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Emotion regulation strategies as mediators between resilience to helplessness-depression and flourishing among Syrian refugees in Istanbul – Turkey

Abstract: Previous studies reported that mental health and emotion regulation strategies deteriorated in the refugee sample. The main goal of the study was to analyze the mediation effect of emotion regulation strategies as expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal between resilience to helplessness – depression and flourishing. The second aim was to determine to what extent emotion regulation strategies and resilience to helplessness-depression predicted flourishing. Forty-seven Syrian refugees, aged 18-64, who were settled in Istanbul fulfilled the coping competence questionnaire (CCQ), the flourishing scale, and the emotion regulation questionnaire (ERQ). The serial mediation analysis indicated that expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal had a significant indirect mediating effect between resilience to helplessness-depression and flourishing. Multiple regression analysis showed that expressive suppression was a negative predictor of flourishing. However, both cognitive reappraisal and resilience to helplessness – depression were positive predictors of flourishing. Moreover, ERQ, flourishing, and CCQ scales showed good internal reliability consistency scores in the refugee group. The study suggested that improvement in emotion regulation strategies may be a helpful strategy in the therapeutic setting.

Keywords: *Helplessness, depression, flourishing, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, emotion regulation*

INTRODUCTION

Turkey has hosted 3.6 million Syrian refugees (The UN Refugee Agency, 2020). Approximately 1 million 850 thousand of them were between 18 to 64 years old (The Interior Ministry of Turkey, 2021). The majority of Syrian people settled in Istanbul with a 528 thousand population. Refugees need psychological support after changing their environments. The study reported that about 60 percent of the individuals who abandoned Syria exposed to nine or more traumatic experiences (Chung et al., 2020).

Traumatic experiences led to an increase in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression symptoms. The research which compared participants who lived in Syria and Turkey found that individuals who stayed in Syria were vulnerable to agoraphobia, panic disorder with agoraphobia, and generalized anxiety disorder, whereas people who settled in Turkey had a higher level of depression and anxiety symptoms (Tekeli-Yesil et al., 2018). It can be interpreted that Syrian individuals who were not able to move out from their homeland had excessive stress resulting in panic disorders.

However, people who were rescued and were able to reach Turkey had a highly traumatic reminiscence. The majority of the participants' family members had experiences in the war. Forty percent of individuals reported testimony of a crime. Those folks who were victimized had a lack of opportunity to find a counselor due to language difficulties (Kaya et al., 2018).

In addition to language barriers, economic situation, and cultural expectations between Turkish and Syrian cultures had a high impact on cultural adaptation (Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al., 2021). Adaptation to the environment and integration in society play an important role in psychological well-being. Social integration, acculturation strategies, and psychological well-being were related to each other. It was predicted that when people had a high level of group efficacy, their life satisfaction elevated. Flourishing was positively correlated with integration with the host culture. On the other side, discrimination undermined flourishing (Bagci & Canpolat, 2020).

Flourishing is to be a crucial factor in the refugee's sample since flourishing was positively related to life satisfaction, less pessimism, and less perception of lone-

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liness (Diener et al., 2010). Flourishing was highly correlated with daily mood regulation and curiosity (Drake et al., 2021). When people performed a high level of flourishing, their resilience to psychological disturbance increased (Uysal, 2015). It was found that flourishing affected cognitive reappraisal of emotion and coping strategies (Vally & Ahmed, 2020). Therefore, an optimal level of flourishing is required for a high function of hope, quality of social interaction, cognitive, and coping strategies.

As individuals implemented cognitive reappraisal strategies, their social skills improved (Cutuli, 2014). Nevertheless, the dominance of using expressive suppression strategies was the determiner of PTSD, anxiety, and depression symptoms in the victimized group (Moore et al., 2008). Furthermore, expressive suppression was an indicator of PTSD symptoms such as avoidance numbing, and hyperarousal (Chukwuorji et al., 2017).

The experimental research demonstrated that social inhibition was positively correlated with expressive suppression. Expressive suppression activated the sympathetic nervous system, while cognitive reappraisal affected the parasympathetic nervous system. Improvement in cognitive reappraisal was a helpful strategy for socially inhibited people (Duijndam et al., 2020). Expressive suppression also adjusted people's physiology and pumped up the heart rate, decreased somatic activity (Gross & Levenson, 1993), and increased blood pressure (Butler et al., 2003). It can be highlighted that the cognitive reappraisal system regulates body functions and cognitive-emotion strategies. Cognitive reappraisal strategies were found to mediate the amygdala activity (Buhle et al., 2014). The study based on refugees in South Korea demonstrated that people who had a high level of expressive suppression were at risk of suicidal thoughts (Park et al., 2018). Hence, activating cognitive reappraisal strategies and deactivating expressive suppression may be helpful to decrease the stress-related symptoms and modulate the cognitive patterns of refugees.

Dysfunctional cognitive emotion regulation strategies adversely modified mood disorders such as depression and anxiety among Syrian refugees in Germany of refugees in Germany (Demir et al., 2020). In addition to that Syrian refugees lost their hope and motivation in Turkey. They were not reluctant to harmonize with the society. Their perception of social support decreased that led to a high level of pessimistic ideas about their future (Yildirim et al., 2020).

Pessimistic thoughts about the future may induce learned helplessness (Abramson et al., 1989). The coping competence questionnaire (CCQ) measures the level of resilience to helplessness-depression. It was suggested that the CCQ was negatively related to neuroticism, stress reaction, and aggression, whereas it was positively correlated with well-being, consciousness, and perception of achievement (Schroder & Ollis, 2013). It was found that 23 percent of flourishing's variance was explained by both mindfulness and CCQ (Akin & Akin, 2015). Hence, it can be said that CCQ was an important factor in increase resilience in refugees.

The study goal was to analyze the relationship between flourishing, resilience to helplessness-depression, emotion regulation strategies as cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. The second aim of the research was to determine the effects of resilience to helplessness-depression, cognitive reappraisal, and expressive suppression on flourishing. The third target of the research was to ascertain the effects of resilience to helplessness – depression on flourishing that mediated via expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal.

METHOD

Participants

In the study, there were 47 Syrian refugees (Males $n=30$, 63.8%) who settled in Istanbul. Participants were contacted via the Syrian Nur association. The mean age of participants was 33.28 ranging from 18 to 64 ($SD = 10.5$). The mean year of moving to Turkey was 4.5 years ranging from 2 to 8 years ($SD = 1.7$). Detailed information on the sample is shown in Table 1. Participants completed the coping competence questionnaire (CCQ), flourishing, and emotion regulation questionnaire (ERQ) scales via the paper-pencil method. Individuals did not gain any benefit from the study. The inclusion criterion for the study was to be above 18 years old.

Table 1. Demographic Variables

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
	<i>n</i>	(%)
Gender		
Female	17	36.2
Male	30	63.8
Occupation		
Student	9	9.1
Unemployed	7	19.1
Missing	31	66.0
Education		
Primary	5	10.6
High School	25	53.2
University	15	31.9
Missing	2	4.3

Materials

Coping Competence Questionnaire

The coping competence questionnaire (CCQ) which is related to helplessness, hopelessness, and depression was developed by Schroder and Ollis (2012). The CCQ has 12 descriptions about one's perception of failures, feeling hopelessness, and helplessness (e.g., "I lose faith in myself when I make mistakes"). The scale is ranged from 1 = ("Very uncharacteristic of me") to 6 = ("Very characteristic of me"). All of the items were reversed and calculated. The higher scores suggested higher resilience to learned helplessness-depression. In the current study,

the Turkish version of CCQ (Akin et al., 2014) was translated into the Arabic language by a Syrian person who was graduated from the Turkish department. The scale had a high internal reliability score (Cronbach Alpha=.82).

Flourishing Scale

The flourishing scale consists of statements about the perception of the meaning of life, quality of social relationships, happiness, engagement in activities, and perception of self. The original version of the flourishing (Diener et al., 2010) scale had 8 statements (e.g., "I am optimistic about my future") ranging from 1= ("Strongly disagree") to 7 = ("Strongly agree"). The Arabic version of the flourishing scale (Salama-Younes, 2017) was used in the Syrian refugees' sample. The higher scores indicated higher levels of flourishing. The scale had a high internal reliability score (Cronbach Alpha=.83).

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

The emotion regulation questionnaire (ERQ) is divided into two categories. Expressive suppression includes 4 statements (e.g., "When I am feeling positive emotions, I am careful not to express them") and cognitive

Data Analysis

The study was computed by SPSS, version 26. Normal distribution and non-parametric tests analysis were determined checking skewness, kurtosis, and standardized z-scores of kurtosis and skewness. It was suggested z-scores between -1.96 and +1.96 for small samples ($n < 50$) are considered as normally distributed (Kim, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Moreover, some authors also suggested that z scores ranging between -2 and +2 were accepted as a normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2010). In the study, z scores of skewness and kurtosis in all scales were reported between -1.96 and +1.96 (see table 2). Therefore, the study was computed using parametrical tests. Pearson correlation test measured the relationship between resilience to helplessness-depression, flourishing scale, and emotion regulation strategies as cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. T-Test independent was used to explain the effects of gender on these variables. Multiple regression analysis was implemented to predict the effects of coping competence, and emotion regulation strategies on flourishing. Flourishing was chosen as a dependent variable, while CCQ and ERQ were independent variables. The serial mediation analysis

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Measure	Mean	SD	Kurtosis (SE)	Skewness (SE)	Kurtosis (Z)	Skewness (Z)
CCQ	51.4	10.9	-.76, (.68)	.35, (.68)	-1,11	-1.38
CR	4.8	1.2	-.09, (.68)	-.12, (.35)	-.14	-.36
ES	4.2	1.2	.05 (.68)	-.35, (.35)	.07	-1.01
Flourishing	46.3	7.9	-.74, (.68)	-.48, (.35)	-1.09	-1.39

Note. SD= Standard Deviation, CCQ= Resilience to helplessness-depression, CR= Cognitive Reappraisal, ES= Expressive Suppression, SE= Standard Error, Z= Standard Score

reappraisal has 6 descriptions (e.g., "When I'm faced with a stressful situation, I make myself think about it in a way that helps me stay calm"). The original version of the scale (Gross & John, 2003) comprised 10 items ranging from 1 = ("Strongly disagree") to 7 = ("Strongly agree"). The Turkish version of ERQ (Koc et al., 2019) was translated into the Arabic language by a Turkish person who was graduated from the Arabic language department. The scale had a good internal reliability score (Cronbach Alpha=.70).

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Test

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. CCQ	-			
2. ES	-.31*	-		
3. CR	-.09	.50	-	
4. Flourishing	.45**	-.25**	.30*	-

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, CCQ= Resilience to helplessness-depression, CR= Cognitive Reappraisal, ES= Expressive Suppression

Table 4. Multiple regression analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients			95.0% CI	
	Estimate	SE	p	LL	UL
CCQ	.40	.132	.004	.134	.666
ES	-.32	.113	.007	-.549	-.095
CR	.46	.115	.000	.224	.687

Note. CCQ= Coping Competence, ES=Expressive Suppression, CR=Cognitive Reappraisal
DV=Flourishing, R2=425, Adj. R2=385, CI=Confidence Interval, LL=Lower Limit, UL=Upper Limit

of the PROCESS model 6 was used to determine the effects of resilience to helplessness-depression on flourishing mediating via expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal. The first mediator was expressive suppression and the second one was cognitive reappraisal. 95 % bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (CI) of indirect effects with 5,000 bootstrap samples were computed. To detect the significance level, the assessment criterion was confidence intervals to be not crossing zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Moreover, since the study had a small sample size the G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) was used to reveal the sample size power of the Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis. The type of power of the bivariate correlation model was the post hoc two tails model. The test's name for the multiple regression was the linear multiple regression, fixed model, R2 deviation from zero. Because after study the G*Power was detected, post hoc test was computed.

RESULTS

It was found that Syrian refugees had a high level of cognitive reappraisal ($M = 4.8$, $SD = 1.15$) and expressive suppression ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 1.2$). Resilience to helplessness-depression ($M = 51.4$, $SD = 10.9$) and flourishing ($M = 46.3$, $SD = 7.9$) were at the optimal level.

Pearson correlation showed that flourishing was positively correlated with resilience to helplessness-depression ($r = .45$, $p = 0.002$) and cognitive reappraisal ($r = .30$, $p = 0.04$). Resilience to helplessness-depression was negatively related to expressive suppression ($r = -.31$, $p = 0.03$).

Multiple linear regression analysis indicated that flourishing was explained with 38.5 percent of variance by resilience to helplessness-depression, expressive suppression, and cognitive reappraisal emotion regulation strategies; $F(3, 43) = 10.58$, $p = 0.001$. It was found that

both cognitive reappraisal ($B = .46$, $SE = .13$, $p = .0001$) and resilience to helplessness-depression ($B = .40$, $SE = .11$, $p = .004$) positively predicted flourishing, while expressive suppression negatively predicted flourishing. ($B = -.32$, $SE = .11$, $p = .007$).

Serial Mediation analysis with the model of 6 was measured. Expressive suppression was a mediator 1, and cognitive reappraisal was a mediator 2. Both of them together indirectly mediated the effects of resilience to helplessness-depression on flourishing. The direct pathway from resilience to helplessness-depression to expressive suppression was negatively significant ($B = -.14$, $SE = .06$, $p = .03$). The direct pathway from resilience to helplessness-depression to cognitive reappraisal was not significant ($B = .05$, $SE = .20$, $p = .59$), while the direct pathway from expressive suppression to cognitive reappraisal was significant ($B = .74$, $SE = .19$, $p = .0004$). The direct pathway from resilience to helplessness-depression to flourishing was significant ($B = .27$, $SE = .09$, $p = .004$). The direct effect of expressive suppression on flourishing was negatively significant ($B = -.64$, $SE = .23$, $p = .006$), and the direct effect of cognitive reappraisal on flourishing was positively significant ($B = .61$, $SE = .15$, $p = .0003$). The total effect of resilience to helplessness-depression on flourishing was positively significant ($B = .32$, $SE = .09$, $p = .001$). The total indirect

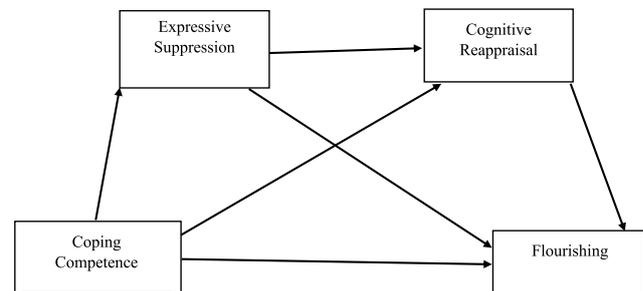


Figure 1. Serial Mediation Analysis Model

Table 5. Serial Mediation Analysis Pathway as Mediators Emotion Regulation Strategies

Model Pathways	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	UL 95%CI	LL 95%CI
CCQ - ES	-.14	.06	-2.2	.03*	-.27	-.01
ES-CR	.74	.19	3.86	.0004**	.35	1.12
CCQ-CR	.05	.09	.54	.59	-.13	.22
ES-Flourishing	-.64	.23	-2.86	.006**	-1.1	-.19
CR-Flourishing	-.61	.15	3.97	.0003**	.30	.92
Total Model Effect	.32	.10	3.36	.001**	.13	.52
Direct Effect	.27	.09	3.03	.004**	.09	.44
Total Indirect Effect	.06	.05			-.05	.15
CCQ-ES-Flourishing	.09	.05			.008	.19
CCQ-CR-Flourishing	.03	.05			-.07	.12
CCQ-ES-CR Flourishing	-.06	.04			-.14	-.005

Note. *pathway significant at $p < .05$, **pathway significant at $p < .001$. Significant pathways were emphasized in bold (95%CI does not cross zero).

effect of resilience to helplessness-depression on flourishing mediated via cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression was not significant ($B = .06$, $SE = .05$, $95CI\% = -.05, .15$). Expressive suppression significantly mediated the indirect effects of resilience to helplessness-depression on flourishing ($B = .09$, $SE = .05$, $95CI\% = .008, .19$), but cognitive reappraisal did not have the same effect ($B = .03$, $SE = .05$, $95CI\% = -.07, .12$). Both expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal had a significant indirect effect of resilience to helplessness-depression on flourishing ($B = -.06$, $SE = .04$, $95CI\% = -.15, -.006$).

Therefore, the results showed that there were no total indirect effects of expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal between CCQ and flourishing. Nevertheless, both expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal with [I.E. $= -.06$] indirect effect size significantly mediated the effects of resilience to helplessness-depression on flourishing. The indirect effect of expressive suppression [I.E. $= .09$] was higher than cognitive reappraisal [I.E. $= .03$]. Therefore, it can be assumed that expressive suppression strategies had a higher significant predictor effect between resilience to helplessness-depression and flourishing than cognitive reappraisal.

DISCUSSION

The study had three main objectives. The first one was to ascertain the mediation effect of ERQ as expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal between CCQ and flourishing. The second one was to analyze the effects of CCQ and ERQ on flourishing. The third objective was to determine how resilience to helplessness-depression, flourishing, and ERQ were related to each other.

The previous study reported that Syrian refugees in the south part of Turkey called Kilis had a low level of flourishing (Yanardağ et al., 2021). However, the current study where sampled in Istanbul indicated that Syrian refugees had an optimal functioning in flourishing ($M = 46.3$, $SD = 7.9$). It was found that people with depression symptoms had a low level of cognitive reappraisal and a higher level of expressive suppression than non-depressed individuals (Joormann & Gotlib, 2010). However, the current study demonstrated that Syrian refugees both had a higher level of cognitive reappraisal ($M = 4.79$, $SD = 1.15$) and expressive suppression ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 1.23$). Furthermore, resilience to helplessness – depression in the refugee group was not at the low level ($M = 51.5$, $SD = 10.9$). Hence, it can be said that expressive suppression emotion regulation strategies can be focused on in the therapeutic setting with the refugee group.

The previous research indicated that cognitive reappraisal was positively correlated with gratitude, social interactions, and flourishing (Millonado & Daep, 2021). The study based on cancer patients suggested that cognitive reappraisal and hope were indicators of mental well-being (Peh et al., 2016). Results showed that flourishing was positively correlated with resilience to helplessness-depression and cognitive reappraisal, whereas expressive suppression was adversely related to resilience

to helplessness-depression. Furthermore, 38.5% of flourishing's variance was explained by both emotion regulation strategies and resilience to helplessness-depression. Therefore, it should be highlighted that increase in emotion regulation strategies and resilience to helplessness-depression may be a helpful strategy in the therapeutic setting so as to develop refugees' mental health.

In addition to that expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal together mediated the effects of resilience to helplessness-depression on flourishing. However, it should be noted that the indirect mediation effect of expressive suppression was 6% more powerful than cognitive reappraisal. Therefore, it can be highlighted that the impact of expressive suppression on the resilience to helplessness-depression and flourishing in the refugee's sample were higher than cognitive reappraisal.

There were two main limitations in the study. The first one was the population that was limited to Istanbul province, and results did not encompass the refugees who settled overall country. The second limitation was the sample size. Even though kurtosis and skewness scores were reported as a normal distribution further studies can be implemented in a larger sample. However, the multiple regression power (.93) was higher than 80%. It can be said that the effects of emotion regulation strategies and resilience to helplessness – depression on flourishing had a good sample size power. Moreover, the actual power size of the relationship between flourishing and resilience to learned helplessness – depression (.90) had a significant power. On the other side, the correlation sample size power of the relationship between the resilience to learned helplessness-depression and expressive suppression (.60) and the power of flourishing and cognitive reappraisal in bivariate correlation test had a low sample size power (.55) that was a limitation for the study.

However, the working hypothesis indicated the indirect mediation role of ERQ between CCQ and flourishing was at a significant level. Since the sample size was small, further studies can concentrate on the mediation effects of ERQ with a larger sample to have a meaningful power effect. In addition to that CCQ and ERQ scales showed high internal consistency and can be used in future studies in the Arabic sample.

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