

The Use of ‘F’-Word among High School Students

Chetan S.V.¹, Atiya Fathima²

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the usage of the F-Word among high school students. It also studied the various factors influencing them to use the word. The sample consisted of 200 students-100 boys and 100 girls, of 10th grade from different schools in North and South Bangalore. The participants provided their demographic details and completed the F-Word Survey Questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were performed to analyze the data. The results suggest that, on an average, 73.5% of 10th grade students have reported to use the F-Word. The percentage of boys is more than the girls, with respect to the usage of the F-Word. The reasons for using the F-word, in the ascending order of most no. of responses, were- anger/frustration, difficulty in using a decent word instead of the F-Word, peer influence, movie/TV/music influence, the feeling of ‘grown up’, fun factor, trend factor, to abuse, and parental/family influence. Girls use the F-Word more due to anger or frustration, difficulty in using a decent word to express their thoughts, the feeling of ‘grown up’ and parental or family influence, than boys. Also, boys are more influenced by peers, movie/TV/music, fun and trend factors and use the F-Word to abuse, than girls. It was also found that students use the F-Word more in Texting (SMS) than on social networking sites, email and chat rooms. The results also suggest that, on an average, 27.89% of students have reported that their parents are aware of their children using the F-Word. And, 55.88% of students have reported that the F-word usage is inappropriate of their age. On an average, 26.5% of students do not use the F-Word. The percentage of girls who do not use the F-Word is higher than the boys.

Keywords: *F-word, Swearing, High school students*

Swearing exists in all human languages as a mode of communication. The F-Word is an English word that is generally considered vulgar which, in its most literal meaning, refers to the act of sexual intercourse. However, it may be used to negatively characterize anything that can be dismissed, disdained, defiled, or destroyed. The word's use is considered obscene in social contexts, but may be common in informal and domestic situations. It is unclear whether the word has always been considered vulgar, and if not, when it first came to be used to describe (often in an extremely angry, hostile or belligerent manner) unpleasant circumstances or people in an intentionally offensive way.

¹Lecturer in Psychology, Surana College, South-End Road, Bangalore

²Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Psychology, Surana College, South-End Road, Bangalore

The Use of 'F'-Word among High School Students

The Oxford English Dictionary states that the ultimate etymology is uncertain, but that the word is "probably cognate" with a number of native Germanic words with meanings involving striking, rubbing, and having sex. The highly profane term remains a taboo word to many people in many countries, while others feel the word remains inappropriate in social etiquette. The word also carries a sacrilegious connotation to some. It is considered highly offensive to utter the word in the presence of children. Some instances of the word can be taken at face value. This term is but one of a number of words an individual could use to express an important meaning. The usage of the F-word is not uncommon in the Indian movies too.

This study has relevance to the present day Indian cultural and educational scenario, where many of the youngsters follow the western trends, with easy access to internet, mobile phone services and foreign movies and television shows. The present study aims to find out the number of students who use the F-word and the various factors influencing the students to use the F-word among 10th standard boys and girls across Bangalore.

According to the website 'Reppler', 47% of Facebook users have profanity on their wall. 80% of the users who have profanity on their Facebook Wall have at least one post/comment with profanity from a friend. 56% of the posts/comments with profanity on a user's Facebook Wall come from friends. Users are twice as likely to use profanity in a post on their Facebook Wall, versus a comment. Whereas friends are twice as likely to use profanity in a comment on a user's Facebook Wall, versus a post. The most common profane word is derivations of the "f-word".

The above stated studies indicate that there has been less research concerning the use of the F – Word among high school students, especially in the Indian context.

METHOD:

Objectives:

- To study the various factors influencing the students to use the F-word
- To determine the gender differences in the usage of the F-word.

Sample:

The participants for this study were 200 students-100 boys and 100 girls, aged between 14 and 16 years, with a mean age of 14.78 years (SD=0.56) of 10th grade from different schools (with the request from different school authorities, the names of the schools have not been mentioned) in the North and South zones of Bangalore, India. Simple Random Sampling Procedure was used to obtain the data.

Design:

The research designs employed in this study are sample survey, and ex-post facto design which is exploratory in nature.

The Use of 'F'-Word among High School Students

Materials:

The study was conducted using the F-Word Questionnaire designed by the researcher to obtain quantitative and qualitative responses. The questionnaire consists of twelve main questions with twenty sub-questions, including four qualitative questions that require the subjects to write about the parents' reaction, other specific reasons for using the f-word, reasons for not using the F-word, and other swear/cuss words they use. The quantitative questions focus on the frequency of the usage of the F-word, reasons for using it, people with whom the students use the F-word, and whether they use it on social networking sites, while Texting, etc.

Procedure:

The principals/heads of various in North and South zones of Bangalore were approached to obtain the authorization to conduct the study. The purpose of the study was briefed and rapport was established. Socio-demographic details were collected in the data sheet prepared, and was followed by the instructions separately to answer the survey questionnaire. The subjects and the principals of the respective colleges were thanked for their co-operative participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The data collected were scored and a master sheet was prepared. The scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics comprising of percentages to determine the usage of the F-Word among school students.

Table-1, The no. of students who have reported to use the F-Word

Total no. of Students	Average %	No. of Boys	%	No. of Girls	%
147	73.5	79	79	68	68

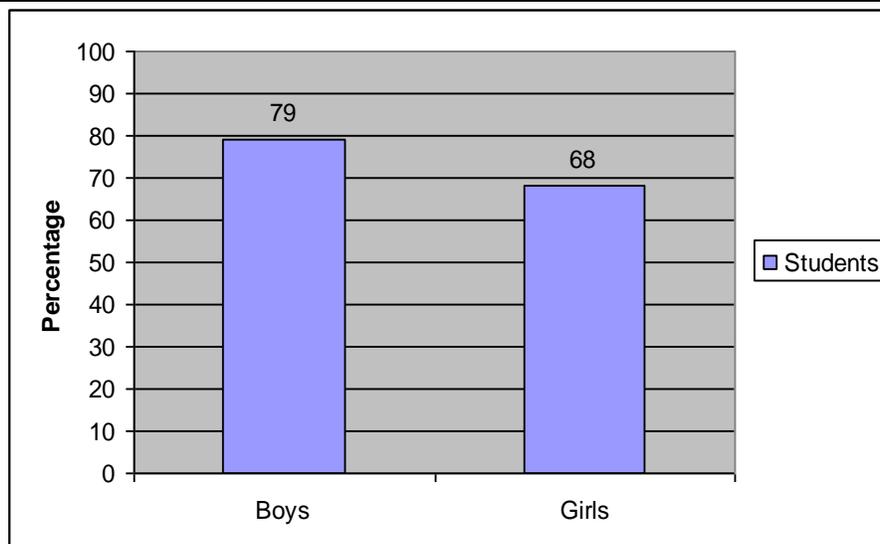


Fig-1. The percentage of Boys and Girls who use the F-Word

The Use of 'F'-Word among High School Students

An observation of Table-1 reveals the no. of students who have reported to use the F-Word. Out of 200 students who were administered the F-Word Questionnaire, 147(73.5%) students have reported to use the F-Word. 79(79%) out of 100 boys and 68(68%) out of 100 girls use the F-Word. This implies that the percentage of boys is more than the percentage of girls who use the F-Word.

Table-2:., Reasons/ Factors influencing students to use the F-Word

	Total no. of Students	Average %	No. of Boys	%	No. of Girls	%
Peer Influence	51	34.69	31	39.24	20	29.41
Movie/TV / Music/ Influence	49	33.33	27	34.17	22	32.35
Fun Factor	41	27.89	29	36.70	12	17.64
Trend Factor	34	23.12	21	26.58	13	19.11
To Abuse	32	21.76	18	22.78	14	20.58
Anger/Frustration	105	71.42	51	64.55	54	79.41
Difficulty in using a decent word	54	36.73	24	30.37	30	44.11
The feeling of 'grown up'	48	32.65	23	29.11	25	30.76
Parental/Family Influence	9	6.12	4	5.06	5	7.35

The Use of 'F'-Word among High School Students

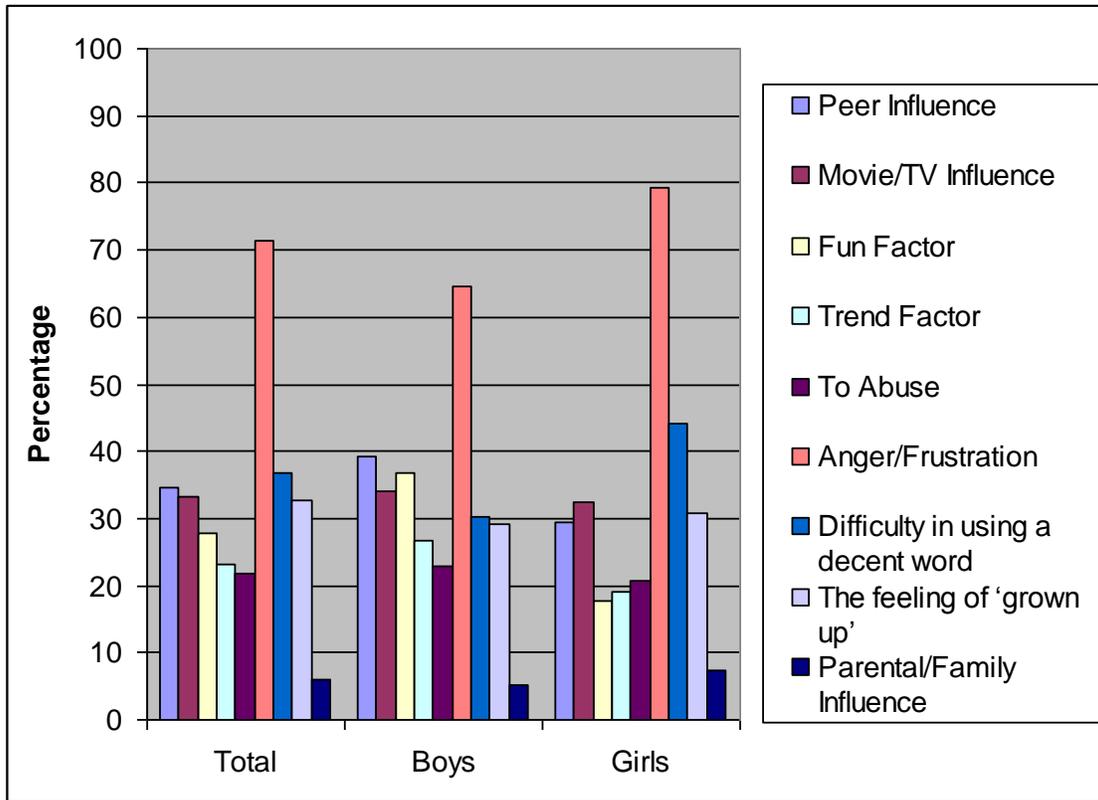


Fig-2. The percentage of reasons/factors influencing students to use

An inspection of Table-2 shows the various reasons or factors influencing students to use the F-Word. The most often reported reason for using the F-Word by students is anger or frustration. 105(71.42%) of 147 students, 51(64.55%) of 79 boys and 54(79.41%) of 68 girls use the F-Word when they are angry or frustrated. The second most often reported reason for using the F-Word is difficulty in finding a decent word. 54(36.65%) students, 24(30.37%) boys and 30(44.11%) girls have mentioned that they have difficulty in using a decent word instead of the F-word.

Peer Influence is one of the reasons why students use the F-Word. 51(34.69%) of 147 students out of which, 31(39.24%) of 79 boys, and 20(29.41%) of 68 girls who use the F-Word, are influenced by their friends and classmates. Movies/Tv/Music play a role in influencing students to use the F-Word. The no. of students influenced by movies/TV/music are 49(33.33%), out of which, 31(39.24%) are boys and 27(34.17%) are girls. The feeling of 'grown up' is also one of the reasons why students use the F-word. 48(32.65%) students, of which, 23(29.11%) boys and 25(30.76%) girls, feel that they are no longer kids, and hence use the F-Word. 41(27.89%) students use the F-Word for fun, out of which, 29(36.70%) are boys and 12(17.64%) are girls. 34(23.12%) students, 21(26.58%) boys and 13(19.11%) girls, have reported that they use the F-word because of the trend where they are considered 'cool'. 32(21.76%) students use the F-Word to abuse, out of which, 18(22.78%) are boys and 14(20.58%) are girls. Parental/family influence is the least reported factor that has influenced students to use the F-word. Only 9(6.12%) of 147

The Use of 'F'-Word among High School Students

students, 4(5.06%) of 79 boys and 5(7.35%) of 68 girls have reported to have been influenced by parents or other family members.

The above data indicate that, girls use the F-Word more due to anger or frustration, difficulty in using a decent word to express their thoughts, the feeling of 'grown up' and parental or family influence, than boys. Also, boys are more influenced by peers, movie/tv/music, fun and trend factors and use the F-Word to abuse, than girls. The no. of boys who are influenced by peers, use the F-word with their friends more than the girls. Similarly, boys who use the word for fun and trend factors also use it with their classmates and stranger more than girls.

Table-3: *The media in which students use the F word other than in spoken form*

	Total no. of Students	Average %	No. of Boys	%	No. of Girls	%
Social Networking Sites	64	43.53	33	41.77	31	45.58
SMS (Texting)	77	52.38	41	51.89	36	52.94
Exam Answer script	8	5.44	3	3.79	5	7.35
Emails/Chatting	39	26.53	24	30.37	15	22.05

The Use of 'F'-Word among High School Students

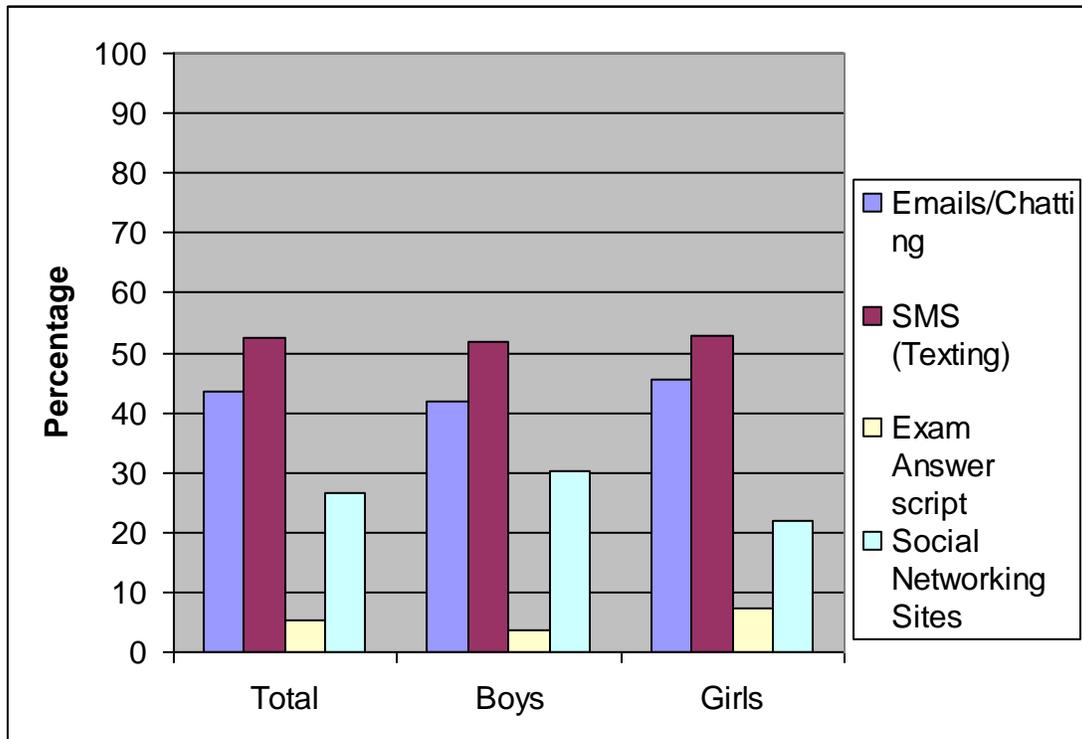


Fig-3. The percentage of students who use the F-Word in different media

An observation of Table-3 shows the various media in which students use the F-Word. 77(52.38%) of 147 students, 41(51.89%) of 79 boys and 36(52.94%) of 68 girls use the F-Word while Texting(SMS). 64(43.53%) students, 33(41.77%) and 31(45.58%) girls use the F-Word on social networking sites. 39(26.53%) students-24(30.37%) boys and 15(22.05%) girls use the F-Word in e-mails and while chatting. It is quite surprising that, 8(5.44%) students, including 3(3.79%) boys and 5(7.35%) girls use the F-Word in their test/exam answer scripts.

The data above indicate that, mobile phones and social networking sites have an impact on students' usage of the F-Word. This could be because; people with various backgrounds and nationalities come together on social networking sites and chat rooms, thus making it a trend to use the F-Word as a common word to express the thoughts. This can be attributed to the fact that, the second most often reported reason for using it is the difficulty in finding a decent word instead of it, and also the trend factor and the feeling of 'grown up' contribute to the frequent usage of the F-Word on social networking sites, e-mail, and while chatting and Texting(SMS).

Table-4: No. of Students who use the F-Word when parents/teachers are around

Total no. of Students	Average %	No. of Boys	%	No. of Girls	%
26	17.68	11	13.92	15	22.05

The Use of 'F'-Word among High School Students

Table-5:*No. of students whose parents are aware of their children's usage of the F Word*

Total no. of Students	Average %	No. of Boys	%	No. of Girls	%
41	27.89	17	21.51	24	35.29

Table-4 and Table-5 show the no. of students who use the F-Word when parents/teachers are around, and the no. of students whose parents are aware of their children's usage of the F-Word, respectively. 26(17.68%) of 147 students including 11(13.92%) of 79 boys and 15(22.05%) of 68 girls use or have used when their parents/teachers are/were around. On an average, 41(27.89%) of 147 students' parents are aware that their children use the F-Word. 17(21.51%) of 79 boys' and 24(35.29%) of 68 girls' parents know their children use the F-Word. The Qualitative reports of the students indicate that, when they used the F-Word when their parents were around, 42.30% of the parents did not react and ignored it, 34.61% of parents criticized them, and 23.07% of parents asked their children not to use the word thereafter.

Table-6:*No. of students who feel that the usage of the F-word is inappropriate of their age*

Total no. of Students	Average %	No. of Boys	%	No. of Girls	%
84	57.14	46	58.22	38	55.88

An inspection of Table-6 shows the no. of students who feel that usage of the F-Word is inappropriate of their age. 84(57.14%) of 147 students, 46(58.22%) of 79 boys and 38(55.88%) of 68 girls, feel that using F-Word is not appropriate for their age.

The data indicate that although many students feel that using the F-Word is not appropriate for their age, they still use it for various reasons mentioned earlier in Discussion-3. This could be because; the students neither want to be left out, nor be the 'odd ones out' when they are in a group of cohorts/peers who use the F-Word (as indicated in the qualitative report of 'other reasons for using the F-Word').

The no. of students who have not reported to use the F-word are 53(26.5%), out of which, 21(21%) are boys and 32(32%) are girls. From the qualitative responses, the reasons for not using the F-Word are that; 21(39.62%) students have reported that they do not know the meaning of the meaning of the F-Word. 17(32.07%) students have mentioned that they do not want to hurt people, as they feel that the F-word is offensive and abusive. 8(15.09%) students have said that they come from conservative and cultured families, and hence they do not use the F word. 7(13.20%) students feel that using the F-Word is unsophisticated.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:

Overall, this study was aimed at investigating the number of high school students who use the F-Word. The following conclusions are drawn based on this study.

1. On an average, 73.5 % of 10th grade students use the F-Word in Bangalore. Gender differences exist, as 79% of boys and 68% of girls use the F-Word.
2. The more often reported reasons for using the F-Word are that of anger and frustration, and difficulty in using a decent word. 71.42% of students use the F-Word due to anger or frustration, and 36.73% of students use it because of difficulty in using a decent word instead of the F-Word.
3. 52.38% of students use the F-word while Texting (SMS) and 43.53% of them use it on social networking sites.
4. On an average, 17.68% of students use the F-Word when parents and teachers are around, and 27.89% of parents are aware of their children's usage of the F-Word.
5. 57% of students, who use the F-Word, feel that the usage of the F-Word is inappropriate of their age.
6. On an average, 26.5% of students do not use the F-Word, of which 21% are boys and 32% are girls.

IMPLICATIONS:

This study provides an insight into the present generation of adolescents' use of swear words that determine their values and socio-cultural influences. This study can be used by educational institutes and parents to make them aware of their children's usage of such words and to control the overt usage of the F-Word or any other swear words, as swearing is considered an act of misconduct, especially with children. The impact of the F-Word and other swear words on children's behavior and attitudes toward their parents, teachers and elders, and their peer group can be explored. Also, the effect and impact of media on children to use swear words can be studied.

REFERENCES

- Jay, T. (2009). The Utility and Ubiquity of Taboo Words. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 4, 153-161.
- Sheidlower, J. (1999). *The F-Word*. New York: Random House.
- Sutherland, S. (2007). "What the Fuck? Curse Word Band Names Challenge the Music Industry", *Exclaim!* Magazine.
- "Fuck.", OED Online. (2008). Draft Revision. Oxford University Press.
- Repler Blog, Retrieved 18 June, 2011, from <http://blog.repler.com/2011/05/23/47-of-facebook-users-have-profanity-on-their-wall/>