ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Psychology

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF IMPULSIVITY AND SOCIAL SUPPORT IN EMOTIONAL REGULATION AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

KEY WORDS: Impulsivity, Social support, Emotional regulation, College students, Young adults

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the connection between impulsivity, social support, and emotional regulation among college students, along with gender differences in emotional regulation. Data were collected from 300 students (ages 18–25) with the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS), Multidimensional Perceived Social Support Scale (MPSS) and Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ). Correlation analysis revealed no significant association between social support ($r = -0.022$, $p = 0.708$) or impulsivity and regulation of emotions ($r = -0.007$, $p = 0.900$). However, a strong positive relationship emerged between social support and emotional regulation ($r = 0.505$, $p < .001$). Regression analysis demonstrated that social support is a significant predictor of emotional regulation, whereas impulsivity showed no such effect. The Mann-Whitney U test showed that females scored significantly higher in emotional regulation compared to males. A key limitation of the study is its dependence on self -report measures, which may introduce response bias. These findings underscore the crucial role of social support in enhancing emotional regulation among students.

INTRODUCTION

Emotional regulation is a critical aspect of psychological well-being, especially among college students who often faces problems related to their social relationship, academic pressure and transition into adulthood. A strong social support from both his or her social environment can help them to manage these emotional ups and downs to a greater extent. Students with low level of emotional regulation were have a tendency to engage in impulsive activities which can cause lot of problems in their life. These can have an effect among the students' emotional regulation, which is needed for maintaining their psychological well-being. Impulsivity is characterized by spontaneous actions taken without prior consideration of potential outcomes. It comprises three key aspects: acting without prior thought, a preference for novelty, and prioritizing immediate rewards over long-term benefits (Flanigan & Climie., 2020). Impulsivity has effects on a person's cognitive, behavioral, social and emotional level. These behaviors can lead to wrong decisions without considering the consequences of it, that may result in negative outcomes, particularly in high stress environments such as college settings. Emotional regulation is essential for managing daily challenges. It involves assessing the situations, elucidate the emotional response or feedback and employ strategies to manage feelings or emotions. However, people with high impulsivity usually find difficult with the process. They tend to involve in maladaptive behaviour as a way to coping with negative emotions, leading to further emotional dysregulation. Studies have shown that impulsivity can discompose the ability to process emotions effectively, resulting in heightened emotional responses and difficulties in maintain stable moods. The college setting introduces distinct challenges that can intensify impulsive behaviour. Studies have shown that college students exhibiting elevated levels of impulsivity tend to experience emotional instability, engage in risky behaviour, and struggle with mental health issues.

Social support is the concept explaining how people build and sustain their social networks. They are sustained by a range of sources, including interpersonal relationships, family, neighbors, peer groups, religious communities, and friends (Sam M.S.,2013). Social support work as an offsetting influence that can buffer the negative effects of impulsivity on emotion regulation. Research has revealed that students who possess robust social support networks have reduced stress levels and improved mental well-being. Specifically, social support can boost self-esteem, self-efficacy, improved stress management and facilitating students to adapt better with emotional difficulties. Such assistance can undo the ill effects of impulsivity by providing other stress reduction and emotion regulation methods. Emotional regulation is a fundamental aspect of psychological well-being, influencing how individuals manage their emotions and respond to stressors. Two factors that can affect emotional regulation are impulsivity and social support. Impulsivity and social support play a significant role, especially in the context of emotional regulation among college students. Impulsivity can lead to maladaptive emotional responses; robust social support can mitigate these effects by promoting healthier coping strategies. Research suggests that student's wo have high levels of social support Are more capable of regulating their emotions and exhibit more adaptive regulatory strategies. Poor emotional regulation can contribute to unfavorable consequences like anxiety, depression, and ineffective coping strategies.

The interplay between impulsivity, social support, and emotional regulation is complex as well as multifaceted. By improving emotional regulation, social support can help counteract the harmful effects of impulsivity. For instance, individuals who receive consistent emotional support are more likely to develop adaptive coping strategies, reducing impulsive behaviour (Lopez, et al). lack of social support can intensify impulsivity and emotional dysregulation, leading to a chain of negative emotional outcomes. Enhancing social support networks and teaching adaptive emotional regulation strategies can significantly reduce impulsivity and its associated negative consequences.

Research Gap

There are previous studies that studied the variables separately. There is a research gap that extends to the lack of studies by interconnecting the three variables; impulsivity, social support and emotional regulation among college students. This gap highlights the need for research that specifically examines how impulsivity and social support together impact emotional regulation in college students and also by focusing on gender differences, which could contribute for the development of targeted support programs aimed at improving students' psychological well-being.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research aims to investigate the intricate relationships between impulsivity, social support, and emotional regulation among college students, with focus on gender differences. Using a quantitative method, through online google forms, the research employs standardized questionnaires to collect data

on impulsivity, social support and emotional regulation among the participants. The research prioritizes ethical considerations as per the guidelines set by the American Psychological Association. The population for the study consists of college students from Bangalore. Data were collected from 300 college students using convenience sampling method. The study was conducted using The Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS), developed by Barratt (1995), is used to assess impulsivity, which includes dimensions such as attentional, motor, and non-planning impulsiveness. This scale consists of 30 items, each evaluated using a 4-point rating system, ranging from "Rarely" to "Almost Always'', The Multidimensional Perceived Social Support Scale (MPSS), proposed by Zimet et al. in 1988 evaluates perceived social support from three sources: family, friends, and significant others. It includes 12 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale, from "Very Strongly Disagree" to "Very Strongly Agree'', The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), developed by Gross and John (2003), assesses emotion regulation strategies. Each statement is evaluated using a 7-point scale, ranging from 'never' to 'always.

Participants were also requested to give different demographic information such as age, gender, education and socio-economic status.

Following Are The Hypotheses Of The Study;-

- **H01:** There is no significant relationship between impulsivity and social support among college students.
- **H02:** There is no significant relationship between impulsivity and emotional regulation among college students.
- **H03:** There is significant relationship between social support and emotional regulation among college students.
- **H04:** There is no significant impact of impulsivity and social support on emotional regulation among college students.
- **H05:** There are no significant gender differences in the relationship between impulsivity and social support on emotional regulation among college students.

RESULTS

The present study examined the relationship between impulsivity, social support, and emotional regulation among college students.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 300)

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Impulsivity	300	72.0	5.70	—		
2. Social Support	300	4.55	1.26	-0.022	—	
3. Emotional Regulation	300	43.7	9.57	-0.007	0.505***	—

Note: M represents the Mean, and SD denotes the Standard Deviation. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) is presented for impulsivity and social support, as well as for impulsivity and emotional regulation. Spearman's rho (ρ) is reported for the correlation between social support and emotional regulation. **p < .001.

Table 2 Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Emotional Regulation

Predictor	Estimate	SE	95%CI		p
			LL	UL	
Intercept	25.83	6.35	13.33	38.33	<.001
Social support	3.83	0.38	3.08	4.57	<.001
Impulsivity	0.0062	0.084	-0.159	0.172	0.941

Note: Table II represents the multiple regression analysis which predicts 25 percent of emotional regulation.

Table 3 Mann-Whitney U Test for Gender Differences in Emotional Regulation

Variable	Statistic	p
Emotional Regulation	8824	.001

Table no. 1, the results showed no meaningful association between impulsivity and social support (r = -0.022, p = 0.708), therefore the null hypotheses is accepted, suggesting that impulsivity functions independently of external social influences. Additionally, no meaningful association was observed between impulsivity and emotional regulation (r = -0.007, p = 0.900), therefore the null hypotheses is accepted. It suggests that impulsivity alone does not predict emotional regulation. Conversely, social support demonstrated a moderately strong positive correlation with emotional regulation (r = 0.505, p < .001), highlighting its essential role in facilitating better emotional management among students. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Table no. 2 shows the result of multiple regression analysis, which confirmed that social support significantly predicted emotional regulation (B = 3.83, SE = 0.38, t = 10.07, p < .001), whereas impulsivity did not contribute meaningfully to the model (B = 0.006, SE = 0.084, t = 0.074, p = .941). The overall model was significant (F (2, 297) = 50.7, p < .001), with social support explaining 25.5% of the variance in emotional regulation (R^2 = 0.255). Therefore, the hypothesis that impulsivity and social support do not significantly impact emotional regulation is partially rejected, as social support was found to be a significant predictor.

Table no.3 shows the result of Mann-Whitney U test, which revealed significant gender differences in emotional regulation (U = 8824, p = .001). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

DISCUSSION

The Pearson correlation analysis found no observable relationship between impulsivity and social support among college students (r = -0.022, p = 0.708). his aligns with the UPPS model of impulsivity (Whiteside & Lynam, 2001), which suggests that impulsivity comprises multiple facets that may interact differently with social support. While impulsivity can lead to difficulties in maintaining relationships, college environments may provide structured support systems that mitigate these effects. The results of this study are consistent with previous research, indicating that impulsivity is intrinsic and may not be substantially shaped by external social interactions (Whiteside & Lynam, 2001). One explanation for this result is that college students' access to structured support systems may mitigate the potential social disadvantages associated with impulsivity. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (1980) further explains that cultural norms influence how impulsivity and social support are perceived, which may account for the lack of significant association.

Similarly, the study found no meaningful association between impulsivity and emotional regulation (r = -0.007, p = 0.900). The dual-process model of self-regulation (Evans & Stanovich, 2013) suggests that impulsive behaviors arise from fast, automatic processing (System 1), whereas emotional regulation requires effortful, controlled processing (System 2). This may explain why impulsivity alone does not predict emotional regulation. The non-significant relationship between impulsivity and emotional regulation contradicts previous findings linking impulsivity to poorer self-regulation (Gross & John, 2003). This suggests that additional factors, such as emotional intelligence and coping mechanisms, may buffer the influence of impulsivity on emotional regulation (Sharma & Singh, 2018). Furthermore, emotional regulation comprises distinct components, such as cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, which may interact with impulsivity differently (Aldao et al., 2010). Future studies should explore these components separately.

However, the study found a significant positive association between social support and emotional regulation (ρ = 0.505***, p < .001). These findings are consistent with Cohen

and Wills' (1985) stress-buffering hypothesis, which argues that social support mitigates stress and enhances emotional regulation. Previous studies have highlighted that peer, family, and institutional support play crucial roles in fostering adaptive emotional regulation (Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Taylor, 2011). Findings were consistent with previous studies (Lopez et al., 2024;Wang et al., 2023), greater perceived social support was associated with more effective emotional regulation strategies. Family support, in particular, remains a strong predictor of emotional regulation even in college settings (Thompson & Meyer, 2007).

Multiple linear regression analysis revealed that while social support significantly predicted emotional regulation ($B = 3.83$, $p < .001$), impulsivity did not ($B = 0.006$, $p = .941$). The model explained 25.5% of the variance in emotional regulation, suggesting that additional factors such as coping strategies, emotional intelligence, and personality traits contribute to this process. Future studies should explore these variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of emotional regulation.

Significant gender differences were observed using the Mann-Whitney U test in emotional regulation ($U = 8824$, $p = .001$). Women tend to use more adaptive strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal, while men often rely on suppression or avoidance (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012; Chaplin, 2015). Cultural and socialization patterns may contribute to this disparity, as women are often encouraged to express emotions and seek social support, whereas men may rely more on suppression or avoidance (Tamres et al., 2002). Future research should investigate potential mediators such as resilience and personality traits to better understand these gender-based differences.

Overall, the findings suggest that while impulsivity alone does not significantly impact emotional regulation, social support plays a crucial role. Future research should investigate potential mediators such as coping mechanisms and personality traits, along with gender-specific approaches to emotional regulation interventions.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the role of impulsivity and social support in emotional regulation among college students, examining their relationships, predictive influences, and gender differences. The findings provided valuable insights into these constructs.

The results revealed no significant relationship between impulsivity and social support, supporting H01. Similarly, no significant relationship was found between impulsivity and emotional regulation, confirming H02. However, a moderate positive relationship was observed between social support and emotional regulation, supporting H03. Furthermore, while social support significantly predicted emotional regulation, impulsivity did not, partially aligning with H04. Additionally, a significant gender difference was found in emotional regulation, leading to a partial rejection of H05.

These findings highlight the crucial role of social support in fostering emotional regulation among college students while suggesting that impulsivity may not play a direct role in this process. This could be because impulsivity is an individual trait that is influenced by other psychological and environmental factors. The gender differences observed indicate that emotional regulation strategies may vary between male and female students.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small and exclusively composed of college students, which may restrict the applicability of the findings to broader populations, such as working professionals, adolescents, or individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Future studies could benefit from expanding the sample to include a more diverse population.

Second, the study was conducted within a specific educational setting, meaning that the findings may not be directly applicable to individuals in other environments, such as workplaces or clinical settings. The influence of impulsivity, social support, and emotional regulation may vary across different life stages and contexts, necessitating further research in varied populations.

Additionally, this study only considered the total scores of impulsivity, social support, and emotional regulation, without analyzing their specific subcomponents. Each of these constructs has multiple dimensions that may interact differently. For example, impulsivity includes aspects including attentional, motor, and non-planning dimensions of impulsivity, each of which could have distinct relationships with emotional regulation and social support. A more detailed analysis of these subcomponents could provide deeper insights into the mechanisms underlying these relationships.

Moreover, the study relied on self-report questionnaires, potential biases, including social desirability bias or misjudgments in self-reporting, may have been introduced. Participants could have responded in a manner they believed to be socially acceptable rather than accurately reflecting their true experiences. Future research could incorporate objective behavioral measures, interviews, or reports from peers and family members to strengthen the reliability of the study's outcomes.

Mitigating these limitations in upcoming research may enhance the study's validity, broader applicability, and deeper understanding of the connection between impulsivity, social support, and emotional regulation.

Implications

The present study explored the impact of impulsivity and social support on emotional regulation among college students. The results highlight that social support demonstrates a moderate yet significant positive link on emotional regulation which aligns with previous findings (Zimet et al., 1988; Lopez et al,.2024). Furthermore, social support has found a significant predictor of emotional regulation, emphasizing its role in helping college students to manage their emotions effectively.

However, the study found no significant relationship between impulsivity and social support or between impulsivity and emotional regulation. This suggests that impulsivity, as a personality trait, may operate independently of external social resources and emotional regulation processes. Additionally, a significant gender difference was observed in emotional regulation, indicating that male and female students may use different strategies to regulate their emotions.

These findings contribute to the existing literature on emotional regulation theories, particularly Gross's Process Model of Emotion Regulation (1998), which emphasizes the role of external factors like social support in shaping emotional responses. The results suggest that social support may act as an external regulatory factor, helping individuals manage their emotions more effectively. On the other hand, the absence of significant association between impulsivity and emotional regulation challenges models that position impulsivity as a direct determinant of regulation strategies. Future research should explore whether other mediating factors, such as cognitive control or coping mechanisms, influence this relationship.

The study's findings have important practical applications for college mental health programs. The results indicated a significant role of social support in emotional regulation, universities and mental health professionals should prioritize peer mentoring programs, counseling services, and social skill development workshops to strengthen students support networks. Additionally, gender differences were observed in emotional regulation, interventions can be tailored to address the specific emotional coping styles of male and female students. The conducted study highlighted the importance of social support in fostering emotional regulation across college students while challenging the assumption that impulsivity directly influences regulation processes. Future studies should explore the role of mediating role of other factors such as stress, mindfulness, or cognitive flexibility to better understand the dynamics between impulsivity and emotional regulation.

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