

Burnout, Emotion Regulation, and Psychological Well-Being among Entrepreneurs in Kerala: A Preliminary Cross-Sectional Study

Jasir Alavi

M.Sc. Psychology (Clinical Psychology), JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, India

Abstract: *Entrepreneurship combines autonomy and opportunity with persistent demands such as financial uncertainty, workload, role overload, and responsibility for business survival. This preliminary study examined the relationships among burnout, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, and psychological well-being among entrepreneurs in Kerala, India. A cross-sectional questionnaire was administered to 32 entrepreneurs (17 women and 15 men; age $M = 34.03$ years, $SD = 9.15$) representing all 14 districts of Kerala. The instrument contained an entrepreneur-adapted nine-item abbreviated Maslach Burnout Inventory, three career-satisfaction items, a modified five-point Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, and Ryff's 42-item Psychological Well-Being Scale. Internal consistency was acceptable to strong for the overall burnout index ($\alpha = .69$), cognitive reappraisal ($\alpha = .75$), expressive suppression ($\alpha = .66$), and psychological well-being ($\alpha = .95$). Burnout correlated strongly and negatively with psychological well-being ($r = -.91, p < .001$). Cognitive reappraisal was positively associated with well-being ($r = .55, p = .001$), while expressive suppression was negatively associated with well-being ($r = -.67, p < .001$). Burnout was also negatively associated with reappraisal and positively associated with suppression. Rank-order sensitivity analyses supported the same pattern. An exploratory regression explained 85.2% of the variance in psychological well-being, with burnout emerging as the only clearly significant independent predictor. The findings suggest that founder-support initiatives should address chronic demands and emotional exhaustion while also strengthening adaptive emotion-regulation skills. Because the sample was small, non-probability based, and collected on a single day using adapted self-report measures, the unusually large associations require replication in a larger preregistered study.*

Keywords: entrepreneurial burnout, emotion regulation, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, psychological well-being, Kerala

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is frequently associated with autonomy, purpose, innovation, and economic opportunity. It also exposes founders and owner-managers to uncertain income, extended work hours, multiple roles, responsibility for employees and customers, and a close link between personal identity and venture performance. These demands can produce substantial psychological strain even when entrepreneurs value the freedom and meaning of their work. Reviews of entrepreneurship and mental health therefore describe well-being as a central but context-dependent outcome rather than a simple consequence of business ownership (Stephan, 2018).

Burnout is commonly described through emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation or cynical detachment, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The Job Demands-Resources model proposes that burnout becomes more likely when sustained demands exceed the personal and contextual resources available to meet them (Demerouti et al., 2001). In entrepreneurship, financial risk, emotional demands, and workload can function as demands, whereas autonomy, satisfaction, social support, and regulatory skills may function as resources. Empirical research has linked entrepreneurs' emotional demands with burnout and identified autonomy and job satisfaction as protective conditions (Ben Tahar et al., 2023).

Emotion regulation may be one such personal resource. Cognitive reappraisal changes how a situation is interpreted before an emotional response becomes fully established. Expressive suppression inhibits the outward expression of an emotion after it has arisen (Gross, 1998; Gross & John, 2003).

Reappraisal is generally associated with more favourable affective and interpersonal outcomes, whereas frequent suppression is often associated with psychological and social costs, although culture and situation can modify these effects (Balzarotti et al., 2010). Entrepreneurs routinely manage uncertainty, rejection, conflict, and the need to project confidence. Their regulation strategies may therefore be relevant to both burnout and broader well-being.

Psychological well-being in Ryff's eudaimonic model includes autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff, 1989). This conception is particularly relevant to entrepreneurship because entrepreneurial work can simultaneously strengthen autonomy and purpose while weakening mastery, relationships, or self-acceptance under prolonged strain. The present pilot study examines whether burnout and emotion-regulation strategies are associated with psychological well-being among entrepreneurs operating across Kerala.

2. Theoretical Background and Literature Review

The Job Demands-Resources perspective provides the primary framework for understanding burnout in this study. Chronic entrepreneurial demands can deplete emotional and cognitive energy, while resources such as autonomy, satisfaction, and coping capacity may buffer that process. Cardon and Patel (2015) demonstrated that entrepreneurial stress involves trade-offs between economic outcomes and health. Ben Tahar et al. (2023) further showed that emotional

demands matter for entrepreneurial burnout and that job resources shape this relationship.

The process model of emotion regulation explains why two entrepreneurs exposed to similar demands may experience different outcomes. Reappraisal intervenes earlier in the emotion-generative process and may support flexible interpretation of setbacks. Suppression intervenes later and may reduce visible expression without reducing internal emotional activation (Gross, 1998). Research using the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire has repeatedly distinguished these strategies and linked them differently to affect, relationships, and well-being (Gross & John, 2003; Balzarotti et al., 2010). In entrepreneurship specifically, De Cock et al. (2020) described emotion regulation as central to navigating the emotional rollercoaster of venture creation.

Recent work has increasingly connected burnout with entrepreneurs' psychological functioning. A study of entrepreneurs in Sindh, Pakistan, reported that burnout was negatively associated with psychological well-being and that psychological capital partially explained this relationship (Malak et al., 2025). However, direct evidence combining burnout, reappraisal, suppression, and Ryff's psychological well-being remains limited in South Asian entrepreneurial settings. Kerala offers a useful regional context because entrepreneurship spans technology startups, conventional businesses, co-founded ventures, and self-employment across urban, semi-urban, and rural districts.

3. Objectives and Hypotheses

The study aimed to describe burnout, emotion regulation, and psychological well-being; test their bivariate relationships; and explore their combined statistical association with well-being. The hypotheses were:

H1: Burnout will be negatively associated with psychological well-being.

H2: Cognitive reappraisal will be positively associated with psychological well-being, whereas expressive suppression will be negatively associated with psychological well-being.

H3: Burnout will be negatively associated with cognitive reappraisal and positively associated with expressive suppression.

4. Method

4.1 Research Design and Participants

A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design was used. The non-probability convenience sample comprised 32 adults actively engaged in entrepreneurship in Kerala. Participants ranged from 19 to 55 years ($M = 34.03$, $SD = 9.15$) and reported between 1 and 22 years of entrepreneurial experience ($M = 7.31$, $SD = 5.65$). All 14 districts of Kerala were represented. The sample included founders, co-founders, business owners, and self-employed entrepreneurs.

4.2 Measures

Burnout and entrepreneurial satisfaction. The first 12 items were adapted from an abbreviated Maslach Burnout Inventory and career-satisfaction items published with McManus et al. (2003). References to doctors and patients were changed to entrepreneurs, clients, customers, or business work. Nine burnout items assessed emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and personal accomplishment, with three items per dimension. Responses ranged from 0 (never) to 6 (every day). An exploratory overall burnout index was calculated by reversing personal-accomplishment items and averaging the nine burnout items, so higher values indicated greater burnout. The remaining three items formed a separate entrepreneurial-satisfaction score and were not included in the primary burnout index.

Emotion regulation. The 10-item Emotion Regulation Questionnaire assessed cognitive reappraisal (six items) and expressive suppression (four items) (Gross & John, 2003). The administered questionnaire used a modified five-point format scored from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), rather than the original seven-point response format. Subscale scores were calculated as item means.

Psychological well-being. Ryff's 42-item Psychological Well-Being Scale assessed autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff, 1989). Items were scored from 1 to 6. Twenty negatively worded items were reverse-scored, and the mean of all 42 items was used as the overall psychological well-being score.

4.3 Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Data were collected on Jul 28, 2026. The researcher administered the questionnaire mostly by telephone, with a small number completed directly in person. The same questions were asked in the same order after verbal consent was noted. Average administration time was approximately 12 minutes, and the full collection process took about seven hours. Responses were entered directly into the spreadsheet during administration. No names, telephone numbers, email addresses, or other direct identifiers were included in the analysis file. The questionnaire was reviewed and approved for the academic project by the research guide, Dr. Shivam Bhartiya, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University). Participation was voluntary, and all 32 records documented informed consent.

4.4 Data Analysis

All 32 questionnaires were complete. Item scoring followed the key supplied with the administered questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha assessed internal consistency. Means, standard deviations, and ranges were calculated. Pearson correlations tested the stated hypotheses. Because the burnout index, expressive suppression, and psychological well-being departed from normality, Spearman rank correlations were also calculated as sensitivity analyses. Finally, a standardized multiple linear regression explored the joint association of burnout, reappraisal, and suppression with psychological well-being. All tests were two-tailed with $\alpha = .05$. Given

the small pilot sample, mediation and subgroup hypothesis testing were not undertaken.

5. Results

The sample was closely balanced by gender and included multiple entrepreneurial roles. District coverage was broad, but participant counts were not evenly distributed across districts. Table 1 summarises the principal demographic characteristics.

Table 1: Participant Characteristics (N = 32)

Characteristic	n / M	% / SD
Female	17	53.10%
Male	15	46.90%
Age (years)	34.03	9.15
Experience (years)	7.31	5.65
Founder	12	37.50%
Business owner	8	25.00%
Co-founder	7	21.90%
Self-employed entrepreneur	5	15.60%
Kerala districts represented	14	100%

Internal consistency was strong for psychological well-being and acceptable for cognitive reappraisal and the burnout index. Expressive suppression was marginally below the conventional .70 benchmark. The three-item personal-accomplishment subscale showed low reliability ($\alpha = .45$), supporting the decision to interpret the exploratory overall burnout index cautiously rather than draw separate conclusions from that subscale.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Measure	M	SD	Range	alpha
Burnout index	2.63	0.66	1.11-3.22	0.69
Emotional exhaustion	3.13	0.85	0.67-5.00	0.79
Depersonalisation	2.96	1.53	0.00-4.67	0.94
Personal accomplishment	4.21	0.67	2.67-5.67	0.45
Entrepreneurial satisfaction	3.99	0.91	3.00-6.00	0.74
Cognitive reappraisal	2.8	0.46	1.83-3.67	0.75
Expressive suppression	2.3	0.67	0.75-3.75	0.66
Psychological well-being	3.96	0.63	3.10-5.24	0.95

As shown in Table 3, burnout had a strong negative relationship with psychological well-being, supporting H1. Cognitive reappraisal correlated positively with well-being, whereas expressive suppression correlated negatively, supporting H2. Burnout correlated negatively with reappraisal and positively with suppression, supporting H3. Spearman coefficients showed the same directions and remained statistically significant, indicating that the pattern was not dependent on Pearson correlation alone.

Table 3: Correlations among the Principal Variables

Relationship	Pearson r [95% CI]	p	Spearman rho
Burnout - well-being	-.91 [-.96, -.82]	<.001	-0.82
Burnout - reappraisal	-.53 [-.74, -.23]	0.002	-0.55
Burnout - suppression	.60 [.32, .78]	<.001	0.41
Reappraisal - well-being	.55 [.25, .75]	0.001	0.53
Suppression - well-being	-.67 [-.82, -.41]	<.001	-0.59

The exploratory regression model was significant, $F(3, 28) = 53.54$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .852$, adjusted $R^2 = .836$. Burnout was

the only clearly significant independent predictor of well-being ($\beta = -.770$, $p < .001$). Suppression approached but did not reach the .05 threshold ($\beta = -.176$, $p = .067$), and reappraisal did not provide significant incremental prediction after the other variables were considered ($\beta = .063$, $p = .476$). Variance-inflation factors ranged from 1.44 to 1.83, indicating no serious multicollinearity. These results suggest that emotion-regulation strategies were meaningfully related to well-being at the bivariate level, but much of their statistical association overlapped with burnout in this small sample.

Table 4: Exploratory Regression Predicting Psychological Well-Being

Predictor	beta	SE	t	p	VIF
Burnout index	-0.77	0.098	-7.82	<.001	1.83
Cognitive reappraisal	0.063	0.087	0.72	0.476	1.44
Expressive suppression	-0.176	0.092	-1.9	0.067	1.61

Note: Coefficients are standardized. $R^2 = .852$; adjusted $R^2 = .836$.

6. Discussion

The study found a coherent pattern linking entrepreneurial burnout, emotion regulation, and psychological well-being. Higher burnout was associated with substantially poorer well-being. Higher reappraisal was associated with better well-being and lower burnout, whereas greater suppression was associated with poorer well-being and higher burnout. Each of the three prespecified correlational hypotheses was supported, and non-parametric sensitivity analyses produced the same overall interpretation.

The strong burnout-well-being association is consistent with the Job Demands-Resources proposition that persistent demands can erode energy and functioning when adequate resources are unavailable (Demerouti et al., 2001). Entrepreneurs carry simultaneous operational, financial, interpersonal, and identity-related demands. Prior entrepreneurial research has similarly connected stress and emotional demands with health costs and burnout (Cardon & Patel, 2015; Ben Tahar et al., 2023). The present results extend this pattern to a small Kerala sample and to Ryff's broader eudaimonic conception of well-being.

The emotion-regulation findings align with the process model. Reappraisal can change the meaning assigned to a setback before the full emotional response develops, potentially preserving perspective, goal direction, and a sense of mastery. Suppression may help a founder maintain composure in a meeting, but habitual suppression does not necessarily resolve the underlying emotional load and may reduce authentic support-seeking. This distinction is compatible with the wider ERQ literature (Gross & John, 2003; Balzarotti et al., 2010) and with entrepreneurship research that frames venture creation as an emotional rollercoaster requiring active regulation (De Cock et al., 2020).

The regression results add an important qualification. Once burnout, reappraisal, and suppression were entered together, burnout accounted for most of the independent statistical

signal. This does not show that emotion regulation is unimportant. Instead, it suggests that the constructs may operate as an interrelated system: reappraisal and suppression are associated with burnout, and burnout is closely associated with well-being. A larger longitudinal sample is required to determine temporal order and to test whether emotion regulation mediates, moderates, or follows changes in burnout. The present cross-sectional data cannot distinguish these possibilities.

The effect sizes are unusually large for behavioural research. They may reflect a genuinely pronounced pattern in the sampled group, but they may also be amplified by the small convenience sample, common response method, researcher-administered format, modified scale response options, or the single-day collection process. The findings should therefore be treated as preliminary estimates rather than population parameters.

7. Practical Implications

Entrepreneur-support systems often focus on funding, infrastructure, legal compliance, technology, and market access. The present findings suggest that founder well-being should be treated as part of venture sustainability. Incubators, co-working centres, industry associations, and mentoring programmes can incorporate brief burnout screening, workload and role-boundary reviews, peer-support structures, and confidential referral pathways.

Emotion-regulation support should avoid simplistic messages to remain positive or conceal distress. Practical training can instead help entrepreneurs identify emotional triggers, reframe controllable and uncontrollable aspects of setbacks, communicate strain appropriately, and seek support before exhaustion becomes chronic. Because suppression can be situationally useful, programmes should emphasise flexible use rather than labelling one strategy universally good or bad.

8. Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations restrict inference. First, the sample of 32 was small and selected through non-probability methods. Although all districts were represented, the distribution was uneven and cannot be considered representative of Kerala's entrepreneurs. Second, the cross-sectional design precludes causal or temporal conclusions. Third, all constructs were assessed through self-report in the same administration, creating possible common-method and social-desirability effects.

Fourth, the abbreviated burnout items were adapted from a physician context, and the overall burnout index was an exploratory composite rather than a standard MBI total score. The personal-accomplishment subscale had low reliability. The ERQ used a five-point response format rather than the original seven-point format, and the suppression alpha was modest. These adaptations require psychometric evaluation in an entrepreneurial sample. Fifth, data were collected on a single day, mostly through telephone administration by the researcher, which may have introduced interviewer or response-pattern effects.

Future research should recruit a larger, stratified sample with sufficient representation by age, gender, district, sector, venture stage, and years of experience. The original response formats or formally validated local adaptations should be used. Confirmatory factor analysis, preregistered hypotheses, and bootstrapped indirect-effect models would become appropriate with adequate statistical power. Longitudinal measurement could clarify directionality, while recorded semi-structured interviews could explain how family expectations, social evaluation, failure, financial uncertainty, and support networks shape emotion regulation in Kerala's entrepreneurial context.

9. Conclusion

Among the 32 entrepreneurs surveyed, burnout was strongly associated with poorer psychological well-being. Cognitive reappraisal showed a favourable bivariate pattern, whereas expressive suppression showed an unfavourable one. Burnout remained the dominant independent predictor in an exploratory joint model. The results provide a focused preliminary basis for larger research and suggest that entrepreneur-support programmes should attend to the psychological sustainability of founders alongside the sustainability of their ventures.

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