

## **Machiavellianism and Bullying Among University Students: Moderating Role of Emotion Regulation**

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The present study aimed to examine the vital role of Machiavellianism and emotion regulation in bullying among university students. The study also intended to determine the differences between men and women students, BS and MPhil students. The age range of the sample was 18-29 years old. Two-Dimension Machiavellianism Scale (Monaghan et al., 2019), Emotion Regulation Scale (Gross & John, 2003) and Forms of Bullying Scale (Shaw et al., 2013) were administered on 300 students (170 men and 130 women) from different universities of Islamabad and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to measure Machiavellianism, emotion regulation and bullying. The results revealed significant negative relationship between emotion regulation subscales cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression and bullying; while, results showed nonsignificant positive relationship between Machiavellianism, emotion regulation subscales (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression) and bullying. The results also showed nonsignificant moderating role of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression between Machiavellianism and bullying. Furthermore, the results revealed that the male students scored higher on Machiavellianism, expressive suppression, and bullying than female university students, while female students use more cognitive reappraisal strategy as compared to male students. Moreover, the results also showed differences based on age and education among university students. Implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research were also discussed.

*Keywords.* Bullying, cognitive reappraisal, emotion regulation, expressive suppression, Machiavellianism

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The view that people can have actively a devious way of behaviour that clearly shows to identify the Machiavellianism trait. The Machiavellian individuals have difficulties to identify and recognize their own feelings and emotions; also they are thought to be thinking externally. The problem in recognizing own affects seems as a main identifying factor of trait of Machiavellianism. The Machiavellian individual seems to see human nature more negatively and tends to practice different strategies of emotion regulation (Rauthmann, 2012).

The Machiavellian trait shows distrust in nature of human and to use other people for gaining own benefits (Andreou, 2004). The People that have trait of Machiavellianism are strongly motivated to show dominancy over other people and to give an impression of superiority to them, use to show bossy attitude, they most of the times persist in negotiating and use to manage the control in groups (Masumoto, Taishi, & Shiozaki, 2016). Superiority to others aid Machiavellians to achieve their goals. Machiavellianism is a complicated structure of the personality of different personality factors (Rauthmann, 2012). Individuals with highly valued entities of Machiavellianism seem more dangerous to judge human nature and are more motivated to employ deceitful strategies. These conclusions are in accordance with other previous correlational studies which resulted that alexithymia is correlated with the Machiavellianism (Lind et al., 2009). Regulation of emotion strategies should provide the individuals with the trait of Machiavellianism to develop and manipulate emotions to achieve a goal of showing dominance over others (Cote et al., 2011). Rottenberg and Gross (2007) over the beyond decade, the rising discipline of emotion law studies have modified the angle of emotion. Besides treating feelings as mental condition that is experienced passively and expressed, current studies have tested those individuals are capable to reassess and modify these feelings also and they organize this process frequently, with the use of a various processes.

Two techniques have acquired specific attention, that is, cognitive reappraisal, which means that to change the entire meaning of an emotional aspect of a situation while another one is expressive suppression which states that to change the behavioural or action aspect of that emotion which can be verbal or non-verbal for example facial expression body language and gestures (Gross & John, 2003). Cognitive reappraisal is an approach that used for emotion regulation in which individual changes the way of thinking about a stimulus as a result the emotional state associated with its changes. Some researchers have found on different previous research that two lobes

of brain like prefrontal lobe and parietal lobe are involved to control other brain areas which must control centers for emotional responses like amygdala. The other researchers have added further that control regions like temporal cortex that have a structure called prefrontal network moderate the semantic representations of emotions and feelings (Buhle et al., 2014; Etkin, Buchel, & Gross, 2015).

The expressive suppression is the second known strategy used in regulation of emotions. Expressive suppression inhibits express of the emotions due to which inappropriate sense and feelings of self and behavior arises. Another phenomenon which is related to expressive suppression is authenticity. It can be defined that at which level an individual can behave in consistence with his or her own feelings, attitudes and believes while avoiding false or misrepresentations (Linton & Power, 2013).

### **Process Model of Emotion Regulation Theory**

Gross and John (2003) was the first who proposed a process model of emotion regulation theory. It was one of the most widely used is emotion regulation process model theory. This theory postulates that regulation of emotions is a five stages process including to choose the condition which will lead to a decision; to do efforts to change that condition; the distribution of attention that involves drawing or diverting attention to an emotional situation, behavior, physiology, and cognitive response system. Bullying is a shared form of violence among children and teenagers that grabbed the most attention of researchers in recent era. Different studies in western countries have revealed occurrence of bullying. A brief investigation was done by using international surveys of two large-scale in almost sixty six countries. Results should founded that in last two months approximately thirty two point one percent students were bullied at least once in school time, in some parts the rate of victimization increases up to 60 percent in the countries; for example, (Kilduff, Chiaburu, & Menges, 2010). The issue of bullying is being addressed significantly in the last decade in Asian countries, which discusses the significance of the issue widespread. The bullying issue especially in teen age is in general has different negative consequences like rejection in peer group and poor performance in academics.

The term emotion regulation was linked in pessimistic way with Machiavellianism (Cote et al., 2011). It is commonly believed that high emotion-regulation knowledge occurs some Machiavellians, and especially in social or sexual behavior they normally leave from usual

or accepted standard. People tend to have lower emotional control knowledge whose score was high on Machiavellianism. Usually, those Machiavellians are harmful who are aware about how to effectively regulating emotions. Enthusiastic knowledge reflects how people will measure feelings and passionate data (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso 2008). Enthusiastic knowledge can work with social practices in a wide reach (Kilduff et al., 2010). About emotional insight, Mayer et al. (2008) noticed that those whose abilities are directed enemy of socially may cause manipulative situations. On the side of this elective view, discoveries from one research revealed that investigation showed that school harassers scored high on an experiment of interpretation of emotions as compared to non-harassers (Patkai & Bereczkei, 2016).

Greater part of the specialists does not trust as a part of casualty's character or culprit's character (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). Though, some attributes and practices like accommodation, anxiety, keeping away from struggle, forceful correspondence, overachieving, absence of decisiveness, absence of social abilities, low or ridiculous high confidence, dubiousness and so forth are being designated (Cook et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2019). Manipulation, being the core of Machiavellianism, gives a reason to believe that emotion regulation will moderate the association between Machiavellianism and bullying. To study and understand this complex concept in detail, the present study will take in consideration the emotional aspects of Machiavellians in a dimensional way. It is assumed that this study will take into account the Machiavellian behaviors and identify the effective strategies that participate to explain the base of this behavior and it's multidimensional expression in students.

The broader objectives of the study were to examine the relationship between Machiavellianism, emotion regulation and bullying among university students. It was also intended to study the effect of Machiavellianism on bullying among university students. In addition, the moderating role of emotion regulation in the association between Machiavellianism and bullying among university students was also studied. Moreover, the differences among the groups of demographic variables (age, gender and education) on Machiavellianism, emotion regulation, and bullying among university students were also examined.

### **Hypotheses**

1. Machiavellianism is positively related to expressive suppression and bullying among university students.

2. Machiavellianism is negatively correlated with cognitive reappraisal among university students.
3. Machiavellianism predicts bullying among university students.
4. Cognitive reappraisal moderates the relationship between Machiavellianism and bullying among university students.
5. Expressive suppression moderates the relationship between Machiavellianism and bullying among university students.

## **Method**

### **Sample**

The study sample comprises of 300 university (170 men and 130 women) undergraduate and graduate students. The data was collected from universities of Islamabad, Wah Cantt, Swabi, and Peshawar and age of the participants ranged from 18 to 29 years. The participants are sampled through the purposive sampling technique based on cross sectional survey research design.

### **Instruments**

The following measures were used to assess the study variables.

#### **Two-Dimensional Machiavellianism Scale (TDMS)**

TDMS Scale (Monaghan et al., 2019) was used to gauge participants' tendency of manipulating and deceiving people for their own interest. It is a 12-items scale, where 4-6 are reverse coded 10-12 are reverse coded. The response criteria were 7-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* = 1 to *strongly agree* = 7 and possible score range was 12 to 84. Higher the score on the scale greater will be the tendency of manipulating and deceiving people in interpersonal relationship whereas lower scores show lesser inclination of manipulating and deceiving others. The alpha Cronbach's reliability derived for TDMS has been reported as .80 (Monaghan et al., 2019).

#### **Emotion Regulation Scale (ERS)**

Emotion regulation was measured by using ERS (Gross & John, 2003) which consisted of 10-items and ERS has two subscales, that is Cognitive Reappraisal which composed of 6 items and Expressive Suppression which comprised of 4 items. The response criteria for the

scale were 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* and the total score ranges from 10-70. Higher scores indicate higher capacity to regulate emotion while low scores show lower tendency to regulate emotions. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability derived for emotion regulation was .85 (Gross & John, 2003).

### **Forms of Bullying Scale (FBS)**

Bullying was assessed through FBS (Shaw et al., 2013). This comprehensive and psychometrically sound tool consists of 20-items. The response options were "*this did not happen to me/I did not do this = 1*"; "*once or twice = 2*"; "*every few weeks = 3*"; "*about once a week = 4*"; and "*several times a week or more = 5*". The total score ranges from 20-100 with higher scores are reflecting high level of bullying and victimization for each dimension while lower scores indicate lower level of bullying and victimization. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability for the total scale was .87 (Shaw et al., 2013).

### **Procedure**

An online Google form was formed for the online data collection during the pandemic of covid-19. The Google form was consisted of a written inform consent having details about the study taking consent of willingness to fill the form and also the three questionnaires of the study. The Google form was sent to the students of different universities of Islamabad and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through social media that is, Whatsapp, Facebook. Maximum data was collected through online method while the remaining was obtained through personal administration. The concerned authorities were approached for the permission then the university students were approached by the researcher. Keeping in view the ethical considerations, the participants were given a detail overview about the study, furthermore, a written inform consent was signed by each participant. Additionally, a brief introduction about the study was given to the participants. Written informed consent was obtained from the respondents and authorities.

### **Results**

The frequencies and percentages of the demographic variables that are, gender, education and age of the study indicated that 56.70% male and 43.30% female university students participated in the present

study. It also included 65.30% BS students while 34.70% were M.Phil students. Moreover, 71% university students are of age range 18-23 years while 29% are of age range 23.1-29years.

Descriptive statistics for the scales, is used in the study, indicated that the alpha reliability coefficient for Two Dimension Machiavellianism Scale is .81, for Emotion Regulation Scale is .74 and subscales i.e., cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression are .71 and .63 respectively while reliability of Forms of Bullying Scales is .87, which indicates that all the scales are reliable and have high level of internal consistency.

Table 1  
*Inter Correlation of Study Variables (N=300)*

| Variables                | 1    | 2     | 3      | 4 |
|--------------------------|------|-------|--------|---|
| 1 Machiavellianism       | -    |       |        |   |
| 2 Cognitive Reappraisal  | -.08 | -     |        |   |
| 3 Expressive Suppression | .05  | .36** | -      |   |
| 4 Bullying               | .11  | -.12* | -.15** | - |

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 1 shows inter-correlation of Machiavellianism, emotion regulation subscales of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression and bullying among university students presented diagonally. As result reveals negative correlation between Machiavellianism and cognitive reappraisal while nonsignificant correlation is found between Machiavellianism and expressive suppression. Results disclosed that there is significant positive correlation between cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression and there is a positive correlation between Machiavellianism and bullying. The results also show significant negative correlation of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression with bullying. Findings revealed significant negative correlation between cognitive reappraisal and significant negative correlation between expressive suppression with bullying.

Moderation Analysis revealed that Machiavellianism significantly positively predict bullying and cognitive reappraisal significantly negatively predict bullying while interaction effect between Machiavellianism and cognitive reappraisal is nonsignificant. Findings also revealed that Machiavellianism significantly positively predict bullying and expressive suppression significantly negatively predict bullying while interaction effect of Machiavellianism with expressive Suppression is non-significantly to predict bullying.

Table 2

*Group Differences on Study Variables Among High and Low Scorers on Machiavellianism (N = 300)*

| Variables  | Low Scorers<br>(n = 178) |       | High Scorers<br>(n = 122) |       | t    | p   | 95% CI |      | Cohen's<br>d |
|------------|--------------------------|-------|---------------------------|-------|------|-----|--------|------|--------------|
|            | M                        | SD    | M                         | SD    |      |     | LL     | UL   |              |
| Cog. Reap. | 29.92                    | 6.34  | 30.17                     | 6.42  | 3.42 | .73 | -1.73  | 1.21 | 0.30         |
| Exp. Supp. | 19.19                    | 5.27  | 19.19                     | 4.80  | .01  | .99 | -1.18  | 1.17 | 0.14         |
| Bullying   | 32.25                    | 10.34 | 35.62                     | 12.66 | 2.52 | .01 | -5.99  | -.74 | 0.11         |

Note. Cog. Reap. = Cognitive Reappraisal; Exp. Supp. = Expressive Suppression.

Table 2 shows the difference on emotion regulation subscales that is cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression and bullying among low Machiavellian and high Machiavellian students. Results revealed that there is a significant difference among low Machiavellian students and high Machiavellian students in the level of bullying that is, high Machiavellian students show more bullying tendencies as compared to low Machiavellian students. Table shows nonsignificant difference between high Machiavellian students and low Machiavellian students on cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.

Table 3

*Gender Differences on Study Variables (N=300)*

| Variables  | Men<br>(n = 170) |      | Women<br>(n = 130) |      | t    | p   | 95% CI |      | Cohen's<br>d |
|------------|------------------|------|--------------------|------|------|-----|--------|------|--------------|
|            | M                | SD   | M                  | SD   |      |     | LL     | UL   |              |
| Mach.      | 44.22            | 7.53 | 43.91              | 7.6  | .36  | .00 | -1.43  | 2.06 | 0.04         |
| Cog. Reap. | 29.7             | 6.10 | 30.45              | 6.6  | 1.01 | .01 | 2.21   | .70  | 0.11         |
| Exp. Sup.  | 19.31            | 4.71 | 19.03              | 5.6  | .46  | .23 | -.89   | 1.44 | 0.05         |
| Bullying   | 35.91            | 6.11 | 30.77              | 10.4 | 3.86 | .34 | 2.47   | 7.60 | 0.45         |

Note. Mach. = Machiavellianism; Cog. Reap. = Cognitive Reappraisal; Exp. Sup. = Expressive Suppression.

Table 3 shows there is significant difference between male and female students on Machiavellianism and emotion regulation subscale that is, cognitive reappraisal among male and female students. Findings reveal that male students are higher in Machiavellianism than female students; while women use more emotion regulation strategies, that is, cognitive reappraisal than male students. Findings also reveal that there is nonsignificant difference on expressive suppression and bullying among male and female students.



Regarding demographics of education and age; findings reveal significant differences on Machiavellianism indicating that BS students have more inclinations of Machiavellianism than M. Phil students. Results further shows that Machiavellianism is higher among lower age group (18-23 years); while use of cognitive reappraisal is more among higher age group (23.1-29 years) students; however, nonsignificant differences are observed in relation to expressive suppression and bullying.

### Discussion

The statement of the first hypothesis of the present study is that Machiavellianism is positively related to expressive suppression and bullying among university students. The findings revealed that the sample data of 300 male and female university students show non-significant positive correlation with expressive suppression and bullying in university students. Present findings are in line with previous researches depicting the relationship between Machiavellianism and emotional intelligence. Moreover, individual who are high on Machiavellianism scored low on emotion related tasks, even they score low on emotion intelligence which means that this study results also goes against the other studies (Barlow et al., 2010; Baughman et al. 2012; Pilch, 2008).

The present study results showed non-significant correlation between Machiavellianism and bullying. Like the present study Glaso et al., 2007; Matthiesen and Einarsen (2001) studied bullying among Machiavellians. It is stated that there exist different types of Machiavellians which have different groups like, those who are manipulating behaviorally are those who bully others. Other studies also suggested that there is a weak link between personality factor that is, Machiavellianism and bullying (Lind et al., 2009).

The present study results showed non-significant negative correlation between Machiavellianism and cognitive reappraisal. Patkai and Brekzei (2016) analyzed Machiavellianism and emotion recognition through different ways which resulted that participant with higher Machiavellianism scores scored low on the cognitive appraisal reflecting that individuals high on Machiavellianism having difficulties while recognizing their own emotions but they can recognize others emotion as well as others can do. It further explains the reasons behind that Machiavellians keep aside their selves from the emotional side of any situation. It gives task-oriented expressions, or clear minded problem solvers. Adding more, due to these all

reasons the Machiavellians takes advantages of others, because they know when others start believing them, in spite of all, they cannot recognize their own feelings and emotions like guilt or shame in these circumstances (Patkai & Bereczkei, 2016).

Findings also indicated that cognitive reappraisal has significant negative relationship with bullying. Research evidence that some individuals involved in bullying are very good in manipulating others with the additional ability to lessen the negative consequences of violence on others. Those individuals have great skills in handling their strong emotions like anger, anxiety, fear, awkwardness, and jealousy can enhance students' skills, skills that help to manage strong affections like aggression, shame, guilt, tension, stress and envy. It also improves skills of students to make use of self-talk in order to get rid of intense expressions like crying, hitting back or respond in a way to harm others or making them easy target for the victims of bullying (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1997).

The present study found that there is significant negative correlation between bullying and expressive suppression among university students. Research have endorsed that those students having poor self-control or abilities to regulate their emotions do bullying (Cook et al., 2010). According to Analitis et al. (2009), mostly every second child answer to bullying have intense emotional expressions which increase the probability of bullying (Craig et al., 2010).

The study results revealed that Machiavellianism positively predict bullying. In a previous study that mentioned dual kinds of bullying victims and dual kinds of bullies of bullying at workplace. The dominant bully hurts other people for the purpose to show his or her power, bossy attitude, hold (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010). On the opposite side, within the groups of bullies there is confrontational victims who are aggressive, and revengers and the passive victims tensed and mostly ignored in social groups (Aquino & Lamertz, 2004; Austin et al., 2007). Another study results states that Machiavellianism is personality characteristic that adds to bullying. The study found that those employees who scored high on Machiavellianism also show high score on bullying. These results support the notion bullying at school (Andreou, 2004), bullying at workplace (Linton & Power, 2013) and bullying among young adults, despite of the background of workplace situation (Cote et al., 2011).

Results revealed that cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression nonsignificantly moderate the association between Machiavellianism and bullying. Kilduff et al. (2010) found that it was only indirect bullying that was associated with social intelligence and

Machiavellian child may be specifically appropriate to the behaviors which are involved in indirect bullying; for example, personal gossips spreading and social elimination. As Crick and Dodge (1999) stated that in research manipulating skills and aggression are not studied as linked variables inconsistently, mostly due to specificity in the types of behaviors. In a previous study, results of linear regression analysis suggested that bullying is not simply predicted by any other variable. It is a strategy which can be used when the situations are favoring, in the same situations it does not mean that a person with Machiavellians have lower skills of emotional intelligence (Patkai & Bereczkei, 2016).

The present study showed significant gender differences on Machiavellianism, emotion regulation and bullying. Majority studies that used self-report as a tool for measuring stated that males tend to use more Machiavellianism than females (Ali & Premuzic, 2010; Linton & Power, 2013). According to (Gross, & John 2003) men use more expressive suppression strategy as compared to women but for cognitive reappraisal no consistent differences have been found in gender.

Findings revealed that lesser educated students expressed more inclinations of Machiavellianism. One of the major possible reason behind these finding is that the educational experiences and workplace experiences positively contribute among highly educated students to be aware of their emotions and the strategies to how to regulate these in a positive way rather than involving in Machiavellianism and bullying behavior. In addition, students in lower age group reported more inclinations of Machiavellianism, while the use of cognitive reappraisal is more among higher age group students. From late childhood to teenage the Machiavellianism increases with age but when it comes to adulthood it tends to decrease and reaches a minimum level at age sixty-five (Gotz, Bleidorn, & Rentfrow, 2020). According to Masumoto et al. (2016) Structural equation model analysis revealed that the young participants use less cognitive reappraisal as compared to old participants who use more cognitive reappraisal strategy, while no such obvious differences found for expressive suppression. A research study focused mainly on bullying and intended to find out the prevalence among adolescents and adults. The study found that bullying was lower among older age participants as compared to young participants and reach the lowest among above sixty-six years aged participants (Wang et al., 2019).

### **Limitation and Suggestions**

The present research is lacking in some areas for which corresponding suggestions are given. The present study was carried out in the limited universities of KPK (University of Swabi) and Islamabad (International Islamic University Islamabad) due to pandemic Covid-19. It is therefore suggested that in future broad areas should be considered for research. Only self-report questionnaires have been used to collect data, for the future studies it is suggested to use not only self-report questionnaires but a wider variety of performance tasks or the inclusion of the Lie scale to address this issue.

### **Implications**

Based on findings of the present research, there are some important implications in educational setting for the students and employees too. As the results of the study showed that there are bullies and machiavellians which are equally known and in peers and fellows. The criminal activities by these students are hardly identified by professionals at schools. The study results address, and encounter believes like this and appealed for more training and workshops for the professionals like teachers, counsellor and other volunteers in order to keep an eye on such aggressive behaviours and deal those students effectively. The Machiavellian bullies are socially skilful and emotionally cold manipulators who are well recognized and adjusted (Sutton, 2001). These machiavellian bullies do misapplication of the social and emotional strategies they have taught in order to take advantages of other students. So, it is a need of time to take notice of the cognitive and emotional both side of their behaviours and activities. It will also help in developing the services in order to promote the emotional and psychological well-being and educational output of adults.

### **Conclusion**

The present study concluded that there is significant negative relationship between emotion regulation components, that is, cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression and bullying; while there is nonsignificant relationship of Machiavellianism with cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression and bullying. Further the study concluded that cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression have nonsignificant moderating role in the association between Machiavellianism and bullying.

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