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The Impact of Substance Use on Emotion Regulation

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The process of altering the strength, length, or nature of an emotional experience is referred to as emotion control. (Gross, 2015). Good emotion management techniques can aid people in controlling their emotions in a way that supports psychological health and adaptable behaviour (Gross, 2015). There are various types of emotion regulation strategies, including cognitive, behavioural, and physiological strategies. Cognitive strategies entail the alteration of one's perspective about a situation, shown through viewing the situation in a more positive or realistic light (Gross, 2015). Behavioural methods, like participating in activities that promote emotion regulation, involve altering behaviour in response to an emotional circumstance (e.g., exercise or mindfulness practices). Physiological techniques, such as deep breathing or gradual muscle relaxation, involve altering one's physical state to control emotions. This involves changing one's interpretation of a situation to alter its emotional and long-term impact. For example, if someone is feeling anxious about an upcoming exam, they might try to reframe the situation by focusing on the opportunity to learn and improve rather than the potential for failure (Gross, et al., 2007). This is why theoretically, to change the emotional impact of a circumstance, one must adjust their understanding of it. One can also use acceptance, which entails noticing and embracing the emotional experience without passing judgment on it or attempting to modify it, as well as diversion, which involves diverting attention away from the emotional circumstance. In general, choosing the best strategy for a circumstance and implementing it to support adaptive functioning and psychological well-being constitutes successful emotion regulation. The expression of emotion is subject to how the individual can regulate it, especially when considering behavioural or environmental factors (Aldao, et al., 2010). These factors are impacted by the two main categories of emotional regulation; reappraisal, and suppression.

Reappraisal often has positive associations where individuals attempt to reframe either an emotion or the way in which they approach the event which created the observed emotion. Suppression on the other hand has negative associations as this strategy revolves around making selective decisions to alter or completely transform the event which created the emotion, the environment in which the emotion took place, or the emotion itself. This transformation is usually caused by denying the associated emotion and event, without accepting or paying attention to the root cause of the observed emotion. There is speculation that mood disorders could be a direct effect of an individual lacking the ability to regulate or accept their own emotions (Crowe, et al., 2022).

A quarter of individuals who have or are currently experiencing a mood disorder are reliant on alcohol and substance usage with the purpose of alleviating pain and/or their negative health or behavioural conditions (Crowe, et al., 2022). Alcohol or substance usage could be interpreted as a response modulation strategy, as the user is making an effort to modify their emotional impact. The most common form of response modulation is suppression, or the volitional inhibition of verbal and/or behavioural emotional expression, which is seen mainly in the usage of defence mechanisms (Bosse, et al., 2017). An area where emotion regulation and defence mechanisms are mechanically enforced is through clinical defence mechanisms, such as medications, antidepressants, and anti-psychotics (Zhao, et al., 2022). There is a major stigma when it comes to mechanical manipulation to correct mood disorders for their long-term effectiveness, which originated through the abuse of recreational drugs (Zhao, et al., 2022). Many clinicians have attempted to hypothesize the correlation between the prevalence of substance users who actively or historically have experienced mood disorders (Crowe, et al.,

2022). Although results have shown a strong relationship between the two, it should be understood that the abuse is likely caused by a deficit in an individual's ability to regulate their emotions (Crowe, et al., 2022). Two studies reflect the correlation between emotion regulation and substance use; one by Caviccholi, et al. (2019), and the other by Sayette (2016) respectively.

Experiment 1: The therapeutic role of emotion regulation and coping strategies during a Stand-alone DBT Skills training program for alcohol use disorder and concurrent substance use disorders

In a 12-week stand-alone Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) skills training program for people with alcohol use disorder and concurrent substance use disorders, the therapeutic value of emotion regulation and coping mechanisms was examined.

Hypothesis:

The goal of the study was to find out how a stand-alone Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) skills training program affected participants with alcohol use disorder and concurrent substance use disorders' ability to regulate their emotions and employ coping mechanisms. The DBT skills training program was designed to enhance coping mechanisms and emotion control.

Methods:

The study recruited 36 participants who undertook a 12-week stand-alone DBT skills training program and had alcohol and concurrent substance use disorders. The course featured four primary skill modules that were covered in weekly two-hour sessions: mindfulness, emotion management, distress tolerance, and interpersonal effectiveness. Participants completed self-report measures of emotion regulation, coping mechanisms, alcohol use, and substance use at baseline, midway through treatment, at the end of treatment, and at the three-month follow-up.

Results:

The findings showed that after completing the DBT skills training program, individuals significantly improved their ability to control their emotions and develop coping mechanisms. Participants specifically indicated less use of unhealthy coping mechanisms (like avoidance and self-blame) and more use of healthy coping mechanisms (e.g., positive reappraisal, and problem-solving). Also, after therapy and during the three-month follow-up, individuals reported a significant decrease in their alcohol and substance usage.

Conclusions:

The study shows that a stand-alone DBT skills training program can help people with alcohol use disorder and other concurrent substance use disorders, to better regulate their emotions and develop effective coping mechanisms. The findings imply that the DBT skills training program can enhance both psychological functioning and outcomes related to substance use.

Experiment 2: Sayette, M. A. (2016). The effects of alcohol on emotion in social drinkers

The article discusses how emotion control affects substance use, especially in people who have mood disorders.

Hypothesis:

The study's main hypothesis was whether alcohol affects positive and negative emotions differently depending on how much is consumed when people drink in social situations.

Methods:

Seven-hundred-twenty social drinkers between the ages of 21 and 35 were recruited for the study, and they were randomly assigned to one of three groups: a control group, a low-dose

alcohol group, or a high-dose alcohol group. Participants conducted an emotion rating task in which they judged their emotional response to visuals that elicited pleasant, negative, or neutral emotions. The tasks were completed before and after consuming their drink, following a within-subject design.

Results:

Findings showed that drinking alcohol significantly increased feelings of happiness, with participants in the high-dosage group expressing happier feelings than those in the low-dose group. Negative emotions were not considerably impacted by alcohol use. The study also discovered that participants who consumed alcohol were less accurate at recognizing the negative emotions expressed in facial expressions.

Conclusion:

Alcohol may obstruct the processing of emotional data, as seen by the decreased accuracy in identifying negative feelings. These findings have consequences for comprehending how alcohol use affects one's emotions and may help guide interventions for people who have trouble controlling their emotions.

Comparison of Cavicchioli et al. (2019) and Sayette (2016):

Cavicchioli et al. (2019) and Sayette (2016) differ in their focus and research design. In a stand-alone DBT Skills training program for people with alcohol use disorder and concurrent substance use disorders, Cavicchioli et al. look into the therapeutic value of emotion regulation and coping mechanisms. Sayette (2016), in contrast, investigates how alcohol affects social drinkers' emotional responses. The studies' methodologies also vary. Cavicchioli et al. used self-report measures of emotion regulation, coping mechanisms, alcohol use, and substance use,

Sayette, on the other hand, investigated the immediate effects of alcohol on emotional reactivity among social drinkers using a laboratory-based experimental approach. The focus of both studies, however, is on how emotion regulation plays a part in substance use. For people with alcohol use disorder and concurrent substance use disorders, Cavicchioli et al. contend that strengthening emotion control abilities can improve outcomes. Sayette contends that alcohol can change how emotions are regulated and might amplify negative emotions in specific circumstances, which may encourage ongoing alcohol consumption. In terms of results, Cavicchioli et al. discovered that the DBT Skills training program improved coping skills and emotion regulation while lowering alcohol and substance usage. Sayette discovered that while alcohol increased some types of negative affect, it had conflicting effects on positive affect and did not increase alcohol consumption. Overall, these investigations add to our understanding of how emotion regulation and substance use are related. Sayette emphasizes the impact of alcohol on emotional reactivity in social drinkers, while Cavicchioli et al. stress the potential advantages of enhancing emotion regulation abilities in the treatment of alcohol use disorder and concurrent substance use disorders.

Emotion and Substance Use; A Reflection:

The research by Cavicchioli et al. (2019) and Sayette (2016) suggests proof of the connection between emotion control and substance use. According to Cavicchioli et al., study's individuals with alcohol use disorder and concurrent substance use disorders may benefit from therapy that incorporates emotion control techniques including mindfulness, distress tolerance, and interpersonal effectiveness. These techniques can result in enhancements in both psychological functioning and outcomes related to substance use. On the other side, Sayette's

research suggests that alcohol usage might negatively impact emotional control, which may encourage ongoing use. Both studies reflect that there is a possible relationship between emotion regulation and substance usage, and how there is a significant suggestion that prevention lies within understanding this. When considered collectively, these findings indicate that emotion control should be taken into account while treating and preventing substance abuse. Clinicians may be able to lessen substance use and its associated negative effects by teaching people effective emotion regulation methods, such as those taught in DBT Skills Training. Collectively, the research of Cavicchioli et al. and Sayette offers complementary perspectives on the connection between emotion control and substance abuse. To create successful treatments to prevent and treat substance use disorders, clinicians and researchers may be better equipped if they are aware of the significance of emotion regulation strategies and the detrimental effects that alcohol can have on emotional regulation.

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