

## Exploring the Influence of Familial Relations on Relational Aggression in Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

Families are the foundational unit of an individual's life, for the first few years after birth a child, parents, and family are the only existing environment to observe and learn from. It is during their young adult age that they start to display their individuality, relational aggression a form of covert and hidden way to cause damage to other people has been a rather unnoticed, less researched area of study, A study on 200 Indian young adults found a significant relationship between familial relationships and relational aggression. Males had higher levels of proactive damage in context with cohesion and reactive damage and ignore in context to expressiveness. Females had higher levels of reactive and proactive damage and ignore in the conflict dimension. However, there were no significant correlations in expressiveness and conflict dimensions. The study highlights the importance of understanding the relationship between familial relationships and relational aggression in young adults to better understand and address this issue.

**Keywords:** *Familial Relations, Family Relationship Quality, Cohesion and Conflict, Relational Aggression, Proactive Aggression, Reactive Aggression*

Familial relations are intricate and dynamic intertwining between the members of a family, i.e. parents, siblings, or extended relatives, these connections are crucial to development and growth of an individual. These bonds hold considerable control over the identity of an individual, i.e. who we are, what we are to become, our values, beliefs, and Behavior. While a strong and positive bond can foster belongingness, stability and emotional support and serve as a mechanism of social learnings, i.e. societal norms, values, and other social skills, it is to be believed that in the case of the contrary, opposite is likely to happen as children learn and mirror the Behavior they observe. Family by structure can be just the core unit, i.e. mother, father and children; a nuclear family or a joint family that is with the extended members too, here each member has a set role, and it has overall become one influence on each individual. Family bonds are studied in three contexts here, i.e. cohesion, expressiveness, conflict.

Relational aggression is a covert form of aggression often passing unnoticed. First coined by **Crick and grotpeter (1995)**, Relational aggression is a form of aggressive Behavior where

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relationships or friendships are used as a means of harm through the use of tactics like malicious gossip, rumours, exposing secrets as well as intentionally ignoring the victim i.e. silent treatment or active exclusion of one individual from all the group interactions as suggested by **Crick & Grotpeter;1995**. This study tests relational aggression on two initial types that further divide into two each. **Reactive relational aggression** which is a response to a perceived threat or provocation aimed at restoring self-esteem after an attack, and **proactive relational aggression** which involves causing harm to achieve personal goals like gaining social dominance, these actions are often well planned and thought out. These two types are further divided into **Reactive Damage** that involves active and deliberate actions aimed at straining or harming one's relationships, reputation or social standing in response to perceived threat, offense, these are retaliatory actions. **Proactive Damage** these are the deliberate and strategic actions that involve spreading rumors, gossip, and manipulation aimed to strain/damage someone's social standing or relationships aimed to weaken the victim's position within the community, **Reactive Ignore**, these are the deliberate actions of excluding or ignoring instead of direct confrontation of any sort usually aimed at isolating the individual in response to perceived threats or offense to one's standing or status, thereby exerting power and control over the social dynamics, **Proactive Ignore**, these behaviors include actions like disregarding or ostracizing deliberately even without any reason or provocation. This can be understood as a behavior aimed at maintaining social dominance or control.

Relational aggression by nature is very covert and dormant and manifests slowly through time, through manipulating relationships and friendships it can cause great harm to others. This study aimed to understand how familial relations affect relational aggression, mainly its development and effect on both genders (male and female).

Psychologists and sociologists have long studied the role of familial relations in individual development, with effective communication being a key determinant of healthy family functioning, as stated by **Duhl, F.J:1981**. The importance of family has been well-emphasized in a study by **Stephenson, smith:1987** it was found that children who were involved in delinquency, bullying, or showed hyper-aggression were highly likely to be having issues at home. **Symister, p., & friend;2003** linked in a study to improve self-worth, in its potential promoting optimism, mental health, and positive Behavior while also possibly causing aggression. **Connolly, I., and O'Moore, M.;2003** stated that a negative family environment can lead to children exhibiting higher levels of neuroticism, extraversion, and psychoticism, with emotional inhibitions and more negative self-sentences. **Merz, E.M., Consedine, et. al. ;2009** pointed out that family relations are consequential for every individual's personality and development, the intergenerational support acts as a part of a structure that supports the well-being of both generations in a parent-child relationship. Relationship quality was the strongest indicator of the well-being of the two generations. **Syed, Moin & Inge Seiffge-krenke; 2013** stated that parents, who are developmentally advanced and proximal to their children's ego development when challenged cognitively in a supporting environment, the growth in their ego excellent.

Relational aggression involves the use of relationships for the purpose of causing harm through tactics like malicious gossip, rumors, and ignoring victims as suggested by **Crick & Grotpeter;1995**. A pattern of findings in a study done on Amazon children showed that relational aggression may be influenced by group interaction structure and dynamics, controlling the group activities and support. The concept of social authority and control is introduced stating them as key elements in the manipulation of group relations. **Crick,**

**Ostrov & Werner; 2006** identified in their work relational aggression as both proactive and reactive functions inked with adjustment issues such as rejection from peers and conflict among students. **Crick et al,2007; Crick et al.,2006;** stated that relational aggression could be seeded as early as three years old and then develop in a more sophisticated pattern through the course of life. **Card et al., 2008.** Claimed relational aggression to be a more sophisticated form of manipulation that requires a deeper understanding of the other person's mental state. **Leff, S.S., Waasdorp, T.E., & Crick, N.R. (2010);** suggested in their research that females may be more likely to exhibit relational aggression due to the importance and value of close peer relationships, they may prefer expression of aggression in a way that damage the peer connections as they are also more affected by relational conflict. This study also connects relational aggression with issues like maladjustment, social isolation, and avoidance of school. Relational aggression has been better studied in the past couple of decades, as a more covert/ hidden form of non-physical aggression and has been referred to by different names like social aggression or indirect aggression, suggests **Voulgaridou, I., Kokkinos, C.M.;2015.**

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

#### *Purpose*

This work aimed to evaluate the impact of family relations on relational aggression in young adults. In addition, it also focuses on whether there is a gender-based difference among young adults displaying relational aggression.

#### *Objective*

- To evaluate the relationship between familial relations and relational aggression in both genders.

#### *Hypothesis*

- H1: A higher level of cohesion among family members would lead to low reactive aggression levels in both genders.
- H2: A higher level of expressiveness would lead to a lower level of proactive aggression in both genders.
- H3: The level of conflict would be directly proportional to both types of relational aggression.
- H4: Females are more likely to show higher proactive relational aggression than the male population.
- H5: Males are more likely to show higher reactive aggression than females.

#### *Variables*

- **Familial relations:** familial relations are the close bond between individuals and their families, here family refers to not just their close core bonds but also distant relatives. **Faizah, S.N. (2023)** describes the family as foundational to creating social identity,
- **Relational aggression:** Researchers defined relational aggression as a covert form of aggression that uses friendships and other close bonds as a means of harm, first introduced as recently as in 1995 by Crick and Grotpeter.
- **Gender:** this study only used male and female data samples.

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### Sample

The purposive sampling method is a method to collect data in this study, with a sample size of 200 people. i.e. 100 male, 100 female all selected sample were young adults i.e. people aged 18 to 25.

### Instruments

- **Brief Family Relationship Scale (BFRS):** The brief family relationship scale used in this research is an adaptation from the family environment scale (FES) Moos & moos, 1994, relationship dimension (27-items). The BFRS consists of 3 subscales, that are cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict. The 3 subscales measure support, levels of negative conflict, expression of opinion, and freedom of expression.
- **Young Adult Relational Aggression Scale (YARAS):** Developed by Dahlen, Clark & McCann (2014), the YARAS is a 38-item scale, measuring peer relational aggression in young adults, the scale has 2 subscales i.e. reactive and proactive with both of them further diving into 2 associated functions i.e. Reactive damage (relationship/ reputation), reactive ignore/ exclude and proactive damage (relationship/reputation), proactive ignore/ exclude.

### Procedure

This study used a form created by compiling the above-mentioned tools, demographic questions, and consent form this form was then given to the participants i.e. among people of appropriate criterion and proper instructions were given and they were asked to fill out the form within the appropriate time frame.

### Scoring

- **Brief Family Relationship Scale (BFRS)** is a 27-item scale marked on a 4 Likert scale, here i.e. 0 to 3 ranging from “strongly agree” to strongly disagree.
- **Young Adult Relational Aggression Scale (YARAS)** is a 38-item scale marked using a 7 Likert scale ranging from “not true at all” to “very true for me”.

## RESULTS

Table No.1 Descriptive Stats (N=100)

	Mean		Std. Deviation	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Reactive Damage	22.37	21.59	14.93126	14.17074
Reactive Ignore	19.57	21.13	8.83891	9.58709
Proactive Damage	21.91	17.44	12.16228	6.87892
Proactive Ignore	16.52	16.25	9.76851	9.27947
Cohesion	6.58	6.17	4.15162	4.98088
Expressiveness	3.91	3.46	2.09904	2.76858
Conflict	8.45	9.37	4.40472	4.21315

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**Table No.2 Correlation Table**

	Male			Female		
	Cohesion	Expressiveness	Conflict	Cohesion	Expressiveness	Conflict
Reactive Damage	.383**	.199*	.276**	0.046	0.18	-0.042
Reactive Ignore	.396**	.221*	0.103	.222*	0.056	-0.142
Proactive Damage	.395**	.226*	.207*	.238*	0.1	-0.023
Proactive Ignore	.367**	0.065	.381**	.315**	0.127	0.081

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

\*. *Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

The study revealed a strong that there is indeed a significant relationship between familial relations and relational aggression in both males and females, in the **cohesion dimension**, positive correlation was found between cohesion and all form of relational aggression for male and females. In, the males, the correlation ranged from **0.046 to 0.238**, indicating a moderate positive association between cohesion and relational aggression factor. In females, the correlation ranged from **0.046 to 0.238**, showing a slight weaker association compared to males. In **expressiveness dimension**, positive correlation was observed, in the males, correlation ranged from 0.199 to 0.226 while in females, correlations ranged from 0.056 to 0.238. The findings suggested higher levels of expressiveness within the family are associated with increased levels of relational aggression. Lastly in the **conflict** dimension positive correlations were found between conflict and relational aggression in the males ranging from 0.276 to 0.381, indicating moderate to strong positive association. In females, correlation ranged from -0.042 to -0.142, suggesting a slightly weaker association compared to males.

Here, higher levels of cohesion expressiveness, and conflict within the family may be linked to increased levels of relational aggression in both genders. the strengths of these associations however vary between the genders

**Table No. 3 Regression Analysis**

Dependent Variables	Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R	STD. error of estimation
<b>Male</b>					
Reactive damage	1	.441a	0.195	0.17	13.60621
Reactive ignore	2	.398a	0.158	0.132	8.23526
Proactive damage	3	.423a	0.179	0.154	11.18995
Proactive ignore	4	.493a	0.243	0.22	8.62855
<b>Female</b>					
Reactive damage	1	.198a	0.039	0.009	14.10418
Reactive ignore	2	.298a	0.089	0.061	9.29222
Proactive damage	3	.251a	0.063	0.033	6.76277
Proactive ignore	4	.317a	0.1	0.072	8.93827

*Note:* Predictor: (Constant) M Conflict, M Expressiveness, M Cohesion Predictor: (Constant) F Conflict, F Expressiveness, Cohesion.

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In the **male**, the reactive damage showed there was a moderate level of explanatory power, with an R-squared value of 0.195. This suggests that approximately 19.5% of the variance in reactive damage can be explained by the predictors (cohesion, expressiveness, conflict). The reactive Ignore with males yielded an R-squared value of 0.158, suggesting that approximately 15.8% of the variance in reactive ignore can be explained by the predictors. The proactive damage showed an R-squared value of 0.179, suggesting that approximately 17.9% of the variance in proactive damage can be explained by the predictors, The Proactive demonstrated the highest explanatory power, with an R-squared value of 0.243. This indicates that approximately 24.3% of the variance in proactive ignore can be explained by the predictors. Among the females, The **Reactive Damage**, showed a relatively low explanatory power, with an R-squared value of 0.039. This suggests that only approximately 3.9% of the variance in reactive damage can be explained by the predictors. The **Reactive Ignore**, yielded an R-squared value of 0.089, indicating that approximately 8.9% of the variance in reactive ignore can be explained by the predictors. The **Proactive Damage** showed a very low explanatory power, with an R-squared value of 0.063, suggesting that only approximately 6.3% of the variance in proactive damage can be explained by the predictors. The **Proactive Ignore** demonstrated a slightly higher explanatory power compared to other factors, with an R-squared value of 0.1. This indicates that approximately 10% of the variance in proactive ignore can be explained by the predictors.

### DISCUSSION

This study found a significant correlation between familial relational and relational aggression; to be specific both males and females showed varying degrees of correlations across different aspects of relational aggression. Here, Descriptive statistics revealed relationships between familial relation factors and relational aggression, while correlation tables revealed gender differences. Regression analysis was used to assess the predictive power of these factors. A potential gender variation was noted in the descriptive statistics, a positive correlation with proactive damage was noted in both genders suggesting an increase in aggression however this relationship was not significant enough in females in the **cohesion** dimension a specific positive correlation with reactive damage in both males and females, and a positive correlation between cohesion and proactive damage, suggesting that higher cohesion may lead to increased damage. Similarly, in the **expressiveness** dimension positive correlations with proactive damage in both genders. higher expressiveness is linked to increased proactive damage. This, however, contradicted the H2, that expressiveness may not always protect against aggression. It was also seen that there is a positive correlation between family conflict and increased levels of relational aggression, affecting both males and females in both reactive and proactive damage, contrasting the H3. The regression analysis, here, supported H4, indicating that females may have a tendency to exhibit higher levels of proactive damage compared to males, indicating a higher level of relational aggression, particularly in causing harm or manipulating social relationships. This result aligns with existing literature suggesting that females may engage in more relational aggression than males, particularly in the form of proactive behaviors. It was also noted that there were no significant differences in reactive aggression levels in both the males and females suggesting that both genders may experience similar levels of reactive aggression, contrasting H5. The role of familial relations in individual development has long been studied by psychologists and sociologists, emphasizing effective communication as a key factor in healthy family functioning (**Duhl, F.J., 1981**). The family environment plays as much of a crucial role in shaping individuals and their Behavior and attitudes, with research showing that issues such as delinquency or aggression in children may have underlying family issues (**Stephenson & smith, 1987**).

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The present study adds to the body of existing literature through an examination of familial relations on relational aggression in young adults, this study proposed hypotheses based on existing theories and findings in the field. The present study however revealed some unexpected findings that might need further research and discussion. Unlike the expectations, the correlation analysis did not show a significant relationship between conflict in the family and relational aggression. These finding in turn contradicts previous research suggesting that conflict may contribute to the development of aggressive Behavior (**Connolly & O'Moore, 2003**) here, it is possible that other factors unaccounted for in the present study may mediate the relationship between conflict and relational aggression.

The regression analysis supported the hypothesis that females may be more likely to exhibit higher levels of proactive relational aggression compared to males, the finding aligning with the previous research highlighting the gender differences in relational aggression patterns (**Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010**). However, the regression analysis did not signify the differences in reactive aggression levels between males and females. This result also challenges the stereotype that males are more prone to reactive aggression compared to females while suggesting that both genders may experience similar levels of reactive relational aggression in the familial context. Correspondingly, the correlation analysis showed positive correlations between expressiveness and proactive damage for both genders, highlighting that higher levels of family expressiveness within the family may not always help against aggression.

These findings give an insight into the depth and complexity of the relationship between relational aggression and familial relations, which are also backed by some existing studies, for example **Peovska, N.,2021** stating that family is one of the most important factors in fostering violent behavior in children. According to the findings, many family characteristics are related to fostering aggressive behavior in children, family functioning, the relation between the members, and more the result highlighting the importance of gender-based consideration, a more tailored approach of addressing the issues and nuances in familial dynamics while trying to examine the predictors of relational aggression. Here, with the male population, the interventions may need to address the family dynamics; they need to encourage healthy family dynamics while addressing maladaptive coping strategies that might manifest in any form of aggression. Interventions for females might need to emphasize alternative doors for emotional expression and conflict resolution given there was a significant lack of association between familial factors and relational aggression. In addition to that interventions aimed at improving family functioning might be beneficial to reducing risks of relational aggression among young adults. In the context of limitations, in the present study, here seems to be lack of its generalizability of the findings due to the sample not to being broad enough to be representative of bigger populations which in turn hampers its ability and limiting the generalizability here. the future, more research needs to be conducted on a broader population using different research designs to further understand the dynamism of familial influence on relational aggression, and gender-based differences while exploring possible moderators of these relationships (like coping styles or peer pressure).

## CONCLUSION

The study found a noteworthy correlation between familial relational and relational aggression, with both males and females exhibiting a varying degree of correlation across different aspects of relational aggression. Descriptive statistics revealed relationships between familial relation factors and relational aggression, while correlation tables revealed

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gender differences. Regression analysis was used to assess the predictive power of these factors. A potential gender variation in descriptive statistics was marked with a positive correlation to proactive damage in both genders suggesting an increased aggression, this relationship however, was not significant enough in females. The regression analysis supported the hypothesis that females may exhibit higher levels of proactive damage compared to males, indicating a higher level of relational aggression, particularly in causing harm or manipulating social relationships. There were, however, no significant differences in reactive aggression levels in both males and females, suggesting that both genders might experience similar levels of reactive aggression. The correlation analysis showed positive correlations between expressiveness and proactive damage for both genders, highlighting that higher levels of family expressiveness within the family may not always help against aggression. The limitations of the present study mainly include its lack of generalizability due to the sample not being broad enough to be representative of larger populations. Future research should focus on broader populations using different research designs to further understand the dynamism of familial influence on relational aggression and explore possible moderators of these relationships. In addition to that interventions aimed at improving family functioning might be beneficial to reducing risks of relational aggression among young adults.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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