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# Cognitive emotion regulation questionnaire – development of a short 18-item version (CERQ-short)

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## Abstract

Aim of the present study was to develop a short 18-item version of the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ; Garnefski, Kraaij, & Spinhoven, 2001). The distinction into nine different conceptual scales (Self-blame, Other-blame, Rumination, Catastrophizing, Positive refocusing, Planning, Positive reappraisal, Putting into perspective and Acceptance) was left intact, while the number of items per scale was reduced from four to two. Psychometric properties of the new two-item scales as well as their relationships with two indicators of emotional problems, i.e., depressive and anxiety symptoms are presented. Reliability and validity of the CERQ-short was supported by the results.

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*Keywords:* Cognitive-emotion-regulation; Cognitive-coping; CERQ; CERQ-short

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## 1. Introduction

Years of research have clearly shown the important role emotion regulation plays in our adaptation to stressful life events (Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, & Reiser, 2000; Gross, 1998, 1999;

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Thompson, 1994). Research has shown that a particularly powerful category of emotion regulation involves the cognitive way of handling the intake of emotionally arousing information (e.g., Thompson, 1991; Ochsner & Gross, 2004, 2005). Because no instrument had been available to assess a broad set of specific cognitive emotion regulation strategies that people use in response to the experience of threatening or stressful life events, in 1999 the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire was developed (CERQ; Garnefski, Kraaij, & Spinhoven, 2001). To date, the CERQ has been included in an increasing number of studies in various countries focusing on relationships between cognitive processes and mental health. Despite some variation across studies, cognitive strategies such as Self-blame, Rumination, Catastrophizing and Positive Reappraisal (inversely) have consistently been associated with negative emotions like depression, anxiety, stress and anger (e.g., D'Acromont & van der Linden, in press; Garnefski et al., 2001; Garnefski et al., 2002a; Garnefski & Kraaij, 2006; Kraaij, Garnefski, & van Gerwen, 2003; Jermann, van der Linden, d'Acromont, & Zermatten, 2006; Kraaij et al., 2003; Martin & Dahlen, 2005).

The CERQ has 36-items in total and consists of nine subscales: *Self-blame*, referring to thoughts of putting the blame of what you have experienced on yourself; *Other-blame*, referring to thoughts of putting the blame of what you have experienced on the environment or another person; *Rumination*, referring to thinking about the feelings and thoughts associated with the negative event; *Catastrophizing*, referring to thoughts of explicitly emphasizing the terror of what you have experienced; *Putting into Perspective*, referring to downgrading the importance of the event; *Positive Refocusing*, referring to thinking about positive experiences instead of thinking about the actual event; *Positive Reappraisal*, referring to thoughts of giving the event a positive meaning in terms of personal growth; *Acceptance*, referring to thoughts of resigning yourself to what has happened and *Planning*, referring to thinking about what steps to take and how to handle the negative event.

Lately, the number of requests to develop a short version of the CERQ has grown. Development of a short version is considered important, because of its assumed usefulness as a fast screening instrument in psychiatric patients and easier inclusion in large self-report research batteries where space is scarce. Purpose of the present study therefore was to create a short 18-item version of the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ-short) by reducing the number of items per scale from four to two. In order to maintain validity, the distinction into nine different conceptual scales was left intact. Psychometric properties of the new two-item scales as well as their relationships with two indicators of emotional problems, i.e., depressive and anxiety symptoms are presented. Results will be compared with the original 36-item version of the CERQ.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

The sample comprised 611 adults from the general population ranging between 18 and 65 years. The mean age was 41 years and 11 months, while 40% was male, 63% indicated to be married, engaged or living together and 35% were either single or divorced. The educational level ranged from primary school (4%), lower vocational or lower general secondary education (20%), intermediate vocational education (16%), higher general secondary and pre-university education (11%), to higher vocational and university education (48%).

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