Is there a relation between emotion regulation strategies and COVID-19 related anxiety in Latinx Adults?

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BACKGROUND

• The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted millions of people living in the U.S. and has caused health and economic problems (CDC, 2020; OECD, 2020).
• Latinx are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 compared to non-Latinx White individuals (Pew Research Center, 2020).
• Individuals at-risk to contract COVID-19 report elevated levels of pandemic-related anxiety and health anxiety (Lee, 2020; Liu et al., 2020).
• Adaptive emotion regulation strategies may help individuals manage their anxiety whereas maladaptive emotion regulation strategies may exacerbate symptoms (Hamidein et al., 2020).

PURPOSE AND HYPOTHESES

Purpose: To understand whether there is a relation between emotion regulation strategies, general anxiety, and anxiety and fear related to COVID-19. We specifically focused on two emotion regulation strategies:

• Expressive Suppression: Expressive suppression involves inhibiting the expression of emotions (Gross & John, 2003).
• Cognitive Reappraisal: Cognitive reappraisal involves evaluating and reinterpreting emotion-laden experiences (Gross & John, 2003).

Hypothesis 1: Expressive suppression, a maladaptive emotion regulation strategy, will be positively related to general anxiety and anxiety related to COVID-19.

Hypothesis 2: Cognitive reappraisal, an adaptive emotion regulation strategy, will be negatively related to general anxiety and anxiety related to COVID-19.

Data Analytic Plan: First, bivariate correlations were run to explore associations between key variables. Next, multiple regression analyses were run to explore whether emotion regulation strategies were predictive of general anxiety and anxiety related to COVID-19.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 245 Latinx adults who resided in the U.S. A total of 348 adults initiated the survey, but only 245 fully completed it.

Procedures:

• Participants completed an online anonymous survey that was available in English and Spanish.
• Participants were recruited via social media (Facebook, Twitter), email, psychology listservs, and university news.

RESULTS

Correlation Analyses:

• Expressive suppression was positively related to general anxiety (r = .270, p < .01) and COVID-19-related anxiety (r = .191, p < .01).
• Cognitive reappraisal was negatively related to general anxiety (r = -.246, p < .01), but was not related to COVID-19-related anxiety (r = .035).

Regression Analyses:

• Expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal explained 12.3% of the variance of general anxiety ($R^2 = .123$, $F(2,225) = 15.88$, $p < .001$). Expressive suppression ($\beta = .271$, $t = 4.36$, $p < .001$) and cognitive reappraisal ($\beta = -.231$, $t = -3.72$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted general anxiety.
• Expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal explained 3.4% of the variance of COVID-19-related anxiety ($R^2 = .034$, $F(2,216) = 3.79$, $p < .05$). Only expressive suppression significantly predicted COVID-19 anxiety ($\beta = .180$, $t = 2.70$, $p < .05$).

DISCUSSION

• Hypothesis 1 was supported. We found a positive association between expressive suppression and both general anxiety and COVID-19-related anxiety. This finding is aligned with previous literature that has found those who utilize expressive suppression are more likely to experience distress (Gross & John, 2003). During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is possible that utilizing maladaptive emotion regulation strategies, such as expressive suppression, can lead to an increase in mental health symptoms. Frequent users of expressive suppression may also find it difficult to be open with those nearby, which is particularly salient given that most families are quarantining together.

• Hypothesis 2 was partially supported. We found a negative association between cognitive reappraisal and general anxiety, but not COVID-19-related anxiety. It is possible that individuals are unsure how to evaluate and reinterpret anxiety related to COVID-19 because there is a high amount of uncertainty of the future. It is also possible that people are unsure how to cope given that the pandemic is a new and ongoing stressor.

Limitations:

• Our results may not generalize to males as most of the sample were females.
• Most of the participants were between ages 18 and 25 and were college students. Therefore, results might reflect specific characteristics of this population and may not be generalizable to people of different backgrounds.

Future Directions:

• Future studies should examine whether age and gender moderate the relation between emotion regulation strategies and COVID-19-related anxiety.
• Also, it might be useful to explore whether emotion regulation strategies change over time and are related to COVID-19 local and national policies (e.g., reopening schools, businesses).

Table 1. Regression Analyses Predicting General Anxiety and COVID-19-related Anxiety

Predictor | $R^2$ | $\beta$ | t
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General Anxiety | | | |
Expressive suppression | .271*** | 4.360
Cognitive reappraisal | -.231*** | -3.721
COVID-related Anxiety | .034* | | |
Expressive suppression | .180* | 2.696
Cognitive reappraisal | -.042 | -6.30

REFERENCES