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Aggression in Young Adults: Role of Narcissism and Value Conflict

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ABSTRACT

Aggression among young adults is a concerning arena which if not controlled/prevented can cause harm not only to oneself but also to the society as a whole. The present study focuses on the relationship between the various aspects of narcissism, value conflict and aggression of male and female post-graduate students. It also attempts to predict the relative contributing variables on the various aspects of aggression. Evidences indicates that disharmony among individuals tends to increase with the increasing disparity between the adaptive and maladaptive traits of narcissism and the various aspects of value conflict. The sample of the present study comprised of 370 participants (male=166, female-204) within the age range of 21-25 years. The Narcissistic Personality Inventory, Value Conflict Scale and, The Aggression Questionnaire was used to obtain the data. The present study determines that there is a significant difference between physical aggression of male and female participants, where males have scored higher. Both the adaptive (superiority) and maladaptive traits (exhibitionism, exploitativeness, entitlement) of narcissism and the conflicts Hate vs. Love and Fear vs. Assertion, have been found as the predictors of physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility.

KEYWORDS: Aggression, Narcissism, Value Conflict, Gender difference, Gender role.

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1.INTRODUCTION

Aggression is one of the pivotal concepts in the study of human behaviour. Social psychologists define aggression as an act which is carried out with the intention of harming people who do not wish to be harmed (Baron & Richardson, 1994). With the advent of the modern era, social scientists have been found to report about the increasing rate of aggression among young adults, resulting in mental, social and personality disintegration. Also, studies report that some psychological variables as manifestations of aggression results not only in the decrement in one's well being but, also other psychological and societal harm. Decades have passed while studying the various causal factors of aggression starting from gender differences and other related constructs. Previous research has demonstrated that men usually are more physically aggressive, while women resorted to more indirect forms of aggression (Bjorkqvist, 1994), though contradictory results were also prominent in some research. There lies a difference in the perception of aggression for both men and women, while women tend to express anger indirectly due to stress-related factors or cultural norms, for men the act of aggression might stem from a threat to their self-esteem or exercising control over others. Also for women to project their aggression verbally tends to originate from the dismissive evaluations which they have received during their growing developmental years. Usually, the development of aggressive tendencies starts during adolescence and if persistent then may portend to major dysfunction in adulthood. Aggression among adolescent and young adults is a significant social and clinical problem thus garnering importance regarding the risk factors which are fostering aggression and also their impact in today's time.

In order to gain a better understanding of the underlying mechanisms of aggressive behaviour, the psychological variables namely, narcissism and value-conflict have been considered in the present study. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th Ed)⁽³⁾, narcissism is characterized by an exaggerated sense of self-importance with an unreasonable sense of entitlement, exploitative tendencies and lack of empathy. Here, narcissism is considered as a social-personality domain which comprises of both adaptive and maladaptive traits. Narcissists tend to hold a strong conscious sense of superiority which is dissociated with their inadequacy unconsciously. Evidence indicates the prominence of narcissistic traits in the projection of aggression. Apart from narcissism, conflicts also serve as a means for people to show aggressive behaviours. Incompatible actions and goals which prevent another or create hindrances in order to make another activity less effective are known as value conflicts (Rathour, Savita and Kang, Tejpreet K, 2015). Most of the time young adults are caught in the "to be or not to be" situation, increasing the inner conflicts giving rise to aggressive dispositions. Value conflicts might lead to interpersonal conflicts compelling one to behave immoral, thus paving the way for hurtful action and violence.

Much less research has been conducted in the area of value-conflict and aggression. Thus, the present study aims to find out the gender difference in aggression along with the causal psychological relationship and the predictor variables resulting in the tendency to aggress, to offer awareness and adopt necessary measures for preventing them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The search for the predictors of sex difference in aggression accounted in the regulation of social roles or gender roles applying to people pre-determined to follow them (Eagly & Crowley, 1986)⁵. Considerable evidences has also reported that not only young men are more prone to commit crime but also have a higher rating in terms of average aggressive behaviours across all ages (Lahey, Waldman & McBurnett, 1999)⁶. The classical studies report of men being more aggressive, which is noticeable from pre-school years (Leobar & Hay, 1997; Onukwufor, 2013) than females, though contradictory results were also obtained reporting women to be, if not higher, almost equally aggressive as men. Women opting for relational forms of aggression and their perception being distinct from that of men has also been reported (Crick, 1996⁹; Crick and Grotpeter, 1995). The role of gender difference in aggression has also been documented in recent times (Kumar & Malik, 2012)

People who are highly narcissistic have been found to score higher on the self-report measures of aggression (Locke, 2009). Previous research has accounted narcissism as a significant predictor of aggressive/violent behaviours linking it with the exploitativeness/entitlement sub-factor of narcissism (Bushman and Baumeister, 2002). Barry, Grafeman, Adler & Pickard (2007) found that the maladaptive traits of narcissism serve as a significant predictor of various acts of delinquency. A positive correlation was also obtained between the exploitativeness/entitlement factor and the various aspects of aggression, namely, physical, verbal, anger, and hostility (Ruiz, Smith & Rhodewalt, 2001). A study also reported feelings of anger in both men and women when correlated with the NPI though the projection of anger was more physical in-case of men than in women (McCann & Biaggio, 1989).

Value conflicts are natural and are also found responsible for spreading societal tension and chaos (Bhardwaj, 1994; 2001). Previous research has also found that along with the context, the content of the situation and the source of interaction also serves as a significant agent in the exhibition of aggressive behaviours/tendencies (Turiel, Hildebrandt & Wainryb, 1991).

3. OBJECTIVES

- To find out whether there is any significant difference between the male and female participants with respect to the different aspects of aggression namely, physical

aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility. To determine the relationship between the various aspects of aggression and that of narcissism.

- To determine the relationship between the various aspects of aggression and that of value conflicts.
- To find out the relative contribution of different dimensions of narcissism and value conflicts on the various aspects of aggression.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Sample

The total sample comprised of 370 participants out of which, 204 were female and 166 males, randomly selected from various institutions in urban Kolkata. All the participants were post-graduate students (pursuing and passed out) within the age range of 21 to 25 years (both single child as well as with siblings) residing in urban Kolkata.. Participants belonging to nuclear/joint/extended family were included. Participants were excluded on the grounds pertaining to them having joined any job, presence of any past or present psychiatric/ physical illness and learning disability. The sampling technique used for this present study is Purposive Random Sampling.

4.2. Research Tools

- Narcissistic Personality Inventory*: This test was developed by Raskin & Hall, 1979⁽²⁰⁾ and later a seven-component structure using principal component analysis was identified (Raskin & Terry, 1988)⁽²¹⁾ namely, Authority, Self-Sufficiency, Superiority, Exhibitionism, Exploitativeness, Vanity, and Entitlement. The Alpha composite reliability scores obtained for this test are 0.83, 0.74, 0.80, and 0.90.
- The Value Conflict Scale*: This scale was developed by R. L. Bhardwaj (2001)⁽¹⁸⁾ and this test intends to measure the following 6 conflicts namely, Evasion Vs. Fortitude, Dependence Vs. Self-Reliance, Selfishness Vs. Probity, Hate Vs. Love, Fear Vs. Assertion, Pragmatism Vs. Idealism. The co-efficient of reliability of conflicts ranges from 0.65 to 0.76 and the co-efficient of validity from 0.53 to 0.79.
- The Aggression Questionnaire*: This test was developed by Buss and Perry, 1992⁽²²⁾ and intends to assess the various aspects of aggression namely, Physical aggression, Verbal aggression, Anger and Hostility. The internal consistency was found to be .89, and the test-retest reliability for the subscales and total score ranged from $\alpha = .72$ to $\alpha = .80$.

4.3. Procedure

Initially, 250 female and 250 male participants were approached. On the basis of the inclusion and exclusion criteria the final sample comprised of 370 participants (204 female; 166 male). Firstly,

the participants were approached with the consent form for their approval and cooperation for collecting the data. After receiving consent, the prospective participants were handed out the data sheets. Proper instructions were imparted; all the necessary queries and questions were attended to. It was taken care of that the actual purpose of the study remained unrevealed and confidentiality was strictly maintained. The data sheet was arranged in the following order: the Information Schedule, Narcissistic Personality Inventory, Value Conflict Scale and The Aggression Questionnaire. After the data collection, the data was scored according to the respective standard procedure.

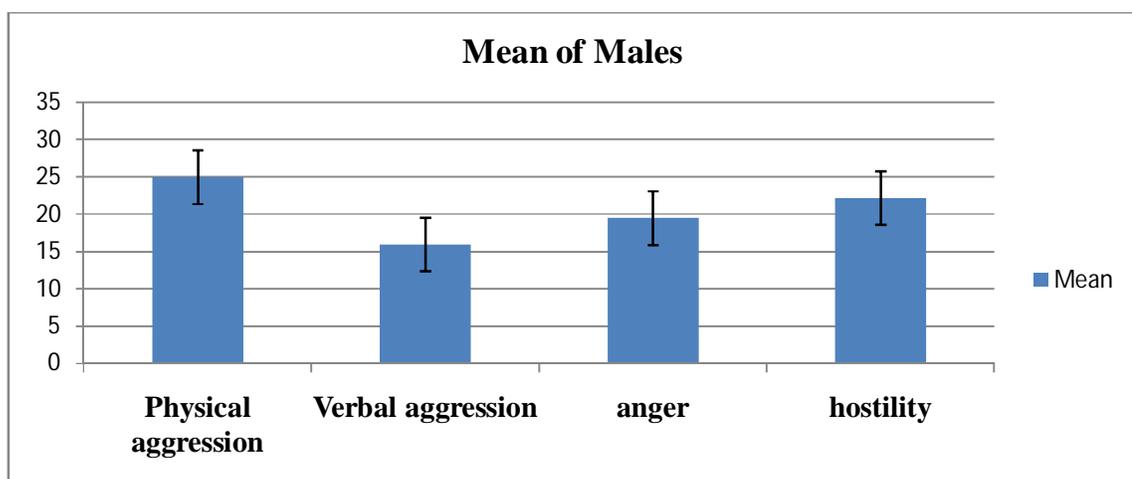
The obtained data was analyzed using IBM SPSS, Version 25. Quantitative analysis was done to compare the various facets of aggression between male and female participants. This was done by computing the Mean, Standard Deviation complementing it with t - test. Correlation (Pearson Correlation Coefficient) was computed for both the sexes with respect to the variables narcissism and value conflict in relation with the factors of aggression (Physical Aggression, Verbal Aggression, Anger and Hostility). Also analysis was carried out to determine the predictors associated with aggression, by applying Linear Regression analysis (Stepwise method).

5. RESULT

Table No. 1: “Comparative analysis of various aspects of aggression”

Domains	Male		Female		t-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Physical Aggression	24.98	6.04	22.64	6.72	.34
Verbal Aggression	15.98	3.60	15.78	3.96	.50
Anger	19.49	5.24	19.90	5.67	.70
Hostility	22.19	6.23	22.04	6.35	.22

There is a significant mean difference between the male and female participants in case of Physical Aggression which is also demonstrated graphically.



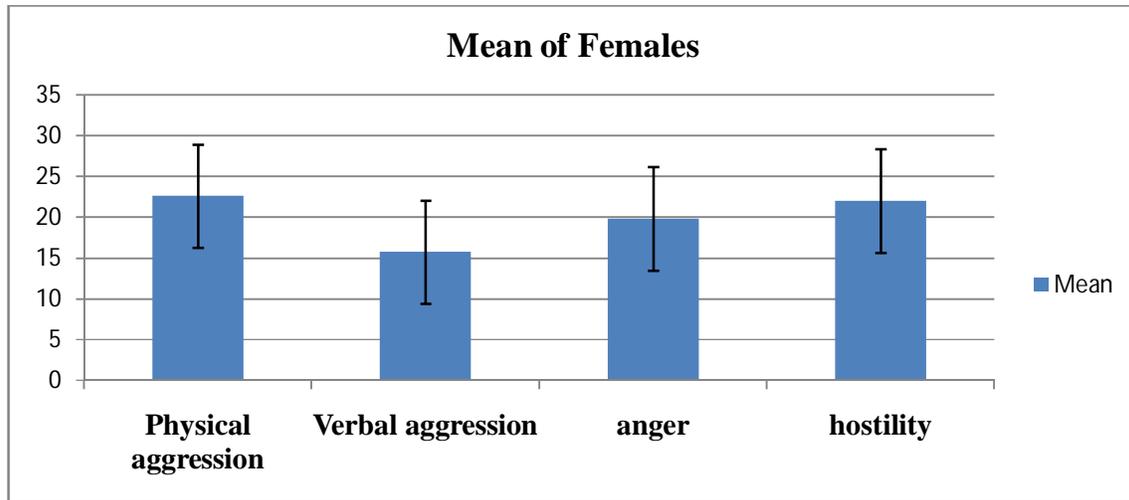


Table No. 2: “Correlation between sub-factors of Narcissism and Aggression”.

Domains	Physical Aggression		Verbal Aggression		Anger		Hostility	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Authority	.148	.169*	.175*	.102	.138	.032	.006	.004
Self-sufficiency	.006	-.011	.134	.049	.013	-.043	.015	-.103
Superiority	.115	.244**	.127	.114	.147	.209**	.163*	.042
Exhibitionism	.151	.233**	.266**	.163*	.224**	.207**	.109	.077
Exploitativeness	.187*	.077	.197*	.036	.192*	-.004	.059	.011
Vanity	.067	.063	.069	.062	.093	-.133	.049	-.001
Entitlement	.072	.289**	.062	.240**	.063	.274**	.287**	.283**

*p < .05. ** p < .01.

The aspects authority, superiority, exhibitionism, exploitativeness and entitlement were found to be positively correlated with the various aspects of aggression.

Table No. 3: “Correlation between the sub-factors of Value Conflicts and Aggression”.

Domains	Physical Aggression		Verbal Aggression		Anger		Hostility	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Evasion vs. Fortitude	-.058	.019	-.134	.124	-.171*	-.032	-.088	.001
Dependence vs. Self-reliance	-.056	-.251**	-.193*	.010	-.255**	-.149*	-.174*	-.109
Selfishness vs. Probity	-.146	-.220**	-.143	-.028	-.267**	-.105	-.108	-.058
Hate vs. Love	-.178*	-.270**	.034	-.277**	.012	-.249**	-.096	-.210**
Fear vs. Assertion	-.230**	-.125	-.202**	.008	-.330**	-.098	-.174*	-.062
Pragmatism vs. Idealism	.071	.011	.141	-.105	.161*	-.130	-.074	.037

*p < .05. ** p < .01.

A significant correlation has been obtained between the conflict Pragmatism vs. Idealism and Anger.

Table No. 4: “Variables contributing significantly to the various aspects of aggression for female participants”

Domains	Variables	R ²	Adjusted R ²	R ² Change	Beta value	F Change
Physical Aggression	Entitlement	.083	.079	.083	.289	18.471
	Hate vs. love	.138	.129	.054	-.235	12.689
	Dependence vs. Self-reliance	.182	.170	.045	-.125	11.014
	Superiority	.210	.194	.028	.170	6.973
Verbal Aggression	Hate vs. Love	.077	.070	.077	-.277	16.933
	Entitlement	.119	.110	.042	.206	9.565
Anger	Entitlement	.075	.070	.075	.274	16.468
	Hate vs. Love	.121	.112	.046	-.216	10.489
	Superiority	.144	.131	.023	.156	5.473
Hostility	Entitlement	.080	.076	.080	.283	17.677
	Hate vs. Love	.110	.101	.030	-.175	6.789

The factors Entitlement (7.9%), Hate vs. Love (12.9%), Dependence vs. Self-reliance (17%) & Superiority (19.4%) contributes significantly in case of physical aggression; Hate vs. Love (7.2%) & Entitlement (11%) for Verbal Aggression; Entitlement (7%), Hate vs. Love (11.2%), Superiority (13.1%) for Anger and Entitlement (7.6%), Hate vs. Love (10.1%) for Hostility.

Table No. 5: “Variables contributing significantly to the various aspects of aggression for male participants”

Domains	Variables	R ²	Adjusted R ²	R ² Change	Beta value	F Change
Physical Aggression	Fear vs. assertion	.053	.047	.053	-.230	9.100
	Hate vs. Love	.105	.094	.052	-.230	9.467
	Exploitativeness	.152	.136	.047	.218	8.948
Verbal Aggression	Exhibitionism	.071	.065	.071	.266	12.385
	Fear vs. assertion	.100	.089	.029	-.162	5.253
Anger	Fear vs. assertion	.109	.103	.109	-.330	19.887
	Exploitativeness	.159	.149	.050	.225	15.321
Hostility	Entitlement	.082	.077	.082	.287	14.629
	Fear vs. assertion	.111	.100	.029	-.170	5.281

The factors Fear vs. Assertion (4.7%), Hate vs. Love (9.4%) & Exploitativeness (13.6%) have contributed significantly in case of Physical Aggression; Exhibitionism (6.5%) & Fear vs. Assertion (8.9%); Fear vs. Assertion (10.3%) & Exploitativeness (14.9%) for Anger and Entitlement (7.7%) and Fear vs. Assertion (10%) for Hostility.

6. DISCUSSION

Aggression among young adults is a growing concern in today’s world. Identification of the factors within an individual, that increases the likelihood of one’s tendency to aggress, including the factors that increase trait aggressiveness and various situational cues that trigger aggression, might lead to awareness as well as an undertaking of the required measures in order to resolve such harmful tendencies, for a better sense of acceptance and importance in the society, prevent societal violence and indeed, everyday aggression resulting in a positive sense of well being, success and a good life ahead. It primarily focuses on determining the inter-relationship among the observed psychosocial variables and also seeks to predict the significantly contributing variables of narcissism

and value conflicts that compel an individual to act aggressively. In relation to the gender difference in aggression, the present study's findings are found to be in accordance with that of the classical studies, showing men possessing an elevated level of physical aggression as compared to women (Archer, 2004²³; Hyde, 1984²⁴). According to the evolutionary perspective, men tend to elicit more physical aggression as a way of re-establishing their status and power when faced with a threat (also supporting the Sexual Selection Theory). The present result can also be explained by the Social Role theory which states that, through the process of socialization, aggressive behaviour gets instilled within oneself while adopting the specific male and female gender roles (Eagly, 1987²⁵). Also, the association of dominance and assertiveness with the male gender role results in the facilitation of physical aggression.

Narcissism comprises of both adaptive and maladaptive traits. In the present study, both the adaptive, i.e., authority and superiority, and maladaptive, i.e., exhibitionism, exploitativeness, and entitlement have been found to share a significant positive relationship with the various aspects of aggression. It is known that people with traits of authority consider themselves superior in comparison to others. When they face a threat to their authority and superiority, their tendency to aggress increases, be it male or female, resulting mainly in physical and verbal aggression; anger & hostility is also expressed. The result regarding the maladaptive traits resembles few earlier studies which state that not only the traits predisposes the individual in eliciting antisocial & aggressive behaviours but also in maintaining and regulating their grandiose self-image (Barry, Grafeman, Adler & Pickard, 2007¹⁴; Salmivalli, 2001²⁶). To strengthen these notions, the statistical analysis has found the adaptive (superiority) and maladaptive (exhibitionism, exploitativeness, and entitlement) traits as the predictors for physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility. The combined belief that one is entitled to things and ability to exploit others to gain things is especially likely to result in aggression or other violent crimes.

In case of value conflict, a significant positive relationship was observed between the conflict Idealism vs. Pragmatism and anger. This conflict refers to the state of indecision between what is considered to be an ideal and practical consideration. Conflicts between values have been found to give rise to many problems creating a dissonance between the man and his environment (Singh & Kaur, 2015)²⁷. Thus, when people face a conflict, whether to adhere to the existing social norms or adopt a more practical solution, it gives rise to feelings of anger. The main conflicts serving as predictors of aggression were Hate vs. Love (female) and Fear vs. Assertion (male). Another probability for this suppression of aggression might be acceptance or tolerance of the conflicting situations, thus not letting the hesitancy or indecision take a toll on their minds. Also, contextual

factors along with different behavioural expressions/outlets related to the value-conflicts may account for the lesser display of aggression.

7. CONCLUSION

Dysregulation of the socializing process not only creates disruption in the interpersonal level but also in the intrapersonal level as well. Societal norms and gender role has depicted its consistent relevancy regarding the disparity between male and female in terms of physical aggression despite the emergence of modernization and diverging social roles which in turn has brought a change in other forms of aggression.. The prominence of maladaptive traits of narcissism is associated with lack of empathy, low self-esteem and incongruent self-concept resulting in crisis and conflicts among young adults. The adoption of a pragmatic approach during the formative years of development in the primary unit of socialization might help in the reduction of such conflicts and crisis leading towards a healthy life and society.

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