BULLYING, VICTIMIZATION, AND REJECTION SENSITIVITY IN ADOLESCENTS: MEDIATING ROLE OF SELF-REGULATION

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■ ABSTRACT

Objective: To explore the mediating role of self-regulation in bullying, victimization as related with rejection sensitivity among adolescents.

Methodology: This cross-sectional research was conducted at the Department of Psychology, University of Gujrat after taking approval from Advanced Studies and Research Board. In first phase, Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ) and Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ) were translated into Urdu language by forward-backward translation method after taking permission from their respective authors. For pilot-testing, these scales were administered on 130 students and scales were found to be reliable with =0.83 and =0.85 respectively. In second phase, Urdu version of Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument (ARRI) by Parada, SRQ, and RSQ were administered to a sample of 608 college students. Stratified Random Sampling technique was use to collect the data. The data was analyzed in AMOS-21.

Results: The study reported male as 330, and female as 278, age range between 16 to 19 years with mean of 17.60±0.83 years. The model fit indices of chi-square/df =2.2 (p<0.001), Goodness of fit (GFI)=0.94, Adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI)=0.91, Comparative fit index (CFI)=0.904, Incremental fit index (IFI)=0.906, Tucker Lewis index (TLI)= 0.88 and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)=0.046 were in the acceptable limits. Structure Equation Model in AMOS-21 showed significant mediating role of self-regulation with bullying, victimization and rejection sensitivity among adolescents.

Conclusion: Self-regulation has fully and significantly mediated the association of both bullying and victimization with the level of sensitivity for rejection in adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescents; Bullying; Peer relationship; Rejection sensitivity; Self-control

■ INTRODUCTION

We have witnessed self-regulation has served as a hallmark for promoting well-being in adolescents. Similarly, high emotional pitch due to hormonal changes in adolescence needs regulatory monitoring particularly in relation to their chums. But problematic relationships with peers, a critical issue in adolescence, might hamper their mental health by escalating element of rejection sensitivity in their personality makeup. In Pakistan, 50.5% were bullied and 42.6% were victimized[1], indicating high prevalence of concerned issue in children, yet went unexplored in college adolescents. Therefore, the present study has explored the interaction of bully, victimization, and rejection sensitivity with mediation of self-regulation. Conceptual definitions of the variables under study are indispensable to delve further into these variables. Self-regulation can be defined as a controlling one's own behavior, emotions and thoughts that produce positive result in ways acceptable for achievement of determined aims and objectives.[2] Bul-

lying is the use of force and hatred to cause harm or control another through physical aggression (hitting, kicking) and verbal aggression (insults, racial or sexual harassment, threats). Whereas, victimization referred to the act of singling out someone by manipulation of social relationships to hurt him or her.[3] Rejection sensitivity is defined as an individual's proneness to rejection. It is a reactive response to disapproval received from others.[4] This rejection sensitivity, unmonitored by self-control, could lead to low self-esteem, and poor academic performance in students, which could in turn effect their education, but also impedes their career aspirations and opportunities, abating their cognitive processing ability and mental health.[5]

The Peer Socialization Model[6] empirically supported in adolescents assumes that peer rejection is the promoter for increased aggressive behaviour over time in individuals who are rejected by their peers and they are more likely to behave aggressively toward others. Since aggression is precursor of combat behaviours,

implications suggest these adolescents are prone for getting caught up in a vicious cycle of bullying and victimization while interacting with peers. Thus, there is a significant association between perceived fighting and harassing incidences with sensitivity to rejection from chums in adolescence.[7-9] Here premises of Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS)[10] posit about a protective strategy of regulating one's emotions and cognitions arising as a result of perceived dejection during experiences of fights. Self-Regulation is a cognitive-affective unit embedded in an individual that operates to shrink the deteriorating effects of rejection sensitivity[11] on personalities of adolescents.

Thus, combining Peer Socialization Model and Cognitive-Affective Processing System into a theoretical framework, the aim of the present is to explore the missing link among bullying, victimization, self-regulation and rejection sensitivity in adolescents. The findings would be beneficial for practicing psychologists, and clinical psychologists to work not only for counseling provision of adolescents with bullying problems, but also to address community intervention for psychoeducation parents, teachers, and health professionals to interact with more self-regulatory enhancing strategies while interacting with adolescents. Nevertheless, the aims and objectives for conducting the present study are to investigate self-regulation as a significant mediator between bullying and rejection sensitivity among adolescents. In addition, to view the former role with victimization and rejection sensitivity among adolescents.

■ METHODOLOGY

This cross-sectional research was carried out in two phases and three standardized instruments were applied in the present study. To measure self-regulation of adolescents, Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ)[12] was used. It consisted of 22 items with very unlikely=1, unlikely=2, neutral=3, likely=4 and

very likely=5 response categories. The reverse scoring was of Item number 5, 11, 17 and 22. SRQ is divided into four subscales 1) Plan; 2) Monitor; 3) Control; 4) Reflect. The first subscale Plan consists of 5 items, Monitor consists of 6 items, Control consists of 6 items and the Reflect subscale consists of 5 items. The original reliability of self-regulation questionnaire was 0.89. To measure rejection sensitivity in adolescents, Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ)[13] was used. It consisted of 18 items with Very unlikely/very unconcerned=1, to very likely/very concerned =6 response categories. The original reliability of rejection sensitivity scale was 0.84. To measure bullying and victimization experiences of adolescents, Adolescent Peer Relationship Instrument (APRI)[14] was used. It consisted of 36 items with Never = 1, Sometimes=2, Once or twice a week =3, Once a week =4, several a week=5 and Everyday=6 response categories. The peer relationship questionnaire divided into two sections A measured bullying and section B measured victimization. In section A was three subscales verbal, physical and social. The verbal subscale consists of 6 items, physical consist of 6 items and social also consist of 6 items. Section B also divided in to three subscale verbal, social and physical. The verbal consist of 6 items, social consist of 6 items and physical also consist of 6 items. The original reliability of peer relationship questionnaire ranged between 0.83 to 0.92 for all subscales.

In first phase, SRQ[12] and RSQ[13] were translated into Urdu language by forward-backward translation method and were found reliable[14]. In second phase, Urdu versions of ARRI[15], SRQ[14], and RSQ[14] were administered to a sample of 608 college students of 1st and 2nd years (Male=330, and Female=278), age range between 16 to 19 years (M=17.60, SD=0.83). Stratified Random Sampling technique was use to collect the data in two steps. First step comprised of making two strata of colleg-

es based on being classified in private and public educational domains and then two colleges in Sarai Alamgir from each strata were selected through random sampling technique from list of colleges obtained from District Office Gujrat. In second step, sampling frame was obtained from the administration of the colleges for 1st year and 2nd year students. College students of 1st and 2nd year were selected because previous researches have been conducted to explore phenomenon of bullying and victimization in school children and university early adults in Pakistan[16-17], neglecting the late adolescent developmental stage studying in colleges of Pakistan. Since every college had different number of students in each class, sample size was determined by using Yumane formula[18] where sample size is equal to total population divided by sum of one with multiple of population size into margin of error constant (0.05). The students were selected by proportional random sampling technique. Inclusion criteria focused on age above 15 years and below 20 years adolescents who is enrolled in first or second year of college. The students studying in school or university were excluded from the present study. This age group was selected because this is the time period where emotions are at their peak and requires significant attention for better performances in various spheres of life[19]. Advanced Studies and Research Board, University of Gujrat approved the research protocol and the data was obtained between January to May, 2019 at Department of Psychology. After sorting the permission from the Principal of the college along with the class teacher of 1st and 2nd years, data was filled out by the students that comprised of written informed consent, demographic sheet and Urdu versions of SRQ, APRI, and RSQ. Confirmatory Factor Analysis was carried out in AMOS-26 to explore the mediating role of self-regulation for bullying, victimization, and rejection sensitivity in adolesc

■ RESULTS

45.7% females and 54.3% males within the age range 16 to 19 years (Mage=17.6; SD=0.83) studying in 1st (53.1%) and 2nd (46.9%) year of the either government (54.8%) or private (45.2%) colleges were approached with the permission of the teacher, and principal. 68.9% were studying arts and 31.1% opted for science. Majority (65.8%) lived in joint family system, in rural areas (70.6%) of Sara-i-Alamgir.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) has yielded model fit summary with significant CMIN/DF value of 2.38 in acceptable range, showing structural relationship among bullying, victimization, rejection sensitivity, with self-regulation. The values of model fit indices such as GFI, AGFI, CFI, IFI, TLI, and RMSEA are 0.92, 0.902, 0.87, 0.885, 0.850, and 0.048 respectively (Table 1). Though

the values of GFI, AGFI, and RMSEA are in acceptable range, yet to increase values of CFI, IFI, and TLI, three items (13, 15, and 17) with low load factor loading were removed from the RSQ, yielding acceptable GFI, AGFI, CFI, IFI, TLI, and RMSEA with 0,94, 0.91, 0.904, 0.906, 0.88, and 0.046 values (Table 2). Results of Structure Equation Model in AMOS-21 showed significant mediating role of self-regulation with bullying, victimization and rejection sensitivity among adolescents. Figure 3 of structure equation model confirms the hypothetical model of the study.

■ DISCUSSION

The structure equation model fit indices confirmed two hypotheses of the study, posited as 'Self-regulation will significantly mediate the relationship between bullying and rejection sensitivity among adolescents'. And 'Self-regulation will significantly mediate the

relationship between victimization and rejection sensitivity among adolescents'. The findings of the present study have highlighted a significant association among the study variables of bullying, victimization, rejection sensitivity and self-regulation in children, adolescents and even adults. Consistent results were found in previous researches. Seventy seven school going children were studied in USA for their emotional self-regulation competencies and experiences of bullying and victimization. Mediational role of emotion self-regulation was found empirically significant for bully-victims as compared to no bully-victim group of children.[20] Transformation from childhood to adulthood in a longitudinal study, people with high rejection sensitivity, exhibited low self-regulation.[21] This served as a plausible sign of explaining self-regulation as playing role to effect rejection sensitivity in college adolescents in our results. Therefore, the findings of the present study in Pakistan implied that intervention plans aimed at enhancing self-regulatory mechanisms to effectively buffer rejection sensitivity should be planned and executed at college level to minimize harmful after effects of bullying in adulthood.

Adolescents with heightened interpersonal rejection sensitivity influenced their peer bullying and victimization[22] and in Pakistan, 120 school going children between age range 9 to 13 years, results indicated significant correlation of rejection sensitivity with bully and fight.[23] However, this relationship between bullying and rejection sensitivity can be reduced by the operative mechanisms of self-regulatory strategies as
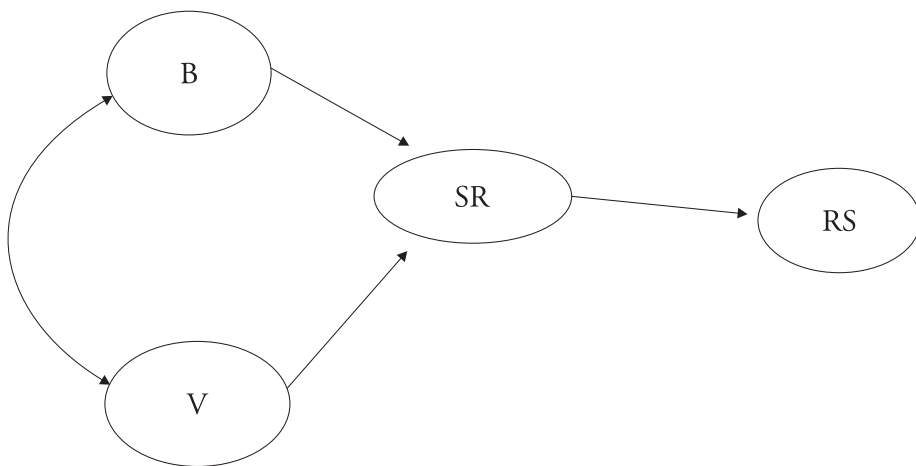

Figure 1: Structure Equation Model For Bullying, Victimization And Rejection Sensitivity: Self-Regulation As Mediator

Table 1: Model Fit Summary for Variables of the Study Without any Item Deletion (N=608)

χ2	CMIN/DF	p	GFI	AGFI	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
502.539	2.38	<0.001	.925	.902	.877	.885	.850	.048

GFI Goodness of fit, AGFI Adjusted goodness of fit, CFI Comparative fit index, IFI Incremental fit index, TLI Tucker Lewis index, RMSEA Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

Table 2: Model Fit Summary for Variables of the Study After Deleting Three Items in Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (N=608)

χ2	CMIN/DF	p	GFI	AGFI	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
502.539	2.2	<0.001	.94	.91	.904	.906	.88	.046

GFI Goodness of fit, AGFI Adjusted goodness of fit, CFI Comparative fit index, IFI Incremental fit index, TLI Tucker Lewis index, RMSEA Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

in the present findings, the latter has played a role of a mediator. Similar findings have been observed in the research study conducted in China where 631 adolescents with mean age 10.52 years in China were taken under investigation and results signified association of low victimization with high self-regulatory skills.[24] Contrasting results of another study in USA on a group of 206 adolescents with mean age = 10.13 years showed that with experiences of relational victimization by peers, they exhibited dysfunctional social-cognitive processes and intensified emotion dysregulation[25] and high depression-anxiety symptoms.[26] Thus, in the light of the contradictory results of the former studies such as bullied children with exhibited low socio-cognitive skill, the vice versa findings of the present study indicate mediating role of self-regulation between bullying and victimization with rejection sensitivity has been found to be strengthened. Since university youth in Pakistan has showed enhanced academic self-efficacy due to high self-regulatory strategies,[27] the mediating position of self-regulation in bullying-victimization syndrome and rejection sensitivity implied that by enhancing emotional and cognitive regulatory mechanisms of the self, sensitivity to occurrence of negative effects of bullying and victimization are minimized. Thus, counseling intervention aimed at enhancement of self-regulation on one hand and reduction of bullying on other hand for the students enrolled in school, colleges, and universities in Pakistan is advisable strategy to be carried out in future.

The sample of the present study was only restricted on the college students. Therefore it is suggested for future research to approach university as well as school level students. The sample was only restricted on the adolescents from age range 16 to 19 years old. Therefore it is recommended to approach adults as well. Adolescents from colleges of Sara-i-Alamgir only were approached. Therefore it is suggested for future research pursuit to incorporate different colleges from varying cities so as to provide comprehensive understanding of the construct under study. In addition to the present variables, individuals' personality traits and parental interactions should be studied while exploring these issues.

CONCLUSION

Self-regulation has fully and significantly mediated the association of both bullying and victimization with the level of sensitivity for rejection in adolescents. Therefore, the implications of the present study have highlighted the implementation of counselling intervention for enhancement of self-regulatory coping strategies in adolescents to handle peer relations effectively. The findings have pointed out target areas to launch workshops in colleges aimed at reduction of bullying, enhancing self-regulation, and development of the wellbeing in adolescents experiencing peer victimization in Pakistan.

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Author's Contribution

Conflict of Interest

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