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The effect of Gender on the Defense Mechanism of Adolescents

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Abstract

The present study is about the effect of gender on the defense mechanisms of adolescents. Defense mechanisms are ways people react to situations that bring up negative emotions. According to the theory given by Sigmund Freud, when an individual's experiences a stressor, the subconscious will first monitor the situation to see if it might harm or not. If the subconscious believes the situation might lead to emotional harm, it may react with a defense mechanism to protect the individual. Defense mechanisms function at an unconscious level to prevent conflicts and accompany anxiety from entering awareness. They work either to cope with conflicts in the inner world or may skew an individual's perception of reality. Consequently, defenses function permanently to maintain psychological stability. The study will provide a foundation for exploring the effect of these variables on adolescents.

Key Words

Defense Mechanisms, Gender, Adolescents.

Defense mechanisms are involuntary and unconscious mental operations that contribute to reducing internal and external stresses. Depending on the conditions and frequency with which the defense mechanism is engaged, it may have healthy or unhealthy outcomes. Defense mechanisms are a part of our everyday life as they are how people deal with stress. Defense mechanisms are the psychological mechanisms or strategies adopted by people to protect from anxiety due to inner conflicts or external threats in specific ways. Humans try to avoid or distance themselves from full consciousness and awareness of unpleasant thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Most defense mechanisms operate primarily at the unconscious level, i.e. outside of a person's awareness, as people do not realize that they are using them at that moment. Thus, everyone uses this ego defence mechanism in different situations. According to Coleman (1968), these are essential for softening failure, reducing cognitive dissonance, alleviating anxiety, protecting ourselves against trauma and maintaining our feelings of adequacy of personal worth.

Components of Defense Mechanisms

Freud's 1905 single work "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious" described seven defense mechanisms- humour, distortion, displacement, repression, suppression, fantasy and isolation. Anna Freud listed nine defense, regression, reaction formation, repression, isolation, projection, undoing, turning against

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the self, introjection and reversal. Ten years later, Anna. Freud added the defenses of identification and intellectualization. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM III- R, American Psychiatric Association, 1987 added the following defenses to the already existing list: devaluation, autistic fantasy, passive aggression dissociation and suppression.

Gleser & Ihilevich (1991), divided or grouped into five general defense styles.

➢ **Turning Against Object (TAO)** involves management threats or internal conflict by inappropriate and excessive attacks on the real or presumed source of perceived danger. With such attacks, anxiety gets diminished as the experience of feeling threatened gets transformed into an experience of making threats and enhances a person's sense of well-being. Displacement and identification with the aggressor are included in this category of defenses.

➢ **Projection (PRO)** involves taking our unacceptable qualities or feelings and projecting them outwards onto another person hence showing hostility or rejection towards the person. Such negative attribution and rejection diminish personal anxiety regarding his or her undesirable qualities as an illusion of mastery and superiority over these trials gets created indirectly thus enhancing self-esteem.

➢ **Principalization (PRN)** functions by involving platitudes, clichés, truisms and sophistry to perceived external threats or inner conflict. This process splits off the awareness of perceived threats from emotional significance and the illusion of understanding is created by which a sense of mastery is established, emotional detachment from perceived threat is achieved which leads to a lowering of anxiety and enhancement of self-esteem. This class of defense include rationalization, intellectualization and isolation

➢ **Turning Against Self (TAS)** functions by directing anger, disapproval or uncalled-for hostility towards the self. Such kind of self-derogation and self-punishment from a fashion reduces or so often the impact of negative or less-than-perfect outcomes. In this class of defense the valuable self-esteem gets protected from further diminution. It includes self-handicapping, masochistic, pessimistic and auto-sadistic responses.

➢ **Reversal (REV)** functions by minimizing the importance of external threats and inner conflict or by removing them completely from awareness. Individuals respond positively or neutrally to a frustrating event which might otherwise evoke a negative reaction. The illusion of mastery is created by obliterating unpleasant reality lowers conscious anxiety and enhances a sense of well-being. It involves defense such as denial, reaction formation, repression and negation. Defense mechanisms are unconscious and non-intentional while coping is a conscious psychological process and intentional

Zhang (2014) discovered that male students tended to report higher use of defense mechanisms such as overconfidence and Turning Against Others (TAO), while females were more likely to use defense mechanisms like the desire to make a good impression. Furnham (2012) researched a lay understanding of defense mechanisms and found that personality traits like openness and neuroticism were correlated with different defense levels. Tallandin and Caudek (2009) studied defense mechanism development in children and found that girls exhibited more regression, displacement, and reaction formation, while boys showed more denial.Mrinal and Singhal (1981) focused on coping styles in gifted adolescents and found that male students had a preference for certain defense mechanisms like REV, TAO, and PRO, while female students tended to choose TAS and PRN. Additionally, Gleser and Ihilevich (1969) developed an objective instrument to measure defense mechanisms and found that males scored higher on TAO and Projection (PRO) compared to females.

Purpose of the Study

To ensure a problem-free and smooth transition from adolescence to adulthood, a good understanding of their defense mechanisms are desired. Defense is any manoeuvre a person may undertake to keep something he cannot bear to see or feel out of his awareness. A defense may also be used simultaneously to prevent him from carrying out an impulse he regards as forbidden. In other words, the purpose of defense is to keep out

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of consciousness that which we badly need to control (i.e., to bind) and to keep unconscious. A defense is like turning our eyes away, shutting them tight, or even fainting to keep from looking at a scene that fills us with horror. The horror could be a vision of something dreadful we imagine ourselves committing.

Objectives

The objectives of the present study was,

To examine the relationship between gender and defense mechanisms.

Hypotheses

Any scientific investigation starts with the statement of the problem. For proper statistical analysis and interpretation of the data, the main hypothesis was divided into sub-sections(dimensions) of the criterion variable, defense mechanism. Based on the above facts, the following hypotheses have been put in this work:

H_1: Gender would have a significant effect on the Defense Mechanism.

H_{1a}: Gender would have a significant effect on the Defense Mechanism -Turning Against an Object

H_{1b}: Gender would have a significant effect on the Defense Mechanism -Projection

H_{1c}: Gender would have a significant effect on the Defense Mechanism -Principalization

H_{1d}: Gender would have a significant effect on the Defense Mechanism -Turning Against Self

H_{1e}: Gender would have a significant effect on the Defense Mechanism -Reversal

Research Method

The research method provides the tools and techniques by which the research problem is to be dealt with method. It is the style of conducting research work determined by the nature of the problem. The present study is the prediction of Gender on Defense Mechanism of Adolescents. For this purpose, the survey method of research has been used.

Sample

In this study, 300 teenagers aged 13 to 19 years old from the Durg district were involved. The technique of stratified random sampling was employed. The stratification was based on location, i.e., urban and rural

Measures

Defense Mechanism

For measuring Defense Mechanisms, the Indian adaptation of the Defense Mechanism Inventory (DMI) constructed by Gleser and Ihilevich (1969) and developed by Mrinal and Singhal (2012) is used.

Statistical Treatment

Statistics is the basis tool of measurement and research. Different statistical methods the t-test was computed to verify the hypothesis.

Result

Table- 1

Group Statistics							
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t -value	df	p-value
TAO	Male	150	35.12	10.717	2.154	298	0.032 S
	Female	150	32.37	11.360			
PRO	Male	150	26.69	8.931	10.833	298	0.000 HS
	Female	150	40.62	12.976			
PRN	Male	150	31.17	9.650	3.939	298	0.000 HS
	Female	150	36.42	13.154			
TAS	Male	150	30.39	9.225	1.702	298	0.090 NS
	Female	150	32.45	11.608			
REV	Male	150	37.85	13.797	5.540	298	0.000 HS
	Female	150	30.01	10.491			

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H$_{1a}$: Gender would have a significant effect on the Defense Mechanism -Turning Against an Object.

The above table- 1 shows, that the p-value was found to be significant at a 0.05 level of significance. This reveals that the Turning Against an Object (TAO) of male and female adolescents differs significantly. Therefore, to find out whether male or female adolescents, have a higher level of Turning Against an Object (TAO), the Mean and Standard Deviation of Turning Against an Object (TAO) scores of males and females were calculated separately. From the above table, it is evident that the mean and standard deviation of Turning Against an Object (TAO) scores of the male adolescent were 35.12 and 10.717 and that of the female adolescents were 32.37 and 11.360 respectively. This reveals that the Turning Against an Object (TAO)of male adolescents were higher than the Turning Against an Object (TAO) of female adolescents.

H$_{1b}$: Gender would have a significant effect on the Defense Mechanism -Projection.

The above table- 1 shows, that the p-value was found highly significant at a 0.01 level of significance. This reveals that the Projection (PRO) of male and female adolescents differs significantly. Therefore, to find out whether male or female adolescent, have a higher level of Projection (PRO), the Mean and Standard Deviation of Projection (PRO) scores of males and females was calculated separately. From the above table, it is evident that the mean and standard deviation of Projection (PRO) scores of males were 26.69 and 8.931 respectively those of females were 40.62 and 12.976 respectively. This reveals that the Projection (PRO)of male adolescents were lower than the Projection (PRO) of female adolescents.

H$_{1c}$: Gender would have a significant effect on the Defense Mechanism -Principalization.

The above table- 1 shows, that the p-value was found highly significant at a 0.01 level of significance. This reveals that the Principalization (PRN) of male and female adolescents differs significantly. Therefore, to find out whether male or female adolescent, have a higher level of Principalization (PRN), the Mean and Standard Deviation of Principalization (PRN) scores of males and females was calculated separately. From the above table, it is evident that the mean and standard deviation of Principalization (PRN) scores of males were 31.17 and 9.650 respectively those of females were 36.42 and 13.154 respectively. This reveals that the Principalization (PRN)of male adolescents were lower than the Principalization (PRN) of female adolescents.

H$_{1d}$: Gender would have a significant effect on the Defense Mechanism -Turning Against Self.

The above table- 1 shows, the p-value was found to be non-significant. This reveals that the Turning against self (TAS) of males and female do not differ significantly. It can therefore be concluded that Turning against self (TAS) of both male as well as female adolescents was found to be of the same extent.

H$_{1e}$: Gender would have a significant effect on the Defense Mechanism -Reversal.

The above table- 1 shows, that the p-value was found highly significant at a 0.01 level of significance. This reveals that the Reversal (REV) of male and female adolescents differs significantly. Therefore, to find out whether male or female adolescents have higher levels of Reversal (REV), the Mean and Standard Deviation of Reversal (REV) scores of male and female was calculated separately. From the above table, it is evident that the mean and standard deviation of Reversal (REV) scores of the male adolescent was 37.85 and 13.797 and those of the female adolescents were 30.01 and 10.491 respectively. This reveals that the Reversal (REV)of male adolescents were higher than the Reversal (REV) of female adolescents.

Conclusion

Defense mechanisms can be defined as "regulatory processes that allow individuals to reduce cognitive dissonance and to minimize sudden changes in internal and external environments by altering how these events are perceived" (Vaillant, 1999). Studies generally tend to support Cramer (2002) who explores the use of defenses and gender differences in the implications of defense use. Cramer (1979) found that males and females differ in their choice of defense mechanisms in a manner consistent with Erikson's theory. Males use defenses that externalize the conflict, whereas females are more likely to deal with conflict internally (Zhang ,2014). (Gourevitch ,1980) found that adolescents have to learn to rely more on themselves, and less on their

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parents. Those not prepared to assume responsibility may resort to rebellion or blame their parents for failures. (Watson and Sinha ,1998) postulated that men and women differed in their choice of defense style, defense level, and individual defense mechanisms different defensive organizations during conflict-laden situations were consistent with the results of the present study. According to our results, male adolescents had confidence in their abilities, whereas females, due to their inbred lack of self-confidence, would constantly wait for confirmation of their actions from their environment (Rath and Nanda, 2012). It should be remembered that the females of our society unconsciously tend to seek society's confirmation of their actions because of their being more vulnerable, which leads to the externalization of locus of control (Gavit ,2017), (Nongtdu and Bhutia ,2017) and (Naik, 2015). Another point concerning the effect of a society is that the facilities and conditions to achieve goals are generally made more available to males. However, females may not be provided with the same facilities that are made available to males due to the limitations imposed by society (Parmar 2012). This in turn would lead females into thinking that success is not solely achieved through personal effort. Defense mechanisms may be employed unconsciously, with the persons unaware that they are using them or why were they using these defenses, which was consistent with the results of the present study.

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