

PARENTAL EMOTIONAL ABUSE, RESILIENCE, AND ACADEMIC PROCRASTINATION IN PAKISTANI MEDICAL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Limited research exists on parental emotional abuse, resilience, expressive suppression, and academic procrastination, especially in Pakistan. This cross-sectional study used purposive sampling to collect data from 18–35-year-old medical students across public and private institutions. Findings showed parental emotional abuse and expressive suppression positively correlated with academic procrastination, while resilience was negatively correlated. Mediation analysis found no significant role for expressive suppression, but resilience significantly moderated the link between emotional abuse and procrastination. The study suggests targeted interventions to improve medical students' well-being.



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INTRODUCTION

Emotional abuse, also known as psychological abuse, significantly affects psychological well-being, self-worth, and the development of children. It comprises behaviors like rejection, criticism, and neglect, which can lead to long-term effects on mental health, relationships, and academic performance (Hoeboer et al., 2021; Rohner & Rohner, 1980). A previous study investigated the prevalence of perceived mistreatment and mental health issues among medical students in Pakistan. It found high levels of mistreatment and psychological morbidity. The study emphasizes the need for improvements in medical education support and resources (Shoukat et al., 2010). Another previous study surveyed medical students in Karachi, Pakistan, revealing that a significant portion experienced suicidal ideation, with some attempting suicide. Parental neglect and psychiatric history were key risk factors, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions (Osama et al., 2014).

Among college students, parental emotional neglect has been linked to higher levels of academic procrastination. This relationship is mediated by future self-continuity and ego depletion, suggesting that emotional neglect may impair a student's ability to plan and manage academic activities effectively (Ma & Song, 2023). Academic procrastination, a common challenge among students, is defined as the tendency to delay academic activities or tasks. It is closely related to low emotional regulation, often aggravated by abusive childhood experiences (Wang et al., 2021). It is evident from previous studies that procrastination contributes to stress and anxiety, further lowering self-esteem, especially in challenging environments like medical school (Roshanzadeh et al., 2021).

Resilience, the ability to bounce back from adversity, plays a critical role in coping with emotional abuse (Kay, 2016). However, expressive suppression—the regulation of emotions by hiding feelings—can worsen

emotional outcomes, leading to poor psychological well-being (Caramanica et al., 2023). Studies have shown that resilience can mitigate the effects of maladaptive perfectionism on academic procrastination, particularly in nursing students, by enhancing positive coping strategies that reduce procrastination (Huang et al., 2022). Understanding these factors is essential for fostering healthier academic environments and supporting students in overcoming procrastination linked to emotional abuse (Masten et al., 2021). A recent study explores the impact of parental emotional abuse on adolescents' psychological well-being in Pakistan. It identifies cognitive reappraisal as a moderator and expressive suppression as a mediator (Shahid et al., 2025).

A study examined the relationship between academic procrastination, students' learning styles, and parents' child-rearing behaviors. It found that older students procrastinate more, and poor parental follow-up contributes to a notable portion of students' procrastination (Gündüz, 2020). Procrastination is linked to emotional regulation failure. This study explores whether resilience strengthens emotional regulation's role in reducing procrastination. IT professionals participated, and responses were analyzed through regression models. Results show that resilience strengthens cognitive reappraisal's impact on reducing procrastination but not expressive suppression (Superna et al., 2021). Another previous study examined the impact of academic procrastination, resilience, and social support on anxiety symptoms in medical students during COVID-19. Findings reveal that a notable portion of students had anxiety, with resilience and social support negatively correlated with anxiety. Resilience mediated the relationship between procrastination and anxiety, suggesting that resilience-promoting interventions could reduce anxiety (Li et al., 2024).

According to cognitive behavioral theory introduced in the 1960s by Aaron Beck, which comprises thoughts, emotions, and behavior, these may relate to study variables. Previous literature has depicted that negative thoughts of worthlessness and hopelessness due to psychological or emotional abuse by parents lead to poor academic performance and elevated academic procrastination (Chen et al., 2022; Tahani et al., 2023). Due to enormous parental abuse,

students are not able to fulfill daily academic activities or cope with challenging academic situations. Expressive suppression increases, and cognitive reappraisal declines, leading to ineffective coping mechanisms and poor self-esteem, which results in academic procrastination. Internal emotional strain negatively impacts students' performance (Lansford, 2002). However, the literature has shown that resilience enhances emotional regulation (Kay, 2016). Moreover, the association of parental emotional abuse among medical students in Pakistan with respect to variables like expressive suppression, resilience, and academic procrastination has rarely been studied. The objective of this study is to explore this relationship and propose targeted interventions.

Hypotheses

1. There is likely to be a positive and significant association between parental emotional abuse and expressive suppression, as well as academic procrastination. However, parental emotional abuse is likely to have a negative and significant association with resilience among medical students in Pakistan.
2. There is likely to be a positive and significant mediating role of expressive suppression between the predictor, parental emotional abuse, and the outcome, academic procrastination, among medical students in Pakistan.
3. There is likely to be a positive and significant moderating role of resilience between the predictor, parental emotional abuse, and the outcome, academic procrastination, among medical students in Pakistan.

Method

This study utilized a cross-sectional correlational research design to examine the relationship between parental emotional abuse, resilience, expressive suppression, and academic procrastination among medical students. A purposive sampling technique was employed, with 377 Pakistani medical students aged 18 to 35 selected to represent the population. Three primary instruments were used in this study. The Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ), developed by Mumtaz et al. (2022), consists of 30 items assessing emotional abuse, rated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater emotional abuse. The scale demonstrated

excellent internal consistency with a reliability coefficient of 0.94. The Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003) is a 10-item scale that distinguishes between emotional suppression and reappraisal, with items 2, 4, 6, and 9 measuring suppression was used to assess expressive suppression. The responses are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with a Cronbach alpha reported for suppression subscale is 0.76. The Brief Resilience Scale, developed by Smith et al. (2008), consists of six items rated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with a Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.80 to 0.91. The Procrastination Assessment Scale for Students (PASS), developed by Solomon and Rothblum (1988), includes 44 items rated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93. Participants were selected based on inclusion criteria: they were Pakistani students

aged 18 to 35 attending private or public medical colleges or universities in Pakistan. Ethical considerations followed the APA 7th edition guidelines. Institutional permission was obtained before data collection, and consent was secured from the authors of the scales used. Informed consent was provided to all participants, ensuring they understood the study's purpose and procedures, with the assurance that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was maintained, and the participants completed a demographic questionnaire followed by the emotional abuse questionnaire and emotional regulation scales. The entire process took approximately 25 to 30 minutes, after which participants were thanked for their participation.

Results

Table 1

Participants' Characteristics (N=377)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Age			25.55	6.65
Gender				
Men	293	78		
Women	84	22		
Socioeconomic Status				
Lower Class	252	67		
Middle Class	79	21		
Upper Class	46	12		

The above table depicts among 377 participants, mostly men (293, 78%) participated while only 84, 22% were women. The mean age of participants in this study is 25.55 and standard

deviation is 6.65. The socioeconomic status of the participants depicts that mostly are from lower class (252, 67%), followed by middle class (79, 21%) and lastly upper class (46, 12%).

Table 2: Correlation Analysis (N=377)

Variables	1	2	3	4
1.PEA	-	.99**	-.11*	.13**
2.Expressive Suppression		-	-.11*	.13**
3.Resilience			-	-.15**
4.Academic Procrastination				-

Note. ** $p < .01$, PEA= Parental Emotional Abuse
The above table depicts parental emotional abuse is significantly and positively associated with

expressive suppression and academic procrastination while negatively as well as significantly associated with resilience. Moreover,

the association of expressive suppression with resilience is negatively significantly and positively significant with academic procrastination.

Furthermore, resilience is negatively and significantly associated with academic procrastination among medical students.

Table 3: Media nation Analysis (N=377).

Antecedents	Consequences							
	Expressive Suppression (M)			AP(Y)				
	β	SE	P	β	SE	P		
PEA (X)	a	.14	.00	.000	c'	.26	.59	.65
Expressive Suppression (M)	-				B	-1.48	4.12	.71
Constant	I	-.89	.02	.000	I	101.98	4.31	.000
	$R^2=.99$ $F(1,375)=307838.82$				$R^2=.01$ $F(2, 374)=3.65$			
	$P<.001$				$P<.05$			

Note. *** $p<.001$, PEA= Parental Emotional Abuse, AP= Academic Procrastination

According to the table above, there is a positive significant direct effect of parental emotional abuse on expressive suppression ($\beta = .14^{***}$, $SE = .00$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, direct effect of parental

emotional abuse on academic procrastination is not significant ($\beta = .26$, $SE = .59$, $p>.05$). Furthermore, the effect of expressive suppression on academic procrastination is negative but not significant ($\beta = -1.48$, $SE=4.12$, $p>.05$).

Indirect Effect

Indirect Path	Effect	Standardized Effect	LLCI	ULCI
Expressive Suppression	-.21	-.52	-3.44	2.51

Indirect effect depicts expressive suppression negatively and non-significantly mediates the

relationship of predictor parental emotional abuse and outcome academic procrastination.

Table 4: Moderation Analysis (N=377)

Variables	β	SE	T	P	R^2	F	LLCI	ULCI
					.06	8.62		
PEA	-.12	.05	-.21	.02			-.23	-.01
Resilience	-1.51	.35	-4.22	.000			-.2.21	-.81
EPA X Resilience	.01	.003	3.27	.000			.004	.01

Note. * $p<.05$. *** $p<.001$, PEA= Parental Emotional Abuse

Hayes' Process Model 1 was utilized to examine the moderating role of resilience between parental emotional abuse and academic procrastination among medical students. According to the table above, there is a direct significant effect of parental emotional abuse on academic procrastination ($\beta = -.12^*$, $SE = .05$, $p<.05$). Furthermore, the results indicates that resilience also effects academic procrastination significantly ($\beta = -1.51^{***}$, $SE = .20$, $p<.001$). The

combined effect of parental emotional abuse and resilience on academic procrastination is significantly positive ($\beta = .01^{***}$, $SE = .003$, $p<.001$), indicating that resilience positively moderates the effect of emotional parental abuse on academic procrastination.

Discussion

There is rarely literature regarding the association of parental emotional abuse, expressive suppression, resilience, and academic procrastination among medical students, specifically in Pakistan. Therefore, the aim of the study was to investigate this association

and come up with required implications for societal welfare.

The first hypothesis of the study is proven as parental emotional abuse is significantly positively related to expressive suppression and academic procrastination and negatively and significantly associated with resilience among medical students of Pakistan. A previous similar study conducted in Pakistan aligns with the result of our study, which shows that parental emotional abuse is significantly and positively associated with expressive suppression among adolescents (Shahid et al., 2024). Another study shows that childhood emotional abuse is negatively associated with resilience and moderates the effect of childhood emotional abuse on depressive symptoms (Ji et al., 2024). Another study also aligns with the result of this study, showing that perceived higher levels of parental emotional neglect correlate with lower future self-continuity and higher ego depletion in these late adolescents, leading to higher levels of academic procrastination (Ma & Song, 2023). The reason for such findings in this current study could be the emotional parental abuse in the Pakistani context, where elders and parents are highly regarded for cultural and religious reasons. This leads to expressive suppression among medical students and lowers their resilience and coping skills, especially as they are already engaged in enormous academic pressure, which leads to procrastination due to difficulty in prioritizing academic activities effectively due to emotional strain.

The second hypothesis of the study, according to Hayes' 4.1 process macro model 4, is not considerably proven as the direct and indirect effects are not significant, despite the total effect remaining significant. The result of this study is contradictory to previous studies, which depict that parental emotional abuse significantly predicts depressive symptoms among students, leading to academic procrastination and lower academic performance via expressive suppression (Cjuno et al., 2023; Li et al., 2020). The reasons behind the non-significant role of expressive suppression could be due to self-reported data from Pakistani medical students, the defense mechanism while filling out the questionnaire, or limited variables—only expressive suppression was taken as a mediator. Rather than focusing on just expressive suppression, other variables like academic stress,

higher family expectations, socio-economic factors, and financial inadequacy fostering academic procrastination should also be considered.

The third hypothesis of the study is significantly proven, as resilience, according to Hayes' 4.1 process macro model 1, significantly moderates the effect of parental emotional abuse (independent variable) on academic procrastination (dependent variable) among medical students in Pakistan. The result of this study is aligned with numerous previous studies, which depict that resilience buffers the effect of parental abuse on students' declining performance in academics and procrastination towards academic activities (Freestun, 2004; Li et al., 2024; Yue et al., 2024). The reason behind the moderating role of resilience could be the coping mechanisms developed to handle parental abuse, effectively managing stress, and higher self-belief. Resilience also helps students stay motivated and focused despite psychological pressure. In the Pakistani context, where elders and parents are highly regarded and respected, this could also explain the moderating role of strong resilience in coping with such abusive environments and adapting effective strategies to maintain academic momentum.

Limitations and Recommendations

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design; future studies may adopt a longitudinal design to study variables over a longer period. The second shortcoming of the study is that it did not use the initial screening question in the demographic questionnaire; therefore, future studies must include screening questions for students who have experienced emotional abuse from parents in the inclusion criteria. A third limitation of the study is that it focused only on Pakistani students; however, the inclusion of Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian countries could be included in future studies, as these are also collectivistic societies. The study did not comprise subgroups of demographic variables in balance; future studies must include these in balance to find the mean differences.

Implications

The first implication of the study is the need for mental health awareness campaigns by mental health professionals in the Pakistani community to ease

parental pressure on children and encourage students to seek mental health professional support to release suppressed thoughts. An academic schedule with discipline is required, along with practical applications of learning and inclusive discussions, to overcome academic procrastination. Resilience must be enhanced in students to cope with parental emotional abuse and keep the study momentum intact. The government and clerics also need to raise their voices via programs on media to prevent emotional abuse from being suppressed in society.

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