


# The Effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Therapy on Job Stress and Emotion Regulation in Employed Women in Tonekabon

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) on job stress and emotion regulation in employed women.

**Methods and Materials:** This quasi-experimental research employed a pre-test-post-test design with a control group. The statistical population consisted of all employed women in Tonekabon in 2025. The research sample included 30 participants selected through purposive sampling, who were then randomly assigned to an experimental group (n = 15) and a control group (n = 15). Research instruments included the Job Stress Questionnaire developed by the UK Health and Safety Executive (1990) and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003). Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) and univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA within MANCOVA) were used for data analysis.

**Findings:** The results indicated a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the post-test regarding the mean scores of job stress and emotion regulation ( $p < .001$ ); specifically, Emotion-Focused Therapy led to a reduction in job stress and an increase in emotion regulation among employed women.

**Conclusion:** The findings favored the experimental group. Overall, the results indicated that Emotion-Focused Therapy led to a reduction in marital stress and an improvement in behavioral emotion regulation among married women.

**Keywords:** *Emotion-Focused Therapy, job stress, emotion regulation.*

## 1. Introduction

Job stress, especially among employed women, is a critical psychological and organizational concern in contemporary societies. With increasing workplace demands, emotional labor, and the dual responsibilities of professional and personal life, women are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of job-related stress. Job stress not only affects individual well-being but also has far-reaching implications for organizational productivity and public health outcomes. Extensive evidence suggests that unmanaged stress contributes to psychological burnout, emotional dysregulation, interpersonal difficulties, and even physical health issues, including cardiovascular diseases and digestive disorders (Andela et al., 2016; Özenoğlu & Erkul, 2024; Zarieh et al., 2023). Hence, identifying effective interventions to reduce job stress and enhance emotional resilience is a priority in psychological research and clinical practice.

The prevalence and severity of job stress in women can be understood within the context of both external and internal stressors. Externally, factors such as workload, role ambiguity, limited social support, and work-life imbalance have been strongly linked to chronic stress (Ahmad et al., 2023; Özenoğlu & Erkul, 2024). Internally, emotional processes such as low emotion regulation capacity, emotional dissonance, and unresolved psychological conflicts exacerbate stress responses and hinder adaptive functioning (Andela et al., 2016; Mohammadi et al., 2023). For instance, research by Mohammadi et al. (2023) among emergency medical technicians in Shiraz showed that poor emotion regulation and low emotional intelligence were associated with higher job stress and PTSD symptoms. Emotional regulation, therefore, has emerged as a key mediating factor in the stress-health relationship, emphasizing the need for interventions that target emotional processing and management mechanisms.

One of the most promising therapeutic approaches in this regard is Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT), which is grounded in the humanistic-experiential tradition and focuses on helping individuals become aware of, express, regulate, and transform their emotional experiences. EFT promotes adaptive emotion regulation strategies and fosters emotional intelligence, which in turn reduces psychological distress and enhances interpersonal functioning (Ansar et al., 2024; Sheikhan & Goodarzi, 2024; White VanBoxel et al., 2024). Studies show that EFT improves emotional clarity and decreases emotional suppression, which are both crucial

for managing job stress in emotionally demanding environments. For example, research by White VanBoxel et al. (2024) in a randomized controlled trial on couples therapy highlighted the role of baseline emotion regulation in predicting treatment outcomes and relationship satisfaction, suggesting that change in emotion regulation mediates broader psychological improvements.

The relationship between emotional intelligence and job stress is also well-documented. Emotional intelligence encompasses the ability to perceive, understand, use, and regulate emotions effectively and is strongly associated with lower stress levels and better work-life balance in women (Ahmad et al., 2023; Ali, 2025). According to Ali (2025), emotional intelligence directly reduces burnout and job stress, mediated by self-efficacy, among women in the public sector. Similarly, Ahmad et al. (2023) emphasized that high emotional intelligence enables better work-life balance and stress management in female employees. In contrast, individuals with low emotional intelligence tend to resort to maladaptive coping strategies such as emotional eating, social withdrawal, or emotional suppression, which further aggravate stress symptoms (Vatanpanah et al., 2023; Yuza, 2022). These findings underscore the necessity of therapeutic models that can enhance emotional intelligence and self-awareness through structured emotional processing.

Emotion-Focused Therapy has demonstrated effectiveness not only in general populations but also in clinical and high-risk groups. For instance, Ansar et al. (2024) found that emotion-focused skills training significantly improved emotion regulation and mental health outcomes among parents, while simultaneously enhancing parent-child relationships. Likewise, Zarieh et al. (2023) reported the efficacy of EFT in increasing cognitive emotion regulation and ego strength in obese cardiovascular patients, supporting the generalizability of EFT across diverse demographic and clinical contexts. In the Iranian context, Sheikhan and Goodarzi (2024) validated the effectiveness of EFT in reducing the severity of psychosomatic symptoms in patients with irritable bowel syndrome by improving their emotion regulation capabilities. These findings collectively suggest that EFT is an empirically supported intervention for reducing psychological distress across populations with complex emotional needs.

Theoretical and empirical literature also suggests that emotion regulation difficulties, particularly among women, often stem from societal expectations, emotional suppression, and insufficient coping mechanisms when navigating work environments. According to Shafiabady et

al. (2023), therapeutic interventions like emotion-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy and mindfulness-based approaches improve emotion regulation and body image among adolescent girls, indicating the role of emotional restructuring in long-term psychological resilience. Although these interventions differ in technique, they all converge on the core goal of enhancing emotional awareness and reducing maladaptive regulation strategies such as suppression or avoidance.

Further supporting this perspective, Shamsudeen and Kannekanti (2023) presented a clinical case showing that combining dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) with habit reversal training could effectively treat trichotillomania in adults with impulsive traits, illustrating the broader applicability of emotion-focused interventions in self-regulation and behavior modification. These multidimensional interventions suggest that targeting the emotional core of psychological problems provides a solid foundation for sustainable mental health improvements.

The Iranian psychological literature also reflects a growing interest in the integration of EFT with culturally relevant stressors and therapeutic needs. For example, Taghva et al. (2020) found that resilience, emotional functioning, and character strengths predict job stress in military personnel, suggesting that enhancing emotion regulation capacity is a protective factor across various high-stress occupations. In tandem, recent research by Vatanpanah et al. (2023) on women with chronic obesity highlighted that compassion-focused therapy—another emotion-centered modality—significantly reduced emotional eating, stress, and rumination, further reinforcing the crucial role of emotional interventions in managing chronic stress responses.

Considering this robust body of evidence, the present study aims to examine the effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Therapy in reducing job stress and enhancing emotion regulation among employed women in Tonekabon.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study design and Participant

This study utilized a quasi-experimental (semi-experimental) and applied research design, employing a pre-test–post-test structure with a control group. The objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) on job stress and emotion regulation in employed women. The statistical population consisted of all employed women residing in Tonekabon in 2025. During the

pre-test stage, women who met the inclusion criteria—including (1) absence of psychological disorders, (2) not participating concurrently in other psychological interventions, and (3) willingness to collaborate in the study—were invited to complete the research questionnaires. From this group, 30 individuals who scored one standard deviation above the mean on the Job Stress Questionnaire developed by the UK Health and Safety Executive (1990) and one standard deviation below the mean on the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire by Gross and John (2003) were purposively selected. These 30 participants were then randomly assigned to an experimental group ( $n = 15$ ) and a control group ( $n = 15$ ), with the experimental group receiving EFT while the control group received no intervention during the research period. The effectiveness of the intervention was then assessed by comparing post-test scores between the two groups.

### 2.2. Measures

The first instrument used in this study was the Job Stress Questionnaire developed by the UK Health and Safety Executive in 1990. This is a 35-item self-report measure designed to assess job stress among employees, divided into seven subscales: (1) Demand (items 3, 6, 9, 12, 16, 18, 20, 22), (2) Control (items 2, 10, 15, 19, 25, 30), (3) Managerial Support (items 8, 23, 29, 33, 35), (4) Coworker Support (items 7, 24, 27, 31), (5) Interpersonal Relationships (items 5, 14, 21, 34), (6) Role (items 1, 4, 11, 13, 17), and (7) Change (items 26, 28, 32). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Never") to 5 ("Always"), with higher total scores indicating lower stress levels. Certain items—specifically items 3, 5, 6, 9, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22, and 34—are reverse scored. The total score ranges from a minimum of 35 to a maximum of 175. In this scoring system, higher scores reflect better psychological well-being and lower perceived job stress. In a study conducted by Toudari et al. in 2013, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales were reported as follows: Demand = .85, Control = .86, Managerial Support = .87, Coworker Support = .79, Interpersonal Relationships = .77, Role = .85, and Change = .78. Their findings also confirmed the seven-factor structure of the questionnaire.

The second instrument used was the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) developed by Gross and John (2003), designed to assess individuals' habitual use of two emotion regulation strategies: Cognitive Reappraisal and Expressive Suppression. The questionnaire consists of 10 items, with six

items (1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10) measuring cognitive reappraisal and four items (2, 4, 6, 9) measuring expressive suppression. Responses are given on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly agree”), with total scores ranging from 10 to 70. Higher scores indicate greater use of emotion regulation strategies. Specifically, the subscale for cognitive reappraisal ranges from 6 to 42, while the suppression subscale ranges from 4 to 28. In the original study by Gross and John (2003), internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) was reported as .79 for reappraisal and .73 for suppression. Similarly, Karimen and Vingerhoets (2012) found internal consistencies of .83 and .79 for reappraisal and suppression, respectively. In Iran, Bigdeli et al. (2013) reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .79 for the reappraisal subscale, indicating acceptable reliability for the Iranian population.

### 2.3. Intervention

The intervention protocol consisted of eight structured weekly sessions based on the principles of Emotion-Focused Therapy, each lasting approximately 90 minutes. The first session focused on introducing the concept of job stress and identifying related emotions in the workplace, encouraging participants to record daily emotional experiences and stressors. In the second session, participants were taught to recognize and understand emotional responses in work settings using emotion theories such as those of Freud and Ekman. The third session introduced effective emotion regulation techniques, including deep breathing, mindfulness, cognitive restructuring, and meditation, followed by practical exercises. The fourth session involved identifying specific workplace stressors (e.g., workload,

interpersonal conflicts) and analyzing emotional reactions to these situations. The fifth session emphasized communication skills training—such as active listening, emotional expression, conflict resolution, and relaxation strategies—to manage interpersonal stress. In session six, participants learned cognitive restructuring strategies to challenge negative thoughts and beliefs related to job stress through simulated scenarios. The seventh session provided coping strategies for managing high job demands, negative feedback, and unrealistic expectations, promoting adaptive responses and personal growth. Finally, the eighth session reviewed all techniques learned, evaluated individual progress in stress and emotion regulation, and facilitated the development of long-term self-regulation plans for future workplace challenges.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

For data analysis, both descriptive statistics (including frequency, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics were utilized. Inferential analyses included multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) to assess overall group differences and univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) for post-hoc examination of each dependent variable. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 27.

## 3. Findings and Results

The means and standard deviations of the pre-test and post-test scores for the variables of job stress and emotion regulation in the experimental and control groups are presented in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Job Stress and Emotion Regulation Variables in the Experimental and Control Groups (n = 15)*

Variable	Group	Pre-test M	Pre-test SD	Post-test M	Post-test SD
Job Stress	Experimental	102.40	9.847	94.00	10.563
	Control	101.87	10.542	101.93	10.620
Emotion Regulation	Experimental	35.33	3.266	39.07	3.575
	Control	34.33	4.909	34.40	4.925

As shown in [Table 1](#), the mean and standard deviation of job stress in the experimental group were  $102.40 \pm 9.847$  in the pre-test and  $94.00 \pm 10.563$  in the post-test. Similarly, the mean and standard deviation of emotion regulation in the experimental group were  $35.33 \pm 3.266$  in the pre-test and  $39.07 \pm 3.575$  in the post-test.

After testing the assumptions of linearity between the variables (job stress and emotion regulation), equality of variances, normal distribution of the dependent variables, and homogeneity of regression slopes, all statistical assumptions were met. Therefore, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to analyze the data.

**Table 2**

*Adjusted Means in the Post-test After Controlling for Covariates*

Variable	Group	Adjusted Mean	Standard Error
Job Stress	Experimental	93.788	0.097
	Control	102.146	1.097
Emotion Regulation	Experimental	38.569	0.335
	Control	34.898	0.335

According to the assumptions of ANCOVA which control for random covariates or confounders, the adjusted post-test means of the dependent variables after eliminating the effect of covariates are presented in Table 2. As seen, the

adjusted mean of job stress in the experimental group was 93.788 and in the control group was 102.146. Similarly, the adjusted mean of emotion regulation was 38.569 for the experimental group and 34.898 for the control group.

**Table 3**

*Multivariate ANCOVA Results for Experimental and Control Groups*

Test	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Effect Size
Pillai's Trace	0.721	32.256	2	25	.001	0.721
Wilks' Lambda	0.279	32.256	2	25	.001	0.721
Hotelling's Trace	2.580	32.256	2	25	.001	0.721
Roy's Largest Root	2.580	32.256	2	25	.001	0.721

The results of the multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) in Table 3 show that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups based on the significance of all four multivariate tests—Pillai's Trace, Wilks' Lambda, Hotelling's Trace, and Roy's Largest Root—indicating that the groups differed significantly in at least one of the dependent variables (job stress or emotion regulation).

Based on the findings from the multivariate ANCOVA and with 99% confidence, the study's hypothesis stating that Emotion-Focused Therapy is effective in reducing job stress and enhancing emotion regulation in employed women is confirmed.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) on job stress and emotion regulation in employed women in Tonekabon. The findings indicated that participants in the experimental group, who received EFT, showed significantly reduced levels of job stress and significantly improved scores in emotion regulation compared to the control group. These results were confirmed by multivariate and univariate analyses of covariance, which demonstrated that the changes in both dependent variables—job stress and emotion regulation—were statistically significant after controlling

for pre-test scores. These findings strongly support the central hypothesis of the study, suggesting that EFT is an effective psychological intervention for managing job-related stress and enhancing emotional regulatory capacities in working women.

The observed reduction in job stress following EFT can be attributed to the therapy's core mechanisms, which target maladaptive emotional responses and promote adaptive processing of emotionally salient workplace experiences. The structure of the intervention allowed participants to explore, express, and transform their emotional reactions toward various job stressors such as excessive workload, workplace conflict, or ambiguous role expectations. This is in line with the findings of Andela et al. (2016), who emphasize that job stressors such as emotional dissonance and role overload are closely associated with burnout symptoms, and that these are mediated by poor emotional awareness and regulation (Andela et al., 2016). The improvement in emotion regulation observed in this study further highlights the transformative capacity of EFT in altering participants' cognitive-emotional schemas and facilitating constructive responses to workplace stressors.

The findings of this study also resonate with prior research linking emotion regulation to occupational well-being. Mohammadi et al. (2023) found that poor emotion regulation strategies were significantly associated with higher job stress and trauma-related symptoms among



emergency healthcare workers, while Ahmad et al. (2023) demonstrated that emotional intelligence—closely related to emotion regulation—was essential for balancing work and personal life and mitigating stress among female professionals (Ahmad et al., 2023; Mohammadi et al., 2023). In the present study, the experimental group not only reported a reduction in stress but also showed an increase in cognitive reappraisal strategies, suggesting that EFT contributed to the development of more adaptive and constructive emotional responses. This supports Ali's (2025) findings on the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between emotional intelligence and job stress, reinforcing the notion that emotion-based skills can reduce emotional burden and prevent burnout (Ali, 2025).

Moreover, the improvement in emotion regulation as a result of EFT is consistent with evidence from diverse populations and therapeutic settings. Ansar et al. (2024), in a randomized controlled study, found that emotion-focused skills training significantly enhanced parental emotion regulation and mental health, suggesting the generalizability of EFT to non-clinical populations with emotion-related difficulties (Ansar et al., 2024). Similarly, Sheikhan and Goodarzi (2024) as well as Sheykhan and Goudarzi (2024) reported improvements in emotion regulation and reductions in psychosomatic symptom severity in patients with irritable bowel syndrome following EFT, further confirming the therapy's efficacy in altering maladaptive emotional patterns (Sheikhan & Goodarzi, 2024; Sheykhan & Goudarzi, 2024). The convergence of findings from these studies with the present results underscores EFT's relevance in occupational health interventions aimed at women, who often carry the dual burdens of professional and domestic responsibilities.

Another important finding of this study is the alignment with broader emotional intelligence and emotion-focused intervention literature. For instance, White VanBoxel et al. (2024) demonstrated that emotion regulation improvement was a significant factor in relationship satisfaction among couples undergoing emotionally focused therapy, suggesting that such interventions have lasting interpersonal and intrapersonal benefits (White VanBoxel et al., 2024). Furthermore, Zariah et al. (2023) found that EFT significantly enhanced cognitive emotion regulation and ego strength in cardiovascular patients with obesity, indicating that changes in emotion regulation may influence core self-regulatory mechanisms that extend beyond the context of therapy (Zariah et al., 2023). In the present study, the enhanced emotion regulation scores suggest not only improved coping with job stress but also the development of

broader psychological resources such as emotional resilience and self-efficacy.

The relationship between job stress, emotional vulnerability, and emotional suppression is particularly important for working women, as highlighted by Özenoğlu and Erkul (2024). Their research revealed that job stress was associated with emotional eating and poor dietary quality among hospital staff, indicating that poorly managed emotions can spill into maladaptive health behaviors (Özenoğlu & Erkul, 2024). The ability of EFT to enhance emotion regulation in this study can thus be considered a preventive mechanism, shielding participants not only from psychological consequences but also from potentially harmful physiological or behavioral outcomes. Similarly, Vatanpanah et al. (2023) reported that compassion-focused therapy significantly reduced emotional dysregulation, perceived stress, and rumination in obese women, echoing the importance of emotion-based interventions in promoting holistic well-being (Vatanpanah et al., 2023).

Findings from adolescent and clinical populations also support the effectiveness of emotion-focused interventions in improving self-regulatory capabilities. Shafiabady et al. (2023) showed that both emotion-focused CBT and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy improved body image and emotional regulation among adolescents pursuing cosmetic surgery, underscoring the developmental significance of targeting emotional competencies early in life (Shafiabady et al., 2023). Additionally, Shamsudeen and Kannekanti (2023) demonstrated the clinical utility of dialectical behavior therapy combined with habit reversal training in managing impulsive traits in adults, highlighting the transdiagnostic relevance of emotion regulation skills (Shamsudeen & Kannekanti, 2023). Together, these findings emphasize that enhancing emotion regulation is not only a therapeutic goal but a preventive and developmental imperative.

Finally, from a psychological perspective rooted in resilience theory, the outcomes of this study support the argument that fostering emotion regulation contributes to greater resilience in the face of occupational challenges. Taghva et al. (2020) proposed that resilience, emotions, and character strengths serve as protective factors against job stress in high-pressure environments such as the military, and similar dynamics appear to be at play among employed women balancing multiple roles and responsibilities (Taghva et al., 2020). By equipping individuals with emotional clarity, acceptance, and transformation skills, EFT seems to facilitate a resilient orientation toward

adversity, rather than promoting avoidance or emotional suppression.

In conclusion, the results of this study add to a growing body of evidence supporting Emotion-Focused Therapy as an effective intervention for improving emotion regulation and reducing job stress, particularly in women. The alignment of the present findings with prior research suggests that EFT enhances core psychological capacities such as self-awareness, cognitive flexibility, and emotional resilience. Given the psychosocial demands of modern work environments—especially on women who face additional social and emotional pressures—emotion-focused interventions provide a vital tool for sustainable mental health and occupational functioning.

## 5. Limitations and Suggestions

This study, despite its meaningful findings, is not without limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small ( $n = 30$ ), which may affect the generalizability of the results to broader populations. Although the use of random assignment and statistical controls increased internal validity, larger sample sizes across multiple occupational sectors would enhance external validity. Second, the study relied exclusively on self-report questionnaires, which may be subject to social desirability bias and introspective limitations. Including physiological or behavioral measures of stress and emotion regulation would provide a more comprehensive evaluation of therapeutic outcomes. Third, the study was conducted only among employed women in a single geographic location (Tonekabon), which may limit the applicability of the findings to other cultural or organizational contexts. Moreover, the follow-up period was not extended beyond the immediate post-test phase, so the durability of the observed effects over time remains unknown.

Future studies should aim to replicate these findings with larger and more diverse samples, including participants from different professions, educational backgrounds, and regions. Longitudinal designs with follow-up assessments at three, six, or twelve months post-intervention would provide insight into the sustainability of EFT's effects on job stress and emotion regulation. It is also recommended to compare EFT with other interventions such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, or mindfulness-based programs in controlled trials to determine their relative effectiveness. Moreover, investigating mediating and moderating variables—such as

personality traits, organizational support, or emotional intelligence—could reveal important mechanisms underlying the observed changes. Including qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups would also enrich the understanding of participants' subjective experiences and the contextual factors that shape therapeutic impact.

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that organizations, especially those with high numbers of female employees, integrate Emotion-Focused Therapy into workplace mental health programs. Human resources departments and occupational health psychologists can offer group-based EFT interventions to address job stress and improve emotional resilience. Training programs for managers and supervisors in emotional awareness and regulation may also foster emotionally intelligent leadership, which can reduce organizational stress at a systemic level. Finally, incorporating EFT-based modules into employee assistance programs (EAPs) can offer a proactive and empowering approach to mental health care, thereby enhancing employee well-being, job satisfaction, and productivity.

## 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.

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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## 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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