



Meta Emotion And Experiential Avoidance Among Smokers And Non-Smokers: Review Study

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ABSTRACT

"We wanted to really understand how smoking affects people's emotional lives, specifically looking at two key areas: **meta-emotion**, which is how people feel about their own feelings, and **experiential avoidance**, which is the tendency to avoid uncomfortable emotions. We explored how smoking impacts these areas, beyond just physical addiction.

We reviewed studies showing that smoking disrupts the body's stress response and changes brain activity, making emotional regulation harder. More importantly, we found that smoking appears to influence **meta-emotion**, causing people to have negative reactions to their own feelings, like feeling ashamed or guilty for feeling sad or anxious. This, in turn, reinforces **experiential avoidance**, where people try to push away or numb these uncomfortable feelings by smoking more. This creates a cycle where smoking becomes a way to escape emotions, but it actually makes emotional regulation worse over time.

Keywords: smoking cessation, nicotine dependence, meta-emotion, experiential avoidance, emotional regulation, stress response, brain activity."

INTRODUCTION

The complex relationship between cigarette smoking and emotional health has become a focal point in addiction research. While the physiological impact of nicotine is well-documented, the psychological dimensions, particularly how individuals process and respond to their own emotions, warrant deeper exploration. This review focuses on two critical psychological constructs: **meta-emotion**, the emotional reactions to one's own emotional states, and **experiential avoidance**, the behavioural tendency to avoid or suppress aversive inner experiences. We posit that these factors play a significant role in both the initiation and maintenance of smoking behaviour. By comparing smokers and non-smokers, we seek to elucidate the unique patterns of **meta-emotional** responses and reliance on **experiential avoidance** that contribute to nicotine dependence.

META-EMOTION

When we talk about **meta-emotion**, we're looking at how people feel *about* their own feelings. It's like having a second layer of emotions. So, you might feel sad, but then you also feel guilty or ashamed for being sad. It's not just the sadness itself, but how you react to the fact that you're feeling sad. Researchers like Norman & Furnes (2016) explore this concept, showing how it impacts emotional regulation. Some people might feel okay with feeling sad, knowing it's a normal part of life. Others might judge themselves harshly for it, thinking they should always be happy. This "feeling about feelings" can really affect how you handle tough times and how you see yourself.

EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE

Experiential avoidance is basically when you try to push away or avoid any uncomfortable feelings, thoughts, or sensations. It's like saying, "I don't want to feel this, so I'm going to do anything to make it stop." This could mean distracting yourself, using substances, or just trying to pretend the feeling isn't there. This idea is central to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) frameworks, as developed by Hayes et al. (1996). While it might give you a quick break from the discomfort, it often makes things worse in the long run. It's like ignoring a warning light on your car; the problem doesn't go away, and it might get bigger. So, instead of dealing with the feeling, you're just avoiding it, which can create more problems.

RATIONALE

"We know smoking is tough to quit, and it's not just about the nicotine. It really messes with how people handle their feelings. This review looks at two things: how people feel about their feelings – like, do you get mad at yourself for being sad? – and how much they try to avoid feeling bad at all.

Researchers have explored how emotions and smoking are linked. For example, studies have shown that people who smoke often use it as a way to cope with stress or negative feelings (Baker et al., 2004). Also, researchers have looked at how people's feelings about their feelings (like meta-emotion) and their tendency to avoid uncomfortable feelings (like experiential avoidance) play a role in various mental health issues (Hayes et al., 1996; Norman & Funes, 2016). However, what's missing is a clear picture of how smokers and non-smokers differ in these areas. We don't really know if smokers feel differently about their emotions compared to non-smokers, or if they try harder to avoid uncomfortable feelings. Most studies look at these things in general, not specifically in people who smoke.

Plus, we don't fully understand how smoking changes these emotional responses. Does nicotine change how people think about their feelings? Does lighting up become a way to avoid feeling bad? We need to figure that out.

This review pulls together what we already know to show where the gaps are. By focusing on these differences between smokers and non-smokers, we can pave the way for better ways to help people quit – ways that address their feelings, not just the physical addiction."

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Over the years, numerous studies have explored the intricate relationship between smoking behaviour and emotional regulation, with increasing focus on the nuanced roles of meta-emotion and experiential avoidance.

Researchers have consistently demonstrated the association between smoking and emotional distress. For example, studies have shown that smokers often use cigarettes as a means to manage negative emotions and stress (Baker et al., 2004). This suggests a link between smoking and the avoidance of unpleasant emotional states, a core component of experiential avoidance. To delve deeper into the emotional underpinnings of smoking, researchers have begun to examine the role of meta-emotion, the emotional response to one's own emotions.

Studies exploring meta-emotion have revealed its significant impact on emotional regulation and psychological well-being. For instance, Norman & Funes (2016) demonstrated a positive correlation between meta-emotional awareness and emotional intelligence. However, the specific influence of smoking on meta-emotional processes remains largely unexplored. Smoking may distort meta-emotional responses, leading to maladaptive coping strategies.

Furthermore, experiential avoidance, the tendency to avoid aversive internal experiences, has been identified as a key factor in various psychological difficulties, including addiction. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) frameworks, as developed by Hayes et al. (1996), emphasize the role of experiential avoidance in maintaining maladaptive behaviours. In the context of smoking, this avoidance

may manifest as a reliance on cigarettes to suppress unpleasant emotions, thereby reinforcing the addiction cycle.

However, a significant gap exists in the comparative analysis of meta-emotion and experiential avoidance between smokers and non-smokers. While studies have examined these constructs independently, there is a lack of research directly comparing these psychological factors in these two populations.

Moreover, the mechanisms through which smoking influences meta-emotion and experiential avoidance are not well-understood. Correlational studies suggest an association, but the underlying processes, such as how nicotine alters meta-emotional processing, are not well-defined. Longitudinal studies are also needed to understand how these constructs evolve with smoking behaviours.

In summary, these studies share an overview of the association that emotional regulation constructs directly or indirectly share with the smoking behaviour of a person, be it statistically significant or insignificant.

CONCLUSION

The reviewed literature underscores the significant role of emotional regulation in smoking behaviour, specifically focusing on the constructs of meta-emotion and experiential avoidance. Research has consistently demonstrated a link between smoking and the use of cigarettes as a coping mechanism for negative emotions and stress, highlighting the relevance of experiential avoidance in maintaining smoking habits. Studies on meta-emotion have shown its importance in overall emotional well-being, but the specific impact of smoking on meta-emotional processes remains largely unexplored.

A critical gap identified in the literature is the lack of comparative research directly examining meta-emotion and experiential avoidance between smokers and non-smokers. This absence of direct comparison limits our understanding of the unique emotional patterns associated with smoking. Furthermore, the precise mechanisms through which smoking influences these constructs are not well-defined, hindering the development of targeted interventions.

The findings of this review highlight the need for future research to address these gaps. Specifically, studies should focus on:

- Directly comparing meta-emotion and experiential avoidance between smokers and non-smokers.
- Investigating the mechanisms by which smoking influences these constructs, including longitudinal studies to track changes over time.
- Developing and evaluating interventions that specifically target meta-emotional processes and experiential avoidance in smoking cessation programs.

By addressing these research gaps, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the emotional dimensions of smoking and develop more effective strategies to support individuals in their efforts to quit. Ultimately, this will contribute to reducing the public health burden associated with smoking.

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