



Research Paper

EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIVITY AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION AMONG BHARATANATYAM DANCERS AND NON-DANCERS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study is to study the emotional expressivity and emotional regulation among Bharatanatyam dancers and non-dancers. The sample consisted of 200 participants, including 100 Bharatanatyam dancers and 100 non-dancers. The measures used were emotional expressivity scale and emotional regulation questionnaire. The study gives an insight about Bharatanatyam learning and its influence on emotional expressivity and emotional regulation. Descriptive correlation research design was adopted. Statistical analysis used were t-test, chi-square, and correlation. The findings revealed significant difference between Bharatanatyam dancers and non-dancers in emotional expressivity and emotional regulation. Additionally, there is no significant relationship between emotional expressivity and cognitive reappraisal but there is negative relationship between emotional expressivity and expressive suppression. Also, there is no relationship between cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.

Keywords: : *emotional expressivity, emotional regulation, bharatanatyam dancers, non-dancers*

1. INTRODUCTION

Bharatanatyam

In India there are various performing arts like music, dance, and drama. The Indian classical dance different forms, some of the major types being Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Kathak, Odissi, Manipuri, and Kuchipudi. The history of dancing is divided into three main periods: prehistoric, medieval, and modern. Bharatanatyam is a dance form from Tamil Nadu traditionally performed in temples. The name means “Dance of Bharata”, referring to the sage Bharata, who composed the Natya Shastra. According to Natya Shastra, art forms are divided into Nritya (pure dance without expression), Nritya (dance with expression), and Natya (dramatic representation with dialogue). Bharatanatyam mainly includes Nritya and Nrityaa.

An essential element of Nritya is Abhinaya, used to express ideas and emotions. It is classified into types: Angika (body movements like hands and limbs), Vachika (speech, music, dialogue), Aharya (costume, jewellery, makeup), and Satvika (mental and emotional expression). Performance items like Shabdham, Varnam, and Padam use abhinaya along with adavus and hasta mudras. Facial expressions, eye and head movements help convey emotions. In Natya Shastra, Bharata presented the Rasa and Bhava theory. Rasa is an aesthetic experience, described as a meta-emotion. The eight rasas are srīngara, hasya, karuṇa, Raudra, vīra, bhayāṅkara, bibhatsa and Adbhuta. Bhava refers to the emotional state represented by the performer. It includes sthāyibhava, vyābhicāribhava, vibhava, anubhava, and sattvikabhava. The durable emotions are rati, hasa, soka, krodha, utsaha, bhaya, jugupsa, and vismaya.

Emotional Expressivity

Emotional expressivity is the extent to which individuals outwardly show their emotions through facial expressions, body movements, gestures, and vocal tone. It reflects outward display and not the internal feeling and is independent of whether the emotion is positive or negative (Kring, Smith,

Neale, 1994). It differs from emotionality, which refers to the tendency to experience positive or negative emotional states. Emotional expressivity reflects a dispositional tendency to communicate emotions and not the regulation or control of expression. Reduced expressiveness, known as flat affect, is seen in schizophrenia. Variations are also seen in personality disorders such as schizoid and histrionic personality disorders. Emotional expression influences awareness of emotions, social functioning, interpersonal communication, and physical health.

The James-Lange theory states that emotions result from physiological responses. Cannon-Bard theory states that emotional experience and physiological changes occur simultaneously. Schachter-Singer theory explains that emotion is based on physiological arousal and cognitive labelling.

Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is the process by which individuals influence their emotions, when they occur, and how they are expressed (Gross, 1998). It involves monitoring and modifying emotional reactions. It can be conscious or unconscious. Two major strategies are cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Cognitive reappraisal involves changing the way one thinks about a situation to alter its emotional impact. It reduces negative affect and increases positive affect. Expressive suppression involves inhibiting outward emotional expression. It may increase negative emotions. Reduce positive affect, and affect social relationships. Individuals using suppression may receive less social support and experience lower life satisfaction and well-being.

The process model by Gross (1998) explains two stages: antecedent-focused (before emotion) and response-focused (after emotion). It includes five strategies: situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. Cognitive reappraisal is an antecedent-focuses strategy and expressive suppression is a response-focused strategy.

Review of Literature

Jia & Zhang (2026) examined emotional regulation in dance and its role in emotional expression among 872 dance majors in seven universities using questionnaire survey. The results showed that emotional regulation in dance had a significant positive predictive effect on emotional expression, and additionally, performance self-confidence and learning engagement were found to play significant independent and chaining mediating roles in this relationship. It also showed that teacher support positively moderated the relationship between emotional regulation in dance and learning engagement and both teacher and peer support positively moderated the relationship between emotional regulation in dance and performance self-confidence.

Jahnavi & Dr. Varma (2025) conducted a study on the Relationship between Indian classical dance forms and psychological well-being: a review. They found that the Indian classical dance has a strong impact on psychological well-being and helped in reducing stress and anxiety, and improving emotional regulation.

Nishanth & Shameen (2025) reviewed on emotional expressivity, emotional regulation, and life satisfaction among young adults. The objective was to examine the relationship between emotional expressivity, interpersonal emotional regulation, and relationship health, also the gender differences. The key findings showed positive correlation between emotional expressivity and life satisfaction. Gender differences influence emotional regulation strategies.

Yaqoob (2025) studied on emotional expressivity, social adjustment and mental health in adults with sample of 250 adults with both males (n=125) and females (n=125). The scales used were Emotional expressivity scale by Kring (1988), Social adjustment scale by Kausar (2007) and Mental health inventory by Veit and Ware (1983) using purposive sampling for data collection. The results showed that there is significant positive relationship between emotional expressivity, social adjustment and psychological well-being in

adults and also significant negative relationship between emotional expressivity, social adjustment and psychological distress in adults. The findings also indicated that there is likely to be gender differences in emotional expressivity, social adjustment and psychological well-being of adults and no significant gender difference in psychological distress of adults. It showed that emotional expressivity, social adjustment are likely to be positively predict psychological wellbeing and negatively predict psychological distress in adults.

Ganesh et al. (2025) conducted a qualitative interview study to illuminate the lived emotional, physical, and spiritual impacts of experienced Bharatanatyam dancers. 15 Bharatanatyam dancers were interviewed and found evidences that Bharatanatyam plays a role in well-being through heightened connections across emotional, spiritual, community and cultural areas, and improvement in physical and mental health.

Pai (2024) The study on Relation between emotional expressivity and emotional sensitivity in Indian classical dancers with 277 Indian adults using Emotional expressivity scale and Emotional sensitivity scale and results revealed that there is no significant difference in gender when it comes to emotional expressivity but there is a significant difference in dancer's and on dancer's emotional sensitivity but not in their emotional expressivity

Nair & Imran (2024) conducted a study on Assessing emotional regulation, empathy and emotional expressivity among Indian classical dancers and non-dancers: A comparative study with a total sample of 259 participants with 129 classical dancers with more than five years of experience and 130 non-dancers. The Berkeley expressivity questionnaire, Empathy Assessment Scale, and Emotional regulation questionnaire were used for the study. The results showed that classical dancers were more emotionally expressive and empathetic than non-dancers but there was no significant difference in cognitive reappraisal and emotional facets of emotional regulation between the groups.

Sarashetti (2024) studied on the influence of Bharatanatyam dancers on mental health, focusing on stress reduction, emotional regulation, cognitive improvement, and overall psychological well-being using literature review, qualitative interview, and quantitative analysis of mental health indicators. Findings suggest that Bharatanatyam enhances cognitive functioning, regulating emotions, reduce stress, and promote mindfulness.

OBJECTIVE

1. To assess the sociodemographic factors of Bharatanatyam dancers and non-dancers.
2. To assess the emotional expressivity of Bharatanatyam dancers and non-dancers.
3. To assess the emotional regulation of Bharatanatyam dancers and non-dancers.
4. To determine the difference between Bharatanatyam dancers and non-dancers in emotional expressivity.
5. To determine the difference between Bharatanatyam dancers and non-dancers in emotional regulation.
6. To find the association between selected demographic factors and emotional expressivity and emotional regulation.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The sample consists of 200 participants with equal distribution between bharatanatyam dancers and non-dancers who have no formal bharatanatyam background from the age of 15 years. The participants were from Palakkad district of Kerala. They were asked to fill the questionnaire voluntarily and anonymously.

MEASURES

The participants provided data regarding their demographic details, emotional expressivity and emotional regulation.

Emotional expressivity scale (Kring, A.M., Smith, D.A, & Neale, J.M., 1994) was used to assess the extent to which people outwardly display their emotions, regardless of emotional valence or channel of expression. The scale consists of 17 items with six-point Likert-scale ranging from “never true” to “always true”. The Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .93$.

Emotional regulation questionnaire (Gross, J.J, & John, O.P, 2003) was used to assess the person’s tendency to regulate their emotions. The scale consists of 10 items with seven-point Likert-scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .73$.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of target variables

Variables	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Emotional expressivity	200	59.985	12.315
Emotional regulation	200	28.79	5.987

The total number of participants are 200. The mean of emotional expressivity is 59.985 and standard deviation is 12.315. The mean of emotional regulation is 28.79 and standard deviation is 5.987.

Table 2. Comparison between bharatanatyam dancers and non-dancers in emotional expressivity and emotional regulation.

Variables	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Emotional expressivity	-.430	198	.668
Emotional regulation	1.786	198	.076

The p value .668 is greater than .05, the difference is not statistically significant for emotional expressivity. For emotional regulation, p value .076 is greater than .05, the difference is not statistically significant.

Table 3. Correlation between Emotional expressivity, cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression

Variable	Emotional expressivity	Cognitive reappraisal
Emotional expressivity		
Cognitive reappraisal	.046	
Expressive suppression	-.645**	0.89

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

There is a significant negative correlation at -.645 level for emotional expressivity and expressive suppression. The r value is .046 showing that there is no significant relationship between emotional expressivity and cognitive reappraisal. The r value 0.037 showing that there is no significant relationship between expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal.

The sample has an equal distribution among Bharatanatyam dancers and non-dancers. Demographic variables indicate that majority of the participants falls under the age group 18-20. Many participants have no background in other

artforms. Majority of the participants have practised for 1-5 years in Bharatanatyam or other artforms and the reason for learning is passion for most individuals and the hours of practises are usually between 1-3 hours.

The study found no significant difference in emotional expressivity between Bharatanatyam dancers and non-dancers. It suggests that although Bharatanatyam training emphasises emotional communication through abhinaya it may not influence general emotional expressivity in everyday life. This finding is consistent with Pai (2024), the results showed no significant differ-

ence in emotional expressivity between dancers and non-dancers.

There was no significant difference in emotional regulation between Bharatanatyam dancers and non-dancers. Similar finding was reported by Nair and Imran (2024), result found no significant difference in cognitive reappraisal and emotional facets of emotional regulation.

There was a significant negative correlation between emotional expressivity and expressive suppression suggesting that individuals who tend to express their emotions openly are less likely to suppress their emotional expression. The result showed no significant relationship between emotional expressivity cognitive reappraisal suggesting that cognitive strategies work independently from expressing emotions outwardly. There was no significant relationship between expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal indicating that use of one strategy does not influence the use of another.

The finding suggests that while Bharatanatyam is an artform emphasising emotional expression, general emotional expressivity an emotional regulation may not significantly differ between Bharatanatyam dancers and non-dancers. But certain demographic factors and involvement in artistic activities may influence them.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the findings of the study showed no significant difference between bharatanatyam dancers and non-dancers with respect to emotional expressivity and emotional regulation. This suggests that engagement in bharatanatyam may not necessarily lead to measurable differences in these emotional domains when compared non-dancers. Furthermore, the results reveal no significant relationship between emotional expressivity and cognitive reappraisal, as well as between cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. However, a significant negative correlation was observed between emotional expressivity and expressive suppression, indicating that individuals who tend to express their emotions more open-

ly are less likely to engage in suppressing their emotional experiences. Overall, these findings contribute to the existing literature by highlighting the complex and selective nature of relationships among emotional expressivity and regulation strategies, while also suggesting the need for further research to better understand the psychological impact of classical dance practises.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The present study has certain limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, the study was limited to female participants from Palakkad, which restricts the generalisability of the findings to males and wider population. Secondly, the focus was mainly on the bharatanatyam dancers, thereby excluding other Indian classical dance forms that may have differing influences on emotional expressivity and regulation. Additionally, the sample size of 200 participants may limit the extent to which the findings can be generalised to larger populations, The study was also constrained by the limited availability of previous research on this specific topic and population restricting the scope for comparison. The use of self-report measures can create the possibility of response biases such as social desirability or inaccurate self-perception. Lastly, other influencing factors such as personality traits, family environment, stress levels, and overall mental health status, were not controlled for the study and may have had an impact on the emotional outcomes observed.

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