

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

**PREVALENCE AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS OF RELATIONAL AGGRESSION IN EDUCATED ADOLESCENTS**

# SONIA MUKHTAR', ZAHID MAHMOOD2

Institute of Clinical Psychology, University of Management and Technology, Lahore

**CORRESPONDENCE: SONIA MUKHTAR,** E-mail: [sonia.mukhtar12@gmail.com](mailto:sonia.mukhtar12@gmail.com)

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# ABSTRACT OBJECTIVE

To estimate the prevalence and associated factors of educated adolescent'srelational aggression.

# STUDY DESIGN

Correlationalstudy

# PLACE AND DURATION OF THE STUDY

Thestudy wasconducted at University of Management and Technology,Lahore from 2015 to 2017.

# SUBJECTS AND METHODS

Asample(N=-400) selected through stratified sampling from public and private educational institutions of Lahore. Adolescents (n=200 boys and n=200 girls) completed (a) Demographic Performa, and (b) Diverse Adolescent Relational Aggression Scale (DARAS) to measure relational aggression from adolescents' perspective. Demographic analyses and Hierarchical Regression Analysis identified related factors and prevalence of relational aggression in educated adolescents.

# RESULTS

Hierarchical regression analysis indicted that age was a positive predictor of relational aggression. Results have also showed that institutional affiliation was found to be negative predictor of relational aggression as private institutions' adolescents demonstrated higher relational aggression. Moreover, fathers' education wasa positive and mothers' education was a negative predictor of relational aggression.

# CONCLUSION

Results helpin implementing interventions to promote the consolidation or increment of sources that constitutes an adolescent's networks arose as concrete and feasible actions.

# KEYWORDS

Prevalence of aggression, Counseling Implication, Cultural Issues

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# INTRODUCTION

Adolescent aggression has become moreprevalent for individuals, in their familial structure, peer group, academic setting and communities'·'. Relational Aggression (RA)can be defined asintentional behaviorscause to damage an individual with resolute interpersonal manipulation or public omission within the context of peer relationships'. In adolescent's perspective Merrell, Buchanan and Tran (2006) defined that relational

aggression is manipulating relationships to wield control over other child or impairing another child's relationships *by* damaging his or her friendships'.Relational aggression is the form of aggression that currently rangesbetween 10-20%'"'and seems cultivating in adolescence with high rapidity'·10•

Relational aggression is another fundamental problem after general aggression, and is one of the most common reasons for referring children to psychological health professionals". In adolescence, relational aggression increases the chance of becoming either aperpetrator or victim of relational aggression" and it is highly correlated with maladjustment and manipulative social interactions throughout in adulthood". Furthermore, earlier relational aggression could lead to severalemotional­ behavioralproblems and socialdisorderslaterin adulthood'',problemslike substance abuse, escalation from relational to verbal and physical aggression, anxiety and depression, suicide ideations, relationship issues with spouse, family and at workplace, and neglectful and abusive parental rearing styles"·". Many researchers have shown that those aggressive behaviors which are established in early childhood and adolescence are moresevere than those behaviorslearnedin adulthood1•.

The intention is the key to identify relational aggression in adolescents as the perpetuator adolescent want to cause harm to the victim adolescent could be the defining characteristic of relationally aggressive behaviors depicted either directly as in verbal confrontation or indirectly as in exclusion fromgroup,spreading rumors, and sabotaging relationships".In comparison to physical aggression or other indirect forms of aggression which aims to harm other person through physical display of anger as in hitting or socially threatening or insulting others", relational aggression distinguished itself as sabotaging social relationships in close friendships, for instance,ostracizing and exclusionof an adolescent fromapeergroup".

According to developmental approach to adolescent's psychology, aggression acts as a function of both individual factors (temperament, or biological factors) and socialstructure(parental rearing styles) 20• Culturally,

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boys are more likely to display physical aggression", girls, however, predominantly tends to display anger through relationally aggressive behaviors". Conversely, addressing gender differences, many researchers found that when it comes to relationally aggressive behaviors then there is no gender inclusive relational aggression, in a meta-analysis of 108 studies on indirect forms of aggression stated no significant gender difference". Moreover, besides gender differences, manyrisk factors have been identified in previousliterature, which includesyounger age,adolescence, family structure of living **with** younger siblings, paternal antisocial behaviors,parentaleducation andexternalized behaviors".Since the most effective programs to prevent relational aggression focuses on young age", identification of its prevalence and associated factors would help mental health professional, social service providers, academic administrations,parents, and community to have a better understanding of how much problematic relational aggression becomes for adolescents if not dealt properly. Thus, this study addresses the relational aggression as a less-known form of aggression, alongside its associated factors in a sample of adolescents attending academic institutes including schools and colleges.

# SUBJECTS AND METHODS

**Participants**

The sample was composed of 400 students with equalproportion of 200 public and private schools (n=l00 girls, n=l00 boys) and 200 public and private colleges (n=l00 girls, n=100 boys) through G­ Power analysis. Stratified sampling technique was employed to divide the sample intomain strata i.e. schools and colleges and later into public and private. Then these strata were divided into four substrata i.e. 9th and 10th from schools and 1st year and 2nd year fromcolleges.Lastly systematic random sampling was used to select the sample from each class. Inclusion Criteria was adolescents of Public and private school and colleges, irrespective of gender, with both parents alive and resided with. Exclusion Criteria was adolescents with one or both parents deceased or abroad or adolescentswho studied in non-school/college system.

# Measures

The Diverse Adolescent Relational Aggression Scale (DARAS) was developed by Horton (2010) for adolescents of age 14-19 years. It consisted of 28 itemsthat were used to assess relational aggression amongclosely associated relationships, thatis,family and friends. All items are positively worded to describe relationally aggressive

behaviors and influences(i.e.,It isokayto talkaboutsomeone behind their back).Items were scored on a 4-point Likert scale (1)*=*strongly disagree to (4)*=*strongly agree. It has high internal consistency with

Cronbach'salphacoefficientof .78(Horton,2010)'3.

A demographic perform basedon the research literature wasdevised to gather demographics information.

# Procedure

The research proposal was presented and approved from the Institute Graduate Committee (IGC) for the approval. In order to

assess the friendliness of English version of measure Diverse Adolescent Relational Aggression Scale, pilot study was conducted. For this purpose, official permission was taken from the author. Institutional permission was obtained in order to collect data from a randomly selected sample of school students. Since relational aggression was to be measured through self-report measure and being a culturally sensitive issue, language barrier was kept in to consideration. In English language, items were less intense and neutral as compared with possible translated version which may escalate chance of response biasness as a pilot study conducted at college and university students proven the friendliness of English version of the scale. This took 8-10 minutes administration of the measure for which neither an item proven to be redundant nor the difficulty level of items was beyond student's level of comprehension.

After the completion of main protocol, the next step was to collect data.For the purposeof data collection,different schools andcollege were contacted and the permission from the authorities was acquired. Out of 8 private schools and colleges and 6 public schools and colleges, four schools and colleges allowed to work with their students. Authorities were briefly explained about the purpose of research, its aims and objectives along with its duration of testing and maintenance of privacy and confidentiality. Further to maintain the record, written permission letters were provided from the Head of Institute of Clinical Psychology, University of Management and Technology.

After the permission was granted, the classes were randomly selected from the various sections. The adolescents were briefly explained about the purpose of research. They were ensured about the right to participation or withdrawal at any stage. It was assured that their information will only be used for research purposes with the maintenance of their confidentiality. Verbal instructions were delivered for the final protocol and administered on the group of class. They were requested not to leave any statement unmarked. After each testing, adolescents were encouraged to give their feedback and open for any query.

After the data collection, 415 filled forms were taken and 15 forms were discarded because of missed information, death of one/both parents or redundant forms. Data was entered into the SPSS-21 and analyzed.

# RESULTS

Results were produced using description analyses including mean, standard deviation, frequency and percentage of demographic characteristicsof the sample and Hierarchical Regression Analysis to predict asocial factors. The mean age of participants was 15.69 with standard deviation 1.71. Data was grouped though visual binning and divided in to two groups which were 12-15 and 16+.189 (47%) were between12to 15 years while211 (53 %) were16+. Age rangeof the participants was from 12-17 years. The sample was equally distributed to boysand girls. Asthe participantswere taken from9th, 10th, 1st and 2nd year, this table also showed their proportion. It indicated that total25% participantswere from 9th, 25%participants were from class 10th, 2S% from class 1st year and rest 25% were in 2nd year. Proportion of boys and girls was 50:50 in the sample taken





equally from private and public institutions. Equal proportion of participants was taken from private and public schools and colleges of9thand 10th, 1st and2nd year respectively.Family systemincludes two categories nuclear family system and joint family system. As shown in the table 1 that 65% were from nuclear family system and 35%were fromjoint family system.

Table I

Percentages and Frequencies of the Demogrnpbics Prope,ties of the Participants

(N=400)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Demographic Variables** | **Boys** | **Girls** | **Total** |
|  | */(%)* |  | *}'(%)* |
| **Gender** | 200 (50) | 200 (50) | 400(100) |
| **Age (Groups)** |  |  |  |
| 12 • 15 | 87 (43.5) | 102(51) | 189(47) |
| 16+ | 113(56.5) | 98 (49) | 211 (53) |
| **No. of Siblings** |  |  |  |
| 0-6 | 194 (97) | I95 (97.5) | 389 (97) |
| 7+ | 6 (3) | 5 (2.5) | 11 (3) |
| **Father's Education (years)** |  |  |  |
|  | 73 (36.5) | 40 (20) | 113 (28) |
| 7 - 13 | 75 (37.5) | 74 (37) | 149 (37) |
| 14+ | 52 (26) | 86 (43) | I38 (35) |
| **Mother's Education (years)** |  |  |  |
| 0·6 | 94 (47) | 43 (21.5) | 137 (34) |
| 7 · 13 | 61 (30.5) | 82 (41) | 143 (36) |
| 14+ | 45 (22.5) | 75 (37.5) | 120 (30) |
| **Family System** |  |  |  |
| Nuclear | 118 (59) | 140 (70) | 258 (65) |
| Joint | 82 (41) | 60 (30) | 142 (35) |

**Table 2**

Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Predictors of Relational Aggression in Adolescents (N=400)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Model** | **SEB** | **B** | **T** | **p** |
| Step I (R=.22,11.R'=.05) |  |  |  |  |
| Control Variables |  |  |  |  |
| Age | 1.05 | .19 | 2.27 | .02• |
| Step II (R=.26,11.R'=.07) |  |  |  |  |
| Age | 1.25 | .22 | 2.70 | .001\*\*\* |
| Institutional Affiliation | -2.48 | .12 | 2.60 | .001••· |
| Step IJI (R=.29,11.R'=.08) |  |  |  |  |
| Age | 1.29 | .22 | 2.77 |  |
| Institutional affiliation | -2.65 | .13 | 2.74 | .001... |
| Father's education | .24 |  | 2.35 |  |
| Mother's education | -.23 | .14 | 2.30 |  |

The above table indicates that in Step I, age was found to be a significant positive predictor of relational aggression, F (2, 397) = 10.7, p < .05. In Step II, age was found to a significant positive

predictor and institutional affiliation (student of private or

government institute) was found to be a negative predictor of relational aggression, F (3, 396) = 9.43, p < .05. In Step 111, age and

father's education was found to be significant positive and institutional affiliation and mother's education was found to be a

negativepredictor of relational aggression, F(5,394) =7.04,p<.05.

# DISCUSSION

Major issue in the academic institutions especially in schools and colleges are the students' interactions in the educational environment can sometimes turn aggressive"2'. In considerations with the influences and development of form of aggression, it is suffice to suggest that there is a progression from relational aggression to verbal aggression to physical aggression". Relational aggression perpetration and victimization have been found to be correlated over periods of several months "·" suggesting that the victim could eventually become a perpetrator; the two roles become reciprocal" and thus put themselves and others at further risk. Being the target of RA has recently been the main contributing factorin globalyouthsuicides'°.

Like present research's findings, previous researches have shown that 15-18 age adolescents reported victims and perpetrator of relational aggression". A theoretical perspective that explains adolescent's aggression is Social Information Processing (SIP) theory on the importance of social interactions for their influences on relationshipsand suggeststhat anadolescent process socialcuesin a way that influences their behavior in the social environment. With social-cognitive abilities, they better perceive the manipulative but sophisticated methods to withdraw from specific relationships".

Result with respect to maternal education, statistical difference was observed in predicting relational aggression as mother's education increases, interestingly the prevalence of relational aggression increased as well. Similar pattern was observed by Canadian researchers that mother who had higher degrees, their children showed high relational aggression as compared with less educated ones".Another study suggested thatrelational aggression was more prevalent among families who had high parental educational degrees2 15 This could support the current research's findings that relational aggression was more common among adolescents who had motherswithhigheducational degrees.

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Current research's findings showed that there is non significant gender difference in relational aggression in adolescents. Previous literature indicated significant gender difference on relational aggression in children but not among adolescents. Prinstein et al. (2001) found non significant gender difference in relational aggression among relational aggressors and victims in their investigated relationship between relational aggression and psychosocial problems among relational aggressors and victims".

Relational aggression may alsocontinueto be acommonstrategy for individual later in life and can be associated with adult psychosocial problems that would impair their relation with friends, colleagues, romantic relations and interfere their parenting styles". This makes understanding of relational aggression all the more imperative for identification,intervention and prevention purposes.



# LIMITATIONS

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There are few limitations also identified for the current research. Firstly, only self-report measures were included in the assessment of relational aggression. Secondly, data was only collected from adolescents, while teachers and parent's perspective could also provide in-depth insight regarding relational aggression's more factors. Thirdly, there are large numbers of adolescents in collectivistic culture like Pakistan; there could be more different expressions of relational aggression so exploring other provinces other thanPunjab wouldhelptoo.

# CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

More established analysis of social, emotional-behavioral problems can be identified by experienced mental health professionals, however, surroundings and setting have unquestionable role in maintaining relational aggression in adolescents. Thus, preventive interventions should centered around adolescents and their surroundings like family, school and peer group.However,parenting plays its role utmost and mothers have a very important role in adolescent's like and even development of emotional-behavioral problems like relational aggression. Nevertheless, for more effective approaches, a multidisciplinary team should work for adolescent's intervention programs at academic settings with developmental psychologists,counseling psychologistsand schoolcounselors.

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| **Sr.** | **Author Name** | **Attiliatlon** ol**Author** | **Contribution** | **Signature** |
| **1** | **Ms. Sonia Mukhtar** | VisitingFaculty,Institute olClinical Psychology. University of Management andTechnology, Lahore | Researchwork Articlewrrting | *gz* |
| **2** | **Pro1. Dr. Zahid Mahmood** | Director. InstituteofClinical Psychology, University of Management andTechnology, Lahore | Supervision Conceptualizatlon |  |

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