



**Finding Gender differences in deviant behavior among adolescents**

**Descobrir as diferenças de género em comportamentos desviantes entre adolescentes**

**Saleha Bibi & Bushra Mussawar**

1. *Saleha Bibi is clinical psychologist*
2. *Ms Bushra Mussawar is a lecturer of Psychology at Foundation University Pakistan*

**Abstract**

Present study was conducted to find out the gender difference in deviant behavior among adolescents. This study was conducted with a sample size (N=300) including both boys and girls. Deviant behavior was measured through its three domains including sensation seeking behavior, moral disengagement and risk taking behavior. Two scales were administered; Moral disengagement scale and sensation seeking scale. It was hypothesized that boys have more tendencies towards deviant behavior (sensation seeking behavior, risk taking behavior and moral disengagement). Result of the study did not support majority of the past literature and explore a new thing that there are no statistically significant gender difference in deviant behavior among adolescents.

**Keywords:** gender differences, sensation seeking, risk taking, moral disengagement, adolescents

**Resumo**

O presente estudo foi conduzido com o objetivo de analisar a diferença de género em comportamentos desviantes em adolescentes. O estudo foi conduzido com uma amostra representativa (N=300) incluindo rapazes e raparigas. O comportamento desviante foi medido através dos seus três domínios incluindo comportamento de procura sensorial, desconexão moral e comportamentos de risco. Duas escalas foram administradas: Moral Disengagement Scale e a Sensation Seeking Scale. A hipótese apresentada é que os rapazes têm mais tendências para o comportamento desviante (procura sensorial, desconexão moral e comportamentos de risco). Os resultados do estudo não suportaram a maioria da literatura prévia e exploraram um novo aspeto que é o facto de as diferenças de género em comportamentos desviantes entre adolescentes ser não significativa.

**Palavras-chave:** diferenças de género, procura sensorial, comportamento risco, desconexão moral, adolescentes

### Introduction

Deviance is turning a major social issue not only all over the world but in Pakistan too. Adolescence is the time period which is particularly associated with deviance. In Pakistan due to a rapid change in tradition, values and technology deviance is growing day by day. Pakistani adolescents are engaged in different types of deviant behaviors like stealing, drinking, rape, abusing, misbehaving with parents and teachers and some more serious crimes like kidnapping and killing (Nadeem, 2002).

Adolescence is the transition phase between childhood and adulthood. Adolescence starts at puberty, the period of development in which individual becomes sexually capable of reproduction. Adolescence is a time period which is known as a time of unpredictable behavior, high rebelliousness and emotional upheaval. Adolescence is thought as a phase of growing autonomy and experimentation; it is considered as a time

period when adolescents relationship with peers group become important and when the chances of engaging in risky behaviors becomes very serious concern (Brown & Reinelli, 2010; Veselska et al., 2009; Kosteslesq 2005; Laible et al., 2004; Shrier, Harris, Stenberg & Breadslee, 2001; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 1997).

Some biological changes are considered important for leading adolescents towards deviants and risky behaviors. Recent research has suggested that in the third decade of life, brain continuously develops, and during young adulthood frontal lobe fully develops (Pharo et al., 2011). This brain area plays important role in self-control in desires, decision making, and in judgment (Giedd et al., 1999). One of the harmful consequences of the delayed maturation of frontal lobe of the brain is thought to be the tendency for the adolescents to choose immediate reward over future outcomes (Giedd et al., 1999). In fact the harmful and deviant behaviors like substance

abuse, unprotected sex and risky driving, are directly related to individuals objection in imaging the long lasting effects of their actions (Giedd et al., 1999; Pharo, 2011).

Researchers have demonstrated that based on gender different domains of maturity may occur at different ages, in man some parts of the brain including the frontal lobe develops late, these discoveries explain the reason that why males are more prone towards deviant behaviors (Giedd et al., 1999). These differences between female and male may also be attributed to hormonal levels and not age, as compared to males, females go through puberty changes at an earlier age (Giedd et al., 1999). Many other researchers have also shown the relationship between the high risk taking behavior and the beginning of puberty (e.g., Pharo, 2011).

During adolescence phase of life the child is subjected to many different challenges, stressors and many other

problematic behaviors such as sexual behavior, drinking and risk taking behavior. High self esteem and positive self concept are considered the important factor in dealing with these challenges and stressors (Pharo, 2011).

Peers and parents are the strong indicators for the frequency and onset of deviant behaviors among adolescents. Micheal and Ben-Zur (2007) explored that good relationships with parents make adolescents less prone to deviant activities.

For maintain a sense of group identity and for gaining accomplishments from peers, adolescents involved in deviant behaviors (Lightfoot, 1992). Peer pressure make adolescents more prone towards deviance and socialization in the peer group of deviants leads the adolescents towards deviant acts (Diblasio, 1986).

### **Gender difference in deviant behavior**

Gender is considered as one of the most important predictor of deviant behaviour among adolescents. Males are

more likely to be involved in deviant behaviour as compared to females (Giordano & Cernkovich, 1997; Mears, Ploeger, & Warr, 1998; Rutter, Giller, & Hagell, 1998; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985). We also know from the previous research that males use drugs more frequently as compared to females (Elliott, Huizinga, & Menard, 1989; Hindelang, Hirschi, & Weis, 1981; Penning & Barnes, 1982).

Gender differences among adolescent in patterns of involvement appears in the deviant behaviour such as substance abuse (Duncan, Strycker, & Chaneton, 2002). During adolescence phase of life, boys acceptability of deviant behaviour changes and because boys are more likely than girls to hold more favourable attitudes about deviance (Zhang, Loeber, & Stouthamer, 2000), this increase in deviant related beliefs become a strong predictor of aggressive and anti social behavior among boys (Pardini, Loeber, & Stouthamer, 2005).

Pardini, Loeber & Stouthamer, (2005) found through their study that boys are more prone towards harmful risky behavior as compared girls. It has also been proved that males in all ages have more tendencies to be engaged in risky behaviour than females (Zuekerman, 2007).

Dowdull (2006) suggested higher level of drugs use among boys as compared to girls. Past research has shown that mother tolerates and sometimes intentionally or unintentionally encourages deviant and risk taking behavior in their sons as compared to their daughters (Morrongiello & Dawber, 2000). This difference may have roots in biological traits in boys and girls (boys are thought to be more physically strong than girls who are perceives as weaker), this attitude by mother may be internalized by children (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

However in contradiction to all these studies. Igbo, Ihejiene and Mary Anselm (2014) found that there exist no significant

gender difference in deviant behaviour among adolescents. Schinkle et al., (2008) found that girls are more engaged in drug abuse as compared to boys.

Daitzman et al (1978) explored the relationship between risk taking, sensation seeking and levels of male testosterone. They suggested a positive correlation between sensation-seeking and testosterone levels, providing a very simple explanation of why men are more prone to engage in such behaviours keeping constant all the other variables.

### **Socioeconomic level and deviant behaviour**

Low socioeconomic level may serve as a root cause for adolescents to be more engaging in high risk taking behavior (Cook, Buchler, & Henson, 2009). Even studies on young adolescents students recommended that students with low socioeconomic level are more prone to be involve in risky behavior as compared to students with high socioeconomic level (Rudasill, Reio, Kosine, & Taylor, 2010).

Research has suggested that adolescents who belong to families with low income are more likely to suffer from higher rates of poor mental and psychical health problems, they are more likely to be engaged in deviant and risky behaviors like unprotected and early sexual intercourse experience, and they are more likely to experience adolescence pregnancy, to be arrested and they have high school dropout (Harris, Duncan, & Boisioly, 2002).

Some researchers have observed adolescents in welfare dependent families and have suggested that these adolescence have the worst mental and psychical health problems and they are more likely to be involve in unprotected sexual activities and greater violence (Harris et al., 2002).

It has been also suggested that families whose income level is low often live in neighborhood where poverty and crime rate are greater, community resources are low and these children are

subjected to low quality school (Cook, Buehler & Henson, 2009).

### **Rationale of the study**

The present study was conducted to explore the gender differences among adolescents at deviant behaviors. Many studies in USA and other countries have been conducted to see the gender difference at different deviant behaviors like substance abuse, unprotected sexual activities and dangerous driving, (among others), (Giordano & Cernkovich, 1997; Mears, Ploeger, & Warr, 1998; Rutter, Giller, & Hagell, 1998; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985), but in Pakistan there was no particular study done to find out the gender difference in deviance.

### **Hypotheses**

Boys are more prone towards sensation seeking and risk taking behaviors as compared to girls.

Boys were more prone towards moral disengagement as compared to girls.

### **Method**

#### ***Operational definitions***

#### ***Deviance***

Deviance includes all the behaviors that are against the social and cultural norms of a particular group or society. Deviance refers to attributes manifested by specific group or individuals in particular circumstances that are judge to break the normative expectation of a specific group.

In current study for exploring gender differences among adolescents in deviant behaviors, the deviant behavior was explored and examined through sensation seeking, risk taking and moral disengagement among adolescents. Sensation seeking and moral disengagement was measured by using Zukerman's scale of sensation seeking behaviors and for measuring moral disengagement among adolescents, Bandura scale of moral disengagement was used.

#### ***Risk taking behavior***

Risk taking behavior refers to any behavior that directly or in indirectly affects individual's physical and mental

health. It includes heavy drinking, dangerous driving, fighting and smoking (Gullone, 2000).

### ***Sensation seeking behavior***

Sensation seeking is a trait defined by the seeking complex, varied, novel and intense situations and experiences and the individual's wiliness to take social, physical and financial risk and danger for the sake of such experiences (Zukerman, 1994).

### ***Moral disengagement***

Moral disengagement refers to a set of psychological mechanisms involving various types of cognitive rationalization that people use to maintain a view of the self when they engage in immoral action (Bandura et al., 2001).

Moral disengagement is one of the strong predictors of unethical behavior and allows individuals to engage in immortal acts and still maintain an intact self image as a moral person (Bandura, 1996).

### ***Participants***

The sample of the present study consisted of 300 adolescents. Half of them were girls and half of them were boys. Two hundred (200) normal adolescents were selected from school and colleges through convenient sampling and 100 adolescent were from clinical populations through purposive sampling. Data was collected from Rawalpindi.

### **Instruments**

Following instruments were used in the present study.

- “Consent form”.
- “Demographic data Sheet”.
- “Moral disengagement scale”.
- “Sensation seeking scale”.

### ***Demographic data sheet***

Demographic data sheet was devised to gather basic information about participants such as name (optional), age, gender, education, father and mother's occupation, marital status, monthly income of the head of family, number of siblings and birth order of participant.

***Sensation seeking scale (Zuckerman, 1994)***

Sensation seeking behavior among adolescence was assessed by using form 4 of the sensation seeking scale (SSS by Zuckerman 1994), which consists of 40 items in a force choice format. The SSS gives an overall scale as well as four subscales; thrill and adventure seeking, experience seeking, boredom susceptibility and disinhibiting. Some of its items have reverse scoring.

Thrill and adventure seeking is used to assess the desire for outdoor activities that have unusual sensation seeking and risk like flying, sky diving and scuba diving. Thrill and adventure can be explained as the desire to be involved in sports and activities that involve speed and danger.

Disinhibiting refers to the desire for having sexual and social disinhibiting. It stands for preferences of out of control activities e.g, wild parties, sexual act.

Experience seeking can be explained as a desire for having novel experiences through the senses and mind. It includes psychedelic experience, social non-conformity and strong desire to associate with unconventional people.

***Moral disengagement scale (MDS; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 1996)***

Moral disengagement was measured by using Moral disengagement scale (MDS; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996) which is a 32 items self report measure that explored individual's tendency to utilize cognitive mechanism that disengage self sections and justify the use of deviant behavior. Scoring on moral disengagement scale is done on five point likert scale (strongly agree, disagree, don't know, agree and strongly agree).

Moral disengagement scale is used for measuring eight moral disengagement mechanism, namely dehumanization, moral justification, displacement of

responsibility, euphemistic language, advantageous comparison, distortion of possible consequences, attribution of blame and diffusion of responsibility. All these mechanisms are used in subscales, each subscale consists of four items and there is no reverse scoring for any item.

### ***Procedure***

Permission was taken from the participant about their wiliness for participation in the study. Participants

were briefly told about the purpose of the study. Proper instructions were given to the participant filling the questionnaires. They were assured that the information taken from them would be kept confidential and will be used only for research purpose. They were instructed to fill the questionnaires with care and not to omit any item. It took almost 30 minutes in administration process and all the data was collected in four weeks.

## **Results**

**Table 1.**

*Demographic characteristics of participants.*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Boys	154	51.3
	Girls	146	48.7
<b>Age</b>	12-14	57	19
	15-17	163	54.3
	18-21	80	26.7
<b>Education</b>	School	97	32.3
	College	203	67.7
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	5	2.5
	Single	195	97.5

<b>Monthly income</b>	10000-40,000	62	20.7
	40,000-80,000	187	63
	Above 80,000	49	16.3
<b>Father occupation</b>	Government employed	31	10.3
	Private	19	6.3
	Unemployed	250	83.3
<b>Mother occupation</b>	Government employed	31	10.3
	Private	19	6.3
	House wife	250	83.3
<b>Siblings</b>	Single child	16	5.3
	0-1	31	10.3
	2-4	140	46.7
	5-7	113	37.7
<b>Birth order</b>	First	82	27.3
	Middle	107	35.7
	Youngest	11	3.7

*Note:*Frequencies (f) and percentages (%) values of demographic variables in term of age, gender, education, marital status, monthly income, father and mother’s occupation, no. of siblings and birth order (N=300)

Table (1) shows the frequencies and percentages of age, gender, education, marital status, monthly income of head of

house, father occupation, mother occupation, no of siblings and birth order of respondent.

**Tables 2**

*Alpha Coefficient Reliability of moral disengagement (MDS), sensation seeking(SSS) and self concept (MDSCS).*

Scales	N	M	S.D	$\alpha$	Ranges		Skew
					Actual	Potential	
MDS	32	84	13.5	.88	1-160	55-119	.296
SSS	40	58	3.4	.79	1-80	49-69	-.29

*Note:* MDS= Moral disengagement Scale, SSS=Sensation Seeking scale.

Table (2) shows that the Cronbranch reliability of moral disengagement scale is .88 that is of good level and Cronbranch reliability of sensation seeking scale is .79.

On average both moral disengagement scale and sensation-seeking scale have good reliability which shows that these are reliable instrument.

**Table 3**

*Mean difference between gender and sensation seeking behavior among adolescents using t-test.*

Variables	Males			Females			T	P
	N	M	S.D	N	M	S.D		
SSS	154	58.34	8.82	146	59.36	9.3	-.976	.330
BS	154	16.02	1.61	146	16.33	1.7	-1.57	.116
D	154	14.99	3.27	146	15.23	3.55	-.62	.533
ES	154	14.58	3.06	146	14.91	3.23	-.91	.36
TAS	154	12.7	2.28	146	12.86	3.25	-.48	.629

*Note:* SSS=Sensation Seeking scale; BS=Boredom susceptibility subscale of sensation seeking scale; D=disinhibiting scale(subscale of sensation seeking scale);ES=Experience Seeking scale(subscale of sensation seeking scale);TAS(Thrill And Adventure scale(subscale of sensation seeking scale).

Table (3) show that there does not exist any significant gender difference in any subscale of sensation seeking behavior. Although female score high on sensation seeking behavior (M=59.36, S.D=9.3) as compared to males (M=58.34, S.D=8.82) but difference is very small and is not

statistically significant. Females also score high on the other domains of sensations seeking behavior including sky driving, wild parties and drinking, etc, but differences in males and females obtain by using t-test are very small and are not statistically significant.

**Table 4**

*Mean difference between gender and moral disengagement behavior among adolescents using t-test.*

Variables	Males			Females			T	P
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
<b>MDS</b>	154	84.2	14.06	146	84.75	12.97	-.300	.76
<b>MJ</b>	154	9.7	2.96	146	9.26	2.4	1.57	.116
<b>EL</b>	154	10.43	2.67	146	10.62	2.7	-.59	.550
<b>AC</b>	154	9.51	3.34	146	9.3	2.8	.357	.721
<b>DR</b>	154	12.70	2.79	146	12.92	2.58	-.717	.474
<b>DC</b>	154	10.36	3.09	146	10.39	3.06	-1.13	.92
<b>AB</b>	154	8.94	2.91	146	9.14	2.7	-.59	.552
<b>DH</b>	154	10.29	2.61	146	10.34	2.7	-.142	.887
<b>DOR</b>	154	12.25	3.05	146	12.66	3.24	-1.13	.25

*Note :* MDS= Moral disengagement Scale; MJ=moral justification subscale of moral disengagement scale; EL=Euphemistic language subscale of moral disengagement scale; AC=Advantageous comparison subscale of moral disengagement scale; DR=Displacement of responsibility subscale of moral disengagement scale; DOR=Diffusion of responsibility subscale of moral disengagement scale; DC=Distorting consequences subscale of moral disengagement scale; AB=Attribution of Blame subscale of moral disengagement scale; DH=dehumanization subscale of moral disengagement scale.

Table (4) show that there does not exist any significant gender differences in moral disengagement scale as p value for the behaviors is greater than .05. Although girls score high in many of the morally unethical behaviors like use of euphemistic language, displacement of responsibility, distorting consequences, attribution of blame towards others, dehumanization but these differences are not statistically significant.

### **Discussion**

The current study was conducted to explore the deviant behavior among adolescents. Sample consisted of 300 adolescents, with the age ranging between 12-21. Study was conducted in one single phase. Sample of 300 adolescents was selected through convenient sampling. Sample was selected from schools and colleges. Deviant behavior is a vast category so it was difficult to directly assess the all domains within deviant behavior. So in this study deviant behavior was measured within three specific domains of the deviance including moral disengagement, risk taking behavior and sensation seeking behavior. In this study moral disengagement was measured by using moral disengagement scale

developed by Bandura in 1996. Risk taking and sensation seeking behavior was measured by using Sensation Seeking Scale developed by Zuckerman in 1998.

Prior to use sensation seeking scale and moral disengagement scale were translated in to urdu for their convenient usage.

Pilot study was done before main study. The purpose of the pilot study was to check the reliability and validity of scales along with checking the feasibility of the sample. After having satisfactory results with regard to reliability and validity of these scales in Pakistani population, main study was conducted. Asian researchers are using these scales in a very successful way. Many studies have been done using this scale into non-western societies in a very successful way (Murtaza & Hussain, 2011). There are also

many unpublished researches in Pakistan using these scales. Although psychological constructs are influenced by cultural variations but successful applications of these scales into non-western societies may be due to the factor that sensation seeking and moral disengagement scale measure deviant behavior in a very indirect manner.

Demographic analyses revealed that majority of the participants were boys. Majority of the participants were between the age range 15-17 (Middle adolescence) that were 163 (54.3%), whereas others were between the age range 18-21 (Late adolescence) that were 80 (26.7%) and 57 (19%) of the participants were from the age range 12-14 (early adolescence). Majority of the participants were from college that were 203 (67.7%), while others were from school 97 (32.3%).

Our hypothesis was that boys are more prone towards deviance. Study of the Dowdall (2006) suggested higher level of drugs use among boys as compared to

girls. As mentioned above, past research has suggested that mothers may play an important role in creating gender differences among adolescents on deviant behaviors. Sometimes mothers tolerate and encourage deviant traits in their children (Morrongiello & Dawber, 2000). This difference may be due to the biological traits in boys and girls (boys are supposed to be more physically strong and girls are perceived as weaker), this attitude by mother may be internalized by children (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Results of this study do not support this hypothesis, as there does not exist a significant gender difference in deviant behavior among adolescents. So it can be concluded that in Pakistani context gender difference in deviant behavior is rare. Many factors may be involved in it like changing trends, parenting styles, peer pressures and personal interest in deviant kind of activities may be the same for girls and boys.

Results of our study reveal no gender difference in deviant behavior among adolescents. Our results are in line with study by Igbo et al. (2014) that revealed that gender has no significant influence on deviant behaviour of secondary school students. However our findings are in contrast with the findings of Okafor (2012) who observed that males have more tendencies towards substance abuse, aggression and truancy as compared to girls. It is also in contrast with the study of Chime (2004) which showed that the number of deviant males were higher than that of females. As our results did not support previous literature so this change can be contributed to cultural and geographical variation. As we were assessing deviant tendencies, participants may hesitate to give their honest responses due to social desirability factor.

Roche, Ahmed and Blum (2008), suggested that females are more likely to be engaged in deviant activities due to family socialization process. In Pakistani

culture girls are grown in a very restrictive environment but some time over restrictions made girls to behave like boys in deviant activities just to demonstrate their individuality and get free from parents restrictions. Rigby and Cox (1996) also found that girls who have low self-esteem are more likely to engaged in delinquent behaviours.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

The current study has many limitations. Firstly the sample size consists of 300 adolescents which is not large enough to generalize the results. Secondly two scales were used including nearly 72 items, Participants may face difficulty in filling the questionnaire with concentration which may directly or indirectly influence the results of the study.

Because we were assessing gender differences in deviant behaviours among adolescents so there were some items on which social desirability may largely influence the findings and in case of social

desirability actual behaviour may be difficult to know.

Only those school and college adolescent participated in the study so we can't generalize the findings of the study on all the adolescent including illiterate (which contain the 30% of Pakistani adolescent) and private school and college students.

As sample was taken from only Rawalpindi and Islamabad regions so we can't generalize our finding on the all of the cities of Pakistan.

Lastly deviance is a huge phenomenon and researcher selected only some aspect of it (moral disengagement, sensation seeking and risk taking) for study so the results drawn from this study can't be applied to study the deviance as a whole.

There are few scales available in Pakistan to measure deviance among adolescents including self-reported delinquency scale (SRDS) developed by Irum Naqvi. Its valid scale further studies

can be done by using this scale. Further studies can be done by including other variable like parental support, communication style, personality types and deviance along with gender. Explorative studies can be done to identify the causes behind deviant behaviors. Although researcher tried her best level to remove exogenous variables but these variables cannot be completely removed so further studies can be done with maximum control of these variables.

As involvement in deviant kind of activities is consider socially bad in our culture so its always difficult to access these behaviors among youth due to social desirability factors. Further studies can be done to identify and minimize the role of social desirability among individual's responses.

### **Conclusion**

This study was done to find out the gender differences among adolescents in deviant behaviors. Results of this study revealed that there exist no significant

gender differences among adolescents in deviant activities. With growing time, not only values and trends are changing but individual ways of thinking are changing too. People conservative way of thinking is turning into modern way of thinking like in the past girls were very less or not totally involved in risky behaviors but now it is coming out as a fashion to be engaged in risky behaviors. This study found no significant gender differences in deviant behaviors so this research is opening new gates for researcher to investigate and

explore about gender differences in deviant and risky behaviors.

Further researches can be done with larger sample size so that the findings can be generalized. More research is needed to include the more aspects of deviance among adolescent. For future researches a comparative study is needed to see the impact of other variables like low socioeconomic status, peers and neighborhood and adolescents deviant behavior.

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