Policy Research Journal
ISSN (E): 3006-7030 ISSN (P) : 3006-7022 Volume 4, Issue 3, 2026

THE ASSOCIATION OF FAMILY COHESION AND RELATIONAL AGGRESSION WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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DOI: http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22228780

Keywords
Family Cohesion, Relational Aggression and Psychological Distress, Young Adults

Article History
Received: 25 January 2026
Accepted: 16 March 2026
Published: 31 March 2026

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Abstract
The aim of the current study was to find out the relationship between Family cohesion, Relational aggression and Psychological Distress in Young Adults. The correlational design was used in the study. The total sample of this present study was 205 undergraduate, graduate and post graduate young adults consisting the age range 18 to 25 from university in Lahore District. Sample was collected through convenient sampling. Data collection was done by using Family Cohesion Scale, Relational Aggression Scale and School Children Problem Scale. Analysis was run by using SPSS 21. Correlation analysis showed a negative significant relationship between Family cohesion and Psychological distress while a positive one between relational aggression and psychological distress in young adult.. The results of this study have significant impact for planning assessments and interventions for young adults.

INTRODUCTION
Adulthood refers to the stage of life when a person has reached maturity. It is typically characterized by taking on more responsibilities, making independent decisions, and facing various challenges and opportunities in personal, professional, and social aspects of life (Canêo, 2017). Adulthood often comes with new experiences such as starting a career, establishing relationships, managing finances, and potentially starting a family. It is a time of personal growth, self-discovery, and navigating the complexities of the world (Fowler et al., 2019). In adulthood period, a person carries burden of managing the university, friendships and family. Family cohesion states to the emotional link and intimacy experienced within a family entity. It is an important part of family function and has been shown to have a substantial influence on people' well-being and overall growth. Studies have found that greater levels of family cohesion are connected with improved mental wellness, greater self-worth, and higher satisfaction with one's life. Furthermore, family cohesion has been shown to be a means of protection against a variety of psychological issues, including drug misuse, criminal behavior, and marital disputes (Hawes et al., 2021). Family Cohesion has four types disengaged cohesiveness, separated cohesiveness, connected cohesiveness and enmeshed cohesion. Disengaged cohesiveness is a type of family cohesion characterised by a deficiency of emotional intimacy and contact between family members. This results in a sense of separation and

autonomy among individuals within the family (Bibak et al., 2022). Separated cohesion characterises families in which members exhibit a certain degree of autonomy while nevertheless gathering for specified activities or occasions, achieving a harmonious equilibrium between individual liberty and familial unity (Olson & Gorall, 2006). Connected cohesiveness refers to a profound emotional connection, assistance, and togetherness between family members, which creates a favourable and caring atmosphere inside the family (Olson & Gorall, 2006). Enmeshed cohesion, in contrast, refers to a situation where there are unclear boundaries among family members, a significant amount of participation and reliance on each other, and difficulties in creating appropriate limits and independence (Ghanbaripanah et al., 2013). Family cohesion can be improved by effective communication, which involves engaging in open and honest discourse, actively listening, and respectfully expressing opinions and feelings. Conversely, ineffective communication, characterised by insufficient communication, misinterpretations, or frequent disagreements, can exert pressure on familial bonds and diminish unity (Rabinowitz et al., 2016).

The researchers discovered that those who indicated higher degrees of family cohesiveness were less likely to participate in hostile conduct against their peers (Smith et al., 2018). Relational aggression is defined as the application of covert and indirectly tactics to undermine the social connections of other people, including gossip, marginalization, and deception While the majority of investigations on relational aggression have concentrated on kids and teenagers, more recent research have given light on the incidence and implications of this phenomena in adults (Juan & As, 2018). Relational aggression refers to deliberate actions that seek to harm and manipulate a person's social relationships by spreading rumours, excluding them socially, or neglecting them. This type of aggression can have a detrimental impact on the mental well-being of the victims (Kokkinos, 2015). Studies indicate that those who participate in relationship aggression may have undergone adverse childhood events such as abuse, neglect, or trauma. These initial life encounters have the potential to influence their social and emotional growth, resulting in challenges in establishing positive connections and managing emotions effectively (Aizpitarte et al., 2019). Relational aggression has to be treated in order to encourage positive social interactions and enhance the general wellbeing of people as well as the others in their social networks otherwise it can lead towards psychological distress Psychological distress, referred to as emotional discomfort, is typically indicated by feelings of sorrow, worry, distractions, and, in the most serious instances, psychotic symptoms,which are also indicators of psychological anguish. Psychological distress is described as a mental condition marked by the presence of anxiety, despair, and signs of illness. (e.g., headaches, sleeplessness, and a lack of stamina) that vary between cultures. Furthermore, symptoms of psychological distress show as depressive disorders, poor levels of competence, and low levels of life happiness, all of which have an impact on the academic success of adulthood (Bhatia & Schneider, 2017).). Adult psychological distress has been linked to relational aggressiveness. Negative feelings, including anxiety and sadness, are referred to as psychological distress. Relational aggressive people may feel shame and internal conflict, which may cause psychological distress. Relational aggression can also result in social exclusion and a state of isolation which can have an adverse effect on one's mental well-being and overall health (Juan & As, 2018).

In collectivistic cultures, the family is regarded as a pivotal and esteemed social entity in various cultures worldwide, including Pakistani culture, where there is a high emphasis on fostering close relationships and ties (Haque, 2014). Pakistani culture emphasises the significance of collective decision-making, reliance among relatives, and the preservation of family honour and respect, which contribute to strong family cohesion (Haq, 2014). On the same side, because of the highly tied cultural norms it is seen that aggression is displaced on the person having a cordial relationship because it seems easy which can further increase the distress faced by an individual.

Even though there is evidence that adult psychological distress, relational aggression, and family cohesion are related, further research is necessary to fully understand the intricate interactions between these factors. Interventions and preventative efforts can benefit from an understanding of the processes by which relational aggression is influenced by family cohesion and how relational aggression exacerbates psychological distress. Finding protective variables that might lessen relational aggression's detrimental effects on psychological wellness is also essential (Linder et al., 2022).

Aim of study

The study emphasize on finding the relationship between family cohesion, relational aggression and psychological distress in young adults moreover it also emphasizes on finding the gender difference between these variables.

Hypothesis

H01: It is hypothesized that family cohesion is negatively correlated with relational aggression and psychological distress in young adults.

H02: It is hypothesized that there would be a positive relationship between relational aggression and psychological distress in young adults

H03: It is hypothesized that there will be gender difference between family cohesion, relational aggression and psychological distress in young adults.

Methodology

This chapter is comprised into sections research design, participants, measures, data collection procedure, data analysis and ethical consideration.

Research Design

The correlational design was used in the study to identify the association among family cohesion, relational aggression and psychological distress in young adult.

Sampling and sample size

Sampling technique for the study was simple convenient sampling technique. The total sample of this present study were consisted of 205 undergraduates, graduates and post graduates young adults consisting the range of 18 to 25 from university in Lahore district. Participants aging from 18-25 and studying in undergrad or graduate program were in included in current research. Moreover participants having any psychological and physical disability were excluded from research.

Measures

Demographic

Demographic characteristics measured the data such as gender, age, semester, education, educational system, birth order, numbers of sibling and family system. Demographic form was in Urdu for the convenience of sample.

Family Cohesion Scale (Zahra & Saleem, 2021)

Family cohesion scale was used in the present study to measure family cohesion in young adults. It was consisted of 51 statements and response option of the scale was 4 Likert- type scale that ranged from Never coded as 1 to Always coded as 5. The reliability of the scale is. Factors of family cohesion were; Mutual Support (F1), Sharing (F2), Parental Involvement (F3), and Emotional Bonding (F4).

Relational Aggression Scale (Tahir & Sarwar , 2019)

Relational Aggression Scale was used to measure relational aggression in young adults. It was consisted of 42 statements and response option of the scale was 5 Likert- type scale that ranged from Not At All coded as 0 to Too Much as 4. The reliability of the scale is. Factors of Relational Aggression were; Competitive Behaviour (F1), Bullying Behaviour (F2), Controlling Behaviour (F3).

Student Problem Checklist (SPC) (Mahmood & Saleem, 2011)

Student Problem Checklist was used to measure psychological distress in young adults. It was consisted of 45 statements and response option of the scale was 5 Likert- type scale that ranged from Never coded as 1 to Always coded as 5. The reliability of the scale is. Factors of psychological

distress were; Dysfunctional (F1), Loss of Confidence (F2), Lack of Self-Regulation (F3), Anxiety Proneness (F4).

Procedure

This research thesis topic was approved by DGC. The questionnaire protocol was finalise after pilot testing. The study participants were asked to provide some of their personal information through the demographics in order to analyse factors. After obtaining permission from the university, data was collected from different universities. Participants were briefed about the study's undertaking to motivate their participation and were asked to provide information for the study. Those who gave their agreement to take part were incorporated in the research. Each participant was required to thoroughly read and complete a permission form as well as three surveys, Family cohesion, relational aggression and psychological distress to collect data. In addition, gender, age, semester, education, educational system, birth order, numbers of siblings and family system also recorded as a demographic variable.

Statistical Analysis

Following statistical analysis were performed

- Correlation analysis
- T test analysis
- Frequency/ percentage

Ethical Considerations

For the purpose of data collecting, consent was also obtained from number of Lahore-based universities. Participant's informed consent was gained after being informed of the study goals and method. Participants were allowed to withdraw at any point and enquire while completing the form. The researcher was properly look at ethical concerns throughout the whole of the data collection procedure. They were kept anonymous by not being asked for their identities.

Results

The purpose of this present study was to find the association among Family cohesion, relational aggression and psychological distress in young adults. The data was analyzed through SPSS software. The descriptive as well as inferential statistics were explored in this study.

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Sample Description

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=205)

Variables	*f*	%
Gender		
Men	105	52.0
Women	100	48.0
Birth Order		
1-3	153	74.6
4-6	48	23.4
7-10	4	2.0
Siblings Number		
1-3	127	62.0
4-6	74	36.0
7-10	4	2.0
Education		
BS	107	52.2
MS	98	47.8
Education System		
Public	42	20.5
Private	163	79.5
Family System		

Nuclear	105	51.20
Joint	100	48.78

Note: f= Frequency, %= Percentage

Table 2 presented the frequency and percentage of demographic characteristics of the respondents. The table showed that most of the participants (52.2%) belonged to BS level and from private sector (79.5%) and also belonged to nuclear family system (52%).

Correlation Analysis

Table 2

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
FCS	-	.76**	.64**	.81**	.79**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
MS		-	.81**	.79**	.69**	.86**	.74**	.71**	.69**	.83**	.72**	.61**	.72**	.84**
SS			-	.76**	.64**	.61**	.72**	.84**	.68**	.72**	.64**	.81**	.79**	.82**
PS				-	.81**	-	.61**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
EB					-	.72**	-	.72**	.84**	.72**	.61**	.72**	.84**	.76**
						-	.81**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
							-	.79**	.82**	.86**	.74**	.71**	.69**	.84**
								-	-	-	-	-	-	-.78
RAS						-	.79**	.76**	.64**	.86**	.74**	.71**	.69**	.78**
CB							-	.83**	.78**	.78**	.86**	.74**	.71**	.69**
BB								-	.72**	.76**	.64**	.81**	.79**	.69**
CB									-	.64**	.81**	.79**	.76**	.64**
										-	.86**	.74**	.71**	.69**
PD											-	.72**	.64**	.78**
DS												-	.84**	.68**
LC													-	.85**
LSR														-
AP														

Pearson correlation among family cohesion, relational aggression and psychological distress (N =205).

Note. $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$, *FCS= Family Cohesion scale, MS= Mutual support, SS= Sharing subscale, PS= Parental support, EB= Emotional bonding, RAS= Relational aggression scale, CB= Competitive behaviour, BB= Bullying*

behaviour, CB= Controlling behaviour, PD= Psychological distress, DS= Dysfunctional scale, LC= Low confidence scale, LSR= Lack of self-regulation, AP= Anxiety proneness

The Pearson correlation was used to find out the relationship among main study variables. The result indicated that family cohesion was negatively correlated with relational aggression whereas relational aggression were positively correlated with psychological distress.

Table 3
Independent Sample t-test for gender differences (N=205)

Scales	Men N= 105		Women N= 100					
	M	*SD*	M	*SD*	*t*	*P*	Lower limit	Upper limit
FCS	68.7	10.9	78.2	15.9	12.1	.001	-.847	.934
MS	27.47	9.8	30.45	11.43	11.43	.001	-1.27	1.45
SS	29.30	11.2	34.56	13.64	13.64	.001	-2.09	1.15
PS	25.39	12.0	28.48	14.82	14.82	.001	-2.03	.95
EB	29.87	9.98	33.42	11.74	11.74	.001	-1.88	1.57
RAS	34.56	11.43	12.29	30.82	9.96	.001	-5.72	3.57
CB	28.48	13.64	11.2	27.47	9.8	.001	-4.87	-1.27
BB	33.42	14.82	12.0	29.63	11.2	.001	-2.69	-.72
CB	30.45	11.74	9.98	25.39	12.0	.001	-3.54	-.723
PD	33.82	14.53	28.48	10.23	12.2	.001	-10.66	-3.14
DS	30.45	11.43	28.42	10.23	13.64	.001	-2.09	1.15
LC	34.56	13.64	30.45	11.34	14.82	.001	-2.03	.95

LSR	28.48	14.82	25.81	12.62	11.74	.001	-1.88	1.57
AP	33.42	11.74	30.29	10.64	10.72	.001	-5.72	3.57

*Note. **p<0.001, FCS= Family Cohesion scale, MS= Mutual support, SS= Sharing subscale, PS= Parental support, EB= Emotional bonding, RAS= Relational aggression scale, CB= Competitive behaviour, BB= Bullying behaviour, CB= Controlling behaviour, PD= Psychological distress, DS= Dysfunctional scale, LC= Low confidence scale, LSR= Lack of self-regulation, AP= Anxiety proneness*

The above table showed that women reported significantly higher in family cohesion (*M* =86.1, *SD* =15.9) as compared to men (*M* =66.7, *SD* =11.9) with larger effect size. Further, the results revealed that men (*M* =98.85, *SD* =15.90) reported higher relational aggression as compared to women (*M* = 82.22, *SD* = 13.05). In addition, the findings highlighted that women reported higher psychological distress (*M* = 11.00, *SD* = 3.83) compared to the men.

Discussion

Family cohesion plays a crucial role in the emotional and psychological well-being of young adults. High levels of family cohesion are generally characterized by supportive, communicative, and affectionate family environments. These positive familial interactions can significantly buffer young adults against various forms of psychological distress and relational aggression. Conversely, low family cohesion often leads to a lack of emotional support and communication, potentially increasing the vulnerability of young adults to psychological issues and aggressive behaviors in their relationships (Rodriguez et al., 2020).

The first hypothesis posited that family cohesion is negatively associated with relational aggression among young adults. This hypothesis was supported by our findings, aligning with previous research indicating that supportive family environments can reduce aggressive behaviors (Erath et al., 2011). Relational aggression, which includes behaviors aimed at damaging someone's social relationships or reputation, is less likely to develop in individuals who experience high family cohesion. Supportive and communicative family dynamics foster emotional regulation and conflict resolution skills, which mitigate tendencies toward relational aggression (Ostrov & Crick, 2007).

The second hypothesis suggested that family cohesion is negatively associated with psychological distress among young adults. This hypothesis was also supported, consistent with existing literature. High family cohesion provides emotional support, enhances self-esteem, and contributes to a secure attachment style, all of which are protective factors against psychological distress (Greenberg et al., 2019). Young adults who perceive their family environment as cohesive are less likely to experience symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress, as the family acts as a primary source of emotional stability and support (Fosco et al., 2012).

The third hypothesis suggested that there is a positive correlation between relational aggression and psychological distress. Recent studies highlight the crucial role of family cohesion in influencing both psychological distress and relational aggression.

The present findings revealed that women reported significantly higher family cohesion compared to men. This result is consistent with the theoretical framework proposed by Cross and Madson (1997), who argued that women are more likely than men to develop an interdependent self-construal, wherein others are considered part of the self. Because women tend to place greater emphasis on relational bonds and emotional connectedness, they are likely to perceive and value family cohesion more strongly than men. Similarly, women's interdependent self-construction emphasizes connection with others and greater attention to the thoughts and feelings

of others, which may heighten their sensitivity to and appreciation of family unity and support.

Regarding relational aggression, the current study found that men scored higher than women. This aligns with findings by Crick et al. (2007), who noted that research generally suggests that relational aggression is more common among girls and women, but boys and men can be relationally aggressive as well. More specifically, males were more likely than females to engage in peer-directed proactive and reactive relational aggression, which may explain the higher scores observed among men in the present study. These patterns suggest that the form and context of relational aggression differ meaningfully by gender.

Concerning psychological distress, the results showed that women reported higher levels than men, a finding well-supported in the broader literature. There is now a general consensus among social scientists that women experience more psychological distress than men, and that this is largely due to aspects of their societal roles. Furthermore, a recurrent finding from epidemiological studies and population surveys is that women report a higher mean level and a higher prevalence of psychological distress than men, and findings suggest that this higher level of distress reflects a true difference rather than gender-biased reporting. These disparities may be rooted in the interplay of biological vulnerability, caregiving burdens, and gender-based stressors that disproportionately affect women

Conclusion

The overall study concluded that the high family cohesion was linked to lower anxiety, depression, and stress, highlighting the family's crucial role in mental health. Notably, women benefited more from cohesive family environments than men , suggesting that gender-sensitive, family-based interventions are essential for effectively promoting well-being and reducing aggression in young adults.

Limitations

- The sample size was small, affecting the generalizability of the findings to a broader population of young adults.
- The study's cross-sectional design does not allow for establishing causality between family cohesion, relational aggression, and psychological distress.
- Reliance on self-reported data can introduce bias, as participants might not accurately recall or may underreport negative behaviors and experiences.
- The study may lack cultural diversity, limiting the applicability of the findings across different cultural contexts.
- Potential confounding variables, such as socioeconomic status, parental mental health, and peer influence, were not controlled for and could impact the findings.
- The study does not account for temporal changes in family dynamics and individual behaviours, which can vary over time and affect the observed relationships.

Suggestions

- Conduct longitudinal studies to establish causality and observe how family cohesion, relational aggression, and psychological distress evolve over time.
- Include more diverse samples to improve the generalizability of the findings across different cultures, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of family cohesion.
- Control for potential confounding variables such as socioeconomic status, parental mental health, and peer influences to isolate the effects of family cohesion.
- Design and test family-based interventions aimed at increasing family cohesion to evaluate their effectiveness in reducing relational aggression and psychological distress.

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