

## Role of Self Esteem in Development of Aggressive Behavior Among Adolescents

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**Abstract:** Purpose of the present study was to investigate the role of self-esteem in development of aggression among adolescents. The sample comprised of 200 (100 male and 100 female) students from senior secondary school of Aligarh Muslim University Aligarh. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was used for measuring self esteem, and Aggression Questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992) was used for measuring adolescents aggression. Pearson Product Moment Correlation and t-test were used for analyzing the data. Result showed that there was significant negative correlation between self esteem and aggression. In gender differences, it was found that male students scored significantly higher on self esteem in comparison to female students. It was also found that male students scored significantly higher on different dimensions of aggression (i.e. physical, verbal, anger and hostility) in comparison to female students.

**Keywords:** Self Esteem, Aggression, Adolescents.

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### Aggression

Aggression is a common mental health problem among adolescents and it posing a serious social problem in the present era of competitive and stressful world. Aggression refers to behavior between members of the same species that is intended to cause humiliation, pain, or harm, antisocial behavior, depression, anxiety, dissociation, and other trauma-related symptoms as well as problems in emotion regulation [1]. Psychologists are more concerned about the causal factors, severity and the therapeutic approaches for controlling aggressive behaviors. It is found that over the last few years, aggression and violence levels have drastically increased among adolescents and young adults [2]. The National Center for Education Statistics [3] reported that 36% of students in grades 9-12 had been in at least one physical fight during the year 2005, which had increased from 33% in 2003. Moreover, from 1985 to 1991, homicide rates increased 154% among 15-19 year-olds [4]. It was reported that in 1999, over 1,700 adolescents under the age of 18 were arrested for homicide in the United States [5].

A Cross-sectional study was conducted by Sharma, Grover, and Chaturvedi (2008) in South Delhi, India, in which they assessed risk behavior related to interpersonal violence and its epidemiological relationship among 550 adolescents of various schools and colleges aged 14-19 years. Their study revealed that, 65 (11.8%) carrying a weapon in past 30 days, 74 (13.5%) had threatened or injured someone with a weapon and almost one in every two boys (49.1%) reported being involved in a physical fight in past 12 months. They also found significant correlation between interpersonal violence and male gender, lower age, and number of close friends [6].

Frick, & Silverthorn, (2001) focused that an increasing number of children are being referred to mental health services for treatment of their aggressive and antisocial behaviors [7]. They further emphasized that it is difficult to

isolate an explanation for this increase; however researchers have been able to identify a variety of factors that correlate with aggressive behaviors. However, there are many factors which play important role in development of aggressive behaviors among children and adolescents. For example, Hawkins et al. (1998) found a strong correlation between juvenile aggression and child maltreatment, poor family management, family conflict, separation from home, and residential mobility [8].

The second variable which is important research topic in psychology in relation to aggression is self esteem. Self esteem can be broadly defined as the "overall evaluation of oneself in either a positive or negative way" [9]. It indicates the extent to which an individual believes himself or herself to be competent and worthy of living. Simply put, self-esteem is essentially one's feeling of self-competence and self-worth.

The relationship between aggression and self-esteem among adolescents has received renewed attention during the past decade and it is currently a topic of debate among many researchers [10]. One side of the argument focused on the '*low self-esteem hypothesis*' in which research indicates that an individual who experiences real-world externalizing problems report lower levels of self-esteem [11];[12];[13]. This view suggests that aggression and antisocial behavior in children are an expression of children's low self-esteem (low self-esteem hypothesis [14]. Ostrowsky (2009) suggested that aggression may provide individuals with low self-esteem with an increased sense of power and independence, that aggression may serve as attention seeking behaviour which enhances self-esteem, or that individuals with low self-esteem may externalize blame for their problems and failures to protect themselves against feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, and shame, which leads to aggression towards others [15].

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Similarly, Rosenberg (1965) emphasized that an individual with lower self-esteem establishes a weaker attachment towards society and as a result, the individual does not conform to social norms, thereby increasing delinquency and aggressive behaviors [16]. Furthermore, many researchers found that low level of self-esteem and a feeling of inferiority intrinsically motivates aggressive behaviors [17];[10]. It has been suggested by many investigators that hostility or anger towards others stems from displaced feelings of inferiority [10]. The other side of the argument focused on ‘**threatened egotism model**’ or “**disputed self-esteem hypothesis**” which predicts that individuals with unrealistically high levels of self esteem have a tendency to be aggressive or violent [18]. It has been argued that high, rather than low, self-esteem is related to aggression. Bushman, Baumeister and colleagues strongly emphasized on the threatened egotism hypothesis, whereby aggression occurs in response to the sense that one’s favorable views of self have been impugned by others’ [19]. Kernis et al. (1989) provide a helpful summary of the argument: *Threats to self-esteem are more apt to be perceived as unjustified if one’s self-concept is positive than if one’s self-concept is negative, and unjustified threats are more likely to prompt anger...Also, high self-esteem individuals may be more likely to take steps to restore a damaged self-view than low self-esteem individuals*’ (Kernis et al., 1989, p.1014) [20].

Samilvalli (2001) noted that aggression is a often a risk-taking behaviour and individuals must have a certain degree of courage and confidence that they will be successful in an aggressive encounter, which would be more typical of individuals with high rather than low self-esteem [21]. The idea that individuals with high self-esteem being more aggressive is also compatible with the anecdotal observation that people who are aggressive often appear very arrogant [19]. However, there is relatively little research evidence for the high self-esteem hypothesis. With the number of inconsistencies among the literature researchers cannot confidently claim that either high or low self-esteem predicts aggressive behaviors. Therefore, the purpose of present study was to examine the role of self esteem in development of aggressive behavior among adolescents.

**Objectives of the study**

Following objectives were formulated for the present study:

1. To find out the nature of relationship between self esteem and aggression.
2. To find out the significance of difference between male and female students on self esteem.
3. To find out the significance of difference between male and female students on aggression.

**II. METHOD**

**Participants**

The sample of present research paper comprised of 200 (100 male and 100 female) students from Senior Secondary School of Aligarh Muslim University Aligarh. The random sampling technique was used for collecting data. Age of the subjects ranged between 15 to 18 years, the mean age being 16.9 years. All the students belonged from upper middle class socio-economic background.

**Instruments:** The following questionnaires were used for measuring self esteem and aggression of the participants.

1. **Self Esteem scale:** The 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale [16] was used to assess global self-esteem, with higher scores indicating more positive self-regard. Each item was responded with 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly agree to 4= strongly disagree. The scale generally has high reliability, with test-retest correlations value between 0.82 and 0.88. The Cronbach’s alpha of the scale in the present study was 0.67.
2. **Aggression Questionnaire:** The Aggression Questionnaire [22] contains 29 self-report Likert-type items (e.g., “I tell my friends openly when I disagree with them”, “Given enough provocation, I may hit another person”) assessing cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of this domain. Subscales include Hostility (i.e., hostile cognition), Anger (i.e., hostile affect), Physical aggression, and Verbal aggression. Correlations among components range from .25 to .48. The factor structure of the AQ has been replicated in several confirmatory analyses [22]. Its internal consistencies was ranging from .53 to .85. Analysis: t-test and product moment correlation were used to analyze the data.

**III. RESULTS**

**Table-1** Correlation between Self Esteem and Aggression.

	Aggression			
	Physical	Verbal	Anger	Hostility
Self esteem	-.397**	-.551**	-.535**	-.586**

\*\*correlation is significant at the 0.001 level.

It is found from above table that there is a significant negative correlation between self esteem and different dimensions of aggression (i.e. physical, verbal, anger and hostility).

**Table-2** Correlation between self esteem and Different Dimensions of Aggression among Male and Female Students.

Aggression	Gender	Self esteem r	z	t. value
Physical	Male	-.56**	.63	2.01*
	female	-.34**	.35	
Verbal	Male	-.67**	.82	1.45
	female	-.54**	.61	
Anger	Male	-.59**	.68	0.20
	female	-.57**	.65	
Hostility	Male	-.62**	.72	0.42
	female	-.65**	.78	

\*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

A comparison of the coefficients of correlation between aggression (its dimensions) and self esteem in both male and female sample indicate that although all the correlations are negative and significant, the correlation between self esteem and physical aggression and is significantly stronger for male group (r= -.56\*\*) as compared to female group (r= -.34\*\*).

**Table-3** Comparison of Male and Female Students on Self Esteem and Dimensions of Aggression Scores

Variables	Group	Mean	S.D.	t-value	df	Sig.
Self esteem	Male	20.01	4.82	2.85	198	.01
	female	18.03	4.99			
Physical	Male	26.78	6.67	2.93	198	.01
	female	24.21	5.70			
Verbal	Male	26.02	6.92	2.76	198	.01
	female	23.42	6.38			
Anger	Male	28.94	7.30	2.26	198	.05
	female	26.72	6.55			
Hostility	Male	32.25	8.63	2.22	198	.05
	female	29.64	7.98			

Table-3 shows that there is a significant difference between male and female students on self esteem. Male students scored significantly higher on self esteem as compared to female students. It was also apparent from this table that male students scored significantly higher on different dimensions of aggression as compared to female students. In other words, male students scored significantly higher on physical, verbal, anger and hostility dimensions of aggression as compared to female students.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The first objective of the present study was to examine the relationship between self esteem and aggression among senior secondary school students. The results of correlational analysis revealed significant negative correlations between self esteem and all dimensions of aggression (i.e. physical, verbal, anger and hostility). This results of the present study are supported by earlier studies conducted by Donellan et. al. (2005) and Trzesniewski et. al. (2006), they also found a strong relationship between low self-esteem and aggression [10];[23].

A comparison of the coefficients of correlation between aggression (its dimensions) and self esteem in both male and female sample indicate that although all the correlations are negative and significant, this correlation is significantly stronger for physical aggression and self esteem in male group as compared to female group. It means that male students whose self esteem is low generally exhibit more physical aggression as compared to female students.

The other objective of this study was to find out the gender differences in self esteem and aggression among same sample. When gender differences was investigated on above sample, it was found that male students scored significantly higher on self esteem in comparison to female students. Males are genetically stronger than females, enjoy liberty in many spheres of life, and opportunities are more open for their growth and development. This may be the reason that their self esteem is higher in comparison to female adolescents.

It is also apparent from the above table that there is significant difference between male and female students on different dimensions of aggression. It is clear from the results that male students scored significantly higher on different dimensions of aggression (i.e. physical, verbal, anger and hostility) as compared to female students. The reason may be lying in the

process of socialization or social upbringing of boys and girls. Girls are not supported to be aggressive while it may be considered as a positive characteristic for boys.

#### V. CONCLUSION

It is concluded that self esteem plays an important role in aggressive behavior, as it is negatively correlated with aggression. Low level of self esteem among adolescents is linked to high aggression. This is true for both male and female adolescents. However, physical expression of aggression among girls has weaker association with self esteem as compared to boys. It is also concluded that male students enjoy high self esteem as compared to female students and their level of aggression is also high.

Similarly it is also concluded that male students scored significantly higher on self esteem as compared to female students. as well as male adolescents are more committed physical aggression as compared to female adolescents.

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