

Friendship Pattern as a Correlate of Age and Gender Differences among Urban Adolescents

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ABSTRACT This study was conducted to assess the gender differences in the pattern of friendships among urban adolescents (14-17 years). The study was based upon a sample of 200 adolescents (100 boys and 100 girls) drawn equally from four randomly selected schools of Ludhiana city. A list of all students aged between 14-17 years in selected schools was prepared by ascertaining their date of birth from school records. 50 boys and 50 girls from two age groups, that is, 14-15.5 and 15.5-17 years were taken to make a total of 100 boys and 100 girls. The results revealed that females exhibited significantly more intense friendship as compared to their male counterparts, yet the differences were greater in the older adolescents as compared to the younger ones. Friendship patterns in males were better in younger years whereas, females exhibited almost similar patterns of friendship in both the age-groups

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is the period of psychological and social transition between childhood and adulthood, when a child moves from dependency to independency in his behaviour. Adolescence is a cultural and social phenomenon and therefore its endpoints are not easily tied to physical milestone. The word 'adolescence' is derived from Latin verb 'adolescere' meaning 'to grow up'. The time is identified with dramatic changes in the body, along with developments in a person's psychology and academic career (Soundar 2005). Friends in adolescence play a very important role in shaping the behaviour of a person. Teenagers stress on two characteristics of friendship. The first and most important is intimacy. Adolescents seek psychological closeness and mutual understanding from their friends. Secondly, teenagers want their friends to be loyal (Buhrmester 1996). Sullivan (1953) was the most influential theorist to discuss the importance of adolescent friendships. He believed that the need for intimacy intensifies during early adolescence, motivating teenagers to seek out close friends.

According to Parker and Gottman (1987), adolescent's friendship serves six functions: companionship, stimulation, physical support, ego support, social competence and intimacy. A capacity to form close, intimate friendship during adolescence is related to overall social and emotional adjustment and competence (Buhrmester 1990). 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. Under natural conditions, people tend to select friends of same sex and race as themselves (Tuma and Hallinan 1981). The same sex friendship is marked by greater sharing, a greater sense of stability and a greater willingness to give the utmost (Cohen 1996). The friendship relationship tends to have a greater impact on both the satisfaction and frustration of the person's basic human needs. Therefore the present study intends to assess the friendship pattern in urban adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted during 2007-08 on urban adolescents, drawn from four government senior secondary (co-educational) schools randomly selected from Ludhiana city. The sample consisted of 200 adolescents (100 girls and 100 boys) in the age range of 14-17 years from middle socio-economic strata, belonging to nuclear and intact families. A list of government senior secondary schools was procured from District Education Office, Ludhiana. From this list four co-educational schools were randomly selected to constitute the sample. A list

of all students aged between 14-17 years in selected schools was prepared by ascertaining their date of birth from school records. The sample was evenly distributed over two sexes, 50 boys and 50 girls from two age-groups, that is, 14-15.5 years and 15.5-17 years were taken to make a sample of 100 boys and 100 girls. The adolescents selected were of Punjabi origin, from middle socio-economic strata and belonging to nuclear and intact families.

Socio-economic Status Scale by Bharadwaj (2001) was used to select adolescents from middle socio-economic strata and Dimensions of Friendship Scale developed by Chandna and Chadha (1986) was administered to assess the friendship patterns among adolescents. Eight dimensions of friendship considered were Enjoyment, Acceptance, Trust, Respect, Mutual assistance, Confiding, Understanding and Spontaneity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data given in Table 1 depicts the gender-wise distribution of adolescents across various levels in different patterns of friendship. The results regarding friendship patterns revealed

that in case of males, dimension of mutual assistance had highest number of respondents (49%), and understanding had lowest number (1%) in high level. This indicates that males voluntarily assist their friends but when it comes to understanding they fail to support. In 'enjoyment' dimension, only one-fourth of males enjoy the company of their friends, whereas in females, more respondents enjoy the company of their friends (36%). In the 'acceptance' dimension, less number of males accept their friends as they are (72% in low level), 16 per cent in average level and only 12 per cent had high acceptance level, whereas comparatively in females, more respondents accept their friends as they are (26 per cent in high level). In the dimension of 'trust' both males and females had similar response. Both had more respondents in low level of trust (41% and 40%). More number of girls comparatively showed higher respect for their friends (39%) than boys (20%). Boys had more respondents in low level of respect (56%) and girls had 30 per cent. In the average level there were 24 per cent boys and 31 per cent girls respectively.

Both boys and girls had highest number of respondents in the dimension of 'mutual assistance'.

Table 1: Gender-wise distribution of adolescents across various levels in different patterns of friendship

S.No.	Friendship patterns	Levels	Total (n=200)	Males (n ₁ =100)	Females (n ₂ =100)	χ^2 value
1.	Enjoyment	Low	79(39.5)	50(50)	29(29)	9.23**
		Average	60 (30)	25(25)	35(35)	
		High	61(30.5)	25(25)	36(36)	
2.	Acceptance	Low	121(60.5)	72(72)	49(49)	11.50**
		Average	41(20.5)	16(16)	25(25)	
		High	38 (19)	12(12)	26(26)	
3.	Trust	Low	81(40.5)	41(41)	40(40)	0.09
		Average	62 (31)	30(30)	32(32)	
		High	57(28.5)	29(29)	28(28)	
4.	Respect	Low	86 (43)	56(56)	30(30)	14.87**
		Average	55(27.5)	24(24)	31(31)	
		High	59(29.5)	20(20)	39(39)	
5.	MutualAssistance	Low	33(16.5)	27(27)	6 (6)	25.51**
		Average	36 (18)	24(24)	12(12)	
		High	131(65.5)	49(49)	82(82)	
6.	Confiding	Low	137(68.5)	80(80)	57(57)	12.64**
		Average	54 (27)	18(18)	36(36)	
		High	9 (4.5)	2 (2)	7 (7)	
7.	Understanding	Low	155(77.5)	88(88)	67(67)	15.74**
		Average	31(15.5)	11(11)	20(20)	
		High	14 (7)	1 (1)	13(13)	
8.	Spontaneity	Low	123(61.5)	69(69)	54(54)	6.08*
		Average	46 (23)	21(21)	25(25)	
		High	31(15.5)	10(10)	21(21)	

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage

* Significant at 5% level ** Significant at 1% level

tance', 49 per cent boys and 82 per cent girls respectively. But, as compared to girls, boys were nearly half in number. Girls had least number of respondents in the low level of mutual assistance (6%). In the average level there were 24 boys and 12 girls. Girls showed higher assistance to their friends. Even boys as compared to all other dimensions showed the highest number but nearly half less when compared to girls. Both boys and girls confided very little in their friends. In high level of confiding there were only 2 per cent boys and 7 per cent girls, whereas in low level there were a high number of 80 per cent boys and 57 per cent girls, while 18 per cent boys and 36 per cent girls were in average level. Boys had least understanding in friendship with highest number (88%) in low level of understanding, 11 per cent in average and only 1 per cent in high. Even girls had less understanding in friendship, but still it was more than boys with 67 per cent in low, 20 per cent in average and 13 per cent in high level.

In spontaneity dimension, more number of boys and girls were in low level, 69 per cent and 54 per cent respectively. In the average level there were 21 per cent boys and 25 per cent girls and in high level there were 10 per cent boys and 21 per cent girls.

Above observations tend to indicate that in almost all the aspects of friendship patterns girls were ahead of boys. The above findings were supported by Bank and Hansford (2000) who explored that men's same sex friendships, even their best friendships, are less intimate and supportive than women's same sex friendships.

The result of the study also reveals that all the dimensions of friendship except 'trust' had

significant gender differences. The highest gender difference was seen in the dimension of 'mutual assistance' ($\chi^2=25.51$, $p<0.01$). In the dimension of 'understanding' ($\chi^2=15.74$), 'respect' ($\chi^2=14.87$), 'confiding' ($\chi^2=12.64$), 'acceptance' ($\chi^2=11.50$) and 'enjoyment' ($\chi^2=9.23$, $p<0.01$) significant differences were seen, females predominated in all dimensions.

It is clear from Table 2 that all friendship patterns except 'trust' showed significant difference among males and females. The mean scores of females were comparatively higher than males in all dimensions. In the 'enjoyment' dimension, girls enjoyed the company of their friends more (M.S. =5.03) as compared to boys (M.S.=4.55). The calculated t-value was significant ($t=2.81$, $p < 0.01$). The results were supported by Bank and Hansford (2000) who reported that women enjoyed their same sex or opposite sex friendships more than men did, and the reason seemed to be the greater intimacy of women's friendship.

Similar pattern was seen in 'acceptance' dimension. Girls accept their friends more (M.S.=5.36) as compared to boys (M.S.=4.60). The difference was found significant ($t=3.22$, $p<0.01$). The mean scores of girls (4.83) in the dimension of 'trust' were similar to boys (4.81). In the dimension of 'respect', the mean score of girls was higher (5.07) as compared to boys (4.28) and the calculated t-value ($t=3.56$) showed a significant difference between the two at ($p<0.01$). All the other dimensions also showed that the mean scores of girls were higher than boys with a significant difference. The mean scores of girls in mutual assistance (6.20), confiding (7.02), understanding (5.06) and spontaneity (4.23) were all higher than the mean scores of

Table 2: Gender differences in mean scores of adolescents in different patterns of friendship

S. No.	Friendship patterns	Males (n=100)		Females (n=100)		t-value
		Mean	S.D. (\pm)	Mean	S.D. (\pm)	
1.	Enjoyment	4.55	1.34	5.03	1.07	2.81**
2.	Acceptance	4.60	1.59	5.36	1.73	3.22**
3.	Trust	4.81	1.53	4.83	1.45	0.84
4.	Respect	4.28	1.33	5.07	1.17	3.56**
5.	Mutual Assistance	5.34	1.33	6.20	0.94	3.67**
6.	Confiding	5.07	1.64	7.02	0.41	4.99**
7.	Understanding	4.16	1.28	5.06	1.26	4.12**
8.	Spontaneity	3.76	1.31	4.23	1.54	2.42*
	Total	36.58	6.21	45.82	5.62	5.04**

* Significant at 5% level ** Significant at 1% level

boys i.e. 5.34, 5.07, 4.16 and 3.76 respectively in the above dimensions. The calculated t-value in mutual assistance ($t=3.67$, $p<0.01$), confiding ($t=4.99$, $p<0.01$), understanding ($t=4.12$, $p<0.01$) and spontaneity ($t=2.42$, $p<0.05$) all show a significant difference in the friendship patterns of boys and girls.

Overall, highly significant differences were found between the friendship patterns of males and females. The total mean score of girls (45.82) was higher than boys (36.58) with highly significant differences ($t=5.04$, $p<0.01$). All the dimensions of friendship patterns were headed by girls. The reasons were supported by Devito (1992) who found that from early childhood, a girl learns that it is her job to take care of relationships. Girls tend to feel strongest when they are being leaned on in a relationship. Another important reason might be the presence of competitive striving, which has been found to be more of a characteristic of men than women (Lewis 1998).

Table 3 shows the age-wise difference in different dimensions of friendship patterns for both males and females. The two age-groups considered were 14-15.5 years and 15.5-17 years. In half of the dimensions males had significant age difference in friendship pattern and in rest of the half they did not have a significant difference, whereas, in all the dimensions of friendship pattern, females showed non-significant differences with age.

In males the dimensions of acceptance, respect, mutual assistance and spontaneity had significant differences with t-value being (3.79, $p<0.01$), (2.50, $p<0.05$), (3.45, $p<0.01$) and (2.02, $p<0.05$) respectively. The mean scores

of different dimensions of friendship were more for boys in age-group 14-15.5 years than those in 15.5-17 years age-group. The overall mean score of boys in 14-15.5 years age-group (38.90) was also greater than the boys in 15.5-17 years age-group (M.S. =34.26) with a significant difference ($t=4.75$, $p<0.01$). This shows that boys in younger age group have closer and more intimate friendship, which starts lessening as they grow older. The results were similar to the study done by Furman and Buhrmester (1992) which found that in mid-adolescence boys have many of the same characteristics as those of girls friendships which begin to decline with age and the increase is less pronounced.

In girls the mean scores in both the age-groups was nearly same. The mean scores in different dimensions in age-group 14-15.5 years were nearly similar to those in 15.5-17 years age-group with no significant difference in any dimension. The only dimension in which the mean score of girls in 15.5-17 years age-group (5.26) was higher than the mean score of girls in 14-15.5 years age-group (4.88) was 'respect'. This shows that girl's respect for their friends' increases with increasing age. The overall scores for both the age groups in girls was nearly the same (M.S.=43.98) for 14-15.5 years and (M.S.=43.66) for 15.5-17 years age-group with no significant difference ($t=0.29$).

Table 4 and shows the difference in the friendship patterns according to age. Significant differences were found in the friendship patterns when we take the age-group as a whole, without considering the gender. The total mean scores of 14-15.5 years age-group (40.44) were higher as compared to 15.5-17 years (37.96).

Table 3: Age differences in mean scores of male and female adolescents in different patterns of friendship

S.No.	Friendship Patterns	Males						Females					
		14-15.5 Years		15.5-17 Years		t-value	14-15.5 Years		15.5-17 Years		t-value		
		Mean	S.D.(±)	Mean	S.D.(±)		Mean	S.D.(±)	Mean	S.D.(±)			
1.	Enjoyment	3.98	1.42	4.30	1.16	1.92	4.12	1.17	4.94	0.97	0.83		
2.	Acceptance	5.24	1.62	3.96	1.48	3.79**	5.54	1.88	5.18	1.55	1.19		
3.	Trust	4.94	1.45	4.68	1.58	0.73	4.80	1.55	4.80	1.37	0.02		
4.	Respect	4.58	1.46	3.98	1.07	2.50*	4.88	1.20	5.26	1.21	1.63		
5.	Mutual Assistance	5.76	1.30	4.92	1.21	3.45**	6.26	1.02	6.14	0.86	0.63		
6.	Confiding	4.32	1.42	4.82	1.77	1.56	5.30	0.56	5.86	1.20	0.36		
7.	Understanding	4.24	1.42	4.08	1.08	0.63	4.90	1.31	5.22	1.20	1.27		
8.	Spontaneity	4.02	1.36	3.50	1.19	2.02*	4.34	1.42	4.12	1.66	0.58		
Total		38.90	4.59	34.26	5.16	4.75**	43.98	6.00	43.66	5.27	0.29		

* Significant at 5% level ** Significant at 1% level

Table 4: Age differences in mean scores of adolescents in different patterns of friendship

S.No.	Friendship patterns	14-15.5 years (n=100)		15.5-17 years (n=100)		t-value
		Mean	S.D. (±)	Mean	S.D. (±)	
1.	Enjoyment	4.96	1.31	5.62	1.11	1.97*
2.	Acceptance	5.39	1.76	4.57	1.62	3.40**
3.	Trust	4.87	1.49	4.77	1.47	0.38
4.	Respect	4.73	1.33	4.62	1.28	0.67
5.	MutualAssistance	6.01	1.19	5.53	1.17	2.88**
6.	Confiding	5.81	1.46	5.34	1.79	1.53
7.	Understanding	4.57	1.40	4.65	1.27	0.42
8.	Spontaneity	4.18	1.39	4.81	1.48	1.72
Total		40.44	5.54	37.96	6.38	2.93**

* Significant at 5% level ** Significant at 1% level

The dimensions having a difference in the mean scores were enjoyment, acceptance and mutual assistance. Remaining dimensions had almost similar mean scores in both the age-groups with non-significant differences. Significant differences were found in the dimensions of acceptance (t=3.40, p<0.01), mutual assistance (t=2.88, p<0.01) and enjoyment (1.97, p<0.05). The total mean scores of the two age-groups showed a significant difference (t=2.93, p<0.01).

Table 5 further divides the age-groups into gender differences. Both the age-groups reported significant differences between males and females, but the differences were more significant in 15.5-17 years age-group (t=5.35, p<0.01) than 14-15.5 years age-group (t=2.87, p<0.01). In the age-group of 14-15.5 years, significant differences between males and females were reported in the dimensions of mutual assistance

(t=2.13, p<0.05), confiding (t=2.16, p<0.05) and understanding (t=2.41, p<0.05). In all the other dimensions the differences were not significant. Differences were seen in the mean scores of males and females with females having higher scores than males in all the dimensions. The total mean score of females in 14-15.5 years age-group (43.98) was higher than males (38.90). The results showed that females in the age-group of 14-15.5 years had a more enjoyable friendship than males; they understand their friends better and confide their secrets more in their friends as compared to males. The results were supported by the study of Gibbs et al. (1985) which said that females at all ages are more expressive in their friendships, showing higher levels of empathy than males. Age differences were there with females showing increased tolerance in friendship with growing age.

Table 5: Gender differences in mean scores of 14-15.5 years and 15.5-17 years old adolescents in different patterns of friendship

S.No.	Friendship patterns	14-15.5 years					15.5-17 years				
		Males		Females		t-value	Males		Females		t-value
		Mean	S.D.(±)	Mean	S.D.(±)		Mean	S.D.(±)	Mean	S.D.(±)	
1.	Enjoyment	4.80	1.42	5.12	1.17	1.22	4.30	1.16	5.94	0.97	2.97**
2.	Acceptance	5.24	1.62	5.54	1.88	1.13	3.96	1.48	5.18	1.55	3.78**
3.	Trust	4.94	1.45	4.80	1.55	0.47	4.68	1.58	4.80	1.37	0.47
4.	Respect	4.58	1.46	4.88	1.20	1.12	3.98	1.07	5.26	1.21	3.74**
5.	MutualAssistance	5.76	1.30	6.26	1.02	2.13*	4.92	1.21	6.14	0.86	4.08**
6.	Confiding	4.32	1.42	5.30	0.56	2.16*	4.82	1.77	6.86	1.20	3.81**
7.	Understanding	4.24	1.42	5.00	1.31	2.41*	3.98	1.08	5.22	1.20	4.99**
8.	Spontaneity	4.02	1.36	4.34	1.42	1.15	3.50	1.19	4.12	1.66	2.28*
Total		38.90	4.59	43.98	6.00	2.87**	34.26	5.16	43.66	5.27	5.35**

different patterns of friendship

* Significant at 5% level ** Significant at 1% level

It is clear from the table that as compared to the friendship of 14-15.5 years the friendship of 15.5-17 years had more significant differences between the males and the females in all the dimensions. In the age group of 15.5-17 years, total mean score of females (43.66) was again higher than males (34.26) with a significant difference ($t=5.35$, $p<0.01$). Even here the females had higher scores than the males in all the dimensions of friendship pattern. All the above results help us to conclude that though female friendship is better in both the age-groups yet, the differences between males and females are more significant in 15.5-17 years age-group. This is because female friendship is relatively constant with increasing age but in males, friendship scores are showing a decline with increasing age. Therefore, the gender differences are clearer in the older age-group.

Hence, with all the above results we concluded that age-related changes in conceptions of friendship can be understood as a specific instance of more basic changes in the development of social cognitions. Age, provides only a very crude indicator of social development. There are considerable variations among children of same age, presumably resulting from different rates of neurological growth as well as their different social experiences. The results are supported with the study of Hartup (1983) which states that the late adolescence females place more value on loyalty and commitment in friendship than males, and much of this is with regard to maintaining confidentiality. During late adolescence most of the friendship expectations which are characteristic of early adolescence recurs. 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.

CONCLUSION

It could thus be concluded from the present study that girls scored higher than boys in all the dimensions of friendship patterns, thus indicating that females have a closer and more intimate friendship as compared to males. The highest gender difference was seen in the di-

mension of mutual assistance. The findings were consistent with Bukowski et al. (2007) study on sex, gender and relationship with peers which revealed gender differences in the features, processes and outcomes related to friendship. Girls in friendship share closer bond than boys. But this does not mean that boys rarely form close friendships. They often do but the quality of friendship is more variable. Because of gender-role expectations boys and girls seem to enter friendships with different social needs. Then their friendship nurtures that need further-girls towards communal concerns, and boys towards achievement and status concerns.

In males, more number of respondents occupied high level of friendship in every dimension in the younger age-group, as compared to their older counterparts, thus, indicating that friendship patterns in males were better in younger years. This shows that friendship in younger years is more close and important and as one starts growing up friendship starts losing its importance and closeness in one's life. Adolescents become more selective in friendship and as they grow this narrowing continue (Hartup and Stevens 1999). In females almost similar pattern of friendship was observed in both the age-groups. All the dimensions of friendship showed non-significant differences, thus showing that female friendship was relatively constant with age. Result was consistent with the finding of Degirmencioglu et al. (1998) which stated that although friendship stability increases with age, friendships are remarkably stable at all ages in females.

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