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## Peer Relationship Pattern of Adolescents: A Study of Locale and Gender Differences

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### **Abstract:**

*Peer relations are an especially important domain of social functioning for children and for adolescents. During adolescence, peers play a large part in a young person's life even while the family continues to be significant. In general, friendships offers youth with many positive opportunities despite the negative connotations that peer relationships have too many of us. Peer relationships are actually important for healthy development and essential for youth to develop into healthy adults. The present study is an attempt to find locale and gender differences in peer relationship patterns among adolescents. The study was conducted in purposively selected Government and private colleges of rural and urban areas of Ludhiana district. The study was based on 400 adolescents comprising 200 boys and 200 girls (equally distributed over locale; 200 rural and 200 urban) aged 18 to 20 years and hailing from intact families. The psychological tool used was Dimensions of Friendship Scale by Chandna and Chadha (1986). Results revealed that there was non-significant difference between rural and urban adolescents however, the mean scores of urban adolescents was slightly higher in comparison to rural adolescents in almost every dimension except enjoyment and trust. Gender wise difference showed that girls had higher scores in all the dimensions of peer relations except enjoyment and trust. Girls were found to be more accepting, understanding and spontaneous towards their friends and thus can be stated to have more intimate and better friendship than boys while, boys were significantly better in trust dimension than girls. This study represents an effort to contribute to this literature by examining the quality of youth peer relations using information gathered from adolescents.*

**Keywords:** Adolescents, peer relations, gender, locale, association

### **1. Introduction**

Adolescence is a time when peers play an increasingly important role in the lives of youth. Teens begin to develop friendships that are more intimate, exclusive, and more constant than in earlier years. In many ways, these friendships are an essential component of development. They provide safe venues where youth can explore their identities, where they can feel accepted and where they can develop a sense of belongingness. Friendships also allow youth to practice and foster social skills necessary for future success. Friendships that emerge during adolescence tend to be more complex, more exclusive, and more consistent than during earlier childhood (Steinberg, 2005).

Peer groups play an indispensable role in the informal networks which characterize college life (Lahelma 2002), providing a security blanket where individuals feel safe to talk about very intimate and personal dilemmas (Carter et al 2003), offering emotional support and social cohesion. It is peer groups, not individuals that are the bearers of gender definitions (Connell 2000). Nonetheless, peer relationships also have the potential to encourage problem behaviors. Although the negative influence of peers is often over-emphasized, more can be done to help teenagers experience the family and the peer group as mutually constructive environments. To accomplish this, families, communities, religious places, schools, and other youth groups can all contribute to helping youth develop positive peer relationships, and deflect negative peer pressures and influences (Brown 2004).

Changes, however, may occur during adolescence as young people become increasingly dependent on their friends and less dependent on their parents for emotional support (Crosnoe and Needham 2004). At such stance, peer acceptance becomes a formidable task for adolescents to enjoy better social lives. A capacity to form close, intimate friendship during adolescence is related to overall social and emotional adjustment and competence. Building and maintaining satisfactory friendships is a relevant indicator of mental and physical well-being and an important protective factor throughout the whole life span, particularly adolescence (Berndt 2004). Banerjee et al (2011) revealed bidirectional relationships between social understanding and peer relations during adolescence.

Peers provide a more realistic model for developing skills and attitudes and help adolescents form attitudes and values. Peer group also provides a medium to test their values derived from their parents. Peers offer emotional security in terms of similarity in thoughts, problems and ideas. There is also an increased awareness of the role of friendship in personal growth and social development as well

as a more realistic outlook towards friendship as Cook et al (2007) found that peer attributes in the school domain affect individual performance outcomes, while peer attribute in social behaviour affect individual social behaviour.

High quality relationships in terms of support, intimacy, and reciprocity - with friends and peers in general, encourage the maintenance of ties and contribute to psychosocial adjustment (Schneider et al 2000). More specifically, friendship patterns characterized by support and sharing of thoughts, feelings, and behavior represent a positive social context where adolescents can strengthen their self-confidence, expectations for the future, and social competence (Rabaglietti and Ciairano 2008). Friendship seems to be the relational experience that, through support and social comparison, provides adolescents with an opportunity to learn new social definitions, to build and/or strengthen their social capabilities, and to experiment with their own identity and different social roles and therefore is a significant variable that mediates emotional independence of an adolescent.

Adolescents' perceptions of the quality of friendships improved from middle to late adolescence. Boys reported sharper increases over time than girls in their perceptions of the quality of their closest, same-sex friendships. Furthermore, perceptions of contextual level variables (i.e., family relationships, teacher/student relations, and student/ student relations) were significantly associated with change over time in perceptions of general and/or closest same-sex friendship quality (Way and Greene 2005).

Bukowski et al (2007) studied gender differences in the features, processes and outcomes related to friendship. They stated that girls share closer bond than boys in friendship. But this does not mean that boys rarely form close friendships. They often do but the quality of friendship is more variable. Boys and girls seem to enter friendships with different social needs because of gender-role expectations then their friendship nurtures in different ways; girls towards communal concerns, and boys towards achievement and status concerns (Vaquera and Kao 2008). The presence of competitive striving, which has been found to be more of a characteristic of men than women might be a reason for lesser intimacy among men in terms of friendship (Lewis 1998).

Sharing of confidence and emotional support seem to be more vital to female friendship than to male friendship during adolescence and throughout life (Papalia 2001). Boys' friendships focus less on conversation than on shared activity, usually sports and competitive games. Boys tend to gain self-concept and self-esteem from competition with friends and girls from helping them. The socialization of girls often emphasizes relational skills and interpersonal understanding whereas the socialization of boys often emphasizes autonomy and individuation (Kimmel, 2004). Thus, girls may acquire the necessary interpersonal and cognitive skills needed for close and supportive friendship at an earlier age than boys.

In light of the above cited literature, the present study was planned to observe the pattern of peer relations among adolescents in Indian context and analyze the locale and gender differences in the pattern of peer relationships.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Sample

The study was based upon the sample of 400 respondents drawn equally from rural and urban areas of Ludhiana district (equally distributed over gender i.e. 200 girls and 200 boys). In the present study random sampling technique was employed. The sample was drawn from government and private colleges of urban Ludhiana and purposively selected blocks of rural Ludhiana. Subjects were between the age group of 18-20 years.

### 2.2. Statistical Techniques

The following statistical techniques were employed in order to analysis the data:

- Mann whitney u test is used to find out the difference between the mean scores of friendship pattern.
- $\chi^2$  Association test has been used to find out the association between friendship and socio personal factors.

### 2.3. Tools

The tools used in the present investigation are the following:

#### 2.3.1. Self-Structured Socio-Demographic Student Profile Questionnaire

Self-structured socio-demographic student profile questionnaire was used to gather information about the socio-personal characteristics of the respondents and his/her family such as name of respondent, address, age, gender, birth order, parental age, education, occupation, family size, type, religion etc.

#### 2.3.2. Dimensions of Friendship Scale

Dimensions of Friendship scale by Chandna and Chadha (1986) was used to assess the friendship pattern among adolescents. The scale has 64 items for eight dimensions of friendship. The dimensions are enjoyment, acceptance, trust, respect, mutual assistance, confiding, understanding and spontaneity. Subjects were asked to respond to items as Yes or No. Items measuring of particular dimension positively and responded as True or Yes were given a score of one. The negatively worded items were given a score of Zero for the true response and a score of one for a false response. The higher the score, the higher was the subject on that dimension.

### 2.4. Procedure

The tool was administered to the randomly selected group of students, and the respondents were given required instructions of the given tests. Answer sheets were scored following the scoring procedure in the manual. On the basis of raw scores, percentages, mean

rank values, Mann Whitney Test and chi square were calculated to examine the local and gender differences in friendship patterns of adolescents.

### 3. Result and Discussion

The following account presents the difference in friendship pattern and association with socio personal factors among adolescents. It also highlights the distribution of respondents over different dimensions of friendship scale. It can be noted that there was no significant difference was found among rural and urban adolescents while, gender wise differences were quite prominent in some dimensions.

#### 3.1. Table 1

Table 1 depicts the distribution of adolescents across different levels of dimensions of friendship pattern. It is evident from table that equal proportions (49.00%) of rural and urban respondents were in highest level of enjoyment while more boys (52.5%) were reported in highest level of enjoyment than girls (45.5%).

In acceptance dimension again rural and urban adolescents shared almost equal proportion in all the levels of acceptance whereas high percentage of girls (58.5%) were in highest level in comparison to boys who were in medium level (43%). As far as trust dimension was concerned rural and urban respondents were equally distributed over all the levels. On probing the data for girls and boys majority (54%) of male adolescents had higher level of trust in comparison to girls who had higher share (43%) in medium level of trust.

When the trend in dimension of respect was seen, it was apparent that both rural and urban respondents were distributed equally in all the levels of respect whereas higher percentage of (46%) boys and (48%) girls were in medium level of respect. The table further elucidates distribution on mutual assistance in which higher percentage of rural (45%) and urban (44.5%) adolescents was in medium level. Gender wise distribution revealed higher percentage (48%) of males in medium category while higher share (43.5%) of female respondents was in higher category.

Data on confiding dimensions revealed that high percentage of rural (49%) urban (56.5%) as well as boys (49.5%) and girls (56%) was in higher level. It depicted that girls are more open with their friends, the reason behind this may be that boys' peer group culture poses obstacles in the development of close friendships because boys feel "the need to protect their vulnerability, prove their masculinity, and preserve their integrity when among their male peers (Chu 2005).

On probing the data with regard to understanding and spontaneity rural and urban adolescents had similar trend as higher number of adolescents were in higher category followed by medium and low level. While, trend for male and female adolescents on understanding dimension was similar but there was a sharp difference in share of respondents as 66 per cent of female respondents in comparison to 48.5 per cent of males reported in high level. In spontaneity, a major proportion of females (63.5%) reported highly spontaneous relations with their friends whereas only 25 per cent of males reported high level of spontaneity.

Chi square value as depicted in Table 1 highlights that among all the dimensions there was no significant association between dimensions of friendship and locale whereas in gender wise analysis there was a significant association between gender and acceptance ( $P < .01$ ), Trust ( $P < .01$ ), Understanding ( $P < .01$ ) and spontaneity ( $P < .01$ ). These finding were in line with Valentina and Gulati (2014) who has reported that there is significant association between gender and understanding and spontaneity level in friendship.

In a study of early adolescents, Phillipsen (1999) finds that girls reported more support in their friendships and have less conflict than do boys and in general, girls' same-sex dyadic friendships tend to be more exclusive than those of boys (Eder and Hallinan 1978).

	Rural (N=200)	Urban (N=200)	Total (N=400)	$\chi^2$	Boys (N=200)	Girls (N=200)	Total (N=400)	$\chi^2$
<b>Enjoyment</b>								
Low	18	25	43	10.75	13	30	43	10.75
Medium	84	77	161	40.25	82	79	161	40.25
High	98	98	196	49.0	105	91	196	49.0
<b>Acceptance</b>								
Low	42	42	84	21.0	60	24	84	21.0
Medium	73	72	145	36.25	86	59	145	36.25
High	85	86	171	42.75	54	117	171	42.75
<b>Trust</b>								
Low	24	24	48	12.0	17	31	48	12.0
Medium	81	80	161	40.25	75	86	161	40.25
High	95	96	191	47.75	108	83	191	47.75

Respect										
Low	26	26	52	13.0	.001NS	30	22	52	13.0	1.0NS
Medium	94	94	188	47.0		92	96	188	47.0	
High	80	80	160	40.0		78	82	160	40.0	
Mutual Assistance										
Low	29	35	64	16.0	0.39NS	34	30	64	16.0	2.17NS
Medium	90	89	179	44.75		96	83	179	44.75	
High	81	76	157	39.25		70	87	157	39.25	
Confiding										
Low	21	18	39	9.75	2.25NS	21	18	39	9.75	1.96NS
Medium	81	69	150	37.5		80	70	150	37.5	
High	98	113	211	52.75		99	112	211	52.75	
Understanding										
Low	34	28	62	15.5	1.28NS	39	23	62	15.5	8.01**
Medium	55	54	109	27.25		64	45	109	27.25	
High	111	118	229	57.25		97	132	229	57.25	
Spontaneity										
Low	50	43	93	23.25	1.05NS	74	19	93	23.25	19.74**
Medium	66	64	130	32.50		76	54	130	32.50	
High	84	93	177	44.25		50	127	177	44.25	
Overall Friendship										
Low	7	9	16	4.0	1.68NS	12	4	16	4.0	7.85**
Medium	46	43	89	22.25		55	34	89	22.25	
High	147	148	295	73.75		133	162	295	73.75	

Table 1: Distribution of adolescents on Friendship

## 3.2. Table 2

Table 2 throws light on the differences in the various dimensions of friendship of rural and urban respondents. It is evident that no significant differences were observed between rural and urban respondents in all the dimensions of friendship scale. The calculated Z value was found to be non-significant however, on the basis of mean rank scores urban adolescents were higher in dimension such as enjoyment (M=205.39), respect (M=201.68), mutual assistance (M=203.42), confiding (M=209.23), understanding (M=202.29) and spontaneity (M=206.80) than rural adolescents. In dimensions like acceptance (203.48) and trust (202.92) rural adolescents scored higher than their urban counterparts.

Friendship	Rural (n1=200)	Urban (n2=200)	Z-value (By using Mann Whitney test)
	Mean rank score	Mean rank score	
Enjoyment	195.61	205.39	.88
Acceptance	203.48	197.52	.53
Trust	202.92	198.08	.43
Respect	199.32	201.68	.21
Mutual assistance	197.58	203.42	.53
Confiding	190.82	209.23	1.67
Understanding	198.71	202.29	.32
Spontaneity	194.20	206.80	1.12
Overall Friendship	198.28	202.72	.38

Table 2: area wise differences in friendship among adolescents

\*significant at 5% level of significance

\*\*significant at 1% level of significance

NS Non significant

### 3.3. Table 3

Data presented in Table 3 depicts that the mean rank scores of females were comparatively higher than males in all the dimensions of friendship pattern except enjoyment and trust. The calculated Z value was found to be significant in dimension of trust ( $p < 0.01$ ), male respondents had significantly higher mean rank scores (231.54) on trust dimension than female respondents (169.46). Similar finding was reported by Pauriyal et al (2011) who reported that girls were ahead in all the dimensions of friendship than boys, except trust.

When analyze the data the calculated Z value was found to be significant in dimensions of acceptance ( $p < 0.05$ ), understanding ( $p < 0.05$ ) and spontaneity ( $p < 0.05$ ). It was observed that girls had notable and significant higher mean scores than boys in these dimensions. This indicates that girls were more accepting, understanding and spontaneous towards their friends than boys. The findings are in concordance with the findings by Valentina and Gulati (2014) who had reported that girls exhibited more intense friendship than boys.

Belle (1989) also reported that compared to girls, boys tend to have a more open network that is less intimate, more volatile, and more likely to include new friends over time. Bank and Hansford (2000) also stated that women are more supportive to their same sex or opposite sex friendships more than men did, and the reason seemed to be the greater intimacy of women's friendship. Girls are almost twice as likely as boys to reciprocate their friendships. Females have longer lasting, more disclosing, and more exclusive friendships, it is reasonable that these friendships are also reciprocated more often for girls than for boys (Billy and Udry 1985; Eder and Hallinan 1978)

Table 3 also elucidate that there was no significant difference in dimensions such as respect, mutual assistance and confiding on the basis of calculated Z value, the mean scores of girls were higher than boys. The findings were consistent with Bukowski et al (2007) who studied gender differences and reported that girls share closer bond than boys in friendship. The development of exclusive and stronger relationships among girls may make friendships between girls more conversationally intimate than friendships between boys. There is also evidence that compared to males, females maintain stronger relationships and share higher levels of disclosure (Billy and Udry 1985). Boys had higher mean score in the dimension of enjoyment than girls however; the calculated Z value was non-significant.

Friendship	Girls (n1=200)	Boys (n2=200)	Z-value (By using Mann Whitney test)
	Mean rank score	Mean rank score	
Enjoyment	195.61	205.39	0.88NS
Acceptance	244.50	156.42	7.85**
Trust	169.46	231.54	5.59**
Respect	203.67	197.33	0.59NS
Mutual assistance	202.92	198.08	0.43NS
Confiding	207.71	192.32	1.39NS
Understanding	238.48	162.52	6.8**
Spontaneity	256.01	144.01	10.02**
Overall Friendship	234.83	166.17	5.95**

Table 3: Gender wise differences in Friendship among adolescents

\*significant at 5% level of significance

\*\*significant at 1% level of significance

NS Non significant

Thus, it can be deduced that girls have stronger friendship ties with their friends than boys with portrayal of closeness with their friends through acceptance, understanding and spontaneity. The presence of competitive striving, which has been found to be more of a characteristic of men than women might be a reason for lesser intimacy among men in terms of friendship (Lewis 1998).

### 4. Conclusion

With the onset of adolescence, individuals have reached a level of cognitive development advanced enough that they may generalize from their past relationships and use abstract thinking processes to allow attachment organization to emerge from their past experiences. This study on friendship suggests that there are not any significant differences in rural and urban adolescents however, urban adolescents were slightly better in some dimensions whereas, prominent differences between boys' and girls' network can be observed. Girls scored higher in almost all the dimensions of friendship except enjoyment and trust thus, it can be concluded that girls possesses more intense, intimate and close friendship than boys. Girls are more likely than the boys to establish intimacy through discussion and self disclosure while, boys are more likely than girls to establish friendship and intimacy through shared activities. Girls were more accepting, understanding and spontaneous towards their friendship as well as they were found slightly better in dimensions like respect, confiding and mutual assistance. The quality of friendship has been assumed to have direct effects on overall social and emotional development.

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