

## The mediating role of stress-management related to difficulties in emotion regulation and psychological welfare in resident female students of Isfahan University dormitory

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**Abstract:** This study was performed in order to determine the mediating role of stress management concerned with emotion regulation difficulty and psychological welfare. The research is according to the correlation method and the statistical society includes the entire female freshman residents in dormitories of Isfahan University Martyrs in 2013 that 200 of them were selected based on simple random selection method. Tools used include Reef's psychological well-being questionnaire, difficulties in emotion regulation scale (DERS) and stress management questionnaire of doctor Malekpour (1997). Indirect effect was examined by using bootstrap method in the program of SPSS macro Preacher and Hayes (2004). Findings showed that difficulties in emotion regulation is related to psychological well-being and procedural and interactive stress management ( $P < 0/01$ ). In addition, stress management is the mediator of the relationship between emotion regulation difficulty and psychological well-being.

**Key words:** Stress management; Emotion regulation difficulty; Psychological well-being

### 1. Introduction

Previous researches have shown that emotional problems involve a high percentage of people in various societies. Emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, hostility and interpersonal sensitivity can be pointed. The high prevalence of these disorders and other emotional problems and the impact of these problems on the overall performance (individual, family, work and social) individual have caused some researchers to consider the risk factors associated with these problems. Including one of these factors, a disorder has been mentioned in emotion regulation (Gross, 2007). In this field, psychopathology researchers do believe that emotion regulation difficulty can predict the person's mental injuries in the future and children and adolescents can be prone to psychiatric disorders such as depression (Abbott 2005).

In addition, it is an important factor in the genesis of depression and anxiety (Beauregard, 2001).

Also, it has been claimed that having an unsuccessful performance in social interactions, aggressiveness, impulsive violence and feelings of shame and guilt are also the results of inadequate regulation of emotional responses (Sandler, Tien and Weest, 1994; quoted Stegal, 2004). Among these, youth as the major population and the stratum of society that are constantly exposed to stresses and environmental and mental pressures such as including educational difficulties, family, social and economy are under the special consideration of researchers and it is clear that entrance to the university is a very challenging part of life for

efficient, active and young staff in each country and is often associated with changes in social and humanistic relations (azyymy and Jannati, 2001). Many students who have recently entered the university are faced with extreme stress and anxiety due to the separation from family, lack of familiarity with the university environment, lack of adequate welfare and economic facilities, difficulty in adapting with the educational system, an uncertain future, a new way of life, parental expectations of their progress, exams and doing assignments (Lapsley, 2009). Stress is not an absolute negative phenomenon because moderate stress is as part of an individual's health and is a motivational factor to adapt to new situations and conditions (Annisy and Fathi-Ashtiani, 2005). But if stress is not be controlled, inhibited or managed it can lead to undesirable effects on physical and mental health of individuals (Haji Heidari and Zarghami, 2004). Studies have shown that using affective coping strategies have an important role in reducing and managing the individual's stress. Methods and strategies that a person uses to deal with stressful factors play a key role in his physical and mental health. An important mental characteristic that a qualified person must have it is sense of well-being or satisfaction. Sense of well-being includes feeling of solidarity in life, emotional balance and overall satisfaction with life. On the other hand, according to previous investigations, stress management is related to increasing physical and mental adaption with stressful life events and higher levels of performance and satisfaction with life. Recent studies have found that there is a positive relationship between effective and efficient emotion regulation and psychological well-being (Sadeghi ,

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2011; Maki K., 2010; Choi Stewart, 2009; Carlson, 2006) and of course stress management has an essential role in management and correct regulation of emotions that studies (Carver et al., 2000; Houyful et al., 2004; Soumerfield and Mac Kra, 2000; Pakenham, 2001; Taylor, 2010; Besharat, 1388) have confirmed this assumption. Therefore, it could be expected that stress management leads to correct regulation of emotions and increases psychological well-being. In the present study we sought to extend previous research on emotion regulation difficulties and the necessity of connecting with the critical and influential group of students by examining the relationship between emotion regulation difficulties and psychological well-being with mediating role of stress management in students.

**2. Method**

The current study is correlative. Difficulties in emotion regulation of endogenous variable, mediator variable stress management and psychological well-being of final exogenous variable. The statistical society of this study includes the entire female freshman residents in dormitories of Isfahan University Martyrs in 2013 that 200 of them were selected based on simple random selection method.

Cochran's formula was used to determine the sample size and by considering the size of the community and the variance of one of the variables, the size of the sample was obtained 220. After distributing and collecting the research's questionnaires 200 questionnaires were analyzable (response rate of 89%). It is important to say the age range of participants was 18-22 years.

**3. Research instrument**

In order to gather information related to the research's different variables, three questionnaires were used, Reef's psychological well-being questionnaire, difficulties in emotion regulation scale (DERS) and stress management questionnaire of doctor Malekpour (1997). Following pages are devoted to introduce each of the mentioned scales.

**3.1. Difficulties in emotion regulation scale (DERS)**

This is a self-reporting questionnaire which has been built in a more comprehensive way in comparing with the available tools in order to evaluate difficulties in emotion regulation and has 36 phrases and 6 subscales. The subscales are as following: 1- Rejection of emotional responses 2- Difficulties in handling the purposeful behavior 3- Difficulties with impulse control 4- Lack of emotional awareness 5 - Limited access to emotion regulation strategies 6 - Lack of emotional transparency. The answer of each subject will be in the range of one to five: 1- Almost never 2- Sometimes 3- Most of the

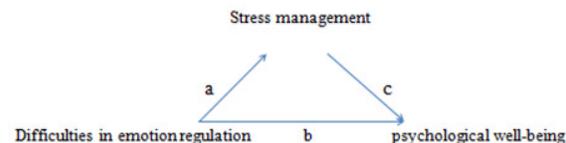
time 5- Almost half of the time 4- almost always. Higher scores indicate greater difficulties in emotion regulation. The mean and standard deviation and the reliability of the questionnaire in this study are respectively 84.0702 and 21.53563 and 0.93.

**3.2. Reef's psychological well-being questionnaire**

This questionnaire was made in 1989 by Reef and has been revised in 2002 and the number of questionnaire's items is 84 (Housrow et al., quoted Ahmadi 2005). This questionnaire evaluates six factors of autonomy; dominate the environment, personal growth, positive relationships with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. Moreover, the sum of these six factors calculates the total score of psychological well-being. This is a kind of self-examination in a six-point scales which can be graded from strongly agree to strongly disagree. High and desirable reliability has been reported for this test (Ahmad, 2012). Mean and standard deviation and Cronbach's alpha for this scale study has been obtained respectively 304.8869 and 47.99228 and 0.95.

**3.3. Stress management questionnaire of doctor Malekpour (1997)**

This questionnaire has 17 questions. Each question has 4 options, in a 4-point Likert scale from "never" to "often". Doctor Malekpour performed the questionnaire on 87 students and exceptional and normal children's parents and on 40 independent persons on two occasions for re-examining the questionnaire in order to evaluate the validity of the questionnaire at the same time. The questionnaire's concurrent validity coefficient and reliability coefficient from retest method has been reported respectively 0.63 and 0.67 (Malekpour, 1997). The mean and standard deviation of the validity and reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the questionnaire in the present research was obtained respectively 46.7141, 8.43198, 0.672 and 0.87.



**Fig. 1:** The research's offered pattern about indirect effect of difficulties in emotion regulation on psychological well-being through stress management

**3.4. Analysis method**

Data were analyzed by using Pearson's correlation coefficient. Baron and Kenny's defaults (1986) were investigated in order to examine the assumptions of research's mediating relations. Baron and Kenny announced that variable M considers as a mediator when: 1) - The variance of X (independent variable) significantly predicts the variance of M (in

Fig. 1,  $a \neq 0$ , 2) - The variance of M significantly predicts the variance of Y (dependent variable) (Fig. 1,  $b \neq 0$ , 3) - When the direction of a and b is controlled, the relationship between X and Y is reduced or not be meaningful. Bootstrap method has been used in Preacher & Hayes's macro program (2004) for meaningful determination of indirect paths of independent variable on the dependent variable via using a mediator variable.

**4. Findings**

**Table 1:** Internal consistency of research variables and their meaningful levels

3	2	1	standard deviation	mean		
-	-	1.00	21.95	79.00	Difficulties in emotion regulation	1
-	1.00	-0.44**	11.26	22.67	Stress management	2
1.00	0.59**	-0.44**	13.66	92.63	psychological well-being	3

In Table 2, the total and direct effects of research variables, which are needed for mediator variable, have been presented based on Preacher & Hayes's method (2004). In this table three needed regressions can be examined, that Preacher & Hayes knew to be needed to determine mediation. As Table 2 shows, emotion regulation difficulties with non-standard ratio of -0.33 significantly predicts the psychological well-being ( $p < 0.01$ ). Therefore; there is a meaningful condition for path c. Difficulties in emotion regulation with non-standard ratio of -0.04 significantly predicts the stress management. Therefore; there is a meaningful condition for path a. Also, stress management with a non-standard coefficient of 0.72 and a meaningful level of 0.0001, predicts the psychological well-being. Therefore; there is a meaningful condition for path b. As presented in Table 2, when the effects of stress management on emotion regulation difficulties and psychological well-being are controlled, the non-standard coefficient is -0.187 (path c'). This path

In Table 1, the mean, standard deviation and inter-correlations between the research's variables is presented. As can be seen in Table 1, difficulties in emotion regulation have a negative relationship with stress management and psychological well-being and stress management has a positive and significant relationship with psychological well-being ( $p < 0.01$ ). Therefore, research hypotheses on the relationship between emotion regulation difficulties, stress management and psychological well-being are approved.

coefficient is reduced in comparing with path c, but still has not lost its significance. Bootstrap method has been used in Preacher & Hayes's macro program (2004) in order to examine the mediating role of emotion regulation difficulties concerned with the stress managing and psychological well-being and the significance of indirect effect. The results of bootstrap method are shown in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3, the lower and the upper bound are -0.156 and -0.019 respectively. The confidence interval is 99 and the number of Bootstrap re-sampling are 1000. Zero isn't placed in the confidence interval which indicates the significance of this indirect path. Therefore, based on the significance of the indirect path, the main hypothesis is confirmed.

Considering that  $a \times b \times c'$  is positive, this type of mediator is named as complementary mediation (Zhao et al., 2010).

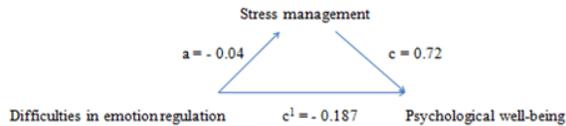
**Table 2:** The direct and total effects of research variables

Significant	t	Standard error	coefficient B	
0.0001	-4.61	0.056	-0.33	Path c: (Direct effect of difficulties in emotion regulation on psychological well-being)
0.0002	-3.62	0.014	-0.04	Path a: (Direct effect of difficulties in emotion regulation on stress management)
0.0001	-4.73	0.343	0.72	Path b (Direct effect of stress management on psychological well-being)
0.0033	-3.20	0.054	-0.187	Path c': (Direct effect of difficulties in emotion regulation on psychological well-being by controlling the stress management)

**Table 3:** The bootstrap results for the path of difficulties in emotion regulation → Stress management → Psychological well-being

lower bound	upper bound	Standard error	Orientation	Boot	Data
-0.156	-0.019	0.029	0.0001	-0.085	-0.085

Fig. 2 shows the pattern of this indirect effect and non-standard coefficients of paths.



**Fig. 2:** The research's final pattern: indirect effect of emotion regulation difficulties on psychological well-being through stress management

## 5. Conclusions

The results showed that stress management has a positive relationship with psychological well-being and negative relationship with difficulties in emotion regulation. Hence, stress management can be considered as a variable mediator between emotion regulation difficulties and psychological well-being. These findings are corresponded to the results of the studies, (Sadeghi, 2011, Macy Kay, 2010; Choi Stewart, 2009; Carlson, 2006; Carver et al., 2000; Houyful et al., 2004; Soumerfield and Mac Kra, 2000; Pakenham, 2001; Taylor, 2010, Besharat, 2009). An emotional regulation difficulty is an Alexithymia or disability in cognitive processing of emotional information (Bgby and Taylor, 2010). When emotional information could not be evaluated in the cognitive process of perception, the individual could be affected by confusion and helplessness in terms of emotion and cognition. This disability can disrupt the person's emotions and cognitions and increase the risk of trauma in a stressful situation. Insufficiency in emotional regulation and management (transition from process to action) is also one of the features of Alexithymia (Bgby and Taylor, 2010). This insufficiency at the level of personal behaviors threatens and undermines the mental health by reducing psychological well-being and increasing the psychological helplessness.

On the contrary, emotional activation corresponded with the ability in emotional self-regulation and cognitive processing of emotional information and emotions regulation. When emotional information perceived and evaluated properly in the cognitive processing, the person's emotions and cognitions will have an optimum performance and as a result, the probability of managing the stress and using a positive emotion-focused coping style in stressful situations will increase (Besharat, 2009). Lack of ability to manage the stress in stressful situations makes the person to use negative emotion-focused coping style that reduces the person's ability to solve problems. This situation causes in intellectual and emotional confusion and simultaneously increases the Alexithymia or difficulties in emotion regulation. Therefore, provides the groundwork for increasing disorders and reduce welfare (Besharat, 2009).

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