# EMOTION REGULATION STRATEGY AND RESILIENCE OF FEMALE PRISONERS

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#### **Abstract**

Female prisoners suffered both mentally and physically. An interview with six of them revealed that they suffered some negative feelings, such as loneliness, depression (of prison rules and other prisoner's bad treatment), emptiness and guilt (of being far from children and no visitors). Moreover, they also suffered from physical problem, like headache, insomnia, and suicidal trial. Both mental and physical caused stress that eventually led them to find their own emotion regulation strategy and resilience. This research aimed to find the effects of reappraisal and suppression as emotion regulation strategies towards the resilience of female prisoners. The participants of this study were 132 female prisoners in Lapas II A Semarang. The data were analyzed by using regression and case analysis. Regression analysis was used to analyze the numeric data, while case analysis was conducted based on interview upon four female prisoners who had high score and low score. This interview aimed at exploring the resilience of female prisoners in Lapas II A Semarang more deeply. The regression analysis showed that reappraisal and suppression altogether affected towards the resilience of female prisoners. However, the result was different when both strategies were applied separately; reappraisal gave significant effects towards resilience while the suppression did not. The case analysis revealed that reappraisal such as significant supports from surroundings (family, friends or prison staff), spirituality and self-esteem were the factors that also influence the resilience ability of female prisoners

# **Keywords: Emotion Regulation Strategy, Resilience.**

## **Biography**



Binta Mu'tiya Rizki was born on August 25, 1985, in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. Having high interest on studying human behaviors, she took psychologycal major as her Bachelor's degree from Semarang State University (2008) and clinical psychology as her Master's degree from Gajah Mada University (2010). Her areas of expertise are *Problem-focused Coping*, *Spiritual Intellegence*, *Resilience* and *Emotion Regulation*. A young lecturer and researcher at Departement of Psychology, Semarang State University (Unnes), she is now working on some on-going researches on environmental awareness and emotion regulation of bullied children.

## **OBJECTIVES**

Study on female prisoners is one of the pivotal studies in clinical psychology. Women are unique creatures complete with complexity of their psychic. They are unique in a sense that the way they face negative issues can cause negative emotions, namely anxiety, worry, stress to depression. However, women are also given the power to survive and adapt to an uncomfortable situation, both physically and psychologically. Various forms of mental disorders, such as stress or depression, cannot be separated from the role of emotions (emotion regulation).

The women discussed in this study were female prisoners. They underwent punishment in prison and separated from family and friends. They were also forced to live with other female prisoners who had different personality characteristics and background that often caused conflict. Based on the initial survey conducted in women prisons class IIA Semarang, in January 2010, there were about one hundred female prisoners, with varying characteristics, both in terms of age, educational background, marital status and form of criminality that they had done. The interviews were conducted with six female prisoners who either have children or did not children, be it thin or fat, dark or bright skin, as well as with different age and form of criminality.

The prisoners told their negative feelings such as loneliness, depression of obeying rules to be followed, desire to be free, unfriendly treatment of other prisoners, no longer having visits from their children and families, as well as the demands of the family. The problem faced in prison could make female prisoners suffered from physical and psychological torture, such as headache, acute insomnia, and even suicide (one of the female prisoners had attempted to do so).

Life in prison blocked female prisoners in fulfilling their developmental tasks of adulthood, such as intimacy (as wives, mothers or loved ones). Their career consolidation and generativity (social relations) would also be hampered. If the person is not able to fulfill the task of development, the ability of the resilience is also not optimal, because there is a lack of positive developments that can help individuals to be able to rise from adversity (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Wyner (2002), the director of the homeless charity Wintercomfort Cambridge, told the story and his experiences in prison. He was jailed for allowing the use of drugs in one of his programs. He said that a prison is a place that has an inhumane system. Therefore, all prisoners should be able to cope well in the face of grief, not only psychologically ill but also physical.

Cases of crimes committed by women have received less attention in terms of physical and psychological wellbeing. This is proven by the discovery of violations of the law (physical abuse/ verbal) in processing cases and also injustice in giving sentence (Irianto and Nurtjahyo, 2006). For example, in getting information out of suspects' criminal behavior in the case of babies trafficking, law enforcement officers still use tactics that violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Based on the testimony of two defendants, they still got the violations like coercion in signing the BAP (Draft of Examination), a pistol on the head, threw a desk calendar, beaten, pull her hair, no meal before signing BAP, burst of words that are not polite (bitch, dog, slut) or the threat of rape or being ordered to get naked.

The problems that resulted in psychological burden did not cease after the sentence set by the judge. Based on the interviews in the initial survey, the female prisoners still had the burden of obeying regulations in prison/jail, separated from the people who loved them and got unpleasant treatment from other prisoners. The research conducted by Nugrahenny (1996)

at women prison in Yogyakarta and Semarang revealed that the most of female prisoners suffered moderate depression.

Based on some of the psychological problems faced by the female prisoners, it was necessary to assess the capabilities of the female prisoners to be able to survive with a healthy mental state during the process of punishment. One capability to do it is resilience. Resilience in psychology is defined as the ability to bounce back from adversity (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Each individual will need resilience to gain happiness on the experienced adverse events. Resilience was needed by female prisoners, because high resilience could make individuals to be able to protect themselves from stress that would lead to depression (Edward, 2005). In stressful conditions, there is a power that can be harnessed to counteract the negative effects for mental health. That power is called resilience, as described Luthar et al, (2000), which is a positive outcome that can be found by individuals even if they are in a miserable condition or at risk. Resilience can protect a person from adverse consequences on hard times (Yu & Zhang, 2007). Thus, resilience is expected to give the spirit of life of female prisoners to be able to undergo the punishment and become a better human being. Thus, they would be able to reconcile with the society after they successfully finished this prison term.

Based on some of the theories and the research results above, it could be concluded that resilience is the ability of individuals to adapt, to survive in stressful conditions, to rise from a bad or stressful experience and to be able to grow to be better with a relatively fast process. The aspects of resilience, according to Connor and Davidson (2003), are as follows: 1) personal competence, high standards and tenacity, 2) trust in one's instincts, tolerance of negative affect, and strengthening effects of stress, 3) positive acceptence of change and secure relationship, 4) Control. This aspect explains the control of a person to achieve the goals and efforts to obtain the support of others, 5) spiritual influences. These five aspects are the indicators of measuring instrument used in this study.

Resilience can be gained by exploiting the potential of positive emotions owned by individuals. A research conducted by Tugade and Fredrickson (2007) explained that positive emotions could build individual resilience capabilities of events encountered. The revaluation of positive values (*positive reappraisal*) produced experience of positive emotions even though when people are in a state of stress, that experience of positive emotions can push the psychological need to help someone move forward to carry on his life (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). Positive emotions can be generated through emotion regulation strategies that maintain or improve the experience of positive emotions (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2007).

The prisoners were expected to have the abilities to survive in stressful situations such as in prison. One of which was the ability to regulate emotions. Emotion regulation was needed to balance the excessive emotional conditions within the individual. If the female prisoners' emotion regulation is not effective, the condition that they experienced daily could trigger stress, depression and other mental disorders. Disturbances in the emotions will affect a person's psychological condition that leads to the experience of mental disorders, such as GAD (Generalized Anxiety Disorder) (Mennin, 2006).

Individuals who are able to regulate emotions well will be able to survive under unpleasant situations and able to control their emotions; therefore, they can gain relief and happiness that are needed by individuals. Emotions can provide both healthful and unhealthy effects; it all depends on the individual's success in regulating emotions (Gross & Thompson, 2007).

Based on the various problems experienced by female prisoners and the explanation of the above theory, female prisoners need emotion regulation that was appropriate and effective in order to survive and move on from psychic discomfort that must be faced daily. Ward and Brown (in Blanchete & Brown, 2006) described nine groups of human primary needs that if once achieved would provide a good life for all offenders so as to stop the crime. They were as follows: life (for example, the use of physical optimally, sexual satisfaction), science, play and work well, autonomy and self-directedness (*self-control*), inner peace, good social relationships, spirituality, and happiness. Resilience and emotion regulation strategy on female prisoners are important to study because it is associated with the aspects of happiness, inner peace, good social relationships, spirituality and self-directedness (self-control). Thus, it is expected to enhance the positive aspects that can stop or at least reduce the risk of crimes. Emotion regulation strategy consists of two strategies, namely: antecedent-focused and response-focused, which in this study are represented and focused on *reappraisal* and *suppression*.

Reappraisal is one form of antecedent-focused emotion regulation strategies, that is in the process of cognitive changes or cognitive change strategies (Gross & John, 2003; Gallo et al, 2009). Reappraisal has a significant relationship with the emergence of positive emotions, be it an experience or expression (Gross & John, 2003). Positive emotions can build individual resilience over events encountered (Tugade& Fredrickson, 2007)

Suppression is one form of response-focused emotion regulation strategies (Gross, 1998). The use of suppression make people experience the discrepancy between what they experienced with facial expressions or behaviors exhibited (Gross & John, 2003). For example, laughing out loud in the midst of stress can regulate the attack of negative emotions that can speed up recovery of heart beat (Fredrickson & Levenson in Tugade & Fredrickson 2007). Based on this theory, both reappraisal and suppression strategies can be used to enhance positive emotions. Therefore, it is assumed can increase resilience.

Based on the background of the study, the purpose of this research was to uncover the relationship between emotion regulation strategies, which were *reappraisal* and *suppression*, with the resilience of female prisoners.

## **METHOD**

The variable involved in this study was the independent variables or predictors, which were emotion regulation strategies (*reappraisal* and *suppression*); and the dependent variable or criterion was resilience. The validity or different scale item for resilience scale and strategy of emotion regulation in this study gave the following results: 1) based on the analysis of the resilience scale of 50 items, 43 items were found as valid and 7 items as invalid to the level of significance of 5%. The *Item-total correlation* moved from 0.262 to 0.673; 2) based on the analysis of the scale of emotion regulation strategy of 32 items, 22 items were found as valid and 8 items as invalid with a significance level of 5%. *item-total correlation* moved from 0.268 to 0.610. Based on the analysis of the scale of reappraisal of 16 items, 14 items were found as valid and 2 items as invalid with a significance level of 5%, *item-total correlation* moved from 0.266 to 0.656. The analysis of the suppression scale of 16 items, 14 items found as valid and 2 items as invalid with a significance level of 5%, *item-total correlation* moved from 0.254 to 0.574.

The reliability of the resilience scale was 0.915 (using alpha cronbach) and emotion regulation strategy was 0.819 (using alpha cronbach). The reliability of the reappriasal scale was 0.745 (using alpha cronbach) and the suppression scale was 0.630 (using alpha cronbach). The research subjects in this study were the prisoners of women prison IIA Semarang. The total numbers of the subjects were 132, involving all female prisoners with a variety of characteristics of age, educational level, time in jail, possession of child and length of sentence.

The methods of data analysis applied were *regression analysis model* with *stepwise method*. The analysis used to predict how the state of the dependent variable if two or more independent variables as predictors had been manipulated (Sugiyono, 2009). In addition, this study also used case analysis by interviewing some prisoners who had the highest and lowest scores to get more data about the resilience of the female prisoners.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The major hypothesis of this study was the fact that there was a relation between emotion regulation strategies (reappraisal and suppression altogether) and resilience. The results of major research hypothesis testing using regression analysis model showed that the value of R = 0.565, F regression = 60.859, p = 0.000 (p < 0.01) which meant that there was significant relation between emotion regulation strategies and resilience; therefore, the research hypothesis of this study was accepted. The effective contribution of emotion regulation strategies (*reappraisal* and *suppression*) could be seen from Rsquare = 0.319. It indicated that resilience variable could be explained by emotion regulation strategy variable with a percentage of 31.9%; whereas, the remaining, 68.1% was explained by other variables. The variable of emotion regulation strategies had partial correlation of 0.565, t = 7.801 and p = 0.000, which meant that there was a positive and highly significant relation between emotion regulation and resilience of IIA female prisoners.

Stepwise regression analysis was conducted to determine which independent variable was dominant in influencing resilience. Step wise regression analysis showed that different emotion regulation strategies (reappraisal and suppression) provided different results; therefore, in this case there were two independent variables (reappraisal and suppression), while the dependent variable was the resilience. Based on stepwise regression analysis, only reappraisal had a significant influence on the resilience of female prisoners, with value of R = 0.639, F regression = 89.758, p = 0.000 (p<0.01) which meant that there was significant relationship between reappraisal and resilience. Based on the case analysis by interviewing four female prisoners who had the lowest and highest score of resilience, the study revealed that the strategic factors of emotion regulation of reappraisal, positive self-esteem was very positive assessment of themselves, support from family or significant others, spiritual activities and positive and fun activities were another factor that could affect the ability of the resilience of female prisoners.

Hypothesis test results showed that emotion regulation strategies had a significant relation with resilience. This meant that the higher the emotion regulation strategies undertaken by female prisoners, the higher resilience would be. Conversely, the lower the emotion regulation strategies, the lower resilience became. The ability to regulate emotions well would significantly improve the resilience of individuals. Reappraisal of emotion regulation strategies contributed effectively or prediction of the ability of the resilience of female prisoners showed 40.4%. Thus, it could be concluded that the ability of individuals in

regulating emotional implied on the quality of the adaptation that could ultimately affect the ability of resilience.

Reappraisal is a strategy that involves cognitive emotion regulation, to reassess the situation so as to defuse the emotion before the emotion raised. The results of the study conducted by Schutte et al, (2009) showed that the strategy of antecedent-focused emotion regulation had a correlation with the high well-being. Reappraisal is one of antecedent-focused emotion regulation strategies. The increase of using cognitive reappraisal predicts the increase of positive *well-being* (Haga et al, 2009). Resilience is one of factors that can determine a person's *well-being* (Huppert et al, 2006).

The subjects that scored low resilience (based on interviews) tended to use emotion regulation strategies of *suppression* by not revealing sadness or anger to others, or diverting attention such as making coffee and reading a novel. Based on the theory by Gross and John (2003), these things could happen for individuals who used suppression to show little expressive behavior and continue to experience negative emotions; however, as noted above, a positive emotional resilience required to sustain the strength of female prisoners. Individuals who used suppression showed symptoms of depression, low life satisfaction, self-esteem, and optimistism that were lower than individuals who used reappraisal (Gross & John, 2003). Low optimistism and life satisfaction could lower the level of resilience of individuals, because resilient individuals had positive emotions, high life satisfaction, optimism and peace (Fredrickson et al, 2003).

Research on suppression carried out by Sirvastava et al (2009) showed that the suppression predicted lower social support (good support from parents, as well as from friends), lack of intimacy with others and social satisfaction was lower. Based on the interviews, Ingra and Nursi (the subjects with low resilience scores) had lower social support. Nursi and Ingra pleaded that they got lack of intimacy with family and Ingra even felt that she did not have close friends in prison.

The use of suppression in regulating emotions could cause cognitive burden because it required repeated effort in managing emotions. Those efforts might spend cognitive resources that were supposed to be used optimally in a social context that involved emotions. Moreover, the suppression was also the greater potential to erode the social function than reappraisal (Gross & John, 2003). The weakness of social function, either in the form of support and intimacy with others, could lower one's level of resilience as the ability or interest to socialize was one of the sources to build self-resilience (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). The weakness of social functions could be seen from Ingra's case. Ingra's self-assessment on herself tended to be negative; therefore, she had low self-esteem, lingering insecure feeling and chose not to seek social support. Consequently, it could destabilize the power of her resilience.

Based on the results of the first hypothesis test and case analysis, it indicated that despite the emotion regulation strategies provided a contribution of 31.9% to the resilience power, it did not mean that the reappraisal and the suppression had equal proportion in creating effective contribution to the resilience. Since based on step wise regression method and the case analysis, the reappraisal appeared as a strategy that tended to be applied by female prisoners who had high resilience. On the other hand, the suppression tended to be applied by female prisoners who had low resilience.

Based on the results of case analysis, subjects that scored high resilience revealed that they tended to use the reappraisal emotion regulation strategy in regulating emotions in facing problems that could cause stress, such as at the time they were worried about their children or

in the process of self-acceptance subject to punishment that must be endured. The results of these studies supported some research results including the study conducted by Gross and John (2003) stated that the participants who did reappraisal were able to reduce the experience and expression of negative emotional behaviors and increase positive effects (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). Emotion is one of the affective aspects, so that when it affects people to be more positive, then the emotions felt will also be positive. Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) argued that there was a reciprocal correlation between the positive meanings with positive emotions. Positive meaning could trigger positive emotions as more comprehensive knowledge created bigger chance of finding positive meaning. The emergence of positive emotions might serve to improve the resilience (Tugade& Fredrickson, 2007). Reappriasal emotion regulation strategies were proven to give effects to the resilience of femaleprisoners, but there were several other factors that also affected resilience. Based on the interview, there were some other factors that affected resilience, one of them was social support.

Social support was very important for femaleprisoners. Social support served a protective factor for female prisoners from negative influences (Becerra et al, 2008). Female prisoners who were forced to have lack of support because they did not get the love from parent or intimacy with friends were expected to utilize or save their psychical potentials to bring out positive emotions in themselves through reappraisal, self-actualization through some useful works, and having a positive meaning during in prison. One of the ways was to get closer to God.

Besides social support, spirituality as confessed by Colony and Mera (female prisoners who scored high resilience) had a positive influence in dealing with problems in prison. Lukoff (2000) said that spirituality could significantly decrease depression by developing positive beliefs and behaviors, and also improved negative influences. Javanese moral values also appeared in Yui and Mera, like the idea of *Nrimo Ing Pandum*, a local wisdom that aims to realize human relationship with God, the brotherhood of man and the harmony with nature (Hawasi, 2007). He also explained that the source of wisdom came from the God Almighty (Amrih, 2002). *Nrimo Ing Pandum* means that in life people must try as much as possible and have dreams and clear objectives (targets), and whatever the outcome, the individual should be able to trust and surrender to God (http://bdautika.wordpress.com).

The idea of *NrimoIngPandum* is a wisdom that will make people feels consistent with what is believed and persevered when face with an ordeal. This form of wisdom will make individuals always have a high self-control that fulfill only things that are needed, not only to reach a personal desire (Amrih, 2002). Self-control here means the ability to control emotions in achieving the goal. The idea of *Nrimo Ing Pandum* contains positive aspects of self-acceptance over the changes and spiritual aspects that are covered in other aspects of the resilience as stated by Connor and Davidson (2003). Based on such understanding, *Nrimo Ing Pandum* was associated with spiritual aspects which have previously been stated that the spirituality helped female prisoners to deal with the uncomfortable feelings when they were in prison/jail.

Positive beliefs of individual spirituality can also be associated with *reappraisal* emotion regulation strategies, for *reappraisal* means reassess a stressful situation for regulating emotions that can stimulate positive emotions (Gross & John, 2003). Positive emotions are considered as a remedy from within (Dowrick et al, 2008). Medicine or power that comes from the individual itself can be increased or reduced in accordance with the will of each individual. Conversely, a person who chooses to bury his feelings and not express emotions in accordance with what is perceived (*suppression*), without any assessment of the

stressful situation, does not reduce any negative experience of negative emotions he is feeling (Gross & John, 2003).

This experience of having negative emotions would remain and lock people inside, drain psychic and mind. As a result, it would take positive potential or resources that existed within the individual. Reappraisal of stressful situations could reduce these negative emotions or increase positive emotions (Gross & John, 2003).

Thus, the reappraisal involved individual's ability on having positive thingking that could be supported by the invidual spirituality, because the individual who was intelligent spiritually, according to the Zohar and Marshall (2001), would be able to resolve the problem of meaning and value, positioning behavior and human life in the broader and richer context of meaning, and were able to estimate that an action or a certain way of life was more meaningful than any other way of life. Good spirituality made people able to follow the values contained in the wisdom of every prayer, had more positive thoughts, and had connection to God. This connected condition to God made a person thought that he was under His will and power (Nafis, 2006). Based on the explanation, one of the efforts that could be done by female prisoners to improve *reappraisal* emotion regulation strategy was by actively participating in *pengajian/ceramah* (religion class/worship) with full consideration, because in that activity there were some spiritual values that could be used to expand mindset and gain wisdom over the trial; therefore, the reappraisal of emotion regulation process would run more easily.

*Reappraisal* that involved positive thoughts and spiritual aspects would bring positive emotions. Positive emotions could affect the strength of the resilience of female prisoners, because one of the characteristics of resilient individuals was the ability to experience positive emotions in a stressful condition so that they could raise successfully from even the worst conditions of misery or suffering (Tugade et al, 2004).

Based on the analysis of quantitative data and the results of the case analysis, it could be concluded that the things that could affect the ability of the resilience of female prisoners in Prison II A Semarang was emotion regulation strategies mainly reappraisal, education level, length of sentence, self-esteem, good social support from family, friends or fellow prisoners, the officers or those who were considered significant in their life and spiritual aspects that gave a positive meaning for female prisoners.

Finally, the study was limited to the role of emotion regulation strategies, which were reappraisal and suppression, towards resilience. Based on interviews with several female prisoners, the fact was found that in addition to use suppression and reappraisal, female prisoners were also diverting their attention as a way to cope with emotions. Therefore, it was suggested for the future research to conduct research on the role of other emotion regulation strategies such as attentional deployment or modification situation towards the resilience of female prisoners.

# **CONCLUSION**

Based on the hypothesis proposed, resilience had significant correlation with emotion regulation strategies. The effective contribution of *reappraisal* towards the resilience was 40.4%. Based on the interviews, the female prisoners who had high resilience found ways to be able to survive in stressful conditions, such as regulating their emotions with reappraisal strategy, having positive self-esteem (positive self-assessment), increasing the spiritual

aspects of the routine worship in accordance with their respective beliefs, doing things that were positive and pleasant (such as doing physical activities and reading novels), and seeking support from some significant persons (friend, officer or family).

There were some suggestions for the future researchers who were interested in the theme of resilience and emotion regulation strategies on female prisoners, it was highly recommended to investigate the influence of emotion regulation strategies such as screening situation, modifying situation, and attentional deployment towards resilience or other factors that contributed to resilience, in which in the study was found at 68.1%. Other factors might be psychological factors such as the experience of domestic violence and other demographic factors, such as economic background, forms of crime, and regional origin. The interviews on some female prisoners using qualitative methods could be used as an alternative to find the data, considering the fact that many women prisoners did some daily activities at the time this study had been conducted. Quantitative research that required the subject of significant numbers of women prisoners should conduct former field tests and make sure that a letter of approval had been signed by the authorites so that the research process will run smoothly, well-controlled and no significant change of procedures during the research process.

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## **Internet-based Source:**

[1] <a href="http://bdautika.wordpress.com/2007/04/07/tentang-nrimo-ing-pandum.di download tanggal 27 mei 2009">http://bdautika.wordpress.com/2007/04/07/tentang-nrimo-ing-pandum.di download tanggal 27 mei 2009</a>, 15:54