

# Defence Mechanism Styles and Personality Types among Adolescents

REENA GEORGE\*

---

## ABSTRACT

*Defence mechanisms are behavioural strategies adopted by an individual to reduce anxiety and enhance one's sense of well-being. They establish illusory mastery over perceived threats, when real mastery is impossible. The defence mechanism style adopted by an individual may be influenced by one's personality. In the present study, five defence mechanisms styles viz., Aggressive, Projective, Intellectualising, Intrapunitive and Repressive, were analysed in relation to the Personality Types viz., Type-A and Type-B, among adolescents studying in the secondary and higher secondary schools of Kerala. The findings revealed that adolescents belonging to different Personality Types adopt significantly different styles of defence mechanisms. Adolescents having Type-B Personality were found to adopt 'Intellectualising Style' and 'Repressive Style', whereas adolescents belonging to Type-A Personality adopted 'Aggressive Style', 'Projective Style' and 'Intrapunitive Style'.*

---

## Introduction

Often when we cannot solve our problems effectively we employ a variety of defence mechanisms toward off intense states of panic or a further build-up of anxiety. These, defence mechanisms allow negative feelings to be lessened without an alteration of the situation that is producing them, often by distorting the reality of that situation in some way. The primary function of defence mechanisms is to ease the acute discomfort of the emotions associated with frustration and unresolved motivational conflict (Coleman, 1960). Defence mechanisms do not eliminate the causes of strain, but rather they help us to cope up with the emotional pain caused by that strain.

---

\* Associate Professor of Education, Karmela Rani Training College, Kollam, Kerala, India. This paper is based on a Minor Research Project financed by the University Grants Commission.

They often leave the underlying causes of strain and the accompanying emotional reactions untouched. Thus, defence mechanisms are only psychological or behavioural devices adopted to alleviate or avoid anxiety associated with strain.

### **Significance of the study**

Defence Mechanisms are the means by which we adapt to the stresses of daily living. People are extremely sensitive to threats to their ego or self-esteem. They erect barriers to protect themselves from external threats, such as failures and disappointments and internal threats such as guilt-arousing desires or behaviour, personal limitations, and real or imagined feelings of inferiority. Freud (1933) called these barriers as 'defence mechanisms', which are unconscious strategies for avoiding or reducing threatening feelings, such as fear and anxiety. Gleser and Ihilevich (1969) defined defence mechanisms as unconsciously motivated, involuntary reactions that are activated whenever perceived threats are too painful to confront consciously. Often several defence mechanisms operate together to achieve a combination of many different forms of behaviours, attitudes, motives and emotions that characterise a particular defensive style. The defensive responses to conflict/threats into five styles of defence mechanisms viz., Aggressive Style - which involves the expression of direct or indirect aggression; Projective Style - which involves the attribution of negative intent or characteristics to others without any evidence; Intellectualising Style - which falsifies reality by reinterpreting it through the use of a variety of general principles; Intrapunitive Style - which includes all intrapunitive attempts employed to falsify reality for the purpose of reducing perceived threats to one's self-esteem and Repressive Style which involves responses to internal or external threats, usually expressed in exaggeratedly cheerful emotions, and unduly positive behavioural responses. The study of defence mechanisms has been a popular theme for research abroad. The present study intends to compare the adolescents belonging to Type A Personality and Type B Personality with respect to the Defence Mechanism Styles adopted by them.

### **Procedure**

The sample for the study, selected through 'Stratified Random Sampling Technique', giving due representation to age, gender and locale, comprises of 1000 secondary school students, and 500 Higher

Secondary school students of Kerala. The tools used for data collection are Defence Mechanism Styles Inventory and Personality Type Inventory.

**Analysis and Interpretation**

Analysis of data to identify the defence mechanism styles of adolescents in the Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools of Kerala revealed that adolescents in the age group 13-17 adopt different styles of defence mechanisms. The defence mechanism styles adopted by adolescents, given in the order of preference, are Intellectualising Style (M=25.27; ? =3.09), Repressive Style (M=23.56; ? =5.28), Projective Style (M=19.22; ? =3.48) Intrapunitive Style (M=17.84; ? =2.75), and Aggressive Style (M=15.64; ? =4.77). Investigation of the Personality Types of adolescents revealed that 21.87 per cent (N1=328) possess Type-A Personality and 78.13 per cent (N2=1172) possess Type-B Personality.

The adolescents belonging to Type-A Personality and Type-B Personality were compared to find out whether the groups differ significantly with respect to the five styles of defence mechanisms adopted by them. The two groups were compared by computing Critical Ratios for each style of defence mechanisms. viz., Aggressive, Projective, Intellectualising, Intrapunitive and Repressive. The details of the comparison are presented in Table-1.

**Table 1**  
**Defence Mechanisms Styles of Adolescents with Type-A and Type-B Personality**

Defence Mechanism Styles	Personality Types				Critical Ratio
	Type-A (N <sub>1</sub> =328)		Type-B (N <sub>2</sub> =1172)		
	M1	1	M2	2	
Aggressive Style	14.31	4.16	13.07	3.5	4.93**
Projective Style	19.01	3.42	18.23	3.08	3.73**
Intellectualising Style	22.16	3.93	23.01	3.4	3.56**
Intrapunitive Style	18.13	3.03	17.11	2.9	5.44**
Repressive Style	23.32	4.20	24.81	3.66	5.83**

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level

The critical ratios reveals significant difference between the subsamples of adolescents having Type-A Personality and Type-B Personality with respect to all the five styles of defence mechanisms viz., Aggressive Style (C.R=4.93; P<.01), Projective Style (C.R=3.73; P<.01), Intellectualising Style (C.R=3.56; P<.01), Intrapunitive Style (C.R=5.44; P<.01) and Repressive Style (C.R=5.83; P<.01). Thus there

is significant difference between adolescents belonging to Type A Personality and Type B Personality with respect to the Defence Mechanism Styles adopted by them. Further adolescents with Type-B Personality is found to have higher mean scores for 'Intellectualising Style' (M=23.01) and 'Repressive Style' (M=24.81), than adolescents with Type-A personality. Whereas adolescents having Type-A Personality have higher mean scores for 'Aggressive Style' (M=14.31), 'Projective Style' (M=19.01) and 'Intrapunitive Style' (M=18.13) than adolescents with Type-B personality.

### **Implications**

The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant difference between adolescents belonging to Type A and Type B Personalities with respect to the Defence Mechanism Styles adopted by them. Adolescents with Type-B Personality adopted Intellectualising and Repressive styles, whereas adolescents with Type-A Personality adopted Aggressive, Projective and Intrapunitive styles, which are unhealthy. The findings of the study imply the need for conscientising adolescents regarding the consequences of adopting unhealthy defence mechanisms and educate them to practice healthy styles of defence mechanisms. The study also recommends Conflict Management Programme for adolescents in the Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools of Kerala.

### **REFERENCES**

- COLEMAN, JAMES C. 1960. *Personality dynamics and effective behaviour*. Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co.
- FREUD, S. 1933. *New introductory lectures on psycho analysis*. New York: Norton.
- GLESER, G.C., AND IHILEVICH, D. 1969. An objective instrument for measuring defense mechanisms. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 33, 51-60.