

Research Paper

Relationship of Relational Aggression with Attachment Styles among Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The role played by attachment of child to parent towards enhancing positive relations among children cannot be over-looked since children who display aggressive behaviors often experience a disruption with their primary caregivers. The objective of the study was to access the relationship between relational aggression and attachment styles among adolescents. The study was based on Attachment theory by Bowlby (1973). For the purpose of data collection, the 210 students from class 8th-12th were selected through Quota sampling method and the sample was distributed between both the gender (105 male students & 105 female students). The Pearson correlation and t -test used for the statistical analysis. It was found that r value of the relationship between relational aggression and attachment style came out to be 0.605 which is highly significant at $p < 0.01$. There were higher chances for adolescents having anxious-insecure attachment are more likely to engage in relational aggression. The significant score for relational aggression for female students came out to be (M=57.00, SD= 16.87) whereas for male students the mean score was (M=51.15, SD= 13.78) and the t value came out to be 2. 75 which is significant at both the levels ($p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$). Thus, it could be concluded that attachment type and gender are two factors that can have a strong impact on the child's relational aggression behavior. The study recommends that the County Government should consider organizing programs aimed at sensitizing parents and care-givers on the importance of parent roles and attachment. It also recommends that Institutes for Curriculum Development to include best attachment type in the curriculum content.

Keywords: Attachment Style, Relational Aggression, Male –Female Adolescents

Relational aggression can be considered to involve any type of behavior or action that is interpersonally related and has a negative influence on a child or adolescent's relationship with his/her peers (Putallaz & Bierman, 2004). This type of aggression can be indirect, usually involving a third party, or direct, involving a one-one-one interaction. Relational bullying is also known as relational aggression, and is interchangeable within direct and social aggression. Relational aggression includes rumor spreading, criticizing behind one's back, social isolation (ignoring peer), sarcasm, embarrassment in public, subtle-

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nonverbal expressions of disdain (mean-mugging/staring meanly), threats to withdraw friendship based on some request, and popularity hierarchy struggles (attempts at diminishing peers social status) (Archer & Coyne, 2005) Xie, Swift, Cairns B., and Cairns, R., (2002) define relational aggression as behaviors that damage a child's friendships or feelings of inclusion by the peer group. Behaviors such as social exclusion/isolation, withdrawing or threatening to withdraw or end a friendship, gossiping, spreading rumors, ignoring, stopping talking to a friend, spreading gossip and rumors by email, etc. Evidence has shown that relational aggression may create just as much or more damage than physical aggression among youth (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Attachment is defined as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1969), and may be considered interchangeable with concepts such as "affectional bond" and "emotional bond." Attachment is a special emotional relationship that involves an exchange of comfort, care, and pleasure. Attachment styles are characterized by different ways of interacting and behaving in relationships. The concept of attachment styles grew out the attachment theory and research that emerged throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Today, psychologists typically recognize three main attachment styles. First is the, Secure Attachment when Children become visibly upset when their caregivers leave and are happy when their parents return. When frightened, these children will seek comfort from the parent or caregiver. Second is the Ambivalent Attachment in which Children are extremely suspicious of strangers. These children display considerable distress when separated from a parent or caregiver, but do not seem reassured or comforted by there turn of the parent. In some cases, the child might passively reject the parent by refusing comfort, or may openly display direct aggression toward the parent. Third is the Avoidant Attachment; these Children tend to avoid parents and caregivers. This avoidance often becomes especially pronounced after a period of absence. These children might not reject attention from a parent, but neither do they seek out comfort or contact. Children with an avoidant attachment shown preference between apparent and a complete stranger.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Li et al., (2015) conducted a study titled as "Indirect aggression and parental attachment in early adolescence: Examining the role of perspective taking and empathetic concern". The study examined the unique and interactive roles of parental attachment and empathy in indirect aggression during early adolescence. A sample of 6301 early adolescents (49.2% boys and 50.8% girls) in urban China, aged from 11 to 14 years, completed self-administrated measures of parent-adolescent attachment, empathy, and indirect aggression. Results indicated that perspective taking was negatively associated with indirect aggression, and empathetic concern was not related to indirect aggression. Hierarchical regression analysis revealed that perspective taking moderated the association between empathetic concern and boys' indirect aggression. The findings highlighted that empathetic concern might not be a sufficient protective factor of indirect aggression for boys with low levels of perspective taking during early adolescence.

Mukhtar and Mahmood (2018) conducted study that examined the moderating role of perceived social support between perceived parenting styles and relational aggression (RA). A sample ($N = 400$) was selected through stratified sampling from public and private schools and colleges. Adolescents ($n = 200$ boys and $n = 200$ girls) completed. Statistical analyses showed that perceived social support moderated the relationship between perceived parenting styles and RA. Findings indicated that perceived social support strengthens the negative relationship between perceived father's Overprotection parenting and RA. Results also showed that perceived social support strengthens positive relationship between perceived father's Anxious Rearing parenting and RA. Moreover, perceived social support

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strengthens the positive relationship between perceived mother's Rejection parenting and R.A.

Kokkinos, Algiovanoglou and Voulgaridou (2019) conducted the study titled as "Emotion Regulation and Relational Aggression in Adolescents: Parental Attachment as Moderator". This study explores the relations between the functional subtypes of relational aggression (proactive and reactive) and difficulties with emotion regulation (cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression). Further, it examines the moderating role of parental attachment including parental availability and dependency in these associations. Participants of the study were 518 Greek junior high school students (50% girls), aged between 12 to 16 ($M = 13.66$, $SD = 1.13$) who completed a self-report questionnaire. The results showed that expressive suppression holds a positive association only with reactive but not with proactive relational aggression, while low maternal attachment security was linked to both proactive and reactive relational aggression. Moderation analyses also revealed that at low levels of perceived dependency on father the expressive suppression was negatively associated with student's engagement in proactive relational aggression.

Monique S and Yoshito (2019) did the study that investigated the association between attachment insecurity and relational aggression among emerging adults in Guam with relational interdependence and gender as moderators of this association. The authors proposed that highly insecure individuals are more likely to be relationally aggressive, especially if they are relationally interdependent and female. One hundred ninety-nine emerging adults (67% female) were recruited from a public university in Guam. The results demonstrated anxiously attached males exhibited high levels of relational aggression when highly interdependent, whereas anxiously attached females showed high levels of proactive relational aggression when low in relational interdependence. In other words, anxiously attached individuals enact relational aggression depending on their levels of relational interdependence and gender.

Vagos and Carvalhais (2020) studied the impact of adolescents' attachment to peers and parents on aggressive and pro-social behavior based on short term longitudinal study. This short-longitudinal study analyzed the cross-sectional and longitudinal pathways linking adolescent's quality of attachment to parents and peers and their practice of aggressive and prosocial behavior; it also explored the moderation effect of gender on those pathways. A total of 375 secondary school students (203 girls and 172 boys), aged between 15 and 19 years old, completed the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment and the Peer Experience Questionnaire - Revised twice, within a four-month gap. Using a path analyses approach, results showed that aggression and prosocial behavior were the strongest predictors of themselves overtime. These effects held stable for boys and girls, though gender-based differences were found in mean levels of attachment to peers and social behaviors.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

To study the relation of relational aggression with attachment styles among adolescents.

Objectives

- To study the relationship of relational aggression on adolescents showing attachment styles.
- To study the gender differences on attachment styles and relational aggression.

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Hypothesis

- **H1:** There will be significant relationship between relational aggression and attachment styles among adolescents.
- **H2:** There will be significant gender differences on relational aggression among adolescents.

For the purpose of data collection all the 210 students belonging to various schools of NCR region from class 8th-12th. The sample was distributed equally between both the gender (105 male adolescents & 105 female adolescents). The present research consisted of one independent variables: Relational Aggression and two Dependent variable: Attachment Styles, Gender Consent was taken before the participants were asked to be a part of the research. The students were also asked to fill in certain Demographic details. The inclusive criteria include the age range of 13-18 years of literate adolescents. It also includes the urban setting, private schools and also includes the adolescents with no medical and psychological illness history. The exclusive criteria include the adolescents with medical and psychological illness history and also the adolescents from urban government schools and the rural areas. The tools were administered one by one and all the instructions were explained to the students. The students were instructed that there were no right or wrong responses. In the end they were thanked for giving their valuable time and efforts.

The questionnaire was scored as per the procedure described in the manual. The instruments used were as follows:

- **Measure of Attachment Style (MOAS):** This scale was constructed of 27 items were tested on a sample of 1000 individuals. Each item was rated on 5-point Likert type rating scale ranging from 1 “Strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. The higher score shows the dominant attachment pattern.
- **Diverse Adolescents Relational Aggression Scale:** The Diverse Adolescent Relational Aggression Scale consisted of 28 items and was worded positively to describe relational aggression behaviors and influences, and were scaled in a four-point Likert format: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree.

After the completion of the test, the total scores were calculated for each questionnaire. Subsequently, mean, standard deviation and t score were calculated which were then analyze using Pearson Correlation and t-test.

RESULTS

Table 1: Correlations between relational aggression and attachment style.

		Relational Aggression	Attachment Style
Relational Aggression	Pearson Correlation	1	.605**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	210	210
Attachment Style	Pearson Correlation	.605**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	210	210

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

Table 1 shows the correlation between relational aggression and attachment style for both the gender. The results were indicative of a significant positive correlation between both the

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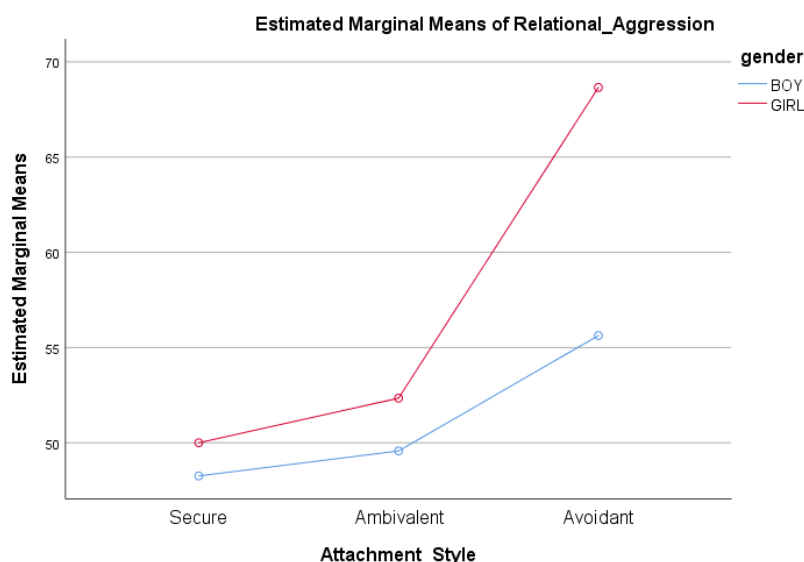
variables (relational aggression and attachment style valued $r = .605$). The correlation is significant at 0.01 confidence interval level.

Table 2: t test statistics

Group Statistics						
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T
Relational Aggression	GIRL	105	57.00	16.879	1.647	2.750
	BOY	105	51.15	13.781	1.345	2.750

Table 2 shows the gender differences in relational aggression among adolescents. The t-value came out to be 2.75 which is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 confidence interval level.

Graph: Relational Aggression means differences of gender.



After organizing and summarizing the data obtained in the research investigation in a systematic form and then applying the appropriate statistics is a must to reach the essence of scientific approach. The result indicated the following: there is a significant relationship between attachment style and relational aggression and gender differences be significant on relational aggression.

DISCUSSION

Attachment styles are characterized by different ways of interacting and behaving in relationships. Whereas relational aggression refers to harm among social relationships caused by covert or hidden bullying or manipulation. The aim of the research is to study the relationship of relational aggression with attachment styles and gender differences on relational aggression among adolescents. Our study has focused on studying how parent-child attachment type and gender can have an impact on the relational aggression of the individual. For this purpose, a sample of 210 students was selected. The students belonged to classes 8th-12th. The sample included 105 male students and 105 female students from various schools in NCR region. The sample was selected through Quota sampling. All participants (sample units) belonged to Delhi region. Two tests were administered on all the students which are as follows, Measure of Attachment Style (MOAS) and Diverse Adolescents Relational Aggression Scale. Statistics used for the sample was Pearson's correlation and t-test.

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Findings of the study indicates

Hypothesis 1 stated that there will be significant relationship between relational aggression and attachment style. The results were indicative of a significant moderate positive correlation between both the variables relational aggression and attachment styles value $r = .605$. The correlation is significant at the level ($p < 0.01$). There were higher chances for adolescents having anxious-insecure attachment are more likely to engage in relational aggression. In anxious-insecure attachment, the child can't rely on their parents to be there when needed. Because of this, the child fails to develop any feelings of security from the attachment figure. Hypothesis 2 stated that there will be significant gender differences on relational aggression among adolescents. This is tested through t test. For the following hypothesis it was found that females are more likely to engage in relational aggression as compared to males. The significant score for relational aggression for female students came out to be ($M=57.00$, $SD=16.87$) whereas for male students the mean score was ($M = 51.15$, $SD = 13.78$) and the t value came out to be 2.75 which is significant at both the levels ($p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$). Thus, in particular there are significant gender differences in relational aggression among adolescents. Therefore, we are accepting all hypotheses and have been proved that hypothesis 1 to be true and significant at 0.01 level and hypothesis 2 to be true and significant at 0.05 and 0.01 level. Our results are also validated in various researches that are done in the past. Hence it is proven that, male and female students both having different types of attachment styles have distinct chances to engage in relational aggression.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This research intends to identify what is the role play of parent-child attachment type and gender as a characteristic that influences an adolescent who indulges in relational aggression behaviors. From the studies in the past and logical behavior pattern, the students who have a higher tendency to exhibit relational aggression, also, have avoidant or insecure attachment type. On these lines, we would have expected that student participants (sample units) who have shown less tendency for relational aggression, to have secure attachment type. Another major finding of the research was that a relational aggression behavior differences was found in the gender wise (females have shown a higher degree of relational aggression behavior as compared to their males' counterparts). Finally, it was also observed that relational aggression and attachment type also have a significant impact on one another.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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