Research Paper

Psychological Needs, Perceived Acceptance and Relational Aggression in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT: *The present study adopts a between groups design to determine gender differences in dimensions of psychological needs, perceived acceptance by friends and dimensions of relational aggression among college students. A correlational design was adopted to determine if dimensions of psychological needs, perceived acceptance by friends and dimensions of relational aggression correlate among college students. Non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 562 college students aged between 20–25 years (272 males, 290 females). Results showed gender differences in relatedness satisfaction, autonomy satisfaction, relatedness dissatisfaction, competence dissatisfaction, autonomy dissatisfaction dimensions of psychological needs, and proactive relational aggression, reactive relational aggression, proactive physical aggression, reactive physical aggression, peer relational victimization, peer physical victimization, peer exclusivity and prosocial behaviour dimensions of relational aggression. Positive correlations were found between the relatedness satisfaction, competence satisfaction, autonomy satisfaction, perceived acceptance by friends and prosocial behaviour in both genders. Negative correlations were found between competence satisfaction, autonomy satisfaction and proactive physical aggression, reactive physical aggression and peer physical victimization among females. Apart from these, other correlations were also observed in both genders. This study recommends the promotion of healthy interactions by educational institutions as part of psychosocial development of the students.*

KEYWORDS: *psychological need, perceived acceptance by friends, relational aggression and prosocial behaviour.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Young adults are a population that undergo many lifestyle changes. Some of the most important characteristics of this developmental period are engaging in relationships. As the young adult begins to step into the unknown world of unprotected and independent adulthood, they experience relationships with peers that are sometimes aggressive in nature. There is an essential psychological need for every emerging adult to belong, root themselves or gain power over one another and engage in these peer behaviours. Developmental research has increasing importance and the complexity of peer relationships and friendships as children grow (Bierman, 2004).

Erikson [1] says that the young adult, emerging from the search for and insistence on identity, and is willing to fuse their identity with others. He or she is ready for intimate connections, that is, the capacity to commit... to concrete affiliations and partnerships. Entering the adult world is the stage in which a person makes more concrete decisions regarding their occupation, friendships, values, and lifestyles [2].

Young adults in their late teens and early 20s in the modern societies pave their way through a number of issues and enter into the responsibilities of the adulthood, 'the young adult is usually preoccupied with self-growth in the context of society and relationships with others' [1]. Self-growth also brings different needs psychologically and frustrations that come along with it. A study on young adults' self-efficacy beliefs in determining prosocial behaviour found that strong sense of efficacy was associated with a high perceived efficacy in the management of social relationships and engagement with empathy in others' emotional experiences [3]. Another study which aimed to examine the prevalence of physical aggression in the

relationships of young adults in Germany found that there were sex differences, women scored higher than men on aggressive acts, and men scored higher on being the targets of partner aggression [4].

Studies also have relational aggression in intimate and peer relationships to be correlated positively with psychological disorders like anxiety, depression and psychological symptoms like anger, stress and alcohol problems in young adult populations [5]. Long-term effects of victimization were investigated in a study with 177 young adults that showed that adolescent victimization associated with increased depression and decreased self-esteem as well as negative views of others in young adulthood, but only when there was a lack of supportive family environment earlier in their adolescence [6].

These studies indicate that while the young adults enter into their adult phase, they go through a number of problems in their personal life ranging from depression to being a victim of aggression. They exhibit different needs for survival as mentioned in Erikson's theory. Intimacy versus isolation is the sixth stage of psychosocial development in Erik Erikson's Theory. During this period, the major conflict centers on forming intimate, loving relationships with other people [1]. These needs are manifested by the young adults in their relationship in order to 'fit in' or belong to a particular group of peers and friends. Need for social connection and peer acceptance is regarded as one of the most fundamental and universal human needs [7].

Psychologist Abraham Maslow 1943 [8] formulated a theory of hierarchy of needs. This theory states various psychological and physiological needs on a pyramid-style hierarchy of importance. He believed people are generally motivated by their innate needs. According to Self Determination Theory by Ryan & Deci [9][10] psychological needs are evolved organismic requirements for certain types of experiences, in particular, for competence (experiences of mastery and effectance), autonomy (experiences of volition and self-ownership), and relatedness (experiences of closeness and connectedness with others). In a study it was indicated belongingness and perceived burdensomeness both individually mediated the relationship between basic need satisfaction and suicidal ideation, while relatedness predicted variance of the interaction of belongingness by perceived burdensomeness while controlling for depression [11]. In another study in Istanbul, it was concluded that grit, satisfaction of three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) and gender to be significant predictors of subjective well-being for young adults. Satisfaction of three basic needs predicts subjective well-being stronger than grit and gender [12].

A study reported both high need fulfillment and future perspective had greater positive health behaviors, and were especially unlikely to smoke [13]. A study on young adults showed that belongingness as a psychological need appeared to have multiple/strong effects on emotional patterns and on cognitive processes whereas lack of attachments linked to varying negative effects on well-being, health and adjustment [7]. The research shows that need fulfilment has a great impact on one's psychological and physiological health. A study that was carried on the sample of 200 individuals all aged from 17 to 35 to examine the role of friendship in psychological well-being stated that there was a positive correlation among both the variables. Acceptance in friendships and close peer relationships are important to one's psychological health [14].

Acceptance is defined as relationship (specific) and relatively stable cognitive appraisals that other's value and care for us and their concern is not contingent upon our holding particular attitude/acting differently from how we typically act. Perceived acceptance is the acceptance that is received from the people [15]. Study conducted on emerging adults studying the social acceptance and peer and romantic relationship self-efficacy as salient factors related to social development, found effects of perceptions of physical attractiveness and peer attachment on peer relationship self-efficacy and self-perceived social acceptance [16]. Another study on young adults also showed that the need for peer acceptance was strong for the young adult to join undesired or undesirable activities may be the price paid for attachment to a group; high self-esteem and self-confidence not only showed resistance to negative peer pressure, but were also significant in the formation and maintenance of friendships, and entry to peer groupings [17].

Early life experiences also play a role in perceived social and peer acceptance. This can be supported by a longitudinal study that found that early negative family experiences, were strongly associated with lower perceived family and friend support in young adulthood [18]. In a 12 year follow up investigation, lower levels of preadolescent peer rejection predicted overall life status adjustment, whereas preadolescents who were friended showed higher levels of general self-worth in adulthood even after controlling for perceived competence in preadolescence, while in contrast, peer rejection and the lack of friendship was associated with psychopathological symptoms in adulthood, although neither uniquely predicted symptomatology [19]. The young adult is faced with different needs and pressures to fit into a particular group of peers. Therefore, subject or get subjected to aggression that is relational in nature. Peer rejection and lack of friend support has clearly been an indicator for symptomatic behaviour and psychopathological symptoms in these young adults.

Relational aggression or alternative aggression which is an another name for relational aggression is a type of aggression in which harm is caused by damaging someone's relationships or social status [20]. Relational aggression is defined as a type of aggression that is "intended to harm others through deliberate manipulation of their social standing and relationships" [21]. In a study on young adults, relationally aggressive

actions included peer maltreatment through social exclusion and damaged interpersonal relationships through behaviors such as spreading rumors or social ostracism [22][23][24][25].

In another study, the results showed that relational aggression correlated with higher peer rejection, antisocial personality features, and borderline personality features, and with lower levels of prosocial behavior for female and male college students [25]. A research conducted on the relations between relational and overt aggression, loneliness, social anxiety, alcohol and drug use and depressive symptoms, in 287 under-graduate students reported men engaged in more overt aggression and also in more relational aggression than women; relational aggression and overt were also correlated positively with social anxiety, depressive symptoms, alcohol use, loneliness,, and drug use for the whole sample [26].

Students reported with high levels of perspective taking, used less relational aggression than their peers. A gender and empathetic concern interaction also reported lower levels of empathetic concern associated with higher levels of relational aggression, only for males [27]. Based on the review of past literature, the present study aims to determine if there were gender differences in dimensions of psychological needs, perceived acceptance by friends and dimensions of relational aggression among college students. It also aims to study whether there is a relationship between dimensions of psychological needs, perceived acceptance by friends and dimensions of relational aggression among male and female college students.

II. METHOD

Research Design

The present study adopts a between groups design to determine whether there are any gender differences in dimensions of psychological needs perceived acceptance by friends and dimensions of relational aggression among college students. The study also adopts a correlational design to determine if dimensions of psychological needs, perceived acceptance by friends and dimensions of relational aggression correlate among college students (males and females).

Sample

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 562 college students aged between 20 – 25 years (mean age = 22.5). Among them 272 students were males and 290 students were females. Out of the total sample, 67.6% of the sample belonged to under graduation courses and 32.4% belonged to post-graduation courses. Students from government colleges, residential educational institutions, vocational courses, distance education were excluded from the sample. Students who were working part time were also not included in the sample.

Instruments
1.   Information Schedule
Information regarding the students' age, gender, educational qualification and basic background information was taken. The schedule also included questions on any history of mental illnesses.
2.   Balanced Measure of Psychological Needs
The Balanced Measure of Psychological Needs (BMPN) was developed in 2012. The scale contains 18 items, 6 items each for: Relatedness, Competence and Autonomy. Reliability analyses of the six 3-item BMPN subscales ranges from coefficients of 0.70 to 0.85 [28].
3.   Perceived Acceptance Scale
The Perceived Acceptance Scale (PAS) was developed [15] to assess perceptions of acceptance within specific categories of relationships. It provides separate scores that reflect acceptance from one's mother, father, family in general and friends. This study uses the friends' dimension of perceived acceptance which has 12 items. Brock et al. (1998) have exhibited internal consistency to be 0.80 for the friends' dimension [29].
4.   Self-Report of Aggression and Social Behavior Measure
Self-Report of Aggression and Social Behavior Measure (SRASBM) was devised by Morales & Crick (1998). The tool has 39 items and respondents rate each item on a seven-point Likert scale. The eight dimensions of the scale and their items numbers are as follows: proactive relational aggression, reactive relational aggression, peer/general relational victimization, proactive physical aggression, reactive physical aggression, peer/general physical victimization, prosocial behaviour and peer exclusivity [30]. Several studies have found adequate internal consistency for the scales of the tool with Chronbach's alphas ranging from 0.71 to 0.87 [31][32][33][34][35][36][37].

Statistical Analysis

The obtained quantitative data of this study were analyzed using independent samples t-test and Pearson Product- Moment Correlation using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0.

Procedure

After selecting the measures, a few arrangements were made for data collection. The questionnaires and the Information Schedule were prepared and organized. The authorities of the under graduation and post-graduation colleges that gave permission for data collection were contacted. The researcher visited the colleges on the scheduled dates. Rapport was established with the students and they were made aware that their participation in the study was purely voluntary. They were assured of maintaining confidentiality through-out the study. The students who agreed to participate in the study were requested to sign an 'Informed Consent Form'. Next, the Information Schedule was administered. Then, instructions for the questionnaires (namely, the BMPN, PAS and BMPN) were given and the students were requested to respond to the items. There was no fixed time limit for any of the questionnaires. However, the respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire in 15-20 minutes. The data collected was then coded, entered in SPSS and statistically analyzed.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Mean Standard Deviation and t-values of under and post-graduate males and females.

	Males (N=272)		Females (N=290)		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t-test
Psychological Needs					
Relatedness Satisfaction	10.83	2.39	11.29	2.40	**-2.26***
Competence Satisfaction	10.61	2.68	10.83	2.24	-1.09
Autonomy Satisfaction	11.12	2.70	11.56	2.27	**-2.08***
Relatedness Dissatisfaction	9.70	2.81	9.19	2.67	**2.21***
Competence Dissatisfaction	10.49	2.29	10.07	2.43	**2.06***
Autonomy Dissatisfaction	10.38	2.45	9.47	2.53	**4.32****
Perceived Acceptance by friends	40.39	7.69	39.32	5.63	1.88
Relational Aggression					
Proactive Relational Aggression	16.28	5.93	12.24	5.97	**8.04****
Reactive Relational Aggression	19.19	6.56	15.04	6.38	**7.61****
Proactive Physical Aggression	10.17	4.40	7.17	4.01	**8.44****
Reactive Physical Aggression	10.79	4.43	7.59	3.92	**9.06****
Peer Relational Victimization	15.68	5.04	12.78	5.80	**6.31****
Peer Physical Victimization	10.38	4.43	7.63	4.15	**7.58****
Peer Exclusivity	14.97	5.88	13.57	5.97	**2.80****
Prosocial Behavior	55.97	10.30	58.58	10.07	**-3.03****

Note: *$p<0.05$, **$p<0.01$

From Table 1, the present study has found that there were gender differences in the variables being studied. The results show that male students had higher levels of relatedness dissatisfaction, competence dissatisfaction and autonomy dissatisfaction (M = 9.70, M= 10.49 and M=10.38 respectively), while the results of female students showed that they scored higher levels of relatedness and autonomy satisfaction (M=11.29 and M=11.56 respectively). The results can possibly indicate that males experience low satisfaction of needs than females as they might experience low quality of relatedness in their friendships, have higher standards of competence and need for autonomy due to societal and cultural pressures.

Self-determination theory [10] says that satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness leads to an immediate well-being while strengthening inner resources of the people

contributing to subsequent resilience, whereas need frustration/dissatisfaction in the needs evoke negative well-being and increasing vulnerabilities for defensiveness and psychopathology. This theory supports the findings of the results as the male students who have scored higher on dimensions like relatedness, competence and autonomy dissatisfaction, have also scored higher on dimensions of relational aggression.

Male students were found to score higher on proactive relational aggression, reactive relational aggression, proactive physical aggression, reactive physical aggression, peer relational victimization, peer physical victimization and peer exclusivity (M = 16.28, M= 19.19, M = 10.17, M= 10.79, M=15.68, M= 10.38 and M = 14.97 respectively) than female students (M = 12.24, M= 15.04, M = 7.17, M= 7.59, M=12.78, M= 7.63 and M = 13.57 respectively). According to a study, boys are more physically than relationally aggressive and girls are more relationally than physically aggressive [38] but findings also suggest that boys do use relational forms of aggression as well [39]. Both genders engage in relational aggression forms, while males score a little higher than the females.

Xie et al. (2002) identified two dimensions of relational aggression: direct social aggression and non-confrontational social aggression. In social aggression that is direct, identity of the perpetrator is known, since the aggression is confrontational in nature i.e. openly insulting a peer. Non-confrontational aggression is indirectly executed i.e. telling tales about a peer to another. Females engage more in non-confrontational aggression as it allows them to release their feelings that are aggressive in nature without endangering their existing relationships [40]. However, in the current study it was found that male and female students engaged in direct and indirect forms of relational aggression equally.

On the other hand, the results of the present study showed that female students were higher on prosocial behaviour (M= 68.58) when compared to the male students (M=55.97). This could be supported by the results of a study conducted on adolescents and young adults suggesting that males and females are both almost equal on most of the prosocial behaviour dimensions. But on the dimensions of perspective taking and mutual concern moral reasoning in females scored higher because they tend to have a better understanding of others' mental state and are more concerned about morality in the society [41].

Table 2: Correlation matrix showing correlation between dimensions of psychological needs, perceived acceptance by friends and dimensions of relational aggression in male college students.

		Relational aggression							
	Peer Acceptance by friends	Proactive Relational Aggression	Reactive Relational Aggression	Proactive Physical Aggression	Reactive Physical Aggression	Peer Relational Victimization	Peer Physical Victimization	Peer Exclusivity	Prosocial Behavior
Psychological Needs									
Relatedness Satisfaction	.41**	-.01	-.01	-.06	.07	.17**	.07	.14*	.32**
Competence Satisfaction	.25**	.00	-.11	-.00	.16**	.09	-.00	.06	.35**
Autonomy Satisfaction	.22**	.07	-.10	-.08	-.02	.07	-.03	-.02	.36**
Relatedness Dissatisfaction	.35**	.21**	.36**	.39**	.41**	.52**	.16**	.38**	-.06
Competence Dissatisfaction	.28**	.28**	.21**	.24**	.03	.53**	.18**	.34**	.13*
Autonomy Dissatisfaction	.26**	.12*	.26**	.24**	.12*	.28**	.24**	.25**	.14*
Perceived Acceptance by friends	1	.19**	.14*	.21**	.08	.32**	.06	.23**	.22**

Note: *p<0.05, **p<0.01

Table 3: Correlation matrix showing correlation between dimensions of psychological needs, perceived acceptance by friends and dimensions of relational aggression in female college students.

					Relational Aggression				
	Peer Acceptance by friends	Proactive Relational Aggression	Reactive Relational Aggression	Proactive Physical Aggression	Reactive Physical Aggression	Peer Relational Victimization	Peer Physical Victimization	Peer Exclusivity	Prosocial Behavior
Psychological Needs									
Relatedness Satisfaction	.27**	-.04	.07	-.06	-.04	.14*	.01	.04	.51**
Competence Satisfaction	.20**	-.09	-.04	-.19**	-.20**	.07	-.18**	-.04	.46**
Autonomy Satisfaction	.10	-.13*	-.02	-.21**	-.18**	-.01	-.15**	-.03	.36**
Relatedness Dissatisfaction	.23**	.18**	.15**	.05	.17**	.31**	.21**	.15*	.10
Competence Dissatisfaction	.27**	.13*	.19**	.02	.13*	.30*	.13*	.15**	.21**
Autonomy Dissatisfaction	.18**	.18**	.19**	.03	.19**	.24**	.21**	.19**	.11
Perceived Acceptance by friends	1	.19**	.18**	.00	.07	.18**	.16**	.24**	.27**

Note: *p<0.05, **p<0.01

The current study aimed to study whether there is a relationship between dimensions of psychological needs (viz. relatedness satisfaction, competence satisfaction, autonomy satisfaction, relatedness dissatisfaction, competence dissatisfaction and autonomy dissatisfaction), perceived acceptance by friends and dimensions of relational aggression (viz. proactive relational aggression, reactive relational aggression, proactive physical aggression, reactive physical aggression, peer/general relational victimization, peer/general physical victimization, peer exclusivity and prosocial behaviour) among male and female college students.

Results from Table 2 & 3, found that relatedness satisfaction in males and females was positively correlated with perceived acceptance by friends (r=0.41; r=0.27, p<0.01), peer relational victimization (r=0.17; p<0.01; r=0.14; p<0.05), and prosocial behaviour (r=0.32; r=0.51; p<0.01). As the results state, relatedness satisfaction has a relationship with greater perceived acceptance by friends and emotion like jealousy and exclusivity in relationships and also a relationship with peer relational victimization which might lead to compliant and submissive behaviours for their friends occasionally. However, due to the need for maintaining acceptance and relatedness in their friendships, they might end up facing victimization to hold on to their friendships.

In male students, the dimension of competence satisfaction showed positive correlation with perceived acceptance by friends (r=0.25; p<0.01), reactive physical aggression (r=0.16; p<0.01) and prosocial behaviour (r=0.35; p<0.01). In female students, the dimension of competence satisfaction showed positive correlation with perceived acceptance by friends (r=0.20; p<0.01) and prosocial behavior (r=0.46; p<0.01). Competence satisfaction in females also showed a negative correlation with the different dimensions of relational aggression like proactive physical aggression, reactive physical aggression, and peer physical victimization. Competence as a concept is subjective in nature. Both the genders perceive competence differently.

For male students, satisfaction of their need for competence is shown through perceived acceptance by friends, physical aggression and prosocial behaviour. Whereas in female students, there was no need to engage in forms of physical aggression as their competence was correlated with high perceived acceptance by friends and prosocial behavior. In the study on adolescents, noted that since childhood, boys were more likely than girls to receive rewards or be ignored altogether for aggressive behavior than girls, who are more likely to receive firm directives for the same aggressive behavior [42].

The results could be an indication of how competence is perceived by both genders, it may manifest itself in males through acceptance, being prosocial and also being physically intimidating while in female students, need for competence is perceived more for peer acceptance and being prosocial with their peers. Popular students might often become aggressive because they know their high status will shield them from the negative consequences of their actions, such as harassing their peers and getting in trouble with their teachers [43].

In the psychological need for autonomy satisfaction, the scores of male students showed positive

correlation with perceived acceptance by friends (r=0.22; p<0.01) and prosocial behaviour (r=0.36; p<0.01), while scores of female students showed positive correlation with prosocial behaviour (r=0.36; p<0.01) and negative correlation with proactive relational aggression (r=-0.13; p<0.05), proactive physical aggression (r=-0.21; p<0.01), reactive physical aggression (r=-0.18; p<0.01), and peer physical victimization (r=-0.15; p<0.01). These results conclude that a need for autonomy satisfaction is manifested in both genders by perceived acceptance by friends and prosocial behaviors.

This finding could be supported with an article on criminological perspectives of girls' violence that says girls often fear interpersonal and relationship conflicts and being unwanted by their peers [44]. This shows that female students try to avoid aggression with their peers and friends, and may indulge in prosocial behaviours. Male students who perceive greater acceptance by friends and are more prosocial exhibit a satisfied need for autonomy.

On the dimension of relatedness dissatisfaction, the scores of male students were positively correlated with perceived acceptance by friends (r=0.35; p<0.01), proactive relational aggression (r=0.21; p<0.01), reactive relational aggression (r=0.36; p<0.01), proactive physical aggression (r=0.39; p<0.01), reactive physical aggression (r=0.41; p<0.01), peer relational victimization (r=0.52; p<0.01), peer physical victimization (r=0.16; p<0.01), and peer exclusivity (r=0.38; p<0.01). While the scores of female students showed a positive correlation with the same dimensions as male students, only leaving out proactive physical aggression. When faced with dissatisfaction in the need for relatedness, even if their perceived acceptance by friends is high, both genders are likely to express this dissatisfaction through these harmful behaviours and being victimized.

Relational aggression, the purposeful infliction of harm on another person through a relationship, is identified as a form of aggression, most often exhibited by females. However, the presumption that only girls display relationally aggressive behaviour has been found to be too simplistic [39]. Therefore, both genders exhibit more or less similar behaviors, while males are more likely to involve themselves in physical harm. As the gender differences in the study suggest, male students have scored higher on dimension of relatedness dissatisfaction and also on dimensions of relational aggression.

Competence dissatisfaction has shown to be positively correlated in males to perceived acceptance by friends (r=0.28; p<0.01), proactive relational aggression (r=0.28; p<0.01), reactive relational aggression (r=0.21; p<0.01), proactive physical aggression (r=0.24; p<0.01), peer relational victimization (r=0.53; p<0.01), peer physical victimization (r=0.18; p<0.01), peer exclusivity (r=0.34; p<0.01) and prosocial behaviour (r=0.13; p<0.01). A positive correlation was found in perceived acceptance by friends (r=0.27; p<0.01), proactive relational aggression (r=0.13; p<0.05), reactive relational aggression (r=0.19; p<0.01), reactive physical aggression (r=0.13; p<0.05), peer relational victimization (r=0.30; p<0.05), peer physical victimization (r=0.13; p<0.05), peer exclusivity (r=0.15; p<0.01), and prosocial behaviour (r=0.21; p<0.01) in female students.

In a research, it was stated, development of gender roles may have an important role to play in the development of relational aggression [45]. As noted earlier, the concept instilled by the society and others, of competence plays a role in how it is perceived. Both genders seem to have a different approach in gaining a sense of competence in their friendships. It may be possible that relational aggression among girls increases when they develop a firmer understanding of gender roles [46]. According to a research on young boys and girls, girls gossip because they are jealous, insecure and want to bring down their peers in order to feel more competent. When males become angry or emotional they are encouraged to express and let it out. However when a female becomes angry they are more encouraged to hold it within them [47]. Leaving out kicking, punching, or threatening to physically hurt their victims, girls were reported to practice more indirect aggression against other girls [48].

A self-reported study that aimed to examine the role of reactive physical aggression and reactive relational aggression in psychological distress, social behaviour, and relationship quality in 329, primarily freshman year students, indicated significant gender difference in the two types of aggression, as well as significant correlations between relational and physical aggression and their relation to psychological, social, and relationship quality variables. In females, exclusivity connected with more reactive relational aggression, whereas in males, hostility and depression correlated with reactive physical aggression [33].

When the need for autonomy was dissatisfied, the scores in male students positively correlated with perceived acceptance by friends (r=0.26; p<0.01), and all the dimensions of relational aggression - proactive relational aggression (r=0.12; p<0.05), reactive relational aggression (r=0.26; p<0.01), proactive physical aggression (r=0.24; p<0.01), reactive physical aggression (r=0.12; p<0.05), peer relational victimization (r=0.28; p<0.01), peer physical victimization (r=0.24; p<0.01), peer exclusivity (r=0.25; p<0.01) and prosocial behaviour (r=0.14; p<0.05). In female students, autonomy dissatisfaction was found positively correlated with perceived acceptance by friends (r=0.18; p<0.01) and proactive relational aggression (r=0.18; p<0.05), reactive relational aggression (r=0.19; p<0.01), reactive physical aggression (r=0.19; p<0.05), peer relational victimization (r=0.24; p<0.05), peer physical victimization (r=0.21; p<0.05) and peer exclusivity (r=0.19; p<0.01) dimensions of relational aggression.

It was found among females, that they are most likely to be perpetrator/victim of relational aggression and males likely to be both perpetrator and victim of overt aggression. Females also reported that aggression was overall more hurtful and damaging than males. It can be concluded from the previous study that the dissatisfaction of autonomy in both genders, is manifested through similar relational aggression behaviors. While male students show higher physical aggression, females tend to show their dissatisfaction by indirect forms of relational aggression [49]. Prosocial behavior could also be an indicator of males striving for more power over their friends to satisfy their need for autonomy. But it is also possible that an emotionally disturbed female may react to a social interaction using direct relational aggression if she interprets the situation to be threatening [50].

For the dimension of perceived acceptance by friends, scores in male students showed positive correlation with proactive relational aggression (r=0.19; p<0.01), reactive relational aggression (r=0.14; p<0.05), proactive physical aggression (r=0.21; p<0.01), peer relational victimization (r=0.32; p<0.01), peer exclusivity (r=0.23; p<0.01) and prosocial behaviour (r=0.22; p<0.01) while for female students, scores indicated a positive correlation with proactive relational aggression (r=0.19; p<0.01), reactive relational aggression (r=0.18; p<0.01), peer relational victimization (r=0.18; p<0.05), peer physical victimization (r=0.16; p<0.05), peer exclusivity (r=0.24; p<0.01) and prosocial behaviour (r=0.27; p<0.01) dimensions of relational aggression.

A study on young boys and girls stated that the popular belief that girls did not exhibit the same levels of aggression as boys within close peer relationships was not true [51][52]. However, when relational aggression is measured in addition to overt aggression, levels of aggression are more or less equal between the genders among the peers [46]. Thus, we may conclude that even if the perceived acceptance by friends is high in both genders, they are still likely to exhibit relational aggression towards their peers in more or less similar ways.

Manipulative behaviors sometimes become noticeable when a friendship has been established and personal information has been disclosed [53]. This could be a possible reason for exhibiting relational aggression when the friendships have reached a deeper point. However, it is known that good quality friendships provide unique opportunities for learning basic social skills and the workings of close relationships [54] which could be a reason for its strong bond with prosocial behavior.

IV. LIMITATIONS

The study does not take into consideration the causes of relational aggression. More emphasis could be placed on the causes for these aggressive behaviours and other variables that possibly play a role in facilitating these behaviours. It also does not take into account how long they have been exhibiting these aggressive behaviours for. The time period could be short and may depend from friend to friend. Friendships might also differ for both genders. Same sex friendships and cross-sex friendships are not considered in the study. Perceived acceptance by friends studies only how much of acceptance is perceived by the friend and not how much the student has accepted his/her friends. If the acceptance of the student towards their friend is studied, we might be able to know the reason for the aggression in their friendships in a better manner.

V. CONCLUSION

The study undertakes the variables psychological needs, perceived acceptance by friends and relational aggression. For many years, students have experienced aggression in their close peer relationships in educational institutions. Little importance has been given to the psychological needs of the student exhibiting such harmful aggressive behaviours towards their other friends. These students have been subjected to punishment for their behaviours. It is important to understand why there is a need to exhibit covert and overt aggressive behaviours and also the lack of those needs that can subject the students to bullying and victimization.

The role of psychological needs of the students and how the need affects their friendships is one of the major objectives of this study. When the need is identified, the educational institutions can try to address the need instead of punishing or judging their behavior. Especially by the introduction of mandatory counsellors in all schools and colleges, the students have an access to the counselor and can understand their need to harm their friends or work on their need that leads them to being victimized by their friends.

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