

## BULLYING-VICTIMIZATION, RESILIENCE, AND ADJUSTMENT IN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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### Abstract

**Background and Objective:** Bullying and victimization remained severe and widespread issues in schools and colleges, and its occurrence has been well recognized via a large scale national and international studies. The current study aimed to examine the relationship between bullying-victimization, resilience, and students' adjustments (academic, social and psychological). Furthermore, the mediating role of resilience between bullying-victimization and adjustments will be examined.

**Methods:** This correlational study was conducted from May 2022 to September 2022 through an online survey and a sample of 200 college students, between the age of 15 to 20, was taken from Lahore city. For assessment purpose, Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale, The Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale, and Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire were used. Bullying-Victimization was taken as independent variable, resilience was taken as mediating variable, while adjustment (academic, social and psychological) was taken as outcome variable.

**Results:** The results indicated that bullying-victimization has a negative relationship with resilience ( $p < .05$ ) and students' adjustments. However, resilience was found to be significantly and positively associated with students' adjustments ( $p < .01$ ). The findings of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin showed the appropriateness of sample data for conducting factor analysis. Mediation analysis revealed that resilience significantly mediates in the association between bullying-victimization and adjustment (academic, social and psychological), accounting for 38.90% of the total association.

**Conclusion:** Bullying-victimization has a negative relationship with resilience and students' academic, social and psychological adjustments. Furthermore, resilience is positively associated with students' adjustments. Moreover, resilience mediates the relationship between bullying-victimization and adjustment.

**Keywords:** Bullying-Victimization, Resilience, Social, Academic and Psychological Adjustment

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**B**ullying remains a severe and widespread issue in schools and colleges, and its occurrence has been well recognized via a large scale national and international studies. Bullying may obtain a range of forms such as verbal aggression, (insulting someone, teasing or racist remarks), physical aggression (hitting,

pushing, kicking, damaging property or punching), cyber aggression (verbal or relational aggression include the texting, or other electronic means) relational aggression (nasty gossip and planned social exclusion,<sup>1</sup> harassment may occur inside and outside college surroundings. A systematic review reported that this problem is deep-rooted but prior to the 1970s, it was unfamiliar and uncommon.<sup>2</sup> As indicated about this concept that bullying is a new name; in the past it was called harassment. When an individual is alone and isolated, not satisfied with school due to physical or verbal suffering, this is harassment. Bullying and harassment both may be different, but both destroy victim's mental health.<sup>3</sup> Researchers explained that violent or aggressive behavior create clatters among

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equivalent authorities, but in harassment or bullying case both parties are not equal, and victims do not secure themselves from authoritative person.<sup>4</sup> Harassment or bullying is contradictory between peers, and both are not mentally or physically equal. The one party is powerful and strengthen while the victim is powerless.<sup>5</sup>

Bullying denotes that it is a continuous or purposeful act in which an individual misuses his power and damages the victim's personality. It develops the worst consequences on mental wellbeing, either in childhood or in adult age.<sup>6</sup> Bullying victimization is connected with high degree of physical and mental health issues, behavioral problems and low educational achievement. Peer bullying is more active in anger, violence or mostly participate in rebellious behavior and manners.<sup>7</sup> However, many other factors intervene to perform bullying such as peer pressure, interpersonal conflicts, home environment, and society.<sup>8</sup> In bullying, social and communal exclusion, and peer pressure lead behavior against the norms and create negative impact on mental health. In childhood, the victim is disturbed on extreme level that leads them towards risky behaviors such as suicidal ideation and self-harm.<sup>9</sup> In the last few years, research has investigated that about 10% to 30% of adolescents are constantly tangled in college bullying, either as victims, bullies, or bully-victims. Bullying at every stage is harmful; for children and young adults comparable, bullying is a destruction of the safety and distinction to which we are all permitted, especially in shared spaces like college and work.<sup>10</sup>

Resilience is usually described as a capability to recuperate from the problematic lifetime happenings; it's individual capability to endure difficulty or recoil back and raise in spite of life's declines.<sup>11</sup> Resilience can also be considered as psychological phenomena that prepares the person to back on normal state after facing a trauma. People who have lack of flexibility are easily overwhelmed, and not mentally satisfied and cope with difficulties.<sup>12</sup> Resilience is a very crucial element for many causes, such as developing a healthy mechanism, enabling them to face worst events and protect the individuals from depression, anxiety and traumas and maintain the stability. Researchers found

that bullying victims have less reliance level and that is why mostly suffer from depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, and antisocial personality disorder, however resilient people can prevent their mental health.<sup>13</sup>

Academic adjustment is the recital in school in a standardized sequence of educational tests. Academic adjustments are modifications in how students take part in classes and actions. These modifications help students to meet standards, but do not modify them.<sup>14</sup> Bullying victimization has been identified as a major issue that badly affects the academic adjustment of the school children. Being victim of the bullying by peers can function as both antecedent and consequence of the poor school adjustment and academic achievement.<sup>15</sup>

Social adjustment is distinct as the amount of which a person involves in capable communal or social behavior and adjusts to the instant communal framework.<sup>16</sup> Studies have been exposed that bullying and victimization experiences harmfully manipulate social modification, mostly in the short period of teenage years.<sup>17</sup> It has been revealed that teenagers who were bullied, express low ranks of social capability, recognition and reputation; also inclined to be lonely or discarded and usually have inferior relationships with their friends.<sup>16</sup>

Psychological adjustment is interpreted as unremitting dynamic procedure that is acted and experienced by the person to change his behavior in arrange to allow him to adjust with himself and with others in the nearby environment.<sup>18</sup> It has been seen that psychological adjustment contains three aspects of a person's personality, including personal, social, and emotional.<sup>19</sup> Bullying in childhood or in adult age leads to psychological maladjustment; the victims experience extreme level of distress that can even cause high risk behaviors such as suicidal attempts and self-harm.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the renowned theories of bullying are: dominance theory, social cognition theory, social capita theory, humiliation theory, organizational cultural theory, Theory of Restorative Justice and Theory of Response to Group and peer Pressure. Among all the theories, Dominance Theory of Bullying-victimization is well formulated in the perspective of college students.

The theory states that students engage in bullying to get social status, available resources and to be dominant in the college. For instance, some students show bossy behavior in the classroom expecting that others may venerate them. In this case, they tend to create alliance with the bullies being their leaders. Moreover, these types of groups initiate bullying to weak students or groups. Students who have leadership traits may use their charisma and skills for dominating others as a tool of gaining power or social prestige and establishing domination. This is how bullying operates in the educational institutes.<sup>20</sup>

College bullying is seemingly a global issue and millions of students have been the victims of it every year. As we have discussed the damages of bullying-victimization on students' mental health and their academic performance, keeping this idea in consideration, it is anticipated that there is a dire need to conduct an in-depth investigation in order to explore its magnitude of effects. Hence, this paper attempts to examine bullying-victimization effects on students in order to dig out its real status quo scenario of college settings.

## METHODS

This correlational study was conducted between May 2022 to September 2022. An online google form was circulated on social media and a sample of 200 college students, between the age of 15 to 20, was taken from Lahore city. The confidentiality and privacy of personal information was assured to the participants, and the contact information of the researcher was mentioned in the form for free consultation, if any participant needed in case of distress while filling the questionnaires. To prevent missing data, all the questions in the google form were compulsory to answer, meaning the participant could not submit the response before answering all the questions. To decrease the impact of confounding, the sample was restricted to college students only and a snowball sampling technique was employed. For assessment purpose, Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CDRS)<sup>21</sup> was used to measure the level of resilience, The Multidimensional Peer-Victimization

Scale (MPVS)<sup>22</sup> was used to evaluate bullying-victimization and Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ)<sup>23</sup> was used to assess academic, social and psychological adjustment. All these scales are Likert scales with adequate psychometric properties, and appropriate to be administered on Pakistani college students. Bullying-Victimization was taken as independent variable, resilience was taken as mediating variable, while adjustment (academic, social and psychological) was taken as outcome variable.  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$  was considered significant. Data were stored and analyzed in SPSS version 21.

## RESULTS

In this study, 200 college students were enrolled. The Cronbach's alpha value of the CDRS, MPVS, and SACQ was found as .71, .78 and .82 respectively. By applying Pearson Product Moment Correlation, results revealed that bullying-victimization has a negative relationship with resilience ( $r = -0.13$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and students' adjustments (academic, social and psychological) ( $r = 2.21$ ;  $p < .001$ ) showing that with an increase in bullying-victimization, the level of resilience and students' adjustment decreases. However, resilience was found to be significantly and positively associated with students' adjustments

**Table 1:** Demographic Characteristics of the Participants ( $n=200$ )

Demographic Variables	M (SD)	f (%)
Age	17.7(1.45)	
<b>Gender</b>		
Male		158(79.0)
Female		42(21.0)
<b>Educational year</b>		
1 <sup>st</sup> year		22(11.0)
2 <sup>nd</sup> year		58(29.0)
3 <sup>rd</sup> year		53(26.5)
4 <sup>th</sup> year		67(33.5)
<b>Institutes of the participants</b>		
Aspire college		71(35.5)
Noor college		8(4.0)
Riphah college		70(35.0)
Punjab college		24(12.0)
Superior college		27(13.5)

**Note.** M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, f=Frequency, %=Percentage

(academic, social and psy-chological) ( $r= 0.27$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

In the mediation model, resilience was depicted as a mediator variable, bullying-victimization was selected as independent variable, and psychological, social and academic adjustment were taken as dependent variable. The results of the goodness-of-fit indices for the measurement of the model are shown in table 2. The bootstrapped regression weights for the measurement model (see table 3), indicated that interaction between resilience and bullying-victimization was found to be significant ( $p < .001$ ). On the other hand, association between students’ adjustments and resilience was observed to be significant too. Also, the association between bullying-victimization and students’ adjustment was determined significantly negative ( $p < .001$ ). Showing that resilience significantly mediates in the association between bullying-victimization and adjustment (academic, social and psychological), accounting for 38.90% of the total association.

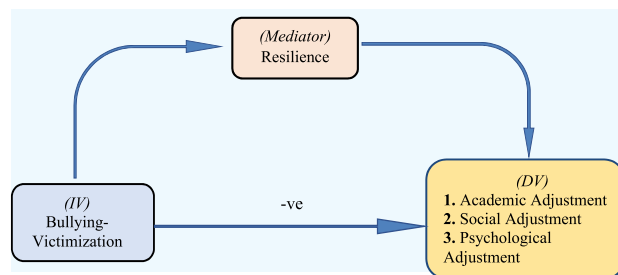


Figure 1. Proposed Model(Mediator)

Table 2: Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Measurement of Model

$\chi^2$	Df	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
791.76	324	.96	.95	.07	.10

Note:  $\chi^2$  = Chi-Square, df = degrees of freedom, TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index, CFI = Comparative Fit Index, RMSEA = Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation, SRMR Weighted Root Mean Square Residual.

Table 3: Bootstrapped Regression Weights for the Measurement Model

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	p
CDRS<---MPVS	.128	.110	.156	.003
SACQ<---CDRS	.211	.068	2.85	.000
SACQ<---MPVS	.206	0.06	3.39	.000

Note: CDRS = Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale, MPVS = The Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale, SACQ = Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire.

DISCUSSION

The study hypothesized that “There will be a negative relationship between bullying-victimization and resilience.” Our results and the previous studies also support this hypothesis. Yubaro et al.<sup>24</sup> determined the relationship between resilience and bullying victimization and checked the effect and worth of resilience. Results revealed that bullying victimization shows the worst consequences on academic performance, but resilience plays a significant role to cope with such problems. Shemesh and Heiman,<sup>25</sup> also examined the relationship between resilience, harassment or bullying in adolescents, and the findings revealed that resilience positively affects bully victims and has a negative relationship with bullying victimization. Likewise, Cohen et al.<sup>26</sup> explored the correlation among individual resilience and peer bullying among school pupils and found a negative relationship between them.

It was hypothesized that “There is likely to be a negative relationship between bullying-victimization and academic, social and psychological adjustment” and the results of the current study confirmed it. Numerous studies support our findings; Wu et al.<sup>27</sup> investigated the relationship between bullying and social and psychological problems. The result revealed that bullying develops social and psychological anxiety which leads to the various issues in academic adjustment. Arslan et al.<sup>28</sup> explored the relationship between bullying, wellbeing and psychological adjustment, and found the significant results. The authors explored that bully victims have poor adjustment due to their decreased mental health. Abdelaziz et al.<sup>29</sup> also examined the psychological health and academic achievement of the adult students, in relation to bullying victimization. They found that bullying experiences are significantly associated with perceived stress and poor psychological health. It further contributes to the low academic achievement.

The findings of the current study have confirmed the hypothesis that “There will be a positive relationship

between resilience and academic, social and psychological adjustment.” Shemesh and Heiman<sup>25</sup> examined the relationship between resilience, psychological well-being, and academic performance of bully victims. They found that resilience has positive effects on bully victims, and it keeps the psychological and social functioning active. The study conducted by Yubaro et al.<sup>24</sup> is also parallel to our results. The study recruited a sample of 1122 university students to find out the relationship between psychological well-being, resilience and bullying-victimization. The bully victims showed poor psychological well-being, however students with high levels of resilience were able to face problems and improve their educational performance. Similarly, Ganotz et al.<sup>30</sup> investigated the role of resilience among bully victims and determined their social and academic performance at school. It was seen that the students who face bullying suffer from mental crises but those who are resilient, they can cope efficiently with social and educational problems and can manage problematic situations.

Our study accepted the hypothesis that “Resilience will significantly mediate between bullying-victimization and adjustment (academic, social and psycho-logical).” Wu et al.<sup>27</sup> explored the moderating role of resilience between educational adjustment, social anxiety and bullying victimization. They found that bullying victimization positively predicts social anxiety in students, but resilience moderates the effect of bullying victimization on social and educational problems of the students. Shemesh and Heiman<sup>25</sup> studied the mediating effect of resilience and wellbeing among adolescents; they proposed that resilience has strong mediating impacts on peer bullying and low levels of wellbeing that may be expressed in physical, emotional and behavioral effects. Fang et al.<sup>31</sup> found that children and adolescents who are bullied by peers are likely to have anxiety symptoms, however, path analysis revealed that resilience has a significant mediating effect between peer bullying victimization and anxiety. Furthermore, among five dimensions of resilience,

interpersonal assistance, family support and emotional regulation, were found prominent mediators. All these studies are parallel to our findings and it contributes to the indigenous literature, however the sample size of the study was small while the population of the mentioned colleges is quite high, so more scientific studies should be conducted in Pakistan on a vast level and interventions to cure and prevent bullying-victimization should be offered.

## CONCLUSION

It is concluded that bullying-victimization has a negative relationship with resilience and students’ adjustments (academic, social and psychological) showing that with an increase in bullying-victimization, the level of resilience and students’ adjustment decreases. Furthermore, resilience is positively associated with students’ adjustments (academic, social and psychological). Moreover, resilience mediates the relationship between bullying-victimization and adjustment (academic, social and psychological). The study denotes the need of mental health professionals at educational institutes to empower students’ resilience and to control bullying-victimization through appropriate behavioral interventions.

### Ethical Approval:

The ethical Approval for this study was obtained from Ripah Institute of Clinical and Professional Psychology Lahore. (Reference No. FSS&H/ERC/RICCP/23/0433).

### Conflict of Interest:

*None*

### Funding Source:

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