



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Emotional intelligence, coping strategies and rejection sensitivity among young adults

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Abstract

Emerging adulthood is a critical developmental phase marked by emotional instability and evolving interpersonal relationships, making individuals particularly vulnerable to rejection-related distress (2). The present study aimed to examine the relationships between emotional intelligence (EI), coping strategies (adaptive and maladaptive), and rejection sensitivity (RS) among young adults. A quantitative cross-sectional correlational research design was employed. A sample of 210 participants aged 18–25 years was recruited using purposive sampling. Data were collected using standardized instruments: the Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10), Brief COPE Inventory, and Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (A-RSQ). Descriptive statistics, Spearman's correlation, and multiple regression analyses were conducted. Results indicated that emotional intelligence and adaptive coping strategies were significantly negatively correlated with rejection sensitivity, whereas maladaptive coping strategies showed a significant positive correlation. Regression analysis revealed that maladaptive coping emerged as the strongest predictor of rejection sensitivity, while emotional intelligence demonstrated both direct and indirect protective effects. The findings highlight the critical role of emotional regulation and coping mechanisms in reducing vulnerability to rejection sensitivity. The study contributes to existing literature and offers practical implications for interventions aimed at enhancing emotional resilience among young adults.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence; Coping Strategies; Rejection Sensitivity; Emerging Adulthood; Emotion Regulation

1. Introduction

Emerging adulthood represents a transitional developmental period characterized by identity exploration, emotional fluctuations, and evolving interpersonal relationships (2). During this stage, individuals are particularly susceptible to emotional distress arising from social interactions, especially experiences of rejection.

Rejection sensitivity (RS) refers to the tendency to anxiously expect, readily perceive, and intensely react to perceived rejection (3). High levels of rejection sensitivity have been associated with adverse psychological outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and interpersonal dysfunction (17,20).

Emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively, has been identified as a protective factor that enhances emotional regulation and resilience (8). Similarly, coping strategies—classified as adaptive and maladaptive—play a crucial role in managing stress and emotional distress (7).

Although previous research has examined these constructs independently, limited studies have explored their combined influence on rejection sensitivity. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the relationships among emotional intelligence, coping strategies, and rejection sensitivity among young adults.

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1.1. Research Hypotheses

- H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and rejection sensitivity among young adults.
 - H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between adaptive coping strategies and rejection sensitivity among young adults.
 - H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between maladaptive coping strategies and rejection sensitivity among young adults.
 - H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and adaptive coping strategies among young adults.
 - H₀₅: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and maladaptive coping strategies among young adults.
 - H₀₆: Emotional intelligence and adaptive coping strategies do not significantly predict rejection sensitivity among young adults.
 - H₀₇: Emotional intelligence and maladaptive coping strategies do not significantly predict rejection sensitivity among young adults.
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2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research design was adopted.

2.2. Participants

A total of 210 young adults aged between 18 and 25 years participated.

2.3. Sampling Technique

- Age between 18–25 years
- Ability to understand English
- Voluntary consent

2.4. Instruments

- Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10)
- Brief COPE Inventory
- Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (A-RSQ)

2.5. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through an online survey. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation.

2.6. Statistical Analysis

- Descriptive statistics
- Spearman's correlation
- Multiple regression
- Significance level: $p < 0.05$

2.7. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to APA ethical guidelines. Participation was voluntary and confidential.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 Descriptive statistics (N = 210)

Variable	Mean	SD	Median	Min	Max	Skew	Kurtosis
Emotional Intelligence	37.40	6.36	38.00	13	50	-0.99	2.00
Adaptive Coping	2.87	0.50	2.88	1.25	4.00	-0.41	0.78
Maladaptive Coping	2.17	0.55	2.09	1.09	3.82	0.52	-0.11
Rejection Sensitivity	9.66	3.83	9.78	1.00	28.80	0.81	2.96

3.2. Correlation Analysis

Table 2 Correlation matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. EI	—			
2. Adaptive Coping	0.404***	—		
3. Maladaptive Coping	-0.179**	0.082	—	
4. RS	-0.225**	-0.171*	0.316***	—

3.3. Regression Analysis

Table 3 Model 1 Summary

R	R ²
0.25	0.06

Table 4 Model 1 Coefficients

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
EI	-0.09	0.04	-1.94	0.053
Adaptive Coping	-1.20	0.56	-2.16	0.032

Table 5 Model 2 Summary

R	R ²
0.34	0.11

Table 6 Model 2 Coefficients

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
EI	-0.10	0.04	-2.58	0.010
Maladaptive Coping	1.90	0.46	4.13	<0.001

4. Discussion

Findings indicate that emotional intelligence enhances adaptive coping, thereby reducing rejection sensitivity (5,8). Conversely, maladaptive coping increases emotional distress and vulnerability to rejection (17,20).

5. Conclusion

The present study provides empirical evidence that emotional intelligence and coping strategies play a significant role in shaping rejection sensitivity among young adults. The findings indicate that individuals with higher emotional intelligence are better equipped to regulate their emotions and respond to interpersonal challenges in a more adaptive manner. This emotional competence, in turn, is associated with lower levels of rejection sensitivity.

Furthermore, the study highlights the differential impact of coping strategies. Adaptive coping strategies, such as problem-solving and cognitive reframing, were associated with reduced rejection sensitivity, suggesting their protective role in managing interpersonal stress. In contrast, maladaptive coping strategies, including avoidance and emotional suppression, were found to exacerbate rejection sensitivity and emerged as the strongest predictor in the regression analysis. These results underscore the importance of how individuals cope with stress, rather than the presence of stress alone.

The findings contribute to the existing body of literature by offering an integrated understanding of emotional intelligence and coping mechanisms as key determinants of rejection sensitivity. The study also supports theoretical frameworks such as emotion regulation models and interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory, emphasizing the role of emotional processes in social functioning.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that interventions aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence and promoting adaptive coping strategies may be effective in reducing rejection sensitivity and improving psychological well-being among young adults. Programs focusing on emotional awareness, regulation skills, and healthy coping mechanisms can be particularly beneficial in academic and clinical settings.

However, the study is not without limitations. The use of a cross-sectional design restricts causal interpretations, and reliance on self-report measures may introduce response biases. Future research may adopt longitudinal designs and include diverse populations to enhance generalizability and explore causal pathways.

In conclusion, emotional intelligence and coping strategies are crucial psychological resources that influence how young adults perceive and respond to rejection. Strengthening these capacities can play a vital role in fostering emotional resilience and healthier interpersonal relationships.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of ethical approval

The study adhered to ethical guidelines.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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