

**The Lecture Contains:**

- ☰ Understanding aggression and its causes
- ☰ Freudian understanding of aggression
- ☰ A critique of instinct theories of aggression
- ☰ Biological theory of aggression
- ☰ Effect of testosterone
- ☰ Testosterone level increases aggression

### Understanding aggression and its causes

- In day to day life, we come across behaviour of people which we terms as aggressive or hostile. In social psychology, aggression is defined as the intentional infliction of some sort of harm on others. Usually, physical acts of aggression are associated the meanings of aggression but other forms of aggression are also not uncommon. These can be verbal or non-verbal acts of aggression.
- There are many theoretical perspectives on aggression. We shall look into the details of the social and personal causes of it but before that let us take a look at the instinct-related and the biological perspectives.



### Freudian understanding of aggression

- According to Sigmund Freud, there are two types of instinct that a person experiences in life: eros and thanatos. Eros is known as the libidinal, sexual (pleasure-related) or life instinct, whereas thanatos is known as the death instinct. It is thanatos that is associated with aggression as according to Freud, this instinct, in the beginning, is directed towards oneself but gradually, it is aimed at others. If it is not released through some safer symbolic medium such as sports, it may result in the acts of violence towards others.



### A critique of instinct theories of aggression

- The instinct theories by Sigmund Freud, Konard Lorenz and sociobiologists provide a meaningful insight into the causes of aggression. However, these theories have faced a couple of criticisms from the social psychologists.
- The first limitation is that of circular reasoning where the observation of aggressive behaviour (assumed to be present among all the human beings) is taken to a fact as well as the evidence of instinct towards aggression. These theories believe that humans are aggressive because of their instincts but they also provide aggressiveness as the evidence of these instincts.
- The other limitation is the universalistic assumption about aggressiveness among the human population. Evidences from diverse societies and culture and the world data about crime and violence indicate a great deal of variation in aggressive behaviour among human beings.



### Biological theory of aggression

- Serotonin, a neurotransmitter, has been found to be associated with regulating or controlling the aggressive impulses of human beings. Marazzatti et al. (1993) conducted a study to examine this by assessing its level of among suicide attempters and highly aggressive people. His findings revealed a low level of Serotonin in comparison with other non-aggressive people.



### Effect of testosterone

- A hormone, testosterone, is associated with aggressive behaviour. To examine this, in an interesting study, Van Goozen, Frijda and de Poll (1994) conducted a study among the female transsexuals who were getting their sex changed to become male with the help of medical treatment. These female transsexuals were also given a heavy dose of testosterone. The results given in Figure 5.1 revealed an increase in their experience of anger, verbal aggression and physical aggression.

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**Table 5.1:**  
**Testosterone level increases aggression**

