

Examining Resilience and Aggression in Adolescence and Early Adulthood

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This study aimed to analyze the difference in the levels of resilience and aggression between two developmental stages: adolescence and early adulthood, using comparative study design. Total 400 participants (Male $n=200$ Female $n=200$; $M_{age} = 21.02$; $SD = 6.77$) were approached through purposive convenient sampling. Participant's demographic information was gathered through Respondent Information Form, while resilience and aggression were measured using The Brief Resilience Scale, and Short Form of the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire, respectively. Analyses through independent samples t-test indicated a statistically significant difference in the level of both, resilience and aggression between adolescence and early adulthood. These findings would help in developing resilience enhancement and anger management programs for different age groups.

Keywords: Resilience, aggression, adolescence, early adulthood, developmental stages

Living a completely stress-free life is a dream of many but it barely ever becomes a reality. Numerous ways have been identified that people utilize to deal with the major and minor difficulties that they face during their lifespan. Each individual reacts in a different manner when faced with adversity. While some people learn to deal with difficult times without any noteworthy maladjustments and distress, others tend to have a challenging time dealing with the same which in turn creates distress and disturbance in their daily lives.

Resilience is one of the many abilities that play an essential constructive role during the times of distress. As described by American Psychological Association (2014), resilience is that route of functioning which helps in bouncing back from an adverse situation without or with less distress. According to Masten (2001), resilience hosts a number of characteristics that lead to achieving positive results even when there is a high probability of failing to adapt with challenging events. Further, it greatly assists in the development of a variety of positive personality characteristics. In addition to this, it has also been noted that resilience is a capacity that does not require extraordinary qualities or resources, in fact, various normative assets and processes can be utilized and adapted for an individual to be resilient. Bonanno (2005) believes that resilience can also be observed in individuals who may not have necessarily gone through major catastrophic events in life or have suffered from any psychopathologies.

Resilience entails several emotional, cognitive, and behavioral characteristics that can be learned and unlearned at any point in life (Malik, 2013). Research work points toward a wide variety of factors that are associated with mediating and moderating resilience. These factors typically comprise of differences in personality traits, social and emotional support, personal characteristics such as self-efficacy, optimism-pessimism, etc., cultural values and beliefs, familial bond, developmental level, education, individual perceptions and emotions, economical resources, gender, etc. (Bonanno, et al., 2011;

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Zeeshan & Aslam, 2007).

Along with resilience, another most commonly observed reactions during the times of distress, frustrations, and a challenge is aggression. The term aggression is commonly identified as an intentionally harmful behavior towards another individual or entity (Baron & Richardson, 1994). Aggression is considered to be a predictable response to any situation in which an individual encounters hurdles in the pathway of his or her desires or goals which leads him or her to feel frustrated and discontented (Dollard, et al., 1939). Moreover, according to Bandura (1977), people can also learn to behave in an aggressive manner through observing such behaviors in their surroundings. Further, if they receive positive reinforcement when they manifest aggression, it may lead their aggressive tendencies to be preserved for a longer period of time.

Aggression can be manifested through behavior, emotions, as well as cognitions. Overt aggression comprises of all those ways of expressing aggression that are apparent and clearly noticeable, whereas, covert aggression consists of those forms of aggression that are obscure and vague (Conner & Barkley, 2004). Several different types of aggression have been identified that can be categorized as either overt or covert aggression. The most common types of aggression include physical aggression, hostility, instrumental aggression, anger, relational aggression, verbal aggression, etc. (Liu, 2004).

Similar to resilience, a large number of individual and environmental factors play a role in the development and moderation of aggression. These factors typically include personality traits, genetic makeup, individual beliefs and attitudes, access to harmful resources, presence of aggressive models in the surroundings, physical and/or psychological ailment, etc. (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Lane, et al., 2011).

Preceding research and theoretical work indicates that resilience and aggression are closely associated, while below mentioned literature points toward the difference in the levels of resilience and aggression during various stages of life. Literature indicates that as the developmental phase changes, the nature of challenges and difficulties in each stage of development are also changed. Further, the ways in which they impact an individual's physical and psychological health and well-being also varies (Abramson et al., 2015).

Anasuri (2016), documents that stressors faced during the early years of life typically include poor socioeconomic status, abuse and neglect, issues related to body image, intellectual and/or learning disabilities, poor parental relationships, etc. On the other hand, during adulthood, people generally experience challenges related to career, increased financial load, problems related to social and personal relationships, upsurge of responsibilities, health related issues, etc. Moreover, many researches indicate that during the early stages of life (childhood and adolescence), the ways of managing and adapting to different situations is vastly different than the later stages of development (Masten & Obradovic, 2008).

It has been noted that resilience is a process that continues to evolve all through the lifetime and its level keeps on altering with the changes in one's cycle of life. Researchers

suggest that even if an individual is not resilient or has lower level of resilience during early stages of life, the number of opportunities and chances that exist in the adulthood increases the probability of developing and enhancing resilience as one transition into adulthood (Werner & Smith, 2001). On the other hand, researches show that aggressive disposition prevails over a period of time during the life cycle. At each stage of life, the interplay of numerous protective and risk factors intervene and modify the level of resilience and aggression due to developmental changes. The way in which an individual deal with the stressors and challenges largely depends on the available resources, both internally and outwardly present for the individual, during a particular stage of development. Researchers have found factors such as perceived stress, prosocial skills, self-compassion, strength of relationship with parents and significant others, socioeconomic status, cognitive skills, self-regulation, objective and perceived social support, self-esteem, quality of life, physical and psychological well-being of parents/family members, emotional state, etc., have a tendency to act as a buffer and/or a facilitator for resilience and aggression throughout the different developmental stages (Chen et al., 2018; Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Masten, 2011; Neff & McGehee, 2010; Reebye, 2005; Teymoori et al., 2018).

The current paper focuses on the difference in the level of resilience and aggression between two chief stages of life: adolescence and early adulthood. The stage of adolescence is typically considered to be the most vulnerable phase of life. It is the time when the highly dependent life of childhood is over and the period of self-discovery, need for autonomy, formation of identity and other numerous physical and psychological changes takes place (Curtis, 2015). The next phase of life that comes right after adolescence is early adulthood. After the transition from adolescence to adulthood, an individual encounters radical internal as well as external changes in life. People in their early adulthood are expected to make major life decisions related to their academics, career, family life, social relationships, etc. and become more independent in contrast to their adolescence phase (Wood et al., 2018).

Among the variety of risk factors, lower chronological age has been identified as one of the risk factors for resilience. Brewin, Andrews, and Valentine (2000) noted that the younger an individual would be, the higher his or her chances would become to be easily affected by the stressful and adverse situations. This subsequently contributes in negatively affecting the level of resilience. Supporting this notion, various other researches indicate that resilience has a positive correlation with the developmental age, that is, resilience tends to increase with an increase in age (Gooding, et al., 2012; Salazar-Pousada, et al., 2010).

Aggression has been observed to be commonly prevalent during the stage of adolescence (Schick & Cierpka, 2016). The manifestation of aggressive behavior seems to advance throughout the phase of adolescence, whereas, it begins to decline post-adolescence (Loeber & Hay, 1997). It has also been noted that the sudden development of aggressive tendencies during adulthood is improbable in case of individuals who do not show any signs of aggression during childhood or adolescence (Broidy et al., 2003). A fair amount of longitudinal studies show that the level of physical aggression starts to wane as an adolescent enters early adulthood (Farrell, et al., 2005). Further, as people transition from adolescence to early adulthood, progress in their psychological well-being enhances

the likelihood of becoming better at emotional regulation which consequently helps in managing negative emotions such as anger (Galambos, et al., 2006).

While resilience and aggression are being extensively studied all over the world, there is still a major lacking in this realm of study in Pakistan. Further, there is also a huge gap in research work with respect to resilience and aggression especially in consideration to the different developmental stages. Pakistan is among those developing countries where stressors and problems have its impacts on people of all ages. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to fill the gap in Pakistani literature and to examine resilience and aggression among the people of Pakistan with specific attention towards different age groups. This study would help in getting a better grasp on the concept of resilience and aggression relevant to our society and culture among developmental stages of adolescence and early adulthood. Subsequently, it will assist in the development of age-specific programs and interventions to build and foster resilience as well as managing aggressive dispositions in the Pakistani population. Keeping the literature review in consideration, for the present study, it was hypothesized that resilience and aggression level would be different between adolescence and early adulthood.

Method

Research Design

The present study was based on comparative study design to examine the difference in the level of resilience and aggression between two developmental stages: adolescence and early adulthood.

Participants

A total of 400 individuals (Male $n=200$; Female $n=200$; $M_{age} = 21.02$ years; $SD = 6.77$) participated in the present study. Participants were selected through purposive convenient sampling, from different educational institutes, workplaces, and residential areas of Karachi, Pakistan. All the participants were divided into two age groups; 200 in adolescence group (Male $n=100$; Female $n=100$) and 200 in early adulthood group (Male $n=100$; Female $n=100$). Details for demographic data are given in Table 1. Moreover, considering the requirement of the scales used in the study, the minimum required education level for the participants was 7th grade.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Demographical Characteristics of the Participants

Age Range (in years)	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
13 - 17	200	15.02	1.39
18 - 34	200	27.03	4.19
Overall	400	21.02	6.77
Age Group	Gender	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Adolescence	Boys	100	50
	Girls	100	50

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	Total	200	100
Early Adulthood	Men	100	50
	Women	100	50
	Total	200	100
Overall	Males	200	50
	Females	200	50
	Total	400	100

Table 1 indicates the descriptive statistics of demographic data for both adolescence and early adulthood group.

Measures

Following measures were used in the current study:

Respondent Information Form

A self-developed form was used to collect demographic characteristics of the participants. This included age, gender, educational level, economic status, etc.

The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS; Smith et al., 2008)

Resilience was measured through the use of The BRS. It is based on self-rating format and has six items in total. The items are answered according to the respondent's degree of agreement with the given statements. All items are equally distributed as positively and negatively worded items. The BRS uses a Likert-scale of 5 points where 1 denotes "Strongly Disagree" and 5 indicate "Strongly Agree". For scoring, firstly, item number 2, 4, and 6 are reversely scored after which the total sum of all items is calculated. Mean score is then calculated for the sum of all items. The BRS has strong psychometric properties with internal consistency reported as Cronbach's alpha = .70 and .95 and test-retest reliability was found to .69 (Windle, et al., 2011). In current study Cronbach's alpha = 0.72.

Short Form of the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ – SF; Bryant & Smith, 2001)

To measure aggression, Short Form of the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ – SF) was used. The BPAQ – SF is developed on self-rating format and uses a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire has a total of four subscales and 12 items. Each of the subscale comprises of three items. Items number 3, 8, and 11 measure physical aggression, items 1, 6, and 9 assess verbal aggression, items 5, 7, and 12 are used to measure anger, whereas, items 2, 4, and 10 are for measuring hostility. The respondents are given instructions to rate their responses considering the extent to which each item defines them using the 1 to 5 rating (1 = "Extremely Uncharacteristic of Me" and 5 = "Extremely Characteristic of Me"). Sum of all the items divided by 12 gives a final score, whereas, scores for the four subscales can also be calculated individually by dividing the sum of the

items of each subscale by three. The psychometric properties of BPAQ – SF indicate that it is a reliable and valid measure for aggression (Hornsveld, et al., 2009). In present study Cronbach’s alpha = 0.74.

Procedure

Using purposive sampling, the sample was first divided into two age groups: adolescence and early adulthood. For the collection of data, various educational institutes, workplaces, and residential areas of Karachi were visited. Where applicable, permission was first taken from heads of the approached organizations and institutes to collect the data. All the approached individuals were given a brief introduction to the study before their verbal and written consent to participate in the study was taken. For adolescent participants, consent was also taken from their parents/guardians/caretakers. The participants were also given assurance regarding their voluntary participation and the right to withdraw without any penalty as well as about the preservation of confidentiality of all their data. After this, they were requested to fill the questionnaires of the study. After scoring independent samples *t*-test was applied using the SPSS to analyze the difference in the level of resilience and aggression between two groups.

Results

For statistical analysis of the results, independent samples *t*-test was applied.

Table 2

Independent Samples t-test Analysis of Difference in the Level of Resilience between Adolescence and Early Adulthood (N=400)

Variable	Age Group	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Resilience	Adolescence	200	3.06	.73	398	-3.05*	.00
	Early Adulthood	200	3.30	.80			

Note. **p* < .05

Table 2 indicates a statistically significant difference in the level of resilience between the two age groups; adolescence and early adulthood. The level of resilience was found to be higher in early adulthood compared to adolescence.

Table 3

Independent Samples t-test to show difference in the level of overall Aggression, Physical Aggression, Verbal Aggression, Anger, and Hostility between Adolescence and Early Adulthood (N=400)

Variables	Age Group	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Aggression	Adolescence	200	3.05	.64	398	5.02*	.00
	Early Adulthood	200	2.72	.67			
Physical Aggression	Adolescence	200	2.65	.97	398	5.91*	.00
	Early Adulthood	200	2.09	.89			
Verbal Aggression	Adolescence	200	2.89	.95	398	1.19	.23

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	Early Adulthood	200	2.78	.88			
Anger	Adolescence	200	3.19	.95	398	3.32*	.00
	Early Adulthood	200	2.88	.87			
Hostility	Adolescence	200	3.08	.84	398	2.64*	.00
	Early Adulthood	200	2.86	.85			

Note. * $p < .05$

Table 3 shows statistically significant difference in the level of aggression between the two age groups; adolescence and early adulthood. The level of aggression was found to be higher in adolescence in comparison to early adulthood. Additionally, independent samples *t*-test was also applied to analyze the differences in the four components of aggression between adolescence and early adulthood. Adolescence group was found to have higher level of physical aggression, anger, and hostility than the group of early adulthood, however the difference in the level of verbal aggression was found to be non-significant.

Discussion

Keeping the need of time in view, the current study aimed to determine the differences in the level of resilience and aggression in two vital developmental age levels, namely, adolescence and early adulthood. Supporting this study's hypothesis, the results indicated a significant difference in the level of resilience between adolescence and early adulthood. The level of resilience was found to be significantly higher in early adulthood compared to adolescence stage of development. A large number of previous researches conducted in various parts of the world also support these results (Chukwuorji & Ajaero, 2014; Sun & Stewart, 2007). Adolescence is considered to be a risky phase of development as it makes individuals highly prone towards vulnerabilities due to the numerous physical and psychological changes that they go through. Developmental psychologists have noted that adolescents have a high tendency to deem themselves as invincible and, therefore, they tend to get involved in a variety of hazardous behaviors without taking the consequences into account (Ahern, et al., 2008). This inclination towards risky and dangerous attitude and behavior subsequently adds into their stressors and difficulties. Hence, it may be that, besides other factors, the precarious attitude and behavior of adolescents makes it difficult for them to be able to control and manage their additional stressors efficiently and that acts as a risk factor and a barrier in the way of their resilience level.

Another reason for higher resilience in early adulthood compared to adolescence could be the advantage of the learning that adults gain from their previous experiences. In contrast to adolescents, adults have more experiences to compare the outcomes of their tried and tested perspectives and behaviors in various situations. This favors them in choosing the healthier pathways to deal with the challenges and adapt in a better way and subsequently makes them more resilient than adolescents (Carbo & Goldstein, 2018). Moreover, strong social bonds also play a dominant role in facilitating resilience (Sapouna & Wolke, 2013). On the other hand, as adolescents' transition into early adulthood, there is a rise in their social interactions due to more opportunities and exposure as well as demands

of the developmental stage of adulthood. The social bonds of an adult extend to professional relationships, romantic relationships, closer friendships, etc (Graber, et al., 2015). This increased social interaction also increases the probability of stronger social relationships which, consequently, assists in increasing the level of resilience among adults compared to adolescents.

Additionally, a rationale for the difference in the level of resilience among these two age groups could be attributed to the level of dependency required by individuals during adolescence. As adolescents have to be more dependent on their parents and/or guardians in different ways such as monetary assistance, decision-making, etc. in comparison to the adults, they are also in a more vulnerable position. This means that due to their close dependence, there is a high probability for them to be directly affected by the stressors their parents/guardians are going through (Hart, et al., 2007). In this way, during the adolescence period of life, many a times the challenges or difficult times that the adolescents encounter are not only their personal but may also be experienced by proxy. Conversely, after the transition to early adulthood, adults do not necessarily have to be dependent on others and thus, have a better control on their environment. Consequently, early adults are likely to demonstrate resilience more than the adolescents and are better able to manage and adapt with their life's adverse situations.

The study was also supported by the results indicating difference in the level of aggression between the two age groups. The level of aggression was found to be significantly higher in adolescence in contrast to the individuals in their early adulthood. In addition to this, difference between adolescence and early adulthood was also analyzed in regards to the four components of aggression. Findings indicated that adolescents have higher level of physical aggression, anger, and hostility than the individuals in their early adulthood.

Corroborating these results, an ample amount of previous research work suggests that aggressive tendencies reach their highest level during adolescence, however, they start to lower down as soon as people enter into early adulthood (Karriker-Jaffe, et al., 2008; Sampson, et al., 2005). Aggression and aggressive behavior during adolescence is a worrying phenomenon worldwide as it has a tendency to lead to dire consequences in later stages of life such as poor relational and social skills, violent and criminal offences, etc. (Brenner, et al., 1999). One of the major reasons for high aggression among adolescents compared to early adults could be attributed to the increased peer pressure that individuals face during adolescence. Researches indicate that since adolescence is that period of life during which individuals are newly introduced to an expanded social life, they become focused on developing and maintaining social relationships. Therefore, it is easy for them to come under peer pressure and display a variety of negative behaviors. Due to the influence of pressure from their peers, many adolescents adopt aggressive attitude and behavior in order to sustain their social status as well as to gain dominance in their social circle (Liu, et al., 2013). Once the stage of adolescence is over, individuals in their early adulthood usually have well-developed social relationships and thus, they have lower odds

of getting effected due to peer pressure. As a result, in comparison to adolescents, early adults are less likely to manifest aggressive disposition.

In addition, studying the pathways of physical aggression during the cycle of life, Aber et al. (2003) identified that during childhood and adolescence, there tends to be high manifestation of physical aggression to achieve one's goals, however, by the time an individual reaches adulthood, the tendency to express aggression through physical means starts to lower down. Moreover, high level of anger in the age group of adolescence compared to the early adulthood can be characteristic of the restrictive environment, criticism, and demanding circumstances that adolescents have to encounter (Dey, et al., 2014). Since adolescence is the age during which individuals tend to become particularly sensitive regarding their personality and self-image, the aforementioned factors and situations contribute greatly in the development of negative emotional state and feelings such as anger among them as they begin to perceive these incidents as threats towards their selves (Yazgan-Inanc, et al., 2007). Moreover, several studies show that in comparison to adults, adolescents have been found to have higher fear of being negatively evaluated (Teachman & Allen, 2007). This fear of negative evaluation significantly contributes in increasing the level of physical aggression, anger, hostility, as well as overall aggression among adolescents (Erwin et al., 2003; Hanby, et al., 2012; Loukas, et al., 2005; Weymouth & Buehler, 2016).

Conclusion and Implications of the Study

It is evident from the present study that the processes of resilience and aggression operate differently in different age groups. The significance of building a resilient society cannot be denied, thus, there is a crucial need for Pakistani researchers to study resilience as well as aggression especially in the context of developmental psychology so that the dynamic forces working in facilitating resilience and impeding aggression throughout the life cycle can be analyzed in depth. Furthermore, considering the positive and negative outcomes associated with resilience and aggression, it is the high time that mental health professionals and researchers in Pakistan should initiate working towards developing material and introducing specialized courses, workshops, and trainings for people of all developmental ages and backgrounds to build, promote, and strengthen resilience and help them in adopting healthier ways of dealing in daily life while also learning to manage aggression.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Researches

The present study had some limitations that should be considered in the future researches. This study did not specifically cater to the associated risk and protective factors for resilience and aggression nor for the developmental stages. As observed in the literature review, there are a variety of factors and variables that impact an individual's level of resilience and aggression, for instance, self-esteem, social values, quality of relationships, perceptions, educational level, social support, gender, socioeconomic status, etc. For future research work, it would be beneficial to take these and other mediating and moderating factors into account considering their imperative role on the variables under

study. This would be advantageous for the mental health professionals, policy makers, and others working in the field of health and development to understand the role and interplay of social, cultural, and environmental factors on resilience and aggression in different stages of development so that work to build and promote resilience and management of aggression can be done accordingly. Moreover, since the sample in the current study was only taken from Karachi, therefore it is not wise to generalize the findings to the overall Pakistani population, therefore, a wider sample catering to different cities of Pakistan should be considered in the forthcoming researches.

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