



Predicting Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies and Psychological Well-Being in FARAJA Forces Based on the Level of Physical Activity

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ABSTRACT

Aims Employees of the Law Enforcement Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FARAJA) are psychologically more vulnerable than other jobs due to the inherent characteristics of the military job. Considering the importance of this issue, the main aim of the current research was to predict the cognitive emotion regulation strategies and psychological well-being in FARAJA forces based on the level of physical activity.

Instrument & Methods The present research was a descriptive-correlational study, which was conducted in 2022. The research population included all the male personnel of FARAJA in Yazd City, of whom 182 individuals were selected based on the available sampling. The research tools were the Psychological Well-Being Scale (2002), the Garnefski Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (2002), and the Sharkey Physical Activity Index (1997). Data were analyzed by Pearson correlation coefficient and simple linear regression using SPSS version 25 software.

Findings The physical activity levels can significantly predict the variables of adjusted emotion regulation strategies and psychological well-being in the male FARAJA personnel ($p < 0.01$). However, due to the low correlation with the non-adjusted emotion regulation strategies, the physical activity levels could not significantly predict this variable ($p = 0.48$).

Conclusion According to the results on predicting emotion regulation strategies and psychological well-being based on the level of physical activity, it is suggested to provide appropriate programs and considerations for the participation of FARAJA male employees in regular physical activities.

Keywords Psychological Well-being; Emotion Regulation; Military Personnel; Exercise

CITATION LINKS

[1] The role of difficulty in emotion regulation and negative repetitive thoughts in predicting ... [2] Mediating role of chronic fatigue in the relationship between ... [3] Cognitive emotion regulation strategies and depressive symptoms: ... [4] Relationships between cognitive emotion regulation strategies and ... [5] Neural network of cognitive emotion regulation ... [6] The relationship between self-efficacy and cognitive emotion regulation with ... [7] What good are positive emotions in crisis? A prospective study of ... [8] Anticipation of emotion regulation and psychological well-being ... [9] The relationship between cognitive emotion regulation ... [10] The effect of emotion regulation skills training on resilience of ... [11] Briefreport: Cognitive emotion regulation strategies and psychological ... [12] Emotion regulation and psychopathology: The ... [13] Compulsive sexual behavior and ... [14] EEG-triggered dynamic difficulty adjustment for ... [15] Optimizing well-being: the empirical encounter of ... [16] The effect of yoga practice on psychological well-being and happiness ... [17] The relationship between regular physical activity with spiritual intelligence ... [18] Positive and negative aspects of well-being: Common ... [19] Influence of family strength on the psychological well-being ... [20] The experiences of individuals with cervical spinal cord injury and their ... [21] The relation between physical activity and the quality of life and well-being ... [22] Articolo target: Psychological well-being and ... [23] Effect of physical-sports leisure activities on young ... [24] Evidence-based intervention in physical activity ... [25] Effectiveness of sports activities on cognitive emotion regulation strategies, perceived ... [26] Relationship between emotion regulation and health-related level ... [27] Impact of physical exercise on psychological well-being ... [28] Determining the correlation between organizational nudge and ... [29] Comparing job burnout and quality of life in physically active ... [30] Reliability and validity of Ryff's psychological ... [31] Sex-specific neural circuits of emotion regulation ... [32] Individual differences in the regulation of positive ... [33] Acute effects of thirty minutes of light-intensity, intermittent ... [34] Explaining the psychological effects of a sustainable lifestyle ... [35] Effects of physical activity on emotional well-being among older ... [36] Momentary assessment of contextual influences on ... [37] Comparison of quality of sleep and well being ... [38] Effect of participation in a course of recreational sports activity on the self-efficacy ...

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Introduction

Mental health is a basic need and is vital for improving the quality of human life. Mental health, as an important part of the general concept of health, includes the ability to establish positive relationships with others, the way to adjust and adapt to the environment, as well as the ability to control stress in everyday life when facing critical situations [1]. Law enforcement personnel, as human resources, face many professional issues due to the inherent characteristics of the military occupation; besides, as a result of the pressures related to their jobs, they are more psychologically vulnerable than the personnel of other occupations [2].

Psychological well-being is a result of a two-way interaction between the use of certain types of cognitive emotion regulation strategies and the appropriate assessment of stressful situations [3]. Cognitive emotion regulation refers to the way a person performs cognitive processing when faced with unfortunate and stressful events [4]; it is a basic prerequisite for healthy social functioning that affects physical and mental health [5].

Given the effect of environmental and job characteristics on law enforcement personnel to enhance their stress levels as well as hard-working conditions, evaluating and recognizing the emotion regulation levels can help to create changes to move to the desired situation [6]. Cognitive emotion regulation refers to the cognitive processes that manage emotionally stimulating information [7] and includes the strategies that individuals use to control emotions in distress [8]. Cognitions or cognitive processes help individuals regulate their emotions and feelings and not be overwhelmed by the intensity of emotions [9]. Any downside and defect in emotion regulation makes a person vulnerable to mental disorders; besides, the lack of appropriate management of emotions, in addition to affecting individuals' social relationships, can disrupt their physical and mental health and lead to the formation of abnormal behaviors or psychological disorders [10]. Many researchers believe that individuals when faced with special and stressful situations, use positive or adjusted strategies (positive refocusing, planning, positive reappraisal, and putting into perspective) and negative or nonadjusted strategies (self-blame, blaming others, mind rumination, catastrophizing, and acceptance) [11].

Nolen-Hoeksema [12] stated that the adjusted emotion regulation allows people to endure stressful situations and face stressful situations more effectively. People who express a high ability to control their emotions (to use the reappraisal strategy), could better control their behaviors as well [13]. Also, people with an emotional reaction at the desired level can separate feeling from thought, and most of the responses they give to the environment are rational rather than emotional. Besides, in

stressful situations, they can think clearly and react involuntarily and emotionally when faced with various issues by thinking and reflecting [14].

Another important psychological component related to emotion regulation and mental health is psychological well-being. Health is a multidimensional concept that includes various factors, such as the absence of illness and disability, the feeling of happiness, and psychological well-being [15]. Psychological well-being mainly deals with happiness, life satisfaction, and positive impact, which is rooted in the concept of the superior human being, and its dimensions are often derived from developmental, humanistic, and existential theories [16].

In recent years, researchers have considered mental health as equivalent to positive psychological functioning and conceptualized it as psychological well-being. These researchers do not consider not having a disease to feel healthy, but they believe that having a feeling of satisfaction with life, sufficient progress, efficient and effective interaction with the world, energy and positive mood, good connection and relationship with the community, and positive progress are the characteristics of a healthy person [17, 18].

The goal of psychological well-being is to create mental health and a healthy environment for establishing correct human relationships and having positive emotions [15, 19]. Given the relationship between cognitive emotion regulation strategies and correct assessment of stressful situations [20], well-being can be considered a key factor in people's lives, especially among people who have sensitive and risky jobs [21].

Mental well-being has a positive effect on short- and long-term health outcomes and disease control, as well as emotional regulation. Well-being, in addition to guiding people to better functions in health, helps people in psychological reactivity when tensions and problems occur and increases individuals' mental health and quality of life [9]. People with high psychological well-being like to play a role in society, have a higher cooperative spirit and mostly have positive emotions [22]. Psychological well-being as a multidimensional structure includes individual and social aspects that affect our understanding, interpretation, and presence in the world as well as the way we face life's events and challenges. This means that psychological well-being relies on the use of emotions and strategies, the appropriateness and effectiveness of which depend on the optimal physical and social performance of the individual [23]. Considering the important role of the aforementioned variables, physical activity is one of the available and low-cost tools that researchers have emphasized as a way to prevent and treat mental disorders as well as improve mental and physical health. In this vein, the motto of the World Health

Organization in 2002 was "Mobility is the key to health". One of the groups that, due to the nature of their job, should participate in regular physical activity in order to enhance their efficiency and performance, is FARAJA personnel [22, 24].

In the last two decades, the relationship between physical activities and psychological well-being and emotion regulation strategies has attracted the attention of the scientific community. In their research, Samadi *et al.* [25] investigated the effectiveness of physical activities in the cognitive emotion regulation strategies, perceived psychological stress, and psychological hardness of veterans and disabled. The results showed that veterans and disabled athletes with perceived stress and nonadjusted strategies had lower emotion regulation and more psychological hardness than non-athletes. Also, Reza zadeh and Talebi [26] investigated the relationship between emotion regulation and health-related levels of physical fitness in firefighters in Tehran. They showed a positive relationship between health-related levels of physical fitness and the level of emotion regulation, while body mass index had a negative relationship with the level of emotion regulation. In their research, Rodríguez-Bravo *et al.* [23] investigated the effect of sports on the psychological well-being of young people. The results showed that active young people had a higher level of psychological well-being. Also, Para *et al.* [27] in their research on the effect of exercise on psychological well-being and medical disorders showed that sports and physical activities had a positive effect on psychological well-being. The number of mental disorders among the employees of various occupations, especially military occupations, is increasing day by day, which brings exorbitant costs for the individual and the organization [28]. Military forces are one of the most influential components in the security, cultural, and political development of any human society, and they must be able to perform their duties well when dealing with critical conditions and dangerous operations with a high level of risk.

In other words, emotion regulation is essential and indispensable, especially in populations that usually encounter situations that provoke strong negative emotions [26], because people who are well adapted to environmental conditions experience less anxiety and depression and as a result, have higher psychological well-being [6].

Considering that psychological well-being and emotion regulation strategies are important psychological components in the field of mental health in crucial and vulnerable groups, such as FARAJA personnel, it is important to control them correctly and optimally, and hence, knowing the strategies to promote these components seems necessary. Although different influential psychological-related factors have been identified and proposed in various studies, so far, there has

been no research on the role of physical activity on these two constructs as effective factors on the productivity and efficiency of FARAJA personnel, which feels like a research gap. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to investigate the predictive role of physical activity in psychological well-being and emotion regulation strategies of male FARAJA personnel.

Instrument and Methods

The present research was a descriptive-correlational study, which was conducted in 2022. The research population included all the male personnel of the FARAJA in Yazd City, of whom 182 individuals were selected based on the available sampling.

The number of samples was calculated using G*Power software considering the effect size of 0.3, the first type error of 0.05, and the statistical power of 0.95. The inclusion criteria comprised not taking psychiatric drugs, the absence of severe physical disorders, and completing the informed consent form, while the exclusion criterion was unwillingness to fill in the questionnaires. The tools used in this research were as follows:

1- Personal Profile Questionnaire

This questionnaire was created by the researcher and given to the subjects in order to collect their general information (age, work experience, education, medical history, physical problems, etc.).

2- Sharkey Physical Activity Index (1997)

Sharkey Physical Activity Index (1997) was used to determine the individuals' level of physical activity. This index includes five items and each item has five scales based on the Likert scale. Each item is given a minimum score of one and a maximum score of five. Therefore, the total score of each participant is between 5 and 25. The validity of the index was confirmed by Mokaberian *et al.* (2013) and its Cronbach's alpha coefficient reliability in military forces was reported to be 0.72 [29].

3- Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ)

This questionnaire was developed by Garnefski and Kraaij (2006) and includes two general coping strategies of cognitive regulation of positive emotions (strategies of acceptance, positive refocusing, planning, positive reappraisal, and putting into perspective) and cognitive regulation of negative emotions (strategies of self-blame, mind rumination, catastrophizing, and other-blame).

The items are scored on a five-point Likert scale (from almost never to almost always) and in accordance with responding to stressful and threatening events in life. The validity and reliability of the cognitive emotion regulation questionnaire have been confirmed and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient reliability for the subscales has been obtained in the range of 0.78 to 0.93 [25].

4- Psychological Well-Being Scale

This scale was designed by Ryff *et al.* in 1989 and consists of 120 items and six factors of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The short version of the scale with 18 items includes six factors, which are scored on a six-point Likert scale from completely disagree [1] to completely agree [6]. This scale has been standardized in Iran by Bayani *et al.* and the obtained results indicate the suitability of this questionnaire for the Iranian society [30].

Data collection procedure

To collect the data, the researchers attended the site for the morning military ceremony as well as the related offices to distribute the questionnaires among the personnel. Initially, the participants were briefed on the purpose of the research and how to complete the questionnaire and then they were invited to participate in the research.

All participants were asked to complete the informed consent form, personal information form, as well as questionnaire items anonymously. They were also assured that all their personal information remains confidential and will only be used in this study. Also, to avoid bias among the participants, they were informed that there were no right or wrong answers for the questionnaire items and that the results of the research did not affect their careers. It should be noted that the current study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Yazd University (IR.YAZD.REC.1401.085).

Statistical procedures

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to describe the research variables. After ensuring the normal distribution of the data, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between the variables. Also, simple linear regression was run to predict psychological well-being variables, positive emotion regulation, and negative emotion regulation based on the level of physical activity. The significance level was considered at $\alpha=0.05$ in all statistical procedures.

Findings

The demographic characteristics of the military forces participating in the research are shown in Table 1.

To check the normality of the data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used, and the results showed that

the data were normally distributed. Therefore, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to check the relationship between the variables (Table 2).

The results of Table 2 show that the correlation between physical activity level and psychological well-being was positive and significant. Also, the correlation between physical activity level and positive emotion regulation was positive and significant. These results show that an increase or a decrease in physical activity level was associated with an increase or a decrease in psychological well-being and positive emotion regulation. However, there was no significant relationship between physical activity and negative emotion regulation. To investigate the possibility of predicting psychological well-being variables and positive emotion regulation based on the physical activity level, after establishing the presumptions, simple linear regression was used.

Table 1) Demographic characteristics of the studied military forces

Variable	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Age (year)	<25	42	23
	26-35	82	45
	36-45	55	30
Work experience (year)	<10	90	50
	20-Nov	79	44
	21-25	8	4.4
	≥26	1	0.5
Education level	Diploma	109	59.9
	Associate & Bachelor of Arts	68	37.4
	Master of Arts and higher	5	2.7
Marital status	Married	132	72.5
	Single	50	27.5

Table 3 shows the results of simple linear regression for predicting psychological well-being and positive emotion regulation based on physical activity level in the male FARAJA personnel.

Table 3 shows that 12% of the variance of the psychological well-being variable and 50% of the variance of the positive emotion regulation variable were explained by physical activity level. The regression coefficients showed that physical activity level with beta coefficients of 0.35 and 0.71 ($p<0.01$) had a significant contribution in predicting psychological well-being and positive emotion regulation of the FARAJA personnel, respectively. However, due to the low correlation with negative emotion regulation, physical activity level could not significantly predict this variable ($P=0.48$).

Table 2) Matrix of the studied variables in military personnel

Variable	Physical activity level	Psychological well-being	Positive emotion regulation	Negative emotion regulation
Physical activity level	1			
Psychological well-being	0.35*	1		
Positive emotion regulation	0.71*	0.53**	1	
Negative emotion regulation	0.05	0.03	0.07	1

* $p=0.01$.

Table 3) The results of simple linear regression for predicting psychological well-being and emotion regulation variables based on physical activity level

Criterion variable	Model	B	SE	Beta	T	p-value	R	R ²	F	p-value
Psychological well-being	Constant value	59.33	1.72		34.48	0.001	0.35	0.12	23.58	0.001
	Physical activity level	0.47	0.096	0.35	4.86	0.001				
Positive emotion regulation	Constant value	18.51	0.86		21.41	0.001	0.71	0.5	180.05	0.001
	Physical activity level	0.65	0.049	0.71	13.42	0.001				
Negative emotion regulation	Constant value	27.77	1.68		16.56	0.001	0.05	0.003	0.49	0.48
	Physical activity level	0.066	0.094	0.052	0.70048					

Discussion

Paying attention to psychological issues has always attracted the attention of researchers so that it has caused extensive efforts to improve and advance psychological status.

The military occupation, due to its nature and related stress, may affect mental health adversely and have many negative physical and psychological consequences [1]. Considering the criticality of the military forces' psychological issues, the aim of this research was to predict emotion regulation strategies and psychological well-being based on the level of physical activity in male FARAJA personnel. The results showed that 12% of the psychological well-being and 50% of the positive emotion regulation were explained by the physical activity level. Our results regarding positive emotion regulation are consistent with those of Rezazadeh and Talebi [26].

Evidence shows that emotion regulation is related to success or failure in various areas of life. The individual's ability to effectively regulate emotions affects psychological happiness and interpersonal relationships, and people who have the capacity to control, measure, and moderate emotional reactions usually have high abilities in emotion perception and management [31].

Researchers believe that the implementation of adjusted, adaptive, and flexible emotion regulation strategies is related to mental health; on the contrary, the use of non-adjusted and non-adaptive emotion regulation strategies is associated with mental disorders [32]. There is a relationship between physical activity as a strategy and emotion regulation skills, and the use of sports and physical activity can lead to an increase in morale, strengthening and regulating the mood of people. Exercise and physical activity increase the ability to control emotions and feelings in people and improve the tolerance of people's mental pressure.

Due to facing various stressors during sports activities, athletes learn to put aside hasty reactions caused by fleeting emotions and rely more on thinking and making wise decisions [26].

Clapp *et al.* stated that exercise helps to improve mood in two direct ways: the release of endorphins and the reduction of cortisol levels (a hormone that helps to maintain blood pressure, and its secretion is related to physical fitness as well as many features and traits needed for health and ability [33]. Participation in sports activities is an important

factor in improving psychological variables, such as cognitive emotion regulation; it also enables individuals to better control their emotions and cope with daily stress more easily. In other words, increasing the levels of positive emotions, exercise, and physical activity strengthens people and helps them deal successfully with negative experiences [26]. Optimal physical fitness can be a positive predictor for the level of positive emotion regulation of the FARAJA personnel.

The results of the present research showed a positive and significant correlation between the level of physical activity and psychological well-being and the ability to explain 15% of the variance of well-being by physical activity. The results are consistent with the results of Rodríguez-Bravo *et al.* [23] and Para *et al.* [27] regarding the effect of physical activity on mental well-being. There is a strong relationship between health-promoting physical activities and psychological well-being, and physical activity and regular exercise at different ages play an important role in reducing mental problems and disorders and increasing mental health and psychological well-being [34].

The positive effects of physical activity on psychological well-being factors can be based on its effectiveness in the individual's standards and opinions in his/her life, which affect the individual autonomy, environmental control, mastery, close connections with others, self-acceptance, and self-esteem. It also makes one feel the effectiveness of changes in life and gaining new experiences in life [35]. Besides, the positive effects of physical activity on psychological well-being can be mediated through positive psychological characteristics, such as self-confidence, self-belief, hopefulness as well as more self-esteem, stronger social relationships, and the ability to adapt and adjust to problems, a part of which is obtained through participation in sports activities.

Also, exercise and physical activity provide situations that divert a person's attention from the current threatening and anxiety-provoking conditions [16, 35]. Physical activity and sports by creating a suitable environment for increasing the feeling of self-empowerment, self-worth, and self-confidence, distraction from negative thoughts and stress, gaining a sense of autonomy, environmental control, and mastery as well as communication with others can cause enhanced psychological well-being in

people [36, 37]. In addition, performing physical activities causes a higher threshold of tolerance in athletes than in non-athletes in dealing with problems and issues. They also improve some psychological and mental characteristics in individuals and cause individuals to be more resistant in coping with prevailing problems [38]. Performing regular physical activities creates changes in the level of brain arousal and biochemical and psychological structure, affecting the nervous system and consuming excess oxygen, thereby creating relaxation and relieving anxiety, increasing the level of psychological well-being [16].

The sample of the present study included male FARAJA personnel in Yazd City, and generalizing the results to other groups should be done with caution. Also, the uniqueness of data collection by questionnaire and self-report as well as the use of available sampling methods were other limitations of this research. Considering the relatively limited review of literature in the military settings, it is suggested that in addition to controlling these limitations, other psychological factors related to physical activity be investigated in future studies. Generally, it is suggested to provide appropriate plans and considerations to involve male FARAJA personnel in regular physical activities in order to improve psychological well-being and positive emotion regulation strategies. Considering the results of this research and given the fact that the FARAJA personnel due to the nature of their occupation are exposed to acute and chronic stressors and mental challenges, it is suggested that the authorities involved in the field of military exercise do appropriate planning for active involvement of FARAJA personnel in regular physical activities. It improves their psychological well-being and emotion regulation strategies, increases mental health, and allows them to boost their efficiency and optimally perform the assigned tasks.

Conclusion

There is a positive and significant relationship between the level of physical activity with positive emotion regulation and psychocognitive well-being in the male FARAJA personnel, but the correlation of physical activity level with negative emotion regulation was not significant. The results of the research showed that physical activity scores can significantly predict psychological well-being and positive emotion regulation strategies in male FARAJA personnel.

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Ethical Permission: Before the implementation of the research, the necessary arrangements were made with the officials of the Police Command of Yazd city, and the study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Yazd University (IR.YAZD.REC.1401.085). In addition, before conducting

the research, the consent of the research subjects was obtained and they were assured that the information would be confidential.

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