

# Turning Against Object

## *The Aggressive Defence Style Adopted by Adolescents*

MERCY ABRAHAM\* and REENA GEORGE\*\*

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### ABSTRACT

*Aggression is a prime human characteristic necessary for survival in the struggle for existence. Aggression is often used as a defence against dangerous pleasures. The aggressive style of defence viz., 'Turning Against Object', adopted by adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years, is studied with respect to the age, gender and locale. The sample for the study constitute a representative group of 1730 adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years, studying in the Secondary and Higher Secondary schools of Kerala. 'Adapted Version of the Defense Mechanisms Inventory' was the tool used. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Scheffé Test for post hoc analysis and Critical Ratios were employed for data analysis. The study found that the adoption of 'Turning Against Object' decreases with age. Gender as well as Locale were found to have a significant influence on the adoption of 'Turning Against Object' as aggressive defence style among adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years.*

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### Introduction

In the animal world, there are three built-in coping mechanisms that are waiting to be activated when the organism confronts a dangerous situation. They are *fight*, *flight* and *freeze*. At the human level, the same broad categories of coping mechanisms are available. However, because of our astonishing adaptability, flexibility and resourcefulness, these behaviours are not limited to fighting, fleeing and freezing; rather, we may stand up and oppose the source of stress, withdraw, or take no action. Depending on the circumstances, any of these behaviours may be either adaptive or maladaptive. When

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\* Former Professor, Department of Education, University of Kerala, Trivandrum, India.

\*\*Sr. Lecturer in Education, Karmela Rani Training College, Kollam, Kerala, India.

stress situations are handled in a competent manner our behaviour tends to be 'task-oriented', but when our feelings of adequacy and worth are threatened by stress situations, our reactions tend to be 'defence-oriented', aimed primarily at protecting ourselves from devaluation and relieving painful tension and anxiety.

### **Turning Against Object: The Aggressive Defence Style**

Aggression is regarded as a primitive defence, originating from the '*fight-flight*' response, and is frequently deployed when more complex and mature defences fail. Aggression has been noted to have a capacity to bolster self-esteem by creating an illusion of dominance, strength and control. Freud (1946) has mentioned, quite early in psychoanalytic literature, about the use of aggression for defensive purposes. 'Turning Against Object', is an aggressive defence style, which involves the expression of direct or indirect aggression that serves to master perceived external threats or mask inner conflicts that are too painful to confront consciously. Classical defence mechanisms like '*identification-with-the-aggressor*', '*displacement*' and '*regression*' can be placed under this defence style.

### **Objectives**

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. to find out whether adolescents in the age levels of 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 differ significantly with respect to the adoption of 'Turning Against Object'.
2. to determine the influence of gender on the adoption of 'Turning Against Object' as defence style by adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years.
3. to assess the differential effect of rural-urban locale on the adoption of 'Turning Against Object' as defence style by adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years.

### **Sample**

A representative group of 1730 adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years, studying in the Secondary and Higher Secondary schools of Kerala, selected on the basis of 'stratified random sampling technique', giving due representations to age levels, gender of the students, locale and management category of the schools constitute the sample for the study.

**Tool**

'Defense Mechanisms Inventory' developed by Gleser and Ihilevich (1969), adapted into Malayalam by George (2004), was used as the tool for the study. The reliability of the adapted version of Defense Mechanisms Inventory was determined by Test-Retest method by administering the tool on 100 students studying in the Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools of Kerala. The reliability coefficient obtained for Turning Against Object, over a period of one week was 0.86, and after a period of one month was 0.84. The validity coefficient computed by correlating the adapted version and the original version of the Defense Mechanisms Inventory was 0.96. Norms, directions for administration and scoring, Response Sheet and Scoring Template are provided in the Manual of the adapted version of the Defense Mechanisms Inventory.

**Analysis and Findings**

1. 'Turning Against Object' among adolescents in the age levels of 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17

Adolescents in the five different age levels viz., 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 years, studying in the Secondary and Higher Secondary schools of Kerala, were compared with respect to the adoption of 'Turning Against Object' as the aggressive defence style. The data and results of the comparisons done using ANOVA (Garrett, 1981) and Scheffé Test (Winer, 1962) to find out exactly the pairs, which differ significantly with respect to the Turning Against Object, are presented in tables 1 and 2.

TABLE 1  
**Comparison of Adolescents in the Age Levels of 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 with respect to 'Turning Against Object': Data and Results of ANOVA**

Source of Variation	df	SS	MS	F-ratio
Between Groups	4	1596.989	399.247	28.482**
Within Groups	1725	24180.574	14.018	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1729</b>	<b>25777.563</b>		

\*\*Significant at 0.01 level

From Table 1, it is evident that there is significant difference between adolescents in the age levels of 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 (F=28.482; p<.01) with respect to the aggressive defence style 'Turning

Against Object', adopted by them. In order to find out the exact pairs that differ significantly Scheffé Test, was done at .05 level of significance. The data and results of Scheffé Test are given in table 2.

TABLE 2  
**Comparison of Adolescents in the Age Levels 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 with respect to 'Turning Against Object': Data and Results of Scheffé Test**

Age levels	N	Turning Against Object		Age levels (in years)				
		M	$\sigma$	13	14	15	16	17
<b>13 years</b>	252	14.15	4.39		*	*	*	*
<b>14 years</b>	386	13.26	4.31			*	*	*
<b>15 years</b>	406	12.76	3.58				*	*
<b>16 years</b>	377	11.92	3.35					*
<b>17 years</b>	309	11.17	3.01					

\*Significant at 0.05 level

It is seen from Table 2 that there is significant difference (at .05 level) between all the age levels under comparison (between adolescents in the age levels 13 and 14, 13 and 15, 13 and 16, 13 and 17, 14 and 15, 14 and 16, 14 and 17, 15 and 16, 15 and 17, 16 and 17), with respect to the aggressive defence style 'Turning Against Object'. Further, from Table 2, it is evident that the defence style 'Turning Against Object' is lowest for adolescents in the age level 17 years (M=11.17) when compared to the 'Turning Against Object' adopted by adolescents in the age levels 16 years (M=11.92), 15 years (M=12.76), 14 years (M= 13.26) and 13 years (M=14.15). This means that adolescents in the lower age levels are found to adopt more defences belonging to the aggressive defence style 'Turning Against Object' than other groups of higher age levels. In other words, *adoption of the aggressive defence style 'Turning Against Object' is found to decrease with age, among adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years, in the Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools of Kerala.*

2. 'Turning Against Object' among Male and Female sub samples of adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years.

The male and female sub samples of adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years, were compared with respect to the adoption of aggressive defence style viz., 'Turning Against Object'. The two-tailed test of

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significance for difference between means (Garrett, 1981) was applied for comparison. The data and results of the tests of significance are presented in table 3.

TABLE 3  
**Comparison of Male and Female Sub samples of Adolescents (age group of 13-17) with respect to Turning Against Object: Data and results of the Test of Significance**

Aggressive Defence Style	Gender Groups				Critical Ratio
	Male ( $N_1=837$ )		Female ( $N_2=893$ )		
	$M_1$	$\sigma_1$	$M_2$	$\sigma_2$	
Turning Against Object	13.092	4.158	12.148	3.502	<b>5.09**</b>

\*\* Significant at .01 level

As seen from Table3, the test of significance shows that there is significant difference between the male and female sub-samples of adolescents (C.R=5.09;  $P<.01$ ) with respect to the adoption of the aggressive defence style 'Turning Against Object'. From the mean scores provided in table 3, it is evident that the male sub-samples have higher mean scores for the aggressive defence style 'Turning Against Object' than the female sub-samples. This is at par with the popular expectation that boys are more aggressive than girls. This implies that *Gender has a significant influence on adoption of the aggressive defence style viz., Turning Against Object, among adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years in the Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools of Kerala.*

3. 'Turning Against Object' among Rural and Urban sub-samples of adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years.

The rural-urban subsamples of adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years, were compared with respect to the adoption of aggressive defence style viz., 'Turning Against Object', by applying two-tailed test of significance for difference between means (Garrett, 1981). The data and results of the tests of significance are presented in Table 4.

As evident from table 4, the critical ratio shows that there is significant difference between the rural and urban sub-samples of adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years, with respect to the adoption of aggressive defence style - 'Turning Against Object'.

According to the mean scores of Turning Against Object, as given in table 4, it is evident that the urban sub-samples have higher mean scores for 'Turning Against Object' than rural sub-samples, indicating

TABLE 4  
**Comparison of Rural and Urban Sub-samples of Adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years, with respect to Turning Against Object: Data and results of the Test of Significance**

<i>Aggressive Defence Style</i>	<i>Locale Groups</i>				<i>Critical Ratio</i>
	<i>Rural(N<sub>1</sub>=880)</i>		<i>Urban(N<sub>2</sub>=850)</i>		
	<i>M<sub>1</sub></i>	<i>σ<sub>1</sub></i>	<i>M<sub>2</sub></i>	<i>σ<sub>2</sub></i>	
Turning Against Object	12.40	63.806	12.811	3.910	<b>2.18*</b>

\* Significant at .05 level

that adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years, from urban locales are more aggressive than their rural counterparts. Thus, *Rural-urban locale has a significant influence on the adoption of aggressive defence style 'Turning Against Object', among adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years in the Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools of Kerala.*

### Conclusion

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of the study:

1. There is a decreasing trend with respect to the adoption of the aggressive defence style - 'Turning Against Object' with increasing age levels among adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years in the Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools of Kerala.
2. Gender has a significant influence on the adoption of 'Turning Against Object' among adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years. The male students prefer to adopt the aggressive defence style 'Turning Against Object' more than their female counterparts.
3. Rural-urban locale has a significant influence on adoption of 'Turning Against Object' among adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years. The urban students prefer to adopt 'Turning Against Object' more than their rural counterparts.

### Implications

The aggressive defence style viz., 'Turning Against Object' preferred by adolescents in the age group of 13-17, involves the expression of direct or indirect aggression adopted to master external threats or

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mask internal conflicts, which are too painful to be confronted consciously. The finding that adolescents in the age group of 13-17 years adopt 'Turning Against Object' as a defence style implies that they tend to adjust to minor as well as major frustrations through aggression and such other aggressive emotional defences, which may make them turn against the frustrating object.

The decreasing trend with respect to adoption of the aggressive defence style 'Turning Against Object' with increasing age levels implies that as adolescents progress up the age levels they tend to adopt more mature and logical defence mechanisms and tend to reduce adoption of defences that are aggressive, immature and childish while facing stressful situations. This is a very strong positive implication.

The finding that the male students prefer to adopt the aggressive defence style 'Turning Against Object' than their female counterparts implies that adolescent boys in the age group of 13-17 years tend to react more aggressively to frustrating situations than adolescent girls in the same age group. This result is in line with the popular expectation that boys are more aggressive than girls.

Adolescents from the urban locales prefer adopting 'Turning Against Object' more than their rural counterparts. This implies that urban adolescents have a tendency to adopt more aggressive ways of defences compared to those from rural areas, which is not a very healthy trend. This may be the outcome of unhealthy competition existing among students in urban schools, and the stressful lifestyle in urban nuclear families. Parents and teachers should give serious attention to this trend prevailing among adolescents in urban locales. The finding indirectly implies that adolescents from rural locales are more sensible and logical in coping with stressful conditions. This may probably be due to the rich life experiences that they might have gained from their family and society. Further, they are generally exposed to the field of work quite early in their life, which might have tempered them to face life and its stresses confidently and rationally.

Education should be concerned more with redirecting aggressive impulses than with inhibiting them. Parents and teachers should help adolescents develop socially acceptable outlets for aggression by teaching them good habits of work, constructive skills and creative play. Organising "*Conflict Management Programmes*" in schools for equipping adolescents in dealing with stressful life situations is strongly recommended.

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