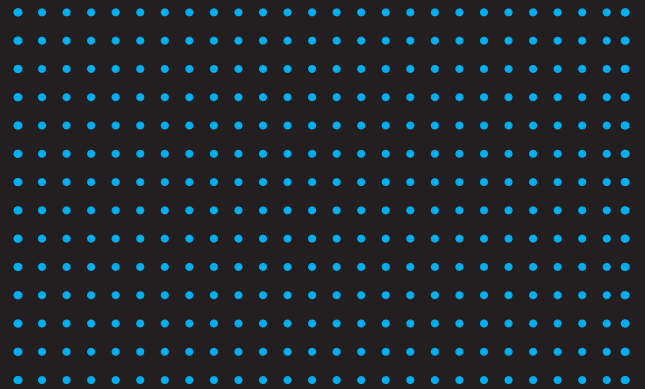




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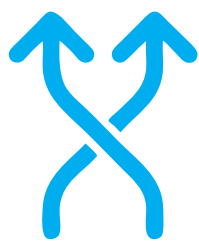
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***SITUAČNÝ TEST EMOČNEJ FLEXIBILITY (STEF): PILOTNÉ
OVEROVANIE KRITERIÁLNEJ VALIDITY V OBLASTI DUŠEVNEJ
POHODY A SEBAHODNOTENIA***

***THE SITUATIONAL TEST OF EMOTION FLEXIBILITY (STEF):
CRITERION VALIDITY PILOT VERIFICATION IN RELATION TO
WELL-BEING AND SELF-ESTEEM***

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ABSTRAKT

Stratégie regulácie emócií sú overované z hľadiska ich adaptívnej a maladaptívnej roly v psychickom zdraví. V poslednej dekáde sa časť záujmu presúva k skúmaniu flexibility používania rôznych stratégií regulácie emócií. Možnosti merania flexibility emočnej regulácie sú výrazne obmedzené vzhľadom na absenciu nástrojov, prípadne ich dotazníkový charakter. Situačný test emočnej flexibility (STEF) je novovytváraný merací nástroj zameriavajúci sa na meranie šiestich stratégií emočnej regulácie, situačnej flexibility expresie emócií a adaptívneho repertoáru stratégií pri regulácii negatívnych emócií. Príspevok prezentuje výsledky overovania kritériálnej validity STEF na dvoch vzorkách vysokoškolských študentov (N = 340) vo vzťahu k sebaúčinnosti, sebaúcte, psychologickej a subjektívnej pohode. Korelačnou analýzou bolo zistené, že stratégie kognitívneho prehodnocovania ako i adaptívny repertoár stratégií pozitívne súviseli so sebaúčinnosťou, sebaúctou, určitými aspektami psychologickej pohody a prežívaním pozitívnych emócií. Naopak, stratégie ruminácie negatívne súvisela so sebaúctou, niektorými aspektami psychologickej pohody a pozitívne s prežívaním negatívnych emócií. Výsledky podporujú kritériálnu validitu STEF.

Kľúčové slová

stratégie regulácie emócií; emočná flexibilita; kritériálna validita; duševná pohoda; sebaúcta

ABSTRACT

Emotion regulation strategies have been verified in terms of their adaptive and maladaptive roles in mental health. In last decade the focus has changed to examine the flexibility of different emotion regulation strategies usage. Opportunities to measure flexibility in emotion regulation are limited due to the absence of instruments, especially their questionnaire nature. The

Situational Test of Emotion Flexibility (STEF) is a newly developed instrument measuring six emotion regulation strategies, situational flexibility of emotion expression, and the adaptive repertoire of strategies for regulating negative emotions. This article presents the results of the STEF criterion validation with two samples of undergraduate students (N = 340) in relation to self-efficacy, self-esteem, psychological and subjective well-being. Correlation analyses revealed the cognitive reappraisal strategy and the adaptive repertoire of strategies were positively related to self-efficacy, self-esteem, certain aspects of psychological well-being, and the experience of positive emotions. In contrast, the rumination strategy was negatively associated with self-esteem and some aspects of psychological well-being and positively related to experiencing negative emotions. The results support the criterion validity of the STEF.

Keywords

emotion regulation strategies; emotion flexibility; criterion validity; well-being; self-esteem

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INTRODUCTION

Emotions are crucial for human experience and behaviour, shaping mental health and social interactions. Over the last two decades, research has demonstrated that difficulties in emotion regulation (ER) are essential to both the development and maintenance of well-being and psychopathology (Aldao et al., 2010; Kraiss et al., 2020). A broad spectrum of ER strategies has been identified, and researchers have aimed to validate their adaptive potential. For example, cognitive reappraisal, acceptance and self-compassion have been shown to have positive mental health outcomes (Aldao et al., 2015).

In contrast, strategies such as rumination, suppression, and avoidance are considered less adaptive (e.g., Aldao et al., 2010; Sloan et al., 2017; Dietrich et al., 2014). However, introducing ER flexibility concept has challenged the strict distinction between adaptive and maladaptive strategies. The *Three Sequential Components of Regulatory Flexibility Model* posits that ER flexibility is guided by three sequential components: context sensitivity, repertoire, and feedback responsiveness. Repertoire, as the flexibility of ER strategies, refers to the use of a variety of regulatory strategies (Bonanno & Burton, 2013). Nonetheless, assessing the flexibility of ER strategies remains challenging due to the absence of standardised instruments.

The Situational Test of Emotion Flexibility (STEF) is a newly developed measurement instrument that measures six ER strategies, situational flexibility of emotion expression, and the adaptive repertoire of techniques for regulating negative emotions (Pílárik et al., 2024). This study aimed to assess the criterion validity of the STEF with indicators of subjective and psychological well-being and two aspects of self-concept, namely self-esteem and self-efficacy.

METHODS

The research was conducted in two studies that had a cross-sectional correlational design.

Sample

The data were collected between February and April 2024 online using social media and face-to-face paper-pencil method. Study 1 involved 162 undergraduate students (128 females). The sample 1 age mean was 21.5 (SD=1.8) ranging between 18-29 years. Study 2 involved 178 undergraduate students (130 females). The sample 2 age mean was 20.9 (SD=1.9) ranging between 18-26 years. Participation was anonymous, and participants gave informed consent before participating in the research.

Instruments

Study 1

The Subjective Emotional Habitual Well-being Scale (SEHP; Džuka & Dalbert) contains ten items in the form of specific emotions, including four positive emotion items and six negative emotion items rated on a six-point scale. Internal consistency of both scales demonstrated acceptable levels (Cronbach $\alpha = .78$ - both scales).

The PERMA-Profiler (Butler & Kern) is based on Seligman's model, measuring five pillars of flourishing: positive emotions (P), engagement (E), positive relationships (R), meaning (M), and accomplishment (A). The questionnaire consists of 15 items (3 items for each pillar), rated on a five-point scale. The PERMA pillars' internal consistency (Cronbach α) was as follows: P = .88; E = .72; R = .54; M = .73; A = .74).

Study 2

The Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg) is a 10-item scale measuring self-esteem, with items answered on a four-point scale. Internal consistency of the scale demonstrated an acceptable level (Cronbach $\alpha = .84$).

The Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES; Schwarzer & Jerusalem) measures an individual's general beliefs about their abilities, regardless of the situation in which they find themselves. GSES is a 10-item scale, with items answered on a four-point scale. Internal consistency of the scale demonstrated an acceptable level (Cronbach $\alpha = .89$).

Study 1 and 2

The Situational Test of Emotion Flexibility.01 (STEF.01; Pilárik et al., 2024) encompasses nine pairs of scenarios (18 scenarios in total). Scenarios were used to evoke three negative emotions (three scenarios for each emotion of fear, sadness and anger). The pairs of scenarios have the same content but are different in the context in which they are set (e.g., the presence of another person). The following six ER strategies were analyzed being the same for each scenario: a) I accept my emotion and have no need to change it (acceptation); b) I decide to see the situation from a broader perspective (cognitive reappraisal); c) I think over and over about my emotion and its causes (rumination); d) I openly express my emotion. (express it) (expression of emotion); e) I ignore my emotion (push it out) (ignoring); f) I have a kind understanding of my emotion (self-compassion). Participants rated the likelihood of their response on the following four-point scale (0 - "definitely no", 3 - "definitely yes"). The summary score for each ER strategy was calculated as the average of the responses across all 18 scenarios. *Emotion expression flexibility* was calculated as the difference between the score for adaptive expression or non-expression of emotion and the disproportion between the tendency to express and not express emotion. *The adaptive repertoire of RE strategies* score reflects the extent to which the respondent uses different types of adaptive ER strategies (cognitive reappraisal, acceptance,

and self-compassion) across the three included negative emotions (see Virostková Nábělková et al., 2025).

Statistical analysis

The normality of the data distribution was assessed before analysis using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The test results did not support the normality of the distribution of the variables. Data were analysed using Spearman correlation coefficients with JASP statistical software. The effect size of the correlation coefficients was assessed as follows: .2, .3, and .5 (weak, moderate, strong, respectively).

RESULTS

The results of the correlation analysis showed that flexibility in expressing emotions was not related to subjective or psychological well-being, self-efficacy, or self-esteem. On the other hand, the repertoire of adaptive emotion regulation strategies was weakly positively related to positive emotions (as a factor of subjective well-being), meanings and accomplishment (as factors of psychological well-being), as well as self-efficacy and self-esteem (Table 1).

Table 1. Spearman correlations between emotional flexibility (STEF), subjective well-being (SEHP), psychological well-being (PERMA), self-efficacy (GSES), and self-esteem (RSES)

		STEF	
		Flex_expr	Adap_rep
SEHP	positive emotions	.08	.24**
	negative emotions	.04	-.04
PERMA	positive emotions	-.08	.15
	engagement	-.09	.09
	positive relationships	.00	.08
	meaning	-.06	.28***
	accomplishment	-.08	.23**
GSES	self-efficacy	-.09	.25***
RSES	self-esteem	.00	.20*

Note. STEF - The Situational Test of Emotion Flexibility; SEHP - The Subjective Emotional Habitual Well-being Scale; PERMA - The PERMA-Profiler; GSES - The Generalised Self-Efficacy Scale; RSES - The Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale; Exp_Flex –emotion expression flexibility; Adapt_rep –adaptive emotion regulation strategies repertoire; *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.

Among the ER strategies, cognitive reappraisal revealed weak to moderate positive relationships with subjective and psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and self-esteem factors. Similarly, self-compassion was weakly positively related to some subjective and psychological well-being factors but unrelated to self-efficacy and self-esteem. Contrary to our expectations, acceptance was not related to any of the well-being and self-concept factors examined. Rumination, as a predicted less adaptive strategy, was weakly negatively related to

psychological well-being factors and positively related to negative emotions (subjective well-being factor). Expressing and ignoring emotions were weakly positively only related to the psychological well-being factor of positive relationships (Table 2).

Table 2. Spearman's correlations between emotion regulation strategies (STEF), subjective well-being (SEHP), psychological well-being (PERMA), self-efficacy (GSES), and self-esteem (RSES)

		STEF					
		Acc	Reapp	Rum	Expr	Ign	Comp
SEHP	positive emotions	-.02	.28***	-.04	.08	.04	.25***
	negative emotions	.01	-.11	.19*	.07	.02	.05
PERMA	positive emotions	.002	.20*	-.10	.09	-.07	.09
	engagement	.12	.26***	-.08	.08	.04	.06
	positive relationships	.07	.14	.07	.20*	-.17*	.19
	meaning	.07	.30***	-.18*	-.02	-.08	.25***
	accomplishment	.07	.26***	-.23**	.00	-.08	.17*
GSES	self-efficacy	.08	.32***	-.03	.06	-.05	.07
RSES	self-esteem	.05	.24**	-.16	.04	-.09	.09

Note. STEF - The Situational Test of Emotion Flexibility; SEHP - The Subjective Emotional Habitual Well-being Scale; PERMA - The PERMA-Profiler; GSES - The Generalised Self-Efficacy Scale; RSES - The Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale; Acc – acceptance; Reapp – cognitive reappraisal; Rum – rumination; Expr – emotion expression; Ign – ignoring; Comp – self-compassion; *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

DISCUSSION

The study provides the first empirical findings on selected psychometric properties of the STEF instrument. It also contributes to understanding ER flexibility and its relations to well-being and self-concept. It highlights the value of ER strategies while challenging some assumptions about their links with subjective and psychological well-being, self-esteem, and self-efficacy.

Unexpectedly, flexibility in emotion expression was not significantly related to subjective or psychological well-being, self-esteem, or self-efficacy. That suggests that flexible emotion expression may not directly increase well-being. Ladecký and Pilárik (2024) came to a similar conclusion where flexibility in emotion expression was only marginally related to symptoms of anxiety and depression in adolescents. However, an adaptive repertoire of ER strategies was positively related to subjective well-being (positive emotions), psychological well-being (meaning, accomplishment), self-esteem, and self-efficacy, supporting the assumption that a wide range of ER strategies fosters resilience and well-being (Aldao et al., 2015).

Cognitive reappraisal was consistently related to positive well-being and self-concept outcomes. That is consistent with research showing that reappraising negative situations positively increases emotion resilience (Gross & John, 2003). Self-compassion also correlated positively with subjective and psychological well-being but was not related to self-efficacy or

self-esteem. While self-compassion promotes emotion resilience (Zessin et al., 2015), it may not directly influence perceptions of personal competence.

As predicted, rumination was negatively related to psychological well-being and was associated with increased negative emotions, reinforcing its role in perpetuating emotion distress (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). Ignoring emotions was associated with weaker positive relationships, reflecting how emotion suppression can impair interpersonal functioning and overall well-being (Gross & Levenson, 1997). Surprisingly, acceptance was not significantly related to well-being or self-concept factors. Although often considered more adaptive (Stenhoff et al., 2020), the passive nature of acceptance may not yield immediate benefits, suggesting that further research is needed to understand its long-term effects and contextual appropriateness.

Future research should examine other aspects of STEF validity (e.g., in relation to emotion disorder symptoms) and the long-term effects of strategies such as acceptance. Longitudinal studies may also clarify how ER flexibility develops across life span and its role in well-being. Last but not least, test methods can help overcome the limits of self-report measurement.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the value of ER strategy flexibility, as measured by the STEF.01, in promoting well-being and self-concepts. While emotion flexibility in expression was not directly related to well-being, a broad range of adaptive ER strategies was positively correlated with psychological and subjective well-being, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. On the other hand, the concept of ER flexibility itself turns out to be multidimensional, which may lead to the development of different approaches for its assessment.

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