

Research Paper

## A Comparative Study on the Usage of Ego Defense Mechanisms between College Girls and Working and Non-Working Women

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### ABSTRACT

Ego defense mechanisms play a very important role in our day to day life. They are necessary to protect one's self esteem from conflicting situations. Girls and women nowadays face many frustrating situations around them everyday. They require ego defense mechanisms to protect their self integrity from these anxiety filled situations. Sigmund Freud gave a number of defense mechanisms, he structured the psyche into 3 parts: id, ego, superego. Ongoing work with defense mechanisms has led to the classification and measurement of various ego functions. There is no general agreement as to the number of defense mechanisms that should be distinguished. To conduct the survey Defense Mechanism Inventory (DMI) by Glesser and Ihelivich was used. The DMI is divided into cluster of mechanisms like Turning Against Object (TAO), Projection (PRO), Principalization (PRN), Turning Against Self (TAS) and Reversal (REV). The inventory consisted of 200 questions in total, which were respectively divided into 10 events. Each event consisted of 4 questions. A sample of 120 subjects were taken, out of which 60 were college going girls aged (19+) and 60 were working and non working women aged (31+). The result reflected that the most frequently used defense mechanism amongst girls (19+) was Principalization which implied that girls tend to try and control their feelings of anxiety. While the most frequently used defense mechanism amongst women was Reversal which implied that women try to respond in a positive or neutral way to conflict arising situations. Since there was a very nominal difference between the results of girls and women, it was concluded that age does not play a major difference in determining the usage of defense mechanism amongst girls and women. By and large females continue to use the same style of defense mechanism when in need to protect one's self esteem.

**Keywords:** *Usage of Ego Defense Mechanisms, College Girls, Working and Non-Working Women*

Defense mechanisms refer to an unconscious automatic psychological process which reduces the anxiety arising from a potentially harmful stimuli. The self is the synthesizing core of

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personality and any threat to its worth or sufficiency is a threat to the very existence of the individual. When an individual faces an anxiety filled situation the ego employs a range of defense mechanisms in order to reduce anxiety by distorting reality to save the self esteem and integrity. With reference to the psychoanalytical theory the use of defense mechanism is to contort reality in order to fight against anxiety and protect one's self-schema. According to John Coleman, the use of ego defense mechanism is essential for softening failure, reducing cognitive dissonance, alleviating anxiety and protecting feelings of sufficiency and personal worth. Defense mechanisms are often differentiated on the basis of how primitive they are. The more primitive a defense mechanism is the less effective it works over long term for a person. Although, more primitive defense mechanisms are usually very effective short-term, and hence are favored by many people and especially children. When adults don't learn proper coping mechanisms they often resort to such primitive defense mechanisms as well. Defense mechanisms are usually unconsciously used, i.e., people usually are unaware while using such defense mechanisms.

Defense mechanisms should be considered normal until and unless their interference increases to such an extent that it interferes with the maintenance of self integrity. They can be categorised into maladaptive and adaptive defenses. Maladaptive behaviour is a negative kind of behaviour which harms the individual. It uses coping mechanisms that are not productive. It hinders the development of the individual and causes increment of anxiety and tension. Adaptive behaviour allows individuals to adapt in a positive manner to various situations. It creates the condition where the individual can properly develop and grow. It is constructive and productive. Unlike maladaptive behaviours, they tend to reduce tension and anxiety.

Psychotherapy is a famous method used to help a person to become aware of what defines mechanisms they are using, how effective they are and how to use less primitive and more effective mechanisms in future. It also helps to focus on using adaptive defenses more than maladaptive defenses.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Sigmund Freud** gave a number of ego defense mechanisms which he refers to throughout his written works. One of Freud's single most enduring idea was that the human psyche has more than 1 aspect. He structured the psyche into 3 parts: id, ego, and superego.

It is the primitive animalistic component of personality and it works on the pleasure principle, which states that people seek pleasure and try to avoid pain.

The ego grows out of the id and is modified by the direct influence of the external world. It works on the reality principle according to which the individual seeks to satisfy his/her instinctual needs in accordance to the reality.

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Superego works on the moral principle. It develops around the age of 3-5 years during the phallic stage of psychosexual development and it incorporates the values learnt from the society and parents.

**Wayne H. Bovey, Andrew Hede**, (2001) 'Resistance to organisational change: the role of defense mechanisms', proposed a study investigating the role of both adaptive and maladaptive defence mechanisms in individual resistance. Surveys were conducted several organisations undergoing major change and responses were obtained from 615 employees. The results indicated that five maladaptive defence mechanisms are positively correlated with behavioural intention to resist change, namely, projection, acting out, isolation of affect, dissociation and denial.

**Robert Plutchik, Henry Kellerman, Hope R. Conte** proposed the assumption that defense mechanisms are related to an emotion in a dynamic and regulatory fashion, and that ego defenses are interrelated and have implications for adaptation in both an evolutionary and an ontogenetic perspective. The authors developed a model for interrelating defense mechanisms, emotions, and diagnostic concepts. They gave four pairs of basic bipolar emotions: fear-anger, joy-sadness, acceptance-disgust, and expectancy-surprise. These bipolar emotions vary in the degree to which they are similar to each other. Casual

**Michael Bond, Susan T. Gardner & John Christian** (1983) in their hypotheses assessed that defenses cluster so as to constitute 'styles' and that these styles can be ranked as more or less adaptive. Their sample comprised of 98 psychiatric patients and 111 non patients. The tools used were (1) a questionnaire measure of self-appraisal of defensive style, (2) a questionnaire measure of ego adaptation, and (3) a sentence completion measure of ego development. The results, argued strongly for the validity of a questionnaire measure of perceived defensive style, also showed that such defenses tend to cluster into styles that can be ranked on a developmental continuum, from "maladaptive action patterns," through "image-distorting" defenses, "self sacrificing" defenses, and "adaptive" defenses.

**Speisman, Joseph C Lazarus, Richard S. Mordkoff, Arnold Davison** in April 1964 proposed the theory of Experimental reduction of stress based on ego-defense. Their findings supported the importance of the process of cognitive appraisal of threat in producing stress reactions, permitting the conclusion that the same visual stimulus varies in the amount of stress produced depending upon the nature of the cognitive appraisal the person makes regarding its significance for him/her.

**Geoffrey M. Margo, Roger P. Greenberg, Seymour Fisher, Mantosh Dewan** gave a report presenting a direct comparison of defensive styles in a sample of depressed psychiatric inpatients and samples of nondepressed male and female normative groups. Consistent with the "depressive realism" literature, nondepressed men and women were more likely than their depressed counterparts to bias their perceptions in an overly cheerful, optimistic direction.

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Counter Normative sex differences were also found. Depressed men were more likely to use internalizing defenses and depressed women were more likely to use externalizing defenses than their respective nondepressed comparison groups.

**Gavin Andrews, Christopher Pollock, Gavin Stewart** gave the 'The Determination of Defense Style by Questionnaire' (1989). In this cross-sectional study, the vulnerability factors of neuroticism, locus of control, and defense style were all correlated with neurotic symptoms, but defense style added little to the variance explained by the other two. The sample group consisted of: a normal population, family practice patients, and patients with anxiety disorders. Within the patient group, however, neuroticism and locus of control did not distinguish among panic disorder, agoraphobia, social phobia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder, while defense style showed patterns characteristic of each disorder.

**John Pellitteri** gave the 'Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Ego Defense Mechanisms'. The author examined the relationship between the components of emotional intelligence and personality factors associated with adaptation, represented by the hierarchical model of defense mechanisms. Bivariate correlation analyses yielded mixed results; the adaptive defense styles were correlated with overall emotional intelligence but not with the emotional perception and regulation components, as was hypothesized. Emotional knowledge was correlated with both adaptive and maladaptive defense styles and with general intelligence, as was expected.

'The Development of Defense Mechanisms' by author **Phebe Cramer**(1987) proposed that defense mechanisms may be characterized as forming a hierarchy, from least to most complex, and that the lowest level defenses emerge early in life, while the more complex defenses emerge later in development. Three defenses—Denial, Projection and Identification—were chosen to test this assumption.

'Men's gender role conflict and use of psychological defenses' by **Mahalik, James R. Cournoyer, Robert J.DeFranc, William Cherry, Marcus Napolitano, Jeffrey M** (1998) hypothesized that men would report using psychological defenses to the degree they self-reported masculine gender role conflict. One hundred fifteen men completed the Gender Role Conflict Scale, the Defense Style Questionnaire, and the Defense Mechanism Inventory. Canonical correlations indicated that men experiencing greater rigidity about being successful, powerful, and competitive; expressing emotions; and expressing affection to other men used more immature psychological defenses and some degree of neurotic defenses. More specifically, these men tended to use defenses of turning against object and projection and tended not to use principalization and reversal. The discussion focuses on the effects of male gender role strain, implications for treatment, limitations, and future research.

**M. T. Whitty** wrote 'Coping and defending: Age differences in maturity of defence mechanisms and coping strategies'. This research examined age differences in the type of defence mechanisms and coping strategies that people employ. In addition, gender

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differences, personality, and environmental variables were taken into account. The youngest participants used significantly less mature defence mechanisms and significantly more immature defence mechanisms than the middle-aged and the oldest group. In contrast, there were no age differences revealed for effectiveness of coping strategies people employ. One further finding was that people with a higher purpose in life were more likely to use mature defence mechanisms.

Ongoing work with defense mechanisms has led to the classification and measurement of various ego functions. There is no general agreement as to the number of defense mechanisms that should be distinguished. Increased work with the ego defense mechanisms clearly points out that the defensive organization of the ego constitutes perpetuity and any attempt to sort out separate defense mechanisms is bound to be irrational.

**Bibring**(1950) on the basis of clinical study and experience noted 24 first order defenses and 15 second order or complex defenses.

**Cameron** (1963) reported 15 defense mechanisms while **coleman**(1964) describes 17 defense mechanisms.

Thus over the years many different defense mechanisms have been identified, some with minute differences. This led to many psychologists attempting to achieve a more frugal classification system. But, so far most of the authors have not provided definite criteria by which these mechanisms could be classified.

**Gleser and Ihilevich**(1969) worked independent of Freud to make their own classification of defense mechanism. They grouped the defenses into 5 categories. The basic ideology of their classification system was that the basic function of the defenses is to resolve the conflicts between the perception of the individual and his/her internalized values. The ego resolves such conflicts by a process wherein it attacks, distorts or becomes selectively unaware of certain aspects of the internal or external world. They proposed the Defense Mechanism Inventory. It has become popular as a reference tool in many studies. The Defense Mechanism Inventory is a paper pencil test which measure the relative intensity of usage of five major groups of defenses, is described. There are 2 versions of this inventory, one for males and another for females. The inventory consists of ten brief stories, two per conflict areas followed by four questions regarding the subject's actual behaviour, fantasy behaviour, thoughts and feelings in the situations described. Five responses embodying the five defences i.e., turning against object, projection, principalization, turning against self and reversal, are provided for each question from which the subject selects the most representative and the least representative of his/her reaction. the subject marks plus (+) for the response most representative of his/her reaction and a minus (-) for the least representative.

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SIGN	SCORE
+	2
-	0
Unmarked	1

**Gleser and Ihilevich's** cluster of defense mechanisms include:

**TURNING AGAINST OBJECT (TAO):** this class of defenses deals with conflict through attacking a real or presumes external frustrating object. Such classical defenses as identification with the aggressor and displacement can be placed in this category.

1. **Identification with the aggressor:** it is A focus on negative or feared traits. it is an unconscious process where a person adopts the perspective or behaviour patterns of a capture or an abuser
2. **Displacement:** Displacement is the redirection of an impulse (usually aggression) onto a powerless substitute target. The target can be a person or an object that can serve as a symbolic substitute. Displacements are often quite satisfactory and workable mechanisms.

**PROJECTION (PRO):** this includes defenses which justify the expression of aggression towards an external object through 1<sup>st</sup> attributing to it, without unequivocal evidence, negative intent or characteristics. it refers to Attributing one's thoughts or impulses to another person. In common use, this is limited to unacceptable or undesirable impulses. A broader definition of projection includes certain operations that allow for empathy and understanding of others.

**PRINCIPALIZATION (PRN):** this class of defenses deals with conflicts through invoking a general principle that “splits off” affects from content and represses the former. Defenses such as intellectualization, isolation and rationalization fall into this category.

1. **Intellectualization:** Here, the individual deals with emotional conflict or internal/ external stressors by the excessive use of abstract thinking or the making of generalizations to control or minimize feelings of anxiety or which are disturbing.
2. **Isolation:** It refers to the splitting-off of the emotional components from a thought. The mechanism of isolation is commonly over utilized by obsessive compulsives.
3. **Rationalization:** Rationalization refers to the offering of a socially acceptable and apparently more or less logical explanation for an act or decision actually produced by unconscious impulses. The person rationalizing is not intentionally inventing a story to fool someone else, but instead is misleading self as well as the listener.

**TURNING AGAINST SELF (TAS):** in this class are those defenses that handle conflict through directing aggressive behavior towards himself/herself. Masochism and autosadism

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are examples of defensive solutions in this category. it also implies redirecting towards oneself emotions that were originally directed towards someone else.

**REVERSAL (REV):** this class includes defenses that deal with conflict by responding in a positive or neutral way to a frustrating object which might be expected to evoke a negative reaction. it consists of converting what is passive into active. Defenses such as negation, denial, reaction formation and repression come under this.

1. **Negation:** it is a mental process in which a person formulates the contents of an unconscious wish into a negative form. The content of the wish finds expression in consciousness, yet the subject continues to disown it.
2. **Denial:** denial refers to the process of Failing to recognize obvious implications or consequences of a thought, act, or situation. it implies rejection of the fact that something is happening.
3. **Reaction Formation:** it refers Going to the opposite extreme; overcompensation for unacceptable impulses. Reaction formation is transforming an impulse or emotion into its opposite.
4. **Repression:** it is The involuntary exclusion of a painful or conflictual thought, impulse, or memory from awareness. This is the primary ego defense mechanism; others reinforce it. Repression is a way of pushing potentially disturbing content out of consciousness.

### METHODOLOGY

The methodology consisted of marking the responses by the subject with plus sign (+) were given the numerical value of two (2), those marked with a minus (-) sign scored zero (0) and the unmarked responses are given the value of one (1). According to the table given below, the serial wise item numbers were differentiated into the 5 different kinds of defenses. The inventory consisted of 200 questions in total which were divided into 10 events. Each event had 4 questions in which the subject had to mark her most preferred and least preferred answer. A cumulative score of each defense was calculated which gave us the degree of usage of each defense by the subject. The score for any 1 defense can range from 0-80 but the total sum of scores for the 5 defenses must be equal to 200.

SR.NO	DEFENSE MECHANISM	SERIAL WISE ITEM NUMBER	TOTAL
1.	Turning Against Object (TAO)	3, 6, 12, 20, 24, 28, 31, 37, 44, 49, 51, 60, 61, 67, 75, 77, 84, 88, 92, 97, 101, 108, 113, 116, 122, 130, 133, 136, 143, 150, 151, 158, 163, 167, 174, 180, 184, 190, 195, 198	40
2.	Projection (PRO)	1, 7, 15, 19, 22, 27, 33, 36, 43, 47, 52, 56, 65, 69, 71, 79, 82, 86, 93, 99, 105, 110, 111, 117, 123, 126, 135, 137, 144, 149, 155, 156, 161, 169, 173, 179, 181,	40

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SR.NO	DEFENSE MECHANISM	SERIAL WISE ITEM NUMBER	TOTAL
		188, 193, 200	
3.	Principalization (PRN)	5, 10, 14, 18, 21, 30, 32, 40, 43, 50, 54, 59, 64, 68, 74, 78, 85, 89, 94, 96, 103, 106, 115, 118, 125, 129, 132, 139, 141, 148, 152, 159, 162, 170, 172, 178, 182, 186, 194, 199	40
4.	Turning Against Self (TAS)	4, 8, 11, 17, 25, 29, 35, 39, 45, 46, 55, 57, 63, 70, 72, 76, 81, 90, 95, 100, 102, 109, 114, 119, 121, 127, 134, 138, 142, 147, 153, 160, 165, 166, 171, 177, 183, 187, 191, 197	40
5.	Reversal (REV)	2, 9, 13, 16, 23, 26, 34, 38, 41, 48, 53, 58, 63, 66, 73, 80, 83, 87, 91, 98, 104, 107, 112, 120, 124, 128, 131, 140, 145, 146, 154, 157, 164, 168, 175, 176, 185, 189, 192, 196	40

The test-retest reliabilities for the five defenses range from 0.80 to 0.92.

TAO= 0.86

PRO= 0.80

PRN= 0.82

TAS= 0.87

REV= 0.92

### ***Research Design***

Research design is purely and simply a framework from study that guides the collection and analysis of the data. The research is based on 'quantitative data analysis'.

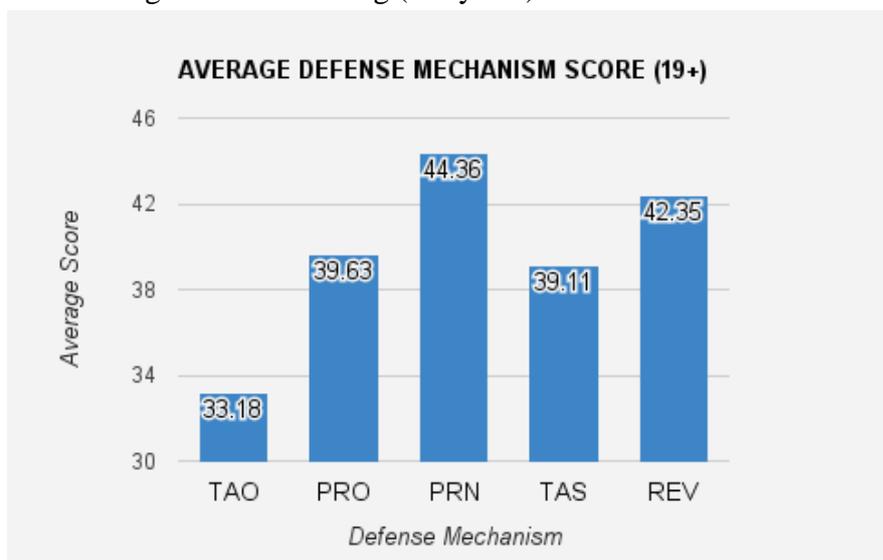
### ***Sample***

The DMI test was conducted amongst college and working females. the total sample size included 120 female subjects out of which 60 were college-going (19+years) and 60 were working females (31+years).

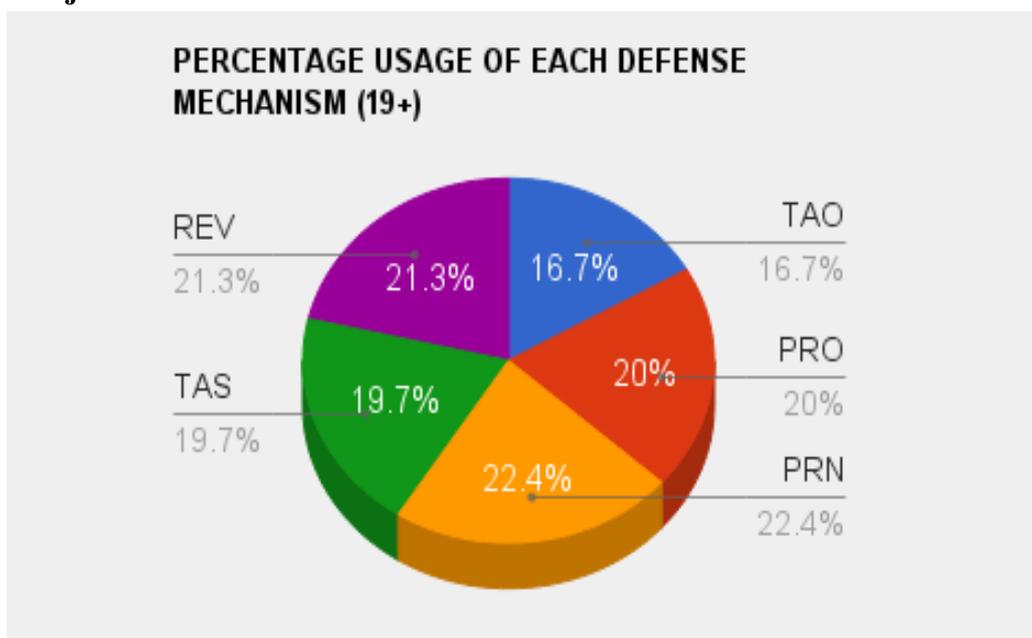
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### RESULT

The test was conducted comparing the results of the defense mechanism used by **college (19+years) girls** and working and non-working (31+years) women.

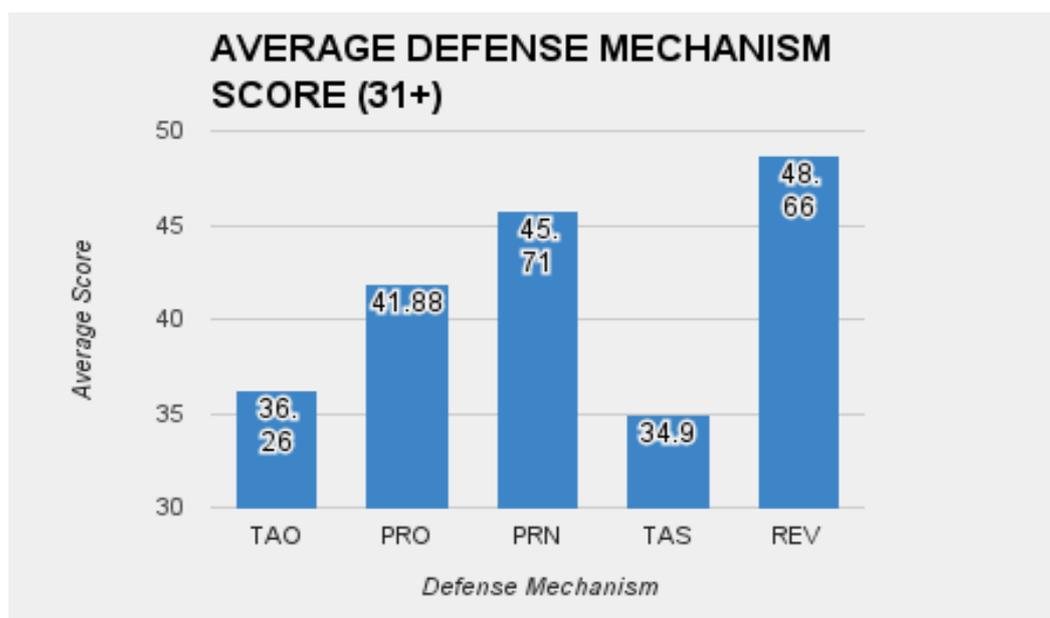


In **college girls (19+years)** the study showed that the average score of each defense mechanism when rounded off was **33.18** for **Turning Against the Object**, **39.63** for **Projection**, **44.36** for **Principalization**, **39.11** for **Turning Against Self** and **42.35** for **Reversal**. The above data reflects that the most frequently used defense mechanism amongst girls is **Principalization**. And the least used defense mechanism is **turning against object**.

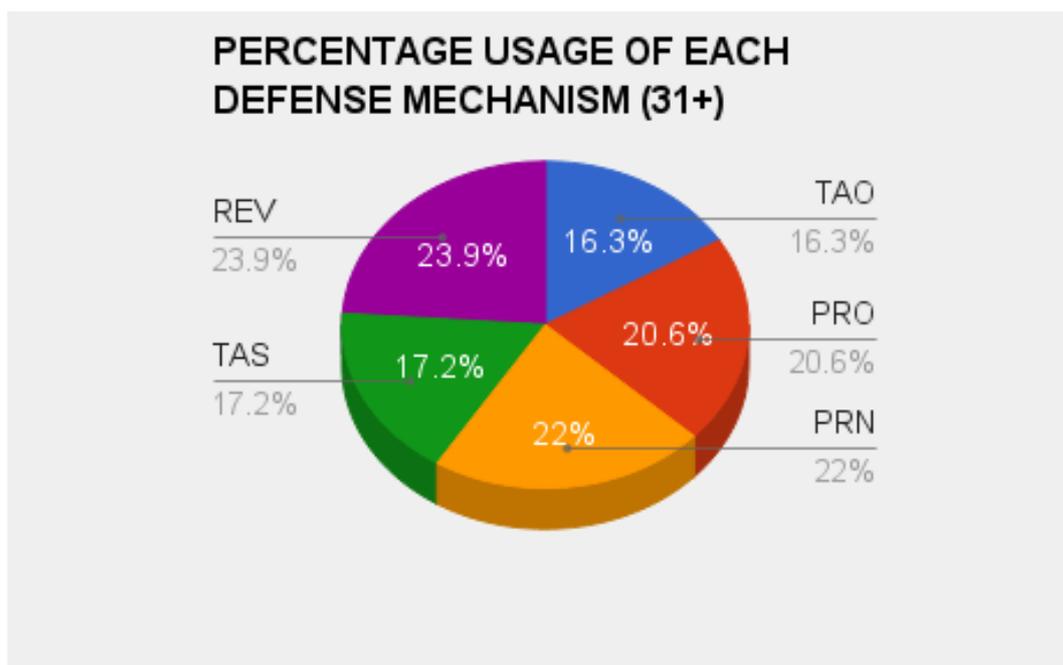


The percentage of usage of each defense mechanism in girls (19+years) is **16.7%** for **TAO**, **20%** for **PRO**, **22.4%** for **PRN**, **19.7%** for **TAS**, and **21.3%** for **REV**.

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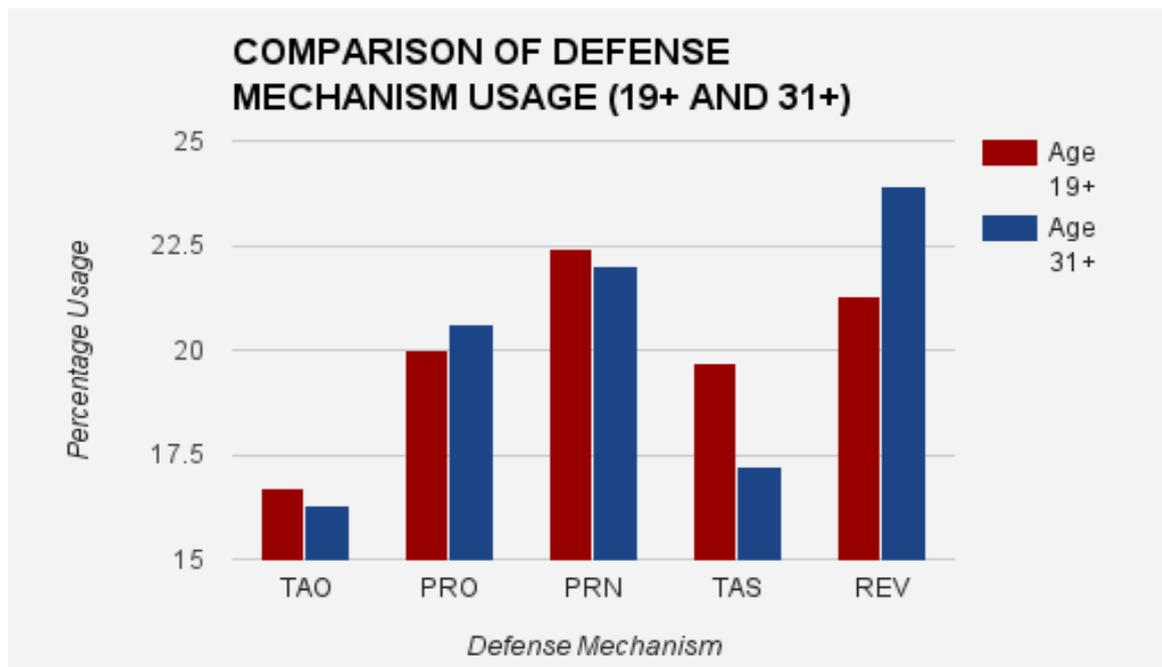


In working and non-working women (31+years) the study showed that the average score of each defense mechanism when rounded off was **36.26** for **Turning Against the Object**, **41.88** for **Projection**, **45.71** for **Principialization**, **34.9** for **Turning Against Self** and **48.66** for **Reversal**. The above data reflects that the most frequently used defense mechanism amongst working and non-working women is **Reversal**.and the least used defense mechanism is **Turning Against Self**.



The percentage of usage of each defense mechanism in working and non-working (31+years) is **16.3%** for **TAO**, **20.6%** for **PRO**, **22%** for **PRN**, **17.2%** for **TAS**, and **23.9%** for **REV**.

## CONCLUSION



The above graph is a comparison of the defence mechanisms used by girls aged (19+) and women aged (31+).

The graph reflects that the most frequently used defence mechanism amongst girls is (19+) is **Principialization** while the most frequently used defence mechanism amongst women is **Reversal**.

This shows that girls tend to control or minimize feelings of anxiety or which are disturbing; they also split off the emotional components from a thought and try to offer socially acceptable or more logical explanation for any act or decision.

While by using reversal women tend to respond to conflicting situation in a positive or neutral way instead of giving a negative reaction. They also tend to formulate the contents of an unconscious wish into a negative form, they deny or fail to recognize implications of anticipation, they overcompensate the acceptable impulses and also tend to repress any painful or conflicting thought.

On comparison we discovered that in the first 3 defenses, i.e., TAO, PRO and PRN, there is a very marginal difference between the results of girls and women. While in TAS and REV there is a substantial difference between the two.

The marginal difference in the first three indicate that, age does not play a major role in the usage of defense mechanism between girls and women.

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Girls tend to use TAS comparatively more than women, which indicate that they handle conflict by directing aggressive behaviour towards themselves. In women REV is used more than girls who indicate that they deal with conflict by responding in a positive or neutral way which might be expected to evoke a negative reaction.

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