

The Mediating Role of Dissociation on Emotional Repression and Memory Loss among College Students

Aafrin A Saleem¹, Aisha Hanan P M¹, Fitha Fathima¹, V S Santhiyago¹ and V A Ajitha^{2*}

¹1st Year PG M.Sc. Clinical Psychology Student, Christ College Autonomous Irinjalakuda Thrissur Kerala India

²Assistant Professor, Christ College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda, University of Calicut, Kerala, India

*Corresponding Author E-Mail ID: ajitha.christ@gmail.com

Abstract

Emotional repression refers to the unconscious avoidance or suppression of emotional experiences while memory loss involves difficulties in recalling everyday events or information. Dissociation is characterized by disruptions in awareness, memory or identity and often develops as a psychological response to stress or unresolved emotional experiences. College students frequently experience academic pressure, interpersonal conflicts and emotional demands which increase their vulnerability to maladaptive emotional processing and cognitive disturbances. Despite the growing attention given to emotional regulation and cognitive functioning, limited research has examined the mediating role of dissociation in the relationship between emotional repression and memory loss among college students. The present study aimed to examine the mediating role of dissociation on emotional repression and memory loss among college students aged 18–25 years. A cross sectional quantitative research design was employed and the samples were selected through a convenient sampling method. Standardized psychological instruments were used to collect the data including the Dissociative Experiences Scale-II (DES-II) to measure dissociation, the Everyday Memory Questionnaire (EMQ) to assess memory loss and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) to evaluate emotional repression. Statistical analyses included Independent Samples t-test, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Linear Regression analysis. The findings revealed that there was no significant gender difference in emotional repression among college students. Dissociation showed a negative correlation with emotional repression and a positive correlation with memory loss while emotional repression showed a slight negative correlation with memory loss. Regression analysis indicated that emotional repression explained only a small proportion of variance in memory loss and the regression model was not statistically

significant. The study highlights the importance of understanding dissociative tendencies and emotional processing patterns among college students and suggests the need for psychological interventions promoting healthy emotional expression and cognitive well-being.

Keywords: *Dissociative Experiences, Everyday Memory, Emotion Regulation, Young Adult*

1 Introduction

Emotions are an essential part of human life and play an important role in psychological well being, behaviour and cognitive functioning. However, individuals do not always express or process their emotions openly. Many people tend to suppress painful thoughts, emotions or experiences in order to avoid emotional discomfort or psychological distress. This tendency is known as emotional repression. Emotional repression refers to the unconscious blocking or avoidance of unpleasant emotions, memories or impulses from conscious awareness (Freud, 1915). Although repression may temporarily help individuals cope with stress, prolonged emotional suppression can negatively affect both mental and cognitive health.

One of the psychological conditions often associated with emotional repression is dissociation. Dissociation can be understood as a disruption in the normal integration of thoughts, emotions, memory, identity and awareness (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Individuals experiencing dissociation may feel disconnected from their emotions, surroundings, thoughts or even from themselves. Dissociation is commonly viewed as a psychological defense mechanism that protects individuals from overwhelming emotional experiences or stress. While mild dissociative experiences are common in everyday life, persistent dissociation may interfere with emotional functioning and memory processes.

Researchers have found that individuals who frequently repress emotions are more likely to experience dissociative symptoms. When emotions are continuously avoided instead of processed, the mind may distance itself from distressing experiences as a way of coping. According to Spiegel et al. (2011), dissociation often develops as a protective response to emotional overload, trauma or unresolved psychological conflict. Over time, this pattern may affect an individual's ability to process emotions in a healthy manner.

Memory loss is another important psychological concern connected with emotional repression and dissociation. Memory is essential for learning, personal identity and everyday functioning. Emotional distress and dissociative experiences can interfere with the encoding,

storage and retrieval of memories. Individuals with higher levels of dissociation often report forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating and problems recalling personal experiences or important information (Staniloiu & Markowitsch, 2012). Emotional repression may also contribute to memory difficulties because suppressed emotions and unresolved experiences can create psychological strain that affects cognitive functioning.

College students are particularly vulnerable to emotional stress and psychological difficulties due to academic pressure, social expectations, relationship problems, career uncertainty and adjustment challenges. Many students may avoid expressing emotions because of fear of criticism, lack of emotional support or social stigma related to mental health. Continuous emotional suppression during this stage of life may increase the risk of dissociative experiences and memory related problems. Since college years are important for emotional development and identity formation, understanding these psychological factors becomes highly relevant.

Previous studies have separately examined emotional repression, dissociation and memory functioning. Gross and John (2003) reported that habitual emotional suppression is associated with increased psychological distress and reduced emotional well-being. Similarly, studies on dissociation suggest that dissociative experiences are linked with difficulties in attention, concentration and memory performance. However, limited research has explored how dissociation may act as a mediating factor between emotional repression and memory loss, especially among college students.

The concept of mediation explains how one variable indirectly influences another through a third variable. In the present study, dissociation is considered as a mediating variable between emotional repression and memory loss. Emotional repression may increase dissociative experiences, which in turn may contribute to memory difficulties. Understanding this relationship can provide deeper insight into the psychological mechanisms through which emotional difficulties influence cognitive functioning.

The present study aims to examine the mediating role of dissociation in the relationship between emotional repression and memory loss among college students. The study is expected to contribute to the understanding of emotional and cognitive difficulties experienced by students and may help in developing mental health interventions, emotional awareness programmes and psychological support systems for young adults.

2. Review of Literature

Samridhi Thukral (2025) conducted a systematic review on perceived stress and dissociative experiences among college students. The review found that academic stress, emotional pressure and trauma-related experiences were positively associated with dissociation, emotional numbness and memory lapses among college students. The study emphasized that prolonged emotional suppression may contribute to dissociative symptoms and disturbances in memory functioning. Chui-De Chiu et al. (2019) examined the relationship between self-referential memory, trauma and dissociation among college students. The findings revealed that weakened self-referential memory and unresolved emotional experiences significantly contributed to dissociative tendencies. The study suggested that dissociation interferes with normal memory integration and emotional processing. Osman Özdemir et al. (2015) investigated the relationship between dissociation, attention and memory dysfunction in a non-clinical sample. The findings showed that dissociative experiences were negatively associated with verbal memory, long-term memory and overall cognitive functioning. Higher dissociation was related to poorer memory performance and greater cognitive dysfunction. Petr Bob et al. (2013) conducted research on dissociation and stress-related psychopathology in healthy young adults. The study showed that stress and emotional difficulties were significantly associated with dissociative symptoms including memory disturbances, emotional numbness and cognitive disruptions. Angelina R. Sutin and Gary D. Stockdale (2011) studied the relationship between dissociation and autobiographical memory experiences. Their findings revealed that individuals with higher dissociation reported emotionally inconsistent and fragmented memories along with greater emotional confusion and shame. The study emphasized that dissociation influences the emotional and phenomenological quality of memories.

3. Method

3.1 Objectives

1. To assess the levels of emotional repression, dissociation and memory loss among college students.
2. To examine the relationship between emotional repression and memory loss among college students.
3. To examine the relationship between emotional repression and dissociation among college students.

4. To examine the relationship between dissociation and memory loss among college students.
5. To determine the mediating role of dissociation in the relationship between emotional repression and memory loss among college students.
6. To examine differences in emotional repression, memory loss and dissociation based on gender among college students.

3.2 Hypotheses

H1: There will be a significant relationship between dissociation and emotional repression among college students.

H2: There will be a significant relationship between dissociation and memory loss among college students.

H3: There will be a significant relationship between emotional repression and memory loss among college students.

H4: There will be a mediating role of dissociation between emotional repression and memory loss among college students.

H5: There will be significant gender differences in emotional repression, dissociation and memory loss among college students.

3.3 Sample

The study was conducted among college students aged 18–25 years residing in India. A total of 160 participants were included in the study, consisting of 80 males and 80 females. The participants were selected using the convenience sampling method.

3.4 Data and Sources of Data

Primary data for the study were collected through Google Forms. The participants completed the questionnaire after providing informed consent and confidentiality was assured. The data collected were used solely for academic and research purposes. The Google Form consisted of items related to emotional repression, dissociation and memory loss. The study was conducted among young adults aged 18–25 years residing in India. Ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, confidentiality and privacy of responses were strictly maintained during the process of data collection.

3.5 Instruments Used

1. Dissociative Experiences Scale – II (DES-II)

The Dissociative Experiences Scale-II (DES-II) was used to assess dissociative experiences among participants. The scale measures dimensions such as amnesia, depersonalization/derealization and absorption. It is one of the most widely used self-report measures for assessing dissociative symptoms in both clinical and non-clinical populations. Participants rate the frequency of their experiences on the scale and higher scores indicate greater dissociative experiences.

2. Emotional Repression Questionnaire (ERQ)

The Emotional Repression Questionnaire (ERQ) was used to assess emotional repression and suppression of emotional expression among participants. The tool evaluates the extent to which individuals consciously or unconsciously inhibit their emotional experiences and emotional expression in daily life. Higher scores indicate higher levels of emotional repression.

3. Everyday Memory Questionnaire (EMQ)

The Everyday Memory Questionnaire (EMQ) was used to assess everyday memory failures experienced by the participants. The scale measures difficulties related to attention, verbal memory, spatial memory and daily activities. Higher scores on the scale indicate greater memory related difficulties in everyday functioning.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data collected from the participants were analyzed using SPSS software. Mean and standard deviation were calculated to understand the overall distribution of scores on emotional repression, dissociative experiences and everyday memory.

An Independent Samples t-test was used to examine whether there were differences between male and female participants on the study variables. Levene's Test was conducted to check whether the variances of the groups were equal. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between emotional repression, dissociative experiences and everyday memory. Multiple Linear Regression analysis was also performed to understand whether emotional repression and dissociative experiences could predict everyday memory. These analyses helped in understanding the relationships and differences among the variables included in the study.

4. Result and Discussion

Table 1: Gender Differences in Emotional Repression

		Variable Gender N Mean Std Deviation			
		Df t test Significance			
Emotional Repression	Male	43.38	44.1	158	0.041 0.521
	Female	80	80	9.96	7.457 0.521

Table 1 presents the results of an independent samples t-test comparing emotional repression scores between male and female college students. The findings indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in emotional repression between males and females, as both groups show similar mean scores.

Gross and John (2003) studied emotion regulation strategies which includes emotional suppression among adults and found that suppression was used by both males and females with only minimal gender differences. Their findings suggested that emotional suppression is a common regulation technique across genders with differences that are frequently too modest to be statistically significant.

Table 2: Model Summary of Regression Analysis

Model R R Square Adjusted R Square

1 .181^a.033 .020

Table 2 presents the model summary of the regression analysis examining the relationship between emotional repression and memory loss. The model shows a low R and R² value, indicating that emotional repression explains a small proportion of variance in memory loss. The table indicates that the regression model explains a small amount of variance in memory loss. Richards and Gross (2000) studied the cognitive consequences of emotional suppression and discovered that suppressing emotions had a measurable but relatively minor impact on memory performance. Participants who suppressed their emotional expressions during emotional situations showed slightly poorer memory for information presented during the task. The study suggests that emotional suppression takes cognitive resources but has a limited effect on memory.

Table 3: ANOVA Summary of Regression Analysis**Model Sum of Squares df Mean Square F Sig.**Regression 400.980 2 200.490 2.656.073^b

Residual 11849.995 15775.478

Total 12250.975 159

Table 3 presents the ANOVA results of the regression analysis, indicating that the overall regression model is not statistically significant ($F = 2.656$, $p = .073$). The ANOVA table shows that the regression model is not statistically significant.

John and Gross (2004) examined the relationship between emotion regulation strategies and various psychological outcomes. Although emotional suppression was linked to some cognitive and emotional consequences the authors found that its predictive power for specific outcomes was typically low when combined with other contributing variables. Their findings indicate that emotional repression alone may not be a strong enough predictor to produce a statistically significant overall model.

Table 4: Correlation Between Dissociation, Emotional Repression and Memory Loss

Dissociation Emotional Repression	Memory Loss
Dissociation Pearson Correlation	1 -.179 0.299
Emotional Repression	
Pearson Correlation	-.179 1 -.031
Memory Loss Pearson Correlation	0.299 -.031 1

Table 4 shows the Pearson correlation between dissociation, emotional repression and memory loss. The results indicate that dissociation is negatively correlated with emotional repression and positively correlated with memory loss, while emotional repression shows negative correlation with memory loss.

The positive association between dissociation and memory loss is consistent with the findings of Onno van der Hart et al. (2006) who discovered that dissociative experiences are frequently followed by memory disturbances and difficulties in information recall. According to Judith L. Herman (1992), the negative relationship between dissociation and emotional

repression may reflect the use of different psychological coping mechanisms. Furthermore, Jane M. Richards and James J. Gross's (2000) research supports the very weak association between emotional repression and memory loss which finds that emotional suppression has only minimal impacts on memory performance. These data indicate that dissociation may be more strongly linked to memory problems than emotional repression among college students.

5. Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship among dissociation, emotional repression and memory loss among college students as well as the mediating role of dissociation in the relationship between emotional repression and memory loss. The findings revealed no significant gender differences in emotional repression among male and female college students. Furthermore, emotional repression was not found to be a significant predictor of memory loss which indicates that it is accounted only for a small proportion of variance in memory difficulties. The correlation analysis revealed weak negative relationship between dissociation and emotional repression while dissociation showed a positive relationship with memory loss. On the other hand, emotional repression had a minor effect on memory loss. These findings suggest that dissociative experiences may be more closely associated with memory related difficulties than emotional repression among college students.

6. Limitations of the Study

1. **Relatively Small Sample Size:** The study was conducted with a sample of 160 college students which may not represent the larger population. A larger sample size would improve the reliability, accuracy and generalizability of the findings.
2. **Restricted Age Group:** The participants were limited to young college students. Therefore, the findings may not be applicable to adolescents, middle aged adults, older adults or even individuals with different educational backgrounds.
3. **Limited Cultural and Demographic Representation:** The study did not include participants from diverse backgrounds. Cultural differences may influence emotional repression, dissociative experiences and memory functioning which limits the broader applicability of the results.

4. **Use of Self-Report Measures:** Data was collected through self-report questionnaires that are vulnerable to response biases such as social desirability, recall errors and also inaccurate self-assessment. Participants may have underreported or overreported their experiences that can affect the accuracy of the findings.
5. **Lack of Control for Confounding Variables:** Several factors that may influence dissociation, emotional repression and memory loss were not controlled in the study. Variables such as stress, anxiety, depression, trauma history, sleep quality and academic pressure could have affected the results.
6. **Cross-Sectional Research Design:** The study collected data at a single point in time which makes it difficult to establish causal relationships among the variables. Longitudinal studies would be beneficial in understanding how dissociation, emotional repression and memory loss develop over time.
7. **Limited Scope of Variables:** The study focused only on dissociation, emotional repression and memory loss. Other psychological factors that may contribute to memory functioning were not examined.

7. Scope of the Study

The present study advances our understanding of the relationship between dissociation, emotional repression and memory loss in college students. By analyzing these psychological dimensions in a young adult population the study sheds light on how emotional and cognitive processes interact at a vital developmental time. The findings may assist psychologists, counselors, educators and mental health professionals in identifying characteristics associated with memory related issues and emotional functioning in students.

The work also serves as a platform for future research into the impact of dissociation and emotional regulation in cognitive functioning. Because dissociation is more strongly associated with memory loss than emotional repression, future research may look at the mechanisms by which dissociative experiences alter memory processing. Researchers may also investigate the effects of stress, trauma exposure, anxiety, depression, coping techniques and social support.

Furthermore, the scope of the study might be expanded to include different populations such as teenagers, working adults, clinical populations and older adults to determine whether the observed relationships are consistent across diverse demographic groups. Future studies may use larger and more diverse samples to improve the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal designs and objective clinical tests in addition to self-report measures may provide a more complete picture of the long-term impacts of dissociation and emotional repression on memory performance.

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