

Aggressive Behavior in University Students: The Role of Family Environment

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ABSTRACT: The present study explored the relationship between family environment and the development of aggressive behavior in university students. A total of 200 males and 200 females, ranging in age from 20 to 25 years participated in the study. Same sex peer-estimated data was used. Stepwise regression analysis was computed to find out the exact variance of family environment in aggression. The results demonstrated that family environment affected aggressive behavior and reported some different correlates of aggressive behavior in males of and females.

Keywords: Aggression, family environment, university students, males and females.

INTRODUCTION

Aggressive behavior is a major concern in most contemporary societies because it may inflict damage and harm on others and constitute a serious threat to the wellbeing of the community at large. Youth aggression and violence are major social problems that affect society as a whole. Each day we learn of unsettling new instances of human cruelty and violence. In recent years, increased concern has been devoted to the issue of violence and aggressiveness on the basis of a perceived and reported increase in violent youth crime. Despite the frequency of such events, however, social psychologists generally believe that human aggression - the intentional infliction of some form of harm on others - is anything but inevitable. (Baron, 1977; Lysak, Rule & Dobbs, 1989). Generally people view aggression as a physical attack only but various forms of aggression have been identified in the literature, including direct physical, verbal, relational, indirect and social aggression etc. (Sharma, 2011). Different thinkers take varying perspectives on the causation of aggression. Factors like instinctual, biological, and social learning i.e., cultural norms, frustration, school environment, mass media, role of the community etc. can be influential in the development of early aggression. Among environmental factors, overall family environment is most crucial.

Family is the most important part of the child's environment (Adams, 1966). The experiences that individual has in early life at home with his family in general and his parents in particular are major determinants of a person's adjustment process during adolescence and in later life (Jayanagraja, 1981, 1985). Children of physically punitive parents tend to use similar aggression when relating to others. Their parents often disciplined them by screaming, slapping, and beating - thus modeling aggression as a method of dealing with problems (Patterson et al., 1982).

Faulty discipline such as over permissiveness in terms of total freedom to children develops a feeling of

insecurity, antisocial, aggressiveness, anxiety friction in behaviour and frustration (Coleman, 1988). Paternal substance abuse and abuse of non-alcohol substances were most important in predicting aggressive and conduct - disordered behaviour in youth. The effect of paternal substance abuse, especially paternal abuse of non-alcohol substances, is greater than the effect of maternal substance abuse in predicting aggression and/or conduct disorder in hospital-treated youth. Parental substance abuse may be associated with severe aggressive/destructive behaviour when the latter is considered as a distinct category (Gabel, Stewart and Shindlecker, Richard, 1993).

Child and adolescent development is deeply rooted in the immediate environment in which a young person lives. The most significant contributing environmental factor may vary depending upon whether the aggression has an early or after onset, for example, early aggression is most likely to stem from familial factors and a "later starter" is more significantly affected by factors outside the home including the school, neighbourhood and peer conditions (Fraser, 1996). The nature of the child's family plays a significant role in the potential development of early aggressive behaviour.

In a Chinese study of sixth grade children (Chen and Rubin 1994), Parental acceptance was associated positively with prosocial competent behaviour and negatively with aggressive behaviour in subjects, and family psychological resources were positively related to aggression. Inconsistent parenting and the inability to set clear limits and strong parent-child relationships figure among the most prominent indicators of child aggressive behaviour (Fraser 1996 and Vitaro, Frank et al., 1997).

Permissive parents may not respond to a child's display of aggression or defiance in reaction to a parental request. This allows the child to learn that aggressiveness is a way to escape punishment and is a viable problem solving strategy. Occurrences of non-compliance and aggressive behaviour in such a context, will not take long to extend to peers and schools, as the instilled use of

aggression becomes the main strategy to achieve social goals (Fraser, 1996 and Loeber et al., 1998). This leads to additional problems as the child develops a low level of tolerance and a high level of frustration towards peers.

Youth aggression and violence are major social problems that affect society as a whole. In fact, the formative role of the family environment (especially through the ages of birth to 6 yrs), either positive or negative, is believed to have long lasting consequences upon child's prosaic development (Mustard et al., 1999).

Antisocial behaviour among children can be long-lasting, if not controlled at an early stage. Such type of behaviour is pernicious to the individual and to the society as well. Beside biological and cultural factors, family environment and school environment are the most influential areas which can directly or indirectly reinforce such type of behaviour, as these are the only areas where the child spend most of his time during childhood days.

On the basis of this, the present investigation explores the relationship between family environment and aggression. In the present study, it is hypothesized that family environment will show its impact in the development of aggressive behaviour among adults. Secondly, males will be higher on all the three types of aggression i.e., physical, verbal and indirect aggression and the correlates/predictors of aggression would be different in males and females.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 400 students (200 males and 200 females) from 20 - 25 years of age group took part in the study. Participants were Indian students drawn from different departments of Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla. The subjects were randomly selected from the classes.

Design
Correlational and regression analyses were conducted to find out the exact variance of different variables of family environment on aggression.

Material

The following tools have been used in the present study for the measurement of different variables viz. family environment and aggression.

a) Direct and Indirect Aggression Scales (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992).

b) Family Environment Scale (Rudolf H. Moos, 1989).

a) Direct and Indirect Aggression Scale

This scale consists of 3 subscales - physical aggression, verbal aggression and indirect aggression. There are total 23 items in it. Out of the 23 items, physical aggression includes 7 items, verbal aggression includes 5 items and indirect aggression includes 11 items.

b) Family Environment Scale

This scale is composed of ten subscales under three main dimensions. There are total 90 items in this scale. Form R has been used in the present study, which measures people's perception of their current family environment. Three dimensions with their subscales are as follows:

Relationship Dimensions-Cohesion, Expressiveness, and Conflict,
Personal Growth Dimensions-Independence, Achievement Orientation, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active Recreational Orientation and Moral Religious Emphasis,
(iii) System Maintenance Dimensions-Organization and Control.

Procedure

In the present study, same sex peer - estimated data was used, i.e. males' ratings of males and females' ratings of females. First, the pairs were made for peer rating. They were given the questionnaires of aggression and family environment. In the case of direct and indirect aggression scale subjects were instructed to read each and every item carefully, and to rate their peer under the options they feel relevant for him/her. While, in the case of family environment scale, subjects were instructed to rate their own current family environment rather than their peers. It was made clear to the subjects that there were no right and wrong answer and there was no time limit. It took about 2 hours for the participants to complete the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Correlational Analysis:

Table-1: CORRELATION BETWEEN FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND AGGRESSION BY GENDER (N=400, N₁=200, N₂= 200)

S.N.	Independent variables	Physical	Aggression	Verbal	Aggression	Indirect	Aggression
	(Family Environment)	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
1.	Cohesion	-.24 ^{α<}	-.10	-.27 ^{α<}	-.03	-.31 ^{α<}	-.14 ^{<}
2.	Expressiveness	-.11	-.18 ^{<}	-.10	-.27	-.09	-.31 ^{α<}
3.	Conflicts	.45 ^{α<}	.21	.41	.31	.47 ^{α<}	.48 ^{α<}

4.	Independence	-.15 ^α	-.03	-.20 ^{α<}	-.08	-.14 ^α	-.09
5.	Achievement orientation	-.13	-.14	-.13	-.39	-.09	-.39 ^{α<}
6.	Intellectual-cultural orientation	.03	-.09	-.13	-.02	-.07	-.08
7.	Active Recreational orientation	-.07	-.14	.02	-.25 ^{α<}	-.09	-.09
8.	Moral Religions Emphasis	-.18 ^{α<}	-.25 ^{α<}	-.17 ^α	-.28 ^{α<}	-.18 ^α	-.21 ^{α<}
9.	Organization	-.20 ^{α<}	-.23 ^{α<}	-.22 ^{α<}	-.30	-.29 ^{α<}	-.14 ^α
10.	Control	.09	.09	.07	.22 ^{α<}	.07	.19 ^{α<}

Table-1 reveals that in Males' sample, cohesion has been found to be negatively and significantly correlated to physical ($r = -.24^{**}$) verbal ($r = -.27^{**}$) and indirect aggression ($r = -.31^{**}$) whereas, in females' sample only indirect aggression has shown negative and significant correlation with cohesion ($r = -.14^*$).

Expressiveness has shown negative and significant correlation only in females' sample with all types of aggression (Physical, $r = -.18^*$, verbal, $r = -.27^{**}$ and indirect aggression, $r = -.31^{**}$). Conflict has shown positive and significant correlation in both the samples with all the three types of aggression (Physical, $r = .45^{**}$ for males and $.21^{**}$ for females, verbal, $r = .41^{**}$ for males and $.31^{**}$ for females and indirect aggression, $r = .47^{**}$ for males and $.48^{**}$ for females). Independence has shown negative and significant correlations with physical ($r = -.15^*$), verbal ($r = -.20^{**}$) and indirect aggression ($r = -.14^*$) only in males' sample. Whereas, Achievement orientation has shown negative and significant correlation with Physical ($r =$

$.14^*$), verbal ($r = -.39^{**}$) and indirect aggression ($r = -.39^{**}$) only in females' sample.

Active recreational orientation has shown negative and significant correlation with physical ($r = -.14^*$) and verbal ($r = -.25^{**}$) aggression only in females' sample. Whereas, Moral-religious emphasis and organization have shown negative and significant correlation in both the samples with physical ($r = -.19^{**}$ and $-.20^{**}$ in males and $-.25^{**}$ and $-.23^{**}$ in females), verbal ($r = -.17^*$ and $-.22^{**}$ in males and $-.28^{**}$ and $-.30^{**}$ in females), indirect aggression ($r = -.18^*$ and $-.29^{**}$ in males and $-.21^{**}$ and $-.14^*$ in females). Control has shown positive and negative correlation with verbal ($r = .22^{**}$) and indirect aggression ($r = .19^{**}$) only in females' sample.

Regression Analysis

A series of multiple regression analysis was conducted mainly to examine the unique contributions of family environment variables in predicting aggression.

Table-2: Regression of Family Environment (10 variables) on Aggressions in Males' sample (N=200)

Dependent Variables	Predictors		R	β	R ²	R ² Change	F	Sig.
Physical Aggression	1.	Conflict	.45	.45	.20	.20	29.18	.01
	2.	Cohesion	-.49	-.41	.24	.04	11.37	.01
	3.	Organization	-.52	-.37	.27	.03	10.21	.01
	4.	Moral Religion Emphasis	-.54	-.32	.29	.02	5.96	.05
Verbal Aggression	1.	Conflict	.41	.41	.17	.17	27.37	.01
	2.	Cohesion	-.47	-.37	.22	.05	15.71	.01
	3.	Organization	-.50	-.34	.25	.03	13.43	.01
	4.	Independence	-.53	-.31	.28	.03	12.22	.01
	5.	M.R. Emphasis	-.55	-.27	.30	.02	6.13	.05
Indirect Aggression	1.	Conflict	.47	.47	.22	.22	39.14	.01
	2.	Cohesion	-.51	-.44	.26	.04	23.30	.01
	3.	Organization	-.55	-.41	.30	.04	21.43	.01
	4.	M.R.E	-.57	-.37	.32	.02	4.86	.05

Table 2 reveals that in males sample, on physical aggression, conflict explained the highest variance of 20% ($\beta = .45$, R^2 change = .20, $F = 29.18$, $p < .01$); cohesion explained 4% of variance ($\beta = -.41$, R^2 change = .04, $F = 11.37$, $p < .01$); organization explained 3% of variance

($\beta = -.37$, R^2 change = .03, $F = 10.21$, $p < .01$) and moral religious emphasis explained the 2% of variance ($\beta = -.32$, R^2 change = .02, $F = 5.96$, $p < .05$). Overall, these predictors have explained 29% of variance.

On verbal Aggression, conflict has again explained the highest variance of 17% ($\beta=.41$, R^2 change=.17, $F=27.37$, $p<.01$); cohesion explained 5% of variance ($\beta=.37$, R^2 change =.05, $F=15.71$, $p<.01$); organization contributed 3% of variance ($\beta=.34$, R^2 change =.03, $F=13.43$, $p<.01$) independence has also explained 3% of variance ($\beta=.31$, R^2 change =.03, $F=12.22$, $p<.01$) and moral religions emphasis contributed 2% of variance ($\beta=.27$, R^2 change =.02, $F=6.13$, $p<.05$). On the whole, these variables have accounted for 30% of variance.

On Indirect Aggression, conflict has explained the maximum variance of 22% ($\beta=.47$, R^2 change =.22, $F=39.14$, $p<.01$); cohesion contributed 4% of variance ($\beta=.44$, R^2 change =.04, $F=23.30$, $p<.01$); organization also explained 4% of variance ($\beta=.41$, R^2 change =.04, $F=21.43$, $p<.01$) and moral religious emphasis explained 2% of variance ($\beta=.37$, R^2 change =.02, $F=4.86$, $p<.05$). These variables have accounted for 32% of variance in totality.

Whereas, in females' sample, Table 3 reveals that on Physical aggression, Moral religious emphasis explained the highest variance of 6% ($\beta =-.25$, R^2 change =.06, $F=20.30$ $p<.01$); organization turned out to be the second significant predictor in the order of entry that contributed 2% of variance ($\beta=-.21$, R^2 change =.02, $F=18.19$, $p<.01$); conflict explained 2% of variance ($\beta=.19$, R^2 change =.02, $F=16.71$, $p<.01$) and expressiveness turned out to be the last predictor in the order of entry that explained 1% of variance ($\beta =-.14$, R^2 change =.01, $F= 6.05$, $p<.05$). Overall, these variables have contributed 11% of variance.

On verbal Aggression, achievement orientation turned out to be the most significant predictor explaining the maximum variance of 15% ($\beta=.39$, R^2 change =.15,

$F=28.41$, $p<.01$); conflict explained 5% of variance ($\beta= -.35$, R^2 change = .05, $F= 28.41$, $p<.01$); organization and moral religious emphasis explained 4% of variance each (β 's = $-.31$ and $-.28$, R^2 change =.04 each, F 's being 21.19 and 20.74, $p<.01$); expressiveness has explained 3% of variance ($\beta= -.25$, R^2 change =.03, $F= 20.12$, $p<.01$); Active recreational orientation explained 3% of variance ($\beta= -.22$, R^2 change =.03, $F= 17.78$, $p<.01$) and control the last predictor in the order of entry, contributed 2% of variance ($\beta=.19$, R^2 change =.02, $F= 15.15$, $p<.01$). In totality, these variables have accounted for 36% of variance. On Indirect Aggression, conflict explained the maximum variance of 23% ($\beta= .48$, R^2 change =.23, $F= 41.05$, $p<.01$); achievement orientation explained 5% of variance ($\beta= -.41$, R^2 change=.05, $F=26.37$, $p<.01$); expressiveness and moral religious emphasis explained 4% of variance each (β 's = $-.37$ and $-.32$; R^2 change =.04 each, F 's being =21.11 and 17.09, $p<.01$) and control explained 3% of variance ($\beta= .28$, R^2 change =.03, $F=15.94$, $p<.01$). Together, these variables have accounted for 39% of variance.

Discussion

The primary purpose of the present study was to examine the role of various factors of family environment as possible correlates of various types of aggression. Violence is disturbingly common in most parts of the world and hindering the global peace and harmony. Researchers have attempted to understand the nature and developmental processes of aggression from a variety of perspectives and to examine personal and contextual factors that may be involved in aggressive development (Chen et al., 2002).

Table- 3 Regression of Family Environment (10 Variables) on Aggression in Females Sample (N=200).

Dependent Variables	S.N.	Predictors	R	B	R^2	R^2 Change	F	Sig
Physical Aggression	1.	M.R. Emphasis	-.25	-.25	.06	.06	20.30	.01
	2.	Organization	-.28	-.21	.08	.02	18.19	.01
	3.	Conflict	.31	.19	.10	.02	16.71	.01
	4.	Expressiveness	-.34	-.14	.11	.01	6.05	.05
Verbal Aggression	1.	Achievement orientation	-.39	-.39	.15	.15	28.41	.01
	2.	Conflict	.45	.35	.20	.05	23.33	.01
	3.	Organization	-.49	-.31	.24	.04	21.19	.01
	4.	M.R. Emphasis	-.53	-.28	.28	.04	20.74	.01
	5.	Expressiveness	-.56	-.25	.31	.03	20.12	.01
	6.	Active Recreational. Orientation	-.58	-.22	.34	.03	17.78	.01
	7.	Control	.06	.19	.36	.02	15.15	.01
Indirect Aggression	1.	Control	.48	.48	.23	.23	41.05	.01
	2.	Achievement Orientation	-.53	-.41	.28	.05	26.37	.01
	3.	Expressiveness	-.37	-.32	.32	.04	21.11	.01

			.57					
4.	M.R. Emphasis		-	.32	.36	.04	17.09	.01
			.60					
5.	Control		.63	.28	.39	.03	15.94	.01

Different thinkers take varying perspectives on the causation of aggression e.g. Freud speculated that human aggression springs from our redirecting toward others the energy of a primitive death urge. Freud stated that beside Eros (birth/constructive instinct) there also exist within man an opposite, destructive drive, which he labeled Thanatos (Freud, 1930/1948). According to him, humans have indeed an innate drive towards destruction and therefore, warfare cannot be avoided. According to Dollard et al., (1939) the source of aggression is always frustration of some kind, whether a recent, situationally relevant frustration or a previous one (e.g., stemming from the childhood). Social learning theory states that aggression is not an innate drive, but it is learned. Many cross-cultural studies have emphasized on cultural differences in aggression (McDavid and Harari, 1994). Some says that environmental factors like family environment, school environment, role of the community etc. are influential in the development of early aggression.

Thus, the present study was undertaken to study the role of family environment in the development of aggressive behaviour. And the results of the present study have supported our hypothesis that family environment plays an important role in the development of aggressive tendencies. The results very well indicate that in males' sample among the various variables of family environment, conflict has emerged as the most dominant predictor of aggression followed by cohesion, organization moral religious emphasis, and independence. Overall, these variables have accounted for 29% of variance in physical aggression (20% by conflict; (-) 4% by cohesion; (-) 3% by organization and (-) 2% by moral religions emphasis) ; 30% of variance in verbal aggression (17% by conflict, (-) 5% by cohesion, (-) 3% each by organization and independence and (-) 2% by moral religious emphasis) and in indirect aggression, these variables have accounted 32% of variance (conflict explained 22%, cohesion and organization have contributed (-) 4% each and moral religious emphasis explained (-) 2% of variance), thus amounting to 91% of variance in aggression in totality. Independently, in males' sample, conflict has explained 59% of variance in total aggression (20% in physical aggression, 17% in verbal aggression and 22% in indirect aggression). Whereas, cohesion has explained (-) 13% of variance in total aggression with (-) 4% in physical aggression, (-) 5% in verbal aggression and (-) 4% in indirect aggression); organization contributed (-) 10% of variance (-4% in physical aggression, -2% in verbal aggression

and -4% in indirect aggression); moral religious emphasis has explained (-) 6% of variance (-2% in physical aggression, -2% in verbal aggression and -2% in indirect aggression) and independence has turned out to be the last predictor of aggression contributing (-) 3% of variance (-3% in verbal aggression) (for details see tables 2 and 4). Negative sign indicates the negative relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables. The results reveal that poor family environments comprising of high conflict, less independence with less emphasis on moral religious emphasis, lack of cohesiveness and poor organization make children vulnerable to aggressive tendencies and antisocial acts. Thus, the results reveal that lower the feelings of togetherness, support and help in the family, the higher will be the physical, verbal and indirect aggression and vice versa (Chauhan, 2006; Rana, 2007 and Sharma, 2011).

Whereas, in females' sample, besides conflict, that explained 30% of variance in totality (2% in physical aggression 5% in verbal aggression and 23% in indirect aggression), other factors have also contributed significantly viz. achievement orientation that has explained (-) 20% of variance (-15% in physical aggression and (-5% in indirect aggression); moral religious emphasis explained (-) 14% of variance with (-6% in physical aggression, -4% in verbal aggression and -4% in indirect aggression); expressiveness explained (-) 8% of variance in totality with (-1% in physical aggression, -33% in verbal aggression and -4% in indirect aggression); control explained (-) 5% of variance in total aggression with (-2% in verbal aggression and -3% in indirect aggression) and active-recreational orientation has contributed (-) 3% of variance in indirect aggression only) thus amounting to 86% of variance in total aggression.

Collectively, in females' sample, 11% of variance is accounted by family environment variables in physical aggression with conflict (2%); organization (-) 2%; moral religious emphasis (-) 6% and expressiveness (-) 1%. Whereas, in verbal aggression, 36% of variance has been contributed by conflict (5%); organization (-) 4%; moral-religious emphasis (-) 4%; expressiveness (-) 3%) active-recreational orientation (-) 3%; achievement orientation (-) 15% and control (2%). In indirect aggression, 39% of variance has been contributed by family environment variables viz. conflict (23%); moral-religious emphasis (-) 4%); expressiveness (-) 4%; achievement orientation (-) 5% and control (3%) thus amounting to 86% of variance in totality (for details see tables 3 and 4).

TABLE -4 SHOWING THE % OR VARIANCE ACCOUNTED FOR BY THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT (10 VARIABLES) IN AGGRESSION BY GENDER.

Family Environment	Physical Aggression		Verbal Aggression		Indirect Aggression	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Conflict	20%	2%	17%	5%	22%	23%
Cohesion	(-)4%	-	(-)5%	-	(-)4%	-

Organization	(-) 3%	(-) 2%	(-)3%	(-)4%	(-)4%	-
Moral Religious Emphasis	(-)2%	(-)6%	(-)2%	(-)4%	(-)2%	(-)4 %
Intellectual-Cultural orientation	-	-	-	-	-	-
Expressiveness	-	(-)1%	-	(-)3%	-	(-)4%
Active Recreational Orientation	-	-	-	(-)3%	-	-
Achievement ornamentation	-	-	-	(-)15%	-	(-)5%
In-dependence	-	-	(-)3%		-	-
Control	-	-	-	2%	-	3%
Total Variance	29%	11%	30%		32%	39%

Results reveal that if there is less emphasis on ethical and religious issues and values, there will be more physical aggression. The family where the activities are not casted into a competitive framework (achievement orientation), and where there is less amount of participation in social and recreational activities (active recreational orientation), there are more chances for the development of verbal aggression. Besides this, lower the degree of importance of clear organisation in planning family activities or responsibilities and lower the support one gets from family members (cohesion) higher will be the verbal aggression among girls. In the case of indirect aggression among girls the family where less importance is given to competition and to get ahead (achievement orientation) and the families where the members are not encouraged to express their feelings openly (expressiveness), more indirect aggression is found.

Thus, the results indicate that family environment plays an important role in the development of aggression. The findings of some other studies are consistent with the results of present study. Tolan and Lorion (1988) found that higher family conflict and less cohesion was associated with more frequent delinquent behaviour. One study conducted by Blaske, Henggeler and Mann (1989) found that assaultive offenders family relations were characterized by rigidity and low cohesion and that their peer relations evidenced high levels of aggression. Harsh and insensitive child rearing styles may lead to frustration and anger and at the same time, serve as a model for the child (e.g., Hart et al., 1992). Warm and supportive parenting may be beneficial for children to control their aggressive behaviour parental warmth and nurturance may be a necessary social condition for children to learn appropriate behaviours during socialization. A lack of parental affection and responsiveness may impede the development of positive orientations toward others and reinforce hostile and disruptive behaviours in peer interaction (Chen et al., 2002).

The findings of the present study indicate that the predictors of aggression were different in males and females. In females, expressiveness, control, achievement orientation and active recreational orientation have emerged as most significant predictors of aggression and in males, cohesion and independence have turned out to be the dominant predictors. Conflict, moral religious emphasis and organization have emerged as common predictors of aggression in both the samples. Though there are various other factors like instinctual, biological and social learning i.e. cultural norms, frustration, school environment, role of the community etc. which are considered as influential in the development of early aggression but the results of the present study indicate

that the role of family environment is the foremost factor. According to the results, factors of family environment have contributed 59% of variance in predicting aggression among boys and 55% of variance among girls (Table 4-5). The results clearly indicate that among various explanations or theories for the causation of aggression, family environment plays a very vital role in the development of aggressive tendencies.

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Vitae

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