

Emotion Beliefs and Adjustment to Loss: Testing a Mediation Model

Lily Merritt, Eva-Maria Stelzer

Department of Psychology, University of Arizona

Background

- Believing that others are helpful for emotion regulation is associated with greater emotion expression and benefit from social support.
- Few have investigated links between interpersonal relationships and emotion control beliefs, especially in bereaved individuals.
- Bereaved people experience intense emotions while grieving.

Methods

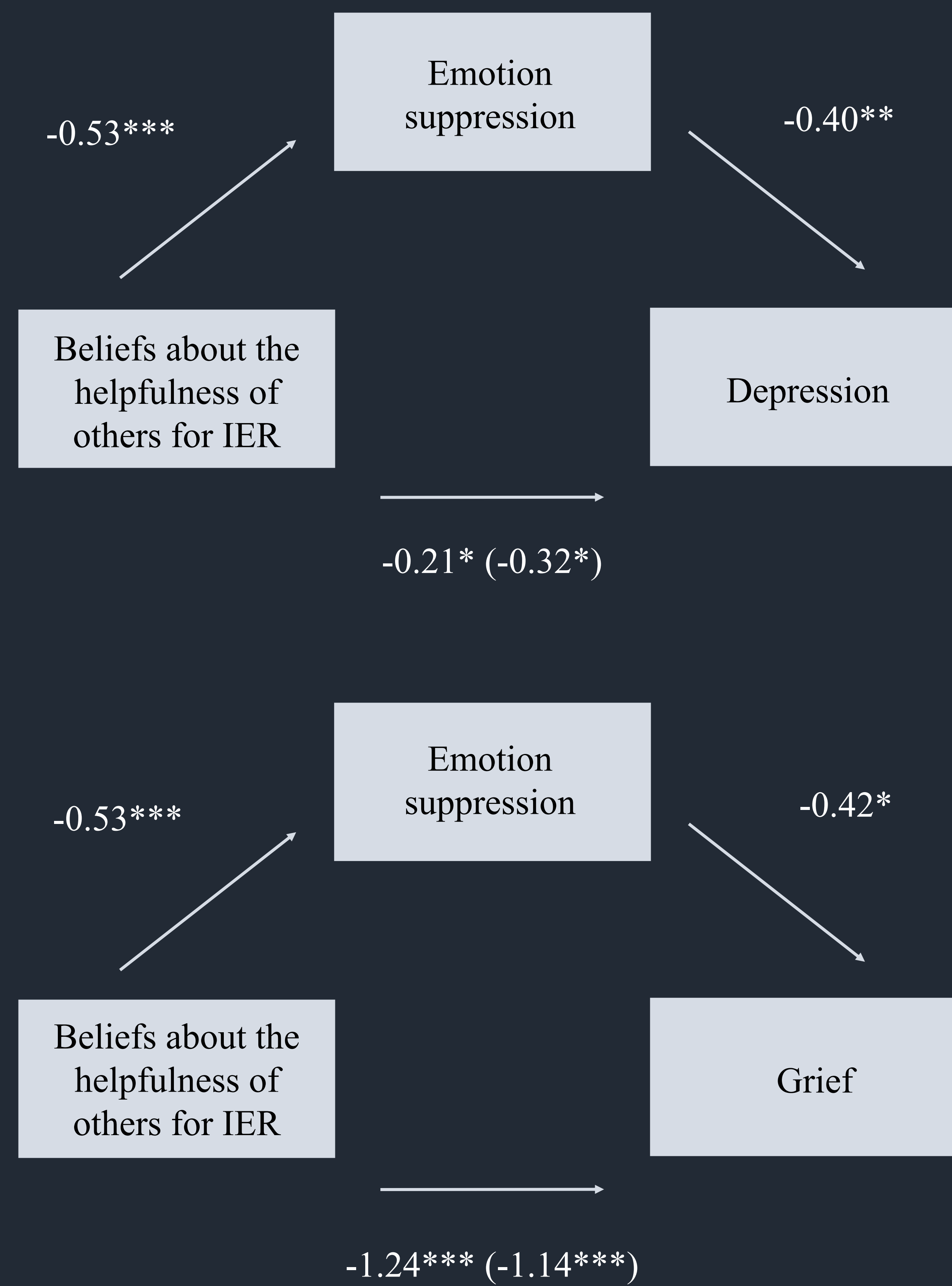
- **Participants.** 156 widows and widowers (85.9% female), who had an average age of 56 years ($M = 56.69$, $SD = 16.95$) and experienced the death of a romantic partner or spouse an average of 2 years prior ($M = 25.7$ months, $SD = 17.59$).
- **Measurement.** Beliefs about the helpfulness of others for emotion regulation (IER) were calculated using a novel measure. Psychological health outcomes were measured using the ICG-R (grief) and the CESD-R (depression).
- **Procedures.** Participants completed a baseline survey, two-week long daily diary survey, and follow-up survey via Qualtrics.
- **Analyses.** Zero-order correlations were computed, and two mediation analyses were run to assess emotion suppression as a mediator.

Results

- Strong positive linear associations between depression and grief ($r = 0.52$, $CI = [0.35, 0.66]$).
- Beliefs about the helpfulness of others for IER were negatively associated with depression ($r = -0.16$, $CI = [-0.36, 0.05]$).
- Beliefs about the helpfulness of others for IER were negatively associated with grief ($r = -0.23$, $CI = [-0.42, -0.03]$).
- Beliefs about the helpfulness of others for IER were negatively correlated with emotion suppression ($r = -0.22$, $CI = [-0.41, -0.01]$).
- Evidence for partial mediation when using emotion suppression as a mediator between beliefs about the helpfulness of others for IER and depression ($b = -0.32$, $p < 0.05$) or grief outcomes ($b = -1.14$, $p < 0.01$).

Associations between interpersonal relationships, emotion regulation, and emotion beliefs have been correlated with:

- Psychological and physical health
- Social support as an emotional buffer
 - Resilience



* indicates $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

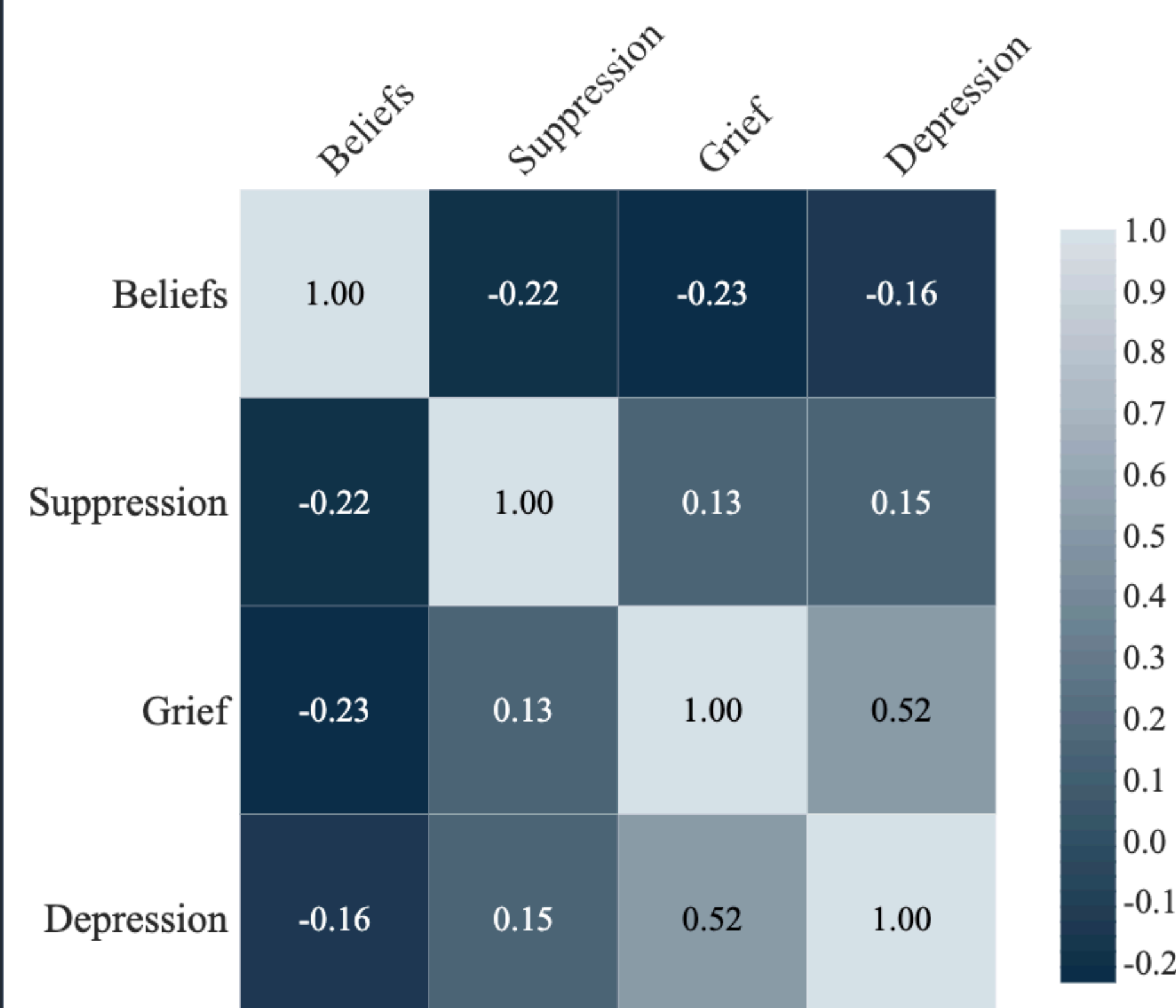
Q1: Are there associations between individuals' beliefs that others are helpful in regulating their own emotions and psychological health outcomes?

Q2: Are these associations mediated by individuals' use of emotion expression?

Results guide future directions for research — extraneous variables may contribute to mediation between beliefs about the helpfulness of others for interpersonal emotion regulation and psychological health.

Conclusions

- Results inform current frameworks of emotion belief research and provide new perspectives on grief outcomes.
- Differences between mediations between suggest that suppression may be a more effective mediator for studying grief.
- Beliefs about the helpfulness of others for ER had a greater effect on grief than depression, signifying a unique link between social support and grief outcomes.
- The response biases associated with a self-report measure were a limitation.
- Findings indicate that beliefs about the helpfulness of others for ER may act as a protective buffer during a transitional time in which a bereaved person has lost an important source of support.



Future Directions

- Findings suggest outside variables may affect the relationship between beliefs, suppression, and psychological health outcomes, such as:
 - Daily emotional experiences
 - Mental health service utilization
 - Resilience

References

- Ford, B. Q., & Gross, J. J. (2018). Emotion regulation: Why beliefs Matter. *Canadian Psychology*, 59(1), 1-14. doi:10.1037/cap0000142
- Shrout, P. E., Herman, C. M., & Bolger, N. (2006). The costs and benefits of practical and emotional support on adjustment: A daily diary study of couples experiencing acute stress. *Personal Relationships*, 13(1), 115-134. doi:10.1111/j.14756811.2006.00108.x