

# Age Differences in Expression of Aggression in Men and Women

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**Abstract:** *The present study investigates age differences in expression of aggression in men and women. Both age and sex were taken as independent variables.*

*In order to test this hypothesis a questionnaire was prepared and given to a sample of 100 consisting of men and women at two age levels. T-test for independent sample mean was applied to the variables. The result of the study indicated that age and sex have significant effects on expression of aggression.*

**Keywords:** *Behavior, Aggression, Hypothesis*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In humans, aggression is usually understood as behaviour which is intended to harm other person either physically or verbally. The term is also used in an extended sense to describe any actions which are performed with persistence and energy. Some psychoanalytic and ethological theorists have speculated that behaviours, which are aggressive in the strict and extended senses, are related to a common source of energy. Many theorists have also drawn a distinction between hostile aggressions, where this harm is merely a means to another end.

According to Bandura, (1977), people became aggressive because they have learned by experience, observation and imitation that it pays. For example, he argues that frustration does not innately lead to aggression but will do so if the individual has learned that this kind of behaviour is reinforcing. Humans can learn this in principle, not only by being repeatedly reinforced for acting aggressively, but also by observing that others are so reinforced and then initiating them. Alternatively, humans may learn that other responses to frustration are more rewarding (Dollard, 1939). Humans also learn to show aggression in many other situations where frustration is not present. For example, subjects working in a hot, stuffy room shared more aggression than controls that were working in more pleasant surroundings, but only when both groups had watched activities of aggressive model (Baron and Lawton, 1974).

Despite the emphasis on aggression as a learned behaviour, there is considerable support for the idea that aggression is an inborn characteristic. Sex differences in aggressive responding are also a widely accepted idea. Barry, Josephson, Lauer and Marshall (1976, 1980) surveyed nearly 150 societies drawn from the standard cross-cultural sample (Murdock and White, 1969-1980) an inculcation of aggressiveness among children between the age of approximately four and twelve years of age (both

early and later during the age span) for both boys and girls. They found considerable variations across societies in inculcation of aggressiveness for boys than for girls, with the sex differences more marked during the later period than during early childhood (Barry *et al*, 1976-1980). A review of 130 studies done on sex differences from 1930's to the mid-1970's (Rohner 1976) confirmed the fact that males, both boys and men, are more aggressive than females. Thus, the findings that males from early in life are more aggressive than females can now, in Rohner's words "be raised to the level of a pan species generalization". Terman and Tyler (1954) have collected a large body of evidence concerning sex differences related to aggressiveness. In general the evidence is consistent with the idea that makes on the average show a lower threshold of aggression than females. Sociological data, animal studies (Cellias, 1944; Devase 1965; Hebb and Thompson 1954; Scott and Frederissan, 1951), research on children (Feshback and Feshbach, 1969; Goldberg, Goodfrey and Lewis, 1967; Lansky *et al*, 1961; Levin and Sears, 1961; Shartell and Bille 1970) and research on adults, (Buss, 1963; 1966; Prasad, 1980; Taylor and Epstein, 1967) suggest sexual dimorphism in aggression. Indeed, it has sometimes been proposed that women are truly the gentle sex relatively free from aggressive urges (Baran and Byrne, 1981). In the Netherlands, as in many other countries, physical aggression is regarded as a typically male behaviour. It is not very surprising then, that Stroo (1971) found much higher aggressive peer rating for boys than for girls. Junger-Tas (1976) too detected differences, the boy/girl offence ratio being 3:2. For boys, Stroo (1971) found a strong correlation between aggression at school and at home, while for girls this relationship was much less clear, girls are less hesitant to behave aggressively as compared to the school situations, where social control is probably stronger. Beatrice Whiting (1963) examined three to ten year old children from six cultures. In all of them, boys manifested more physical aggression and girls were more sociable, shared more readiness to help, and had a greater sense of responsibility. Sex differences in socializing techniques may very well explain this phenomenon.

Thus cross-cultural research describes aggression, achievement orientation, self-confidence, and anxiety as masculine, while caring, sense of responsibility and sociability are more feminine traits. Intra-culture inquiries yield similar result, with but a few exceptions. Most of the researchers agree that boys are more aggressive than girls (Gardan and Smith 1965). But in recent years systematic research on the issue suggests that women are less aggressive than men only under certain conditions, especially when women believe that they have feminine

sex roles. In situations where such restraints are absent, differences between the sexes may decrease or even fully vanish (Frodi, Macaulay and Thome, 1978). Clear evidence for this view is provided by an experiment conducted by Richardson, Bernstein and Tailor (1929). It suggests that relatively low level of aggression often shown by females stems from their belief that such behaviour will be viewed as sex-inappropriate by others. Conditions serving to remove such restraints may encourage higher level of aggression. Further support for their view is provided by studies involving direct comparison between males and females (Baron and Ball, 1974).

So the impact of sex role standards will be different for males and females at different age levels. For example, a young girl may not be bothered about sex role standards and behave very gently, inhibiting her potentiality to aggress. Men on the other hand may not have or very less social restraints on their part, the expression of aggression may not change with the age.

In present study, an attempt is made to understand the dynamics of human aggressiveness, by examining the age differences in expression of aggression in men or women at two age levels, i.e. teenager and middleagers.

Two hypotheses have been developed for the study:

- H<sub>1</sub>: The expression of aggression will be greater for men than women.
- H<sub>2</sub>: The expression of aggression in teenagers will be greater than middleagers.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1 Sample

A total of 100 subjects were used in this experiment. There were 50 males and 50 females, each group comprised of 25 teenagers and 25 middleagers. The teenager group (N=50) was formed of college students; average age of this group was ranging between 13 and 18 years. The middle age of this group (N=50) comprised subjects from different occupations, average age-range was between 40-50 years.

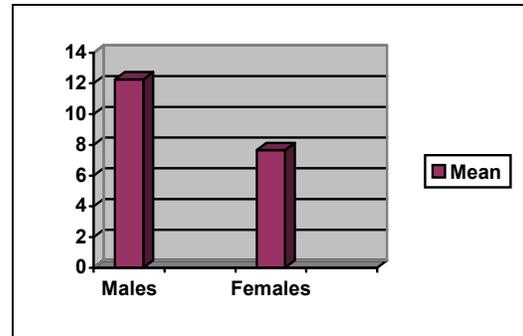
The subjects were selected with respect to demographic characteristics. Data was collected on the basis of a questionnaire, which was prepared from the personality research form. Then all the responses were recorded on the original PRF Answer Sheets.

### 2.2 Statistics

The statistical significance was assessed by the application of t. test for independent sample mean. The degree of freedom associated with t. test is  $n_x + n_y - 2$ .

Table 1: Mean, Standard deviations and T ratio for expression of aggression between males and females.

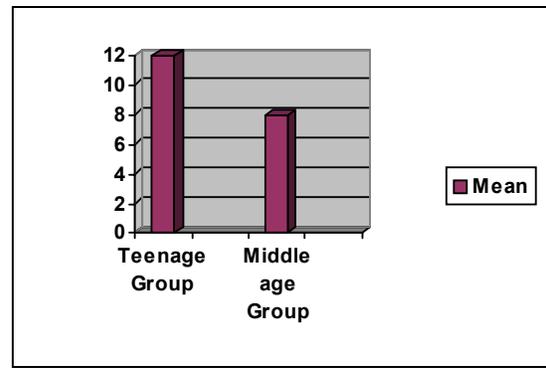
Groups	Mean	SD	Df	T ratio	Level of significance
Males	12.24	3.40	98	7.508	.001
Females	7.66	2.70	98		



Graph A: Mean sources for expression of aggression of males and females

Table 2: Mean, Standard deviations and t ratio for expression of aggression between teenage and middle age group

Groups	Mean	SD	Df	T ratio	Level of significance
Teenage	11.94	2.82	98	2.426	0.025
Middleage	7.96	13.59	98		



Graph B

## 3. RESULTS

The result of the statistical analysis for the hypotheses are shown in Tables 1 and 2 and in Graphs A and B. Table 1 indicates the X, SD and t ratio for male and female groups. Table 2 shows the X, SD and t ratio for teenage and middle age groups.

Hypothesis No. 1, "the expression of aggression will be greater for men than women", as the table value (3.160) is less than the obtained value (7.508) at .001 level of significance, so we accept the hypothesis that there is significance difference between the expression of aggression for men and women.

Hypothesis No. 2, "the expression of aggression will be greater for teenage group than the middle age group", it may be noted from the t test table (table No. 2) that the table value (1.980) is less than the obtained value (2.426) at 0.025 level of significance.

So the result goes in favour of the hypothesis that is teenage group are more aggressive than middle age group.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Aggression is a personality trait that has been long studied by man with great patience and wonderment. Although aggression can be broadly defined as a form of behavior, including attempts to master a task, most psychologists use the term in a restricted sense to apply to actions with intent to injure others. The frequency of more bizarre forms of maladaptive aggression is probably related to the fact that aggression, next to sex, is the most highly regulated and repressed of all types of human social behavior. Aggressive behavior and its causes therefore have great significance for social scientists.

Society labels certain behavior patterns as unacceptable and prohibits their overt expression. The expression of aggression is one of them. How far an individual learns and follows their standards determines whether an individual is socialized or not. These standards will be different for the two sexes and with age an individual gradually imbibes their sex role standards. As the result of the first hypothesis indicate, where men score higher than women, indicates the importance of these sex role standards. Though both men and women express their aggression in more direct and active ways, men do not bother about the social approval, whereas women are more conscious about the social approval.

Maccoby and Jacklin (1980) attribute the sex differences to the sexual division of labor. Because different socialization pressures on boys and girls, they dispatch different adult traits, with the male role requiring more aggressiveness. This is the fact that females are child-bearers and close to home activities. They argued that males are biologically predisposed toward aggressive behavior. Societies using harsher and less affectionate socialization practices have higher levels of both internal and external conflict.

With regard to the second hypothesis, which concerns significant age difference with regard to expression of aggression, the teenage group shows greater aggression than the middle age group. The high scores of the teenage group can also be explained in terms of the socialization process. The young men and women might have not yet established their personal identities, and might not inhibit their aggressiveness; they feel it is a part of their personality. But the middle-aged men and women who by now are very assertive and sure to their status in the society may be inhibiting aggression. Middle aged men and women avoid expression of aggression because of the

general social restraints attached to their forms of behavior. But men who are comparatively more free to express their aggression in direct ways and to identify aggressive behavior with their sex roles, express aggression mostly directly. Even with the increasing age, which brings about changes in their self-assertion, they express aggression mostly in the direct ways.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

In closing this discussion of relationship between aggression age and sex, it is important to point out that any conclusion reached on this subject are highly tentative. Theory, instrument, and research designs are developing so rapidly in this area that new and important hypotheses and conclusions are likely to appear with every new research.

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