

## Parent-Child Emotional Relationship as a Predictor of Aggression in Girls

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### Abstract

*The present study examined the role of emotional relationship of parents in predicting aggression among girls. The sample consisted of 500 girls, aged 11-13 years from Kullu (Himachal Pradesh, India). Stepwise Regression Analysis indicated that hindering and condemning relationship of girls with father contribute significantly to aggression with 10% of variance, and tense and distant relationship with mother, contribute significantly with 7% of variance. Collectively these factors have contributed 17% of variance in girls' aggression.*

**Keywords:** aggression, hindering, condemning, distant, tense

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### **Introduction**

Family environment is considered to be the most important factor in the child's psychological development. This includes not only the child's relation with his mother and father but also between the parents themselves, as well as the relation with his siblings and other close relatives. The experience the person has in early life at home with his family determines his adjustment process in later life. The degree of family conflict appears to be the significant factors.

In a study conducted on Indian students it was observed that among various variables of family environment, factors like cohesion, expressiveness, independence, achievement orientation, moral religious emphasis, organization and active recreational orientation in the family significantly predict aggression among boys and girls (Rana & Malhotra, 2005).

In most families, patterns of interaction between parent and child are well established in the elementary school years. Various studies have been conducted by different researchers that show how parent-child interaction plays an important role in the overall development of the child.

Close relationships with parents have also been associated with positive outcomes for adolescents, such as better academic performance and fewer problem behaviors (Hair et al., 2005). Good communication is an important parenting skill (child development institute). Parents who discuss important matters—such as academic performance, puberty, and drug use—provide their children with knowledge that can help them lead more productive and safer lives (U.S., 2005).

### **Parent-child relationship and aggression**

In order to curb the instances of violence it is very important to understand aggressive behaviour and the causal or contributing factors for aggression.

Patterson's Theory of parenting builds upon Attachment Theory and offers evidence that disruptions in the bonding associated with attachment leads to aggressive behavior (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Patterson, 1986).

Emotional relationship of parents with children seems to play a dominant role in the development of aggression in a child. Child's aggression is usually a by-product of the negativity that is demonstrated in the family

dynamic. The quality and strong parent-child relationship plays a vital role. The way, in which a child gets disciplined, and closeness to the parent plays an important role in learning aggression.

Caspi and colleagues (2004) conducted qualitative interviews with parents of identical-twins to determine which twin received more maternal statements of warmth and which received more maternal negativity. These results indicated that the twin that received more statements of maternal negativity also showed more antisocial and aggressive behavior problems.

On the basis of the studies shown above it can be concluded that parent-child interaction plays an important role in the development of a child. In a family environment the parent-child relationship has an important influence on the child's development. Quality of parent child interaction is one of the major predictors of emotional and social development of children.

Children whose parents are both responsive and demanding continue to thrive psychologically and socially during the middle childhood years.

Keeping in mind the parent-child relationship and its impacts on the overall development of a child an effort has been made in the present study to see the effects of parent-child interaction in the development of aggressive behavior. In the present study, an attempt is made to investigate the relative importance of the Childs' emotional relationship to both parents in inducing aggression among children. At the level of psychometry there are various types of scales for measuring aggression. In the current research, direct and indirect aggression scale by Bjorkqvist et al. (1992) has been used. For measuring the emotional relationship of parent-child, Emotional Relationship to Parents Scale by Bjorkqvist and Osterman (1992) has been used.

Aggression can't be injected but it is precipitated by the environmental factors. Instincts get unfolded and accentuated by the environment that's why there are differences in the expression of people in terms of aggression across the globe.

In India females are expected to show elegant, submissive and peaceful behavior while males are associated with rough, assertive, aggressive and independent behavior. Since women aggression has not received much attention in Indian studies because it is generally considered as male phenomenon therefore an attempt was made to observe the level of female aggression through this study. The present study is an attempt to assess the role of parent-child emotional relationship in the development of aggression among girls.

## **Method Sample**

A total of 500 school girls from 11-13 years of age groups took part in this study. Participants were Indian students recruited from different government schools of Kullu (HP). Simple random sampling technique was used. Since the data was selected from different schools and the total \ strength was very high, therefore, random table was used for this purpose. The students were from lower middle class. In order to collect the required data permission was taken from the School Principal. Games periods, recess time, zero periods were given for filling up the forms.

## **Tools**

a) "*Direct and Indirect Aggression Scales,*" (DIAS) developed by Bjorkqvist et al., (1992).

The instrument consists of three subscales: physical, verbal, and indirect aggression.

Of the 23 items, physical aggression comprises 7 items, verbal aggression 5 items and indirect aggression 11 items. Ratings were made

on a five point scale, ranging from 0 to 4 i.e., 0 = never, 1 = seldom, 2 = sometimes, 3 = quite often, 4 = very often. Minimum and maximum scores for physical aggression are (0-28), for verbal aggression (0-20) and for indirect aggression (0-44). The subscales of DIAS had high levels of internal consistency, ranging from .80 to .94 in the different subgroups of the study. The test retest reliability is .85 and criterion validity of this scale is .88.

b) *Emotional Relationship to Parents Scale* by Bjorkqvist and Osterman (1992).

In this scale there are total 9 forms of relationships under two headings i.e, the relationship to my mother and the relationship to my father. The purpose of this scale is to investigate children relationship to their parents.

In the scale there are adjective pairs like warm-cold, close-distant, tense-relaxed, secure-insecure, open-restrained, understanding-condemning, hindering-supporting, indifferent-interested, and respectful-lacking in respect. These represent positive relationship at one end and negative at the other end. Subjects are required to mark the alternative that comes closest to their experience. CM means the level of close relationship the child feels with his mother and CF means the same with father. In the same way all the other factors were coded. These factors show what a child feels about his relationship with his mother and father. Results were estimated on a five point rating scale, ranging from 0 = not at all, 1 = a little, 2 = medium, 3 = much, 4 = very much. The test retest reliability is .84 with internal consistency .90.

### Procedure

In the present study, same sex peer estimated data was used i.e., girls rating girls for the Direct and Indirect Aggression Scale. First the pairs were made for peer rating. After that

participants were asked to rate their peer under the options they felt to be relevant. In the case of parent-child emotional relationship scale subjects were instructed to rate their relationship with their father as well as with mother. It was made clear to the subjects that there were no right and wrong answers and there was no specific time limit. Scoring of the responses was done carefully.

### Results

Correlational analysis of physical aggression with verbal and indirect aggression; and parent-child emotional relationship factors among girls.

Result shows that physical aggression is positively and significantly correlated with Verbal ( $r=.76, p<.01$ ) and indirect aggression ( $r=.75, p<.01$ ).

Regarding parent-child emotional relationship factors, TM i.e., tense factor of mother ( $r=-.17, p<.01$ ), factor HM i.e., hindering factor of mother ( $r=.16, p<.01$ ), TF i.e., tense factor of father ( $r=.13, p<.01$ ), HF i.e., hindering factor of father ( $r=.18, p<.01$ ), and IF i.e., indifferent factor of father ( $r=.09, p<.05$ ) have shown a positive and significant correlation with physical aggression while factor WM i.e., warm factor of mother ( $r=-.09, p<.05$ ), and UF i.e., understanding factor of father ( $r=-.10, p<.05$ ) have shown negative and significant correlation in the development of physical aggression.

Correlational analysis of verbal aggression with indirect aggression; and parent-child emotional relationship factors among girls As indicated by table 1, verbal aggression is positively and significantly correlated with indirect aggression ( $r=.79, p<.01$ ). It is clear from the table that factor TM i.e., tense factor of mother ( $r=.16, p<.01$ ), HM i.e., hindering factor of mother ( $r=.17, p<.01$ ), TF i.e., tense factor of father ( $r=.18, p<.01$ ), and IF i.e., indifferent

factor of father ( $r=.11$ ,  $p<.05$ ) are positively and significantly related to verbal aggression while factor WM i.e., warm factor of mother ( $r=-.11$ ,  $p<.05$ ), RM i.e., respectful factor of mother ( $r=-.11$ ,  $p<.01$ ), and UF i.e., understanding factor of father ( $r=-.15$ ,  $p<.01$ ) are negatively and significantly related with verbal aggression.

Correlational analysis of indirect aggression with parent-child emotional relationship factors among girls

Table no. 1 illustrates that TM i.e., tense factor of mother ( $r=.18$ ,  $p<.01$ ), HM i.e., hindering factor of mother, TF i.e., tense factor of father ( $r=.13$ ,  $p<.01$ ) HM i.e., hindering factor of mother ( $r=.13$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and HF i.e., hindering factor of father ( $r=.17$ ,  $p<.01$ ) are positively related to indirect aggression. On the other hand factor WM i.e., warm factor of mother ( $r=-.10$ ,  $p<.05$ ), RM i.e., respectful towards mother factor ( $r=-.13$ ,  $p<.01$ ), and UF i.e., understanding factor of father ( $r=-.12$ ,  $p<.01$ ) are negatively and significantly related to indirect aggression.

### Regression Analysis

After computing the intercorrelations, stepwise regression was computed to analyze the unique contribution of different factors of parent-child emotional relationship in the development of aggression among girls.

Table 2 shows that among emotional factors, factor HF i.e., hindering factor (father) has emerged as the most contributing factor,  $\beta = .18$ ,  $R^2 \text{ ch} = .03$ ,  $F = 17.33$ ,  $p < .01$ . It explains 3% of variance. Factor TM i.e., tense factor (mother) emerged as the next significant contributing factor explaining 2% of variance,  $\beta = .13$ ,  $R^2 \text{ ch} = .02$ ,  $F = 8.79$ ,  $p < .01$ .

It can be seen that factor HF and TM collectively contribute 5% of variance in **physical aggression** among girls.

It is evident from Table 3 that among emotional factors hindering factor (father) has

again emerged as the most contributing factor  $\beta = .23$ ,  $R^2 \text{ ch} = .05$ ,  $F = 28.09$ ,  $p < .01$ . It explains 5% of variance. Factor UF i.e., understanding factor (father) has significantly and negatively contributed in verbal aggression  $\beta = -.12$ ,  $R^2 \text{ ch} = .01$ ,  $F = 8.1$ ,  $p < .01$ . It explains 1% variance. Factor TM i.e., tense factor (mother) has significantly and positively contributed in verbal aggression among girls showing 1% of variance,  $\beta = .09$ ,  $R^2 \text{ ch} = .01$ ,  $F = 4.6$ ,  $p < .05$ .

It indicates that factors HF, UF and TM have contributed 7% of variance in predicting verbal aggression among girls.

Regarding indirect aggression, Factor TM i.e., tense factor (mother) has again shown the significant and positive contribution in indirect aggression,  $\beta = .18$ ,  $R^2 \text{ ch} = .03$ ,  $F = 17.57$ ,  $p < .01$ . It reveals 3% of variance. Hindering factor (father) has emerged as the next contributing factor,  $\beta = .12$ ,  $R^2 \text{ ch} = .01$ ,  $F = 6.59$ ,  $p < .01$ . It explains 1% of variance. Factor CM i.e., close factor (mother) has significantly and negatively contributed in indirect aggression  $\beta = -.09$ ,  $R^2 \text{ ch} = .01$ ,  $F = 5.19$ ,  $p < .05$ . It explains 1% variance (Table 4).

On the whole, it can be seen that factors TM, HF and CM have contributed 5% of variance in predicting indirect aggression among girls.

The summary table clearly shows that hindering relationship with father and tense relationship with mother plays a more dominant role in the development of aggression among girls in comparison to other factors (Table 5).

Results indicate that the total contribution of parent-child emotional factors comes out to be 17%. i.e., these factors contribute 17% of variance towards aggression among girls with 5%, 7% and 5% of variance in physical, verbal and indirect aggression.

## Discussion

The primary purpose of the present study was to examine the role of various parent-child emotional relationship factors as possible causes of different forms of aggression.

Of the many different relationships we form over the course of the life span, the relationship between parent and child is among the most important that has a great influence on his behavior. Among the early risk factors with small effect sizes on youth violence is poor parent-child relations.

The results, as initially predicted, pointed to parent-child emotional relationship factors to be the significant variables related to the likelihood and frequency of aggressive behavior among the participants.

Table no.2, 3 & 4 shows that among all factors, factor HF has contributed 3%, 5% and 1% of variance in physical, verbal, and indirect aggression, total 9% of variance in aggression. It shows that the hindering relationship with father (HF) has a negative impact on the girl child which makes her aggressive. It reveals the fact that frequent obstruction and opposition to the thoughts of girls by their fathers can have a negative impact on their self-esteem. It can lead to frustration which further results in aggression. In Hart et al.'s (1998) study, fathers' coercion was more strongly correlated with daughters' than sons' overt aggression. However, if a father discourages his children and intrudes on potential learning situations by being too restrictive or imposing his own solutions, he will have a bad influence on his children. Such situations can make the child frustrated which can lead to aggression among them. Parents who are overly negative and critical might instigate oppositional and aggressive behavior in their children.

It is clear from table no.2, 3 & 4 that Tense relationship with mother(TM) has positively and significantly contributed 2%, 1%

and 3% of variance in physical, verbal and indirect aggression. It illustrates that tense relationship with mother leads to more aggression among girls i.e., the more relaxed a girl feels with her mother lesser are the chances of her becoming aggressive. The results clearly shows that in case of girls if the mother-child relationship is tensed, the girls are likely to develop disturbed and aggressive behaviour. It seems that if a girl child shares the problems and issues comfortably with her mother and get a positive response from the mother then the level of irritation goes down leading to peace of mind. It indicates that a relaxed relationship of mother and daughter can play a positive role in handling disturbed behavior of the child.

The fact that, up to middle childhood, mothers spend more than twice as much time alone with their children than do fathers (Russell & Russell, 1987) makes such negative parent-child exchanges involving mothers more likely than fathers. Research has clearly implicated the link between child emotion dysregulation and child aggression (Schwartz & Proctor, 2000). Studies by emotion researchers also suggest the mediating effect of children's emotion regulation in channeling the effect of emotion-related negative parenting practices on children's social adjustment. For example, mothers' expressions of negative emotions were related to children's externalizing behavior problems in schools through the influence of the former on children's emotion regulation (Eisenberg et al., 2001). In one study, Parke et al. (2005) found that beside other factors, independent risk factors for aggression severity included greater exposure to family environments characterized by maternal negativity toward the child, family negative expressiveness, and maternal depression.

A study conducted by Evans et al. (2012) suggests that aggression, though not shyness, may relate to mothers' parenting

through associations with maternal beliefs. Findings extend the understanding of the child's role in contributing to the socialization environment associated with maternal beliefs and behaviors.

Table no.3 depicts that understanding relationship to the father (UF) is significantly and negatively correlated with verbal aggression, contributing 1% of variance. It reflects that understanding relationship with father leads to low levels of verbal aggression. It shows that if the father understands the emotions and feelings of the child, the chances of the child becoming verbally aggressive in future are less because understanding relationship reduces the unnecessary argumentation. It means more condemning relationship can result in high level of verbal aggression among girls.

Generally it is seen that girls are more close to their fathers and see them as their role models. Understanding relationship with father helps them in solving their problems and troubles at home and at school thus diminishing her insecurities and developing her self-esteem. Negative paternal affect such as high levels of hostility, had significant direct and indirect effects on adolescent negative social behaviour, which in turn predicted decreased peer acceptance (Paley, Conger, & Harold, 2000). Father involvement (as measured by frequency of contact and relationship quality) is also associated with a lower frequency of externalizing and internalizing symptoms such as acting out, disruptive behaviour, antisocial behaviour, depression, sadness and lying (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002a; King & Sobolewski, 2006). One study of school-aged children found that children with good relationships with their fathers were less likely to experience depression, to exhibit disruptive behavior, or to lie and were more likely to exhibit pro-social behavior (Mosley & Thompson, 1995).

Factor CM i.e., close relationship to mother has also contributed 1% of variance showing a negative and significant relation with indirect aggression. It indicates that close relationship with mother contributes to low levels of indirect aggression. Close relationship with mother makes the girl child share the thoughts and ideas. In other words it reflects that distant relationship with mother contributes in increasing indirect aggression by indulging her more in gossiping, ignoring, and criticizing the other person. (Table no. 4).

Following studies also support the results of present study. Jones et al. (2008) and McKee, Forehand et al. (2008), found that only the dimension warmth uniquely and differentially predicted externalizing problem behavior. A proposed explanation for this negative relation with externalizing behavior is that a lack of parental support (i.e. warmth, involvement) interferes with a child's capacity to regulate arousal (Tronick, 1989). As a result, children may have difficulty with considering consequences of actions and with refraining from aggressive behavior (Brody et al., 2002). Results of present study also show that factor CM and UF are also significantly and positively correlated with supporting(S), and warm(W) relationship to parents. It means that these factors have contributed significantly in the proportion of variance of factor CM and UF in relation to aggression.

Warm and supportive parent-child interactions are known to facilitate the development of prosocial behaviours, and mitigate the development of problem behavior (Aunola and Nurmi, 2005; Finkenauer et al., 2005).

In one study by Talebi and Verma (2007) on factors related to aggression in Iranian and Indian school children it was found that attachment security demonstrated significant negative correlations with aggression in the

boys, girls and the total Iranian sample. In the Indian sample, attachment security was also found to be significantly negatively correlated with aggression.

What children learn about the world is based on how parents raise and educate them. The behavior of parents toward children, and the examples parents set, **are** the lessons they teach. Children brought up in homes where adult behavior is confusing, emotionally unstable and communication is poor susceptibility to aggression increases. Positive parenting contributes to child development in many ways; most notably, it lays the foundation for future relationships with friends, classmates, teachers, and other adults in the community.

Taken together, the findings of this study portray the importance of parent-child emotional relationship in the development of aggressive behaviour in girls.

This research has few limitations. A primary limitation is that the results cannot be generalized to all cultures. Culture is a label for all the many different features that vary from society to society and that comprise the independent variables (Segall, 1984). As the present study was conducted on Indian subjects from a particular area. Therefore, the role of culture deserves more attention because what is considered aggressive in one particular culture or ethnic group may not be so within another. Although males in most cultures are physically more aggressive than females, the latter are also aggressive, but tends to resort to other means, which puts them in less danger of physical retaliation.

Indian females are by no means unaggressive, and the low interpersonal aggression in schools has to be explained in other ways. Girls from Asian cultures disapprove of relational aggression more than physical aggression, whereas girls in the USA view relational and physical aggression as being

equally unacceptable (Fang, Desoto, & Bumgarner, 2007). Though our samples were from single place from Himachal Pradesh limits our ability to generalize the findings. Nonetheless, the results are highly significant and can act as a guide for further research in the field of human aggression.

Another limitation is that parents were not given the opportunity to fill the forms, to know the level of aggression and relationship with their children, which would have perhaps added more reliability in the results.

An implication of these findings is that child's emotional feelings towards his parents should be taken into account when improvement in parent-child relationship is desired.

Taken together, these findings support strong recommendations to investigate further the contribution of parent-child emotional relationship in the overall development of the child.

The information from this study can be used to develop targeted interventions aimed at managing aggression.

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**Table 1:** Correlation matrix of Parent-child emotional relationship factors and aggression (girls)

	P	V	IA	CM	WM	TM	SM	OM	UM	HM	IM	RM	CF	WF	TF	SF	OF	UF	HF	IF	RF
P		.76**	.75**	-.08	-.09*	.17**	-.06	-.03	-.04	.16**	.05	-.08	.01	-.06	.13**	.03	-.03	-.10*	.18**	.09*	-.05
V			.79**	-.07	-.11*	.16**	-.07	-.04	-.08	.17**	.04	-.11**	.01	-.09	.18**	.01	-.04	-.15**	.23**	.11*	-.07
IA				-.09*	-.10*	.18**	-.07	-.04	-.04	.13**	.01	-.13**	-.03	-.07	.15**	.02	-.05	-.12**	.17**	.08	-.06
CM					.26**	-.05	.19**	.33**	.25**	.03	.03	.29**	.47**	.24**	-.00	.23**	.32**	.22**	.04	.12**	.17**
WM						-.13**	.46**	.35**	.25**	-.08	-.09*	.22**	.26**	.42**	-.09	.37**	.26**	.27**	.03	-.02	.28**
TM							-.01	-.02	-.00	.28**	.24**	-.11*	-.06	-.11	.46**	-.09*	-.02	-.06	.22**	.21**	-.12**
SM								.29**	.21**	-.08	-.09	.27**	.18**	.24**	-.03	.29**	.20**	.19**	-.03	.04	.19**
OM									.19**	-.10*	-.03	.32**	.26**	.33**	.02	.24**	.39**	.29**	.00	.09*	.23**
UM										-.17**	-.01	.16**	.17**	.14**	.01	.10*	.27**	.38**	-.02	-.01	.15**
HM											.19**	-.08	.04	-.01	.27**	.00	-.09*	-.09*	.38**	.14**	-.03
IM												-.05	-.01	-.14**	.23**	.04	.00	-.04	.19**	.51**	-.09*
RM													.34**	.38**	-.17**	.25**	.28**	.26**	.09*	.00	.37**
CF														.42**	-.11*	.34**	.44**	.35**	.00	.05	.32**
WF															-.17**	.35**	.35**	.42**	-.02	.05	.42**
TF																-.09*	-.08	-.07	.34**	.19**	-.09*
SF																	.27**	.31**	-.00	-.00	.35**
OF																		.40**	-.06	.00	.29**
UF																			-.04	-.02	.29**
HF																				.20**	.04
IF																					-.03
RF																					

\*  $p < .05$ \*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 2 :** Stepwise regression analysis of Parent-child emotional relationship factors with physical aggression among girls

Variables	Order of Entry	Value r	Reg. Coff.	Beta weight $\beta$	t	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F - ratio
HF	1	.18**	.76	.18	4.16	.03	.03	17.33**
TM	2	.17**	.65	.13	2.96	.05	.02	8.79**

\* p&lt; .05

\*\* p&lt; .01

**Table 3 :** Stepwise regression analysis of Parent-child emotional relationship factors with verbal aggression among girls

Variables	Order of Entry	Value r	Reg. Coff.	Beta weight $\beta$	t	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F - ratio
HF	1	.23**	.82	.23	5.3	.05	.05	28.09**
UF	2	-.15**	-.44	-.12	-2.85	.09	.01	8.1**
TM	3	.16	.40	.09	2.15	.10	.01	4.6*

\* p&lt; .05

\*\* p&lt; .01

**Table 4 :** Stepwise regression analysis of Parent-child emotional relationship factors with indirect aggression among girls

Variables	Order of Entry	Value r	Reg. Coff.	Beta weight $\beta$	t	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F - ratio
TM	1	.18**	1.89	.18	4.19	.03	.03	17.57**
HF	2	.17**	1.01	.12	2.57	.07	.01	6.59**
CM	3	-.09*	-1.16	-.09	-2.28	.08	.01	5.19*

\* p&lt; .05

\*\* p&lt; .01

**Table 5 :** Summary of results in tabular form

TYPES OF AGGRESSION	EMOTIONAL RELATIONSHIP FACTORS			
	HF	TM	UF	CM
PHYSICAL	3%**	2%**	-----	-----
VERBAL	5%**	1%*	1%**	-----
INDIRECT	1%**	3%**	-----	1%*

\* p&lt; .05

\*\* p&lt; .01

