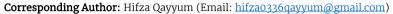
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Cultural Blueprints of Emotion: How Societal Norms Shape Expression, Regulation, and Well-Being

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Abstract: Emotional regulation is intimately tied to cultural practices, however, research regarding this correlation across socioeconomic lines remains scant. The need to understand cultural context as it regards emotional expression and regulation for the sake of psychological wellness remains salient. To explore cultural norms and emotional regulation strategies in the context of emotional wellbeing with a consideration of the moderating effect of socioeconomic status. A cross-sectional study design with a sample of 300 participants obtained through convenience sampling. The participants completed The Cultural Orientation Scale (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003), and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (Tennant et al., 2007). Data analysis was conducted using Pearson correlation, independent samples t-test, and one-way ANOVA to determine demographic differences. Found strong positive correlations between cultural norms and emotional expression (r = .88, p < .01), as well as cognitive reappraisal and emotional well-being (r = .78, p < .01). Males demonstrated greater self-reported scores on cognitive reappraisal relative to females (t = .78, t = .002). Also, socio-economic status served as a significant predictor of reported cultural norms (t = .88, t = .002). Also, socio-economic status served as a significant predictor of reported cultural norms (t = .297) = 4.89, t = .008) and emotional wellbeing (t = .78) = 5.90, t = .003). Emotional regulation strategies and the general well-being of an individual are shaped by cultural values which are of immense importance. These relationships, which have been affected by socioeconomic differences, present an opportunity for culturally specific psychological treatment programs.

Keywords: Cultural Norms, Emotional Regulation, Emotional Well-being, Socioeconomic Status, Psychological Adjustment

Introduction

Emotions have internal and social dimensions. On one hand, the cognitive and evaluative processes that occur within a person are considered intrapersonal functions while on the other hand, the social bonds and communication are considered interpersonal functions (Carroll et al., 2022; Orkibi et al., 2024). Emotions influence interactions deeply, but the way this happens differs across different cultures. While the ability to feel emotion is shared globally, the socio-cultural environment decides how expressed or controlled these emotions are (Burić et al., 2021). It impacts the overall wellbeing of a person and how they interact socially. These diversities require an analysis of the relationship between cultural values, emotional expectations, and psychological results (Dai et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

Rules of emotion display differ from culture to culture and refer to elements that a person is permitted to show in public and those that should be curbed (Yousefi Afrashteh & Hasani, 2022). Individualistic cultures like those in North America and Western Europe tend to value emotional expression as a means of personal self-identity and fostering communication (Davis & Hadwin, 2021; Orkibi et al., 2024). Emotions like happiness, anger, and pride are easily expressed as they are considered common and useful for self-genuineness and social interactions. On the other hand, collectivistic cultures such as those in East Asia and the Middle East focus on social harmony, which leads to some form of control of the emotional

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expressions by individuals for the sake of the smooth maintenance of the group (Scheibe, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2024). People in such cultures may choose to restrain or disguise emotions that can be socially destructive such as anger or frustration but will elicit those which are socially constructive like gratitude or humility (Vishkin, 2023).

The methods people use to regulate their emotions also differ within cultural contexts. Expressive suppression, defined as the volitional strategy of inhibiting emotional reactions or 'putting on a poker face,' is much more pronounced in collectivistic cultures that deem social harmony as paramount (Beard et al., 2023). Although this method could enhance social participation, extended use of this method has been shown to result in increased stress levels and lower well-being (Davis & Hadwin, 2021). On the other hand, cognitive reappraisal, which means changing the meaning of an emotional event so that its impact is different, is common in individualistic cultures with heavy emphasis on personal well-being (Gomez-Lopez et al., 2022). There are also differences in instrumental emotion coping strategies with interdependent cultures paying more attention to collaborative problem solving than independent cultures, which tend to promote coping with negative feelings of distress on one's own (Laban et al., 2024).

The effect of cultural standards on emotional regulation is of great consequence on one's emotions wellness. While there are societies where emotional suppression is a norm, individuals do not suffer from negative psychological impacts (Berasategi Sancho et al., 2022). On the contrary, people who step outside of the culturally accepted emotional norms may suffer emotional dissonance which manifests itself in form of stress, anxiety, or low life satisfaction (Shenaar–Golan et al., 2023). The cultural fit hypothesis assumes that well-being is derived from an individual's education and context. Thus, emotional regulation is a strategy that works within a cultural context depression which also determines its success (Wang et al., 2022).

Problem Statement

A person's expression and regulation of emotions are vital aspects of their psychological functioning, and variation in their expressions is often attributable to sociocultural differences. Many scholars have researched emotions and their universality (Kliziene et al., 2021; Clark et al., 2021). However, very few have studied how cultural display rules impact one's regulation and expression of emotions, which, in turn, affects one's emotional health. Individualistic cultures tend to encourage the free expression of emotion, while collectivistic ones tend to moderate emotional expression for sociocultural preservation. Still, the psychological outcomes of these regulatory policies are complex. For instance, high levels of emotional suppression are associated with greater levels of stress, versus high levels of emotional freedom being linked with social tension in some cultures. In consideration of the increasing globalization and crosscultural interactions, looking at the influence of culture on emotional well-being and regulation is critical. This study intends to fill the existing gap by analyzing how cultural norms affect emotional display rules and subsequently how these rules impact a person's emotional well-being.

Significance of the Study

The impact of culture on emotional expression and regulation is critical for psychology, mental health, and intercultural communication. This study focuses on emotional display rules within cultures, and serves mental health practitioners, educators, and policymakers aiming at achieving emotion-related holistic health interventions. In multicultural countries, understanding different approaches to emotional regulation helps improve social relations, decrease cultural conflicts, and develop culture friendly mental health initiatives. Ultimately, this study helps advance global psychological knowledge by investigating the impact of different emotional regulation approaches on a person's well-being in various cultural settings. The results should be helpful for cross-culture training development, improving emotional intelligence, and increasing respect towards different emotional cultures.

Aim of the Research

This study looks to analyze how emotional expression and regulation is influenced by cultural norms on the scope of emotional well-being. An effort is made to find differences in emotional regulation strategies like expressive suppression or cognitive reappraisal, and their effects in different cultures, particularly, within Ethiopian and American societies. This study is also set to try to understand the idea of cultural fit and emotional wellbeing by trying the test whether compliance to cultural emotional norms improves or retards mental health. The aim of this paper is to answer the question of how emotions are managed in different societies though the basic components of emotions are universal. The analysis seeks to enable further and deeper discussion on culture psychology and emotion regulation.

Methodology

The study implemented a cross-sectional survey research design to analyze how different regions of Pakistan were affected by cultural norms regarding emotional expression and regulation. This approach made it possible to measure the effects of emotional display rules on the well-being of respondents within a set timeframe. Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, and Quetta were the five major cities included in this study so as to capture varied social as well as cultural perspectives. Using a purposive non-probability sampling method, 300 participants were selected with the sample size being generated using G*Power sample size estimator. Pakistani citizens residing in the country and above the age of 18, educated and speaking Urdu or English were eligible. Those with any diagnosed psychological disorder or in treatment with a psychotherapist were not accepted into the sample to keep the sample homogeneous and avoid confounding. The methodology employed to collect information consisted of structured questionnaires given in person or online to cater for participants with various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Prior to the data collection process, The Institutional Review Board (IRB) provided approval and informed consent was to assure compliance to ethical guideline by APA such as voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and withdraw from the study at any point.

To analyses the cultural norms of the respondents, the study relied on the Cultural Orientation Scale (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) that reviewed social norms pertaining to hierarchy, emotional expressiveness, and collectivism. Some sample items are: "People should tell others the truth even if it angers them" and "Authority figures should be respected more than personal viewpoints." For measuring emotional wellbeing the study took advantage of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2007) that checked some positive emotions and thoughts with items such as "I have felt very positive about the future" and "I have been thinking and making up my mind with great ease." They were required to answer this question on a 5-point Likert Scale (1 = never, 5 = always). In order to study emotional regulation in different cultures, the study adopted the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003) which covered two primary components: Cognitive Reappraisal (6 items) and Expressive Suppression (4 items). This scale was shown to have good internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.79 for expressive suppression and 0.81 for cognitive reappraisal, thus was found to be reliable. Besides these, all participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire to gain basic details, such as age, gender, level of education, marital status, social class, and the town they live in.

In order to assess the interrelationships and group differences, SPSS version 28 was employed to enable descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis), reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha), as well as inferential statistics like Pearson product moment correlation, linear regression, independent sample t-tests, and ANOVA. The use of these techniques enabled systematic analysis of the provided data regarding cultural norms, emotional expression, and well-being. The study deepened the understanding of emotional expression within different cultures by demonstrating how cultural norms influenced the strategies for emotional regulation and emotional well-being. The results of the study pointed towards the need for reevaluation of mental health policies, interventions, and cross cultural psychology due to the emphasis on sensitive approaches regarding emotional wellbeing of different cultures.

Results Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 300)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
	Male	150	50.0
Gender	Female	140	46.7
	Other	10	3.3

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
	18-25	120	40.0
Age (Years)	26-35	90	30.0
Age (Teats)	36-45	60	20.0
	46+	30	10.0
	Primary	20	6.7
	Secondary	80	26.7
Education Level	Bachelor's	120	40.0
	Master's	60	20.0
	PhD	20	6.7
	Low	100	33.3
Socioeconomic Status	Middle	140	46.7
	High	60	20.0

Table 1 shows that participants (N = 300) had 50% male representation, 46.7% female and 3.3% other, indicating almost equal gender distribution. Most participants (40%) were within the 18–25 age bracket, earned a bachelor's degree (40%), and were within the middle socioeconomic status (46.7%).

 Table 2

 Correlations between Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Cultural Norms	3.85	0.78	-	-	-	-	-
2. Emotional Expression/ Regulation	3.55	0.72	.41**	-	-	-	-
3. Cognitive Reappraisal	3.28	0.65	.32**	.69**	-	-	-
4. Expressive Suppression	3.72	0.81	.37**	.79**	.78**	-	-
5. Emotional Well-being	3.61	0.70	.46**	.88**	.78**	.79**	-

The Pearson correlations for the different study variables are shown in Table 2, where all cultural norms, emotional expression norms, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, and emotional wellbeing had significant positive correlations, the strongest being emotional expression norms with emotional wellbeing (r = .88, p < 01).

Table 3Independent Samples t-Test for Gender Differences in Study Variables

Variable	Gender	M	SD	t	df	p
Cultural Norms	Male	3.89	0.76	1.85	288	0/0
Cultural Norms	Female	3.78	0.79	1.05	200	.049
Emotional Expression Norms	Male	3.65	0.68	1 52	288	0/1
Emotional Expression Norms	Female	3.57	0.71	1.52	200	.041
Cognitive Reappraisal	Male	3.72	0.70	2.12	288	.002
cognitive keappraisai	Female	3.38	0.73	3.12	200	.002
Expressive Suppression	Male	3.40	0.64	25/	288	.012
Expressive Suppression	Female	3.17	0.63	2.54	200	.012
Emotional Well-being	Male	3.79	0.79	2.02	288	0//
Emotional wen-being	Female	3.63	0.82	2.02	200	.044

Table 3 shows the results of the independent samples t-test for the gender differences in the study variables, which indicated that males dominated the scores for cultural norms, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, and emotional wellbeing as compared to females (p < 0.05), hence revealing the differences in emotions regulation strategies between female and male participants.

Table 4One-Way ANOVA for Socioeconomic Status and Study Variables

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
	Between Groups	6.24	2	3.12	4.89	.008
Cultural Norms	Within Groups	188.71	297	0.64		
	Total	194.95	299			
	Between Groups	7.12	2	3.56	4.77	.009
Emotional Expression	Within Groups	221.93	297	0.75		
	Total	229.05	299			
	Between Groups	9.41	2	4.70	6.33	.002
Cognitive Reappraisal	Within Groups	220.32	297	0.74		
	Total	229.73	299			
	Between Groups	3.82	2	1.91	3.26	.040
Expressive Suppression	Within Groups	174.09	297	0.59		
	Total	177.91	299			
	Between Groups	8.67	2	4.34	5.90	.003
Emotional Well-being	Within Groups	218.63	297	0.74		
	Total	227.30	299			

The results of the one-way ANOVA for the effect of socioeconomic status on the differences in means of the study variables is presented in Table 4, which show significant effects for all the variables (p < .05) where those of higher socioeconomic status had stronger cultural norms, emotional expression norms, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, and emotional wellbeing.

Discussion

The Emotional Health and Cultural Norms Everyday Perceptions Study explains the intersection between cultural norms, emotional management, and psychological health or emotional well-being. In this case study, the participants hailing from cultures that practice collectivism and verticality had a prominent tendency towards what is called Expressive Suppression and this aligns to the prior study conducted by Gubler et al., (2021). This particular research further supports the claim that societies with high social desirability (where people demonstrate behaviors and traits that are culturally accepted) utilize emotional suppression or hiding one's emotions as a means of coping strategy to sustain group harmony as Hofstede (2001) would put it.

Moreover, societies that maintain the Expressive Suppression norm have the tendency of there being low Emotional Wellbeing when assessed clinically. This underlines the concept that emotion expression habits has a profound impact in open attitude societies aimed at nurturing positive emotional health. Supported by previous studies, Riforgiate et al., (2022), ascribed the power of psychologic recovery stemming from the possibility of disclosing emotions or stress that highly contributes towards well-being. Furthermore, Cognitive Reappraisal as a strategy was also demonstrated to positively affect emotional well-being which is in continuity as this strategy of regulation is viewed to be adaptive in different cultures according to Steinert & Dennis (2022).

There were evident gender differences regarding the emotion regulation strategy used. Males scored higher on expressive suppression, while females showed a higher usage of cognitive reappraisal. This is in accordance with previous studies suggesting that males in collectivist societies tend to suppress emotions more because of societal standards around masculinity (Wang et al., 2023). The results from the independent t-test also show that the use of emotional regulation strategies is, indeed, different across genders, which indicates the impact of stereotypical gender expectations on emotional coping.

The results of the ANOVA analysis proved that cultural norms, emotional regulation, and emotional well-being were considerably influenced by socioeconomic status. People from higher socioeconomic statuses had greater use of cognitive reappraisal and emotional well-being, which is consistent with other studies that point toward the financial security having a positive effect on psychological resiliency and

coping resources (Modak et al., 2023). On the other hand, lower socioeconomic status groups tended to show higher levels of expressing emotions, which could be attributed to higher stress levels and lower psychological resources needed to cope with stress.

These findings help to develop the existing literature on sociocultural and psychological factors about emotional regulation by corroborating evidence that cultural standards along with socioeconomic variables are essential in processes related to emotional health. The strong correlation between emotional expression norms and well-being emphasizes the importance of providing universal health coverage with culturally sensitive methods for healthy emotional regulation. Moreover, the role of cognitive reappraisal in emotional well-being is profound; therefore, mental health interventions should work towards better mental health through easing cognitive reframing exercises.

Although informative, due to the Cross Sectional nature of this study, the data did not permit determining causality. Additionally, this study sought to understand the interplay of cultural and socioeconomic information in relation to emotional regulation strategies developing socially acceptable mental health interventions which can be used at the community level. Further studies need to explore these associations by employing cultural context over a significant period of time, hence using longitudinal approaches is advisable.

Future Directions

Future research should study the impact of cultural changes, like globalization and digital communication, on emotional regulation strategies over time. Longitudinal and cross-cultural studies examining other regions and populations would shed further light on the changes in emotional display rules over time. Also, research on interventions like cognitive reappraisal training programs tailored to particular cultures could improve emotional functioning at both the individual and societal levels.

Limitations

Although this research makes important contributions, there are some limitations that need to be noted. This study relied on self-reported measures which could result in biases due to social desirability and the emotional regulation socially constructed view. Also, the study was conducted in five major cities, which may not be generalizable to rural areas that may have different cultural and economic normative and socioeconomic standards. Future studies need to cover a wider geography and add qualitative approaches to capture the emotional regulation experience.

Conclusion

In this particular study, we appreciate the importance of cultural customs and socioeconomic conditions within a society concerning emotional regulation approaches and well being. The results highlight that cognitive reappraisal is an important predictor of psychological health, but more expressive suppression exists in collectivistic, lower socioeconomic groups. These findings broaden the understanding of regulation of emotions in culturally diverse systems and suggest that future studies should focus on developing effective mental health programs that consider cultural and societal contexts.

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