Methods to Regulate Negative Emotions under the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: Under the current environment of the COVID-19 pandemic, people have to decrease the times to go outside to have face to face contact with other people and be in touch with nature, and it is easier to feel negative emotions. Therefore, it is currently very necessary to investigate effective emotion regulation methods for people to relieve negative emotions in the COVID-19 pandemic and more people can reduce negative emotions and be healthier under the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper summarizes different emotion regulation strategies to regulate negative emotions under the COVID-19 pandemic, skills to reduce negative emotions under the COVID-19 pandemic, behaviors to relieve negative emotions under the COVID-19 pandemic and methods regulate ineffective emotions for specific populations during the COVID-19 pandemic, so as to help people relieve negative emotions and have more healthier emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, Emotion regulation, Strategies, Mental health

1.   Introduction

In the current climate of the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone must restrict their opportunities to go out and meet with others, wear masks outside, and constantly monitor news regarding COVID-19 to modify their coping strategies. Outside, they must wear masks and follow other laws to avoid spreading viruses. Many people experience stress frequently, and it is easy to feel unpleasant emotions and develop despair and anxiety. Therefore, exploring efficient methods for reducing negative emotions and increasing happy feelings is vital. Under the COVID-19 pandemic, consequently, more people will feel more comfortable and healthier. The study aims to identify effective methods for reducing negative emotions in a COVID-19 setting. The process of research is a literature review. This research aims to make it easier for people to have healthier feelings, limit destructive emotions, and be more helpful in the wake of the current COVID-19 epidemic by compiling the existing effective strategies for treating harmful emotions. Even amid the pandemic, it is hoped that more people will be aware of more effective techniques to enhance mood, allowing them to continue doing what they enjoy and being whom they wish to be.

2.   Strategies to Alleviate Negative Emotions

Four primary strategies enhance one's disposition during a COVID-19 pandemic. The first one is reducing negative emotions through emotion control techniques. Integrative emotion regulation is

the first effective emotion regulation technique. Integrative emotion management entails a disposition of openness and acceptance toward unpleasant feelings, even when they are painful and challenging. Integrative emotion regulation is a process in which people work to control their unpleasant emotions and gain insight into how these emotions reflect their personality, values, and preferences. Ultimately, people's actions are influenced by their increased emotional awareness. They are more at ease expressing or hiding their emotions and understand how to act on them. They can learn to control their reactions in the future when their feelings are high. Integration was associated with a small but statistically significant increase in anxiety and depression and a moderate increase in overall life satisfaction. Emotional maturity involves adopting a more proactive outlook. It's not only about being open to feeling other people's emotions; it is also about using those emotions to guide our choices and progress toward goals [1].

Integrative emotion controllers are not afraid of or numb to their negative emotions; instead, they approach them with a genuine and innate interest. Using negative emotions as a form of behavioral feedback, one aspect of integrative emotion regulation, people may avoid the pitfalls associated with dysregulation. Integrative emotion regulators pay close attention to their emotions, try to gain insight, and model their actions after they have previously handled negative feelings. For them, negative feelings have the potential to be valuable indicators of where and how to make changes in one's conducts. Both are likely to protect against the helplessness brought by dysregulation, although the latter is significant. New studies are beginning to back up the benefits of emotional integration, showing positive links between it and things like happiness and adaptive social outcomes like kindness, empathy, and close relationships. Dynamic integration was found to be a predictor of future gains in mental health in longitudinal studies. People who were encouraged to engage in emotional integration rather than repress or decrease their feelings during a fright-inducing film showed lower levels of anxiety and tension after being exposed to the same movie a second time. Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, worries about the corona are positively connected with all three emotion regulation techniques, with the most vital relationship being between dysregulation and integration. One's quality of life, including their ability to relax and sleep soundly, might take a hit when they are worried about their heart. People might be prompted to practice emotional integration to boost their affective functioning. Since many existing emotion control programs focus on cognitive reappraisal and problem-solving, it appears beneficial to add material and exercises on dynamic integration. To mentally reappraise an emotional episode or actively attempt to resolve the issue causing negative emotions, people may need to be taught to welcome and acknowledge their feelings, understand the source of their emotions, and then choose voluntarily how to act on them during the COVID-19 pandemic [1].

The second strategy is to refocus on planning, which involves considering what actions to take and how to deal with unfavorable incidents. It is the cognitive component of action-focused coping, which does not necessarily predict actual conduct. Positive redirection is the practice of diverting one's attention away from a traumatic incident and toward joyous and pleasant topics. Refocusing on positive things can be regarded as a sort of "mental disengagement" and is defined as turning or redirecting one's attention to more positive subjects to think less about the original incident. It may be claimed that diverting attention to more positive issues is an excellent short-term response, yet, it may hinder adaptive coping in the long run [2]. Individuals who adopt positive emotional regulation strategies, such as active refocusing and refocusing plans, can view the epidemic dialectically, have an optimistic outlook on their health, and improve the quality of their lives while ensuring the quality of their sleep. Therefore, guiding individuals to adopt positive re-attention emotional regulation strategies can effectively improve the quality of their lives [3].

Making peace with unpleasant feelings is the last strategy. This new kind of CBT is known as "Acceptance and Commitment Therapy" (ACT). Its crucial notion is "acceptance", which is not

only tolerance but a positive rather than critical accommodation of experience in the present moment; that is, making room for uncomfortable sensations, urges, and emotions rather than rejecting, manipulating, escaping, or viewing them as objects. Accepting reality involves allowing our ideas and feelings to exist, regardless of whether they are pleasant or painful. Be receptive to them and give them space [4]. ACT's overarching goal is to help people learn to tolerate unpleasant emotions and thoughts while simultaneously fostering a commitment to taking positive steps toward improving one's life. In particular, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) aims to reduce the practice of avoidance, defined as the deliberate avoidance of thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations that have been evaluated as undesirable. Extreme levels of experiencing avoidance and other control mechanisms for managing emotional experiences are characterized by suppression and release. Recent empirical studies preliminarily support the validity of this construct by showing that people with high scores on experiential avoidance react to emotionally provoking procedures, like physical challenges and emotionally charged film clips, with more significant emotional distress and negative cognition than those with low scores on experiential avoidance. Many of the ACT's techniques geared at overcoming experience avoidance center on developing prosocial behavior, or the "ability to connect the present moment more thoroughly as a fully functioning human individual and to alter or persevere in behavior when doing so achieves desired purposes" [5]. Only by being willing to hear the truth can people take the next step of "dedicated action" to ensure their safety feeling and the safety of others.

3.   Skills to Reduce Poor Moods

The second phase of reducing poor mood during the COVID-19 pandemic is to develop strategies to alleviate negative feelings. The first talent is resilience, which is the capacity to adapt and rebalance in adversity. It is required for individuals to build themselves up in life and after risk exposure. Psychological resilience is the capacity to be influenced by one's social and cultural environment, which can be continuously developed, sculpted, and increased through training and external aid. Through education and guidance, adolescents can develop insight and self-reflection and improve their ability to assess situations; through the support and training of families, schools, and society, the development of their tenacity and the improvement of their problem-solving skills will contribute to the advancement of adolescents' psychological resilience and their resilience to adversity [6].

The second ability is problem-solving, which focuses on coping with stressful events or situations under personal control instead of dealing with stress through emotional techniques such as fantasy, patience, and denial avoidance. Problem-centered coping can help adolescents reduce psychological crises. Still, adolescents in crisis are more likely to use emotion-centric coping. Over-emotion-oriented coping is associated with various psychological problems and maladaptive behaviors, such as surveys showing that in the COVID-19 pandemic, anxiety levels, clinical depressive symptoms, smartphone addiction, and Internet addiction were significantly positively correlated with over-emotion-oriented coping. Therefore, training programs that teach adolescents effective coping methods can develop their stress coping abilities and enhance their coping skills, thereby decreasing the likelihood of psychiatric crises [6].

The third competency is empathy. Empathy training can facilitate the development of emotion management skills, and reducing an individual's risk perception can increase their emotion regulation level [7].

4.   Behaviors to Relieve Negative Emotions

The third phase to alleviate negative mood during a COVID-19 epidemic is to develop activities that lessen negative feelings. The initial behavior aims to increase social support. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the availability of social assistance can facilitate the mental health development of an individual. Increasing social help can motivate individuals to employ cognitive reappraisal procedures, reducing negative emotions such as depression and anxiety, increasing positive emotional experience, and improving mental health. Individuals are more able to re-evaluate and think about emergencies and change negative cognition, such as self-denial, catastrophic thinking, perfectionism, etc., in response to stress, thereby reducing their negative emotions and promoting their mental health, the more support they receive from others in society and the more positively they utilize that support. Less psychologically or objectively supported by their spouses, friends, or family members, individuals are more inclined to use harmful, repressive coping techniques for self-preservation and to manage their conduct by suppressing their emotions. An increase in social support can strengthen an individual's psychological resilience and lessen the frequency with which expressive inhibitions are used, enhancing their ability to respond to stress and reducing their anxiety and depression symptoms. The emotion regulation theory and process model also emphasize that expression inhibition is a maladaptive emotion regulation strategy, that the use of expression inhibition reduces the experience of positive emotions while alleviating the negative emotions of the individual, that the negative physiological experience is not reduced, and that the use of expression inhibition may also harm the individual's cognitive function. This study also demonstrates that increased levels of social support during the COVID-19 pandemic help individuals reduce avoidance and inhibition of their emotional expression, i.e., high levels of social support reduce the use of expression suppression strategies, which explains why, during the COVID-19 pandemic, social support for expression suppression strategies helps people maintain a healthy mental state. Individuals who do not actively use social support will experience more negative emotions when encountering difficulties. In contrast, those who actively participate in group activities and effectively use social support to vent their challenges and overcome obstacles will experience more positive emotions [8].

The second behavior is increased physical activity. The role of physical exercise in enhancing mood is that it can successfully lower unpleasant emotions among college students during an epidemic. The more time spent engaging in physical activity during an epidemic, the happier and less negative emotions there are [9].

As for the third, it is to develop a list of the things that make you happy, check them off, and then do them. Some examples of these activities include viewing shows and movies that you usually want to see but do not have time to read, playing mindless mini-games, hugging comfortable items, taking a hot bath, chatting online, working out, taking deep breaths, etc. In conclusion, arm yourself with positive feelings, maintain a sunny disposition, and make yourself joyful [4].

The fourth characteristic is to establish a daily routine. Replicating a regular practice in this type of situation likely gave people a sense of control by requiring them to take practical actions to develop a step-by-step plan to deal with the problem [10].

5.   Methods to Alleviate Stress and Destructive Emotions in Specific Populations

Finding techniques to alleviate stress and destructive emotions in specific demographics is the fourth measure to reduce low mood during the COVID-19 pandemic. International students make up the bulk of the starting enrollment. Overseas, students commonly used "wished the problem would go away or be repaired" and "had ideas or expectations about how things may turn out" as

wishful thinking. The phrases "I attempted to examine the situation to understand it better" (problem analysis management) and "I thought that every cloud has a silver lining. Therefore I tried to see the bright side of things" (optimism bias) had the highest response rates among Hungarian students (falls into cognitive restructuring coping). For international students, wishful thinking was linked to increased stress and anxiety, while goal orientation had the opposite impact. Reduced stress and anxiety were seen among students studying at home who used cognitive restructuring as a coping strategy [11]. The Acupoint-Plucking approach can significantly alleviate psychological stress in front-line nurses fighting epidemics to release negative emotions such as tension and worry immediately [12].

6. Conclusion

To sum up, there are four aspects that can help improve negative emotions for people under the COVID-19 pandemic. The first is to learn effective emotion regulation strategies, including integrative emotion regulation, positive re-attention emotional regulation strategies and accepting bad feelings. The second is to develop skills to alleviate negative feelings, which include resilience, problem solving skill and empathy. The third aspect is to have behaviors to lessen negative feelings, including increasing social support, having more physical exercise, doing something that is joyful, and establishing a daily routine. The forth is to have different methods to alleviate stress and destructive emotions for specific populations including international students and front-line nurses fighting epidemics. The meaning of the research for this paper is to help more people understand and learn effective methods to reduce negative emotions and have healthier mood during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, more people can have more positive emotions, have better psychological condition and enjoy a better life in the COVID-19 pandemic. The first limitation in the study is that there are different kinds of effective methods to regulate negative emotions for people in COVID-19 pandemic, but the classification of different effective methods to reduce negative emotions has not yet been very logical and clear. It is needed to find out more negative emotion regulation methods so there may be more clues to make the classification and connection between different methods more clear. The second limitation is that in some papers, there is no experimental data that prove some methods that relieve negative emotions are scientifically valid. So, it is probably needed to have more scientific experiments and data that can prove the effectiveness of those methods.

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