



## ANGER ASSESSMENT AMONG HIGH SCHOOL CHILDREN

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Adolescent anger, aggression and violence in school and college campuses are on rise across globe. Anger typically associated with hostile thoughts, physiological arousal and maladaptive behaviours inspires powerful often aggressive feelings and behaviours that affects all aspects of life. Negative outcomes of anger, its long term consequences, its negative impact on academic success and emotional well-being makes it a social menace.

**Materials & Methods:** 1220 high school children (652 girls and 568 boys) in the age group of 12 to 16 years participated in a survey using self-reporting anger scale STAXI-2 CA. Data was analysed to study the prevalence of state and trait nature of anger and anger expression styles.

**Results:** Multivariate General Linear Model and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were used to analyse the data. 45% of the children experienced elevated and high state anger and 23% experienced elevated & high trait anger. Higher scores of state and trait anger were observed in girls than boys. Significant positive correlation was observed between anger expression out with both state and trait anger. Higher levels of anger experience and lower levels of anger control are observed in girls than boys.

**Conclusions:** High school children exhibited higher levels of anger experience and expression and moderate levels of anger control. The study has implications for thorough assessment of anger with more physiological parameters and developing culture specific, yoga based anger management programs and assessment tools.

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### INTRODUCTION

Anger which enables a 'fight' response has been linked to hostility, aggression and violence especially in adolescents. The terms 'anger' 'aggression' 'violence' lack clarity in their definitions, demarcation and homeostatic levels that are healthy. The relation between these terms is mediated by moral disengagement (Ramírez JM 2009). Consideration of interplay of these constructs is essential in order to take forward the research work on these constructs. (Hubbard, 2006).

The concept of anger stated by Spielberger which is regarded as more fundamental is considered as the basis for this study. According to him, anger is an emotional state or condition that consists of feelings which vary in intensity from mild irritation or annoyance to intense fury and rage, accompanied by activation and arousal of the autonomic nervous system (Spielberger, 1988; Brunner 2009).

Problems associated with inappropriate expressions of anger remain the most serious concerns of parents, educators, and the mental health community. Childhood aggressive behaviour is considered as a risk factor for adulthood violence and criminal behaviour (Rowell, 2002). Uncontrolled anger is a contributing factor of adolescent deaths due to homicide, suicide and injuries (CDC, 2015). Anger is a strong emotional predictor of violence which has a strong correlation with cognitive distortion (Simona VC, 2012). Anger contributes positively to physical and verbal aggression (Rubio GF, 2016; Cornell, 1999). Intense, uncontrolled feelings of anger are often associated with externalizing behavior problems, particularly aggression (John EL, 2005). Adolescent anger leading to violence is hence identified as a health disparity (CDC, 2012).

Schools and colleges across the globe are witnessing a massive rise in anger related behaviours and conduct disorders. According to indicators of school safety and crime 2015, USA, about 58% of public schools recorded incidents of physical attack or fight without a weapon. Higher percentages of

females (15%) than of males (13%) reported bullied. Higher percentage of males (7%) than of females (5%) reported being pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on (NCES 2016-079).

Amongst 94777 Japanese adolescents, 8.7% have experienced intense anger (Itani O, 2016). Study further reports higher levels of intense anger among students who had history of smoking, alcohol use, skipping breakfast and using mobile phones for longer duration. Out of 1662 Malaysian adolescents, when angry, 7.1% have hit others, 25.1% have hit objects, 27.8% have become aggressive verbally (Rohany N, 2014). High attitude to aggression was also found in 81% of 426 Malaysian adolescents (Chidiebere, 2015). Turkish adolescents, 24% of the 2409, recorded very high rates of aggression scores (Dilek A, 2016). Positive correlation between anger and suicide ideation is reported in 18.5% of 14537 Chinese adolescents (Ping Z, 2012).

Angry behaviours, bullying, aggression are also on rise among the Indian adolescents. Study of 1500 Indian adolescents reports 23% of victims and 13% perpetrators of violence (Munni, 2006). About 18% of 5476 youths from different cities of India reported high aggression scores. Higher anger-aggression scores were observed in males than females and also in the age group of 16-19 years (Sharma MK, 2015). Parental anger styles tend to have strong impact on anger expression in Indian adolescent females (Kavitha D, 2014). Aggression has shown negative correlation with interpersonal and romantic relationships among Indian youth (Sharma MK, 2013). Indian alcohol-dependent youths reported low levels of anger control, high level of trait anger and poor quality of life (Sharma MK, 2012).

Adolescents with high trait anger have shown negative health, social, and academic consequences related to anger (Colleen, 2014). Adolescents exposed to violence had poorer school performance and adjustment scores (Munni, 2006). Dispositional anger leads to higher risk-taking behaviour in adolescents (Jungmeen KS, 2015). Self-esteem in adolescents reported positive correlation with anger control and negative relationship with trait anger (Coskun A, 2009). Significant correlation is observed between trait anger and proneness to shame in youth (Jennie H, 2011).

Studies on adolescent population have documented significant association between anger and depression, stress (Pullen 2015; Zimmer GMJ 2015; Deffenbacher, 1996); suicidal attempts, conduct disorders, hyper tension, heart diseases, psychosomatic ailments (Dale JT 2009; Stephanie SD, 2009; Ahmad G, 2007; Grunbaum, 1997). Anger has significant positive correlations with negative life events, anxiety and drug use in adolescents (Kathryn Puskar, 2008). Studies on premenstrual syndrome in adolescent girls reported high prevalence (59%) of anger/ irritability as a most common symptom (Raval CM, 2015; Doerte UJ, 2014).

Though adolescent anger is a strong predictor of aggression, violence, crime and homicide and a major risk factor for many health problems, it has received relatively less attention of researchers. Most of the studies have included anger as secondary variable or a comparative construct. Research on studying correlates of maladaptive nature of anger in adolescents has lagged behind than adults (Matthew AK, 2008). Understanding the developmental trajectory of high anger levels in adolescents is important, considering its role as

a precursor to negative adult physical, psychological and social health outcomes (Catherine PB, 2010).

India is going to be the youngest nation by 2020 with 64% of its population comprises of adolescents and youths. India is also witnessing increased anger related issues in schools and colleges and also early onset of psychosomatic ailments. Hence study of adolescent anger is an essential component of public health promotion in India. On contrary, no studies are cited studying prevalence of anger and its effective management amongst Indian adolescents. There is also dearth for culturally suited measurement tools to assess adolescent anger. This study is therefore focussed to understand the prevalence of anger, its types and intensity in high school children using available self-reporting STAXI-2-CA scale.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Design:** It is school based survey conducted in high schools with one time data collection in groups. Anger is the only parameter measured in this study. The study was approved by the institutional ethical committee. Consent to participate in the survey was obtained in writing by the children and approval obtained from school authorities. Authorised tools and software were used for measurements and assessment.

**Sample:** The participants of the study included 1220 healthy adolescents studying in 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> standard in English medium private co-education high schools in south Bangalore. Sample size had a good baseline match of gender but not of age. Inclusion criteria was ability to read, write and communicate in English while adolescents unwilling to participate were excluded.

**Tool:** State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-Child and Adolescents (STAXI 2 CA scale), a 35 item self-report scale that measures anger experience, expression and control in adolescents. STAXI-2 C/A has five subscales - State anger (10 items), Trait Anger (10 items), Anger Expression-Out (5 items), Anger Expression-In (5 items) and Anger-Control (5 items). The tool divides the adolescent age range into three groups 9-11 years, 12-14 years and 15-18 years.

Having 3 point Likert scale, STAXI-2 CA has high reliability and validity scores with internal consistency ( $\alpha$ ) 0.87 for state anger, 0.80 for trait anger, 0.70 for anger expression out, 0.71 for anger expression in and 0.79 for anger control in normative samples. Spanish adaptation of this scale found the structure of this scale robust and acceptable internal consistency and test-retest reliability scores (Victoria DB, 2003).

STAXI-2-CA professional manual acts as a tool for data processing as it provides data of normative samples as well as conversion tables of percentile scores and t-scores, gender wise and age group wise. Statistical software SPSS version 10 was used to analyse the data.

**Procedure:** As a pilot work, the scale was first administered to 30 children to assess the feasibility, content understanding, etc. A psychologist was present while administering the scale. Some of the terms like 'grumpy' 'grouchy' were difficult to understand by the children in the Indian cultural context. The meaning of such terms was explained to the group and also incorporated within brackets in the scale.

Then the scale was administered in 8 schools during academic hours around 10 to 11 am. About 14 high schools were approached out of which only 8 schools consented to

participate in the study. The scale was administered in groups (section wise). Children were briefed about the study and then asked to fill up the questionnaire. Children were instructed to answer all the questions and they took around 5-10 minutes for filling up the questionnaire.

**Data processing:** Totally 1236 children participated in the survey, out of which 16 questionnaire were incomplete with more than 50% unanswered questions. The sample size mentioned above (1220) is after excluding these 16 cases.

Raw scores of each subscale corresponding to each participant were converted into percentile scores and t-scores with the help of conversion tables provided in the professional manual.

Percentile scores were used to calculate intensity of anger, gender difference and significance through multivariate analysis using General Linear Model; T scores were used to calculate correlation using bivariate Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients.

**ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

Data of 1200 participants (652 girls and 568 boys) was considered for analysis. The age wise distribution of participants included 72 children aged 12 years (42 girls and 30 boys), 629 children aged 13 years (325 girls and 304 boys), 282 children aged 14 years (163 girls and 119 boys), 191 children aged 15 years (103 girls and 88 boys) and 46 children aged 16 years (19 girls and 27 boys).

The mean and standard deviation of raw scores for all subscales was calculated using t test.

**Table 1** Mean and Standard Deviation of Raw scores

|                      | SA             | TA             | AO          | AI          | AC             |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| <b>Scoring Range</b> | <b>10-30</b>   | <b>10-30</b>   | <b>5-15</b> | <b>5-15</b> | <b>5-15</b>    |
| Girls (n=652)        | 14.9<br>(±3.7) | 19.5<br>(±3.6) | 9.1 (±2.0)  | 9.2 (±2.2)  | 11.6<br>(±2.3) |
| Boys (n=568)         | 15.4<br>(±3.8) | 18.9<br>(±3.3) | 9.2 (±2.1)  | 9.2 (±2.1)  | 11.1<br>(±2.4) |
| Total (n=1220)       | 15.1<br>(±3.8) | 19.2<br>(±3.5) | 9.1 (±2.0)  | 9.2 (±2.2)  | 11.4<br>(±2.4) |

SA-State Anger, TA-Trait Anger, AO-Anger Expression Out, AI-Anger Expression In, AC-Anger Control

Table 1 shows overall higher levels of trait anger (19.2%) indicating higher levels of anger proneness and regular experience of intense anger without specific provocation. Moderate level of anger control (11.4) is also observed denoting the tendency to control expression of anger. Marginal difference is seen between genders in all subscale except anger expression-in. Clarity on these will be obtained analysing the percentile and t scores in the subsequent tables.

**Table 2** Intensity of anger among boys and girls

| Intensity →<br>Subscale ↓ |       | Low Anger (< 25) | Average Anger (26-75) | Elevated Anger (76-89) | High Anger (> 90) |
|---------------------------|-------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| State Anger               | Girls | 0 (0%)           | 287 (44%)             | 313 (48%)              | 52 (8%)           |
|                           | Boys  | 40 (7%)          | 346 (61%)             | 143 (25%)              | 39 (7%)           |
| Trait Anger               | Girls | 131 (20%)        | 336 (52%)             | 122 (19%)              | 63 (10%)          |
|                           | Boys  | 110 (19%)        | 366 (64%)             | 64 (11%)               | 28 (5%)           |
| Anger Expression Out      | Girls | 242 (37%)        | 263 (40%)             | 103 (16%)              | 44 (7%)           |
|                           | Boys  | 100 (18%)        | 375 (66%)             | 66 (12%)               | 0 (0%)            |
| Expression In             | Girls | 35 (5%)          | 332 (51%)             | 186 (29%)              | 99 (15%)          |
|                           | Boys  | 27 (5%)          | 292 (51%)             | 168 (30%)              | 81 (14%)          |
| Anger Control             | Girls | 129 (20%)        | 262 (40%)             | 132 (20%)              | 129 (20%)         |
|                           | Boys  | 59 (10%)         | 283 (50%)             | 82 (15%)               | 144 (25%)         |

Table 2 reports 37% of children experiencing elevated state anger and 7% of children experiencing very high state anger indicating children experiencing relatively intense anger at the time of scale administration. More number of girls (56%) than boys (32%) have shown higher levels of state anger.

Trait anger scores also show more in girls (19% and 10%) than boys (11% and 5%) in elevated and very high trait anger zone respectively. Prevalence of 23% of children experiencing higher levels of trait anger indicate very high proneness to anger and are alarming.

Relatively low anger expression-out scores (17.5%) indicate children having hostile attitude and exhibit aggressive tendencies with a lesser frequency. More girls (16% and 7%) than boys (12% and 0%) have shown elevated and very high anger expression out. Surprisingly no boys fell in the very high anger expression-out zone.

High anger-expression-in scores (44%) indicate adolescents hold-in or suppress anger when they are angry or furious. Significant gender difference is not observed in terms of anger expression in scores.

In all 15%, 45%, 15%, 25% of children reported low, average, elevated and very high extent of anger control respectively. This shows 60% of the children are in low and average anger control zone where they tend to control angry feelings less frequently, modulating their anger expression or hiding their feelings. 40% of children have shown elevated and very high anger control abilities. This indicates children are tolerant, understanding and or patient with others. They control their anger by relaxing, calming down and reducing the feelings.

Mixed pattern is seen in gender wise distribution across intensity levels of anger control. Low anger control (girls 20%, boys 10%), average control (girls 40%, boys 50%), elevated anger control (girls 20%, boys 15%) and very high anger control (girls 20%, boys 25%). Further analysis is needed to substantiate gender difference.

**Table 3** chi-square data & significance level for gender difference in subscales

|                           | SA     | TA    | AO    | AI    | AC    |
|---------------------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Chi Square value</b>   | 105.45 | 29.01 | 85.84 | 5.31  | 33.76 |
| <b>Significance level</b> | <.001  | <.001 | <.001 | 0.912 | <.001 |

SA-State Anger, TA-Trait Anger, AO-Anger Expression Out, AI-Anger Expression In, AC-Anger Control

Table 3 indicate significant gender difference is reported in all subscales except anger expression-in.

**Table 4** Pearson Correlation of Anger Experience, expression and control

| Gender         |    | TA     | AO     | AI     | AC      |
|----------------|----|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| Girls (n=652)  | SA | .411** | .356** | -.076  | -.110** |
|                | TA |        | .542** | .013   | -.061   |
| Boys (n=568)   | SA | .469** | .477** | .053   | -.075   |
|                | TA |        | .566** | .189** | -.007   |
| Total (n=1220) | SA | .439** | .395** | -.017  | -.098** |
|                | TA |        | .535** | .085** | -.045   |

SA-State Anger, TA Trait Anger, AO-Anger Expression Out, AI-Anger Expression In, AC-Anger Control

Table 4 provide gender-wise correlation coefficient values for all subscales. High positive correlation between State and Trait Anger (0.439) with 0.01 level of significance is observed. Similarly high positive correlation is seen between Anger

expression out and State anger (0.395) as well as Trait anger (0.535). However, Anger expression-in and Anger control have not shown any strong correlation with either state or trait anger.

Frequency of answering various options for Q 21 (I show my anger) and Q 25 (I hide my anger) were analyzed to check the authenticity of response for two contradictory questions. Both questions were answered 'never' by 85 (6.98%) children and 'often' by 35 (2.87%) children which indicates high reliability of responses.

## DISCUSSION

The study indicates higher levels of state (45%) and trait (23%) anger experience and moderate levels of anger control (40%) among high school children. Gender difference was also observed. Girls showed higher levels of anger and lower levels of anger control (table 2).

60% of children having average and low anger control scores indicating children having poor abilities to address their anger issues. They tend to modulate the amount of anger they express in an inappropriate manner which is a cause of concern (table 2). 15% of children having very low anger control and very high anger expression in and /or anger expression out scores indicated presence of lack of well-developed internal anger control mechanisms (table 2). Positive correlation has been seen between trait and state anger. Higher correlation is observed with respect to anger-expression-out with both state and trait anger. Higher levels of both state and trait anger and low levels of anger control may be a high risk factor for many behavioural and conduct disorders (table 4). Results of anger expression scores are characterized by children having hostile attitude and aggressive tendencies and are generally reacting to anger provoking situations by suppressing or holding in their angry feelings (table 2). The findings are also corroborated with available literature in this area.

Gender difference was significantly observed in anger expression in adults in a study conducted in India using STAXI-2 Hindi version with males having higher anger expression and control than females, which implies the need for developing gender specific anger management program (Mamta, 2013). Females were found to be predominantly victims in the study on prevalence of violence among Indian adolescents and males were an important predictive factor for witnessing and perpetrating violence (Munni, 2006). Whereas in other studies, like African American adolescence reported no gender difference in anger expression scores measured using two scales STAXI and FAS (Cheryl A, 2002). A Meta analytic review on gender difference in emotion expression in children reports significant but very small difference of negative emotion expression in boys than girls. It also reported change in emotion expression as the age advances and found the shift in emotion expression in adolescent girls from less during childhood to high expression in adolescents (Tara MC, 2013). Another intervention based pilot study indicated girls having higher levels of anger expression and lower levels of anger control than boys. However, their response to anger management program was better than boys as they showed greater improvement in both anger expression and anger control scores (Isaac B, 2015)

Presence of high level of anger suppression is also linked to children having a) an aggressive family background, b) shy away expressing anger, c) have been sexually abused and have

learnt to suppress their anger for fear of reprisal and d) having emotionally internalizing disorders (Brunner, 2009). Studies also have reported significant gender difference between anger covariants and systolic and/or diastolic blood pressure readings in relation to anger (Roxanne PH, 1998; Albayrak, 2012).

A number of studies are cited documenting cultural influence on anger experience and expression even though physiological effects are universal (Seung HY, 2010). Significant difference in anger experience and expression is reported in Asian American and European American women (Iris BM, 2010). Subjective feedback from the participants of the current study also supports these findings. Children had difficulty in differentiating the meanings for words such as 'angry' 'irritated' 'annoyed' 'mad'. Also difficulty in understanding the sentences like, 'I say mean things', 'I do things like slam doors'.

Figurative language (anger is hot) is often ambiguous and should be used with caution on psychological tests unless there is evidence the language is understood cross-culturally (Barchard KA, 2016). The subjective feedback by the children during the administration of scale corroborated this view. Children had difficulty in understanding 'I keep my cool' 'Hot headed' etc. Analysis of question wise frequency of response to questions revealed that questions like 'I am mad', 'I get Mad', 'I am hot headed', 'I do things like slam doors' have received higher percentages (74%, 57%, 44% and 50%) of 'never' answers. It indicates children are not able to relate them with these questions. This aspect may have had its bearings on the results obtained. Future studies are recommended using physiological biomarkers of anger in addition to culturally appropriate self-reporting scales.

The strength of this study is assessing anger in the school setting with a large sample size of 1220 children. The study aimed at closer observation of types of anger experience and anger expressions and also analysed correlation among the subscales. Very few or no studies are reported assessing and analyzing intensities of anger and also anger as a sole construct. This study measured anger using self-reporting scale to assess children's knowledge about anger which may not be easily observed by adults. Observational feedback of the scale administrator is that the children lacked introspective ability and had response bias. Social desirability response set might have also influenced under/over report of their degree of anger.

Future studies are recommended to consider socio-economic, anthropometric and demographical data of participants as these aspects strongly influence experience and expression of anger in adolescents. The study was conducted only in private high schools. It is also recommended to extend the study to corporation/ govt schools as well as residential schools. The replication of this study in other settings (urban, rural, clinical, minority subjects) may strengthen the findings of this study. Since adolescent period (10 to 19 years) is a transitional stage heralded by tremendous growth and changes, age-wise assessment of anger is recommended. In addition to self-reporting assessment, there is a need to get the assessment done by the teachers and parents.

The present study has implication for developing anger management programs/assessment tools based on yoga – medication (spirituality), as yoga based programs have found effective in addressing issues of cognitive and executive

functions in adolescents in addition to promoting fitness and physiological health in adolescents.

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