

The Role Of Cognitive Dissonance In Shaping Relationship Dynamics Among Teenagers And Adults

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ABSTRACT

Cognitive dissonance is an important aspect of influencing interactions between people, especially in the case of intimate relationships. It occurs when two or more conflicting beliefs, values, or behaviors cause psychological distress, prompting people to resolve the issue through various coping strategies. The study looks at how this psychological tension affects interpersonal relationships across various age groups, with an emphasis on emotional well-being and decision-making. Through the investigation of intrinsic as well as external causes of cognitive inconsistency, the study seeks to investigate its impacts on sustaining or destroying social connections. A mixed-methods technique was used whereby structured questionnaires and statistical package tools were employed to measure reaction from a multi-faceted sample. Results show that while cognitive dissonance does have an effect on relationship dynamics, it is generally weak, with other psychological and social factors being more influential towards relationship stability. The study underlines the necessity of promoting emotional regulation, self-awareness, and open communication to mitigate ill effects. Synthesizing cross-cultural studies and neurological study can further enrich the understanding of how individuals resolve competing emotions and beliefs. Investigation of these areas can enhance methods of enhancing social interaction and emotional resilience in professional and personal environments.

Keywords: Cognitive dissonance, relationship dynamics, emotional regulation, interpersonal conflict, psychological well-being

1. INTRODUCTION

Cognitive Dissonance is a psychological phenomenon that denotes the discomfort that individuals experience when their ideas or attitudes are in conflict. This concept has been extensively examined in psychological research, with ramifications for comprehending individual behaviour and broader societal phenomena (Ibala, et al., 2021). Cognitive dissonance may manifest in several circumstances. Cognitive dissonance refers to the simultaneous existence of two conflicting thoughts or views on a certain subject. Such occurrences are prevalent in emotionally abusive contexts and partnerships with narcissists.

Cognitive dissonance may influence lives in various ways, frequently resulting in conflict and uncertainty. Cognitive dissonance may be especially confounding in the context of relationships. Individuals in romantic relationships often fail to recognize the impact of this dissonance on their interactions with their partners. Although occasional discord is anticipated in any connection, individuals in dysfunctional and abusive relationships may frequently encounter cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance may often be beneficial, enabling people and couples to access their values, beliefs, and aspirations, thus enhancing their comprehension of how these elements correlate with their behaviours and relationships. This experience may be illuminating and frequently fosters greater intimacy between couples (Ploger, et al., 2021).

Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT), established by Leon Festinger in 1957, elucidates the psychological discomfort individuals encounter while possessing contradictory ideas or actions. Festinger's initial tests revealed that individuals are driven to diminish dissonance by modifying attitudes, obtaining new knowledge, or altering behaviours. Researchers have progressively broadened CDT to encompass many areas, including decision-making, ethical conduct, and interpersonal dynamics. The idea has impacted psychology, marketing, and social sciences, offering insights into human thinking and

justification. Contemporary it enhances CDT by incorporating neuroscientific and behavioral economic viewpoints (Snodgrass, et al., 2021).

Addressing cognitive dissonance necessitates effort and comprehension as one progress toward a state of healing. Cognitive dissonance may enhance the understanding of the environment and internal feelings, even in overwhelming situations when it feels a lack of control. It entails fostering self-awareness and confidence in the actions and emotions as it navigate the life with intention and clarity. Making small changes and shifts in the thinking can lead to discover the genuine values, learn to hold fast, and stay true (Kieler, 2023).

Overcoming cognitive dissonance necessitates substantial introspection and self-awareness to facilitate rehabilitation and alleviate trauma and anxiety. It may identify when it begins to lose self-awareness and adjust the activities through enhanced self-knowledge. Recall the principles, observations, and emotions, then implement adjustments that correspond with the values. Although individuals may develop and change with time, maintaining integrity to the fundamental values and ideas may be achieved by addressing cognitive dissonance (Onken, et al., 2021).

The study aims to investigate the role of cognitive dissonance in shaping relationship dynamics between adolescents and adults, assessing how internal conflicts influence interpersonal communication, decision-making, and emotional adaptation. The inquiry examines both internal and external factors contributing to dissonance, aiming to identify coping methods and their effectiveness in maintaining or undermining relationships. The study adds to the body of knowledge by identifying age-related differences in cognitive dissonance experiences, providing insights into how people deal with conflicting beliefs in romantic, family, and social relationships. The results can be used to inform interventions aimed at promoting healthier relationship patterns. The study is composed of an “introduction, literature review, research methodology, results and analysis, discussion, and conclusion”.

Lie Ken Jie, C., et al., (2025) explored how divorced parents faced social pressure to adopt shared custody, which sometimes augmented conflict and distress among children. The study analyzed the experience of children between the ages of 3 and 12 through narrative therapy to understand coping mechanisms. The findings highlighted the importance of narrative therapy in family mediation in assisting children to manage emotions and re-establish emotional equilibrium. Although, Jeppsson, F., & Schiller, L. (2024) explored the intention-behavior gap in sustainable consumption under Cognitive Dissonance Theory. Individuals in higher incomes easily adapted to sustainable behaviors, while low-income people faced difficulties. Psychological considerations and product availability had determined choices. Aligned behavior and reduced cognitive dissonance contributed to steering the right strategies for young people to ensure sustainable consumption.

Kidwell, M. C., & Kerig, P. K. (2023) examined moral injury in children, which had commonly been neglected due to their vulnerability. It encompassed such ideas as attachment and betrayal trauma to advance a developmental model of moral injury. It facilitated the identification of moral harm in children, the explanation of maladaptive meaning-making and future study direction on emotional and behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, Shanks, J. E. (2023) examined how shame, rooted in childhood trauma, undermined social relationships and promoted cognitive distortions. The study probed their relationship among young adults and found that cognitive distortions had adversely affected relationships. A psychoeducational intervention successfully diminished shame and distortions, highlighting the potential of cognitive education in enhancing emotional well-being.

Alexopoulos, C. (2021) Examined cognitive dissonance reduction tactics among men who practiced infidelity, based on evidence from Ashley Madison users. It indicated that attitude and self-concept modification had been associated with online infidelity, while self-concept modification had been the only one to impact offline infidelity. These tactics successfully reduced psychological distress, and notable differences in coping were found across infidelity settings. Although, Nicholson, S. B., & Lutz, D. J. (2017) explored how the intimate relationship abuses frequently emphasized external reasons, neglecting the psychological processes of victims. It analyzed cognitive dissonance as a determinant in victims' choices to remain or go, impacted by self-esteem and commitment theories. Comprehending dissonance processes enhanced treatments, assisting victims in terminating cycles of abusive relationships.

Despite extensive studies on cognitive dissonance in many contexts, there is a gap in applying its intricacies to vulnerable people and their decision-making behaviors. Studies have examined cognitive dissonance in children of divorce, juvenile moral harm, and sustainable consumerism; nevertheless, its intersectionality regarding functionality across developmental and socio-economic categories remains little explored. Additionally indicates a correlation between intimate partner violence and infidelity, necessitating further exploration into the long-term psychological impacts and coping techniques across diverse ethnicities. Addressing these disparities can enhance intervention and policy strategies.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is based on a mixed-methods design with a combination of “qualitative and quantitative methods” to investigate the influence of cognitive dissonance on relationships between adolescents and adults in Ludhiana. Primary data is gathered using standardized questionnaires derived from established Cognitive Dissonance and Interpersonal Relationships scales, whereas secondary data are obtained from research reports and academic studies. A descriptive and exploratory research

design enables a thorough examination of cognitive dissonance (external, internal) as an independent variable and how it affects interpersonal relationships. A stratified random sampling technique allows for balanced representation, with 200 participants (100 teenagers, and 100 adults) split evenly by gender. Statistical packages such as MS Excel and SPSS facilitate the processing of data, using techniques such as “mean, standard deviation, correlation, and regression” analysis to arrive at meaningful conclusions. The structured questionnaire provides accuracy, cost-effectiveness, and systematized collection of data, enhancing the study's reliability and relevance to the social dynamics in urban areas.

Research objectives

- To examine the impact of internal and personal cognitive dissonance on teenage and adult relationships.
- To evaluate the impact of external and impersonal cognitive dissonance on teenage and adult relationships.
- To investigate the relationship between cognitive dissonance and relationships among teenagers and adults.
- To provide recommendations for mitigating the negative affects of cognitive dissonance and fostering healthier relationship dynamics.

Research question

- How does internal and personal cognitive dissonance influence relationship satisfaction and stability among teenagers and adults?
- What role do external and impersonal factors play in shaping cognitive dissonance and its effects on teenage and adult relationships?
- What is the relationship between cognitive dissonance and relationship dynamics among teenagers and adults?
- What strategies can be implemented to reduce the negative impact of cognitive dissonance and promote healthier relationships among teenagers and adults.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table: 1 Demographic profile of the respondents

Sr. No.	Demographic Characteristics		N	%
1	Gender	Female	100	50.0%
		Male	100	50.0%
2	Age	Teenager (13-19 years)	100	50.0%
		Adult (20+ years)	100	50.0%
3	Education level	Middle School	43	21.5%
		High School	46	23.0%
		Undergraduate	52	26.0%
		Postgraduate	59	29.5%
4	Employment Status	Student	63	31.5%
		Employed	47	23.5%
		Unemployed	50	25.0%
		Self-employed	40	20.0%
5	Relationship Status	Single	48	24.0%
		Married	51	25.5%
		Separated	43	21.5%
		Divorced	58	29.0%
6	Family Structure	Nuclear family	60	30.0%

	Extended Family	68	34.0%
	Single-parent household	72	36.0%

The age and gender demographic of the study in table 1 explained how population is well-balanced between male and female and between teenage and adult age groups, with 50% males and 50% females and a split between teenagers “aged 13-19 years and adults aged 20+ years”. Education level ranges from middle school (21.5%), high school (23%), undergraduate studies (26%), to postgraduate studies (29.5%). Employment status indicates a varied composition, with 31.5% students, 23.5% employed, 25% unemployed, and 20% self-employed. Relationship status indicates that 24% are single, 25.5% married, 21.5% separated, and 29% divorced. Family structure distribution indicates that 30% are from nuclear families, 34% from extended families, and 36% from single-parent families. This representation of the diverse demographic guarantees a balanced investigation of cognitive dissonance and relationship dynamics among various social and economic strata.

Objective: 1 To examine the impact of internal and personal cognitive dissonance on teenage and adult relationships.

Table 2 Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.160 ^a	.025	.021	10.64406
a. Predictors: (Constant), Internal & Personal				

Table 2 presents the summary statistics for a two-predictor regression model, "Internal" and "Personal." The model produces a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.160, indicating a slight positive connection between the predictors and the DV. An R-squared value of 0.025 signifies that internal and personal characteristics account for just 2.5% of the variance in the DV, suggesting that the model possesses little explanatory capacity. The corrected R-squared of 0.021 is somewhat diminished, accounting for the quantity of predictors in the model. The standard error of the estimate is 10.64406, indicating the average discrepancy between the anticipated and observed values in the model. This model demonstrates inadequate proficiency in reliably predicting the DV based on the given predictors.

Table 3 ANOVA

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	586.572	1	586.572	5.177	.024 ^b
	Residual	22432.608	198	113.296		
	Total	23019.180	199			
a. Dependent Variable: Interpersonal Relationships						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Internal & Personal						

ANOVA table 3 tests whether the overall model of regression for predicting interpersonal relationships is significant or not. “The regression sum of squares is 586.572, with 1 degree of freedom, resulting in a mean square of 586.572”. The F-value of 5.177 and the associated p-value of 0.024 imply that the model is statistically significant at 0.05 level, thus implying that predictors (Internal and Personal) indeed influence interpersonal relationships. The residual sum of squares equals 22,432.608 with 198 degrees of freedom, and the total sum of squares equals 23,019.180. Generally, the findings indicate that the model elucidates a substantial proportion of interpersonal relationship variance.

Table 4 Coefficients

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	90.339	9.641		9.370	.000
	Internal & Personal	.531	.233	.160	2.275	.024
a. Dependent Variable: Interpersonal Relationships						

The coefficients table 4 shows the relationship between the predictors (Internal & Personal) and the dependent variable (Interpersonal Relationships). The constant term has an unstandardized coefficient of 90.339 with a standard error of 9.641, and it is very significant with a “t-value of 9.370 ($p < 0.001$)”. The unstandardized coefficient of the predictor "Internal & Personal" is 0.531, with a standard error of 0.233 and a “standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.160”. The t-value of the predictor is 2.275, & the p-value is 0.024, meaning that it is significant at the 0.05 level. This implies that interpersonal relationships are predicted to increase by 0.531 units for each unit increment in the combined internal and personal factors.

Objective: 2 To evaluate the impact of external and impersonal cognitive dissonance on teenage and adult relationships.

Table 5 Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.139 ^a	.019	.014	10.67697
a. Predictors: (Constant), External & Impersonal				

The model Summary table 5 gives us the statistics of a regression model with two predictor variables: "External" and "Impersonal." The correlation coefficient R is 0.139, showing a poor positive relationship between the predictors and the DV. The value of R-squared is 0.019, which tells us that there is an explainable variance in the dependent variable of only 1.9% by external and impersonal variables, hence very low explanatory power. “The adjusted R-squared of 0.014 is lower, as it shows the number of predictors in the model”. “The standard error of the estimate is 10.67697, which is the average difference between the observed and predicted values”. Generally, this model indicates very little capability for predicting the DV using the provided predictors.

Table 6 ANOVA

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	447.629	1	447.629	3.927	.049 ^b
	Residual	22571.551	198	113.998		
	Total	23019.180	199			
a. Dependent Variable: Interpersonal Relationships						
b. Predictors: (Constant), External & Impersonal						

Table 6 of the ANOVA assesses the significance of the regression model using "External & Impersonal" as a predictor of interpersonal interactions. The regression sum of squares is 447.629 with one "degree of freedom, resulting in a mean square of 447.629". The F-value is 3.927, and the p-value is 0.049, indicating significance at the 0.05 level. This suggests that the model, utilizing external and impersonal factors as predictors, explains a considerable portion of variance in interpersonal interactions. The residual sum of squares is 22,571.551 with 198 degrees of freedom, while the total sum of squares is 23,019.180. Consequently, the model demonstrates statistical significance in interpersonal connections.

Table 7 Coefficients

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	95.888	8.272		11.592	.000
	External & Impersonal	.410	.207	.139	1.982	.049

a. Dependent Variable: Interpersonal Relationships

The table 7 of coefficients indicates the association of the predictor "External & Impersonal" with the "dependent variable DV" "Interpersonal Relationships." The constant has an unstandardized coefficient value of 95.888 and a standard error of 8.272 and is significant with a t of 11.592 ($p < 0.001$). The predictor "External & Impersonal" also has an unstandardized coefficient of 0.410 and a standard error of 0.207, with a "standardized coefficient (Beta)" of 0.139. The t-value for the predictor is 1.982 and the p-value is 0.049, which means that it is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This means that for every one-unit increase in external and impersonal factors, interpersonal relationships are predicted to rise by 0.410 units.

Objective: 4 To provide recommendations for mitigating the negative effects of cognitive dissonance and fostering healthier relationship dynamics.

To mitigate the adverse impacts of cognitive dissonance and promote healthier relationship dynamics, individuals must develop self-awareness and emotional regulation skills. Open communication is needed to enable partners to talk through issues and conflicts positively. Enabling cognitive flexibility—embracing multiple perspectives and adapting beliefs—can reduce inner conflict. Educational programs and counselling services can offer coping skills to manage dissonance constructively. Enhancing social support systems, such as family and peer relationships, develops emotional resilience and stability. Mindfulness exercises and stress management skills also enable people to deal with contradictory thoughts without anxiety. School-based relationship education can be implemented for teens to build strong communication skills right from the start. For employed adults, emotional intelligence-based corporate and community courses can improve interpersonal interactions. With these methods being integrated, individuals can reduce cognitive dissonance, enhance understanding between each other, and create more fulfilling and stable relationships across different social and personal situations.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of the present study support a statistically significant but weak connection between cognitive dissonance (internal-personal and external-impersonal) and intergenerational and interpersonal relationships for teenagers and adults. Both R-squared figures for the models (2.5% internal-personal, 1.9% external-impersonal) suggest that cognitive dissonance does not explain very much variance in relationship processes alone. This concurs with earlier studies by Mangi, et al., (2021), where it was established that although cognitive dissonance affects social interactions, emotional intelligence and communication competencies have a more prevailing effect. Tovmasyan, (2023) also underscored that dissonance effects tend to be moderated by situational and personal factors, which could account for the low explanatory power noted in this research. But the statistical significance ($p < 0.05$) of both models verifies that cognitive dissonance does play a role in relationship outcomes, supporting a study by ADEGOKE, (2019), that unresolved cognitive dissonance may result in long-term interpersonal strain. Future study should investigate other psychological and social moderators to better determine the general impact of cognitive dissonance on relationships.

5. CONCLUSION

The strong but weak effect of cognitive dissonance on relationship dynamics between adolescents and adults, and its implication is that internal and external dissonance affects interpersonal interaction, but other psychological and social processes equally play important roles. It points to the necessity of interventions focusing on self-consciousness, emotional

control, and verbal communication to counteract the damaging effects of cognitive dissonance in relationships.

Yet, the limitations of the study are that it is based on self-reported measures, which could be biased, and that it targets a single urban population, thus not allowing for generalizability. Longitudinal effects, diverse socio-economic populations, and qualitative perspectives should be studied in the future to understand coping better in various relationship contexts. Incorporating cross-cultural comparisons and neurobiological considerations could further contribute to understanding and applying implications of cognitive dissonance in relationships.

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