

## Empirical Evidences for Gender differences in Anger Expression of Adolescents



Psychology

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### ABSTRACT

The present research article is an endeavor to explore empirical supports available in the area of gender role in anger research. Most of the studies of anger in adult males and females have failed to report significant gender differences in the experience and expression of anger, while others have reported significant gender differences in the expression of anger. As can be seen from the preceding studies, inconsistencies exist in the literature. Contradicting studies indicate that researchers are unclear as to whether differences in anger exist between genders. As such, a research gap has emerged that needs to be filled (Zimprich & Mascherek, 2012). In order to understand how this research gap developed, it is necessary to examine further the role of "Gender differences in Anger Expression of Adolescents."

### INTRODUCTION:

#### ANGER: Meaning & Definition:

Anger has been defined in many ways from "a negative, phenomenological (or internal) feeling state" (Kassinove & Sukhodolsky, 1995, p.7) to "a basic emotion whose function is to provide the organism with motivated capacities to overcome obstacles" (Lewis, 1993, p.150). Psychologists have described it as an emotional reaction characterized by extreme displeasure, rage, indignation, or hostility.

According to Charles Spielberger (1980) "Anger is an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage." Like other emotions, anger is accompanied by physiological and biological changes. When a person becomes angry his heart rate and blood pressure rises, as do levels of energy adrenaline, noradrenalin, and hormones (Peacock, 2000).

Anger can be caused by both External and internal factors may be a cause of anger. One can be angry at a specific person (such as a colleague or student) or event (a traffic jam, a canceled train), or his anger may be caused by worrying or brooding about one's personal problems. Memories of traumatic or enraging events can also trigger angry feelings.

Deffenbacher et al. (1996) have been defined "anger as an experiential state consisting of emotional, cognitive and physiological components that co-occur, rapidly interacting with and influencing each other in such a way that they tend to be experienced as a single phenomenon". It is also described as a negative emotion in terms of subjective experience. Anger is considered to be the drive or motive behind aggressive behavior and the subjective experience that accompanies aggressive impulses (Averill, 1983).

According to Izard (1977), anger is a powerful and necessary tool for survival. The innate purpose of anger is to enable the mobilization of energy so that the person becomes capable of self-defense with vigor and strength in an assertively appropriate manner. Anger potentiates a sense of personal control which enables the person to take action (Biaggio, 1987).

Novaco (1985) defined anger as having four distinct components: physiological, affective, behavioral and cognitive. **The physiological component** of anger refers to the changes occur in one's heart rate, blood pressure and hormones like adrenaline or noradrenalin. **The affective component** of anger, also referred to as anger experience, relates to the strength of emotional responses toward anger provoking situations. **The behavioral component** refers to coping mechanisms, which may be positive or destructive, that people use to express anger. **The cognitive component** reflects the types of negative beliefs or hostility, that people have about the world and in particular refers to the negative attributions they hold towards others or places.

#### Anger Expression:

The instinctive, natural way to express anger is to respond aggressively. Anger is a natural, adaptive response to threats; it inspires powerful, often aggressive, feelings and behaviors, which allow us to fight and to defend ourselves when we are attacked. A certain amount of anger, therefore, is necessary to our survival. On the other hand, we can't physically lash out at every person or object that irritates or annoys us; laws, social norms, and common sense place limits on how far our anger can take us.

Dr. Spielberger says that people use a variety of both conscious and unconscious processes to deal with their angry feelings. The three main approaches are **expressing, suppressing, and calming**.

**Expressing your angry feelings** in an assertive—not aggressive—manner is the healthiest way to express anger. To do this, you have to learn how to make clear what your needs are, and how to get them met, without hurting others. Being assertive doesn't mean being pushy or demanding; it means being respectful of yourself and others.

**Anger can be suppressed**, and then converted or redirected. This happens when you hold in your anger, stop thinking about it, and focus on something positive. The aim is to inhibit or suppress your anger and convert it into more constructive behavior. The danger in this type of response is that if it isn't allowed outward expression, your anger can turn inward—on yourself. Anger turned inward may cause hypertension, high blood pressure, or depression. Unexpressed anger can create other problems. It can lead to pathological expressions of anger, such as passive-aggressive behavior (getting back at people indirectly, without telling them why, rather than confronting them head-on) or a personality that seems perpetually cynical and hostile. People who are constantly putting others down, criticizing everything, and making cynical comments haven't learned how to constructively express their anger. Not surprisingly, they aren't likely to have many successful relationships.

**Anger can be calm down** inside. This means not just controlling your outward behavior, but also controlling your internal responses, taking steps to lower your heart rate, calm yourself down, and let the feelings subside. When none of these three techniques work, that's when someone—or something—is going to get hurt.

#### Empirical Evidences for Gender differences in Anger Expression of Adolescents

Gender differences in the experience and expression of anger (Affective and Behavioural Components) have also been investigated in adults with generally no significant differences being found (Averill, 1983; Stoner and Spencer, 1986). Newman, Gray, and Fuqua (1999) reported that no significant differences have been found between men and women on six different subscales measuring both state and trait anger. Biaggio (1989), however, reported significantly more anger producing situations for men than women. Sharkin's

(1993) review of gender differences in the experience and expression of anger suggests that results are inconclusive and that this may reflect a need for further study in the area.

Overall, studies tend to suggest that males are more comfortable in expressing anger over other emotions, such as sadness (Newman et al., 1999; Nunn & Thomas, 1999; Sharkin, 1993). Plant, Hyde, Keltner, and Devine (2000) also report that people generally stereotype when interpreting emotions such as anger and sadness. It is more likely that displays of anger will be interpreted as an exclusively male domain. In general, however, most studies of anger in adult males and females have failed to report significant gender differences in the experience and expression of

Research into gender differences in hostility, the cognitive component of anger, has been neglected in most studies and particularly in school settings. However, there is some limited research that indicates that negative cognitions relate to lower levels of adjustment to high school (Boman & Yates, 2001). This relationship between negative cognitions and school adjustment was especially evident in males.

Research into attributional bias in aggressive boys (Graham, Hudley & Williams, 1992; Nasby, Hayden, & DePaulo, 1980) suggests that boys also are more likely to be more hostile towards school. In school settings, it appears that school aged males are more likely, based on previous research in non-school populations, to express their anger negatively. It is also appears there are no significant gender differences in the experience of anger

Regarding anger expression, females were more likely to have positive coping mechanisms. These coping mechanisms were all of a passive nature. For example, girls were more likely to share their feelings or talk things over with someone else when angry. Males were more likely to indicate destructive coping mechanisms and it was noted that these were active in character. For example, boys were more likely to break things or disrupt a class when angry. This is consistent with other studies that have reported adolescent males are more likely to outwardly express their anger (Cox, Stabb, & Hulgus, 2000; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1980; Crick, 1997). Not all studies have reported this difference between the inward and outward expression of anger (Averill, 1983; Newman, Gray, & Fuqua, 1999; Stoner & Spencer, 1986). However, those studies that have not reported this have been of adults rather than adolescents.

The experience and expression of anger have particularly been explored in anger researches done on young infants and found that its initial experience and expression have been associated with constructive responses such as the ability to persist when encountering frustration (Lewis, 1993). Lewis \*reports that gender differences in the experience and expression of anger do not appear at this young age.

Studies involving adolescents and children have mainly reported results indicating no differences between boys and girls on the experience of anger (Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992; Zahn-Waxler, Cole, Richardson, & Friedman, 1994). However, these studies and others have reported significant gender differences in the expression of anger (Maccoby, & Jacklin, 1980; Crick, 1997). In both these studies boys were more likely than girls to use physical expression of their anger. In contrast to these results, Swaffer and Epps (1999), in their study of male and female adolescents, found no significant differences in either the experience or expression of anger. However, in a study of elementary, middle, and high school students, Cox, Stabb, and Hulgus (2000) found that boys were significantly more likely to express their anger outwardly than girl

Boman (2003) studied gender differences in the affective, behavioral, and cognitive components of anger. He found that girls and boys do not differ in their experience (affective) of anger and girls are more likely to express positively (behavioral) their anger than boys.

Additionally, his results supported the expectation that boys are more hostile (cognitive) towards school than girls.

Research indicates that differences exist between adolescent males and females with regard to expression of emotions (Brandts & Garofalo, 2012). Although research depicts females as more emotionally expressive, males have a reputation of being more predisposed to anger. According to Sadeh, Javdani, Finy, and Verona (2011), females experience anger, but may express it differently than males. For example, instead of expressing anger by striking objects, adolescent females may talk to friends or peers (Fischer & Evers, 2011). Conversely, other studies purport that females express anger similarly to males, but experience difficulty recognizing and admitting the emotion due to social expectations and constraints (Karreman & Bekker, 2012). Males, on the other hand, tend to display anger more commonly and comfortably (Fischer & Evers, 2011). One of the many reasons that adolescent males may feel comfortable expressing anger is because it is socially acceptable (Burt et al., 2013). Akhtar and Kushwaha (2015) have also reported the significant differences exist between adolescent males and females with regard to verbal aggression expression. Adolescent males have higher aggression expression score than the femal

Zimprich and Mascherek (2012) determined that no anger differences existed between males and females. They declared that although genders may express anger and respond to situations differently, they generally experience similar levels of anger. As can be seen from the preceding studies, inconsistencies exist in the literature. Contradicting studies indicate that researchers are unclear as to whether differences in anger exist between genders. As such, a research gap has emerged that needs to be filled (Zimprich & Mascherek, 2012). In order to understand how this research gap developed, it is necessary to examine cultural influences.

According to theories of aggression by Parke & Slaby (1983), gender role and learning play a key role for anger and aggressive behavior of males. Males are exposed to parenting practices that promote rough-and-tumble, anger and aggressive behaviors whereas females are exposed to parenting practices that promote caring and close interpersonal relationships. These differential socialization practices appear to foster adolescents' anger to a greater extent in males than in females.

#### **Objectives of the Study:**

In the light of above mentioned review of literatures, the objectives of this article is to provide empirical supports available in the area of gender role in anger research for the researchers. Contradictory statements of the researches may also be helpful for further investigation of gender effect on aggression expression with special reference to adolescent populations and motivate to the researchers for collecting further empirical support. Intervention programs can also be designed for adolescents to cope in healthy ways with their anger separately as per need of angry females and males.

#### **Conclusion:**

On the basis of the review of the literatures, it can be concluded that the present article will be helpful for the researchers working in the area of anger research. Contradictory statements of the aforesaid researches may also be helpful for further investigation of gender effect on aggression expression with special reference to adolescent populations. Empirical supports for the effectiveness of gender role in adolescent's aggression expression could also be drawn by arranging further researches in this area.

#### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY:**

To prove the effectiveness of gender role in adolescent's aggression expression follow-up studies should be made by researchers on adolescent populations. This study may also be helpful to explore the passive/active aspects of anger coping and its relationship to gender. Intervention programs can also be designed for adolescents to cope in healthy ways with their anger separately as per need of angry

females and males and to include the important aspect of anger expression. Finally, it may be very helpful for teachers to pay attention to the statements made by adolescents that suggest an underlying hostility among them. This could be useful in preventing some later behavioural problems, both in the classroom and schoolyard, which reflect destructive anger coping strategies.

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