

## **How emotion regulation and emotion regulation strategies can help the victims to cope with bullying?**

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### **Summary:**

Emotion regulation refers to a process by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them and how they experience and express their feelings.

Emotion regulation can be automatic or controlled, conscious or unconscious and may have effects at one or more points in the emotion producing process. This paper focuses on how emotion regulation and its strategies can help the victims to cope with bullying by laying the framework of two chief modals. Subsequent potential areas for further research on this topic are also mentioned.

## **How Emotion Regulation and Emotion regulation strategies can help the victims to cope Bullying?**

One out of every five (20.2%) students report being bullied. 41% of students who reported being bullied at school indicated that they think the bullying would happen again.

Of those students who reported being bullied, 13% were made fun of, called names, or insulted; 13% were the subject of rumors; 5% were pushed ,shoved, tripped, or spit on; and 5% were excluded from activities on purpose. ( [National center for educational statistics, 2019](#))

### **Bullying:-**

School bullying, like bullying outside the school context, refers to one or more perpetrators who have greater physical or social power than their victim and act aggressively toward their victim by verbal or physical means. This behavior is not a one-off episode; it must be repetitive and habitual to be considered bullying.

Students who have parents of lower educational levels, are thought to be provocative, are perceived to be vulnerable, or are typical or considered outsiders, are at higher risk of being victimized by bullies. Baron (1977) defined such aggressive behaviour as behaviour that is directed towards the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment.

The results show that bully-victims are perhaps the most vulnerable group of all. This group may turn to bullying after being bullied themselves as they may lack the emotional regulation or support required to cope with it.

First, I will summarize the Process model by James J. Gross followed by the Regulatory Flexibility Model by Bananno and Burton to lay out a framework for the Research paper. Later I will talk about the consequences of emotion regulation failure and emotion misregulation. Finally I will discuss the strategies that could be applied to effectively regulate emotions for coping up with the effects of Bullying.

### **But before that it is essential to understand what Emotion Regulation is?**

Emotion Regulation is the term generally used to describe a person's ability to effectively manage and respond to an emotional experience (Gross, 1990; Gross, 2013).

People make conscious and unconscious efforts to change their own positive and negative emotions, and the way these emotions are expressed (Gross, 2007). These processes have been labelled emotion regulation. Emotion Regulation has received great attention (Gross, 2015), as the use of maladaptive Emotion Regulation strategies has been shown to be a strong predictor of psychological disorders, and ineffective interpersonal functioning (Richards & Gross, 2000).

As noted by Gross (2007), one of the main issues when studying Emotion Regulation is to find a way to organize the possible limitless number of Emotion Regulation strategies.

To that aim, research with adults has mainly been conducted under the paradigm of the Process Model of Emotion Regulation (Gross, 2015). The Process model of Emotion Regulation relies on the Modal Model of Emotion which considers that the emotion generation process occurs in a particular sequence, and different Emotion Regulation strategies can be categorised on the basis of their temporal location along the emotion generative process. At the broadest level, actions are

classified as antecedent-focused (i.e., strategies that are employed before an emotional response has become fully activated) or response-focused, (i.e., those adopted after an emotional response has already been generated).

Antecedent-focused strategies involve: 1) Situation selection (i.e., taking actions that make it more or less likely that one will end up in a situation, that will give rise to desirable or undesirable emotions), 2) Situation modification (i.e., efforts to directly modify the situation to alter its emotional impact), 3) Attentional deployment (i.e., redirecting one's attention within a given situation in order to influence one's emotions through concentration or distraction), and 4) Cognitive change (i.e., modifying how one appraises the situation in order to alter its emotional significance, either by changing how one thinks about the situation or about one's capacity to manage the demands it poses).

Finally, response-focused strategies include 5) Modulation of response (i.e., regulation of emotion-expressive behavior). Thus, by knowing which Emotion Regulation strategy has been activated it is possible to identify what component of the emotional experience has been targeted. Further in the model Gross discussed two specific strategies to down-regulate emotion. One is Reappraisal and the other one is Suppression.

Reappraisal is a type of cognitive change process whereby individual's attempts to modify their thoughts to alter the emotional response. It is antecedent focused response, activating before the full emotion response kicks in.

The second strategy that has been focused on is suppression, it is a behaviourally orientated tactic in which emotion-expressed behaviour is decreased when emotionally aroused (Gross, 2013). It is response-focused, and is activated when the emotion is already underway.

Later in the paper Gross mentions various consequences of Emotion misregulation which included Affective, Cognitive and Social consequences.

An example of emotion misregulation could be -If a victim of Bullying tries to suppress his emotions as an emotion regulation strategy but ends up enclosing them for a long time which results in a psychological disorder such as depression.

While much of the research on emotion regulation has been guided by Gross's highly influential Process model and the proposition that emotion regulation strategies differ in terms of when they have their primary impact on the emotion-generation process (Gross, 1998; Gross & Thompson, 2007), I will also be referring to a newer model by Bananno and Burton, the Regulatory Flexibility Model.

Although stress and coping theory emphasized that coping efficacy was a matter of fit between the strategy and ongoing situational demands, in practice researchers and theorists have tended to catalogue specific coping strategies as either adaptive or maladaptive. It has been generally assumed, for example, that problem-focused coping strategies are considerably more adaptive than emotion-focused coping strategies. However, Bananno and Burton seem to disagree as they stress that emotion regulation strategies are not inherently "good" or "bad". They consider the tendency to assign a value judgment about the consistent efficacy or consistent lack of efficacy of a particular emotion regulatory strategy as the fallacy of uniform efficacy.

Next they introduced the concept of regulatory flexibility as an alternative to the categorical perspective and considered how this perspective differs from other recent reviews of the coping and emotion regulation literature. They proposed three sequential components of regulatory flexibility—1) Context Sensitivity, 2) Repertoire, and 3) Responsiveness to feedback—with a particular emphasis on individual differences.

## **Context Sensitivity**

Context sensitivity implies to be sensitive about the content. The efficacy of any particular behavior or emotion regulation strategy will also tend to depend on context (Aldao, 2013; Folkman, 1984; Gross, 1998; McCrae, 1984; Sheppes et al., 2012; Tamir, 2009). Bananno and Burton argues that many stressor situations provide relatively clear contextual cues about the impinging demands and opportunities, and in such situations it is possible to estimate with considerable confidence what the most effective regulatory strategy might be. However, in stress situations where the contextual demands and opportunities are less readily decoded, determination of the most appropriate or effective regulatory strategy becomes more of a best guess among plausible alternatives.

For instance:-If there are two victims who were bullied for their physical appearances. They could involve disengagement or distraction as the most efficacious coping strategy or they could choose to face the bullies based on the context of the situation.

## **Repertoire:-**

Selection of the appropriate emotional regulation strategy. Researchers found that participants who reported using a greater number of coping strategies were less distressed and, importantly, showed less impact of cumulative life stress. By contrast, participants who reported using fewer types of coping were more distressed and had greater distress at higher levels of cumulative life stress.

Building a robust repertoire is very essential as it provides you with the capacity to choose from a greater number of regulatory strategies.

For instance:-While being bullied the victims could choose from a variety of regulatory strategies to cope up with stress, such as disengagement(distraction), reappraisal(cognitive reappraisal) based on the situation one is in.

### **Responsiveness to feedback:-**

The ability to monitor feedback about the efficacy of the regulatory strategy that has been enacted and to adjust that strategy if it needed a few adjustments, end the strategy, or select a new regulatory strategy as needed. The feedback stage is essential as it involves evaluation of the regulatory strategy selected. Researches argues that inclusion of feedback in flexible emotion regulation assures not only implementation but also maintenance of the regulatory strategy chosen.

Returning to the example discussed earlier, the victims of bullying who chose distraction as their coping strategy realised during feedback that the strategy was not working efficiently and needed some adjustments, so along with distraction they decided to build on a finer personality with the aim to elevate their confidence.

But there are times when individuals tend to misregulate their emotions. Research showed that both victims of bullying often use ineffective coping or emotion regulation strategies . Children who experience problems in regulating their anger even show increased levels of victimization. While not much is known yet about the effect of maladaptive emotion regulation strategies on performing acts of cyberbullying behavior, one study showed that adolescents who find themselves less able to use and regulate emotions are more at risk to become a victim of cyberbullying . Furthermore, research focusing on traditional bullying showed that one of the main predictors of both being a traditional bully and a victim of bullying is the inability to deal

with feelings of anger . Since anger is an important predictor of cyberbullying behavior , it is therefore pivotal to know whether the way adolescents regulate their anger affects their cyberbullying behavior.

In this respect, there exist multiple suggested effective strategies to cope with bullying. Lonigro et al. (2014) suggest that anger-management programs could be an effective manner to reduce prevalence rates of both traditional bullying and cyberbullying behavior.

Individuals who believe in their ability to cope are less likely to become distressed in the face of threatening situations and are more able to control negative thoughts and to take actions to reduce the risk of harm from negative events. This framework is highly applicable to bullying where the control of negative thoughts and adaptive actions are important in reducing maladjustment for victims .

Self-efficacy for proactive behavior captures an individual's capacity to enact behaviors such as support seeking, problem solving, assertiveness, and conflict resolution. These behaviors have been deemed to be effective in managing negative peer interactions . Self-efficacy for avoiding aggressive behavior encapsulated children's belief in their ability to forgive and for avoiding responses such as revenge seeking, which have been associated with the escalation of victimization and greater risk of psychological harm.

Children's level of distress in response to being harassed is also influenced by their behavioral responses. The use of proactive strategies such as conflict resolution and support seeking have been associated with less distress for victimized children . It's expected that children who do not feel efficacious about proactively handling their victimization would have feelings of hopelessness, lack of control, and powerlessness which would be associated with depression. Further, lower confidence in their ability to proactively respond to the victimization would also

be expected to lead to greater fears of being rejected by their peers (i.e., social anxiety), as they may feel their peers view them as “weak” given they have been unable to defend themselves . Positive cognitive distortions from adaptive schemas that were learned in childhood, such as self-compassion strategies (thinking “I am worthy of love and kindness” to restore self-esteem) and emotion regulation strategies (thinking “I have the control over how I react to this situation” to regain a sense of control) can also be used as coping strategies.

So to conclude, emotion regulation is the ability to exert control over one’s own state by adapting various regulatory strategies. My research question- how emotion regulation and emotion regulation strategies can help the victims to cope bullying is answered by the above mentioned strategies that are used to regulate emotion in different situations. An individual’s ability to build a robust repertoire and effectively implement and monitor regulatory strategies such as reappraisal, suppression, disengagement can help them to cope with not only bullying but various stressful situations. The problem/issues that remain today are even though various anti-bullying measures are being enforced, bullying is still a very dominant issue prevailing in schools, workplaces, etc. There is a lot of scope in this field of research and future studies can explore what can be the plausible reason for an individual to bully. If I were to continue my research on this topic, I would conduct a survey on therapies that could be used by the victims to cope with bullying.

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