

Abstract

Background and Objectives: Aging theories suggest that emotion regulation ability improves with age over the course of adulthood and older adults regulate their emotions better than younger adults. However, when a crisis occurs, older adults' advantage in emotion regulation may dissipate due to their physiological decline in aging. This study examined: with the infection risk perception aroused on COVID-19, the association between age and psychological well-being, emotion regulation strategies and the consequences associated with the emotion regulation pattern during COVID-19 in Hong Kong.

Research Design and Methods: This study was carried out from March to May 2020. 91 younger adults and 107 older adults took part in a 21-day daily diary study. Participants reported the psychological well-being including positive affect, negative affect, depression; infection risk perception level, emotion regulation strategies on daily basis. Repeated measures ANOVA was performed.

Results: If infection risk perception was low, younger adults' depression level decreased across time. Younger adults' negative affect and depression level were reported to be higher than those of older adults. Both cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression were reported to be higher among older than those of younger adults. Both cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, although cognitive resource-consuming, were moderating factors for depression among older adults. For older adults with higher infection risk perception, having high cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression helped them to reduce depression over time. However, the same buffering effect did not occur for younger adults.

Discussion and Implications: These results demonstrated the importance of emotion regulation under the context of a worldwide health crisis. Recommendations were given from public

administration and psychosocial support perspectives on assisting adults to develop skills to buffer against distress.

Keywords: aging, emotion regulation, COVID-19, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression