

# Assessing Aggression in Young Adults

Shailesh Bhagat, Dr. Nirmala Singh Rathore and Prakriti Sushmita

*NIMS Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, NIMS University, Jaipur*

Date of Submission: 02-12-2022

Date of Acceptance: 12-12-2022

## ABSTRACT

This research was conducted on a sample of 60 college going students from Jaipur, India, to assess the levels of aggression and the nature of aggressive behaviour in young adults. The study used the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (1992) which measures aggression on four domains i.e. physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility. Responses were statistically analysed to find out the levels of aggression in each domain. The results obtained were also compared with previous studies and any differences and similarities were highlighted with possible explanations. The key findings of this research show males (mean = 88.24) scoring higher than females (mean = 85.94) in overall aggression. Within individual domains, there was very minimal gender difference found for 'anger' and 'verbal aggression'. Males reported higher in 'physical aggression' while females reported higher for 'hostility'. However, these gender differences were not found statistically significant at .05 level of significance.

**Keywords:** physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, hostility, Buss-Perry

## Assessing Aggression in Young Adults

Aggression is a word that we use every day to characterize the behaviour of others and perhaps even of ourselves. We say that people are aggressive if they yell at or hit each other, if they cut off other cars in traffic, or even when they smash their fists on the table in frustration. But other harmful acts, such as the injuries that sports players receive during a rough game or the killing of enemy soldiers in a war might not be viewed by everyone as aggression. Because aggression is so difficult to define, social psychologists, judges, and politicians (as well as many other people, including lawyers), have spent a great deal of time trying to determine what should and should not be considered aggression. Doing so forces us to make use of the processes of causal attribution to help us determine the reasons for the behaviour of others.

Social psychologists define aggression as behaviour that is intended to harm another individual who does not wish to be harmed (Stangor, 2022).

Aggression can affect your health and relationships. Research suggests that there is a link between anger and chronic inflammation, which can cause secondary health problems like cardiovascular issues. Anger and aggression are also associated with mental health conditions. However, it isn't clear if unregulated anger causes those conditions, or if the conditions themselves make it difficult to manage intense emotions like anger and aggression. Experiencing aggression at the hands of a partner, friend, or family member also has detrimental effects. People who have been victims of physical or psychological aggression view those experiences as harmful, even when their aggressor doesn't. These forms of aggression can ultimately lead to the end of the relationship (Factors That Lead to Aggression, 2022).

Such serious implications of aggression in our society makes it a very important topic of study to get better understanding of aggression related behaviour of individuals. In our research we aim to measure the levels of aggression and study its nature in young adults. To do this we have chosen the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire developed by Arnold H Buss and Mark Perry in 1992. It is a 29-item questionnaire that requires response on a 5-point Likert scale. The test is further divided into 4 factors or subscales, namely, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility. The test measures levels of aggression on each of these four factors.

## The four factors of Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire:

### Physical aggression

Physical aggression is behaviour causing or threatening physical harm towards others. It includes hitting, kicking, biting, using weapons,

and breaking toys or other possessions (Kaye & Erdley, 2011).

#### Verbal aggression

Verbal aggression is the communication-based version of throwing a punch at the elder victim, with the intent to induce a desired emotional response. Verbal abuse can also take the form of bullying, which is emotional intimidation perpetrated by a person who is stronger than or in a position of power over the victim.

#### Anger

Anger is an emotion characterized by antagonism toward someone or something you feel has deliberately done you wrong. Anger can be a good thing. It can give you a way to express negative feelings, for example, or motivate you to find solutions to problems. But excessive anger can cause problems.

#### Hostility

Hostility is a multidimensional personality trait with distinct cognitive, affective, and behavioural features. The cognitive component of hostility is evident in the habitual patterns of cynical mistrust and negative, suspicious attitudes and beliefs that hostile individuals have toward their interpersonal network and the community at large. The affective (emotional) component reflects the internal and external expression of anger and contempt, which may vary in degrees from moderate to high. The behavioural component may manifest through mannerisms and actions that perpetuate interpersonal conflicts, such as aggression and irritability. Although distinctions can be made among the cognitive, affective, and behavioural components of hostility, they often are interrelated and co-occur (Henderson et al., 2013).

#### Methods

##### Participants

An online survey questionnaire was circulated amongst undergraduate and postgraduate college students. 60 responses were received consisting of 35 females and 25 males who filled out the questionnaires willingly. Using this as a sample group various statistical measures were

used on the data collected and analysis was carried out.

#### Measures

This research uses the Buss-Perry aggression questionnaire which measures levels of aggression in terms of four factors: physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility. It is a well-established measure of aggression developed by Arnold H Buss and Mark Perry (1992). There are 29 items in the test which require response on a 5-point Likert scale. Regarding the reliability of the test, the test-retest correlations as found in the original study by Buss and Perry (1992) were: physical aggression, .80; verbal aggression, .76; anger, .72; and hostility .72 (total score = .80). For scales with a relatively small number of items, these coefficients suggest adequate stability over time.

#### Procedure

The study uses online questionnaire survey method for data collection. The data received was analysed using SPSS on four factors of the aggression scale. Gender wise mean scores and standard deviation scores were obtained and T Test analysis was carried out to find out any significant gender difference in mean scores. Furthermore, correlational analysis was carried out between the four domains of the aggression scale.

## RESULTS

The participants were rated on 4 domains of aggression and corresponding mean scores were calculated: physical aggression (mean 25.83), verbal aggression (mean 15.40), anger (mean 20.45) and hostility (mean 25.22). The test was conducted on 5-point Likert scale with response options as: extremely uncharacteristic of me, somewhat uncharacteristic of me, neither uncharacteristic nor characteristic of me, somewhat characteristic of me, extremely characteristic of me. Any item scored on this scale, was correspondingly interpreted as very low score, low score, moderate score, high score, or very high score. The scoring range for each domain of aggression was adjusted according to the number of questions in that domain (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

Score Range and Interpretation Table for Domain Wise Mean Scores

	Physical aggression	Verbal aggression	Anger	Hostility	Total
Very low	9 - 16.2	5 - 9	7 - 12.6	8 - 14.4	29 - 52.2
Low	16.3 - 23.4	10 - 13	12.7 - 18.2	14.5 - 20.8	52.3 - 75.4

Moderate	23.5 - 30.6	15 - 17	18.3 - 23.8	20.9 - 27.2	75.5 - 98.6
High	30.7 - 37.8	18 - 21	23.9 - 29.4	27.3 - 33.6	98.7 - 121.8
Very high	37.9 - 45	22 - 25	29.5 - 35	33.7 - 40	121.9 - 145

Further, gender wise mean scores and standard deviation scores were calculated and a t test analysis was carried out for mean gender differences in each domain (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

Domain Wise Mean Scores and T Test Analysis

Domains	Male		Female		df	t	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Physical aggression	27.32	5.40	24.77	6.27	55.91	-1.68	.10	0.44
Verbal aggression	15.64	4.17	15.23	3.37	44.72	-.41	.69	0.11
Anger	20.32	4.70	20.54	4.79	52.48	.18	.86	0.05
Hostility	24.96	5.95	25.40	4.60	43.29	.31	.76	0.08
Total score	88.24	16.94	85.94	14.93	47.67	-.54	.59	0.14

Note. Due to unequal sample sizes Welch's t test was used for each domain. No significant gender differences were found in any of the domains at .05 level of significance. The effect size was seen small in all domains.

The scores on the four subscales of aggression were also inter-correlated with each other using the Pearson correlation coefficient and a significant correlation was found between all four scales at .01 level of significance (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

Pearson Correlation Coefficient Between the Four Domains of Aggression

Domains	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Physical aggression	25.83	6.01	-			
2. Verbal aggression	15.40	3.70	.49**	-		
3. Anger	20.45	4.71	.56**	.64**	-	
4. Hostility	25.22	5.16	.46**	.50**	.51**	-

Note. \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

## DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to measure the levels of aggression in young adults and to assess their behaviour on various domains of aggression. The four domains of aggression along with their corresponding means are: physical aggression (mean 25.83), verbal aggression (mean 15.40), anger (mean 20.45) and hostility (mean 25.22). The total mean score for males was 88.24 and for females it was 85.94.

The mean scores show that males on average have reported slightly more in overall aggression which is in line with previous research findings on this topic (Bettencourt, 1996). However, the mean scores are all in the same category of interpretation i.e. moderate level scores and gender differences in any of the scales were not

found statistically significant at .05 levels of significance. One of the previous studies by Buss and Perry (1992) showed that men scored significantly higher than women on physical aggression, verbal aggression, and hostility, but not on anger (Buss & Perry 1992). In our research, we found a similar direction in our results for two domains i.e. physical aggression and anger with statistically non-significant gender differences. Verbal aggression was found very similar for both genders and females scored slightly higher on hostility.

Furthermore, a correlational analysis was carried out between domains using Pearson's r correlation coefficient and significant inter-domain correlations were found at .01 level of significance. This gives the inference that those participants who

scored high in one domain were also quite likely to score high in other domains. However, since correlation doesn't prove causation, any inference must be concluded with caution.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can say that the average levels of aggression that we found in the participants of our sample group, in all domains of aggression (i.e. physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility) were at moderate level. In individual domains females reported slightly more hostile aggression while males reported slightly more physical aggression. None of these gender differences however were statistically significant.

Although a topic like aggression is well explored in psychology but most of the studies and experiments that have been performed were mostly cumulated around a certain time period and to certain geographical locations. The importance and implication of a study like ours is that it helps to check the previously established results and tries to find any new emerging patterns that could've emerged due to rapidly changing times or simply cultural differences. For future research we suggest working with a larger and diverse sample size and including more variables to be able to explore the topic more in depth.

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