Tides of Stress: The Impact of Hurricanes on Emotion Regulation During a Pandemic

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Emotion regulation is the way individuals manage, experience, and exhibit their emotions. This novel study investigated how emotion regulation strategies were used during the COVID-19 pandemic. The population was organized into two groups in the New Orleans area: participants who reported experiencing a local hurricane (n=502) and those with no hurricane experience (n=234). Demographics, hurricane experience, emotion regulation and stressors were analyzed. Participants' usage of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, two different emotion regulation strategies, was assessed using the 10-item self-report Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. Welch's t-tests compared cognitive reappraisal usage and expressive suppression usage in the two groups. For both cognitive reappraisal usage ($p<.001$) and expressive suppression usage ($p<.001$), there was a significant difference in the scores for the previous hurricane-affected group and the non-hurricane-affected group. Mann-Whitney U tests were performed due to the nonparametric distribution of scores and confirmed a significant difference between the two groups for usage of both strategies ($p<.001$). Results indicated that the non-hurricane-affected group utilized both cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression more than the individuals in the previous hurricane-affected group during the global pandemic, as predicted by the researcher's hypothesis. The hurricane-affected group's prior experience in stressful disaster situations and disruption of normative routines may contribute to negative effects on their emotion regulation abilities. Understanding negative effects on the emotion regulation of disaster survivors can help mental health providers create targeted strategies to aid vulnerable populations in the future.

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