

Cognitive Reappraisal, Stress Resilience And Self Compassion Among Young Adults

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Abstract

Background: Cognitive Reappraisal, Self-Compassion and Stress Resilience are major psychological resources that influence how individuals deal with emotional difficulties in everyday life. Due to increasing academic, social, and work-related pressures among young adults in India, awareness of these internal coping mechanisms has become increasingly important. This study is grounded in established theoretical frameworks such as the Gross Process Model of Emotion Regulation, where cognitive reappraisal is viewed as an adaptive emotion regulation strategy (Gross, 1998), and Neff's Self-Compassion Theory, which emphasizes responding to personal challenges with kindness rather than self-criticism (Neff, 2003). Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between cognitive reappraisal, self-compassion, and stress resilience among young adults.

Materials and Methods: The study was conducted on a sample of 242 young adults using an online survey method. Cognitive reappraisal was measured using the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire Short Form (ERQ-S), stress resilience was assessed using the Resilience Evaluation Scale (RES), and self-compassion was measured using the State Self-Compassion Scale Short Form (SSCS-SF).

Results: The findings revealed a positive and significant relationship between cognitive reappraisal and stress resilience. A moderate positive correlation was observed between stress resilience and self-compassion. However, no significant correlation was found between cognitive reappraisal and self-compassion. Additionally, a significant gender difference was identified in cognitive reappraisal and self-compassion, whereas no significant gender difference was found in stress resilience.

Conclusion: The study highlights the role of cognitive reappraisal and self-compassion in contributing to stress resilience among young adults. These findings have important implications for counselling and mental health interventions, suggesting that promoting emotion regulation strategies, resilience-building approaches, and self-compassion practices can enhance overall psychological well-being.

Keywords: Cognitive Reappraisal, Self-Compassion, Stress Resilience, Emotion Regulation, Young Adults, Psychological Well being

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I. Introduction

Young adulthood is a developmental period during which academic pressure and identity construction can be high, often affecting mental health and normal functioning. Within this context, emotion regulation processes become crucial in determining how individuals respond to stress. According to the Process Model of Emotion Regulation given by Gross (2015) suggests that cognitive reappraisal is defined as the change in the meaning of the negative experience regarding stress. The empirical results always tend to indicate that the cognitive reappraisal correlates with reduction of distress and enhancement of emotional well-being (Aldao et al., 2010). In a more comprehensive adaptation view, stress resilience with resilience models proposed by Masten (2014), states that it is the ability to adapt to adversity and come out of negative events. This adaptive capacity allows young adults to cope successfully with academic demands and social stressors. Theoretical combination of emotion regulation and resilience models hypothesize that cognitive reappraisal serves as a central process by which people reappraise stressors, which enhances resilience and facilitates the developmental flexibility in the face of current demands. Despite the fact that all three constructs play a role in psychological wellbeing few studies have investigated the relationship between cognitive reappraisal, self-compassion and stress resilience in young adults who are exposed to stressors in modern life. Therefore, the aim of the current research is to study the correlations between cognitive reappraisal, self-compassion and stress resilience among young adults to gain a clearer insight into how these emotional resources work together to promote a healthy lifestyle.

II. Literature Review

Young adulthood is a stage of development that is characterized by a great deal of academic pressure, a changed social status and identity construction. The listed pressures predispose one to the effects of psychological stress and it is necessary to learn about the emotional processes that facilitate wellbeing and adaptation. Two adaptive emotion regulation techniques such as cognitive reappraisal and self-compassion have already received significant research interest, since young adults who successfully apply these methods are more likely to exhibit emotional adjustment, lower levels of distress, and higher levels of resilience (Burnham, 2022; Prentice et al., 2021). This review is a synthesis of theoretical and empirical contributions that the authors use to explain the role of cognitive reappraisal and self-compassion in stress resilience among young adults, present major theoretical frameworks and call out gaps in the existing literature to justify the current research.

Cognitive reappraisal is a process of changing the meaning of a stressor in order to change the way it affects the person. Reappraisal activities often lead to resilience to stress and individuals reframe the difficulty in a manner that does not harm their psychological wellbeing (Stover et al., 2024). McRae and Gross (2016) also note that reappraisal improves adaptive emotional function and promotes healthy coping. It is a pre-existing approach based on the Process Model of Emotion Regulation by Gross (1998), which acts as an intervention between the pre-existing and the complete formation of emotional reactions.

Self-Compassion as a Regulatory Process of mindfulness.

Self-compassion can be defined as being kind to oneself, recognizing common humanity, and having emotional stability. Increased self-compassion makes young adults less susceptible to emotional fluctuations as it is found to increase resilience (Bluth and Blanton, 2018; Chandra, 2022; Sirois et al., 2023). Neff (2009) noted that self-compassion reduces self-criticism and emotional reactivity and facilitates more adaptive responses to stress. Self-compassion is a protective mechanism which prevents emotional dysregulation.

Stress Resilience as a Consequence of Adaptive Emotional Processes.

Resilience is the ability to change and recover from adverse situations. Theoretical literature defines resilience as a dynamic process that is defined by the regulatory skills. Cognitive reappraisal is one of the essential resilience building processes that supports positive reinterpretation of adversity (Riepenhausen et al., 2022). On the same note, self-compassion facilitates resilience by ensuring that individuals are not overwhelmed by distress (Neff, 2009). These results indicate that cognitive as well as emotional strategies are important in the process of building resilience.

Integrated Theoretical Perspective

The new theoretical viewpoints explain that cognitive reappraisal and self-compassion work together. Self-compassion lowers the obstacles to effective reappraisal that can be common (shame and self-judgment) hindering the effectiveness of self-compassion making it more successful (Diedrich et al., 2016). The existing models of emotion regulation emphasize that integrating emotional and cognitive strategies are more effective in promoting a greater resilience in young adulthood.

Cognitive Reappraisal and Psychological Adjustment.

The advantages of cognitive reappraisal are always backed by empirical findings. Stover et al. (2024) also confirmed that when the use of reappraisal is frequent it is related to better wellbeing and resilience. The authors showed that young adults who had a stronger cognitive control demonstrated the ability to use reappraisal in response to stress more effectively (Lin et al., 2022). A similar study done by Kalsi and Bains (2021) also revealed that frequent application of reappraisal leads to less emotional distress and adaptive functioning.

Self-Compassion as a Defensive Process.

The role of self-compassion is highlighted in studies involving various groups of people. Similar results were found by Chandra (2022) that self-compassion is related with resilience and less stress among South Asian students. Prentice et al. (2021) stated that greater self-compassion expected to lower mental distress and emotional wellbeing. Bluth and Blanton (2018) found that self-compassion leads to resilience and healthier coping mechanisms among adolescents and young adults.

Cognitive Reappraisal Interaction with Self Compassion.

It is proposed that reappraisal and self-compassion go hand in hand with each other. Burnham (2022) established that the two strategies relieve anxiety and emotional distress in social stressful situations. Randomized intervention trials by Preuss et al. (2021) reported that reappraisal, self-compassion interventions have similar effects on emotional distress in the COVID 19 pandemic with self-compassion having a slightly stronger impact on emotional recovery. Diedrich et al. (2016) revealed that self-compassion improves the effectiveness of reappraisal especially in people who are self-critical.

Stress Resilience as a Consequence of Reappraisal and Self-Compassion.

Both reappraisal and self-compassion play an important role in stress resilience. As noted by Sirois et al. (2023), self-compassion leads to a decrease in self-criticism that allows people to be more efficient in managing their emotions and overcoming stress. Riepenhausen et al. (2022) states that reappraisal reinforces resilience through facilitating positive reinterpretation of challenges. It has been indicated that self-compassion improves the quality of reappraisal by reducing the level of emotional resistance (Diedrich et al., 2016). As the model of Gross (1998) suggests, these strategies are the complementary processes of the mind and emotion which are mutually reinforcing and should be looked at in combination. Taken together the studies indicate that cognitive reappraisal and self-compassion are both important factors in promoting stress resilience in young adults. Reappraisal is a cognitive process which alters the perception of stress and self-compassion is an emotional process which decreases self-judging and enhances emotional stability. Although there is considerable evidence of the relationship between cognitive reappraisal and self-compassion and stress resilience, current studies are constrained by their cross-sectional designs and lack of research into how these strategies operate within different cultural groups and stressful situations. There is limited research examining how cognitive reappraisal and self-compassion work together. These gaps demonstrate the necessity of the research with a greater variety of samples, multi method evaluation and designs that could explain the causal relationships between cognitive reappraisal, self-compassion and resilience in young adults.

III. Material And Methods

Research design: The study design adopted was a correlational research design that was used between cognitive reappraisal, stress resilience and self compassion among young adults.

Participants / sample: Sample size consisted of young adults (18 - 40 years old) who took part in a survey link that was offered by the social networks and personal contacts online. The total of 242 survey responses were collected from participants including students, employed individuals and homemakers between 18 to 40 years. The subjects must be able to read and answer English based questions and also give informed consent. The final sample size reflects the practical recruitment available for the study and is consistent with sample sizes used in similar research.

Instruments and measures: The research involved three self-report measures that were standardized. The reliability (Cronbach) and each critical evidence of validity is presented as applied to each of the instruments below.

Resilience Evaluation Scale (RES) : A 9 item self-report measure of perceived self-confidence and self-efficacy in the presence of difficulty. A 5-point Likert scale was used to introduce the items the higher the score the stronger the person is. It was calculated by summing up the 9 items of the scale. The Cronbach of the total score of the RES is good ($=.81$) and subscales (Self Confidence $=.83$ Self Efficacy $=.76$) and the factor analytic and convergent validity also prove the evidence. (Dai et al., 2024).

Emotional Regulation Questionnaire Short Form (ERQ-S): ERQ-S is a 6-item short scale which measures two common emotion regulation strategies (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression). The current study used all the six ERQ-S items. The subjects were evaluated with the help of the 7-point Likert scale (1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree). The scores were computed based on the ERQ-S scoring instructions. The validation study shows that the ERQ-S has an internal consistency on an overall level (Cronbach $=0.81$) and on the factorial and construct validity is reported in the samples. (Preece et al., 2023).

State Self Compassion Scale Short Form (SSCS-SF): Self compassion was measured with the 6 item SSCS-SF. The Rapid, compassion, common humanity, and mindfulness are evaluated on participants. These six items were applied in this study and answers were indicated within a 5-point Likert scale. When an item consists of negative wording it was reverse scored and then summing was done. Items which are negative were reverse scored before the summing. The development is reported in the state self-compassion scales where their validation research has a good internal consistency of the short version (Cronbach $= 0.86$) and has demonstrated the presence of factorial and construct validity. (Toth-Kiraly et al., 2021). The scale scores were also added up as per the scoring rules that were presented by the instruments. Then it was converted into reverse scored items and totals were calculated. The higher the score is the more the individual is being kind to themselves.

Procedure: The data were collected using an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was initiated with the participant who had accepted to participate will move to the demographics section and the three psychometric measures. None of the information that can be personal to a particular person was not received the answers were

stored in the secure account of the researcher and the analysis was performed on the collected information. The general ethics was employed in the research methodology in terms of online survey (voluntary participation, confidentiality, right to withdraw).

Data analysis: The analysis was done using SPSS statistics (statistical package for social science). All the variables of the study and significant demographics were determined and calculated with the help of descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, range). Normality was tested using the Shapiro Wilk test and the distribution characteristics were considered. Non-parametric procedures were adopted. Correlations between cognitive reappraisal and stress resilience and self-compassion were tested with the help of the Spearman rank order correlation. Non-Parametric tests were used for the comparison between groups of people considering demographic variables. Mann Whitney U tests were employed for gender and Kruskal Wallis tests for relationship status, academic qualification, living situation, gadget use, overthinking levels. The p-value was to identify statistical significance of $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

IV. Results

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Percent (%)
Gender - Female	129	53.3
Gender - Male	113	46.7
Current Status - Student	93	38.4
Current Status - Employed	85	35.1
Current Status - Unemployed	18	7.4
Current Status - Self-employed	34	14.0
Current Status - Others	12	5.0
Relationship Status - Single	130	53.7
Relationship Status - Unmarried	20	8.3
Relationship Status - Married	90	37.2
Relationship Status - Widowed	1	0.4
Relationship Status - Divorced	1	0.4

Primary Analyses

Table 2 Correlations of Study Variables

Variables	M	SD	CR	SR	SC
<i>Cognitive Reappraisal</i>	29.71	5.90	-	-	-
<i>Stress Resilience</i>	23.62	7.77	.224**	-	-
<i>Self-Compassion</i>	19.09	3.07	-.028	.395**	-

Note: CR = Cognitive Reappraisal; SR = Stress Resilience; SC = Self-Compassion
Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

Rank Order Spearman Correlations was carried out to answer the research questions of the study. There was a positive and significant relationship between cognitive reappraisal and stress resilience ($\rho = .224, p = .000$). There was moderate positive correlation between stress resilience and self-compassion ($0.395, p = .000$). There was no major correlation between cognitive reappraisal and self-compassion ($-.028, p = .660$).

Secondary Analyse

Table:3 Mann Whitney U test results

Variables	Mann Whitney U	Z	p
Cognitive Reappraisal	6208.500	1.991	.46
Stress Resilience	6785.000	-.928	.354
Self-Compassion	5449.500	-3.417	.001

To show gender differences among the variables A Mann Whitney U test was performed. Results indicated significant differences for Cognitive Reappraisal ($p = .046$) Self-Compassion ($p = .001$) No significant gender differences were found for stress resilience ($p = .354$).

Kruskal-Wallis

Table:4 Kruskal Wallis results from the study

Variables	Relationship Status	p	Current Status	p
	χ^2		χ^2	
CR	15.073	.005	9.296	.054
SR	3.390	.495	9.197	.056
SC	1.303	.861	9.062	.060

Note: CR = Cognitive Reappraisal; SR = Stress Resilience; SC = Self Compassion

Kruskal Wallis test was used for demographic variables including relationship status, educational qualification, living situation, gadget use and levels of overthinking showed differences in psychological variables. Kruskal Wallis test results showed that relationship status produced significant differences only in cognitive reappraisal and levels of overthinking produced significant differences in stress resilience and self compassion. All other demographic variables did not show significant differences in any of the three psychological variables.

V. Discussion

This study examined the relationship between cognitive reappraisal, stress resilience and self-compassion among young adults based on the key theoretical perspectives from emotion regulation and resilience research. The correlational findings partially aligned with the proposed hypotheses. As expected, cognitive reappraisal showed a significant positive relationship with stress resilience. This aligns with Gross's Process Model of Emotion Regulation (1998, 2015), which defines reappraisal as a strategy that helps to modify emotional responses by changing the meaning of stressful events. Young adults who reframe challenging situations may be better adapted to academic and relational pressures consistent with actual work showing a reappraisal role in reducing distress and promoting resilience (Aldao et al., 2010; McRae & Gross, 2016).

Stress resilience also showed a positive relationship with self-compassion supporting theoretical views that self-compassion acts as an emotional support during difficult situations. According to Neff's (2003, 2009) model of self-compassion protects individuals from being affected by stress through kindness and mindful emotional awareness. This result supports findings showing that self-compassion increases recovery from emotional difficulty and strengthens coping mechanisms. (Bluth & Blanton, 2018; Sirois et al., 2023).

However opposite to earlier literature (e.g., Diedrich et al., 2016), cognitive reappraisal did not correlate with self-compassion. This suggests that within this sample the cognitive reframing of stressful events and the emotional stance of self-kindness may function as distinct strategies rather than mutually reinforcing processes. This is an important difference from theory that self-compassion reduces barriers like shame or self-criticism to effective reappraisal, indicating that these mechanisms may operate independently depending on individual differences, stress contexts or cultural norms (Huang, Lin, Wang & Du., 2025).

Significant gender differences in cognitive reappraisal and self-compassion were shown by the Mann Whitney U test with women generally reporting lower levels of self-compassion. This is consistent with research indicating that young adult women face more internalized stress and self-criticism (Yarnell et al., 2018). Gender differences in stress resilience were not statistically significant indicating that emotional resources and cognitive habits may have a greater influence on resilience than demographic identification.

Significant differences in cognitive reappraisal between relationship status groups were found by the Kruskal Wallis test. This demonstrates how relational dynamics affects people's cognitive responses to emotionally charged situations. People in secure relationships for example, might rely on stronger emotional resources that allow for more adaptable perspectives on stressors.

Stress resilience was found to differ significantly among current status categories (e.g., students, employed individuals, homemakers). These differences can be due to the various stress demands carried on by tasks at home, job responsibilities, or academic pressure.

There were not any noticeable differences in other demographic factors, like living situation, gadget use, or level of education. This suggests that psychological traits like overthinking or interpersonal situations like relationship status may have a greater impact on these emotional variables than structural or environmental demographics. Overall, these results show that although resilience, self-compassion, and cognitive reappraisal have connections, they are also influenced by individual situations and ways of coping.

First the positive association between cognitive reappraisal and stress resilience reinforces Gross's (1998) model, confirming that reappraisal increases the adaptive emotional regulation by reframing stressors in ways that reduce emotional distress. This supports the idea of reappraisal remains a central mechanism in promoting psychological stability during emerging adulthood.

Second, the strong relationship between self-compassion and resilience supports Neff's (2003, 2009) theoretical framework and mindfulness-based emotion regulation models suggest that conceptualize self-compassion as a protective factor against emotional dysregulation. These findings extend prior theoretical work by showing that level of self-compassion as measured in this study plays a meaningful role as a supporting factor under everyday stress.

The lack of a relationship between cognitive reappraisal and self-compassion shows that current ideas about how people regulate emotions may not fully explain how these two skills work in young adults. Some theories suggest that thinking strategies and self-kindness naturally support each other but our findings suggest that this may not always be the same case for everyone. The strong effect of overthinking on both self-compassion and resilience also suggests that any explanation of these emotional skills should include the role of overthinking since it can interfere with healthy coping.

Lastly, when describing how young adults use these regulatory methods, emotion regulation theories must consider related and interpersonal variables into consideration, as shown by the observed demographic differences, particularly differences across gender, relationship status, and cognitive styles.

Practical Application

The results suggest a number of important applications for counselling interventions, environments for learning, and psychological practice.

1. Improving Cognitive Reappraisal Abilities

Professionals in mental health may think about including cognitive reframing exercises into therapy programs for young people because of the significant connection between reappraisal and resilience. These therapies may help people in giving more adaptable explanations of stressors, and improve their emotional recovery when faced with challenges in their academic, professional, or personal life.

2. Encouraging Practices for Self-Compassion

With the significant correlation between resilience and self-compassion, mindfulness based self-compassion training may be helpful in decreasing emotional tiredness and improving coping. People with high levels of overthinking, who often struggle with self-kindness and emotional balance, could find this very helpful.

3. Specialized Help for Subgroups at Risk

Relational and gender differences show that interventions for emotional regulation should be specifically designed for Interventions aimed at reducing self-criticism and improving emotional awareness may be helpful to women in stressful or shifting relationship phases as well as those with strong overthinking tendencies.

4. Benefits in Academic and Professional Environments

Workshops that combine self-compassion methods with reappraisal training can be put into universities and organizations. These kinds of initiatives may improve resilience in difficult situations that improve wellbeing and help young adults deal with performance pressure.

Limitations

The survey's participants were from both India and other nations which includes differences in ways of coping and emotional responses and limits how broadly the findings can be applied to a particular cultural group. Because convenience sampling limits representation, the results may not be common for every young adult from different backgrounds.

Recommendation for future research

Researchers can explore more using longitudinal designs to understand how cognitive reappraisal, self-compassion and resilience change over time and influences psychological adjustments. Future research work should investigate additional psychological variables like rumination, anxiety to accurately explain the correlations between these variables. Future studies can include larger and more diverse samples

VI. Conclusion

- The study showed a strong relationship between stress resilience and cognitive reappraisal. Self-compassion's function as a psychological buffer that supports greater emotional functioning was highlighted by its weak positive relationship with stress resilience.
- Male showed greater use of cognitive reappraisal strategies and higher self-kindness. Whereas females use cognitive reappraisal strategies less frequently.

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