regulation and its importance in daily life. The participants learn about the basic functions of emotions and the role of emotions in influencing thoughts and behaviors. The session focuses on building an understanding of how emotions impact relationships, decision-making, and mental health. Participants are encouraged to reflect on their current emotional experiences and identify any challenges they face in managing their emotions.

Session 2: Identifying Emotions In the second session, participants are taught to recognize and label their emotions accurately. They learn about different types of emotions (e.g., primary vs. secondary emotions) and how to differentiate between them. The session includes exercises that help participants practice identifying their emotional states in various situations. The goal is to enhance emotional awareness and enable participants to become more attuned to their emotional triggers.

Session 3: Understanding the Cognitive Model of Emotions The third session focuses on the relationship between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Participants learn about the cognitive model, which explains how thoughts influence emotions and actions. They explore how negative thinking patterns can lead to maladaptive emotional responses and practice identifying these patterns in their own lives. Cognitive restructuring techniques are introduced to help participants challenge and modify unhelpful thoughts that contribute to emotional distress.

Session 4: Developing Emotional Regulation Strategies In this session, participants are introduced to specific emotion regulation strategies. These include techniques such



as cognitive reappraisal, mindfulness, and relaxation exercises. The participants practice applying these strategies in hypothetical scenarios to better manage both positive and negative emotions. The aim is to increase emotional flexibility and provide participants with tools to regulate their emotions in a healthy and adaptive manner.

Session 5: Managing Negative Emotions This session is dedicated to managing negative emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, and anxiety. Participants explore the causes and consequences of these emotions and learn practical techniques to cope with them, such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and grounding exercises. The session emphasizes the importance of accepting negative emotions as a natural part of life while also finding ways to reduce their intensity and duration.

Session 6: Enhancing Positive Emotions The sixth session shifts focus to enhancing and maintaining positive emotions. Participants learn strategies to cultivate positive emotions such as gratitude, joy, and contentment. Activities may include gratitude journaling, savoring positive experiences, and engaging in activities that promote well-being. The session encourages participants to actively seek out and amplify positive emotional experiences in their daily lives.

Session 7: Emotion Regulation in Interpersonal Relationships In this session, participants focus on how to regulate emotions in the context of interpersonal relationships. They learn communication skills such as assertiveness and active listening to improve their interactions with others. The session also covers techniques for managing emotions during conflicts and maintaining

emotional balance in relationships. Role-playing exercises are used to practice these skills in real-life scenarios.

Session 8: Review and Application The final session provides a comprehensive review of the skills and techniques learned throughout the program. Participants reflect on their progress and discuss how they have applied emotion regulation strategies in their lives. The session focuses on creating a personalized emotion regulation plan that participants can use to maintain and further develop their emotional regulation skills after the program ends. Additionally, participants are encouraged to set long-term goals for continued emotional growth.

2.4. Data Analysis

For data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. In the descriptive statistics section, central tendency indicators such as mean and standard deviation were applied. In the inferential statistics section, depending on the research topic and if the assumptions for using covariance analysis were met, the data were analyzed using SPSS22 software.

3. Findings and Results

In the present study, 30 female students from Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch, in 2023 were examined. Their ages had a mean of 34.43 ± 7.05 years. In this section, the descriptive findings, including the mean and standard deviation of the pre-test and post-test scores of self-consciousness in the experimental and control groups, are presented.

 Table 1

 Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) of Pre-test and Post-test Self-Consciousness Scores in Experimental and Control Groups

Variable	Group	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	
Private Self-Consciousness	Experimental	27.60 (4.96)	30.86 (2.74)	
	Control	27.26 (4.60)	27.86 (4.58)	
Public Self-Consciousness	Experimental	21.53 (3.50)	23.20 (2.04)	
	Control	18.26 (4.33)	18.93 (3.89)	
Social Anxiety	Experimental	9.86 (5.86)	14.60 (3.41)	
	Control	11.66 (3.41)	12.33 (3.41)	

The results of Table 1 show that the mean self-consciousness in the experimental group increased significantly in the post-test phase compared to the control group. Given that the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test value for the research variables in both the pre-test and post-test of the control and experimental groups is between -1.96 and +1.96, and the statistic is not significant, the assumption of

normality in the statistical population is accepted with 95% confidence. One of the assumptions for using covariance analysis is the homogeneity of variances. To test this assumption, Levene's test is used. If this test is not statistically significant, the assumption of homogeneity of variances is fulfilled. Based on the F-value obtained from Levene's test, no significant difference is observed at the



 α =0.05 level between the variances, thus accepting the null hypothesis of homogeneity of variances.

The results also showed that Box's M test for the group variable was not significant (p = 0.142). Therefore, the

assumption of homogeneity of the covariance matrix has been properly met. Thus, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) can be used to test the second hypothesis of the study.

Table 2Group Variable Effect Test

Test	Value	F-value	Hypothesis df	Error df	Significance	Eta Squared
Pillai's Trace	0.50	7.83	3	23	0.001	0.50
Wilks' Lambda	0.49	7.83	3	23	0.001	0.50
Hotelling's Trace	1.02	7.83	3	23	0.001	0.50
Roy's Largest Root	1.02	7.83	3	23	0.001	0.50

According to the data in Table 2, the Wilks' Lambda value shows a significant effect of the group variable on the dependent variable.

 Table 3

 Results of Multivariate Covariance Analysis for Self-Consciousness Scores

Source of Variation	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F-value	Significance Level	Eta Squared
Group	Private self-consciousness	35.43	1	35.43	15.63	0.001	0.38
	Public self-consciousness	21.48	1	21.48	15.23	0.001	0.37
	Social anxiety	32.31	1	32.31	13.43	0.001	0.34

Based on the results and the F-values obtained in Table 3, there is a significant difference between the post-test mean scores of the self-consciousness subscales between the experimental and control groups. Therefore, there is a significant difference between the experimental group, which received emotion regulation training, and the control group, which did not receive any intervention, with the experimental group showing better performance.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of emotion regulation training on self-awareness in female university students. The results showed a significant difference in the post-test mean scores of the self-awareness subscales between the experimental and control groups. In other words, the students who received emotion regulation training demonstrated a notable improvement in self-awareness compared to the control group, which did not receive any intervention. These findings align with previous studies (Ahadian fard et al., 2017; Ahmadian, 2021; Alborzi & Khosh Lahjeh Sedgh, 2023; Khezri et al., 2022; Mertens et al., 2022; Nasirpour & Sadeghikia, 2022), highlighting the effective role of emotion regulation training in improving self-awareness and enhancing individual mental health.

One of the main components examined in this study is emotion regulation. Emotion regulation, as a fundamental psychological skill, refers to cognitive and behavioral processes that help individuals manage and modulate their emotions. This skill is particularly important for individuals facing emotional challenges in life, especially in the context of marital life. According to psychological theories such as Gross's (2007) model, emotion regulation includes interventions that enable individuals to cope with their emotions in a healthy and constructive manner. Based on the findings of this study, emotion regulation training led to an increase in the level of self-awareness in female university students. Self-awareness refers to the ability to recognize and understand one's emotions, feelings, and thoughts, helping individuals gain a deeper understanding of themselves. This skill involves recognizing strengths and weaknesses, desires, fears, and dislikes. When individuals become aware of their emotions and thoughts, they can respond more effectively to various situations, including conflict situations. This, in turn, helps individuals analyze their behaviors more consciously and prevent unwanted emotional reactions (Ahmadian, 2021).

From a theoretical perspective, Gross (2020) emphasizes the importance of emotion recognition in his research.



According to this theory, cognitive processes and emotion regulation are directly related. An individual who masters emotion regulation possesses higher cognitive abilities to understand their emotions and can channel these emotions constructively. Emotion regulation training based on this model helps individuals manage unpleasant emotions, such as anxiety, anger, and depression, in challenging situations. According to Gross's (2020) model, human emotions have both cognitive and behavioral aspects, and emotion regulation means managing these aspects simultaneously. Emotion regulation enables individuals to become more aware of their thoughts and feelings and respond appropriately to these emotions (Sohrabi et al., 2022). Therefore, individuals who acquire emotion regulation skills not only become more successful in controlling their emotions but also develop higher self-awareness.

Recent research has shown that emotion regulation can positively impact various aspects of individual mental and social health. Emotion regulation helps improve selfawareness, thereby enhancing an individual's ability to face everyday challenges. This is especially important in marital life, where more complex interpersonal interactions are required. Married individuals who learn emotion regulation skills can react more logically and effectively when faced with stressful situations. Marital life is one area where selfawareness and emotion regulation are particularly emphasized. Recent research suggests that emotional interactions between couples play a significant role in the quality of marital relationships (Latafati Beris et al., 2021). Couples with high emotion regulation skills and selfawareness are better equipped to handle daily challenges in their shared lives. This helps them control their emotional reactions during conflicts and dissatisfaction, allowing them to face issues constructively rather than resorting to destructive defense mechanisms.

Recent research indicates that emotion regulation and self-awareness directly improve interpersonal relationships. Individuals with high self-awareness can better analyze their emotions and thoughts, leading to a deeper understanding of their own needs and those of others, and they use this understanding to improve relationships (Khezri et al., 2022; Latifian & Seif, 2007). Additionally, emotion regulation can increase psychological flexibility, which in turn reduces conflicts and improves the quality of marital life. Beyond individual impacts, emotion regulation plays a crucial role in improving social interactions. Research shows that individuals with emotion regulation skills have a higher ability to establish positive social relationships. By

managing their emotions when interacting with others, these individuals can avoid inappropriate reactions and build healthier interpersonal relationships (Gross & John, 2021).

Emotion regulation also plays an important role in social and academic environments. In academic settings, students with strong emotion regulation skills can better cope with academic stress and pressures, leading to improved academic performance and increased satisfaction with their academic lives. During university years, when individuals face new challenges such as marriage, independent living, and increased responsibilities, learning emotion regulation skills can help them successfully navigate this challenging period (Mirzaei et al., 2019; Shams & Tasbih Sazan, 2016; Sharbaaf et al., 2022; Sohrabi et al., 2022).

Given the results of this study and the review of previous research, it can be concluded that emotion regulation training positively impacts the increase of self-awareness in female university students. These results highlight the importance of psychological education in improving individual and social skills. Emotion regulation helps individuals gain a better understanding of their own and others' emotions, enabling them to manage emotional reactions constructively and logically. Ultimately, this leads to improved interpersonal relationships and enhanced quality of life.

5. Limitations and Suggestions

The first limitation of this study was the lack of opportunity to conduct follow-up assessments with the participants. The second limitation involved the potential bias of participants in responding to the self-report questionnaires. It is recommended that follow-up studies be conducted to evaluate the impact of the training in this study on other samples to determine its generalizability. Additionally, future studies should examine the effectiveness of such interventions in combination with or in comparison to other validated trainings. Using observation methods and case studies for data collection is another recommendation from this study.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.



Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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