

Family Communication Patterns And Internet Addiction As Correlates Of Aggression Among Adolescents: Who Is At Greater Risk In Himachal Pradesh, India?

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Abstract:

Background: Adolescence stage is usually associated with identity struggles which often leads to insecurity further prompting aggression. During this pivotal stage of life, family interactions play a paramount role in mitigating aggression risks. Moreover, in the era of digitalization, there are a plethora of online communities and social platforms, which offer space for adolescents to seek connections beyond the physical realm. However, excessive reliance on virtual world may pose challenges often leading to behavioural problems like aggression. The present study was conducted to comprehend the influence of family communication patterns and internet addiction on the aggression among adolescents.

Material and Methods: The study involved 406 adolescents (202 boys and 204 girls), aged 14-18 years, utilising Fitzpatrick & Koener's (2006) Family Communication Patterns instrument, Internet Addiction Test (IAT) developed by Kimberly Young (1996) and Buss and Perry's (1992) Aggression Questionnaire, to measure family communication patterns, internet addiction and aggression among adolescents. t-tests, Pearson correlations, and stepwise regression were employed to explore gender differences, associations, and to identify significant predictor of aggression.

Results: The present study found significant gender differences in conversation orientation (a dimension of family communication patterns), with the results of girls outscoring boys. Contrarily, no significant gender differences were found in internet addiction and aggression among adolescent girls and boys. Further, conversation, conformity orientation (dimensions of family communication patterns) and internet addiction had a notable negative correlation with aggression in both genders. The study further revealed that conversation and conformity orientation turned out to be significant predictors of aggression among adolescent boys whereas conversation orientation and internet addiction turned out to be a significant predictor of aggression among adolescent girls.

Conclusion: It is observed from the current results that family communication and internet addiction play a pivotal role in lowering aggression among adolescents.

Keywords: Family communication patterns, conversation orientation, conformity orientation, aggression

Date of Submission: 17-02-2024

Date of Acceptance: 27-02-2024

I. Introduction

In the pivotal phase of adolescence, individuals aged 10-19 years undergo a transformative journey marked by significant changes across biological, cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional dimensions. In this crucial period, parents play an important role as a buffer against potential mental health crises. Family serves as a secure emotional foundation where adolescents feel loved and accepted, regardless of external circumstances. Interpersonal communication between parents and adolescents significantly influences various psychological outcomes. It has been observed that family interactions play a vital role in preventing the risk of aggression among adolescents (Labella and Masten, 2017). According to Martin and Ruble (2004), children learn gender-appropriate behaviour by observing parents and therefore parental communication significantly impacts gender development. Research in the field of aggression has found that adolescent boys and girls identify noteworthy gender disparities in aggression, with studies consistently indicating higher levels of aggression among boys as compared to girls (Lal and Sekhri, 2019; Roy and Jha, 2022).

Furthermore, other studies, have shown that families who emphasized discipline and control over their adolescents, showed higher levels of aggressive behaviour among adolescents. In contrast, families that prioritised warm communication and understanding of their adolescents were observed to have lower levels of aggression among adolescents (Dabaghi et al., 2017; Rinaldi, Bulut, and Stasio 2023). Similarly, Rana and Malhotra (2005) discovered that higher cohesion, expressiveness, and caring environment provided by family members, had a

significant negative correlation with aggression among adolescents.

Moreover, the increased reliance on gadgets among adolescents during the pandemic resulted in a decline in direct communication with their families. Notably, attempts to limit adolescents' internet use have been associated with an increase in aggression among adolescents (Zhang et al., 2022). Hence in the era of the tech-savvy generation, where a profound reliance on the internet is the norm, adolescents find themselves heavily immersed in the virtual world. While the virtual platform serves as a positive avenue for self-expression and relationship-building, over-dependence on the same leads to behavioural problems like aggression. Studies have shown that heightened integration with technology contributes to sedentary behavior, and disruptions in this connection often lead to aggressive behavior among adolescents (Agbaria, 2021; Chandwani, 2022).

Other studies have also shown that there exist significant gender differences when it comes to internet addiction. For example, a study conducted by Dhawan, Kang, and Sharma (2021) explored the relationship between gender and internet addiction among students of Ludhiana, India. The results showed significant gender differences in internet addiction among adolescents, with boys scoring significantly higher in internet addiction than girls. Similarly, Shan et al. (2021) found that boys had higher internet addiction compared to adolescent girls.

In light of these findings, current research has made an effort to understand that internet usage and family communication patterns impact adolescents' aggression. Research in India has mainly concentrated on understanding parenting styles but no study has been conducted till now, to understand how family communication can potentially impact the aggression of adolescents. Hence the present study tried to understand the role of family communication patterns on the aggression of adolescents. Specifically focusing on adolescent girls and boys in Himachal Pradesh, India. The study seeks to further identify significant predictors of aggression within the context of family communication patterns and internet addiction.

Objectives

Considering the above-mentioned review of literature, the following objectives of the study have been formulated:

- (i) To assess and compare the two dimensions of Family communication patterns (i.e., conversation and conformity orientation) and aggression among adolescent boys and girls.
- (ii) To determine the effect of Family communication patterns (i.e., conversation and conformity orientation) on aggression among adolescent girls.
- (iii) To evaluate the effect of Family communication patterns (i.e., conversation and conformity orientation) on aggression among adolescent boys.
- (iv) To evaluate and compare internet addiction among adolescent girls and boys.
- (v) To identify the effect of internet addiction on aggression among adolescent girls.
- (vi) To examine the effect of internet addiction on aggression among adolescent boys.

Hypotheses

Based on the review of the literature the following hypotheses have been formulated:

- (i) Adolescent boys will have significantly higher aggression as compared to adolescent girls.
- (ii) Internet addiction will be significantly higher among adolescent boys as compared to adolescent girls.
- (iii) There will be a significant positive correlation between Internet Addiction and Aggression among adolescent girls.
- (iv) There will be a significant positive correlation between Internet Addiction and Aggression among adolescent boys.

II. Material and Methods

Participants

In the present study, a stratified sampling technique was employed to randomly select 500 adolescents, evenly divided between 250 boys and 250 girls. The sample belonged to Shimla, the capital city of Himachal Pradesh. The data was collected during the partial lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, presenting challenges in accessing various public schools. Despite, initially shortlisting around ten public schools to cover the total student population, the final sample size was reduced to 406 adolescents (202 boys and 204 girls) due to incomplete or incorrect responses and, in some cases, unavailability of students during the pandemic. The age ranged from 14-18 years. On average, 51 students from each school participated in the study. Nearly 26.3 per cent of the adolescents were studying in the 9th standard, 22.6 per cent in the 10th standard, 25.1 per cent in the 11th standard and 26.1 per cent in the 12th standard. Demographic details of the sample taken in the present study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Adolescents

Sr. No	Background Characteristics	Percentage	Number
1.	Gender		
	Male	49.8	202
	Female	50.2	204
2.	Age (in years)		
	14	20.4	83
	15	21.3	86
	16	19.7	80
	17	17.7	72
	18	20.9	85
3.	Standard		
	9 th	26.3	107
	10 th	22.6	91
	11 th	25.1	102
	12 th	26.1	106

Measures

Family Communication Patterns Scale-R

The way families communicate with each other was measured with the help of the revised Family Communication Pattern instrument developed by Fitzpatrick & and Ritchie (1994). It is a self-report measure consisting of 26 items with two subscales namely conversation (15 items) and conformity orientation (11 items). The responses were measured on a 7-Likert scale ranging from 1 "Strongly disagree" to 7 "Strongly agree". The scores will be the average taken out of all total item scores on each subscale. The reliability of conversation orientation was found to be higher than 0.80 for conversation orientation and conformity orientation. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be 0.93 for conversation orientation and 0.89 for conformity orientation.

Buss and Perry (BPQ)

The Aggression Questionnaire was designed by Buss and Perry (1992) and is used to measure aggression among adolescents. It is a self-report measure, which consists of 29 items. It is a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 being "extremely uncharacteristic of me" to 5 being "extremely characteristic of me" BPQ measures the four aspects of aggressiveness i.e., verbal aggression (5 items), physical aggression (9 items), anger (8 items) and hostility (8 items). A total score on aggression is obtained by summing the subscales which range from 29 to 145. A higher score indicates high aggression and lower scores must be interpreted as low levels of aggression. The internal consistency of the whole questionnaire is .89. Test-retest reliability for the subscales ranges from .72 to .80 (Buss & Perry, 1992).

Internet Addiction Test

Internet Addiction Test (IAT) developed by Kimberly Young (1996) is a self-report questionnaire which measures the severity of compulsive use of the Internet for adults and adolescents. It is a 20-item questionnaire and each item must be scored on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0=less extreme behaviour to 5= for most extreme behaviour. The internal reliability of the scale is .93. The split-half reliability has been reported to be good at .72. Its concurrent validity is satisfactory when tested against the CIAS ranging from .27 to .40 and its convergent validity with time spent online was .21. The scores range from 0 to 100. A higher score range indicates a greater level of addiction. Total scores ranging from 20-49 reflect an average internet user; scores ranging from 50-74 indicate a moderate level of internet addiction; scores of 75-100 reflect a higher level of dependence upon the internet.

Procedure

To collect data for the present study, permission was obtained from the school administration. Suitable dates were allocated by the concerned Principals. On the assigned dates questionnaires were provided to the students during their regular school hours and instructions were given to mark their responses in the presence of their class teachers.

Statistical Analysis

- (i) **t-test:** A t-test was conducted to see the significance of differences between adolescent girls and boys on two sub-variables of revised family communication patterns (conversation and conformity orientation), internet addiction and aggression.
- (ii) **Correlation Analysis:** Correlation analysis was computed for two sub-variables of revised family

communication patterns (i.e., conversation and conformity orientation) and internet addiction with aggression. (iii) **Stepwise regression Analysis:** It was carried out to determine the most significant predictor of aggression. The predictor variables were family communication patterns (i.e., conversation and conformity orientation) and internet addiction.

III. Results

Comparison of means (t-test)

To compare the means of all the variables between adolescent girls and boys, t-ratios were calculated to test the significance of differences. Results have been reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Showing comparative analysis of Adolescent Boys and Girls on Family Communication Patterns, Internet Addiction and Aggression

Variables	Boys (N=202)		Girls (N=204)		t-ratio
	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev	
Conversation Orientation	3.83	.929	4.20	1.019	3.802**
Conformity Orientation	3.93	.908	4.11	1.110	1.819
Internet Addiction	47.07	17.35	44.95	17.24	1.234
Aggression	86.40	13.97	85.34	15.14	.729

p<.01**

Two sub-variables of family communication patterns (conversation and conformity) were used to measure the gender differences between adolescent girls and boys. Table 2 indicates that adolescent girls (M=4.20) have scored significantly (t=3.8, p<.01) higher on the conversation orientation dimension as compared to adolescent boys (M=3.83). Adolescent girls as compared to boys appeared to be more open for conversation with their family members. However, no gender differences were observed in the conformity orientation dimension.

The results further revealed that in internet addiction, the mean score (M=44.95) of adolescent girls was (t=1.234) and boys' mean score was (M=47.07). Thus, showing no significant gender differences between adolescent girls and boys. Hence, the hypothesis stating that **“Internet addiction will be significantly higher among adolescent boys as compared to adolescent girls”** was not proved.

Furthermore, no significant gender differences were observed in aggression between adolescent girls and boys. Thus, the hypothesis stating that **“Adolescent boys will have significantly higher aggression as compared to adolescent girls”** was not proved.

Results of Correlation Analysis

The correlation of two sub-variables of family communication patterns (conversation orientation, conformity orientation) and internet addiction with aggression are presented separately for adolescent girls in Table 3 and adolescent boys in Table 4.

Table 3: Showing the correlation of Family Communication Patterns (i.e., conversation and conformity orientation) and Internet Addiction with Aggression among Adolescent Girls.

Sr.No.	Variables	Aggression
A.	Family communication patterns	
1.	Conversation Orientation	-.280**
2.	Conformity Orientation	-.264**
B.	Internet Addiction	-.188**

p<.01**

It is evident from Table 3 that Conversation Orientation (r=-.280, p<.01) had a significant negative correlation with aggression. This further signifies that the more open the family conversation, the less aggression was found among adolescent girls.

The other dimension of family communication patterns i.e., conformity orientation (r= -.264, p<.01) was found to have a significant negative correlation with aggression among adolescent girls, indicating that a family which expects its members to conform to the shared beliefs and values have lower aggression.

Table 3 further indicates that there was a significant negative correlation between internet addiction (r= -.188, p<.01) and aggression among adolescent girls. The results reveal that the higher the internet addiction lower will be the aggression among adolescent girls. Thus, the hypothesis stating that **“There will be a significant**

positive correlation between internet addiction and aggression among adolescent girls” was not substantiated.

Table 4: Showing correlation of Family Communication Patterns (i.e., Conversation and Conformity Orientation) and Internet Addiction with Aggression among Adolescent Boys.

Sr.No.	Variables	Aggression
A.	Family communication patterns	
1.	Conversation Orientation	-.415**
2.	Conformity Orientation	-.425**
B.	Internet Addiction	
		-.301**

p<.01**

Table 4 indicates that there was a significant negative correlation between conversation orientation ($r = -.415, p < .01$) and aggression among adolescent boys. It shows that the more openness in communication among family members the lesser will be the aggression among adolescent boys. Furthermore, Table 4 indicates a significant negative correlation between conformity orientation ($r = -.425, p < .01$) and aggression among adolescent boys. The results reveal that more the uniformity in beliefs, attitudes, and values in a family, lower the aggression among adolescent boys will be.

Table 4 further indicates that there was a significant negative correlation between internet addiction ($r = -.301, p < .01$) and aggression among adolescent boys. The results show that higher the internet addiction lower the aggression. Thus, hypothesis “There will be a significant positive correlation between Internet Addiction and Aggression among adolescent boys” was not substantiated.

Stepwise Regression Analysis: Table 5 and Table 6 present the results of the stepwise regression analysis of variables in terms of their importance in predicting the aggression of adolescent girls and boys.

Table 5: Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of different variables of Family Communication Patterns (i.e., Conversation and Conformity Orientation) and Internet Addiction as predictors of Aggression among Adolescent Girls

Sr No.	Variables	R	β	t	R ²	R ² Change	F-ratio (R ² Change)
1.	Conversation Orientation	-.280**	-.270	-4.054**	.078	.078	17.245**
2.	Internet Addiction	-.188**	-.172	-2.58**	.108	.029	6.79**

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

An inspection of the above table suggests that the significant predictors of aggression among adolescent girls were conversation orientation ($\beta = -.270, t = -4.054, p < .01$) and internet addiction ($\beta = -.172$ and $t = -2.58, p < .01$). Thus, lower aggression was predicted by higher conversation orientation and internet addiction. These two variables accounted for 11 per cent of the variance. Out of this conversation orientation variable accounted for 8 per cent ($F = 17.24, p < .01$) of the variance and internet addiction accounted for 3 per cent ($F = 6.79, p < .01$) of the variance among adolescent girls.

Table 6: Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of different variables of Family Communication Patterns (i.e., Conversation and Conformity Orientation) and Internet Addiction as predictors of Aggression among Adolescent Boys

Sr No.	Variables	R	β	t	R ²	R ² Change	F-ratio (R ² Change)
1.	Conversation Orientation	-.425**	-.230	-2.78**	.180	.180	43.79**
2.	Conformity Orientation	-.415**	-.222	-2.72*	.247	.028	7.43**

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

Table 6 reveals that the significant predictors of aggression among adolescent boys were conversation orientation ($\beta = -.230, t = -2.78, p < .01$), and conformity orientation ($\beta = -.222, p < .01$). Thus, lower aggression among adolescent boys was predicted by higher scores on both dimensions of family communication patterns (conversation and conformity orientation). Out of this, Conversation Orientation explained 18 per cent ($F = 43.79, p < .01$) of the variance, and Conformity Orientation explained 3 per cent ($F = 7.43, p < .01$) of the variance in the

aggression of adolescent boys. Overall, these variables accounted for 21 per cent of the variance in aggression.

IV. Discussion

The results of the present study revealed that there were significant gender differences between adolescent girls and boys on the conversation orientation dimension of family communication patterns. Significantly, adolescent girls scored higher on the conversation-orientation dimension as compared to adolescent boys. The reason for significant differences could be the prescribed gender roles, where culture and society play a pivotal role in influencing gender-based behaviour. Social traditions have impacted self-expression within the family, so it is common for girls to be more expressive than boys. It has also been observed that in the family, girls do not hesitate to discuss their problems, whereas boys do so as it may be taken as a sign of weakness. According to Bandura (1977), a child learns gender differences at an early age and observes the pattern of communication of each gender in his/her family thereby, eventually adopting certain patterns of behaviour based on their gender. Similarly, the way parents communicate with children based on their gender influences the way they interact with other members of a family (Bornstein, 2016).

Furthermore, no significant gender difference was found between adolescent girls and boys on the conformity orientation dimension. The reason could be that nowadays parents provide the same environment, opportunities, and restrictions to both sons and daughters. It was observed in the present study that, the mean scores on both conversation and conformity orientation dimensions are on the higher side. This indicates that the family encourages open communication but at the same time also wants to maintain the hierarchy within the family.

The findings further showed that no significant gender differences exist between adolescent girls and boys in internet addiction. The results are congruent with the previous researches conducted by Khan, Shabbir and Rajput (2017) and Hassan et al (2020). These studies revealed that adolescent girls and boys were equally involved in the internet services and Internet addiction was unrelated to gender. Similarly, the sample taken for the present study (both genders) had equal access to the internet.

The results of the present study showed that no significant gender differences were found between adolescent girls and boys in aggression. The findings lend support to previous researches suggesting that both adolescent girls and boys were equal in experiencing aggression (Ghosh, 2016; Shaban and Kumar, 2016). These studies suggested that the pattern of aggression is changing and in modern times both girls and boys have equal opportunities to express their aggression. The same has also been observed in the present study.

The current investigation also observed that the conversation orientation dimension had a significant negative correlation with aggression among adolescent girls and boys. The study indicated that higher conversation orientation will lower aggression among adolescents. The regression analysis results further corroborated these results, which indicated that conversation emerged as a significant predictor of aggression among adolescent girls. One plausible explanation could be that families are known to be the building blocks of society. It is the first school through which a child understands the basic functioning of society. The perception of the world around them and self-awareness in younger ones is influenced by the interaction of their family. Family communication helps in the development of adolescents' cognitive schemas which in turn influence adolescents' processing of social information in new situations, thereby impacting their information processing, behavioral and psychological outcomes (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2006).

Aggression usually occurs within the context of interpersonal conflicts (Avtgis and Rancer, 2010). Researchers have demonstrated that family expressiveness was inversely correlated with adolescents' aggression because conversation-oriented communication enhances their cognitive flexibility and conflict management skills (Schrodt et al., 2007; Koesten et al., 2009). It has been observed that families encourage children to openly express their thoughts or feelings on matters even when their parents might disagree. This open expression was found to enhance adolescents' social information processing skills. Crick, Nicki, and Dodge (1994) explained that social information processing skills are a set of cognitive-emotion mechanisms, showing how children comprehend a particular event which eventually influences their response to that situation. These skills promote social competence and reduce aggressive behaviour. Hence, showing an inverse relationship between conversation orientation and aggression among adolescents.

Furthermore, another important finding of the present study was that conformity orientation had a significant negative correlation among adolescent girls and boys. The regression analysis further showed that conformity orientation emerged as a significant predictor of aggression among adolescent boys. The rationale behind the current results could be that the sample utilized for the present study belonged to a collective society where people usually have a negative attitude towards aggression, and adolescents would rather control their aggression to avoid negative feedback from others (Gudykunst, 1993).

Another reason for showing negative relationship between conformity orientation and aggression among adolescents could be that the sample belonged to the consensual family type, where parents encourage open communication but at the same time expect their children to obey the hierarchy within the family i.e., putting

parents above children. This type of communication creates some tension and often these restraints are resisted by the children. However, due to open conversation, they are less likely to have ongoing disagreements with the elder members of the family (Shorey,2022). Parents usually make the ultimate decisions in the family and explain the reasons for making certain decisions to their children, showing that the current sample may have enough understanding of other's points of view, in their family.

Another noteworthy finding of the present research work is that, a significant negative correlation was found between internet addiction and aggression among adolescent girls and boys. The results were further corroborated by the results of the regression analysis showing that internet addiction has emerged as a significant predictor of aggression only among adolescent girls. It seems that the COVID-19 pandemic had played an important role in showing a negative relationship between internet addiction and aggression. Based on these lines, a study was conducted by Melumad and Pham (2020) surveyed to understand the importance of internet usage in adolescent lives. The findings showed that the internet helped students get connected with people, and provided a heightened sense of privacy. Similarly, in the current study, for adolescents internet might have acted as a gateway to communicate with their peers and helped them sail through the uncertainty during the pandemic. In other words, adolescents' aggression may have been digitally pacified, meaning that the internet might have acted as a source of psychological comfort by providing them with a sense of privacy by immersing themselves away from the external world of uncertainty.

To conclude, this study identified distinct gender variations in adolescent family communication patterns. Girls displayed higher conversation-orientated scores, likely influenced by prescribed gender roles. However, no significant gender differences were found in conformity orientation, indicating parity in modern parenting practices.

Contrary to expectations, no significant gender differences in aggression and internet addiction were observed. Further, family communication patterns dimensions (i.e., conversation and conformity orientation) and internet addiction had a significant negative correlation with aggression among adolescents.

Moreover, the present study has tried to understand how the cognitive aspect of family communication patterns impacts the aggression of adolescent girls and boys. Also, the results have provided insights on how internet usage lowers the aggression among adolescents. This study is also unique because the data was collected during the pandemic, providing an opportunity to explore how these variables may interact with each other.

One limitation of the present research is that the findings may not be easily generalizable to populations outside of the studied geographical area. This can limit the external validity of the present study.

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