

## **Resilience, Psychological Well-being, and Emotional Regulation: A Comparative Study of Military Personnel Vs. Civilian Population**

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Present research aimed to know the difference between military personnel with endurance training and civilian population (with no endurance training), with respect to resilience, psychological well-being, and emotional regulation. Correlation and comparative design was used for this study. A sample of 180 participants with age range of 20-55 years was taken from different walks of military units and civilian population by using snowball sampling, and purposive sampling strategies respectively. The Adult Resilience Measure (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011), Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002), and Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003) were used to assess variables. The results indicated that the military personnel with endurance training were significantly higher on psychological well-being than the civilian population (with no endurance training); while, the civilian population was significantly higher on expressive suppression facet of emotional regulation than the military personnel. There was a significant positive relationship of resilience with psychological well-being and emotional regulation in each group. Additionally, resilience predicted psychological well-being and emotional regulation in both groups, after controlling the effect of demographic characteristics. This research gives an insight into resilience, psychological well-being, and emotional regulation in military personnel with endurance training and the civilian populations with no endurance training. This research also adds to the body of literature in counselling and clinical psychology especially, in Pakistani perspective.

*Keywords.* Resilience, psychological well-being, emotional regulation, endurance training, military vs. civilian

Military training comprises of endurance tasks that are similar in nature and need to be performed continuously for a long period of time. Many domains of military training focus on high endurance, work

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capacity, and efficiency of work. Strength and stamina along with resilience are the core values of a military troop (Korth, 2017). Resilience has a major say in adaptation to traumatic and stressful events. Traumas that are faced by military personnel during a field operation or war have long lasting effects (Eveding, 2012). Resilience is the capacity of individuals to navigate their ways to resources that sustain well-being (Ungar et al., 2007). As per the resilience theory, risk and protective factors are the determinants for resilience. These factors include hardiness, acceptance, hope, mastery, resourcefulness, self-efficacy, and sense of coherence (Curwen, 2016). As per the cognitive model of psychological resilience, cognitive processes are the core components along with additional mapping system that flexibly utilizes cognitive processes related to a particular perceived situation (Parsons, Krujit, & Fox, 2016). The functionality of resilience is further increased by the regulation of emotions.

Emotional regulation is defined as how one regulates and manages its emotions. It involves emotional experience, or what one feels like inside and emotional expression, or how one shows its emotions in the way they talk, give gesture, or behave (Gross & John, 2003). During a person's lifespan, it is not always necessary to control the emotions but situations where emotional regulation is a sign of being adaptive while employing multiple strategies (McRae, 2016). The expression and experience of emotions in a variety of situations along with the modification processes of emotions fall under the category of emotional regulation (Enebrink, Björnsdotte, & Ghaderi, 2013). Emotional responses are inhibited commonly by utilization of two strategies namely expressive suppression which reduces the behavioural expression of the emotion but does not suppresses the experience of that emotion and cognitive reappraisal which changes the emotions by altering the position of the entire emotional response (Chen, 2016). Regulation of emotions is the most influential processes at the interface of emotions and cognitive processes (Koole, 2009). The regulation of emotions is deemed as a core component of mental health and well-being. Psychological well-being is the extent of contentment an individual has with their life as well as their mental state and outlook on life (Hills & Argyle, 2002). Well-being is a continuously changing concept that encompasses social, subjective, and psychological domains (Ryff, 2004). In addition, Ryff (as cited in Sze, 2015) widened the concept of psychological well-being by inculcating multidimensional categories of self-acceptance, personal growth, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life, and positive relations. Resilience is a prevalent phenomenon which occurs as a result of systems that work to adapt to ever changing environments. The ultimate verdict that resilience is not a

rare, but a common phenomenon opens new horizons for protection of human race (Masten, 2001). The experience of people's resilience varies from one person to another, and hence, is diverse in nature (Ungar, 2004). The pathways to resilience are flexible, multiple, and surprising at times for various people including military personnel and civilian population (Bonano, 2004).

Military personnel are exposed to most stressful situations as compared to any other professionals due to multiple factors like seclusion during deployment, staying away from families, physical threats, and the weight on one's consciousness for being responsible for others' lives (Harms, Krasikova, Vanhove, Herian, & Lester, 2013). The ability of emotional control is a crucial factor for evolution and the ability of individuals to adapt to their environments (Ochsner & Gross, 2005). Constant experience of emotions that are positive in nature, result in effective healing from everyday stressors in case of individuals who exhibit high resilience (Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti, & Wallace, 2006). Evidence from research suggests that a positive approach and adaptation to adversities in life does not stem internally rather they are affected by external factors. Factors that protect a soldier from strenuous conditions include social support as well as psychological resilience (Pietrzak, Johnson, Goldstein, Malley, & Southwick, 2009). Emotional suppression strategy is inversely related to well-being, whereas, cognitive reappraisal strategy is directly related to the construct of well-being (Gross & John, 2003). Early life experiences like harsh disciplining by parents is inversely related to the cognitive reappraisal facet of emotional regulation and directly related to expressive suppression facet (Enebrink, Björnsdotte, & Ghaderi, 2013).

There is a wide range of differences when it comes to types and nature of stressors and environmental pressures faced by civilian and military population. Military population is trained in a particular way to confront these challenges whereas the individuals constituting the civil population develop its own individual ways to overcome the stressors. Endurance training is an essential part of the military training. The endurance training has certain effects on the psyche of the personnel and in the long run affects the psychological well-being. Military personnel persevere in face of adversity in the line of duty as well as in their everyday life. This research would lay ground for the relationship that their training has with resilience, psychological well-being and emotional regulation. It would also provide scientific support for whether to include endurance training as part of life of civilians as an intervention to battle everyday challenges. The basic purpose of this research is to know the difference between military and civil population

with respect to resilience, psychological well-being and emotional regulation.

### **Hypotheses**

1. Military personnel are likely to have more resilience, psychological well-being, and emotional regulation as compared to civilians.
2. There is likely to be a positive relationship among resilience, psychological well-being, and emotional regulation in military as well as civilian population.
3. Resilience is likely to predict psychological well-being and emotional regulation in military population.

### **Method**

#### **Sample**

A total of 180 men were recruited for the study, out of which 50% were military personnel ( $n = 90$ ) and 50% were civilians ( $n = 90$ ). The individuals were recruited using snowball sampling technique for military personnel and purposive sampling strategy for civilians. Sample was taken from civilians from different walks of life and military personnel belonging to different branches. The sample was equalized based on the following inclusion and exclusion criteria.

**Inclusion criteria.** Only male participants were included. People with age of 20 years and above were included. People who understood (read and write) English language properly were included. For military population, retired individuals were also included. For military population, individuals with minimum 1 year of service were included.

**Exclusion criteria.** Individuals, who have studied psychology or were practicing psychologists, were excluded. Individuals who were suffering from some terminal, major psychological/ physical illness were also excluded. Military personnel who sustained major injuries/ loss of limbs during military operations or accidents; who were relegated; who had a court martial; served in medical corps, and who took early retirement were also excluded from the sample.

Table 1  
*Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N=180)*

| Characteristics            | <i>f</i> | %    |
|----------------------------|----------|------|
| Age (in years)             |          |      |
| 20-25                      | 96       | 53.4 |
| 26-30                      | 24       | 13.3 |
| 31-40                      | 15       | 8.3  |
| 41-50                      | 10       | 5.6  |
| 51-55                      | 35       | 19.4 |
| Education                  |          |      |
| Undergraduate              | 146      | 81.1 |
| Postgraduate               | 34       | 18.9 |
| Category                   |          |      |
| Civilian                   | 90       | 50.0 |
| Military serving           | 56       | 31.1 |
| Military retired           | 34       | 18.9 |
| Years of Military Service  |          |      |
| Does not apply (civilians) | 90       | 50.0 |
| 1-5                        | 33       | 18.4 |
| 6-10                       | 6        | 3.3  |
| 11-20                      | 10       | 5.5  |
| 21-30                      | 39       | 21.7 |
| 30+                        | 2        | 1.1  |
| Branch of Military (Arm)   |          |      |
| Fighting arm               | 37       | 20.6 |
| Supporting arm             | 32       | 17.8 |
| SSG                        | 21       | 11.6 |
| Does not apply (civilians) | 90       | 50.0 |

Table 1 represents the general characteristics of sample including age range from 20 to 55 years with undergraduate and postgraduate education. Sample was mainly divided in three groups including civilians and military serving, and military retired. Further information with respect to years of military service and branch of military was provided.

### Measures

**Demographic sheet.** All participants reported their age, education, and category (military or civilian). Civilians reported their field of work whereas, military personnel reported their branch (arm) and years of service.

**Resilience Research Centre Adult Resilience Measure (RRC-ARM).** This measure was developed by Ungar and Liebenberg (2011). It measures the resources an individual has that bolsters their resilience. It comprised of 28 items with a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = *not at all* and 5 = *a lot*. Sample items were “I cooperate with people around me” and “I have opportunities to apply my abilities in life”. The score ranged between 28-140, where higher score showed higher level of resilience. The Cronbach alpha of the scale as given by authors (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011) was .83; while, in the current research it was found to be .97.

**The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ).** The scale was developed by Hills and Argyle (2002). It measures extent of happiness which translates into psychological well-being. It comprised of 29 items with a 6-point Likert scale where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 6 = *strongly agree*. Sample items were “I feel I have a great deal of energy” and “There is a gap between what I would like to do and what I have done”, and 10 items were reverse scored. All the items were added and then divided by 29 to get a score, where a higher score shows higher levels of psychological well-being. The Cronbach’s alpha of the scale as given by author was .65 (Hills & Argyle, 2002) while coefficient of .89 was found in the present research.

**Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ).** Scale was developed by Gross and John (2003). It measures the ability to regulate emotions. The scale consist of 10 items with 7-point Likert scale where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*. Sample items were “I keep my emotions to myself” and “When I am feeling positive emotions, I am careful not to express them.” The scale comprised of two subscales: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression and the score ranges between 6-42 for cognitive reappraisal subscale and 4-28 for expressive suppression subscale. The Cronbach alpha reliability given by author was .82 (Gross & John, 2003); while, in the present study, alpha coefficient of .92 was acquired.

## **Procedure**

The study was approved by the Departmental Board of Studies, Department of Psychology, Lahore Garrison University. Permissions for using the instruments were sought from the respective authors of the scales. Informed consent was taken from the participants. Data were collected from military personnel through Google forms, as reaching out to them in person was not possible due to security protocols. Data from civilians based in the same city was taken through physical forms where

participants (students and teachers) were approached at universities while those from other cities filled Google forms as well. After screening and removing duplications, 90 participants from each population samples were retained (180) on which analysis was run.

## Results

To find the relationship among the study variables, Pearson Product Moment correlation is computed. For both the populations, the results show a significant positive relationship of resilience with psychological well-being and emotional regulation facets. Both the subscales of emotional regulation had a significant positive relationship with each other. However, coefficients of correlation are much stronger in military personnel than civilians.

Table 2

*Relationship Between Resilience, Psychological Well-being, and Emotional Regulation in Military Personnel and Civilians*

| Variables                   | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    |
|-----------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| 1. Resilience               | -    | .65* | .45* | .40* |
| 2. Psychological Well-being | .65* | -    | .38* | .31* |
| 3. Cognitive Reappraisal    | .73* | .69* | -    | .61* |
| 4. Expressive Suppression   | .68* | .51* | .62* | -    |

*Note.* Upper diagonal shows result of civilians and lower diagonal shows results of military personnel.

\* $p < 0.01$ .

To test the differences between both the populations independent sample  $t$ -test analysis is computed. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

*Differences of Resilience, Psychological Well-being and Emotional Regulation in Military Personnel and Civilians*

| Variables  | Civilians<br>( $n = 90$ ) |       | Military Personnel<br>( $n = 90$ ) |       | $t(98)$ | $p$ | 95% CI |       | Cohen's<br>$d$ |
|------------|---------------------------|-------|------------------------------------|-------|---------|-----|--------|-------|----------------|
|            | $M$                       | $SD$  | $M$                                | $SD$  |         |     | $LL$   | $UL$  |                |
| Resilience | 103.76                    | 22.48 | 103.73                             | 24.19 | 0.01    | .99 | -1.23  | 2.02  | 0.00           |
| PWB        | 58.37                     | 9.30  | 61.28                              | 10.09 | 2.01    | .05 | -2.90  | -0.75 | 0.30           |
| CR (ER)    | 26.68                     | 8.56  | 24.32                              | 9.71  | 1.73    | .86 | -0.11  | 1.88  | 0.26           |
| ES (ER)    | 16.84                     | 5.82  | 13.98                              | 6.25  | 3.18    | .00 | -4.82  | -0.65 | 0.47           |

*Note.* PWB = Psychological Wellbeing; CR = Cognitive Reappraisal; ES = Expressive Suppression; ER = Emotional Regulation.

It shows that there is a significant difference between civilians and military personnel with respect to psychological well-being and expressive suppression facet of emotional regulation. Psychological well-being is high in military personnel whereas expressive suppression is high in civilians.

To find whether resilience predicted psychological well-being and emotional regulation, hierarchical regression analysis was run. The results are shown in Table 4 and 5 respectively.

Table 4

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Psychological Well-being and Emotional Regulation in Civilians (N = 90)*

| Predictor              | Psychological Well-being |      | Emotional Regulation  |      |                        |      |
|------------------------|--------------------------|------|-----------------------|------|------------------------|------|
|                        |                          |      | Cognitive Reappraisal |      | Expressive Suppression |      |
|                        | $\beta$                  | SE   | $\beta$               | SE   | B                      | SE   |
| Block 1                |                          |      |                       |      |                        |      |
| Age                    | -.05                     | 1.42 | -.03                  | 1.32 | .11                    | .90  |
| Education <sup>a</sup> | .24*                     | 3.59 | .18                   | 3.34 | -.03                   | 2.29 |
| Block 2                |                          |      |                       |      |                        |      |
| Resilience             | .66**                    | .03  | .46***                | .04  | .44***                 | .03  |
| R                      | .68                      |      | .48                   |      | .44                    |      |
| R <sup>2</sup>         | .46                      |      | .23                   |      | .19                    |      |
| $\Delta R^2$           | .41                      |      | .20                   |      | .18                    |      |
| F                      | 24.50***                 |      | 8.38***               |      | 6.87***                |      |

Note. <sup>a</sup>0 = Undergraduate; 1 = Postgraduate

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Resilience is found to predict psychological well-being, cognitive appraisal, and expressive suppression after controlling the effect of demographic characteristics (age and education). Higher education significantly predicted psychological well-being among civilian population.

In relation to the sample of military personnel, resilience is found to predict psychological well-being, cognitive appraisal, and expressive suppression after controlling the effect of demographic characteristics (age, education, category, years of service, and branch). Military personnel with undergraduate level of education are found to have better cognitive reappraisal; while, serving personnel reflect higher psychological well being.



Table 5

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Psychological Well-being and Emotional Regulation in Military Personnel (N = 90)*

| Predictor                 | Psychological Well-being |      | Emotional Regulation  |      |                        |      |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|------|-----------------------|------|------------------------|------|
|                           |                          |      | Cognitive Reappraisal |      | Expressive Suppression |      |
|                           | $\beta$                  | SE   | $\beta$               | SE   | $\beta$                | SE   |
| Block 1                   |                          |      |                       |      |                        |      |
| Age                       | .23                      | 1.62 | -.16                  | 1.59 | .04                    | 1.06 |
| Education <sup>a</sup>    | .22                      | 2.84 | .28*                  | 2.78 | -.08                   | 1.85 |
| Category <sup>b</sup>     | -.44**                   | 3.42 | -.24                  | 3.36 | -.19                   | 2.23 |
| Years of Service          | .01                      | 1.48 | .13                   | 1.46 | .06                    | .97  |
| Branch (Arm) <sup>c</sup> | -.08                     | 2.31 | -.08                  | 2.26 | -.01                   | 1.50 |
| Block 2                   |                          |      |                       |      |                        |      |
| Resilience                | .78***                   | .03  | .73***                | .03  | .71***                 | .02  |
| <i>R</i>                  | .82                      |      | .77                   |      | .71                    |      |
| <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>     | .68                      |      | .60                   |      | .50                    |      |
| $\Delta R^2$              | .58                      |      | .50                   |      | .46                    |      |
| <i>F</i>                  | 29.57***                 |      | 20.57***              |      | 13.55***               |      |

Note. <sup>a</sup>0 = Undergraduate; 1 = Postgraduate; <sup>b</sup>0 = Serving; 1 = Retired; <sup>c</sup>0 = Fighting Arm; 1 = Supporting Arm.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

A significant difference between civilians and military personnel has been found with respect to psychological well-being and expressive suppression facet of emotional regulation. Psychological well-being is high in military personnel. Commonly it is thought by military psychiatry departments that basic military training has a positive impact on the psychological well-being of a regular recruit. Military psychiatric department employs multiple strategies to further enhance the physical and psychological outcomes of the training in order to fight with the daily stressors of military life (Friesen & Lutzker, 2008). Our result is supported by this common perception.

Expressive suppression is more in civilians as compared to military personnel. This implies that those who have gone served in the military have less emotional suppression as compared to their civilian counterparts. Eveding (2012), said that where course of military training alters the way of a person's life and serves as a source of major transformation on the other hand, military attracts individuals who are comparatively less neurotic, open to new experiences and adventures, blunt, possess aggressive tendencies, competitive, and care less about the

feelings of others as compared with their civilian counterparts. This attitude of caring less about feelings of others gives rise to low expressive suppression.

Nonsignificant difference is found between civilians and military personnel with respect to resilience. Previous research has shown that resilience is not an extraordinary phenomenon. Resilience is not an innate characteristic rather; it can be practiced and learned (Hurley, 2020). Owing to this fact anyone who has experienced trauma or adversities and have bounced back from it whether they are military personnel or civilians, they exhibit high levels of resilience. A significant relationship of resilience with psychological well-being and emotional regulation facets was established in this study. Theory of positive emotions proposed by Broaden and Build model (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004) is used as an infrastructure for having a better insight about psychological resilience. A study utilizing multimethod approach revealed that regulation of negative emotions and experience of positive emotions helped in achieving psychological resilience which in turn promotes a better psychological well-being (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

Resilience is found to predict psychological well-being and emotional regulation, after controlling the effect of demographic characteristics in civilian and military populations. The results of regression analysis are supported by a research conducted by Soury and Hasanirad (2011). The results showed that psychological well-being is predicted by resilience; whereas, optimism played a role of minor mediator in this relationship.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

All the measures used in the research were self-report and therefore, subject to self- presentational biases. Military participants from different arms should be taken in same number for the sake of comparison. The future researchers may explore the differences between serving and retired individuals and also from different arms of military forces.

### **Implications**

This research has indicated the positive impact of endurance training (military training) on their psychological well-being. This implies that endurance training exercises should be incorporated in life of common man in order to enhance their psychological well-being. Additionally, education and training on resilience may enhance peoples' psychological well-being and emotional regulation. Further, the

researchers should explore why the emotional suppression is more common (and its consequences) among civilian population as compared to the military personnel. This research is helpful for the scholars and general public in enhancing their understanding on the nature of similarities and differences in military and civilian population with respect to resilience, psychological well-being, and emotional regulation. It is helpful for counselling and clinical psychologists and the policy makers as well.

### Conclusion

The results showed that there is a significant difference in expressive suppression facet of emotional regulation and psychological well-being in military and civilian population where psychological well-being is higher in military personnel and expressive suppression is higher in civilians. No difference in resilience and cognitive reappraisal facet of emotional regulation was found in both groups. Resilience predicts psychological well-being and emotional regulation in both groups, after controlling the effect of demographic characteristics.

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