



## Behavioural Problems among Adolescents in Context with Sex-difference, Adjustment and Predisposing Psychological Correlates

### ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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### Abstract

*The present study intended to compare adjustment of adolescents in terms of their self-concept, self-disclosure and ego-strength respectively. It was hypothesized that respondent children of (i) high self-concept, (ii) high self-disclosure and (iii) high ego-strength groups of adolescents would differ significantly in terms of adjustment as compared to their counterparts. Equal no. of adolescents (No = 50 to each group) were selected to constitute the sample. In this way 100 selected adolescents equally belonging to high (N=50) and low (N=50) self-concept, self-disclosure and ego-strength groups respectively. They were administered Hindi Adaptation of Bell's Adjustment Inventory, Self-concept Scale, Self-disclosure Scale, Ego-strength Scale besides PDS to measure the variables. The obtained data were treated using t-test. The results supported the hypotheses. It was found that adolescents respondents possessing high self-concept, high self-disclosure, high ego-strength all excelled over*

*their counterparts in terms of having sound adjustment. Thus, it was concluded that adjustment is function of personality traits namely self-concept, self-disclosure and ego-strength respectively. High positive personal traits are conducive to sound adjustment.*

### Key Words

*Behavioural, Sex-difference, Psychological Correlates.*

### Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial stage of human development characterized by significant physical, emotional, and social changes. During this transitional period, individuals undergo profound transformations as they navigate the complexities of identity formation, peer relationships, academic pressures, and emerging independence. However, this period of development is also marked by the onset of various behavioral problems that can significantly affect an adolescent's well-being and future trajectory. These problems often manifest as externalizing behaviors (such as aggression, delinquency, and substance abuse) or internalizing behaviors (such as depression, anxiety, and eating disorders). Understanding the nature of these behavioral problems, their underlying psychological correlates, and the impact of sex differences is critical for promoting healthy adolescent development.

One of the first factors that need to be considered when examining behavioral problems in adolescence is sex differences. Research has consistently shown that boys and girls exhibit different patterns of behavioral problems. Boys, particularly in their teenage years, tend to display more externalizing behaviors such as aggression, conduct disorders, and risky behaviors like substance abuse. Girls, on the other hand, are more likely to show internalizing problems, including depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. These differences are partly attributed to biological factors such as hormonal changes (e.g., the impact of testosterone and estrogen), but also to societal expectations and gender roles that shape the way boys and girls express their emotions and cope with stress. Boys may be socialized to outwardly express aggression or dominance, while girls may be socialized to internalize their emotional distress, leading to different coping mechanisms and behavioral manifestations.

Sex differences in behavioral problems are also influenced by the varying ways in which boys and girls adjust to the challenges of adolescence. Adolescent adjustment refers to the individual's ability to adapt to the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes associated with this stage of life. Adolescents with poor adjustment tend to experience more stress, have less effective coping strategies, and are at greater risk of developing behavioral problems. Boys and girls may struggle with adjustment in different ways. For instance, boys may experience more difficulties in forming positive relationships with peers or authority figures, leading to aggressive or oppositional behavior. Girls, on the other hand, may face pressures related to body image, societal expectations of femininity, or relational aggression, which can contribute to emotional problems. The ability to successfully navigate these adjustments is essential for preventing the development of behavioral issues.

In addition to sex differences and adjustment challenges, the development of behavioral problems is often closely linked to a range of predisposing psychological correlates. These include factors such as family dynamics, peer influences, personality traits, and mental health history. Adolescents who come from dysfunctional family environments, where there is inconsistent discipline, lack of emotional support, or exposure to parental conflict, are more likely to develop behavioral problems. Similarly, peer pressure and the need to conform to group norms can exacerbate problem behaviors, particularly among adolescents who are already vulnerable. Psychological factors such as low self-esteem, poor emotional regulation, impulsivity, and difficulty in coping with stress are common psychological correlates of behavioral problems. Additionally, adolescents with a history of trauma, such as childhood abuse or neglect, may have higher levels of internalizing or externalizing behaviors due to unresolved emotional pain.

Psychiatric conditions, such as anxiety disorders, depression, and conduct disorders, also play a critical role in the development of adolescent behavioral problems. These mental health issues, often exacerbated by the stress of adolescence, can make it more difficult for individuals to manage their emotions and behaviors, leading to a cycle of maladaptive coping strategies.

The interplay between sex differences, adjustment difficulties, and psychological correlates is complex, and it is essential to recognize that behavioral problems in adolescents cannot be attributed to a single cause. Rather, they are the result of multiple interacting factors that include biological, psychological, and socio-cultural influences. Addressing these problems requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account the unique challenges faced by boys and girls during adolescence and provides targeted interventions that promote healthy emotional and behavioral development.

## **Review of Literature**

Nolen-Hoeksema, (2012) emphasized the significant sex differences in adolescent mental health, highlighting that boys are more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviors like aggression and substance abuse, while girls are more prone to internalizing behaviors such as depression and anxiety. Nolen-Hoeksema argues that these differences are influenced by both hormonal changes and gender socialization, where societal

expectations shape the ways boys and girls express emotional distress. Furthermore, the paper reviews how these sex differences contribute to distinct developmental pathways for boys and girls during adolescence. Conger et al., (2000) investigated how various aspects of the family environment—such as parenting styles, parental conflict, and socio-economic stress—predispose adolescents to behavioral problems. Their review highlights that adolescents from families with high levels of conflict or inadequate parental support are at greater risk of developing both internalizing and externalizing disorders. Furthermore, the review explores how the effect of family dynamics might vary by sex, noting that boys are more likely to externalize their problems, while girls may internalize them. Hankin & Abela, (2005) reviewed examines how psychosocial factors, such as peer relationships, academic stress, and body image, contribute to adolescent depression. They find that girls are more vulnerable to depression during adolescence due to the interplay of biological and social factors, including gender norms and the pressure to conform to idealized body images. Boys, on the other hand, often express depression through externalizing behaviors, which can complicate diagnosis and treatment. Prinstein & Dodge, (2008) addressed the role of peer influence in the development of risky behaviors, including substance abuse, aggression, and delinquency. The authors conclude that peer influence is particularly strong in adolescence, but its effects differ by sex. For boys, peer pressure often leads to externalizing behaviors, while for girls, peer influence may result in relational aggression or body dissatisfaction. This review underscores the complexity of social dynamics and their contribution to behavioral problems in adolescence. Moffitt et al., (2001) conducted a review focusing on conduct disorder (CD), a common externalizing problem in adolescence. The review explores the psychological and neurobiological factors that contribute to the development of CD, including impulsivity, poor emotional regulation, and low academic achievement. The authors find that boys are more likely to be diagnosed with CD, but highlight that girls with conduct problems tend to exhibit relational aggression rather than overt acts of violence or aggression. Ruble et al., (2006) reviewed literature on how gender role socialization affects adolescent adjustment. Their review shows that societal expectations for boys to be assertive and girls to be nurturing can create discrepancies in coping strategies. Boys may suppress emotional vulnerability, leading to aggressive or disruptive behavior, while girls may internalize stress, leading to anxiety or depression. The review suggests that these socialized behaviors contribute to different trajectories of adjustment in boys and girls. Zimmerman & Stony, (2010) focused on emotional regulation as a predisposing factor for behavioral problems in adolescence. Zimmerman and Stony discuss how difficulties in regulating emotions can lead to both internalizing and externalizing problems, and they highlight sex differences in emotional regulation. Boys tend to externalize emotional distress, leading to behaviors like aggression, while girls often internalize their emotions, contributing to depression or anxiety. The review suggests that gendered expectations around emotional expression influence these patterns. Orth et al., (2010) reviewed literature examining the role of self-esteem in the development of behavioral problems among adolescents. They find that low self-esteem is a strong predictor of both internalizing and externalizing behaviors. The review emphasizes that the relationship between self-esteem and behavioral problems is moderated by sex, with girls more likely to develop depression and anxiety as a result of low self-esteem, while boys are more likely to engage in aggression and delinquent behavior. Buchanan et al., (1992) reviewed by Buchanan and colleagues explores how hormonal changes during adolescence influence behavioral development, with a particular focus on sex differences. The review outlines the role of sex hormones such as testosterone and estrogen in the emergence of certain behaviors, with testosterone being linked to aggression and externalizing behavior in boys, while estrogen has been associated with mood swings and internalizing behaviors in girls. The review suggests that hormonal fluctuations contribute to sex-specific behavioral patterns. Chung & Maisto, (2010) reviewed of the risk factors for adolescent substance use, emphasizing gender differences in the onset and progression of substance-related problems. They note that boys are more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as early drinking or drug use, often due to peer influence and a desire for social acceptance. Girls, conversely, are more likely to develop substance use problems in the context of emotional distress or interpersonal issues, such as relationship difficulties or body image concerns. Beck et al., (1996) examined the cognitive-behavioral factors contributing

to adolescent problem behaviors. The authors focus on how distorted thinking patterns, such as poor self-regulation and negative self-concept, are linked to both internalizing and externalizing behaviors. The review highlights that boys with externalizing disorders tend to have cognitive distortions related to aggression and impulsivity, while girls with internalizing disorders may exhibit distorted thinking patterns related to self-worth and social acceptance. High school students have not been compared in terms of behavioural problems and pre-disposing psychological correlates especially in Patna (Bihar). This is why present study is undertaken.

## Objectives

The study intended to make a comparison of behavioural and emotional problems between adolescent boys and adolescent girls in terms of dimensions of adjustment and pre-disposing psychological factors.

## Hypotheses

1. There will be significant difference between adolescent boys and adolescent girls in the predominance of behaviour and emotional problems in terms of various dimensions of adjustment.
2. There would be significant difference between adolescent boys and adolescent girls on various psychological predisposing factors causing behavioural and emotional problems.

## Method of study

### Sample used

The sample comprised of 100 high school adolescent students having behavioural problems. The adolescent students were selected based on the report of teachers, parents etc. and data-obtained by Behaviour Problem Inventory. They were selected equally in respect of sex-difference (Boys : 50; Girls : 50). The respondents were of the age groups 13-16 yrs. They were of the class IX and X. The behaviour problem male and female high school urban adolescent students were selected from among adolescent student population of various schools of urban Patna. Other than the conditions of research the respondents were matched so far as practicable.

### Design used

Between group design was used.

### Tools used

1. A PDS was used to seek the personal information about the respondents.
2. Behaviour Problems Inventory was used to identify the various behavioural problems amongst them.
3. Hindi Adaptation of Bell's Adjustment Inventory was used to measure the various dimensions of adjustment.

## Results and Interpretations

**Table 01:** Mean, SD, t-value showing a comparison between boys and girls in terms of behavioural and emotional problems on the various measures or dimensions of adjustment inventory

Dimensions	Adolescents	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p
Home	Boys	50	14.81	3.46	7.33	98	<.01
	Girls	50	19.65	3.14			
Health	Boys	50	14.96	3.45	7.12	98	<.01
	Girls	50	19.87	3.39			
Social	Boys	50	14.26	3.19	7.58	98	<.01
	Girls	50	19.11	3.26			

Emotional	Boys	50	14.98	3.23	7.41	98	<.01
	Girls	50	19.87	3.37			
Overall	Boys	50	60.27	3.50	11.65	98	<.01
	Girls	50	68.19	3.29			

The results displayed table-01 clearly revealed that adolescent girls manifested comparatively poor adjustment in each area of adjustment including overall adjustment. The mean values for adolescent girls on home (Mean = 19.65), health (Mean = 19.87), social (Mean = 19.11), emotional (Mean = 19.87) and overall (Mean = 68.19) dimensions are comparatively higher than adolescent boys means on home (Mean = 14.81), health (Mean = 14.96), social (Mean = 14.26), personal (Mean = 14.98) and overall (Mean = 60.27) dimensions respectively. The t-values for home (t = 7.33; df = 98; p<.01), health (t = 7.12; df = 98; p<.01), social (t = 7.58; df = 98; p<.01), emotional (t = 7.32; df = 98; p<.01) and overall (t = 11.65; df = 98; p<.01) dimensions were found significant. It means adolescent girls group manifested poor adjustment than adolescent boys groups on each and every dimensions of adjustment. Therefore, adolescent girls manifest higher degree of behavioural and emotional problems than adolescent boys in terms of maladjustment in the areas of home, health, social, emotional and overall adjustment. Thus, sub-hypothesis no. 01 of hypothesis-(1) is retained. Adolescent boys may appear to excel in home, health, social, emotional, and overall adjustment over adolescent girls due to several sociocultural and psychological factors. In many societies, adolescent boys are often given more freedom, mobility, and encouragement to be independent and expressive, which help them develop confidence and coping skills. Adolescent girls, on the other hand, may face more restrictions, societal expectations, and emotional suppression, leading to stress and adjustment difficulties. Moreover, gender role conditioning can sometimes limit girls' opportunities to voice concerns or seek support, affecting their adjustment levels.

**Table 02:** Chi-square showing a comparison between adolescent boys and adolescent girls in terms of their behavioural and emotional problems

Behavioural	Group	Sex-difference		t2	df	p
		Girls	Boys			
	N=50	N=50				
Over Sensitivity	High	68%	35%	22.00	1	<.01
	Low	32%	66%			
Temper Tantruon	High	55%	42%	27.66	1	<.01
	Low	45%	58%			
Aggressiveness	High	35%	71%	26.18	1	<.01
	Low	65%	29%			
Stubbornness	High	69%	34%	24.75	1	<.01
	Low	31%	66%			
Lying	High	68%	38%	18.18	1	<.01
	Low	32%	62%			

Shyness	High	67%	36%	19.41	1	<.01
	Low	33%	64%			
Negativism	High	72%	34%	29.17	1	<.01
	Low	28%	66%			
Selfishness	High	32%	69%	27.66	1	<.01
	Low	68%	31%			
Withdrawal	High	32%	70%	29.17	1	<.01
	Low	68%	30%			
Jealous	High	67%	32%	24.75	1	<.01
	Low	33%	68%			
Stealing	High	71%	38%	22.00	1	<.01
	Low	29%	62%			
Restlessness	High	71%	32%	30.73	1	<.01
	Low	29%	68%			
Nail biting	High	35%	39%	23.35	1	<.01
	Low	65%	31%			

The results displayed in table-02 clearly revealed that more than 68% girls and only 35% of boys were found having high over sensitivity as behavioural and emotional problem. Contrary to it only 32% of girls and more than 65% of boys were found having over sensitivity as their behavioural and emotional problems. The chi-square showing the association among percentages was found significant ( $\chi^2 = 22.00$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

Further, more than 55% girls and only 42% of boys were found having high temper tentrum as behavioural and emotional problem. Contrary to it only 45% of girls and more than 58% of boys were found having lower temper tentrum as their behavioural and emotional problems. The chi-square showing the association among percentages was found significant ( $\chi^2 = 3.41$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .05$ ).

Again, more than 71% boys and only 38% of girls were found having high aggressiveness as behavioural and emotional problem. Contrary to it only 29% of girls and more than 62% of boys were found having low aggressiveness as their behavioural and emotional problems. The chi-square showing the association among percentages was found significant ( $\chi^2 = 26.18$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

Further, more than 69% girls and only 34% of boys were found having stubbornness as behavioural and emotional problem. Contrary to it only 31% of girls and more than 66% of boys were found having stubbornness as their behavioural and emotional problems. The chi-square showing the association among percentages was found significant ( $\chi^2 = 24.75$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

Further, more than 68% girls and only 38% of boys were found having high lying as behavioural and emotional problem. Contrary to it only 32% of girls and more than 62% of boys were found having low lying as their behavioural and emotional problems. The chi-square showing the association among percentages was found significant ( $\chi^2 = 18.18$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

Further, more than 67% girls and only 36% of boys were found having shyness as behavioural and emotional problem. Contrary to it only 33% of girls and more than 64% of boys were found having low shyness as their behavioural and emotional problems. The chi-square showing the association among percentages was found significant ( $\chi^2 = 19.41$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

Further, more than 72% girls and only 34% of boys were found having negativism as behavioural and emotional problem. Contrary to it only 28% of girls and more than 66% of boys were found having low negativism as their behavioural and emotional problems. The chi-square showing the association among percentages was found significant ( $\chi^2 = 29.17$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

Further, only 32% girls and more than 69% of boys were found having high selfishness as behavioural and emotional problem. Contrary to it more than 68% of girls and only 31% of boys were found having low selfishness as their behavioural and emotional problems. The chi-square showing the association among percentages was found significant ( $\chi^2 = 27.16$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

Further, more than 70% of boys and only 32% girls were found having high withdrawal as behavioural and emotional problem. Contrary to it only 30% of boys and more than 68% of girls were found having low withdrawal as their behavioural and emotional problems. The chi-square showing the association among percentages was found significant ( $\chi^2 = 29.17$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

Further, more than 67% girls and only 32% of boys were found having jealous as behavioural and emotional problem. Contrary to it only 33% of girls and more than 68% of boys were found having low jealous as their behavioural and emotional problems. The chi-square showing the association among percentages was found significant ( $\chi^2 = 24.75$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

Further, more than 71% girls and only 38% of boys were found having high stealing as behavioural and emotional problem. Contrary to it only 29% of girls and more than 68% of boys were found having low stealing as their behavioural and emotional problems. The chi-square showing the association among percentages was found significant ( $\chi^2 = 22.00$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

Further, more than 71% girls and only 32% of boys were found having high restlessness as behavioural and emotional problem. Contrary to it only 29% of girls and more than 68% (N = 99) of boys were found having low restlessness as their behavioural and emotional problems. The chi-square showing the association among percentages was found significant ( $\chi^2 = 30.73$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

Finally, only 35% girls and more than 69% of boys were found having high nail biting as behavioural and emotional problem. Contrary to it more than 66% of girls and only 31% of boys were found having low nail biting as their behavioural and emotional problems. The chi-square showing the association among percentages was found significant ( $\chi^2 = 23.35$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

Boys often exhibit higher levels of emotional and behavioral problems such as temper tantrums, aggressiveness, lying, silence, stealing, restlessness, nail biting, and stubbornness due to a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors. They are typically socialized to externalize emotions, leading to more visible disruptive behaviors. Additionally, hormonal influences and less emphasis on emotional expression may contribute to poor emotional regulation. These factors make such issues more observable in boys compared to girls, who often internalize distress.

Girls tend to excel in emotional and behavioral problems like oversensitivity, negativism, selfishness, withdrawal, and jealousy due to their tendency to internalize stress and emotions. Social and cultural expectations often discourage girls from expressing anger or assertiveness openly, leading them to channel distress inward. Additionally, heightened emotional awareness and sensitivity, combined with pressure to conform to idealized behavior, can make them more vulnerable to mood-related issues and interpersonal insecurities, resulting in these specific emotional and behavioral patterns.

## Conclusions

- (1) Sex-difference is the significant contributor to the growth and development of emotional and behavioural problems. Adolescent girls are found more prone to behavioural and emotional problems in the light of dimensions of adjustment.
- (2) Adolescent girls dominate in over sensitivity, temper tantrum, stubbornness, shyness, negativism, jealous, stealing, restlessness whereas adolescent boys are more prone to aggressiveness lying, selfishness, withdrawal and nail biting areas of behavioural and emotional problems.

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