

## Bullying Attitude, Parental Control, Emotion Regulation and Mental Health in Young Adults

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When someone intentionally humiliates or hurt the feelings of other person not only in front of other people but also behind the back of that person then it is said to be known as bullying. It can include both physical and mental harassment. Victims of bullying undergo mental trauma and it can cause lasting effects on their emotion regulation strategies and mental health. They also face difficulties in forming warm and trusting relationships due to low psychological well-being. This study aimed at examining the effects of bullying on mental health of both bully and victim. It also aimed at exploring association between parental control, bullying, and emotion regulation. 274 college students participated in this study and convenience sampling was done. It was found that, there is no direct association between parental control and bullying. But, expressive suppression strategy of emotion regulation influences the relationship of bully behaviour and parental control. Higher parental control at early age of participant and higher expressive suppression will contribute lowering the bully attitude. Also, if parental control is low and expressive suppression is also low then bullying attitude in the child will be high. Higher control of father results in decreased mental health and higher control of mother results in lowering all the aspects of mental health which are hedonic, social and psychological well-being. Mental health of victim of bullying was also found to be low. Also, males use more of expressive suppression than females.

**Keywords:** Bullying, Parental control, Victims of bullying, Emotion regulation, Mental health, Expressive suppression.

Bullying is defined as a systematic abuse of power involving repeated aggression against another person that is intentional (Olweus, 1994). It is considered as a negative behavior which is aimed to hurt another person physically or mentally, either by words or actions. Such behaviours may include verbal aggression, isolation/exclusion, ill-mannered behavior, physical aggression and threat or blackmailing. Verbal bullying includes teasing, name calling, racist remarks, verbal abuse and use of foul language against someone. Physical bullying includes damaging property, hitting, tripping, pinching, etc. It is said to cause both long-term and short-term damage to the child involved. Social bullying is carried out behind the person's

back and is referred to as covert bullying. It is designed to cause humiliation and damage someone's social reputation or image.

It has been reported that practices of parenting and family management contributes indirectly when interacted with the person's behaviour characteristic towards the aggressive behaviour such as bullying in children (Craig et al., 1998). Children of permissive parents' face hardships in reducing their impulsive aggression (Miller et al., 2002). There is found to be positive correlation between the bully behaviour of children and the utilisation of harsh, punitive and authoritarian practices of parenting (Espelage et al., 2000) and children who were less likely to involve in bullying behaviour perceived their

parents as authoritative (Rican et al., 1993). Several researches have also reported that children by merely observing the interaction patterns between their family members, learn to behave aggressively at others who are less powerful (Patterson and Dishion, 1985).

Children who have experienced victimisation problems are more likely as compared to those who have not experienced are more likely to come from families having histories of poorly managed conflict, child abuse and poor attachment (Perry et al., 1992). Children of authoritative parents have greater psychosocial competence and lower levels of psychological and behavioral dysfunction (Lamborn et al. 1991). ER involves the conscious or unconscious processes of monitoring, evaluating and modifying emotional reactions to achieve one's goals (Thompson, 1994). Deficits in emotion regulation is caused due to severe stress present during the period of childhood and adolescence (Cicchetti & Toth, 2005). Negative emotions like anger, sadness and contempt are elicited due to experiences of peer victimization (Mahady Wilton, Craig, & Pepler, 2000), and those who are the victims of peer aggression, especially the youth show high levels of emotional reactivity and arousal (Schwartz, Dodge, & Coie, 1993). A study done in 2011 aimed to study whether those students who were bullied in school continued being bullied even during their higher education or not. This study revealed the pattern of being bullied or being a bully is continued in their college years as well (Adams and Lawrence, 2011). Emotion regulation has shown to have mediating effect on between the child aggression and harsh parenting also the harsh parenting of mother affected emotion regulation of their child more strongly than fathers' (Chang et al., 2009).

Newman, Holden, and Delville (2010) hypothesized that the method of adapting to and dealing with bullying would have a lasting effect on strategies used to deal with future stress. Gouri, Rajib Ray, et.al (2010) conducted a study in private engineering college in India, to see the prevalence and effects of bullying. This study showed the prevalence of 25%

bullying cases. The actual physical harm which was reported in the study was only 5% but this is to be remembered that there are other severe forms of bullying as well, which are verbal abuse, spreading false information or rumours and being cornered or isolated (faced by 67% students) which can lead to harmful effects. Reports of past bullying and other peer victimization in college students were associated with lower mental health functioning (Holt et al., 2014).

### **The Present Study**

It has become very evident from the previous researches done in this area that parental involvement has been linked to bullying attitude as well as becoming a victim of bullying at school or college. Also, there are researches which suggests that there are direct as well as indirect effect of parenting on bullying and victim attitude. Few studies also show that there is no direct effect of parental monitoring on bullying. Also, harsh parenting has a direct as well as an indirect effect on child aggression through the mediating process of child emotion regulation. Due to the dual results of previous researches the role of parental control is confused to have direct or moderating effect on bullying. So, the specific problem is to find out the role of parental control in bullying among young adults of today's generation.

### **Research Objectives**

- To see the prevalence of bullying attitude in young adults.
- To explore association of parental control with bullying attitude.
- To ascertain the intervening effect of parental control in relationship of bullying attitude with emotion regulation and mental health.

### **Hypotheses**

- There would be significant association of scores obtained on parental control with mental health.
- Bullying attitude would be negatively associated with mental health.

- There would be significant negative association between victims of bullying and mental health.
- Parental control would moderate the association between bullying attitude, emotion regulation and mental health of young adults.

### Method

#### Sample

In this study, data of 274 students from the age group 18-29 years (young adults), pursuing masters or bachelor course in any university or college are used. Mean age of the participants included in the study is 21.17 years. In the sample of 274 participants, 112 are females and 162 are males.

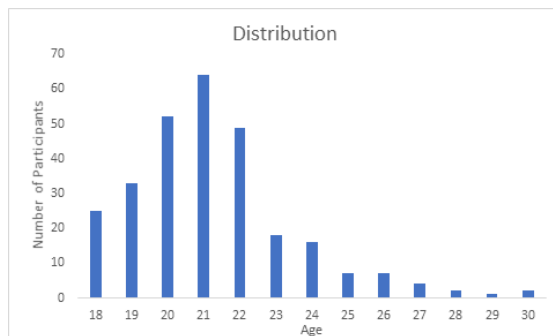


Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the sample collected. The age of the sample ranged between 18-29 years.

**Table 1: Summary of the demographic characteristics of the study sample**

Characteristics	N	Percentage
Gender		
Female	112	40.87%
Male	162	59.12%
Education Level		
Bachelor	228	83.21%
Master	46	16.78%

#### Measuring Instruments

Following instruments were included in final data collection: Illinois Bully Scale, Mental Health Continuum-Short Form, Parental Control

Scale, Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. Basic demographic details including age, gender, educational course (Master's or Bachelor's) and name of the college or university were asked.

#### Illinois Bully Scale

IBS is a tool that is used to measure bullying and victimization through directly surveying students. It is research validated tool. The survey is bifurcated into two sections: question 1-9 is dedicated for measuring student involvement in bullying and from question 10 to 16 measures the degree to which students have been victimized by bullying. The survey provides instructions to the participants as to answer according to what has happened at their institution or school within the last thirty days. Due to this time period constraint, this tool helps to measure the changes that occur in bullying behaviour instead of just portraying what happened in the entire school life. There are no norms available to allow schools to use this survey to compare the level of bullying in their school to other schools or to determine what is a "good" or "bad" level of bullying. The survey is intended to be used to track rates of bullying in a school over time. Each question has 5 options; Never, 1 or 2 times, 3 or 4 times, 5 or 6 times and 7 or more times. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of this scale is 0.83 for the present study. The author of this instrument is Dr. D.L Espelage (2001).

#### Mental Health Continuum-Short Form

MHC-SF has fourteen items best suited to measure facets of wellbeing; hedonic, social and psychological wellbeing. This scale was made from its long form which had forty items. The response option in MHC-SF measures the frequency with which respondents experienced each symptom of positive mental health. The response options given the questionnaire are; Never, Once or Twice, About Once a Week, About 2 or 3 times a Week, Almost Every day and Every day. The total score on scale can range from 0 to 70 points. Higher scores indicate a higher level of wellbeing. The MHC-SF in adolescents and adults of United States has shown >0.80 as its internal consistency and

discriminant validity (Keyes, 2005b, 2006; Keyes et al., 2008; Lamers et al., 2011; Westerhof & Keyes, 2009). The Cronbach's alpha reliability of this scale is 0.893 for the present study.

### **Parental Control Scale**

PCS was developed by Ronal P. Rohner and Abdul Khaleque (2004). It is a self-report questionnaire consisting of thirteen items (except, the Parent PCS: Infant Version). It assesses the perceptions of behavioural control they now experience as children (Child PCS: Mother or Father version), experienced earlier in childhood (Adult PCS: Mother or Father version), or now enforce on their children (Parent PCS: Child version). All versions are identical except for minor differences such as the verb tense used. A fourth version (Parent PCS: Infant Version) has only eight items. Items in this scale are scored on 4-point Likert Scale; 4 indicates Almost Always and 1 indicates Almost Never True. In the present study, the adult version of the test has been used which is Adult PCS: Mother and Father. Low parental control is indicated by score 13-26, moderate parental control indicated by score of 27-39, firm control by parents is indicated by score of 40-45 and a score between 46-52 indicates strict/restrictive control. Alpha coefficient for the Infant version was 0.74. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of this scale is 0.89 for the present study.

### **Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ, 1998)**

ERQ was made by Gross and John (2003) to assess the everyday use of two strategies which are cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression for emotion regulation. The questionnaire consists of ten items are rated on seven-point Likert type scale. The choices range from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The higher score an individual obtains in one of the strategies indicates the more usage of that emotion regulation strategy. Alpha reliabilities for the scale averaged as .79 for Cognitive Reappraisal and .73 for Expressive Suppression. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of this scale is 0.85 for the present study.

### **Procedure**

An informed consent from the participants were taken and those who were willing to participate was asked a total of 66 questions (4 different questionnaires). There was no time limit to fill the questionnaires but they were asked not to dwell on any item for a long and they were also asked to choose the option which came first in their mind. Convenience sampling was used to collect data from the students and a total sample 274 students were taken.

### **Results**

The responses obtained from participants was analysed using following statistical procedure;

- Correlational analysis was used to explore the association among all the variables used in the study.
- Mean and standard deviation were used to look for the nature of the data
- Regression was used to see the predictability of I.V on D.V. Moderation analysis was done to see the association between bully and parental control (ER strategies as moderator).

This Table shows that Victimization is negatively significantly correlated with Psychological Well-being ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, Psychological well-being will be low in victims of bullying.

**Table 2. Correlations of Bully, Victim, Hedonic, Social, Psychological Well-Being, Cognitive Reappraisal and Expressive Suppression.**

	Bully	Victim	HWB	SWB	PWB	ERCR	ERES
Bully	1	.603**	0.011	0.001	-0.063	0.011	0.008
Victim	.603**	1	-0.116	-0.033	-.153*	0.039	0.026

\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$

**Table 3: Correlations among Parental Control of Father and Mother, Cognitive Reappraisal and Expressive Suppression**

	PCF	PCM	ERCR	ERES
PCF	1	.671**	0.086	0.047
PCM	.671**	1	0.005	-0.042

\*\*p<0.01

There was seen no significant correlation among Parental control of father and mother with Emotion regulation strategies.

**Table 4: Correlations among Bully, Victim, Parental control of Father and Mother**

	Bully	Victim	PCF	PCM
Bully	1	.603**	-0.062	-0.031
Victim	.603**	1	0.054	0.056

\*\*p< 0.01

This table shows that there is no significant correlation among parental control scale and bullying scale.

**Table 5: Correlations among Parental Control of Father and Mother, Hedonic, Social and Psychological Well-Being**

	PCF	PCM	HWB	SWB	PWB
PCF	1	.671**	-.125*	-0.102	-.148*
PCM	.671**	1	-.183**	-.149*	-.160**

\*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05

The results of correlation show that, Parental Control of Father is significantly negatively correlated with Hedonic Well-Being and Psychological Well-Being (p<0.05).

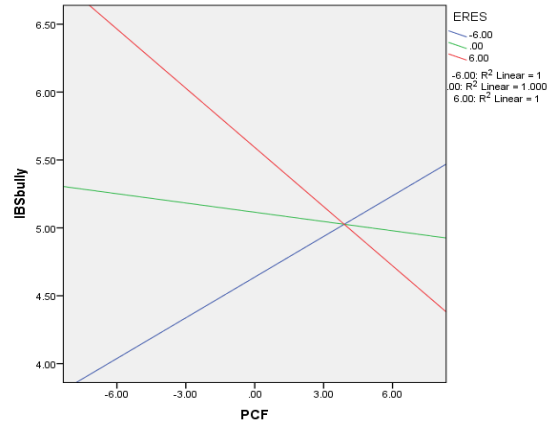
Parental Control of Mother is significantly negatively correlated with Social Well-Being (p<0.05), Psychological Well-Being (p<0.01) and Hedonic Well-Being (p< 0.01).

**Table 6: Moderation Analysis for association between bully and parental control of Father (ER strategies as moderator)**

	$\beta$	SE B	t
Constant	5.11	0.289	17.7
ERES	0.08	0.052	1.52
PCF	-0.023	0.045	-0.501
ERES x PCF	-0.02	0.007	-3.71**

\*\*p<0.01

Moderation was found significant for Father ( $\beta = -.02$ ) through Expressive Suppression Strategy on Bullying behavior.



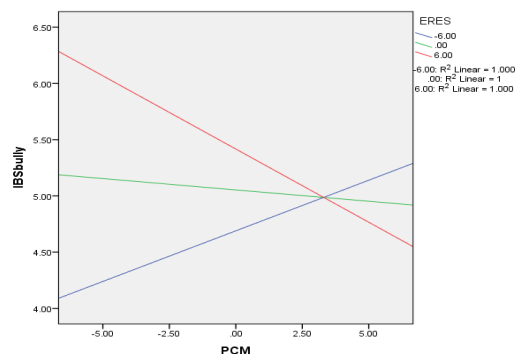
**Figure 1: Expressive suppression as a moderator for association between parental control of father and bully behavior increases.**

**Table 7: Moderation Analysis for association between bully and parental control of Mother (ER strategies as moderator)**

	$\beta$	SE B	t
Constant	5.053	0.286	17.68
ERES	-0.2	0.052	1.161
PCM	-0.02	0.042	-0.474
ERES x PCM	-0.018	0.007	-2.606**

\*\*p<.01

Moderation was found significant for Mother (b= -.01) through Expressive Suppression Strategy on Bullying behavior.



**Figure 2: Expressive suppression as a moderator for association between parental control of mother and bully behavior increases.**



### Discussion

This study aimed to explore the relationship of bully behavior, victim behaviour, and parental control with emotion regulation and mental health. The major objective of the study was to ascertain the association of parental control with bullying attitude. By using correlation analysis, no such significant relationship was found between bullying and parental control. On the other hand, parental control (father) was negatively significantly correlated with Hedonic and Psychological Well-Being, and parental control (mother) was also negatively significantly correlated with Hedonic, Social and Psychological Well-Being and hence our hypothesis that, there would be significant association of scores obtained on parental control with mental health is accepted. This suggests that higher the parental control, lower will be the mental health. Similar findings were found in a study that there exists a significant negative correlation between parental care and psychological well-being. There is also negative correlation between parental control and psychological well-being (Indumathy & Ashwini, 2017).

Moderation analysis was used to find out the influence of Expressive Suppression (Emotion Regulation Strategy) on the relationship between parental control and bullying, it was found that, if the parental control is high and expressive suppression is also high then bully behavior will be low. Therefore, our hypothesis regarding role of ER strategies in relationship of parental control with bully behavior is accepted. It suggests that higher control of father and mother will contribute in displaying lower level of bully behavior. And possible reason would be increased expressive suppression found in children. Results of moderation analysis also indicated that if expressive suppression is low in children and parental control is high then the bully behavior will also be high. This indicates the role of parental control on the development of emotion regulation strategy while defining the existence of bully behavior in children.

Findings of the present study provide support to earlier researches conducted on exploring influence of expressive suppression

on relationship of parental control and bully behavior. A study revealed that, higher levels psychological control by mothers, were related to lower levels of emotion regulation in young adults. By doing moderation as well as mediation analysis, it was found that parental control act neither as moderator nor as mediator and Expressive suppression was found to behave as a moderator (Manzeske & Stright, 2009). In our study there was found to be no direct or intervening effect of parental control on bullying as victimisation which is supported by earlier researches showing that bullying or victimisation is not related to the monitoring by parents (Georgiou & Stavrinides, 2012).

The scores on Victim dimension of Illinois Bullying Scale were found to be negatively significantly correlated with Psychological Well-Being dimension of MHC-SF. This indicates that the victims of any kind of bullying have poor psychological wellbeing and our hypothesis that, there would be significant negative association between victims of bullying and mental health is accepted. Being bullied tends to increase the likelihood of psychological distress and feelings of maladjustment and inadequacy mediated the effect of peer victimization on the level of depression (Rigby, 2003).

Next hypothesis of this study was that, bullying attitude would be negatively associated with scores of mental health. By performing correlation analysis, no such significant association was found and hence there is not enough evidence to accept this hypothesis. This might suggest that, nowadays, the students who bully do not understand the severity of the situation and they are just doing it for the sake of having fun. Such acts of bullying are not giving any kind of negative influence on the wellbeing of students who bully others. This gives us another scope to study the influence of validation by peers and bystanders on their acts of bullying and effects on mental health.

### Conclusions

Even after many researches and review papers have been done on bullying, there is always something new to know in this field. Bullying is something which is so impactful in person's life that either a person can come out

of that event without affecting his or her mental health and developing positive coping strategies or trapped into that situation and develop negative coping strategies. It was found in this study that, there is no direct influence of parental control on bullying attitude and no direct and indirect influence on victim attitude. There was found significant negative impact of parental control on bullying attitude in the presence of expressive suppression (emotion regulation strategy) as moderator. This means that higher parental control and higher expressive suppression result in low bully behavior. No such influence of expressive suppression was found in relationship of parental control and victim behavior. This suggests that there must be some other variable moderating this relationship and future researches can be done in this direction. It was also found that, victims have lower psychological well-being which indicates the impact on mental health of victims. Victims of bullying have less self-acceptance, poor environmental mastery, find difficulty in forming warm and trusting relationships with others, less personal growth, autonomy and purpose in life.

It was found that, those whose parents had higher control over their children when they were 7-12 years old, children used more of negative coping strategy that is, suppressing their emotions or not expressing positive or negative emotion and experiencing more of negative emotion and less positive emotion. In this study, it was found that although parental control does not directly contribute in bully or victim attitude and it's the expressive suppression that influence the relationship between parental control and bully attitude. So, if the parental control is high then in early age of child the, he/she will use more of expressive suppression which will make him or feel inauthentic, less satisfied with life and their relationships are less emotionally close. Because of this, there are very less likelihood of them that they will bully others. This result contradicts the conventional results of other researches and hence more work should be focused on expressive suppression as moderator in this relationship of bullying and parental control.

Higher parental control of mother contributes in decreasing the mental health of the children.

Hedonic, social as well as psychological well-being of participants whose mother had greater control when they were around 7-12 years old, were found to be lower. Higher control of father was also found to decrease the hedonic and psychological wellbeing.

### **Limitations**

Small sample size of 274 college students.

### **Future Implications**

Sample size should be increased.

Equal participants of bachelor and master degree should be taken.

Parents should be made aware that how parenting style and parent-child bonding contribute in the bully and victim attitude of their children.

Awareness should be spread among students that their acts of bullying other students can influence the mental health of victims in a way that they might not be able to cope any stress in a positive way in future.

More studies should be done on exploring the lasting effects of higher parental control in early age of life on mental health at later age.

Future research can be done to explore the moderating variable in the relationship of parental control and victim behavior.

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