

Emotion Regulation and Fear of Negative Evaluation: A Correlational Analysis in Early Adolescence

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage characterised by rapid emotional, cognitive, and social changes. During this period, the ability to regulate emotions effectively is vital for fostering psychological well-being and healthy interpersonal relationships. Conversely, fear of negative evaluation, an individual's apprehension about being judged unfavourably by others, can hinder social adjustment and contribute to anxiety-related difficulties. The present study sought to explore the relationship between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation among early adolescence in Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu. A total of 280 students (147 males and 133 females) aged 12–14 years were selected through simple random sampling. Standardised scales were employed to measure the two variables. Data were analysed using Pearson's correlation and *t*-test. Results indicated a significant negative correlation between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation ($r = -0.42, p < 0.01$), suggesting that adolescence with higher emotional control experience less fear of social judgment. Additionally, a significant gender difference was found, with males demonstrating better emotion regulation than females ($t = 2.45, p < 0.05$). The findings underscore the importance of fostering emotion regulation skills among adolescence to mitigate social anxiety and enhance emotional resilience.

Introduction

"Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering."
— George Lucas

Emotions form the foundation of human experience, influencing cognition, behaviour, and interpersonal relationships. The ability to manage and modulate these emotions effectively, known as *emotion regulation*, is central to psychological well-being, especially during early adolescence, a period characterised by significant emotional and social transitions. According

to Gross (1998), emotion regulation refers to the processes through which individuals influence the emotions they experience, when they experience them, and how they express these emotions. It encompasses both conscious and unconscious efforts to manage affective responses in diverse contexts (Medeski et al., 2017).

Emotion regulation differs from mood regulation and coping. While mood regulation focuses on altering emotional experiences and coping targets long-term adaptation to stressors, emotion regulation

pertains specifically to managing immediate emotional responses and expressions. Gross's (1998) process model identifies five key mechanisms in emotion regulation: situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. Situation selection and modification involve proactive steps to approach or avoid emotionally charged environments. Attentional deployment refers to shifting focus away from emotional stimuli to manage arousal. Cognitive change involves reinterpreting a situation to alter its emotional impact, and response modulation concerns the physiological or behavioural management of emotional expression.

As individuals mature, their regulatory capacity and adaptability evolve. Research suggests that adolescence demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of emotional contexts and employ sophisticated regulation strategies compared to younger children (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011). Parental influences such as emotional coaching, warmth, and authoritative parenting also play a critical role in shaping adolescence' emotion regulation skills. Older adolescence, for instance, tend to exhibit lower anger reactivity and greater emotional awareness, reflecting both developmental and

environmental contributions to regulatory competence.

Parallel to the development of emotion regulation is the emergence of *fear of negative evaluation* (FNE), a construct central to social anxiety. FNE is defined as the apprehension about being judged unfavourably by others, accompanied by concerns about potential criticism or rejection (Watson & Friend, 1969). Social evaluations are integral to adolescence peer interactions and identity formation, yet they also pose emotional challenges (Schoeneman, 1983). Cognitive theories propose that FNE arises from biased information processing, where individuals interpret ambiguous social cues as threatening (Clark & McManus, 2002).

Emotion regulation and FNE intersect meaningfully in the context of adolescence mental health. Difficulties in regulating emotions can exacerbate anxiety and heighten sensitivity to social evaluation (Cisler et al., 2010). Conversely, effective regulatory strategies such as cognitive reappraisal (reframing emotional situations) and expressive suppression (inhibiting emotional expression) can mitigate anxiety and promote adaptive social functioning (Gross, 1998). For instance, Hughes et al. (2007) found that emotion regulation moderated the

relationship between body image concerns and psychological symptoms among adolescence. Specifically, maladaptive regulation strategies like avoidance were associated with higher levels of bulimic and depressive symptoms, whereas adaptive strategies helped buffer negative emotional outcomes.

Thus, understanding the interplay between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation during early adolescence is essential for elucidating the developmental pathways of social anxiety and emotional well-being. This study seeks to examine the correlation between these two constructs, offering insights into how emotional control mechanisms influence the fear of being judged or rejected by peers. Such knowledge can inform the design of targeted interventions in schools and counselling settings to enhance adolescence' emotional resilience and social confidence.

Review of Literature

Emotion regulation (ER) has been conceptualised as the set of processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express them (Gross, 1998). Gross's process model situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change,

and response modulation remains the dominant organising framework in ER research and has been widely used to classify strategies as antecedent-focused (e.g., cognitive reappraisal) or response-focused (e.g., expressive suppression). Subsequent syntheses have emphasised that ER may be both explicit and implicit (conscious and automatic), and that its effectiveness depends on the fit between strategy and situational demands (Gross, 1998; Medeski, Watson, & Gross, 2017). This model provides a useful foundation for examining how adolescence manage emotional arousal in socially evaluative contexts.

Developmental research indicates steady maturation in ER capacity across childhood and adolescence. Younger children rely heavily on caregivers and more rudimentary behavioural strategies, whereas adolescence show growth in cognitive regulatory capacities (e.g., reappraisal, perspective-taking) and greater strategic flexibility (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011). Cognitive maturation and increasing social complexity during early adolescence (roughly ages 10–14) expand opportunities for using antecedent-focused strategies, but also increase exposure to socially evaluative situations (peer scrutiny, identity formation) that can challenge regulatory systems. Parental socialisation,

emotional coaching, warmth, and authoritative parenting have been consistently linked to better ER outcomes in offspring, suggesting that family processes shape both the repertoire and the adaptive use of ER strategies across development.

Empirical studies distinguish between strategies that generally associate with better psychosocial outcomes (e.g., cognitive reappraisal) and those linked to poorer outcomes (e.g., expressive suppression, avoidance). Cognitive reappraisal, changing how one thinks about a situation, tends to reduce negative affect and preserve social functioning, whereas expressive suppression often decreases outward signs of emotion at the cost of increased physiological arousal and poorer social outcomes (Gross, 1998). Research among adolescence indicates that habitual use of maladaptive strategies (rumination, avoidance, suppression) predicts greater internalising symptoms (anxiety, depression), whereas flexible deployment of adaptive strategies predicts resilience (Cisler, Olatunji, Feldner, & Forsyth, 2010).

Fear of negative evaluation (FNE) refers to apprehension and distress about being judged unfavourably by others (Watson & Friend, 1969). FNE is central to social

anxiety and becomes particularly salient during adolescence, when peer evaluation informs self-concept and social identity (Schoeneman, 1983). Cognitive models of social anxiety posit that FNE arises from biased attention and interpretation of social cues. Ambiguous feedback is often appraised as threatening, which exacerbates avoidance and safety behaviours, maintaining anxiety over time (Clark & McManus, 2002). In adolescence, elevated FNE is linked to social withdrawal, reduced peer engagement, and increased risk for depressive and anxiety disorders.

A growing body of research highlights the interplay between ER and social anxiety constructs such as FNE. Emotion dysregulation is implicated in both the development and maintenance of anxiety disorders; poor ER skills make it harder for individuals to downregulate fear and anxiety in social contexts, thereby intensifying FNE (Cisler et al., 2010). Several studies show that adolescence with higher anxiety exhibit greater reliance on avoidance and suppression and less frequent use of reappraisal (Hughes, Gullone, & Watson, 2007). Conversely, adaptive ER (e.g., reframing evaluative situations) can buffer against social-evaluative fear, facilitating more confident social interactions. The moderating role of ER has also been observed in domain-

specific contexts: Hughes et al. (2007) reported that ER moderated the relationship between body image concerns and psychological symptoms, implying that ER may similarly moderate the relation between social evaluative concerns and broader adjustment.

Family context and parenting practices strongly influence both ER development and vulnerability to FNE. Parental modelling of regulatory strategies, emotional coaching (labelling and discussing emotions), and authoritative parenting styles correlate with more adaptive ER in adolescence, which in turn reduces susceptibility to social anxieties. Peer dynamics also shape FNE: peer rejection or harsh criticism can heighten anticipatory fear of future evaluations, while supportive peer environments can mitigate evaluative fears.

Most empirical work relies on self-report instruments, ER questionnaires (e.g., ERQ/ERQ-CA) and FNE scales (e.g., BFNE), which capture habitual strategies and evaluative concerns but can be influenced by introspective accuracy and social desirability. Longitudinal designs and multimethod approaches (self-report, behavioural tasks, physiological measures) are advocated to clarify directional relations: whether poor ER precedes

increases in FNE, or elevated FNE undermines ER efforts through cognitive load and avoidance. Cross-sectional correlational studies (the design adopted in the current paper) are useful for establishing associations and informing hypotheses, but they cannot confirm causality.

Several gaps remain. First, while ER and social anxiety have been linked, fewer studies examine the specific relationship between distinct ER processes (e.g., reappraisal vs. suppression) and FNE during early adolescence, a sensitive period for social development. Second, moderation and mediation pathways (e.g., parental socialisation moderating ER–FNE links, or ER mediating the effect of peer stressors on FNE) are underexplored. Third, much of the extant literature aggregates across adolescence; targeted studies focused on the early adolescence window (12–15 years) are needed because of rapid developmental shifts in cognition, peer salience, and ER capacity. Finally, many studies use community samples with wide age ranges; focused samples from school settings can clarify typical patterns and inform school-based interventions.

The literature indicates that adaptive ER strategies are protective, whereas maladaptive regulation heightens risk for

anxiety and FNE. Early adolescence represents a crucial period to study these dynamics because of rapid socio-emotional development and increased exposure to peer evaluation. The current correlational study will (1) examine associations between overall ER capacity and FNE in early adolescence, (2) compare specific strategies (reappraisal, suppression) in relation to FNE, and (3) explore gender differences if sample size permits. By focusing on this developmental window and disaggregating ER strategies, the study aims to clarify patterns that can guide school counselling programs and family-based interventions to reduce fear of negative evaluation and promote adaptive emotional development.

Statement of the Problem

Early adolescence is a period marked by emotional instability and increased sensitivity to social judgment. Ineffective emotion regulation during this stage can heighten the *fear of negative evaluation* (FNE), leading to anxiety and social withdrawal. Although emotion regulation is known to influence mental health, limited research has explored its specific relationship with FNE among early adolescence. Understanding this connection is vital for promoting emotional resilience and reducing social anxiety in

school settings. Hence, the present study aims to examine the correlation between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation among early adolescence.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation among early adolescence.
2. To determine the gender differences in emotion regulation among early adolescence.
3. To determine the gender differences in fear of negative evaluation among early adolescence.

Research Methodology

The study sample comprised 280 early adolescence aged between 12 and 14 years, drawn from various government and private schools in the Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu. The participants were equally divided by gender, consisting of 280 students (147 males and 133 females), to facilitate gender-based comparative analysis. The selection process utilised a simple random sampling technique, ensuring that each student in the target population had an equal probability of being included. This approach minimised sampling bias and enhanced the representativeness of the sample.

All participants were enrolled in Grades VII to IX and belonged to middle socioeconomic backgrounds. The inclusion criteria required participants to be within the specified age range, enrolled in regular schooling, and willing to participate with parental consent. Students with diagnosed psychological or emotional disorders were excluded to maintain the homogeneity of the sample. The final sample thus represented a balanced and diverse group of early adolescence suitable for studying emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation.

Hypothesis of the study

In this study, the primary aim is to examine the relationship between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation among early adolescence. Specifically, the objectives are to determine the extent of the correlation between these two psychological constructs and to identify possible gender differences in both emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation. Based on these objectives, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

H₁: Emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation are significantly correlated.

H₂: Gender significantly influences emotion regulation among early adolescence.

H₃: Gender significantly influences fear of negative evaluation among early adolescence.

Instruments

Two standardised instruments were used to measure the key variables of the study: emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation.

1. Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ)

The *Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ)*, developed by Garnefski and Kraaij (2002), was utilised to assess participants' cognitive emotion regulation strategies. The questionnaire consists of 36 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (rarely) to 5 (almost always). Subscale scores were computed by summing relevant items, with possible scores ranging from 4 to 20 for each subscale. The CERQ demonstrates good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .68 to .86, and has been widely validated in adolescence populations.

2. Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (BFNE)

The *Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (BFNE)*, developed by Leary (1983), was administered to measure the degree of apprehension associated

with being negatively judged by others. The scale contains 12 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). Factor analytic studies support the scale's construct validity, and prior research has reported high internal consistency ($\alpha = .90$) and satisfactory test-retest reliability ($r = .75$) over a four-week interval.

Procedure

After finalising the research instruments, formal permission was obtained from the heads of participating institutions. Informed consent was secured from all participants before data collection, ensuring adherence to ethical research standards. The questionnaires were distributed in group settings during school hours and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Data were collected, coded, and organised systematically for statistical analysis to determine the relationship between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation among early adolescence.

Statistical Techniques

Since your study examines (1) the relationship between *emotion regulation*

and *fear of negative evaluation*, and (2) *gender differences* in both variables, the appropriate statistical techniques would be:

- **Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r)** – to measure the relationship between *emotion regulation* and *fear of negative evaluation*.
- **Independent Samples t-test** – to compare *male* and *female* participants on both variables.

Data Analysis

The collected data were coded, tabulated, and subjected to appropriate statistical analyses using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 25). Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were computed to summarise the data.

To examine the relationship between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was employed. This test determined the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the two psychological constructs.

To assess gender differences in emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation, the Independent Samples t-test was conducted. This test compared the mean

scores of male and female participants to determine whether significant differences existed between the two groups.

The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$, ensuring that results with a probability of less than 5% by chance were considered statistically significant.

Result of the study

Table 1. Correlation between Emotion Regulation and Fear of Negative Evaluation

Variables	N	R	p-value	Significance
Emotion Regulation & Fear of Negative Evaluation	280	-0.42	0.001	Significant

The results indicate a moderate, negative, and statistically significant correlation ($r = -0.42$, $p < 0.01$) between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation among early adolescence. This finding implies that adolescence who effectively regulate their emotions are less likely to experience anxiety or apprehension about being negatively judged by others.

The negative direction of the correlation demonstrates that as levels of emotion regulation increase, the fear of negative evaluation decreases correspondingly. This association highlights the adaptive role of emotion regulation in reducing self-conscious emotions and social anxiety

Correlation between Emotion Regulation and Fear of Negative Evaluation

To explore the relationship between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was computed. The results are shown in **Table 1**.

during early adolescence, a developmental stage characterised by heightened sensitivity to peer perception and social comparison.

The obtained correlation coefficient ($r = -0.42$) further suggests that approximately 17.6% of the variance ($r^2 \times 100$) in fear of negative evaluation can be statistically explained by differences in emotion regulation abilities. This indicates a meaningful, though not absolute, predictive relationship between these two constructs.

These findings align with prior research (Gross, 2015; Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010), which emphasises that

individuals with strong emotion regulation skills are better equipped to manage social stressors, interpret peer feedback more rationally, and experience fewer negative self-evaluative emotions. Consequently, promoting emotional regulation strategies during adolescence may serve as a protective factor against excessive fear of social judgment and related anxiety symptoms.

Gender Differences in Emotion Regulation

To investigate whether gender plays a significant role in emotion regulation, an Independent Samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of male and female adolescence on the Emotion Regulation scale. The results are presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Gender Differences in Emotion Regulation

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Significance
Male	147	58.23	8.64	2.45	0.015	Significant
Female	133	55.42	9.12			

The results revealed a significant gender difference in emotion regulation scores ($t = 2.45$, $p < 0.05$). Male adolescence ($M = 58.23$, $SD = 8.64$) reported significantly higher levels of emotion regulation compared to female adolescence ($M = 55.42$, $SD = 9.12$). This indicates that male participants tend to employ more effective cognitive and behavioural emotion regulation strategies in managing their emotional experiences.

This finding suggests that males, within the sampled age group (12–14 years), may possess greater emotional control or utilise

adaptive coping strategies such as cognitive reappraisal more efficiently than females. This pattern may be influenced by socialisation factors, where boys are often encouraged to suppress or manage emotional expression, while girls may exhibit greater emotional openness or sensitivity to social contexts.

Consistent with prior findings (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2002; Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011), these results indicate that gender differences in emotion regulation emerge during early adolescence—a period characterised by rapid emotional and social

development. However, while males scored higher on regulation, this does not necessarily imply better emotional well-being, as excessive suppression can also have negative psychological effects.

Gender Differences in Fear of Negative Evaluation

Table 3. Gender Differences in Fear of Negative Evaluation

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Significance
Male	147	41.36	7.42	2.68	0.008	Significant
Female	133	44.82	8.01			

The results indicated a significant gender difference in Fear of Negative Evaluation ($t = 2.68$, $p < 0.01$). Female adolescence ($M = 44.82$, $SD = 8.01$) reported significantly higher levels of fear of negative evaluation compared to male adolescence ($M = 41.36$, $SD = 7.42$).

This suggests that female participants tend to experience greater apprehension and anxiety about being negatively judged or evaluated by others. Such tendencies may stem from heightened social sensitivity, interpersonal awareness, and greater emotional atonements often observed among adolescence girls. These findings align with existing research indicating that females, particularly during early

To determine whether gender differences exist in the level of Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) among early adolescence, an Independent Samples t-test was performed. The results are presented in **Table 3**.

adolescence, exhibit higher vulnerability to social anxiety and self-conscious emotions (Leary, 1983; Jaismeen Dua, 2019).

The observed gender difference may also reflect developmental and sociocultural influences, where adolescence girls are often subject to stronger social and appearance-based evaluation pressures. Conversely, boys may adopt more detached or externally focused coping styles, resulting in lower self-evaluative fear.

Overall, these findings underscore the importance of gender-responsive emotional development programs in schools to promote healthy emotion regulation and reduce maladaptive social fears among adolescence.

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation among early adolescence and to determine whether gender differences exist in these variables. The findings provide meaningful insights into the emotional and social functioning of adolescence during a critical developmental stage.

The results revealed a significant negative correlation between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation ($r = -0.42$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that adolescence who exhibit better emotional regulation experience lower levels of fear regarding negative social judgments. This finding is consistent with Gross's (1998) process model of emotion regulation, which suggests that individuals who effectively manage their emotional responses are less susceptible to anxiety and social fears. It also aligns with studies by Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, and Schweizer (2010), who found that adaptive regulation strategies such as cognitive reappraisal reduce vulnerability to negative affect and social anxiety. Thus, enhanced emotion regulation serves as a protective factor that enables adolescence to manage peer pressure, rejection, and social comparison, common stressors during early adolescence.

The analysis of gender differences in emotion regulation showed that male adolescence scored significantly higher than females ($t = 2.45$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that males tend to employ more effective emotion regulation strategies. This result could be attributed to gender-specific socialisation patterns, where boys are often encouraged to suppress emotional expression and display self-control, while girls may be more open and emotionally expressive. Similar results were reported by Zimmer-Gembsuck and Skinner (2011), who noted that males often demonstrate greater emotional inhibition and regulation during early adolescence. However, while higher regulation scores may indicate better control, it is essential to recognise that over-suppression of emotion can sometimes lead to internalising problems, emphasising the need for balanced emotional expression.

Regarding fear of negative evaluation, findings revealed that female adolescence reported significantly higher levels compared to males ($t = 2.68$, $p < 0.01$). This supports previous findings by Leary (1983) and Jaismeen Dua (2019), which suggest that adolescence girls are more sensitive to peer evaluation and social feedback. Cultural and developmental factors may contribute to this pattern, as females are often more socially attuned and experience stronger pressure to conform to social

expectations. Such heightened concern over external judgment may increase susceptibility to anxiety and self-conscious emotions during adolescence.

Taken together, these findings emphasise the interconnectedness between emotion regulation and social anxiety processes. Early adolescence is a transitional phase marked by identity formation, peer evaluation, and emotional maturation. Deficits in emotion regulation may amplify fears of social judgment, while adaptive strategies can buffer against negative self-evaluative emotions. The study thus highlights the importance of incorporating emotion regulation training and social-emotional learning (SEL) in school programs to enhance resilience, reduce anxiety, and promote psychological well-being among adolescence.

Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation among early adolescence, along with the influence of gender on these variables. The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation, indicating that adolescence who effectively manage their emotions tend to experience less anxiety about being negatively judged by others.

Furthermore, male adolescence demonstrated higher levels of emotion regulation, whereas female adolescence reported greater fear of negative evaluation, highlighting the influence of gender-based emotional and social experiences during adolescence.

These results underscore the crucial role of emotion regulation as a protective mechanism against Social Anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation in early adolescence. The study emphasises the importance of integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) programs and gender-sensitive counselling approaches within school settings. Such initiatives can help adolescence develop adaptive emotional strategies, enhance self-confidence, and reduce fear-based responses to social evaluation. Future research could extend this work by examining additional factors such as family dynamics, peer relationships, and cultural variables that may influence emotional development and social anxiety among youth.

Limitations of the Study

While the present study provides valuable insights into the relationship between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation among early adolescence, several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the study relied on self-report questionnaires, which may be subject to social desirability bias and response inaccuracies, as participants might have underreported or overreported their emotional experiences. Second, the sample was confined to adolescence from schools in Kanyakumari District, limiting the generalizability of the findings to broader populations or different cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Third, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to infer causality between emotion regulation and fear of negative evaluation, as the observed relationships are correlational in nature.

Additionally, the study considered only gender as a demographic variable, without examining other influential factors such as family environment, peer relationships, or personality traits, which could further explain variations in emotion regulation and social anxiety. Future studies employing longitudinal or mixed-method approaches and incorporating a more diverse sample may provide deeper insights into developmental patterns and causal mechanisms underlying these psychological constructs.

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