

Exploring cognitive emotion regulation strategies with adolescent girls and boys

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Abstract: Nowadays modern world is full of many changes that affect all areas of human life. These continuous changes lead to an increase in psychological tension and emotional disorders as well as a decrease in resistance to stress. The increased stressogenicity of the environment, which is manifested in the flood of information, natural disasters, to which is added the ideology of the cult of success and achievements - is a serious pressure for the adolescent's mental state.

In adolescence, significant changes occur in both the cognitive and emotional spheres of a person. Adolescents have the ability to better control their emotions, their range of feelings also expands. This is also influenced by the development of cognitive processes, which in turn contributes to the formation of strategies for the cognitive regulation of emotions.

In order to determine whether adolescent girls and boys use different strategies for cognitive regulation of emotions, a study was planned, in which 60 adolescents participated, 30 of whom were girls and 30 were boys. The research tool was the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, which measures nine emotion regulation strategies identified by the authors.

Research has shown that adults of both sexes use both adaptive and maladaptive strategies for cognitive regulation of emotions. Also, it appeared that the rate of some maladaptive strategies was much higher among girls than among boys.

Keywords: stressogenicity, adolescence, emotion control, cognitive regulation

The accelerated pace of life in modern society, accompanied by constant changes and a stressful environment, underscores the growing importance of understanding these

dynamics. This heightened awareness necessitates the regulation of emotional responses and gives rise to dysfunctional aspects of emotion regulation.

Almost every individual encounters challenging situations, perceived as threats, losses, or challenges, prompting the activation of various coping strategies. Notably, different mechanisms of behavior regulation often intertwine in response reactions. For instance, an emotion-oriented support strategy may manifest cognitively in its implementation, while a problem-solving strategy inherently encompasses both cognitive and emotional components (Eisenberg, Fabes & R. A., 1995; 1239-1261). Consequently, the classification of coping strategies into emotion-focused and problem-solving categories poses challenges in distinguishing the meaning and function of these facets of coping (Schroevers, Kraaij & Garnefski, 2007; 413–423).

One method for addressing this issue involves elucidating the contribution of cognitive processes to the regulation of emotions. Emotion regulation encompasses the amalgamation of processes dedicated to overseeing, influencing, and modifying emotional responses (Gross J., 1999; 551-573).

Cognitive regulation of emotion entails a deliberate response to emotional stimuli, affording individuals the ability to manage their emotional states. Research indicates a correlation between the utilization of specific cognitive emotion regulation strategies and the prevalence of conditions such as anxiety, depression, and other emotional disorders.

It is particularly pertinent to investigate emotion regulation in adolescents, given that adolescence represents one of the most challenging phases of human development. This transitional period is marked by pronounced alterations across various dimensions, encompassing anatomical-physiological, spiritual-psychological, moral aspects, as well as the development of personality and character formation. Adolescence is characterized by an age-specific crisis, manifested through negativism, stubbornness, and protest. During this phase, teenagers engage in a self-discovery process, seeking recognition, and endeavoring to establish their identity within both peer groups and society at large.

The physiological state of an adolescent's body significantly influences their emotional experiences. The heightened excitability and rapid fluctuations in mood observed in adolescents can be attributed to underlying biological changes (Gogichaishvili, 2001: 240).

A fundamental characteristic of a teenager's emotional life is the presence of contradictory feelings and emotions, often marked by the alternating occurrence of positive and negative state of being. This dynamic interplay contributes to the continual evolution of the teenager's overall mental state and mood.

According to the Theory of cognitive regulation of emotions, it is imperative to distinguish cognitive and behavioral strategies for individual examination. Within this theoretical framework, Garnefski et al. introduced the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ; Garnefski, Kraaij & Spinhoven, 2002), a widely employed

instrument that has undergone adaptations in numerous languages globally. Notably, in 2002, the Georgian version of the questionnaire was formulated and adapted by S. Zubashvili (2022).

The diagnostic appropriateness and validity of the original version of the questionnaire have been substantiated through a comprehensive research cycle conducted on a representative sample. A robust correlation has been established between cognitive emotion regulation strategies and the levels of depression, anxiety, and anger (Garnefski, Kraaij & van Etter, 2005; 619-631). Notably, within risk groups—comprising participants of military operations, farmers affected by epidemics, and women victims of violence—the intensity of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic symptoms is contingent upon the frequency of deploying destructive strategies. Conversely, the utilization of effective strategies has been associated with a diminution of these adverse emotional states (Garnefski & Kraaij, The Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. Psychometric Features and Prospective Relationships with Depression and Anxiety in Adults, 2007; 141-149).

The questionnaire comprises 36 items designed to assess 9 emotion regulation strategies as identified by the authors. These strategies are categorized into two distinct groups:

- **Facilitating adaptation (Effective):**
 1. Acceptance of what happened
 2. Focus on the positive
 3. Focus on planning
 4. Positive reassessment
 5. Perspective consideration
- **Impeding adaptation, enhancing maladaptive effects (Destructive):**
 6. Self-blame
 7. Rumination (i.e., obsessive thinking about what happened)
 8. Catastrophizing
 9. Blaming others

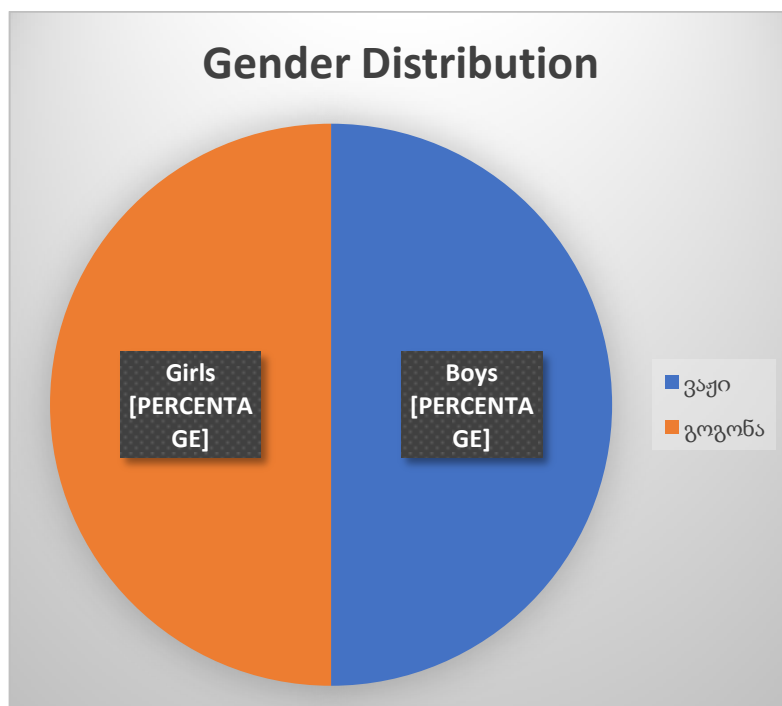
The questionnaire encompasses nine distinct scales, each designed to measure specific cognitive emotion regulation strategies. These scales are defined as follows:

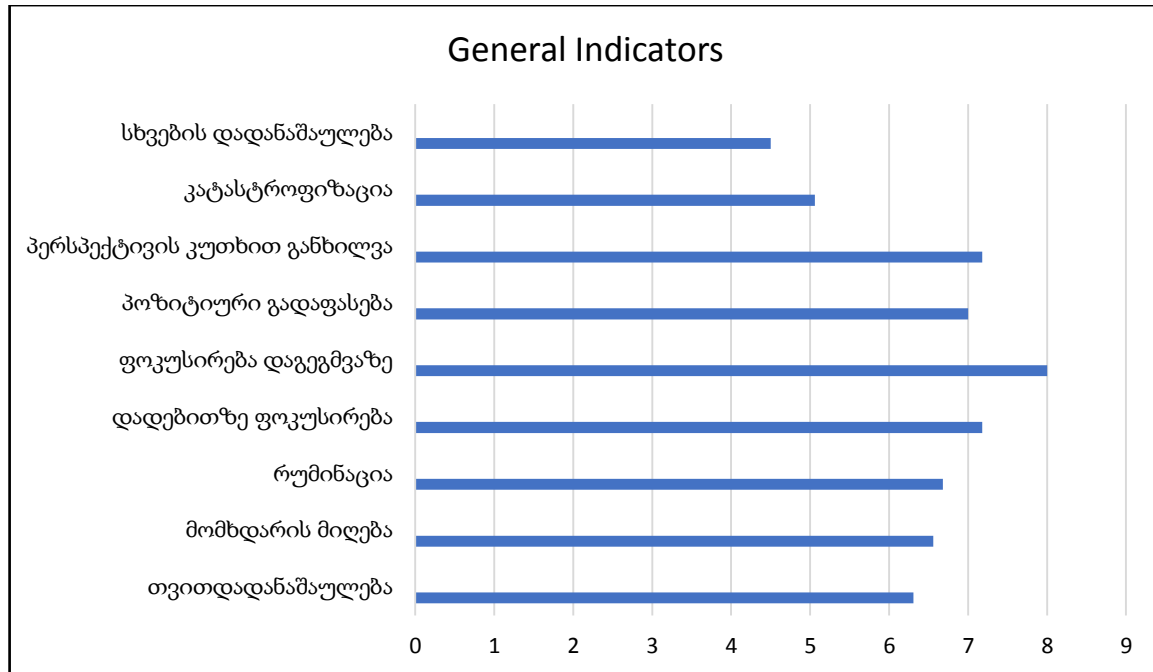
1. **"Self-blame"**: The inclination to attribute blame to oneself for a given incident (e.g., "I feel that I am to blame for the incident").
2. **"Acceptance"**: The belief in the necessity of accepting the occurrence of a situation (e.g., "I think that I have to accept what happened").
3. **"Rumination"**: Engaging in continuous, obsessive contemplation about the incident (e.g., "I think about my feelings, emotions caused by this situation").

4. **"Focusing on the positive"**: Redirecting thoughts toward more pleasant subjects as an alternative to dwelling on a challenging situation (e.g., "I am trying to think of something more pleasant than what I experienced").
5. **"Focus on planning"**: Contemplating the necessary steps to address the current situation (e.g., "I'm thinking about how I can handle this situation").
6. **"Positive reappraisal"**: Seeking a positive meaning, such as personal growth or the acquisition of new experiences, arising from the incident (e.g., "I think that as a result of what happened, I can become stronger").
7. **"Consideration in terms of perspective"**: Mitigating the severity of the incident by comparing it with another situation (e.g., "I think that others have experienced much worse things").
8. **"Catastrophizing"**: Pondering the exceptional severity of the incident and its negative consequences (e.g., "I often think that what I experienced is much more serious than the experience of others").
9. **"Blaming others"**: Assigning blame to others for the incident (e.g., "I feel that others are to blame for what happened").

According to our research hypothesis, adolescent girls and boys use different cognitive emotion regulation strategies.

Sixty teenagers aged 12-16 participated in the research, 30 of them were girls and 30 were boys. The results of the research are presented graphically below.





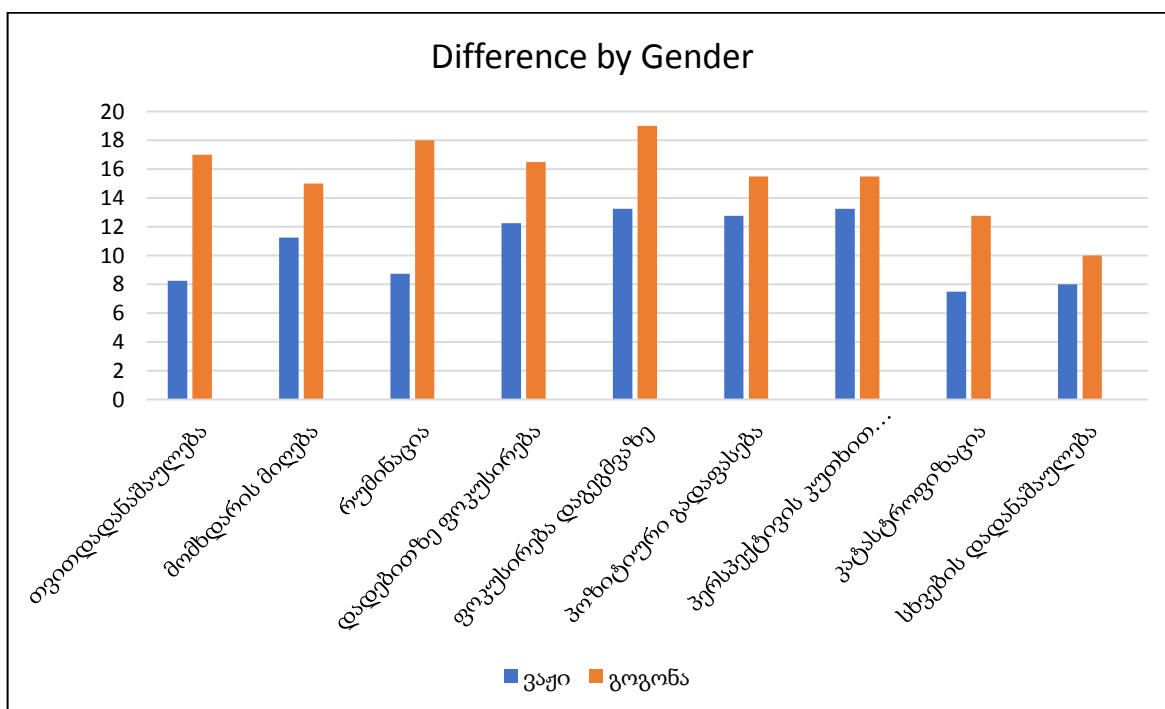
When examining the collective scores of adolescents of both genders, a notable prevalence of adaptive strategies, particularly "focus on planning," is evident. Additionally, adolescents exhibit elevated scores in various other adaptive strategies. The data reveals a notable reliance on coping mechanisms, with the highest frequency observed in the "rumination" strategy and the lowest in "blaming others." Interestingly, these findings defy conventional expectations, as prior research often suggests that adolescents, in stressful situations, tend to lean towards maladaptive emotion regulation strategies (Kraij, 2002: 637).

In the gender-stratified data analysis, a distinct pattern emerges -both girls and boys exhibit the highest prevalence in the adaptation-promoting strategy of "Focus on planning." However, it is noteworthy that the rate of this strategy is comparatively higher among girls. Similar trends are observed across other adaptation-promoting strategies, with girls consistently demonstrating relatively higher rates. A conspicuous disparity between girls and boys becomes evident in strategies impeding adaptation, specifically "self-blame," "rumination," and "catastrophizing," where girls exhibit rates nearly twice as high as their male counterparts.

We posit that the elevated rate of self-blame among girls may be attributed to gender socialization norms, wherein girls are often encouraged to embody qualities such as reserve, obedience, trust, and consideration for others. Consequently, when situations deviate from expectations, girls may experience a heightened sense of guilt.

Furthermore, the substantially higher rates in rumination and catastrophizing among girls could be associated with their inclination to contemplate events extensively and perceive them in a more pessimistic light.

As for the strategy "Blaming others," a marginal disparity is observed, with a slightly higher rate among girls, suggesting a lack of substantive difference between genders. Existing research consistently supports the notion that individuals, irrespective of gender, tend to attribute blame to others, and this phenomenon may well be at play in this context (Owens, Bower & Black, 1979).



Age group analysis was not undertaken in this study due to an uneven distribution of subjects across individual age categories (younger and older adults). Considering the potential impact of age on the variables under investigation, we propose that future research endeavors incorporate a more extensive study design to systematically explore age-related dynamics, ensuring a balanced representation of subjects across different age cohorts.

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