



Impact of Emotional Regulation, Parental Autonomy and Social Media Use on Self

Compassion among Adults

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Abstract

Rising unemployment, growing mental health issues and lack of equitable resources are a growing concern in a country like India. The sample in this study, 18-30 years, face a myriad of issues that are of grave concern. The moment people reach their eighteen, they enter adulthood and face a significant change in their identity, especially related to their career growth. The ever-changing societal pressure takes a forefront in their life, and they struggle with building their own identity. Lack of good self-esteem along with self-compassion lowers their performance. On top of this, the increased use of social media fuels their insecurities. Lack of healthy supportive parental relationships also plays a huge role in lowered emotional regulation. All of these concerns just make it difficult for the sample to build a healthy sense of independent self. Emotional regulation is the ability to manage your emotions while parental autonomy is a parenting style that involves an environment that supports a child's need to be autonomous and independent. Social media use involves a form of recreation activity that people take part in to entertain themselves like watching Snapchat, doom-scrolling Instagram. Self-compassion concept involves being kind to oneself, being your own support system and being a forgiving person when things go hard. A total sample of 43

respondents in the age group of 18-30 years was collected. Standardized scales are used to measure variables, Emotional Regulation, Parental Autonomy, Social Media Use and Self-Compassion. The purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of emotional regulation, parental autonomy and social media use on self-compassion in the chosen sample. The results found a significant relationship between Self compassion and emotional regulation, self-compassion and autonomy support and self-compassion and social media use. Social media usage is also found to be significantly correlated with difficulties in emotional regulation. It has been suggested to practice mindfulness, practice cognitive reappraisal and inculcate breathing exercises for improved emotional regulation and self-compassion in oneself.

Keywords: *Emotional regulation, parental autonomy, social media use, self-compassion*

Introduction

"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion"- Dalai Lama

The present study aimed to investigate how a person's self-compassion is affected by one's capacity to regulate one's emotions, one's experience with one's parents since childhood and social media use. The sample aged 18-30 years face a significant developmental journey, transitioning from adolescence into early adulthood. This phase eventually ends in an attainment of full maturity by the age 30. Emotional regulation requires the ability and capacity to manage your emotions-particularly the overwhelming ones. Parental autonomy requires building a strong, healthy and supportive environment for one's children. Excessive use of social media, for example, doom-scrolling Instagram reels, YouTube really hinders one's productivity. Self-compassion is a habit to stay kind and forgiving to oneself especially during hard times. The present sample often reveals a lack of self-worth and heightened increase in self-judgement. Several interconnected factors like

one's poor relationship with one's parents in childhood along with a lack of emotional regulation and excessive use of social media which is a platform that feeds comparison, and jealousy could be the possible reasons for such poor emotional states.

Bluth and Blanton (2015) researched on a study titled "Mindfulness and Self-Compassion: Exploring pathways to Adolescent Emotional well-being" on 9-12th grade students. A total of 67 adolescents was collected from an urban high school. The scales used were Children and Adolescent Mindfulness measure (CAMM), Positive and Negative Affect scale (PANAS), Self-compassion Scale (SCS), Student's Life satisfaction scale (SLSS) and Perceived Stress scale (PSS). The results found significant relationship between mindfulness and emotional health, both acting as mediators for better mental well-being. The study suggested teachers to make interventions that fostered and taught adolescents how to be mindful and compassionate towards oneself for better mental health.

A study titled "Social Media Use and Perceived Social Isolation Among Young Adults in the U.S." by Primack et al. (2017) on 1787 adults of 19-32 years age. The study aimed to explore the relationship between Perceived social isolation (PSI) and social media use. Scale used was a four-item scale developed by the Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System Scale (PROMIS). The results concluded that young adults with high social media use (SMU) felt more socially isolated than their counterparts with less social media use.

A study titled "Self-compassion as an emotion regulation strategy in major depressive disorder" by Diedrich et al. (2014) was conducted on 48 clinically diagnosed patients above 18, diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder (MDD). The data was collected by conducting a Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Axis I and Axis II for mental Disorders (SCID). The results concluded that self-compassion works as an adaptive strategy for emotional

regulation in patients with Major Depressive Disorder, especially for those suffering from high levels of depressed mood.

Recent survey research done on various cities in America under The Muhammad Ali Index debuted “The 2025 Commission Report” through Net Compassion Score (NCS) revealed many troubling trends. The results concluded growing polarization, with 70% Americans stating that they feel a desire for reduced aggressive political rhetoric while 61% of Americans say that they felt a decrease in compassion in the last four years. Respondents also claimed a decrease in empathy towards marginalised groups. It was found that only 1 in 3 Americans felt compassionate about marginalised groups of all people with lowest compassion levels for people with crimes, illegal migrants and higher socio-economic classes. Female respondents were also found to have less self-compassion than males. On the other hand, it was found that there has been an increase by 40% over the past 5 years when it comes to compassion related online searches. The report also identified five layers of compassion- for self, for groups, for local area and nation. It was also found that one third of U.S. adults had below average self-compassion metrics. It was also reported that 2 out of 3 people preferred to learn about compassion from everyday people rather than from political leaders, social leaders or experts.

Emotional Regulation

Emotion regulation refers to the “processes by which we influence emotions we experience, when we experience them, and how we experience and express them”. (Gross, 1998)

Emotion regulation consists of the extrinsic and intrinsic process responsible for monitoring, evaluating and modifying in emotional reactions (Thompson, 1994). Emotion regulation has been defined as the processes individuals use to manage both their internal experience and the external expression of emotions (Gratz & Tull, 2010; Gross, 2013).

Examples include directing one's attention away from the cause of a negative emotion; cognitively reappraising the cause of the negative emotion; and accepting, discharging, or suppressing a negative emotional state (Gross, 2013; Webb, Miles, & Sheeran, 2012).

A study by Schreiber et al. (2012) titled "Emotional regulation and Impulsivity in Young Adults" found a link between emotional regulation, dysregulation and impulsive behaviour. The study concluded by analysing 194 young adults (27.8% females, age range: 21.3 +/- 3.32 years old, 91.8% single, 85.1% Caucasian) by grouping them as high, low and average in emotional dysregulation and compared that with impulsive behaviours. The scales used were Difficulties in Emotional Regulation scale (DERS-16) to measure emotional dysregulation, rater reported assessments were used- Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview (MINI), Yale Brown Obsessive Compulsive Scale for Pathological Gambling (PG-YBOCS), Self-Reported Assessments- Eysenck Impulsivity Questionnaire (EIQ), Barratt Impulsivity Scale (BIS), The Tridimensional Personality Inventory (TPQ) and the Padua Inventory- the Washington State University Inventory Revision (PADUA). Certain cognitive assessments were done too. The conclusion was that emotion regulation should be considered an important factor while assessing individuals with higher risk of developing an addiction.

A study titled "Neural Circuits of Emotion Regulation: a comparison of Mindfulness based and cognitive reappraisal strategies" by Opialla et al. (2015) investigated emotional regulation of fifty-three participants, using Functional magnetic resonance (fMRI) by applying mindfulness and cognitive reappraisal strategies on 24 subjects and 23 subjects respectively. Various self-reported questionnaires were done that assessed Depression, Anxiety, Neuroticism, Extraversion and emotion regulation. The scales used were Self-Rating Depression Scale (SDS), State Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), Eysenck personality inventory (EPI) and emotion regulation questionnaire (ERQ). Mindfulness self-report questionnaires were used as well. The results concluded that mindfulness strategies and

cognitive reappraisal strategies employ similar neural brain circuits during emotional stimulation.

A study by Amendola (2018) titled “The Relationship between difficulties in emotion regulation and dysfunctional technology use among adolescents” was conducted on 280 Italian students from two Italian public secondary schools aged 11 to 18 years (51.1% males). The scales used were The Internet Addiction Test, Video game dependency scale, The Brief Multicultural version of the test of mobile phone dependence and the difficulties in emotional regulation scale. The results concluded that lack of emotional regulation and social media addiction are linked and that effective strategies need to be there to solve this issue. The study suggested making a longitudinal study to find a direct causal relationship between the two while simultaneously employing a multidisciplinary perspective.

Parental Autonomy

Autonomy support refers to the active support of the child’s capacity to be self-initiating and autonomous (Ryan et al., 2006). Parental autonomy support relates to the extent to which parents allow children freedom of choice, as well as to actively discover, explore and articulate their opinions and choices. It is positively associated with children’s academic achievement, psychosocial functioning, psychological health among others (Vasquez et al., 2015).

A study by Ma et al. (2022) titled “Parental Autonomy Support and Mental Health among Chinese adolescents and Emerging adults: The Mediating role of self-esteem” conducted a study on 1617 adolescents aged 10-17 years and 1217 emerging adults aged 17 to 26 years. The research was conducted in two studies with first study conducting its survey using Parental autonomy support questionnaire, Self-esteem scale and satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) and the emotional symptoms subscale of the Strengths and difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) while the second study employing the same scales and adding another

scale to measure depressive symptoms using Centre for Epidemiological Studies Scale (CES-D). Gender, Age and family socioeconomic status (SES) of subjects were also taken to be covariates in both studies. The findings concluded that parental autonomy support was positively associated with life satisfaction and negatively linked with emotional problems with self-esteem acting as a mediator between the two. The study suggested changing parental styles and improving individual self-esteem among adolescents and emerging adults.

A study by Laurin and Joussemet (2017) titled “Parental Autonomy Supportive Practices and toddlers’ rule internalization: A prospective observational study” was conducted on 2 and 3.5 years of age toddlers and study was conducted in two groups, T1 and T2. The survey was conducted through observation in which the toddlers were given tasks and activities to perform: Kochanska and colleagues ‘do’ socialization contexts and certain ‘don’t’ situations too. The results concluded supporting a toddler’s autonomy in socialization context fosters rule internalisation.

Social Media Use

According to Bayer et al. (2020): social media are “computer-mediated communication channels that allow users to engage in social interaction with broad and narrow audiences in real time or asynchronously.”

Kietzmann et al. (2011) defined social media with a broad stroke in that social media “employ(s) mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content”

A study titled “Use of social media platforms among adults in the United States-Behaviour on Social Media” by Hruska and Maresova (2020) was conducted on 2002 samples above age 18 in the U.S. The study was conducted through cell phones and landlines random digit dialled samples and sampling for this was provided by Survey Sampling

International. The study concluded that High income households use social media a lot. The study also found that with age, social media usage has decreased significantly.

A study titled “Self-compassion moderates the predictive effects of social media use profiles on depression and anxiety” by Phillips and Wisniewski (2021) was conducted on three hundred undergraduate Australian students in the age range of 18 to 71 years. The survey was conducted by measuring six variables indicative of social media use: time spent on social media, frequency of social media use, problematic social media use, perception of social media interactions, emotional responses to social media use and Fear of missing out (FOMO). Other scales used were the modified version of the core affect scale, the Depression Anxiety and Stress scale (DASS-21), Short form of the Self-Compassion Scale. The research found that self-compassion protects vulnerable social media users against anxiety and depression.

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is defined as “a felt response to suffering that involves caring and an authentic desire to ease distress” (Goetz, Keltner & Simon-Thomas, 2010). Compassion is a fundamental aspect in Buddhist Psychology, not only entailing being in contact with suffering, but also involving a profound commitment to relieve this suffering (Lama, 1995, Neff, 2003).

A study titled “The effect of self-compassion on social media addiction among college students- The mediating role of gratitude” (Wei, 2024) conducted a study on 1131 university Chinese students of which 519 were males and 612 were females (45.9% males and 54.1% females respectively). The study employed self-compassion scale, gratitude questionnaire and Bergen social media addiction scale on its sample. The results of the study concluded that positive self-compassion reduced social media addiction by fostering gratitude among the sample while negative self-compassion increased social media addiction and

diminished gratitude levels. The study suggested that mental health professionals develop better strategies to prevent social media addiction and educational institutions develop self-compassion development strategies for college students.

A study titled “Self-compassion in relation to Alexithymia, Empathy and Negative mood in young adults” by Lyvers et al., (2020) was conducted on 253 young adults aged 18-30 years who were recruited from two Australian universities. The responses were conducted via survey hosting website. The samples were administered validated measures of Alexithymia, Self-compassion and empathy. Results found that there was negative correlation found between alexithymia and self-compassion and empathy, and the latter two variables were positively correlated with each other. Alexithymia was also found to be a negative predictor of self-compassion in a hierarchical regression model.

A study titled “Mediating role of self-compassion, emotional regulation on the relationship between and psychological distress” by Keel and Pidgeon (2017) was conducted on 89 university Australian students. The scales used were the self-compassion scale (SCS), the depression, anxiety and stress scale (DASS-21) and the cognitive emotional regulation questionnaire short (CERQ). The results found that there was a significant negative correlation found between self-compassion and psychological distress, depression, stress and anxiety. Emotional regulation was also found to be significantly negatively correlated with psychological distress (including depression, anxiety and stress). A significant positive relationship was found between self-compassion and emotional regulation. Significant positive relationships were also found between psychological distress, depression, stress and anxiety. It was suggested to make interventions for inculcating compassion amongst Australian students to have better emotional regulation especially when it comes to lowering depression.

Purpose

The purpose is to study the impact of emotional regulation, parental autonomy and social media use on self-compassion among adults (18-30).

Hypothesis

H1: There will be a significant positive relationship between social media use and difficulties in emotional regulation.

H2: There will be significant negative correlation between difficulties in emotional regulation and self-compassion

H3: There will be significant negative correlation between self-compassion and social media use.

Method

The study was conducted on a sample of 43 respondents of which 38 were females and 5 were males. The age range of this sample was between 18-30 years. The measures used were **Difficulties in emotional regulation scale (DERS-16)** developed by Bjureberg et al., (2016). This 5-point likert scale had 16 items and the responses ranged from: Almost Never (1), Sometimes (2), About half of the time (3), Most of the time (4) and almost always (5). The second measure used was **Perceived Parental Autonomy Support Scale (P-PASS)** developed by Mageau et al., (2015). This 5-point scale had 24 items and the responses had to be scored from a likert scale by choosing one response from Do not agree at all (1), Hardly agree (2), Slightly agree (3), Somewhat agree (4), agree (5), strongly agree (6) and very strongly agree (7). The third measure was the **Social Media Use Scale (SMUS)** developed by Tuck and Thompson (2024). SMUS utilized a 9-point likert scale to measure social media usage. The responses ranged from Never (1), 1-2 times per week (2), 3-4 times per week (3), 5-6 times per week (4), Once daily (5), 2-5 times daily (6), 6-9 times daily (7), 10-13 times daily (8) and Hourly or more (9). The last measure used was the **Self-compassion scale**

(SCS) developed by Neff (2003). The scale used was a likert 5-point scale with responses ranging from Almost never (1) to Almost always (5). The responses were collected using google forms online and prior consent was taken from the respondents to fill the form.

Procedure

The study was conducted through an online survey created using Google Forms. Participants were informed about the voluntary nature of their participation, assured of their anonymity, and provided with an option to give informed consent before proceeding. Participants were requested to complete the questionnaire at their convenience. Upon submission, they were thanked for their participation. No personally identifiable information was collected to maintain confidentiality.

The survey included standardized scales to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected. The scales used were Emotion Regulation Scale, Perceived Parental Autonomy Scale, Social Media Use Scale and Self-Compassion Scale.

Analysis of Data

Results

Table 1: *N, Mean and Standard Deviation*

	Difficulties in Emotional Regulation	Autonomy Support	Psychological Control	Social Media Use	Self- compassion
N	43	43	43	43	43
Mean	31.6	61.6	37.0	8.76	13.6
Standard Deviation	8.85	12.3	12.3	3.51	1.90

Table 2: Correlation

	Difficulties in Emotional Regulation	Autonomy Support	Psychological Control	Social Media Use	Self- compassion
Difficulties in Emotional Regulation	—				
Autonomy Support	0.020	—			
Psychological Control	0.215	-0.220	—		
Social Media Use	0.463**	-0.012	0.045	—	
Self- compassion	-0.466**	0.365*	-0.147	-0.371*	—
Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$					

Discussion of results

As per the first hypothesis (H1), the result of the present study demonstrated a positive significant correlation between social media use and difficulties in emotional regulation ($r = 0.463$, $p < .01$). The second hypothesis (H2) proved a significant negative correlation between self-compassion and difficulties in emotional regulation ($r = -0.466$, $p < .01$). The third hypothesis, (H3) also came out to be true- a significant negative correlation was found between self-compassion and social media use ($r = -0.371$, $p < .05$). A significant

positive correlation was also found between self-compassion and Autonomy support- a subscale of parental autonomy ($r = 0.365$, $p < .05$).

A study supporting ***hypothesis 1***, titled “Adult Attachment Style, Emotion Regulation, and Social Networking Sites Addiction” by Liu and Ma (2019) was conducted on 463 college students. The scales used were the short version of the Experience in close relationships scale (ECR-SV), Difficulties in Emotional regulation scale (DERS-16) and Chinese Social media addiction scale. The study examined the mediating role of emotion dysregulation on association between insecure attachment and social networking sites addiction. Results of the study found that emotional dysregulation partly mediated relationship between social networking sites addiction and anxiety attachment. Further extant studies also found that people high in emotional dysregulation often used internet for mood alteration which can lead to internet addiction (Lei and Wu, 2007).

A study supporting ***hypothesis 2*** by Verger et al., (2021) titled “High Artistic Achievements and Low Emotion Dysregulation: The Moderating and Mediating Role of Self-compassion” was conducted on 168 participants. The scales used were the Creative Achievement Questionnaire (CAQ), Difficulties in emotional regulation scale (DERS-16) and Self-compassion scale (SCS). The results found that significant relation between high artistic achievements and low emotional dysregulation was mediated by self-compassion.

A study supporting ***hypothesis 3***, titled “Social Media Addiction, Self-Compassion, and Psychological Well-Being: A Structural Equation Model” by Mitropoulou et al., (2022) was done on 255 Greek adults. The scales used were the Bergen Social Media Addiction scale, The Self-Compassion scale and the Depression, Anxiety and Stress scale. The results found that individuals with high levels of self-compassion tended to report fewer social media addictive behaviour and distress.

A study titled “A Helping Hand Isn’t Always So Helpful: Parental Autonomy Support Moderates the Effectiveness of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation for Emerging Adults” by Newman and Davis (2023) was conducted on 194 emerging adult college students. The scales used were the Interpersonal Regulation Interaction scale (IRIS) and the Perceived Parental Autonomy Support scale. The results of this study found that higher levels of support, parental emotional responsiveness and cognitive support related to higher perceived interpersonal emotional regulation effectiveness. The study concluded that autonomy support likely plays a meaningful role in the effectiveness of various Interpersonal emotional regulation processes. This study supported the result finding of our present study which states a positive significant correlation between self-compassion and autonomy support (a subscale of parental autonomy).

Conclusion

Rising unemployment, growing mental health issues and lack of equitable resources are a growing concern in a country like India. The sample in this study, 18-30 years, face a myriad of issues that are of grave concern. The moment people reach their 18, they enter into adulthood and face a significant change in their identity, especially related to their career growth. The ever-changing societal pressure takes a forefront in their life and they struggle with building their own identity. Lack of good self esteem along with self-compassion lowers their performance. On top of this, couple this with the increase in social media use which just fuels their insecurities. Lack of healthy supportive parental relationships also plays a huge role in lowered emotional regulation. All of these concerns just make it difficult for the sample to build a healthy sense of independent self. Emotional regulation is the ability to manage your emotions while parental autonomy is a parenting style that involves an environment that supports a child’s need to be autonomous and independent. Social media use involves a form of recreation activity that people take part in to entertain themselves like

watching Snapchat, doom-scrolling Instagram. Self-compassion concept involves being kind to oneself, being your own support system and being a forgiving person when things go hard.

This study was done on 43 participants. The age group of the sample was 18-30 years. Standardized scales were used to measure variables- Emotional Regulation, Parental Autonomy, Social Media Use and Self-Compassion. The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of emotional regulation, parental autonomy and social media use on self-compassion in the chosen sample. The results found a significant relationship between Self compassion and emotional regulation, self-compassion and autonomy support and self compassion and social media use. Social media usage was also found to be significantly correlated with difficulties in emotional regulation. It has been suggested to practice mindfulness, practice cognitive reappraisal and inculcate breathing exercises for improved emotional regulation and self compassion in oneself.

To improve emotional regulation, one needs to get into a habit of staying mindful, journaling, and inculcating meditation practises. Healthy supportive relationship with parents is crucial for healthy identity so parents should strive to be empathetic with their children. Parents should strive to listen to their children, take their children's perspective into consideration too. Social media and its increased usage interfere with one's emotional health so the chosen sample should limit its use by staying mindful of when they use it the most. Limiting social media use requires effort, consistency and hard work so one should start this journey by limiting their use rather than stopping its usage at once. Self-compassion requires being a kind person to oneself. Various self-help books, resources are available which help manage your expectations and emotions. Setting realistic expectations and forgiving yourself at hard times are some of the suggestions people with low self-compassion should strive to develop.

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