

# A study on difference in aggressive behaviour of adolescents boys and girls

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■ **ABSTRACT :** The present study entitled “gender difference in aggressive behaviour of adolescents” was undertaken in the Ludhiana district of Punjab. The study was designed to compare aggressive behaviour of adolescent boys and girls across low and middle socio-economic strata. The sample comprised of 400 adolescents (200 boys and 200 girls) of the age group 13-17 years equally distributed over two different socio-economic strata *i.e.* low and middle (200 LSES and 200 MSES). Socio-economic status scale by Bharadwaj and Buss- Durkee aggression scale by Sultania, was used in this research study. Gender differentials revealed that adolescent boys were more assaultive, negative and verbally aggressive than adolescent girls, while girls were more suspicious than boys. Low socio-economic status boys outnumbered girls in expression of negative behaviour and verbal aggression. In middle socio-economic status boys are more assaultive than girls while girls are more irritative and suspicious than boys. Mean difference showed boys exceed girls in showing assaultive behaviour, negativism and expression of verbal aggressive while girls were more suspicious than boys. Two way interaction involving socio-economic status and gender in different dimensions of aggression showed boys with low socio-economic status had nearly same intensity of negativism as girls with middle socio-economic status followed by boys with middle socio-economic status. The lowest level of negativism was found in girls with low socio-economic status.

■ **KEY WORDS:** Aggressive behaviour, Adolescents, Gender

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**A**ggression is a form of behaviour characterized by physical or verbal attack. It may be directed outward against others or inward against the self, leading to self-destructive or suicidal actions. Kakar (1974) defines aggression as an attempt by an individual or group to inflict physical injury on another individual or group without the consideration of whether their

attempt was intentional or whether it was successful. Berkowitz (1993) defined aggression as any form of behaviour that is intended to injure someone physically or psychologically. The dictionary meaning of aggression is hostile or violent behaviour or attitudes. It is a disorganized emotional response. Operationally aggression may be defined in terms of frequent

quarreling, impulses of taking revenge and reactionary attitudes to traditions and beliefs. It is considered as a learned behaviour or as an act against frustration which is affected by various biological and environment factors.

Men and women in all cultures from the very moment of birth are perceived and treated differently. The tasks assigned to males and females vary to a great extent. There is no doubt that in almost all cultures boys received more reward and encouragement and less punishment for aggressive behaviour than girls do. In Indian culture if a girl or women talks loudly, laughs loudly and even walks fast, she is criticized by the family and society for her aggressive acts. On the contrary, many parents believe that the ideal boy should be able to fight back and defend himself when attacked. Boys are generally not made to feel guilty and anxious about aggressive behaviour as girls. During the pre-school years therefore boys are allowed to express more aggression than girls in play and fantasy. Fighting, physical attacks, negative behaviour, quarrelling, lying, verbal aggression argument, destructiveness and temper tantrum are more common among boys than among girls. In every society boys are allowed to express aggression to their frustrations or interference of goals, aspirations while girls are asked to tolerate frustration or withdraw from the situation. Women show more suppressed aggression and less overt aggression compared to the males (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1980).

Males often engage in physical aggression or “direct” form of aggression, females are more likely to exhibit “relational” aggression or “indirect” forms of aggression, such as exclusion of others from their social group and slander. Several research studies showed that males are often described as more physically aggressive and females as more relationally aggressive (Boulton and Underwood, 1992 and Sharp and Smith, 1991). In addition, some authors have argued that bullying serves to enhance peer group standing for males, whereas body image and appearance are important factor for female peer group status (Eder, 1995). Saudino (2003) reported that females are not necessarily less aggressive but they tend to show their aggression in less overt, less physical ways. Aggression in girls is often overlooked because it takes an indirect form. Women generally cope with anger and frustration in less violent ways. Women might mask their aggression through manipulation, silence, and exaggerated sweetness. However, over time, such coping

mechanisms, can lead to depression, disconnected relationships or even numbing behaviours such as overeating, drinking or drug use. Investigators have succeeded in disconfirming the long held belief that males are more aggressive than females (Buss, 1961 and Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974). Studies have shown that males and females aggress in different ways with males using physical aggression more than females, and females using indirect or relational aggression more than males (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995 and Lagerspetz *et al.*, 1988).

Socio-economic status of the family is an important factor which contributes to the behaviour development. There is an association between economic hardship and children’s problem behaviour, such as aggression. Experience of intense economic stress produces negative exchanges within the family. As negativity increases between the parents, short-tempered responses to children also increase (Skinner *et al.*, 1992). The aversive conditions of lower class life are important determinants of high rates of aggression. The restricting and controlling behaviour of parents is many times frustrating for the child and may culminate in aggression by the child (Mathur, 2004). Adolescents who are brought up in a low socio-economic status family may develop a variety of behavioural problems. These problems are caused by growing up in a socially and economically deprived family. As a result of continual financial squabbles at home, the adolescents themselves become aggressive.

## ■ RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted in Ludhiana district of Punjab state. The sample comprised of 400 adolescents (200 boys and 200 girls) in the age group of 13-17 years, equally distributed over two different socio-economic strata *i.e.* low and medium. The sample in the two socio-economic groups was equally distributed over both the sexes *viz.*, male and female.

**Tools used to conduct the investigation was as follows:**

### *Socio-economic status scale :*

Socio-economic status scale (Bhardwaj, 2001) was administered to select the respondents belonging to low and middle socio-economic status families.

### **Buss-Durkee Aggression scale :**

Buss-Durkee aggression scale was used for the assessment of aggressive behaviour of respondents. It is a self-report type of test which measures general aggression as well as various forms of aggression, such as assault, indirect aggression, irritability, negativism, resentment, suspicion, verbal aggression and guilt. The Hindi adaptation was done by Sultania (2006) for Hindi speaking population/sample. The scale consists of 67 items which measure eight forms of aggression like assault, indirect aggression, irritability, negativism, resentment, suspicions, verbal aggression and guilt. The inventory includes 59 items that measure hostility and 8 items measure guilt. Reliability determined by Spearman- Brown formula and test- retest method.

### **■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Table 1 showed gender differentials in level of aggressive behaviour in two different socio economic status *i.e.* low and middle socio-economic adolescents. The perusal of table reveals that in low socio-economic status the difference is discernible in negativism, verbal aggression and total aggression. In the negativism dimension, more number of girls showed low level of negativism while more boys showed high level of negativism. Boys outnumbered girls in showing high level of verbal aggression while more girls showed medium level of total aggression. More number of girls showed low level of total aggression while more boys showed medium level of aggression. Malhotra (2008) reported that aggression among children from a poor socio-economic background is a means for survival. Adolescents have been found to be more attracted to participating in violent or gang behaviour when they come from economically disadvantaged homes or communities have low self esteem or they are seeking revenge (Joe and Chesney, 1995).

In middle socio-economic status adolescents the difference is more distinct in the dimension irritability, suspicion. More number of girls showed high level of irritation while boys outnumbered girls in medium level of irritation. More proportion of girls showed high level of suspicion but low level of assault. The result is consistent with the findings of study of Boulton and Underwood (1992) who reported that males often engage in physical aggression and females are more likely to exhibit “relational” or “indirect” forms of aggression

such as irritation and exclusion of others from their social group. Gender difference is observed in medium level of total aggression where boys outnumbered girls. There is evidence that males are quicker to aggression (Frey, 2003; Coie and Dodge, 1997 and Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974) and more likely than females to express their aggression physically (Bjorkqvist *et al.*, 1994). Furthermore, there are gender differences in the seriousness of aggression. Males are more likely than females to commit more serious acts of aggression. Hadley (2003) studied male versus female aggression and concluded that males are more aggressive than females and from about four years of age onwards boys are more likely than girls to engage in aggressive and non- aggressive antisocial behaviour (Pepler and Craig, 1995). Although males often engage in physical aggression or “direct” form of aggression, females are more likely to exhibit “relational” aggression or “indirect” forms of aggression, such as exclusion of others from their social group and slander.

Table 2 portrays difference in mean scores of different dimension of aggression among boys and girls. The pervasive gender different was found in the dimension of assault, negativism, suspicion and verbal aggression. Boys exceed girls in showing assault (5.30 and 4.90, respectively), negativism (2.53 and 2.34, respectively) and expression of verbal aggressive (4.48 and 4.23, respectively) while girls (5.54) were more suspicious than boys (5.23) (Fig. 1). The result is consistent with findings of Jacklin (1974) who reported that males are generally more physically aggressive than females.

Males are generally more physically aggressive than females (Coie and Dodge, 1997 and Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974) and even they commit the vast majority of murders (Buss, 2005). Cumming *et al.* (1989) studied children’s responses to different forms of expressions of anger between adults. The study examined the responses to anger as a function of the mode of expression of anger (non-verbal, verbal and physical). The results showed that boys reported more angry feelings in response to anger than girls. This is one of the most robust and reliable behavioral sex differences, and it has been found across many different age groups and cultures. Both young and youth males and females are more likely to engage in aggressive behaviour and commit violent crimes between the ages of 14 and 24

**Table 1 : Gender differentials in level of aggressive behaviour**

Dimensions of aggression	Levels of aggression	LSES			MSES			Total Boys	Total girls	Z Value (Boys and Girls)
		Boys	Girls	Z value	Boys	Girls	Z value			
Assault	Low	10 (10)	11 (11)	-0.23	11 (11)	23 (23)	-2.26**	21 (10.5)	34 (17)	-1.335
	Medium	66 (66)	74 (74)	-1.23	75 (75)	66 (66)	1.40	141 (70.5)	140 (70)	0.077
	High	24 (24)	15 (15)	1.61	14 (14)	11 (11)	0.64	38 (19)	26 (13)	1.157
Indirect aggression	Low	11 (11)	9 (9)	0.47	8 (8)	9 (9)	-0.25	19 (9.5)	18 (9)	0.122
	Medium	77 (77)	86 (86)	-1.64	60 (60)	64 (64)	-0.58	137 (68.5)	150 (75)	-1.021
	High	12 (12)	5 (5)	1.77	32 (32)	27 (27)	0.78	44 (22)	32 (16)	1.081
Irritability	Low	5 (5)	15 (15)	-2.36*	12 (12)	10 (10)	0.45	17 (8.5)	25 (12.5)	-0.923
	Medium	78 (78)	73 (73)	0.82	79 (79)	64 (64)	2.35**	157 (78.5)	137 (68.5)	1.602
	High	17 (17)	12 (12)	1.00	9 (9)	26 (26)	-3.16***	26 (13)	38 (19)	-1.157
Negativism	Low	13 (13)	34 (34)	-3.50***	26 (26)	15 (15)	1.93*	39 (19.5)	49 (24.5)	-0.853
	Medium	70 (70)	60 (60)	1.48	52 (52)	61 (61)	-1.28	122 (61)	121 (60.5)	0.072
	High	17 (17)	6 (6)	2.44**	22 (22)	24 (24)	-0.34	39 (19.5)	30 (15)	0.842
Resentment	Low	13 (13)	10 (10)	0.66	12 (12)	7 (7)	1.21	25 (12.5)	17 (8.5)	0.923
	Medium	43 (43)	41 (41)	0.29	46 (46)	40 (40)	0.86	89 (44.5)	81 (40.5)	0.572
	High	44 (44)	49 (49)	-0.71	42 (42)	53 (53)	-1.56	86 (43)	102 (51)	-1.133
Suspicion	Low	8 (8)	13 (13)	-1.15	15 (15)	10 (10)	1.07	23 (11.5)	23 (11.5)	0.000
	Medium	84 (84)	75 (75)	1.58	84 (84)	83 (83)	0.19	168 (84)	158 (79)	0.911
	High	8 (8)	12 (12)	-0.94	1 (1)	7 (7)	-2.17**	9 (4.5)	19 (9.5)	-1.386
Verbal aggression	Low	22 (22)	29 (29)	-1.14	24 (24)	30 (30)	-0.96	46 (23)	59 (29.5)	-1.045
	Medium	50 (50)	62 (62)	-1.71*	61 (61)	53 (53)	1.14	111 (55.5)	115 (57.5)	-0.285
	High	28 (28)	9 (9)	3.46***	15 (15)	17 (17)	-0.39	43 (21.5)	26 (13)	1.591
Guilt	Low	17 (17)	8 (8)	1.92*	11 (11)	8 (8)	0.72	28 (14)	16 (8)	1.356
	Medium	75 (75)	79 (79)	-0.67	77 (77)	81 (81)	-0.69	152 (76)	160 (80)	-0.683
	High	8 (8)	13 (13)	-1.15	12 (12)	11 (11)	0.22	20 (10)	24 (12)	-0.452
Total aggression	Low	10 (10)	21 (21)	-2.15*	12 (12)	14 (14)	-0.42	22 (11)	35 (17.5)	-1.315
	Medium	74 (74)	61 (61)	1.96*	72 (72)	53 (53)	2.78***	146 (73)	114 (57)	2.372**
	High	16 (16)	18 (18)	-0.38	16 (16)	19 (19)	-0.56	32 (16)	37 (18.5)	-0.468

LSES: low socio-economic status; MSES: middle socio-economic status,

\*, \*\* and \*\*\* indicate significance of values at P=0.10, 0.05 and 0.01, respectively

**Table 2: Differences in mean scores of different dimensions of aggression among adolescent boys and girls**

Dimensions of aggression	Gender		F Ratio	SEM	CD
	Boys (Mean score)	Girls (Mean score)			
Assault	5.30	4.90	5.223**	0.101	.280
Indirect aggression	4.39	4.20	1.899	0.097	NS
Irritability	4.09	4.20	.586	0.097	NS
Negativism	2.53	2.34	2.765*	0.079	.219
Resentment	3.38	3.55	1.18	0.110	NS
Suspicion	5.23	5.54	3.766*	0.115	.319
Verbal aggression	4.48	4.23	4.082**	0.096	.243
Guilt	6.01	6.19	2.117	0.087	NS
Total aggression	35.39	35.21	.107	0.389	NS

\*, \*\* and \*\*\* indicate significance of values at P=0.10, 0.05 and 0.01, respectively

NS=Non-significant

years than at other ages, the onset for females tends to be two years earlier on average. Anderson and Bushman (2002) studied human aggression and reported that sex

difference have been consistently observed across cultures. Males typically exhibit greater levels of aggression than females. This behavioural difference has

**Table 3 : Two way interaction involving socio-economic status × gender in different dimensions of aggression**

Dimensions of aggression	Socio-economic status	Gender		F Ratio	SEM	CD
		Boys (Mean score)	Girls (Mean score)			
Assault	Low	5.47	5.21	0.209	0.142	NS
	Middle	5.13	4.74			
Indirect aggression	Low	4.02	3.86	0.047	0.138	NS
	Middle	4.76	4.54			
Irritability	Low	4.13	4.01	2.690	0.137	NS
	Middle	4.05	4.38			
Negativism	Low	2.67	2.03	16.724***	0.111	0.309
	Middle	2.38	2.65			
Resentment	Low	3.35	3.48	0.066	0.156	NS
	Middle	3.40	3.61			
Suspicion	Low	5.42	5.64	0.343	0.162	NS
	Middle	5.03	5.44			
Verbal aggression	Low	4.63	4.23	1.217	0.136	NS
	Middle	4.33	4.23			
Guilt	Low	5.85	6.23	2.614	0.124	NS
	Middle	6.16	6.14			
Total aggression	Low	35.54	34.69	1.479	0.551	NS
	Middle	35.24	35.73			

\*, \*\* and \*\*\* indicate significance of values at P=0.10, 0.05 and 0.01, respectively NS=Non-significant

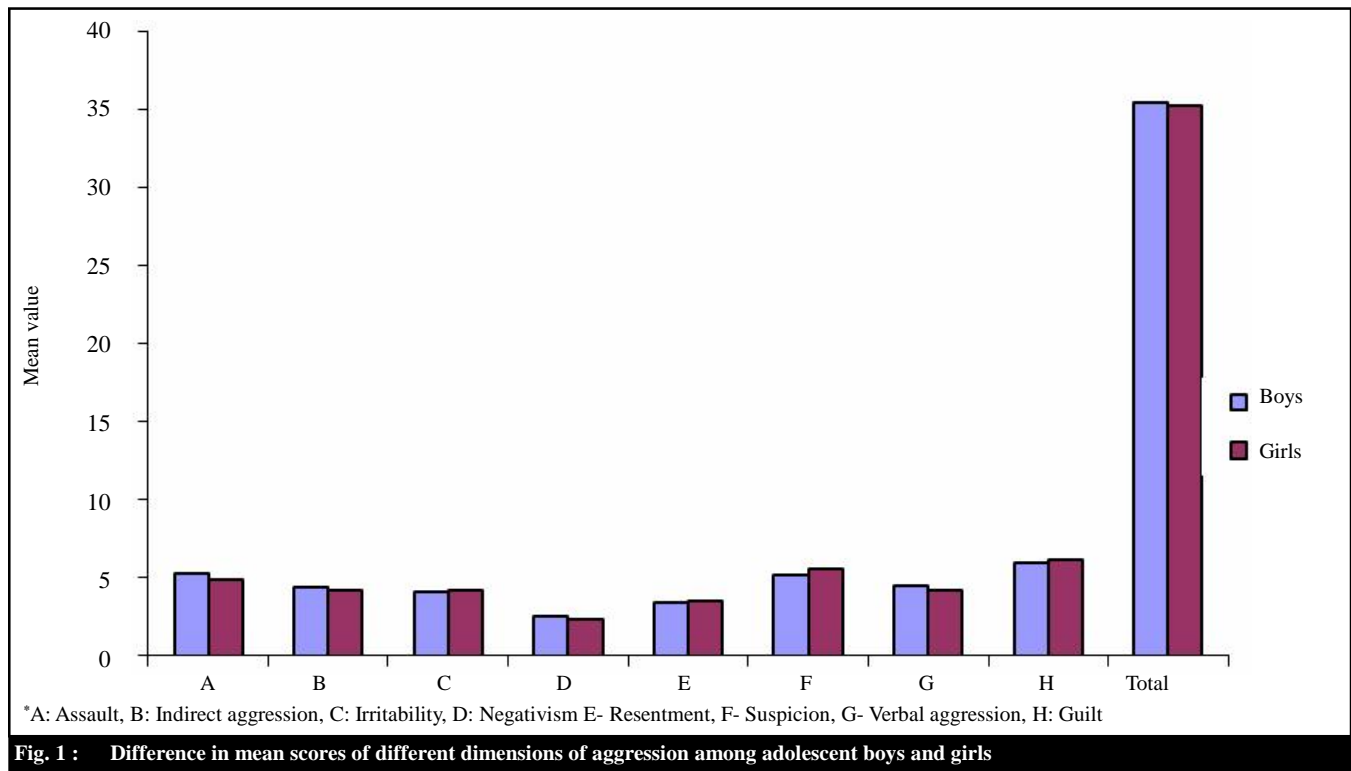


Fig. 1 : Difference in mean scores of different dimensions of aggression among adolescent boys and girls

been linked with higher levels of the hormone Testosterone.

Table 3 portrays a two way interaction involving socio-economic status and gender in different dimensions of aggression. The outcomes indicate pervasive significant difference ( $F=16.724$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) in the dimension of negativism. An investigation of mean score reveals that boys with low socio-economic status (2.67) had nearly same intensity of negativism as girls with middle socio-economic status (2.65) followed by boys with middle socio-economic status (2.38). The lowest level of negativism was found in girls with low socio-economic status (2.03). The result is consistent with findings of Jaana and Richard (1994) who reported that economic hardships produce frustration that affects adolescents. Adolescents from lower class family cannot fulfill their needs and are greatly restricted in their lives which lead to negative feeling in them. Girls with middle socio-economic status also showed higher level of negativism. The reason could be the coping style like silence, manipulation, depression or disconnected relationship used by most of the women. The other dimension of aggression showed non-significant difference.

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