

Research Paper

Understanding Adjustment in Adolescence: Gender and School-Based Variations

Ms. Sonakshi Pandey¹, Dr. Navita Abrol^{2*}

ABSTRACT

Effective adjustment in various areas of life is difficult to attain, especially when without any resources, healthy adjustment in different areas of life makes a person feel secure and positive about themselves and are ready to face situations of daily life, an unhealthy adjustment creates higher levels of dissatisfaction and distrust on others. The present study is exploratory in nature as it seeks to assess the level of adjustment of the adolescents on various domains, identify areas of conflict on these domains A sample of 100 students (14-18 years) were collected through Adjustment Inventory for School Students (AISS) scale A.K.P. Sinha & R.P. Singh. Mixed method was employed for the analysis. Quantitative findings indicated an average adjustment level when compared between schools and across genders. The study suggested the need for training students on various life skills in order for them to have a healthier adjustment and a positive outlook in life.

Keywords: *Adjustment, Adolescence, Life Skill*

Historically, the evolutionary theory specifies that the individual who is able to change with the changes in circumstance, survives. In other words, adaptation, is the key to survival in its very basic form. Adjustment, is the psychological counterpart of adaptation. Good (1959) defines, “Adjustment is the process of finding of behavior suitable to the environment or the changes in the environment.” A comfortable life without any strain, stress, conflict and frustration is possible only when a person achieve harmony with his environment, therefore adjustment is an ability to cope in social situations and achieve satisfaction. (Kumari & Kamala, 2023)

Adolescence is the most important human life stage because an individual experiences significant biological, cognitive, emotional, and social changes. It is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood that involves multifaceted adjustments in almost all domains of life. Steinberg (2017) also emphasize that educational, emotional, and social adjustments are very important to shape adolescents' well-being and future development. The person who successfully adjusted in these domains leads to academic success and personal resilience and social competence.

¹Research Scholar, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India

²Deputy Director, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India.

ORCID: 0000-0002-8308-3459

*[Corresponding Author](#)

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During adolescent years, a person transits from concrete operational stage to formal operational stage of cognitive development, which characterized by hypothetical and abstract thinking. Eccles & Roeser (2011) recognized various factors like academic pressure, peer competition, curriculum and instruction affect educational adjustment of adolescents. Since, hormonal changes is at the highest during this life stage, which directly affects the emotional well-being of adolescents. Emotional adjustment is needed to build positive self-concept and develop various coping styles to deal with the emotional turbulence and face new challenges.

The need for affiliation to the group, social acceptance, and independence, social adjustment is required. Positive and negative social experiences affect the future life of adolescents accordingly, like high self-esteem and self-motivation is outcome of positive social experience while negative interactions may lead to withdrawal, anxiety, or behavioural issues.

It is felt that there is a dearth of comprehensive and contextual research specially in Indian context that explores adolescents adjust across educational, emotional, and social domains and especially in context of gender and education set-up. This study will provide insights to educators, parents, and policymakers that help in designing more effective interventions and support systems.

Objectives

1. The study was undertaken with the following objectives:
2. To assess the level of adjustment of the adolescents of 14-18 years of age in educational, emotional and social domain.
3. To identify the effect of gender on educational, emotional and social adjustment of the adolescents of 14-18 years of age.
4. To identify the effect of school on educational, emotional and social adjustment of the adolescents of 14-18 years of age.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The cited studies on adolescent adjustment largely focus on gender differences across emotional, social and educational home-related domains. Shah and Shah (2023) reported significant gender differences in emotional, social, and educational adjustment among adolescents, indicating that adjustment patterns vary meaningfully between boys and girls.

Devi and Sharma (2021) found that secondary school students generally exhibit an average level of adjustment. Their findings showed a significant gender difference only in emotional adjustment, while family, social, educational, and financial adjustment did not differ significantly between boys and girls.

Yashpal Azad (2024) observed that boys demonstrated better social adjustment than girls, whereas no significant gender differences were found in emotional and educational adjustment. The study also reported that adjustment variables did not significantly influence academic achievement.

Focusing on home environment, Kumari and Kamla (2023) revealed that gender significantly influenced students' adjustment to the home environment, while school location, parental occupation, and income had no effect.

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Similarly, Makwana and Kaji (2014) found no significant gender differences in home, school, and emotional adjustment; however, boys were significantly better adjusted socially than girls.

In contrast, Mansingbhai and Patel (2014) reported that girls had higher overall adjustment scores than boys, while residential background (urban–rural) showed no significant influence on adjustment.

Vyas (2021) found significant differences in school adjustment among higher secondary students, with female students exhibiting better overall adjustment compared to male students.

Overall, the findings across studies indicate inconsistent gender differences in adolescent adjustment. While boys tend to show better social adjustment in several studies, girls often demonstrate better overall or school-related adjustment. Emotional and educational adjustment outcomes vary across contexts, highlighting the need for further focused research on gender-based differences in adolescent adjustment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the present study, the explorative and correlational research methodology of quantitative research design has been used. The reason to select these research designs was to provide a more comprehensive view to the findings by evaluating the effect of independent variables on the variables under study, i.e. Emotional, Social and Educational adjustment.

Locale of the Study

The universe of the study were adolescents aged 14-18 years. Equal number of samples (50 each) were collected from a government school & a private school. It was made sure that the represented sample was equal from both males and females from both schools., belonging to urban population of Delhi NCR.

Sampling Technique

Stratified Random Sampling method, was used to collect the sample. A sample of 100 adolescents was selected from Delhi-NCR zone. These adolescents were asked to respond to a dichotomous closed-ended questionnaire (AISS).

Tool used

Researchers used Adjustment Inventory for School Students (AISS) to assess the emotional, social and educational adjustment of the selected sample. The Adjustment Inventory for School Students (AISS) is a self-administering inventory, which was developed by A.K.P. Sinha & R.P. Singh in 1993. The inventory consists of 60 questions in 'Yes or No' format which seeks to assess students on three areas of adjustment: Emotional, Social and Educational. The item analysis validity was determined using biserial correlation for total score and area score, which was .001.

Data collection

Permission was sought from the school authorities to collect the data from the selected sample for classes 9th and above. The hardcopies of questionnaire were distributed to class teachers of the classes for distribution. Every class room was supervised in order to address any doubts presented by teachers or students while filling up the questionnaire. The questionnaire was collected by the teachers of each class and were handed over.

Data analysis

Since the study followed a quantitative method design, the quantitative analysis of the data of 100 student scores on AISS were computed through the paired 't' test. The calculated mean scores were compared to the mean scores on the norm table given in the test inventory.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The findings of the study have been divided into three major sections, keeping the objectives of the study in mind.

General Profile of the Respondents

This section includes the general profile of the respondents like Age, gender, level of education etc.

Table 4.1: Demographic features of Learners

Category	Details	Total	Percentage
Gender	Males	50	50%
	Females	50	50%
Age group	14 years	9	9%
	15 years	37	37%
	16 years	49	49%
	17 years	5	5%
Level of Education	Class 10 th	27	27%
	Class 11 th	63	63%
Type of School	Government	50	50%
	Private	50	50%
Medium of responses	English	85	85%
	Hindi	15	15%

The table 4.1 exhibits demographic information of respondents that is categorized by gender, level of education, and medium of responses. The respondents are evenly distributed between males (50%) and females (50%), to make the sample equal for further comparison. Out of the total 100 respondents, 27% are from Class 10 and 63% are from Class 11, showing a higher representation of students in Class 11. The distribution suggests that perceptions and responses may be more representative of the higher grade level. A large majority of respondents (85%) gave responses in English possibly reflecting their schooling background and medium of instruction.

Gender wise Educational, Emotional and Social Adjustment of adolescents

Table 4.2: Educational, Emotional and Social Adjustment of adolescents

Adjustment level	Males (50) %age	Females (50) %age
Educational Adjustment		
Good	36	26
Average	50	42
Below average	14	32
Mean	5.36	6.10
Emotional Adjustment		
Good	30	50
Average	54	22

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Adjustment level	Males (50) %age	Females (50) %age
Below average	16	28
Mean	5.24	5.62
Social Adjustment		
Good	38	38
Average	52	40
Below average	10	22
Mean	5.26	6.12

Table 4.2 reflects the educational, emotional, and social adjustments levels of male and female adolescents. It is found that 50% of male and 42% of female respondents reported average educational adjustment whereas 36% male and 26% female respondents were good and 14% male and 32% of female respondents were below average in educational adjustment. The obtained mean score for males and female were 5.36 and 6.10 respectively. The norm table range both for males and females were under '5-7' indicating an 'Average' level of adjustment in Education. Similarly in Emotional Adjustment majority (54%) of male respondents reported average adjustment whereas half of female respondents (50%) reported good adjustment. The male respondents scored an average of 5.24 on this domain and females scored 5.62 which is slightly higher than their male counterparts. According to the norm table, males fall in the range of '5-7', indicating 'Average' levels of adjustment, females on the other hand fell in the '2-5' range category, indicating 'Good' levels of adjustment.

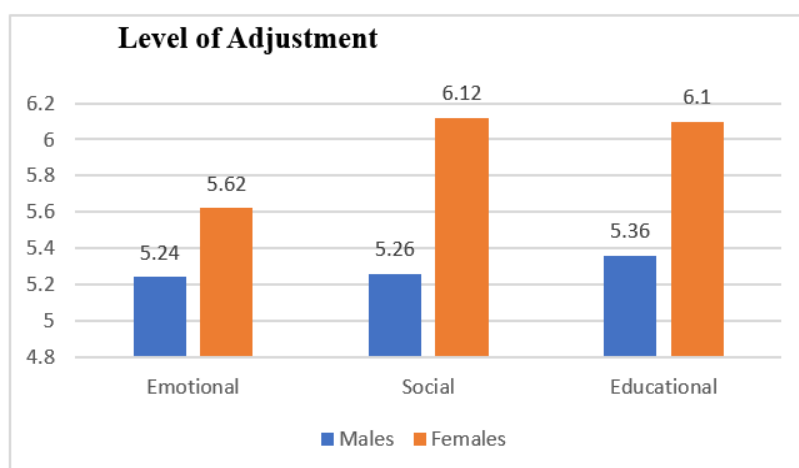


Figure 1- Calculated domain-wise mean scores AISS- between genders

In social adjustment, maximum respondents fall under the average category i.e. 52% male respondents and 40% female respondents. The mean scores for males and females were 5.26 and 6.12 respectively. Both fall in the 'Average' levels of adjustment category in norm table. Figure 1 compares the calculated mean scores of both the gender in all the three domains.

Effect of Gender on overall adjustment of adolescents

Table 4.3 reflects the calculated mean of male and female respondents on AISS, indicating that scores of female students on the Adjustment inventory were slightly on the higher end (more dysfunctional) than the scores calculated of male students. The t-test revealed that female respondents scored significantly higher on the overall adjustment according to

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Adjustment Inventory for School Students than male respondents. This indicates that females exhibit better overall adjustment compared to males.

Table 4.3: Gender wise Mean, Standard deviation and t-test Score for overall adjustment

AISS Score	Male	Female
Mean	15.88	17.92
Standard Deviation	4.493	5.862
t-test	-1.953 @ $p = .027$.	

School wise Educational, Emotional and Social Adjustment of adolescents

Table 4.4: Educational, Emotional and Social Adjustment of adolescents

Adjustment level	Govt School (50) %age	Private School (50) %age
Educational Adjustment		
Above average	48	14
Average	38	54
Below average	14	32
Mean	5.12	6.48
Emotional Adjustment		
Above average	52	28
Average	30	46
Below average	18	26
Mean	5.12	5.75
Social Adjustment		
Above average	52	28
Average	36	52
Below average	12	20
Mean	5.22	6.12

Table 4.4 shows a stronger presence of high adjustment levels among government school adolescents. Government school adolescents consistently display higher percentages in the above-average category across all the three domains in comparison to private school adolescents. Like a significantly larger share of government school adolescents (48%) demonstrated above-average educational adjustment compared to private school adolescents (14%). More than half of government school adolescents (52%) showed above-average emotional adjustment, while most private school adolescents (46%) fell into the average category. A greater share of government school adolescents (52%) exhibited above-average social adjustment compared to private school adolescents (28%). On the other hand, a higher percentage of private school adolescents (52%) reported average social adjustment. While government school adolescents consistently had higher percentages in the above-average category across educational, emotional, and social areas, private school adolescents achieved higher mean scores in all three domains. All mean values fell within the 'average' adjustment range (5–7) according to the norm table.

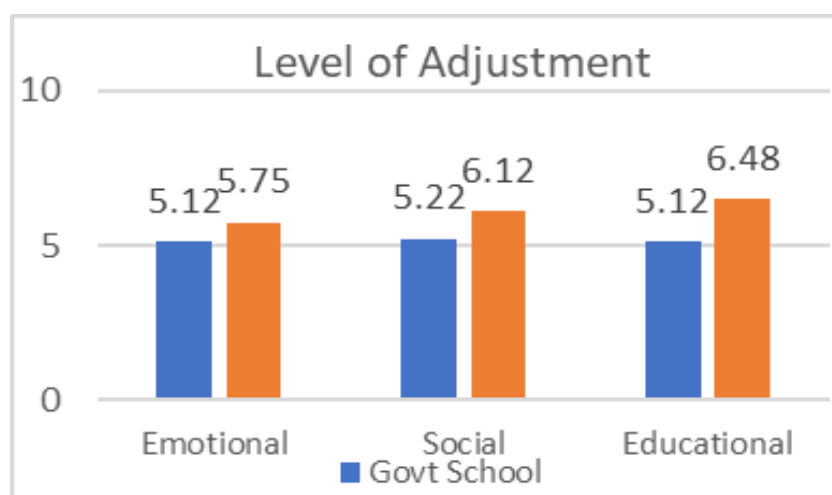


Figure 2- Calculated domain-wise mean scores AISS- between schools

The calculated mean scores for Govt & Pvt schools on the ‘Emotional Adjustment’ domain, were, 5.12 & 5.75, respectively, indicating average nature of coping in both schools. In the ‘Social Adjustment’ domain, the scores were 5.22 & 6.12. indicating a higher score in the private school students in comparison to Govt school ones, despite slight difference in scores, both lie in the average levels of adjustment category. In the ‘Educational Adjustment’ domain, while Govt school students scored a mean of 5.12, for Pvt school it was 6.48.

Effect of Type of School on overall adjustment of adolescents

Table 4.5: Gender wise Mean, Standard deviation and t-test Score for overall adjustment

AISS Score	Govt School	Private School
Mean	15.40	18.40
standard deviation	5.376	4.815
t-test	-2.93, p= .002.	

Table 5 shows the calculated mean score for the Govt School on AISS was 15.40 with a standard deviation of 5.376 & for Private School received a mean of 18.40, with a SD of 4.815.

The overall mean scores on the AISS inventory reflected a higher score for private school students versus that of the Govt school students. An independent-samples t-test revealed that private school students ($M = 18.40$, $SD = 4.82$) scored significantly higher on the AISS than government school students ($M = 15.40$, $SD = 5.38$), $t(df) = -2.93$, $p = .002$.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study show that adolescents, regardless of gender or school type, mostly display average levels of educational, emotional, and social adjustment. This highlights the need to move from a focus on content to a more holistic approach that meets adolescents' psychosocial needs.

The notably higher overall maladjustment scores among female adolescents suggest a need for support mechanisms that consider gender differences in schools. Counselling services and emotional support programs should focus on issues like academic stress, emotional

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control, and self-concept development, especially for female students during mid-to-late adolescence.

Differences in adjustment patterns between government and private schools indicate that the school environment and academic culture significantly impact adolescents' adjustment. Private school students had higher average maladjustment scores, while government school students were more often found in the above-average adjustment categories. This points to the need for specific interventions, with private schools working on reducing stress and performance pressure and government schools enhancing current socio-emotional coping strategies.

The study also shows the limited effectiveness of textbook-based life skills education. Schools should adopt hands-on learning methods, like group activities, reflective exercises, peer interactions, and real-life problem-solving tasks to help students develop essential skills.

Additionally, the findings highlight the importance of improving school-based counselling and training teachers in adolescent psychology and early signs of adjustment problems. Regular assessments using standardized tools can help identify at-risk students and enable timely help.

From a research perspective, this exploratory study points to the need for long-term and intervention-based research to track changes in adjustment patterns over time and assess the effectiveness of structured psychosocial interventions. Including adolescents from various socio-economic and educational backgrounds would make the findings more applicable.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes that fostering healthy adjustment during adolescence requires a collaborative effort from schools, families, and policymakers, with a continuous focus on emotional well-being, social skills, and supportive educational environments.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that adolescents aged 14 to 18 generally show average levels of educational, emotional, and social adjustment, indicating they cope adequately but not optimally across these areas. Gender findings reveal that females have better emotional adjustment overall, though their scores indicate slightly greater vulnerability to maladjustment compared to males. School comparisons show that more government school adolescents are in the above-average adjustment category, while private school adolescents have higher average maladjustment scores, with this difference being statistically significant. Overall, the findings highlight that adolescent adjustment is influenced by both gender and school context, underscoring the need for structured life skills education, emotional support systems, and school-based interventions to encourage healthier adjustment and well-being during this critical stage of development.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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