

EXPLORE THE ROMANTIC LOSS, PERSONALITY TRAITS, EMOTIONAL REGULATION, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG ADULTS

Samreen Usman^{*1}, Shamsa Batool^{*2}, Sarfraz Ahmad Mayo³, Anam Arif⁴, Gul-Samreen Niazi⁵

^{*1}Al-Razi institute Lahore

^{*2}HOD of Applied Psychology Department, Al-Razi institute Lahore (PHD Psychology Scholar)

³PHD Psychology Scholar, Lecturer in Psychology, Govt. Graduate College, Raiwind, Distt. Lahore

⁴Lecturer Applied Psychology Department, Al-Razi institute Lahore (PHD Psychology Scholar)

⁵Al-Razi institute Lahore

^{*1}samersp2@gmail.com, ^{*2}shamsabatool007@gmail.com, ³sarfrazmayo@gmail.com

⁴anaya.anaya6376@gmail.com, ⁵samanniazi526@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author: *

Samreen Usman

Shamsa Batool

Abstract

Although romantic loss is a significant psychosocial stressor during emerging adulthood, its psychological effects remain understudied in the South Asian context. This study examined the relationships among romantic loss, Big Five personality traits, emotion regulation, and psychological distress among young adults in Pakistan; tested whether romantic loss and personality traits predicted emotion regulation and psychological distress; compared these variables across gender; and examined whether emotion regulation mediated the effects of romantic loss and personality traits on psychological distress. A cross-sectional correlational design was used with 200 university students aged 18–30, recruited from private institutions in Lahore using purposive and convenience sampling. Four psychometrically sound measures were administered: the Breakup Distress Scale, Big Five Inventory, Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, and Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21. Correlational analyses revealed significant relationships among most study variables, with agreeableness the only personality dimension directly associated with breakup distress severity ($r = .48, p < .01$). Regression analyses showed that romantic loss and personality traits each independently predicted emotion regulation, with personality traits contributing more strongly ($\beta = .44$ vs. $\beta = .34, ps < .001$), and together significantly predicted psychological distress, though the effect size was modest ($R^2 = .07$). Gender differences were largely non-significant, except that women reported significantly higher emotion regulation than men ($p = .021$), potentially reflecting culturally patterned differences in emotional expression rather than a fixed psychological difference. Contrary to expectations, bootstrapped mediation analyses indicated that emotion regulation did not significantly mediate the relationship between romantic loss and psychological distress, or between personality traits and psychological distress, as both indirect effects' confidence intervals included zero, suggesting that romantic loss affects distress through pathways beyond emotion regulation alone. These findings underscore the need for culturally responsive, emotion-focused interventions, while highlighting unmeasured

factors such as social support and resilience as likely contributors to post-loss psychological adjustment.

Introduction

Psychological distress affects an estimated 5% of adults worldwide (World Health Organization, 2023), and romantic loss, the separation, termination, or bereavement of a romantic relationship, is among the most significant psychosocial stressors of emerging adulthood (Monroe et al., 1999). Heightened identity exploration and emotional vulnerability during this developmental period increase susceptibility to the psychological aftermath of relationship dissolution (Arnett, 2000), often producing sadness, anxiety, and depressive symptoms in the short term (Sbarra & Emery, 2005).

One regulatory strategy implicated in post-breakup distress is expressive suppression, outwardly masking an emotion while still experiencing it internally (Gross, 1998). Chronic suppression is associated with heightened psychological distress, reduced well-being, and poorer interpersonal functioning (Gross & John, 2003). Individual differences in the Big Five personality traits: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism, further shape emotional coping and stress reactivity across cultures (Schmitt et al., 2007), consistent with the Five-Factor Model (Costa & McCrae, 1992), which frames personality as a distal predictor of appraisal and regulatory responses to stressful events.

Longitudinal work shows that post-breakup emotional trajectories are non-linear and prolonged by continued contact with an ex-partner, with romantic love fading slowly while sadness, anger, and relief follow more erratic courses (Sbarra & Emery, 2005). Self-concept disruption and physiological reactivity further predict poorer psychological functioning after loss (Mason et al., 2012), while attachment anxiety and avoidance, more than gender alone, predict distress and maladaptive coping such as persistent efforts to reconnect with a former partner (Davis et al., 2003). Within Pakistan specifically, romantic loss has been linked to depressive symptoms and heightened distress, compounded by cultural stigma that reinforces suppressive coping (Sarwar et al., 2020).

Meta-analytic evidence confirms robust associations between the Big Five traits and emotion regulation strategies: neuroticism predicts maladaptive strategies such as suppression and rumination, whereas conscientiousness and extraversion predict more adaptive regulation (Barańczuk, 2019). Agreeableness, reflecting sensitivity to interpersonal harmony, is uniquely tied to distress following relational disruption (Graziano & Tobin, 2009). Suppression itself, distinct from cognitive reappraisal, predicts lower positive affect, higher negative affect, and poorer relational and psychological outcomes over time (Gross & John, 2003), and mediates the path from dispositional vulnerability (e.g., insecure attachment, childhood maltreatment) to grief severity after a breakup (Heshmati et al., 2021).

Meta-analytic evidence indicates that women rely more on emotion-focused coping, social support seeking and rumination—than men, though effect sizes are small and consistent across stressor types (Tamres et al., 2002). More recent work suggests that attachment processes and coping strategies, rather than gender per se, better explain post-breakup distress (Gehl et al., 2024).

Despite the established importance of these constructs, little research has examined them together within South Asian, and specifically Pakistani, samples. Existing Pakistani research links romantic loss to psychological distress and depressive symptoms (Sarwar et al., 2020), but the mechanisms, particularly how personality shapes emotion regulation, which in turn shapes distress, remain largely untested in this cultural context, where stigma and limited psychological services may compound emotional suppression. The present study addresses this gap by examining romantic loss and Big Five personality traits as joint predictors of emotion regulation and psychological distress among Pakistani adults, and by testing gender differences across these variables.

Aims and Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between romantic loss, personality traits (Big Five dimensions), emotion regulation, and psychological distress among adults.
2. To determine whether romantic loss and personality traits significantly predict emotion regulation and psychological distress among adults.
3. To investigate gender differences in romantic loss, personality traits, emotion regulation, and psychological distress among adults.
4. To examine whether emotion regulation mediates the relationship between romantic loss and psychological distress, and between personality traits and psychological distress, among adults.

Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant relationship between romantic loss, personality traits (Big Five dimensions), emotion regulation, and psychological distress among adults.

H2: Romantic loss and personality traits will significantly predict emotion regulation and psychological distress among adults.

H3: There is a significant gender difference in emotion regulation, romantic loss, personality traits, and psychological distress among adults.

H4: Emotion regulation will significantly mediate the relationship between (a) romantic loss and psychological distress, and (b) personality traits and psychological distress, among adults.

Method

Design

This study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design to examine relationships among romantic loss, personality traits, emotion regulation, and psychological distress, using standardized self-report measures (Gross & John, 2003; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

Participants and Sampling

A non-probability sample of 200 university students (18–30 years) was drawn from private institutions in Lahore, Pakistan, using purposive (for screening) and convenience sampling (for data collection). This age range corresponds to the developmental period of emerging

adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Eligible participants were enrolled university students aged 18–30 who had experienced a romantic loss within the past two years and could read English. Individuals currently in a relationship, diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder, receiving psychological or pharmacological treatment, or submitting incomplete responses were excluded.

Measures

A demographic sheet captured age, gender, education, relationship history, and time since loss. Standardized assessment tools were administered such as, (1) Breakup Distress Scale (BDS), (2) Big Five Inventory (BFI), (3) Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ-S), and (5) Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21).

Procedure

Following institutional ethical approval, participants were approached individually or in small groups on university campuses and provided written and verbal informed consent. After screening for relationship/breakup status, participants completed the demographic sheet followed by the BDS, BFI, ERQ-S, and DASS-21 in English (approximately 20–30 minutes). Incomplete responses were excluded during data screening.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed in IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26). After screening for missing data, normality, and outliers, descriptive and reliability statistics were computed for all variables.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to standard ethical principles for psychological research. Institutional approval and written informed consent were obtained, and participants were free to withdraw at any time without consequence. No identifying information was collected, and confidentiality was maintained throughout. Participants who showed signs of distress during data collection were referred to university counselling services.

Results

This chapter presents the results obtained through statistical analysis of the data collected for this study. It begins with the sample's

demographic characteristics, followed by descriptive statistics for the continuous study variables and a reliability analysis of the study scales. The chapter then reports the results of

hypothesis testing, including correlational analysis, multiple regression analysis, and independent samples t-tests conducted to address the study's research questions.

Table 1 *Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 200)*

Variable	f	%	M	SD
Gender				
Male	83	41.5		
Female	117	58.5		
Education Level				
Intermediate	21	10.5		
Bachelor's	135	67.5		
Master's	26	13.0		
MPhil	2	1.0		
Other	16	8.0		
Marital Status				
Single	175	87.5		
Engaged	13	6.5		
Married	10	5.0		
Divorced	2	1.0		
Current Relationship Status				
Recently broken up	91	45.5		
Single	59	29.5		
Complicated / on-off	30	15.0		
In a relationship	20	10.0		
Time Since Romantic Loss				
Less than 1 month	62	31.0		
1-3 months	62	31.0		
More than 6 months	26	13.0		
Not applicable	27	13.5		
3-6 months	23	11.5		
Breakup Initiator				
Me	128	64.0		
Others	47	23.5		
Partner	25	12.5		

Variable	f	%	M	SD
Socioeconomic Status				
Middle	148	74.0		
Low	38	19.0		
High	14	7.0		
Family System				
Nuclear	131	65.5		
Joint	69	34.5		
Residence				
Urban	171	85.5		
Rural	29	14.5		
Living Arrangement				
With family	176	88.0		
Hostel	18	9.0		
Alone	6	3.0		
Age			21.25	2.465
No. of past romantic relationships			1.13	0.629

Note. f = frequency; % = percentage. Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

Table 1 presents participant demographics (N = 200). The sample was predominantly female (58.5%) and held a bachelor's degree (67.5%); most were single (87.5%), students (77.5%), from middle-income (74.0%), nuclear-family (65.5%), urban (85.5%) households, living with family (88.0%). Regarding relationship history, 45.5% had recently broken up, and most relationships had lasted 6 months to 2 years. Romantic loss was recent for the majority: 62%

within the past 3 months. Notably, 64.0% identified themselves as the one who initiated the breakup, rather than their partner.

Participants averaged 21.25 years (SD = 2.47), reflecting a young-adult sample with a fairly homogeneous age range. On average, participants reported 1.13 past romantic relationships (SD = 0.63), indicating limited relationship history for most.

Table 2 Reliability Analysis of Study Scales (N = 200)

Scale	Items	α
Breakup Distress Scale	16	.945
Big Five Inventory (total)	44	.866
Extraversion	8	.685
Agreeableness	9	.761
Conscientiousness	9	.691
Neuroticism	8	.711

Scale	Items	α
Openness	10	.608
Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (total)	10	.764
Cognitive Reappraisal	6	.604
Expressive Suppression	4	.624
DASS-21	21	.898

Note. BDS = Breakup Distress Scale; BIG5 = Big Five Personality Inventory; ERQ = Emotion Regulation Questionnaire; DASS = Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale; α = Cronbach's alpha.

All scales demonstrated acceptable to excellent internal consistency. The Breakup Distress Scale (α = .945) and the DASS-21 (α = .898) showed excellent reliability. The BIG5 (α = .866) demonstrated good overall reliability, with subscale alphas ranging from acceptable (Openness, α = .608) to good (Agreeableness, α

= .761). The ERQ (α = .764) also showed acceptable reliability, with its Cognitive Reappraisal (α = .604) and Expressive Suppression (α = .624) subscales within an acceptable range. Overall, these findings confirm that all measures used in the study were psychometrically reliable for the present sample.

Table 3 Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 200)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. BDS	—										
2. BFI Total	-.023	—									
3. ERQ Total	.327*	.429*	—								
4. DASS-21	.214*	.111	.169*	—							
5. Cognitive Reappraisal	.354*	.437*	.922*	.152*	—						
6. Expressive Suppression	.285*	.320*	.892*	.148*	.693*	—					
7. Extraversion	-.130	-.860*	.294*	.081	.310*	.181*	—				
8. Agreeableness	.483*	.634*	.409*	.156	.431*	.327*	.457*	—			
9. Conscientiousness	.125	.847*	.400*	.153*	.381*	.342*	.651*	.552*	—		
10. Neuroticism	.108	.754*	.445*	.189*	.461*	.355*	.488*	.529*	.613*	—	
11. Openness	-.087	.858*	.344*	.001	.363*	.231*	.719*	.404*	.650*	.524*	—

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
M	42.20	134.57	38.95	27.73	18.77	16.30	24.24	26.95	28.22	24.38	30.21
SD	13.12	19.42	9.82	12.11	5.57	4.66	4.50	4.51	4.54	4.20	5.30

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). BDS = Breakup Distress Scale; ERQ-CR = Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Cognitive Reappraisal); ERQ-ES = Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Expressive Suppression); DASS = Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale.

As shown in Table 3, the Breakup Distress Scale (BDS) was significantly positively correlated with Cognitive Reappraisal ($r = .354$, $p < .01$), Expressive Suppression ($r = .285$, $p < .01$), overall emotion regulation ($r = .327$, $p < .01$), psychological distress ($r = .214$, $p < .01$), and Agreeableness ($r = .483$, $p < .01$). Romantic loss was not significantly associated with Extraversion, Conscientiousness, or Neuroticism.

Overall emotion regulation (ERQ) was significantly correlated with all Big Five personality dimensions and with psychological distress, with the strongest associations found for Cognitive Reappraisal ($r = .922$, $p < .01$) and

Expressive Suppression ($r = .892$, $p < .01$), reflecting the expected overlap between the total scale and its subscales. Psychological distress (DASS) was significantly associated with Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, Cognitive Reappraisal, and Expressive Suppression, but showed no significant relationship with Extraversion or Openness. Taken together, the majority of study variables were significantly interrelated, indicating meaningful associations between romantic loss, emotion regulation strategies, personality traits, and psychological distress. These findings partially support Hypothesis 1.

Table 4 Multiple Regression Analysis: Romantic Loss and Personality Traits as Predictors of Emotion Regulation and Psychological Distress ($N = 200$)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Emotion Regulation (ERQ)					
Constant	-1.395	4.559	—	-0.31	.760
BDS	0.252	0.045	.337	5.64	< .001
BFI Total	0.221	0.030	.437	7.31	< .001
Psychological Distress (DASS-21)					
Constant	10.214	5.832	—	1.75	.081
BDS	0.189	0.058	.214	3.24	.001
BFI Total	0.098	0.038	.142	2.58	.010

Model 2: $R = .268$, $R^2 = .072$, Adjusted $R^2 = .062$, $F(2, 197) = 7.614$, $p < .001$. Note. BDS = Breakup Distress Scale; BFI = Big Five Inventory (personality traits).

Tabled showed that both regression models were statistically significant. For emotion regulation, romantic loss and personality traits together accounted for a substantial proportion of variance ($R^2 = .297$), with personality traits emerging as the stronger predictor ($\beta = .437$, $p <$

.001) relative to romantic loss ($\beta = .337$, $p < .001$). For psychological distress, the model explained a smaller proportion of variance ($R^2 = .072$); here romantic loss was the stronger predictor ($\beta = .214$, $p = .001$) compared to personality traits ($\beta = .142$, $p = .010$), although

both remained statistically significant. Together, these results support Hypothesis 2, indicating that romantic loss and personality traits significantly predict both emotion regulation and psychological distress, with personality traits

playing a comparatively larger role in emotion regulation and romantic loss playing a comparatively larger role in psychological distress.

Table 5 Independent Samples *t*-Test Comparing Male and Female Participants (*N* = 200)

Variable	Men M (SD)	Women M (SD)	<i>t</i> (198)	<i>p</i>	95% CI	Cohen's <i>d</i>
BDS	41.37 (11.00)	42.77 (14.45)	-0.75	.457	[-5.12, 2.31]	0.11
BFI Total	135.05 (20.79)	134.23 (18.47)	0.29	.770	[-4.69, 6.33]	0.04
ERQ	37.04 (9.22)	40.29 (10.04)	-2.33	.021	[-6.00, -0.50]	0.33
DASS-21	27.73 (10.83)	27.71 (12.97)	0.01	.992	[-3.42, 3.45]	0.00

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; *CI* = confidence interval. *p*-values are two-tailed.

The above table revealed that no significant gender differences emerged for breakup distress, $t(198) = -.745$, $p = .457$, personality traits, $t(198) = .293$, $p = .770$, or psychological distress, $t(198) = .010$, $p = .992$, indicating that male and female participants reported comparable levels on these variables. A significant gender difference was found for emotion regulation, $t(198) = -2.332$, $p = .021$, $d = 0.33$, with women reporting higher use of emotion regulation strategies than men. Overall, gender differences were limited to emotion regulation, with no significant differences observed for romantic loss, personality traits, or psychological distress.

These findings partially support Hypothesis 3.

Mediation Analysis

A supplementary analysis was conducted to test whether emotion regulation (ERQ) mediated the relationships between (a) romantic loss (BDS) and psychological distress (DASS), and (b) personality traits (BIG5) and psychological distress (DASS). Bootstrapped mediation analyses (5,000 resamples, bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals), following the Preacher and Hayes (2008) approach used in the PROCESS macro (Model 4), were conducted for each pathway. Results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Bootstrapped Mediation Analysis: Emotion Regulation as a Mediator of Romantic Loss and Personality on Psychological Distress (*N* = 200)

Pathway	Effect	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> / boot	<i>p</i>	95% CI [LL, UL]
BDS → ERQ → DASS	Total effect (<i>c</i>)	0.197	0.064	3.080	.002	[0.048, 0.344]
	Direct effect (<i>c'</i>)	0.164	0.068	2.424	.016	[0.016, 0.311]
	Path ^a (BDS→ERQ)	0.244	0.050	4.861	< .001	[0.130, 0.368]
	Path ^b (ERQ→DASS)	0.137	0.090	1.523	.130	[-0.007, 0.269]
	Indirect effect (<i>a</i> × <i>b</i>)	0.034	0.020 †	—	—	[-0.002, 0.077] †
BIG5 → ERQ → DASS	Total effect (<i>c</i>)	0.069	0.044	1.577	.117	[-0.009, 0.142]

	Direct effect (c')	0.030	0.048	0.611	.542	[-0.064, 0.126]
	Path ^a (BIG5→ERQ)	0.217	0.033	6.680	< .001	[0.130, 0.286]
	Path ^b (ERQ→DASS)	0.184	0.096	1.919	.056	[-0.022, 0.366]
	Indirect effect (a×b)	0.040	0.021 †	—	—	[-0.005, 0.078] †

Note. BDS = Breakup Distress Scale; ERQ = Emotion Regulation Questionnaire; DASS = Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale; BIG5 = Big Five Personality Inventory. † Indirect effect SE and CI are derived from 5,000 bootstrap resamples (percentile method); t/p values are not applicable to the indirect effect and are tested via the bootstrapped CI instead. Mediation is supported only when the 95% CI for the indirect effect excludes zero.

For the first pathway, romantic loss significantly predicted psychological distress both before ($c = 0.197$, $p = .002$) and after ($c' = 0.164$, $p = .016$) accounting for emotion regulation, indicating that the direct effect of romantic loss on distress remained robust. However, the indirect effect through emotion regulation was not statistically significant, $b = 0.034$, boot SE = 0.020, 95% CI [-0.002, 0.077], as the confidence interval included zero. This indicates that emotion regulation did not significantly mediate the relationship between romantic loss and psychological distress in this sample.

For the second pathway, personality traits were not significantly associated with psychological distress at the total-effect level ($c = 0.069$, $p = .117$), and the indirect effect through emotion regulation was similarly non-significant, $b = 0.040$, boot SE = 0.021, 95% CI [-0.005, 0.078]. Emotion regulation therefore did not significantly mediate the relationship between personality traits and psychological distress.

Taken together, these results indicate that although romantic loss, personality, and emotion regulation were all significantly interrelated (see Table 3), emotion regulation did not function as a statistically significant mechanism linking either romantic loss or personality traits to psychological distress. The direct effect of romantic loss on distress persisted independent of emotion regulation, suggesting that romantic loss impacts psychological distress through pathways not captured by emotion regulation alone, a pattern consistent with the view that unmeasured variables such as social support (Lahey &

Orehek, 2011) and resilience (Bonanno & Kaltman, 2001) may better account for post-loss adjustment in this sample.

Discussion

This study examined the relationships among romantic loss, personality traits, emotion regulation, and psychological distress in young adults in Pakistan. Findings are discussed below by hypothesis, followed by implications, limitations, and future directions.

Personality traits significantly predicted emotion regulation and emerged as its strongest predictor ($\beta = .437$, $p < .001$), consistent with Barańczuk's (2019) meta-analytic finding that Big Five traits robustly predict emotion regulation strategies and confirming personality as a central determinant of how individuals manage emotional experience.

Romantic loss severity, however, correlated with only one personality dimension, agreeableness ($r = .483$, $p < .01$). This selective association aligns with Graziano and Tobin's (2009) view that agreeableness reflects heightened sensitivity to interpersonal harmony and disruption, which may explain why highly agreeable individuals report more acute breakup distress.

Notably, neuroticism showed no significant association with breakup distress ($r = .108$, ns), contrary to typical expectations. Given the sample's demographic profile (young, urban, and family-embedded, with 88% living with family), this may reflect cultural norms of emotional restraint rather than an absence of underlying distress. In collectivist, family-oriented contexts, individuals high in

neuroticism may suppress observable expressions of distress due to social desirability concerns, attenuating this relationship in self-report data.

Romantic loss, emotion regulation, and psychological distress were all significantly interrelated at the bivariate level ($r_s = .21-.33$, $p_s < .01$), and both romantic loss and personality traits significantly predicted psychological distress in regression, though the variance explained was modest ($R^2 = .072$). To clarify how these variables related to one another, a bootstrapped mediation analysis (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) tested whether emotion regulation carried the effect of romantic loss, and separately personality, onto psychological distress.

Neither indirect effect was statistically significant: romantic loss $\rightarrow$ emotion regulation $\rightarrow$ distress, $b = 0.034$, 95% CI [-0.002, 0.077], and personality $\rightarrow$ emotion regulation $\rightarrow$ distress, $b = 0.040$, 95% CI [-0.005, 0.078]. In both cases the confidence interval for the indirect effect crossed zero, indicating no statistical support for emotion regulation as a mediating mechanism in this sample. Notably, the direct effect of romantic loss on distress remained significant even after accounting for emotion regulation ($c' = 0.164$, $p = .016$), suggesting romantic loss affects distress through pathways this study did not measure.

This null mediation result is informative rather than a shortcoming. It suggests that while suppression-related processes (Gross & John, 2003) may still operate at the level of individual experience, they do not statistically explain the loss-distress link in this dataset as a group-level mechanism. Other unmeasured factors likely carry more explanatory weight, a point developed further below.

Gender differences were limited to emotion regulation, with women reporting significantly higher levels than men, $t(198) = -2.33$, $p = .021$, $d = 0.33$, consistent with Tamres et al.'s (2002) meta-analytic finding that women rely more heavily on emotion-focused coping strategies. This finding appears to sit in tension with the popular assumption that women are more emotionally expressive overall (Camp et al., 2023), suggesting the observed gender gap reflects regulation *strategy* rather than general emotional expressiveness.

No significant gender differences emerged for breakup distress, personality, or psychological distress. This null pattern is consistent with Gehl et al. (2024), who found that coping style and attachment security; not gender, better predict post-breakup distress, and with Cochran and Rabinowitz (2023), who reported minimal gender variation across broad mental health symptom domains. Fischer and Manstead (2000) further argue that gender differences in emotion regulation are more plausibly attributable to social roles and cultural expectations than fixed psychological sex differences; a framing consistent with the present, culturally distinct sample. Together, these findings suggest romantic loss functions as a comparably significant stressor for both men and women, even where regulatory strategies diverge.

Romantic loss and personality together explained only 7.2% of variance in psychological distress, and mediation via emotion regulation was not supported, together pointing to substantial unmeasured contributors to post-loss adjustment. Perceived social support is a strong candidate (Lakey & Orehek, 2011), particularly given that 88% of this sample lived with family; the presence and quality of that support may shape distress in ways the current variables did not capture. Individual differences in psychological resilience (Bonanno & Kaltman, 2001) offer a further explanation for the variability in distress responses observed here.

These findings support emotion-focused intervention for young adults coping with romantic loss, given the significant zero-order relationships among loss, regulation, and distress, even though a direct mediating mechanism was not confirmed statistically. Approaches such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and emotion-focused therapy may still be clinically relevant, targeting emotion regulation as one of several relevant levers rather than the primary pathway. The gender difference in regulation strategy also suggests interventions should be tailored: destigmatizing help-seeking may be especially important for engaging men, who may be less likely to access support following a breakup.

The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference regarding the direction of

relationships among loss, regulation, and distress; the non-significant mediation result in particular should be interpreted as inconsistent with a *statistical* indirect pathway, not as evidence against emotion regulation mattering to individuals' lived experience. The sample was narrow young, urban, family-embedded students, limiting generalizability to other age groups, socioeconomic contexts, or cultural settings. Reliance on self-report measures also introduces risk of social desirability bias, a particular concern given the cultural sensitivity around disclosing relationship experiences.

Longitudinal designs are needed to clarify the temporal and potentially causal relationships among romantic loss, personality, emotion regulation, and distress. Future research should examine Big Five facets at a finer grain – particularly neuroticism, given its unexpected null association here; and incorporate culturally specific variables such as social support, family influence, and religious coping, which may better explain the unexplained variance in distress identified in this study. Testing alternative mediators (e.g., social support, resilience, attachment security) or moderated-mediation models may clarify why emotion regulation did not emerge as a significant mechanism here. Qualitative and mixed-methods designs could further illuminate the lived experience of romantic loss.

Romantic loss, personality, and emotion regulation were significantly interrelated among young adults in this sample, and both romantic loss and personality significantly predicted psychological distress. However, emotion regulation did not statistically mediate either relationship, and the direct effect of romantic loss on distress persisted independent of it. Gender differences were confined to emotion regulation, with women scoring higher than men; no other gender differences emerged. These findings inform culturally responsive approaches to supporting young adults coping with relationship loss in Pakistan, and point toward longitudinal, multi-method research, with attention to social support and resilience as candidate mechanisms; as the next step for this line of inquiry.

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