



## Emotional Regulation as a Predictor of Anger Management and Empathy in Police Officers: Evidence from Pakistan

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### ABSTRACT

Policing is a high-risk occupation of that kind where the exposure to stress is chronic, the interpersonal conflict is high, the emotionally evocative situations that demand effective behavioral control and professional composure are high. Emotional regulation has been recognized as a key psychological mechanism in the way people cope with emotional arousal and respond to stressful environments. However, there is limited empirical evidence studying its role in Pakistani law enforcement. The current study examined the emotional regulation as a predictor of anger management and empathy among police officers of Pakistan. A cross-sectional survey study was used with a purposive sampling of 100 serving police officers in Lahore. Standardized measures of self-report were used to reach emotional regulation, anger management, and empathy. Reliability analyses showed acceptable internal consistency for all scales. Pearson correlation analyses showed the emotional regulation was positive related to anger management ( $r = .315, p < .01$ ) and empathy ( $r = .230, p < .05$ ). The findings suggest that officers with higher levels of emotional regulatory capacities are reporting better anger management and higher levels of empathic responsiveness when in a professional context. These results provide support for the notion that emotional regulation reflects an important psychological competency beneath both emotional control and interpersonal sensitivity in policing. The study provides empirical evidence from a non-Western country and the need for structured emotional regulation training in police development programs to drive and improve adaptive behavioral outcomes and police-community relations.



## **Introduction**

Policing of modern societies is a key institution in modern societies which is charged with tasks of maintaining order, regulating behaviour and upholding public safety (Newburn 2003). In Pakistan however, policing takes place under a certain context of public criticism, allegations of corruption as well as falling institutional trust (Qazi, 2017). Public perception surveys have consistently shown that a large percentage of citizens distrust police officials as participating in corrupt practices, along with negative experiences being had with law enforcement officials, further weakening perceptions regarding legitimacy compared to positive contact which tends to improve perceptions of legitimacy (Gilani Research Foundation Polls, 2017; Rome & Davis, 1997; Worrall, 1999). These realities underscore the importance of looking at psychological mechanisms that may be linked with the behavior of police, especially in emotionally charged situations.

Police officers are regularly exposed to occupational stressors such as excessive workload, work-family interference, lack of organizational support and lack of autonomy (Collins & Gibbs, 2003). In addition to structural stress, officers must often work with hostile suspects, offenders, and emotionally disturbed victims in situations that demand immediate emotional control and good judgment (Garcia, Nesbary, & Gu, 2004). Continuous exposure to aggression and violence often leads to emotional stress and instability, which can manifest itself in irritability, excessive anger or abuse of authority (Tepper, 2007). Understanding how officers can control emotional responses is therefore critically important to understanding opportunities that are linked to professional conduct.

Emotional regulation is the inherent and extrinsic processes by which individuals monitor, evaluate and modify emotional responses to achieve situational goals (Rottenberg & Gross, 2007). Effective regulation consists of experiencing a full range of emotions, modulating the intensity of those emotions, and expressing them appropriately in the context of social emotions (Gross, 1999). Emotional regulation can be intentional, meaning the conscious suppression of one's emotions in the moment, such as during confrontation, or automatic, meaning withdrawal from any stimuli emotionally provoking (Gross & Thompson, 2007). Adaptive functioning in emotion regulation is conducive to constructive behavior and goal-directed functioning while inadequate functioning may be emotionally reactive and result in impairment of judgment (Bridges et al. 2004). In certain higher-risk careers, like the police force, emotional control is a basic competency that affects not only self-control but also how people relate to each other.

Anger is a frequent emotional reaction to situations concerning perceived injustice, provocation or obstruction (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Shure, 1989; Trost, 2012). Although anger may have adaptive purposes such as motivating corrective action (Averill, 1982; Frijda et al., 1989), unmanaged anger increases the likelihood of aggression and socially undesirable consequences (Averill, 1983). Anger management is the cognizability and control of anger, in socially appropriate and constructive ways as opposed to suppressing or over expressing irritability explosively (Hamby, Stith, Grych, & Banyard, 2013; Schwartz, 2006). Given that anger is influenced by cognitive appraisal processes, effective emotional regulation may subsequently be related to how anger is experienced and expressed in professional situations.

Empathy is another important psychological concept in policing. Defined as an understanding of another person's emotional experience from his or her perspective, empathy entails a sense of affective responsiveness and a sense of cognitive perspective-taking (Paivio & Laurent, 2001; Davis, 1996; Baron, 2003). Empathy promotes prosocial behavior, constructive communication, and social bonding (Riess, 2017). Research suggests that empathy is not just an inborn trait but can

be developed from training and experience (Riess, 2011). Importantly, empathic engagement involves regulating one's own emotional responses, as without good emotional regulation the experience of emotionally significant situations may result in emotional self-harm rather than emotional responding-with empathy.

Theoretical perspectives like appraisal theory suggest that emotional experiences are caused by cognitive interpretation of events (Frijda et al., 1989). Differences in appraisal processes may be related to whether or not emotional arousal leads to constructive regulation rather than maladaptive expression. Within the context of policing, effective emotional regulation may support the regulation of anger and increase empathic responsiveness by helping officers to re-interpret stressful encounters and reducing emotional intensity. On the other hand, if anger is not well regulated, there is likely to be increased anger and less perspective taking.

Despite the training programs containing information on how to manage emotions such as empathy and anger, empirical research looking at how these constructs interlink (emotional regulation, anger management, and empathy) interact within police populations in Pakistan is limited. Most discussions of police reform are structural and administrative, with significantly less attention being paid to psychological competencies that influence day-to-day interactions. Considering that people continue to have specific concerns about aggression as well as misuse of authority, the study of emotional regulation as a predictor of anger management and ability to empathize are both important theoretically and for practical use.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The present study aims to:

- Assess the level of emotional regulation among the police officers.
- Measure the degree of anger management among the police.
- Examine the resentment of justice to the police officers
- Determine whether emotional regulation predicts anger management
- Determine if emotional regulation is predictive of empathy.

### **Hypotheses**

H1: Emotional regulation is positively related to anger management in police officers.

H2: Emotional regulation is positively related to empathy among police officers.

H3: The emotional regulation is a significant predictor of anger management of the police officers.

H4: Emotional regulation will have a significant predictive effect on empathy in police officers.

### **Rationale of the Study**

Emotional regulation, anger management, and empathy are the key competencies for efficient policing. Assessing these constructs within police populations in Pakistan may provide lessons to underpin evidence-based training interventions to enhance adaptive emotional control and constructive public interaction. By addressing the empirical study of emotional regulation as a predictive mechanism in the experience of anger management and empathy, the present study contributes to the psychological understanding of one's conduct as a police officer in a high-stress occupational setting as well as practical implications to institutional development and reform. Emotional regulation, anger management, and empathy are important competencies in police work. Assessing these constructs among the police populations in Pakistan may have implications for evidence-based training interventions for building adaptive emotional control and

constructive public interaction. By empirically investigating emotional regulation as a predictive mechanism of anger regulation and empathy, the present study is relevant to psychological knowledge of professional behavior in high-stress occupational settings and has practical implications for institutional development and reform.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

The present study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional correlational research design in order to analyze emotional regulation as a predictor of anger management, and empathy among police officers. Standardized self-report questionnaires were used to assess the study variables. The design was suitable for the investigation of associations and predictive relationships between psychological constructs in a natural occupational setting.

### **Participants**

The study sample consisted of 100 serving police officers recruited from police stations of the city of Lahore, Pakistan. Participants were aged between 35 and 40 years and were working at the level of Inspector and Sub-Inspector. Participants were limited to officers in the 35-40 years age group to minimise variability caused by early career adjustment and late career administrative positions. Officers in this age range are, on average, in mid-career, and actively engaged in their operational duties and public interaction. Limiting the sample to Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors ensured relative homogeneity in terms of supervisory responsibilities and field exposure to reduce the possible confounding effects associated with hierarchical differences in job role and decision taking authority. The sample consisted of officers who are currently on active duty assignments that involve public interaction and operational responsibilities. Participation was voluntary and all the respondents gave an informed consent before data collection.

### **Inclusion/ Exclusion Criteria**

Police officers were eligible to participate if they were (a) serving in the police department currently, (b) between 35 and 40 years of age, and (c) having the rank of Inspector and Sub-Inspector. Officers who were not available to participate during the data collection period or refused were excluded from the analysis.

### **Sampling Procedure**

Purposive sampling was utilized to approach the officers in selected police stations. After authorizing permission, the presence of officers was told the purpose of the study and were invited to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed before administration of the instruments. A total of 118 officers were approached for their participation. Of these, 100 officers agreed and completed the questionnaires, for a response rate of 84.7%. Participants had a mean age 37.2 years ( $SD = 1.64$ ). The average length of service was 12.4 years ( $SD = 3.10$ ) which we can assume would reflect significant levels of professional experience working within operational policing roles.

## **Measures**

### **Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)**

Emotional regulation was measured at the same time using the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire developed by Gross and John (2003). The ERQ is a construct that includes 10 items that were meant to give measures of individuals tendencies to regulate their emotions through

cognitive reappraisal or expressive suppression. Responses are recorded on a 7-point Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher the score, the more emotional regulation strategies are used. The scale was found to show good internal consistency in the current study ( $\alpha=.83$ ).

### **Anger Management Scale**

Anger management was assessed through the Anger Management Scale adapted from Hamby, Stith, Grych and Banyard, L. (2013). The version used in this study consisted of five items measuring the awareness and regulation of anger in different situation. Responses on question were collected on a Likert-type scale with increasing scores indicating greater anger management competencies. Internal consistency reliability in the current sample was acceptable ( $\alpha=.70$ ). Minor linguistic changes were developed to maintain the contextual validity in policing environments while retaining the original structure of the constructs. The adapted items were reviewed by two subject matter experts in clinical and occupational psychology to ensure face validity and clarity of the items. No structural changes were made to the scale and the response format was kept the same as in the original instrument.

### **Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ)**

Empathy was measured based on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire by Spreng et al. (2009). The TEQ contains 16 items of empathy as an emotional process. Items are scored on a Likert-type scale, such that the total score reflects a greater sympathetic tendencies. The scale showed reliable results in the current study ( $\alpha = .75$ ).

### **Procedure**

Prior to collecting data, permission was sought from the relevant authorities in the police department. Participants were contacted in their respective police stations and given a brief explanation of the purpose of this study. They were told that their participation was voluntary and responses would be confidential and anonymous. Informed consent was obtained, in writing, by each participant. Questionnaires were administered in a paper and pencil version and were individually completed. Sufficient time was allowed for participants to provide responses to all items.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study has been conducted as per the institutional ethical guidelines and was approved by the concerned departmental research committee. Permissives from police authorities were secured before the collection of data.

### **Statistical Analysis**

Data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 20. Descriptive statistics were calculated to investigate mean and standard deviation of study variables. Reliability analyses were performed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients as a measure of internal consistency of the scales. Pearson Product-Moment correlation analyses were conducted to investigate relationships between emotional regulation, anger management and empathy. In order to test the predictive role of emotional regulation a set of measures of anger management and empathy, regression analyses were performed to test whether or not emotional regulation had a significant predictive role regarding these outcomes.

## Results

Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 20. Descriptive statistics, reliability analyses, Pearson product–moment correlations, and linear regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationships among emotional regulation, anger management, and empathy.

### Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Means, standard deviations, and internal consistency coefficients for all study variables are presented in Table 1. All scales demonstrated acceptable reliability. Emotional regulation showed good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .83$ ), while anger management ( $\alpha = .70$ ) and empathy ( $\alpha = .75$ ) demonstrated satisfactory reliability.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Study Variables (N = 100)**

Variable	k	M	SD	$\alpha$
Emotional Regulation	10	33.84	4.48	.83
Anger Management	5	12.19	2.02	.70
Empathy	16	34.41	4.18	.75

Note.  $k$  = number of items;  $\alpha$  = Cronbach’s alpha.

### Correlation Analysis

Pearson product–moment correlations were computed to examine associations among the study variables. As shown in Table 2, emotional regulation was positively and significantly correlated with anger management,  $r(98) = .315, p < .01$ , and empathy,  $r(98) = .230, p < .05$ . The correlation between anger management and empathy was positive but not statistically significant,  $r(98) = .038, p > .05$ .

**Table 2: Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 100)**

Variable	1	2	3
1. Emotional Regulation	—		
2. Anger Management	.315**	—	
3. Empathy	.230*	.038	—

Note.  $p < .05^*$ ,  $*p < .01$ .

To provide both conceptual precision and comparability with prior research, two analytic models were estimated. First, a composite emotional regulation score was examined to assess the overall predictive association. Second, the two ERQ subcomponents (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression) were entered simultaneously to examine their distinct contributions. Retaining both models allows evaluation of global predictive effects as well as theoretically differentiated regulatory strategies.

**Table 3: Regression Analyses Predicting Anger Management and Empathy From Emotional Regulation Subscales (N = 100)**

Outcome Variable	Predictor	B	SE B	B	95% CI	p
Anger Management	Reappraisal	0.18	0.05	.31	[.08, .28]	< .01
	Suppression	-0.06	0.07	-.12	[-.19, .07]	.24
Empathy	Reappraisal	0.22	0.08	.27	[.06, .38]	< .01
	Suppression	-0.15	0.07	-.19	[-.29, -.01]	< .05

Note. CI = Confidence Interval.

The overall regression model predicting anger management from reappraisal and suppression was statistically significant,  $F(2, 97) = 6.41, p < .01$ , accounting for 12% of the variance ( $R^2 = .12$ ). The model predicting empathy was also significant,  $F(2, 97) = 7.02, p < .01$ , explaining 13% of the variance ( $R^2 = .13$ ). Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated acceptable tolerance values ( $> .70$ ) and variance inflation factors ( $VIF < 1.40$ ), suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern in the subscale analyses.

### **Regression Analyses**

To examine whether emotional regulation significantly predicted anger management, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. Emotional regulation significantly predicted anger management,  $F(1, 98) = 10.86, p < .01$ , explaining approximately 9% of the variance ( $R^2 = .09$ ). Emotional regulation was a significant positive predictor of anger management ( $\beta = .315, p < .01$ ), indicating that higher levels of emotional regulation were associated with better anger management. A second regression analysis was performed to determine whether emotional regulation predicted empathy.

Emotional regulation also significantly predicted empathy,  $F(1, 98) = 5.46, p < .05$ , explaining 5% of the variance ( $R^2 = .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [.01, .12]$ ). The effect size ( $f^2 = .05$ ) reflects a small effect size.

**Table 4: Regression Analyses Predicting Anger Management and Empathy From Emotional Regulation ( $N = 100$ )**

<b>Outcome Variable</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE B</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>F</b>
Anger Management	0.14	0.04	.315**	.09	10.86**
Empathy	0.21	0.09	.230*	.05	5.46*

Note. Emotional regulation entered as predictor.

$p < .05^*, *p < .01$ .

### **Summary of Findings**

The results indicate that emotional regulation is positively associated with both anger management and empathy among police officers. Furthermore, emotional regulation significantly predicts both constructs, supporting the proposed hypotheses that emotional regulation functions as a foundational psychological competency influencing emotional control and empathic responsiveness within policing contexts.

### **Discussion**

The present study examined emotional regulation as a predictor of anger management and empathy among police officers. Consistent with the proposed hypotheses, emotional regulation was positively associated with both anger management and empathy. Furthermore, regression analyses demonstrated that emotional regulation significantly predicted variance in anger management and empathy, supporting its role as a foundational psychological competency within policing contexts.

The positive association between emotional regulation and anger management suggests that officers who are better able to monitor and modify their emotional responses demonstrate greater control over anger expression. This finding aligns with theoretical perspectives emphasizing that effective regulation involves modulation of emotional intensity and appropriate expression in socially demanding situations (Gross, 1999; Rottenberg & Gross, 2007). In occupational environments characterized by provocation, hostility, and time pressure, the capacity to regulate emotional arousal appears critical for preventing maladaptive anger responses. Given that

unmanaged anger has been linked to aggression and misuse of authority (Averill, 1983; Tepper, 2007), strengthening emotional regulation skills may reduce the likelihood of excessive force and improve professional conduct.

Emotional regulation was also positively related to empathy, indicating that officers who effectively regulate their emotions report greater empathic responsiveness. Empathy involves both affective and cognitive components, including emotional responsiveness and perspective-taking (Davis, 1996; Baron, 2003). The ability to regulate personal emotional distress may enable officers to remain attentive to others' experiences rather than becoming overwhelmed by their own reactions. This interpretation is consistent with conceptualizations of empathy as requiring modulation of self-focused emotional arousal to facilitate prosocial engagement (Paivio & Laurent, 2001; Riess, 2017). In practical terms, emotionally regulated officers may be better positioned to engage constructively with victims, suspects, and community members. An additional noteworthy finding was the non-significant association between anger management and empathy. Although both constructs were positively related to emotional regulation, they were not directly related to each other. This pattern suggests that the ability to regulate anger does not necessarily translate into heightened empathic responsiveness. In policing contexts, anger control may reflect behavioral restraint and rule adherence, whereas empathy may involve affective attunement and perspective-taking processes that operate independently. It is also possible that institutional role demands encourage emotional control without necessarily fostering emotional engagement. This distinction highlights that anger management and empathy, although both emotionally relevant competencies, may represent partially independent pathways shaped by emotion regulation strategies rather than directly reinforcing one another.

Although emotional regulation significantly predicted both anger management and empathy, the proportion of explained variance was modest. This suggests that while emotional regulation is an important predictor, additional factors such as organizational climate, personality characteristics, and situational stressors may also be associated with anger control and empathic behavior. Nonetheless, identifying emotional regulation as a statistically significant predictor underscores its relevance within psychological models of police functioning. Beyond its applied implications, the present findings contribute theoretically by extending emotion regulation frameworks into a non-Western, high-risk occupational context. Much of the existing literature on emotional regulation has been developed and validated in Western civilian samples. By demonstrating that emotional regulation, particularly its reappraisal component, is statistically associated with both anger management and empathy in policing, this study supports the cross-contextual relevance of emotion regulation theory. The findings suggest that emotional regulation operates not merely as a personality characteristic, but as a professional competency embedded within occupational demands. This conceptual positioning broadens the application of emotion regulation models to institutional and organizational settings, particularly in environments characterized by chronic stress and public accountability.

From an applied perspective, the findings have implications for police training and professional development. Training programs that incorporate structured emotional regulation strategies may enhance officers' ability to manage anger and respond empathically in high-pressure encounters. Emphasizing emotional competencies alongside procedural training may contribute to improved police–community relations, particularly in contexts where public trust is fragile.

## **Limitations**

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference, and longitudinal research is needed to establish temporal relationships among the

variables. Second, reliance on self-report measures may introduce response bias, particularly in occupational settings where social desirability concerns are salient. Third, the sample was drawn from a single metropolitan area, which may limit generalizability to other regions.

Future research may benefit from incorporating multi-method approaches, including behavioral assessments or supervisor evaluations, to complement self-report data. Examining additional psychological and organizational predictors may also provide a more comprehensive understanding of factors influencing emotional control and empathy in policing. Additionally, because all variables were measured using self-report instruments administered at a single time point, the findings may be influenced by common method variance. Although anonymity and confidentiality were emphasized to reduce socially desirable responding, particularly in an occupational context where impression management may be salient, shared method variance cannot be fully ruled out. Future research employing multi-source assessments, temporal separation of measures, or behavioral indicators would strengthen causal inference and reduce potential method bias.

## **Conclusion**

The present study provides empirical evidence that emotional regulation is positively associated with anger management and empathy among police officers. Emotional regulation significantly predicted both outcomes; however, the magnitude of explained variance was modest, indicating that additional psychological and organizational factors likely contribute to these competencies.

These findings suggest that emotional regulation represents one meaningful component within a broader network of factors shaping emotional control and interpersonal functioning in policing contexts. While not exhaustive in explanatory power, emotional regulation may serve as a valuable target for professional development initiatives.

Future research employing longitudinal and multi-method designs is warranted to clarify the temporal and contextual dynamics of these relationships. Overall, the study contributes to the growing literature on psychological competencies in high-risk occupations by highlighting emotional regulation as a statistically significant, yet partial, predictor of anger management and empathy within Pakistani law enforcement.

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