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EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING: A CLINICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Emotional regulation and emotional intelligence are closely connected psychological processes that influence how individuals respond to internal emotional experiences and external demands. Psychological well-being depends not only on the absence of mental illness but also on the capacity to maintain positive functioning, meaningful relationships, adaptive coping, and a sense of personal competence. Emotional intelligence may provide the knowledge and awareness required to identify emotions, while emotional regulation determines how those emotions are managed in specific situations. Clinical research increasingly recognizes emotion regulation as an important process in psychological disorders and treatment. This paper explores the influence of emotional regulation and emotional intelligence on psychological well-being from a clinical perspective. It examines the relationship between emotional awareness and well-being, the role of adaptive and maladaptive regulation strategies, and the implications for psychological assessment and intervention. The paper argues that strengthening emotional competencies may contribute to improved psychological functioning, resilience, interpersonal relationships, and subjective well-being.

Keywords: Emotional regulation, emotional intelligence, psychological well-being, clinical psychology, emotion awareness, resilience, mental health

I. INTRODUCTION

Psychological well-being is a multidimensional concept involving positive functioning, life satisfaction, emotional balance, meaningful relationships, personal growth, and the ability to cope effectively with challenges. Clinical psychology has traditionally focused strongly on psychological symptoms and mental disorders, but contemporary approaches increasingly recognize the importance of positive functioning alongside symptom reduction. A person may experience occasional negative emotions without having a mental disorder, while another individual may have relatively low symptoms but still experience poor life satisfaction or limited psychological functioning. Emotional regulation and emotional intelligence are therefore important areas for understanding how individuals maintain well-being under ordinary and stressful conditions.

Emotional regulation refers to the processes through which individuals influence the intensity, duration, expression, and meaning of emotional experiences. People may regulate emotions through cognitive reappraisal, acceptance, problem-solving, attentional strategies, social support, or behavioural responses. Some strategies, such as persistent rumination, avoidance, and excessive suppression, can become maladaptive when used inflexibly. Meta-analytic evidence among people with mental disorders has shown that acceptance and reappraisal are positively related to well-being, whereas avoidance and rumination are negatively related to well-being. Thus, the quality and flexibility of emotion regulation may be more important than simply attempting to control emotions.

Emotional intelligence complements emotional regulation by emphasizing the capacity to perceive, understand, and manage emotional information. Individuals need awareness of emotions before they can regulate them effectively. Emotional intelligence may therefore provide a psychological foundation for adaptive regulation. A 2026 meta-analysis examining 111 studies and 911 effects found that emotional intelligence and emotion-regulation processes are related, although the strength and nature of associations differed according to the type of emotional intelligence and regulatory process examined. This emerging evidence highlights the importance of distinguishing between emotional awareness, emotional understanding, and actual regulatory behaviour.

The clinical relevance of these constructs is substantial. Difficulties in emotion regulation are associated with a broad range of mental health problems, and recent evidence supports their

transdiagnostic significance. At the same time, emotional intelligence and well-being have demonstrated positive associations in meta-analytic research. Understanding these relationships may help clinical psychologists develop interventions that do not focus exclusively on reducing symptoms but also promote adaptive functioning and psychological well-being. This paper therefore examines the influence of emotional regulation and emotional intelligence on well-being, focusing on emotional awareness, adaptive and maladaptive regulation, and clinical implications for psychological intervention.

II. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, EMOTIONAL AWARENESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Emotional intelligence may influence psychological well-being by helping individuals recognize and interpret their emotional experiences. Emotional awareness is the capacity to identify what one is feeling and understand the circumstances associated with those feelings. Without such awareness, individuals may experience distress without understanding its source or may respond to emotional discomfort through automatic behaviours. Greater emotional awareness can create psychological distance between an emotional reaction and a behavioural response. This provides individuals with an opportunity to reflect on what they are experiencing before deciding how to act.

The relationship between emotional intelligence and well-being has been supported by quantitative research. A meta-analytic investigation involving 25 studies, 77 effect sizes, and 8,520 participants found a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and subjective well-being, with an overall association of approximately .32. These findings suggest that people with greater emotional competencies tend, on average, to report better subjective well-being. However, correlation does not establish that emotional intelligence directly causes well-being. Personality, social relationships, socioeconomic conditions, coping styles, and other psychological factors may influence both emotional intelligence and well-being.

Emotional understanding may also improve self-regulation by allowing individuals to distinguish between different emotional states. For example, frustration may require problem-solving, sadness may require social support or acceptance, while anxiety may require cognitive restructuring or gradual engagement with avoided situations. If all negative emotions are treated as identical, individuals may repeatedly apply inappropriate coping

strategies. Emotional intelligence may therefore increase psychological flexibility by helping individuals match responses to emotional circumstances. This perspective is consistent with contemporary research emphasizing emotion regulation as a dynamic and context-sensitive process.

Interpersonal functioning provides another pathway between emotional intelligence and well-being. Individuals who recognize their own emotions may communicate more clearly, while understanding others' emotions can facilitate empathy and constructive social interaction. Stronger interpersonal relationships can provide emotional support, companionship, and practical assistance during difficult periods. Conversely, repeated interpersonal conflict may increase emotional distress and undermine well-being. Emotional intelligence may therefore contribute indirectly to well-being by supporting relationship quality. Nevertheless, interpersonal functioning is influenced by many variables, and emotional intelligence alone cannot guarantee healthy relationships.

Emotional intelligence may also support resilience by helping individuals process difficult emotional experiences without becoming overwhelmed. Psychological well-being does not require constant happiness or the absence of distress. Instead, healthy functioning involves the capacity to experience negative emotions while continuing to pursue meaningful goals. Emotionally aware individuals may be better positioned to acknowledge difficult feelings, understand their significance, and employ flexible coping strategies. This distinction is particularly important in clinical psychology because attempts to eliminate all negative emotions may result in avoidance or suppression rather than healthy adjustment.

Thus, emotional intelligence and emotional awareness can contribute to psychological well-being by supporting self-understanding, interpersonal functioning, resilience, and adaptive coping. However, their effects should be considered within individual and cultural contexts. Emotional expression and regulation are influenced by social norms, family environments, cultural expectations, and developmental experiences. Contemporary research has emphasized that the relationship between emotion regulation and mental health can vary across cultural contexts. Clinical approaches should therefore avoid assuming that one emotional style is universally optimal and should instead consider the individual's cultural and interpersonal environment.

III. ADAPTIVE AND MALADAPTIVE EMOTION REGULATION

Emotion regulation is not inherently beneficial simply because an individual attempts to change an emotional state. The effectiveness of regulation depends on the strategy, context, timing, and flexibility with which it is used. Cognitive reappraisal, for example, involves changing the interpretation of an emotionally challenging situation. Acceptance involves allowing an emotional experience to exist without excessive struggle. Problem-solving focuses on changing controllable aspects of a stressful situation. These strategies may support psychological well-being when applied appropriately. Research in clinical populations has found positive relationships between reappraisal and acceptance and well-being.

In contrast, some regulatory strategies may become problematic when they are rigid or excessive. Rumination involves repetitive attention to negative thoughts and experiences without productive resolution, while avoidance involves attempting to escape situations or internal experiences associated with distress. Suppression involves inhibiting emotional expression and may be useful in certain contexts but problematic when used habitually. Evidence indicates that avoidance and rumination are negatively related to well-being among people with mental disorders. These findings suggest that psychological interventions should focus on increasing flexibility rather than simply encouraging individuals to regulate more frequently.

Recent clinical research strengthens the importance of this distinction. A 2026 systematic review and meta-analysis examining emotion-regulation strategy implementation across mental disorders found that individuals with mental disorders can implement regulation strategies, although their effectiveness may be somewhat lower than that of healthy controls. The findings also suggested that cognitive-change strategies and prior regulation training may improve effectiveness. This is clinically important because emotional dysregulation should not necessarily be viewed as a fixed inability. Individuals may develop more effective regulatory skills through appropriate intervention and practice.

Emotional intelligence may facilitate adaptive regulation because effective regulation requires emotional information. An individual must recognize an emotional response before deciding whether it needs to be changed, accepted, expressed, or acted upon. The recent meta-analysis on emotional intelligence and emotion regulation demonstrates that the relationship is complex and varies across forms of emotional intelligence and regulation processes. This suggests that clinicians should not assume that high emotional intelligence automatically produces effective regulation. Awareness without appropriate behavioural

strategies may not be sufficient.

Clinical interventions can therefore focus on helping individuals develop a broader repertoire of regulation strategies. A client may learn to use reappraisal in situations where interpretation can be changed, acceptance when an emotion cannot immediately be eliminated, problem-solving when practical action is possible, and social support when interpersonal resources are needed. Such flexibility can help prevent dependence on a single strategy. The aim is not to remove unpleasant emotions but to reduce the extent to which emotions interfere with valued activities, relationships, and psychological functioning.

Overall, adaptive emotional regulation can be understood as flexible management rather than rigid emotional control. Psychological well-being is supported when individuals can experience emotions without being dominated by them and can select responses that fit the demands of a situation. Clinical psychology can contribute by identifying maladaptive regulation patterns and helping individuals build alternative responses. This approach is particularly relevant because emotion regulation is increasingly recognized as a transdiagnostic mechanism across psychological disorders and therapeutic interventions.

IV. CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

The integration of emotional intelligence and emotion regulation into clinical practice can improve psychological assessment by providing information about how individuals understand and respond to emotional experiences. Clinicians may assess emotional awareness, regulatory strategies, coping patterns, interpersonal functioning, and psychological symptoms. Standardized measures can be combined with clinical interviews and behavioural observations to create a more comprehensive formulation. This approach avoids reducing emotional functioning to a single questionnaire score and allows clinicians to understand how emotional processes operate within the individual's broader life context.

Intervention may begin with emotional identification and awareness. Clients can be encouraged to notice emotional states, bodily sensations, thoughts, situational triggers, and behavioural tendencies. This process may help individuals identify patterns that previously operated automatically. Once emotional patterns become more visible, therapy can introduce appropriate regulatory strategies. Cognitive-behavioural methods may address unhelpful interpretations, acceptance-based approaches may reduce struggle with unavoidable emotions, and behavioural interventions may address avoidance. Contemporary clinical

reviews emphasize that emotion regulation can be a mechanism through which psychological treatments produce improvement.

Psychological well-being should remain a central treatment outcome rather than merely an indirect consequence of symptom reduction. Clinical improvement can involve greater life satisfaction, meaningful relationships, positive functioning, autonomy, resilience, and engagement with valued activities. Research indicates that emotion regulation is associated with well-being even among individuals with mental disorders. Therefore, interventions that strengthen emotional competencies may have relevance beyond reducing symptoms. They may also help individuals develop the capacity to maintain healthier functioning after acute psychological difficulties have improved.

Prevention is another important clinical application. Emotional intelligence and regulation skills can potentially be strengthened before severe psychological problems emerge. Psychoeducational programs can teach individuals to recognize emotions, understand stress responses, communicate effectively, and use adaptive coping strategies. Such programs may be particularly useful in educational, occupational, and community settings. However, preventive approaches should not suggest that individuals are solely responsible for their mental health. Social inequality, discrimination, trauma, family conditions, and environmental stressors can significantly affect psychological well-being and must also be recognized.

The therapeutic relationship itself provides an important context for emotional learning. Clients can experience validation while learning that emotions can be acknowledged without automatically determining behaviour. Therapists can model emotional awareness, reflective thinking, and interpersonal regulation. Over time, individuals may internalize these skills and apply them outside therapy. The therapeutic process therefore represents both a structured intervention and a relational environment in which emotional competencies can develop. Such work should remain sensitive to cultural expectations regarding emotional expression and interpersonal behaviour.

In summary, the clinical value of emotional intelligence and emotion regulation lies in their potential to provide modifiable targets for psychological intervention. Recent research indicates that emotion-regulation difficulties are widespread across mental disorders, while effective regulation is associated with better well-being. Clinical psychology can use this

evidence to move beyond a narrow focus on symptom reduction and incorporate emotional competence, psychological flexibility, and positive functioning into treatment. Such an approach can contribute to more comprehensive and person-centred mental health care.

V. CONCLUSION

Emotional intelligence and emotional regulation are important psychological processes that can influence psychological well-being. Emotional intelligence provides individuals with capacities for recognizing and understanding emotional experiences, while emotion regulation concerns the processes used to respond to and manage those experiences. Research has demonstrated positive relationships between emotional intelligence and subjective well-being and has identified important connections between emotion regulation and mental health. Together, these findings suggest that emotional competencies have meaningful relevance for psychological functioning.

Adaptive regulation is particularly important because not all attempts to control emotions are beneficial. Acceptance, cognitive reappraisal, and problem-solving may support well-being, whereas persistent avoidance and rumination can be associated with poorer outcomes. Recent research further indicates that individuals with mental disorders can learn and implement emotion-regulation strategies, particularly when appropriate training is provided. Consequently, emotional regulation should be viewed as a potentially modifiable psychological process rather than a fixed personal characteristic.

From a clinical perspective, emotional intelligence and regulation can be incorporated into assessment, case formulation, prevention, and psychological treatment. Clinicians can help individuals identify emotional patterns, develop flexible coping strategies, improve interpersonal functioning, and strengthen psychological resilience. Contemporary clinical psychology increasingly recognizes emotion regulation as a transdiagnostic treatment mechanism, supporting its relevance across diverse psychological problems. At the same time, interventions must consider cultural, developmental, interpersonal, and environmental factors.

In conclusion, strengthening emotional intelligence and flexible emotion regulation may contribute to improved psychological well-being and more adaptive functioning. The objective should not be to eliminate negative emotions but to help individuals understand emotions, tolerate distress, and respond effectively to changing circumstances. Future

research should investigate these relationships across diverse populations and clinical settings and should clarify causal pathways between emotional competencies and well-being. A clinically informed approach that integrates emotional intelligence, emotion regulation, and positive psychological functioning can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of mental health.

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