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# Effects of Cyberbullying Exposure on Emotional Regulation and Mental Health in Adolescents

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**Abstract:** ***Cyberbullying has become an important concern for adolescent well-being because online harassment can continue beyond school settings and expose young people to repeated social stress. This study examined the relationships between cyberbullying exposure, emotion-regulation strategies, and mental health among adolescents. A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design was used with 100 secondary-school adolescents aged 13–18 years (M = 15.42, SD = 1.38). Measures included the Cyber-Victimization Scale (CYBVICS), Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), and Early Adolescent Mental Health Scale (EAMHS). Descriptive statistics, Pearson product–moment correlations, and simple linear regression analyses were reported. Cyberbullying exposure was negatively correlated with cognitive reappraisal (r = −.42, p < .001) and mental health (r = −.58, p < .001), and positively correlated with expressive suppression (r = .48, p < .001). Cognitive reappraisal was positively associated with mental health (r = .51, p < .001), whereas expressive suppression was negatively associated with mental health (r = −.46, p < .001). Regression analysis indicated that cyberbullying exposure accounted for 33.6% of the variance in mental-health scores, $R^2$ = .336, F(1, 98) = 49.68, p < .001. The findings indicate meaningful associations among online victimization, emotion regulation, and adolescent well-being. Because the study is cross-sectional and relies on self-report measures, the findings do not establish causality.***

**Keywords:** cyberbullying; cyber-victimization; emotion regulation; cognitive reappraisal; expressive suppression; adolescent mental health

## 1. Introduction

Digital communication and social networking are central to many adolescents' social lives. These platforms provide opportunities for connection, learning, and self-expression, but can also facilitate cyberbullying. Cyberbullying includes harmful online actions such as sending threatening or humiliating messages, spreading rumours, sharing personal content without permission, impersonation, and deliberate exclusion from online groups. Unlike face-to-face bullying, online harassment may be persistent, widely shared, and difficult for the person targeted to escape (Smith et al., 2008; Tokunaga, 2010).

Adolescence is a developmental period involving changes in identity, peer relationships, and emotional functioning. Experiences of peer rejection or humiliation can therefore be particularly stressful. Reviews and meta-analyses have linked cyber-victimization with psychological distress, depressive symptoms, anxiety, loneliness, and lower self-esteem (Hamm et al., 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; Modecki et al., 2014). These associations make cyberbullying a relevant issue for schools, families, and professionals supporting young people.

Emotion regulation refers to processes through which people influence how emotions are experienced and expressed. Gross and John (2003) distinguish cognitive reappraisal, which involves reinterpreting a situation to alter its emotional impact, from expressive suppression, which involves inhibiting the outward expression of emotion. These strategies may relate differently to psychological well-being. Reappraisal can support flexible coping, while habitual suppression may leave emotional distress unaddressed; however, the consequences of a strategy can depend on context.

Although prior work has examined cyberbullying and mental health, considering cyber-victimization alongside distinct emotion-regulation strategies may help clarify the patterns associated with adolescent well-being. The present study examined the relationships between cyberbullying exposure, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, and mental health among adolescents aged 13–18 years.

## 2. Objectives and Hypotheses

The study aimed to examine cyberbullying exposure and its associations with emotion regulation and mental health among adolescents. Specifically, it examined the relationship between cyberbullying exposure and cognitive reappraisal, the relationship between cyberbullying exposure and expressive suppression, and the association between cyberbullying exposure and mental-health scores. It also explored the associations of both emotion-regulation strategies with mental health.

H1: Cyberbullying exposure is significantly related to emotion-regulation strategies among adolescents. H2: Cyberbullying exposure significantly predicts adolescent mental-health scores. The null hypothesis stated that there are no significant relationships among cyberbullying exposure, emotion regulation, and mental health.

## 3. Method

### 3.1 Research Design and Participants

A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design was used. The sample comprised 100 secondary-school adolescents aged 13–18 years (M = 15.42, SD = 1.38). The dissertation reports 52 female participants (52%) and 48 male participants (48%). In terms of age, 31 participants were aged 13–14 years, 44 were aged 15–16 years, and 25 were aged 17–18 years. Participants were drawn from secondary-school grade levels 8–12. The original project describes random sampling as the intended approach, where practically possible.

### 3.2 Measures

Cyberbullying exposure was measured using the Cyber-Victimization Scale (CYBVICS), described in the project as an 18-item self-report measure assessing online victimization experiences over the previous 12 months. Responses use a five-point frequency scale, with higher scores indicating more frequent cyber-victimization.

Emotion regulation was assessed using the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003). The 10-item measure assesses cognitive reappraisal (six items) and expressive suppression (four items), scored as separate subscales. Higher scores indicate greater reported use of the respective strategy.

Mental health and psychological well-being were assessed using the Early Adolescent Mental Health Scale (EAMHS), described in the project as a six-item measure, with higher scores representing better mental health and well-being.

### 3.3 Procedure and Ethics

The project describes administration of the questionnaires through a Google Form, including demographic questions and the three measures. It states that participation was voluntary and that confidentiality, parental/guardian consent for minors, and adolescent assent were to be considered. The manuscript does not provide a specific ethics committee name, approval number, data-collection dates, or school/location details; these should be added only if verified from the study records. As the participants included minors, the authors should confirm and report the actual permissions and consent procedures used.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the sample and study variables. Pearson product–moment correlations examined bivariate associations, and simple linear regression models examined whether cyberbullying exposure statistically predicted cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, and mental-health scores. Statistical significance was evaluated at $p < .05$; the reported associations were significant at $p < .001$.

## 4. Results

The sample included 100 adolescents. The largest age group was 15–16 years (44%), and 42% were in Grades 10–11. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics reported in the dissertation.

**Table 1:** Demographic characteristics of participants (N = 100)

| Characteristic | Category | n | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Female | 52 | 52.0 |
| | Male | 48 | 48.0 |
| Age | 13–14 years | 31 | 31.0 |
| | 15–16 years | 44 | 44.0 |
| | 17–18 years | 25 | 25.0 |
| Grade | Grades 8–9 | 36 | 36.0 |
| | Grades 10–11 | 42 | 42.0 |
| | Grade 12 | 22 | 22.0 |

Descriptive statistics showed a mean cyberbullying-exposure score of 41.25 (SD = 11.80), cognitive reappraisal of 23.85 (SD = 6.42), expressive suppression of 18.20 (SD = 5.15), and mental-health well-being of 15.10 (SD = 4.25). The dissertation reports skewness and kurtosis values within −1.0 to +1.0 for all measures.

**Table 2:** Descriptive statistics for the study variables (N = 100).

| Variable | Mean | SD | Observed score range |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cyberbullying exposure (CYBVICS) | 41.25 | 11.80 | 18–76 |
| Cognitive reappraisal (ERQ-CR) | 23.85 | 6.42 | 8–38 |
| Expressive suppression (ERQ-ES) | 18.20 | 5.15 | 6–26 |
| Mental health (EAMHS) | 15.10 | 4.25 | 6–26 |

Pearson correlations indicated that cyberbullying exposure was negatively associated with cognitive reappraisal ($r = −.42$, $p < .001$) and mental health ($r = −.58$, $p < .001$). Cyberbullying exposure was positively associated with expressive suppression ($r = .48$, $p < .001$). Mental health was positively associated with cognitive reappraisal ($r = .51$, $p < .001$) and negatively associated with expressive suppression ($r = −.46$, $p < .001$).

**Table 3:** Pearson correlation matrix. **p < .001, as reported in the dissertation

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Cyberbullying exposure | — | −.42** | .48** | −.58** |
| 2. Cognitive reappraisal | −.42** | — | −.28** | .51** |
| 3. Expressive suppression | .48** | −.28** | — | −.46** |
| 4. Mental health | −.58** | .51** | −.46** | — |

Regression analyses showed that cyberbullying exposure significantly predicted lower cognitive reappraisal, $\beta = −.420$, $R^2 = .176$, $F(1, 98) = 20.98$, $p < .001$, and higher expressive suppression, $\beta = .480$, $R^2 = .230$, $F(1, 98) =$

29.38, $p < .001$. Cyberbullying exposure also significantly predicted mental-health scores, $\beta = -.580$, $R^2 = .336$, adjusted $R^2 = .330$, $F(1, 98) = 49.68$, $p < .001$. Thus, the model accounted for 33.6% of the variance in mental-health scores. These are statistical predictions within the sample and should not be interpreted as proof of causation.

## 5. Discussion

The findings indicate that greater cyberbullying exposure was associated with lower cognitive reappraisal and greater expressive suppression. This pattern suggests that adolescents reporting more online victimization also tended to report less use of reframing and more tendency to hide outward emotional expression. Emotion-regulation strategies are important for understanding how people respond to stressful experiences (Gross & John, 2003; Gross, 2015). The present associations are consistent with broader research linking cyber-victimization to emotional and psychological difficulties (Kowalski et al., 2014; Tokunaga, 2010).

Cyberbullying exposure was also associated with lower mental-health scores and was a statistically significant predictor in the regression model. The model explained 33.6% of the variance in reported mental health. This finding is consistent with reviews identifying links between cyberbullying and outcomes such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, and reduced well-being (Hamm et al., 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014). The online nature of victimization may make it difficult for adolescents to disengage from harmful interactions, particularly when content is repeatedly shared or remains accessible.

Cognitive reappraisal was positively associated with mental health, while expressive suppression was negatively associated with it. These findings underscore the value of examining specific strategies rather than treating emotion regulation as a single undifferentiated ability. The results may inform school-based cyberbullying awareness, accessible counselling, opportunities for adolescents to seek support, and skills-based activities that encourage emotional awareness and flexible coping. Parents and educators may also benefit from maintaining non-judgmental communication so that adolescents feel able to disclose harmful online experiences.

The findings should nevertheless be interpreted cautiously. A cross-sectional correlational design cannot establish whether cyberbullying exposure precedes changes in emotion regulation or mental health, and self-report measures may be affected by recall or response biases. The sample size and geographical scope also limit generalization. Future research could use longitudinal designs, diverse school settings, and additional variables such as perceived social support, resilience, and school climate.

## 6. Conclusion

In this sample of 100 adolescents, cyberbullying exposure was negatively associated with cognitive reappraisal and mental health, and positively associated with expressive suppression. Mental health was positively associated with cognitive reappraisal and negatively associated with expressive suppression. Cyberbullying exposure statistically predicted mental-health scores and accounted for 33.6% of their variance. These findings support the importance of addressing online victimization alongside adolescents' emotional coping and well-being. Since the study was cross-sectional, causal conclusions are not warranted. Further research with broader samples and longitudinal methods is recommended.

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