

## Gender differences in physical and verbal aggression among adolescents

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines gender differences in physical and verbal aggression among adolescents. A sample of 100 students (50 males, 50 females) aged 15–18 years was selected through purposive sampling from secondary and higher secondary schools. The Physical Aggression and Verbal Aggression subscales of the Buss–Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) were administered. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the t-test. Results revealed that male adolescents scored significantly higher on physical aggression, whereas female adolescents scored significantly higher on verbal aggression ( $p < 0.01$ ). These findings align with prior research indicating that males tend toward direct, overt aggression, while females more often engage in indirect or verbal forms.

**Keywords:** *Adolescents, Gender Differences, Physical Aggression, Verbal Aggression*

Aggression among adolescents is a major concern in developmental psychology due to its implications for mental health, peer relationships, academic performance, and long-term social adjustment. It is commonly defined as behavior intended to harm another individual physically or psychologically (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Among the various forms of aggression, physical aggression involving direct bodily harm such as hitting, kicking, or fighting and verbal aggression involving hurtful speech, insults, threats, or derogatory remarks are two of the most studied categories (Buss & Perry, 1992). Understanding the gender differences in these aggression types is essential for tailoring preventive interventions and addressing the distinct needs of male and female adolescents.

### *Physical Aggression and Gender*

A consistent finding across cultures is that adolescent boys tend to engage in higher levels of physical aggression compared to girls. This pattern is supported by large-scale cross-national studies. For example, Nivette et al. (2018), in a study of 63 low- and middle-income countries, found that boys were more than twice as likely as girls to report involvement in physical fights during the previous year. These differences are often explained by both biological and social factors: testosterone levels during puberty have been linked to heightened aggressive tendencies in males (Book et al., 2001), while gender socialization encourages boys to display assertiveness and dominance through physical means (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

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### *Verbal Aggression and Gender*

The picture for verbal aggression is more nuanced. Some studies report that boys also engage more in overt verbal aggression than girls (Archer, 2004), while others find that girls may equal or even exceed boys in certain contexts, particularly in indirect verbal aggression using language to socially exclude or demean without direct confrontation (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992). A study in rural West Bengal by Chowdhury et al. (2013) found that while boys were more physically aggressive, girls engaged more in verbal indirect passive aggression, such as spreading rumors or making sarcastic comments. These patterns suggest that while boys may favor direct verbal confrontations, girls may use verbal aggression in subtler forms to navigate social conflicts while avoiding physical risks.

Both physical and verbal aggression have serious developmental consequences. Persistent physical aggression in adolescence is linked to delinquency, school dropout, and criminal behavior in adulthood (Huesmann et al., 2002). Verbal aggression, while often underestimated, can cause significant psychological harm, leading to depression, anxiety, and lowered self-esteem in victims (Wang et al., 2011). Longitudinal studies indicate that adolescents who engage heavily in verbal or relational aggression are at increased risk of social maladjustment and poor peer relationships (Crick et al., 2006).

Research shows that same-gender parental hostility maternal hostility toward daughters and paternal hostility toward sons is strongly associated with aggression in adolescence (Underwood et al., 2001). Peer group dynamics can further reinforce gender-typical aggression; boys often receive peer approval for physical dominance, while girls may gain social leverage through verbal manipulation or relational exclusion (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). Cultural factors influence these patterns as well. In collectivist societies, where overt conflict is discouraged, verbal aggression especially indirect forms may be more common among girls, while in individualistic cultures, direct verbal and physical aggression may be more socially tolerated in both genders (Takahashi et al., 2002). However, globalization and changing gender norms are blurring these distinctions, with some studies noting increased physical aggression among girls in urbanized settings (Leadbeater et al., 1999).

The research suggests that boys tend to engage more in physical aggression, while gender differences in verbal aggression are context-dependent, with boys often favoring direct forms and girls more likely to use indirect verbal strategies. These patterns are shaped by biological, evolutionary, social, and cultural factors. Recognizing these differences is essential for educators, parents, and policymakers seeking to develop gender-sensitive interventions aimed at reducing aggression and promoting healthier adolescent development.

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

**Archer (2009)** this study explained that testosterone levels, combined with reinforcement of aggressive behaviors in male peer groups, contribute to this pattern. **Bjorkqvist et al. (1992)** this study found that girls are more likely to use indirect forms of aggression, including gossip and social exclusion, which often rely on verbal strategies. **Card et al., (2008)** this study found that that adolescent boys exhibit higher levels of physical aggression compared to girls. **Crick & Grotpeter, (1995)** this study found that Girls may utilize verbal aggression as a socially acceptable means of conflict expression, especially in cultures where physical aggression by females is discouraged. **Gupta and Mehtani (2017)** this study found that adolescent girls in Delhi schools were more likely to use verbal aggression as a coping mechanism for interpersonal conflicts. **Kaur & Kalaramna, (2004)** this study found that These differences are often attributed to traditional gender role expectations prevalent in

## Gender differences in physical and verbal aggression among adolescents

Indian society, where assertiveness in males is tolerated or even encouraged, but physical aggression in females is discouraged. **Kuppuswamy (2010)** this study highlighted that collectivist values in Indian families often discourage open physical confrontation, especially among girls, leading to the use of indirect or verbal forms of aggression. **Maccoby and Jacklin (1974)** this study found that were among the first to systematically document that males tend to engage more in physical aggression than females. **Mehta and Singh (2012)** this study reported that verbal aggression in girls was closely linked to relational aggression, including rumor-spreading and social manipulation, particularly in close-knit peer groups. **Mishra and Singh (2015)** this study found that urban adolescents in Uttar Pradesh revealed that boys engaged in more overt acts of aggression due to peer group pressure and competitive academic environments. **Sharma and Grover (2010)** this study noted that physical aggression in boys is often reinforced by peer approval, whereas girls are more likely to face social sanctions for similar behavior. **Sharma and Saini (2013)**, this study reported that boys are more prone to direct confrontations and fights, while girls prefer indirect forms such as gossip or social exclusion. **Singh and Kaur (2011)** this study found that male adolescents tend to exhibit significantly higher levels of physical aggression compared to female adolescents, whereas females often display more verbal and relational aggression. **Underwood et al., (2001)** these studies suggest that boys are more likely to engage in fights and physical bullying, while girls tend to avoid overt physical confrontations. **Verma and Sharma (2018)** this study found that high consumption of violent television content and online games correlated positively with aggressive tendencies among Indian adolescents.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Adolescence is a developmental stage marked by significant biological, emotional, and social changes, which may lead to heightened aggressive tendencies. Research suggests that gender differences often influence the type and intensity of aggression displayed males are often associated with higher levels of physical aggression, whereas females may display more verbal or relational aggression.

### *Objective of the Study*

1. To compare male and female adolescents in terms of physical aggression.
2. To compare male and female adolescents in terms of verbal aggression.

### *Hypothesis of the Study*

- There is no significant difference between male and female adolescents in physical aggression.
- There is no significant difference between male and female adolescents in verbal aggression.

## **METHODS**

### *Sample*

The sample for the study consisted of 100 adolescents, including 50 males and 50 females, aged between 15 and 18 years. Participants were selected using purposive sampling from secondary and higher secondary schools in the Aurangabad district. An equal number of male and female participants were included to ensure balanced gender representation in the study.

### *Research Design*

The present study used a comparative research design.

## Gender differences in physical and verbal aggression among adolescents

### *Variables Used for Study*

- **Independent variables- Gender** - 1) Male Adolescents 2) Female Adolescents
- **Dependent variables - Aggression** – 1) Physical Aggression 2) Verbal Aggression

### *Research Tools*

#### **Buss–Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ)**

The Buss–Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ), developed by Buss and Perry (1992), is a standardized self-report measure designed to assess individual differences in aggression. For the present study, only the Physical Aggression and Verbal Aggression subscales will be used, as these directly address overt aggressive behaviors relevant to adolescents. The Physical Aggression subscale assesses the tendency to use physical force, while the Verbal Aggression subscale measures the tendency to express aggression through words. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater aggression. The BPAQ demonstrates high reliability and validity across diverse populations, including Indian adaptations.

### *Procedures of Data Collection*

The primary information was gathered by giving personal information from to each student. The students were called in a small group of 10 to 15 students. To fill the inventories subject where general instructions belong to each test. Data were obtained by using particular scoring particular scoring palter standardized for each scale.

### *Statistical Treatment*

At the first stage data were treated by descriptive statistical techniques i.e. mean and standard Deviation and t test was done by using SPSS Software.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### *Gender on Physical Aggression*

#### **Hypothesis-01**

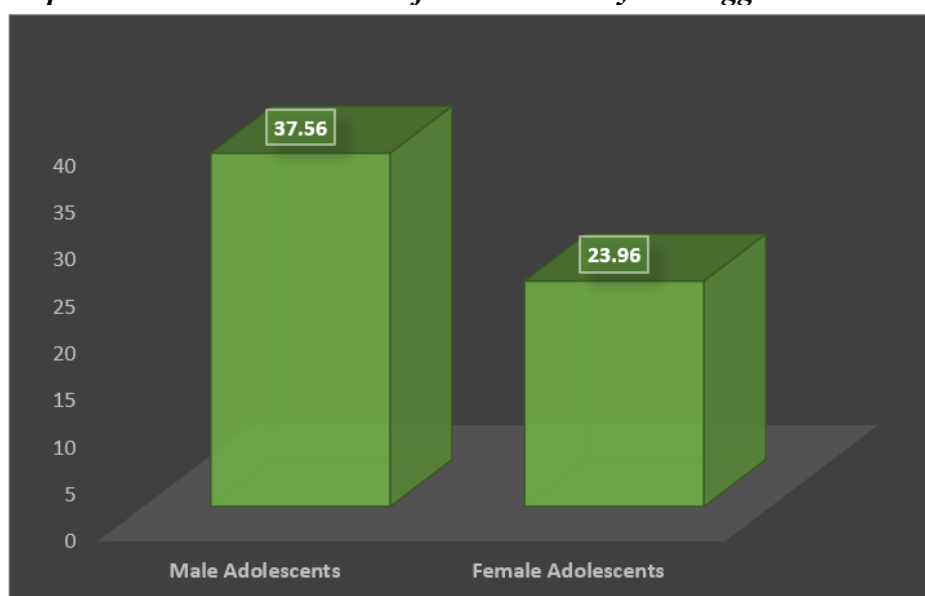
- There is no significant difference between male and female adolescents in physical aggression.

**Table No.01 Show the Mean, SD and 't' Value of Gender on Physical Aggression**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>'t' Value</b>	<b>Sign.</b>
Physical Aggression	Male Adolescents	37.56	1.89	50	98	34.07	0.01
	Female Adolescents	23.96	2.08	50			

## Gender differences in physical and verbal aggression among adolescents

**Graph No.01. Show the Mean of Gender on Physical Aggression**



Observation of Table No. 01 and Figure No. 01 indicates that the mean values of the Gender Group differ noticeably in their Physical Aggression. The mean  $\pm$  SD for Male Adolescents was  $37.56 \pm 1.94$ , and for Female Adolescents was  $19.40 \pm 1.88$ . The obtained  $t$  value was 34.07. The effect of Gender on Physical Aggression was found to be statistically significant ( $t$  value (1, 98) = 34.07,  $p < 0.01$ ). This level of significance indicates that the calculated  $t$  value exceeds the critical value at the 0.01 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This implies that Male Adolescents experience significantly higher levels of Physical Aggression compared to Female Adolescents.

These results are consistent with prior research suggesting that males are more likely to engage in direct and overt forms of aggression, such as physical aggression, whereas females are more inclined toward indirect or relational aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Archer, 2004). Biological and hormonal factors, particularly higher testosterone levels in males, have been linked to increased physical aggression (Book et al., 2001). Additionally, social learning theories emphasize that boys are often reinforced for aggressive physical behavior through cultural norms, peer approval, and media portrayals of masculinity (Bandura, 1973; Huesmann, 2018). From a socio-cultural perspective, traditional gender-role expectations may contribute to these differences. In many societies, including the Indian context, boys are often socialized to display toughness, dominance, and assertiveness, whereas girls are encouraged to adopt more nurturing and passive roles (Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Hyde, 2014). This social conditioning can lead to the development of higher physical aggression in males over time. Moreover, evolutionary perspectives suggest that physical aggression in males may be rooted in adaptive behaviors associated with competition for resources, status, and mates (Daly & Wilson, 1988). Although such evolutionary explanations are debated, they offer a possible framework for understanding why physical aggression is more pronounced in males across cultures. females' lower physical aggression may reflect both biological tendencies and societal constraints that discourage overt aggression in favor of more covert, verbal, or relational strategies (Bjorkqvist, 1994). Studies have shown that when aggressive tendencies are measured in non-physical forms, gender differences are often smaller or even reversed (Underwood, 2003).

## Gender differences in physical and verbal aggression among adolescents

### Gender on Verbal Aggression

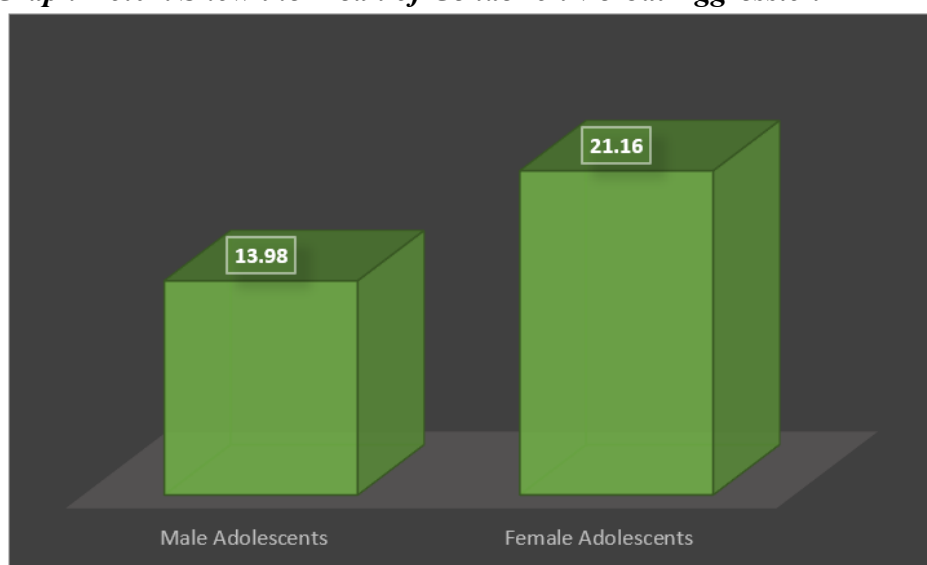
#### Hypothesis-02

- There is no significant difference between male and female adolescents in verbal aggression.

**Table No.02 Show the Mean, SD and F Value of Gender on Verbal Aggression**

Factor	Gender	Mean	SD	N	DF	F Value	Sign
Verbal Aggression	Male Adolescents	13.98	1.30	50	98	27.28	0.01
	Female Adolescents	21.16	1.33	50			

**Graph No.02. Show the Mean of Gender on Verbal Aggression**



Observation of Table No. 02 and Figure No. 02 indicates that the mean values of the Gender Group differ noticeably in their Verbal Aggression. The mean  $\pm$  SD for Male Adolescents was  $13.98 \pm 1.30$ , and for Female Adolescents was  $21.16 \pm 1.33$ . The obtained 't' value was 27.28. The effect of Gender on Verbal Aggression was found to be statistically significant (*t* value (1, 98) = 27.28,  $p < 0.01$ ). This level of significance indicates that the calculated 't' value exceeds the critical value at the 0.01 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This implies that Female Adolescents experience significantly higher levels of Verbal Aggression compared to Male Adolescents.

These findings align with earlier research suggesting that while males tend to express aggression through more direct and physical means, females are more likely to use indirect or verbal forms of aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Bjorkqvist, 1994). Verbal aggression, which includes behaviors such as insults, sarcasm, threats, and verbal humiliation, may be perceived as a socially acceptable outlet for hostility among females, particularly in contexts where physical aggression is discouraged by social norms (Archer & Coyne, 2005). From a socio-cultural standpoint, gender role socialization plays a substantial role. In many cultural contexts, girls are encouraged to avoid overt physical conflict but may express dissatisfaction, anger, or competition through verbal means (Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Hyde, 2014). This pattern may be reinforced through peer group interactions where verbal skills are a central component of social influence and relational positioning (Underwood, 2003). Additionally, relational aggression theory suggests that verbal aggression often

## Gender differences in physical and verbal aggression among adolescents

serves as a tool for managing interpersonal relationships, maintaining social dominance, or retaliating against perceived slights (Werner & Crick, 1999). For adolescent girls, the peer group environment particularly in school settings may provide a fertile ground for verbal exchanges that function both as a form of bonding and as a method of exclusion or intimidation (Sutton & Smith, 1999). The present results also reflect possible influences of communication style differences between genders. Females are generally found to be more verbally expressive, which may also contribute to their higher scores on verbal aggression measures (Tannen, 1990). However, while higher verbal aggression may be less physically harmful than direct violence, it can still have significant psychological consequences for targets, including stress, anxiety, and diminished self-esteem (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). These findings underscore the importance of interventions targeting verbal conflict management skills and empathy development, particularly among female adolescents. Anti-bullying programs should address verbal and relational aggression as seriously as physical aggression, as both can be harmful to peer relationships and emotional well-being.

### CONCLUSION

1. Male Adolescents experience significantly higher levels of Physical Aggression compared to Female Adolescents.
2. Female Adolescents experience significantly higher levels of Verbal Aggression compared to Male Adolescents.

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## Gender differences in physical and verbal aggression among adolescents

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## Gender differences in physical and verbal aggression among adolescents

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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