

# ***A Study on the Refusal Behavior of Defending Rights in High School Students' Daily Social Activities and Its Impact***

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**Abstract:** At the senior secondary school level, young people's growing maturity should also lead to an increased awareness of their own rights and interests. However, in reality, many high school students exhibit an inadequate understanding of their rights and are slow to assert themselves when their interests are violated. To thoroughly investigate this phenomenon, this study distributed paper questionnaires among randomly selected participants and conducted a detailed data analysis. After reviewing relevant literature and analysing questionnaire data, the authors concluded that high school students are not accustomed to asserting their rights through refusal. The lack of awareness is attributed to two primary factors: firstly, the impact of students' family education on their willingness to exercise refusal rights, and secondly, the challenge posed by the influence of social circles and moral persuasion. Furthermore, the majority of high school pupils voiced apprehension regarding the possible aftermaths of declining. The data collected by the authors showed that 80% of the students who engaged in refusal behaviours used mild or indirect strategies.

**Keywords:** rights protection, refuse, self-protection

## **1. Introduction**

In the daily lives of high school students, they often encounter requests or demands from various people, and sometimes even from egoists who want to achieve their own ends.

Sometimes there are even egoists who want to achieve their own goals, which can damage of high school students' own interests by various means. According to the authors' in-depth research and personal experience, students are worried about whether to refuse, how to refuse, and the consequences of refusing. However, after searching the relevant literature, the authors found that there is a large gap in scientific research on this important issue. Therefore, "Investigating high school students' rights-based refusal behaviour in everyday social interactions" has become a topic worthy of in-depth investigation.

For the convenience of the reader, a brief list of the main components of the study is provided here. This paper examines:

1. The current situation of students' rights-based refusal behaviour in their everyday social lives. For example, what factors make students aware of refusing to defend their rights; what scenarios make students willing to take the initiative to refuse; the frequency of refusal of different people; the type of refusal behaviour (simple and direct verbal expression, euphemistic expression or disregard,

etc.); as well as the impact of refusal behaviour on the individual's psychology, personal rights and interests, and so on.

2. From the questionnaire survey on the rights-based refusal behaviour of senior high school students, it was concluded that senior high school students are not used to defending their rights and interests through refusal. How to make high school students aware of the benefits of assertive refusal and how to cultivate the habit of assertive refusal among high school students has become an issue worthy of further investigation.

3. Given the academic gaps in various types of research, a relevant sociological investigation of the rights-defending refusal behaviour of high school students in everyday social interaction can provide data support for various types of academic arguments. Reflecting on the consequences of students' everyday refusal behaviour, solving them and proposing also has some practical significance.

## 2. Literature Review

Human emotions are intricate, and proper interpersonal conduct is crucial in life. The seemingly straightforward task of declining someone's request to assert one's rights and interests is daunting for most individuals to execute. Based on the questionnaires conducted, it was discovered that a majority of high school students still face several difficulties when it comes to turning down offers. To investigate the underlying causes of these observations, extensive amounts of relevant data were analysed.

This is not solely due to variations in emotional intelligence and refusal style. It is not unreasonable that many people apprehend that refusing another's request will have emotional repercussions. Evidence has demonstrated that "hurt sentiments, envy, loneliness, shame, guilt, social anxiety, and embarrassment are seven common emotions that surface when people believe their relationship value to others is low or in danger. During rejection experiences, other emotions, like sadness and anger, may also surface, but these are responses to aspects of the circumstance other than poor relational value [1]."

The rejection-sensitive social cognitive model, developed by Downey and Feldman in 1996, is a possible explanation for individuals' diverse reactions. "Individuals who are easily hurt by rejection from others have a tendency to anticipate, recognise, and overreact to it with anxiety. This essay demonstrates how intimate relationships are harmed by this cognitive-affective processing propensity. An operationalization of the anxious-expectations component of rejection sensitivity is presented in Study 1. Research 2 offers empirical proof that individuals who experience anxiety about rejection are more likely to identify deliberate rejection in others' unclear actions [2]." Pietrzak, Downey et al. also point out that "early, protracted, or severe rejection experiences with carers and significant others are the root cause of rejection sensitivity. Children get the ability to expect rejection from close individuals as a result of these experiences, and since these relationships are important, these expectations are emotional-filled [3]."

Currently, scholars both domestically and internationally have undertaken numerous developmental studies on the acceptance and rejection of peers. These studies indicate that the adolescent phase is a time when individuals are exceptionally attuned to peer relationships, and that acceptance or rejection from peers influences the self-esteem, sense of belonging, sense of control, and sense of existence of adolescents. Peer acceptance has a direct impact on the aforementioned aspects of adolescents' lives. One of the most comprehensive studies of data available was conducted by Christina M L Beeson, Heather Brittain et al. They "examined the temporal precedence between perceived peer rejection, rejection sensitivity, depression, and aggression in a sample of 544 adolescents (55.7% girls; Mage = 14.96 years at the first measured time point) assessed yearly from Grade 9 to Grade 12 [4]." The study "provided support for the symptoms-driven and social process models by showing that, at various points during adolescence, violence or sadness preceded feelings

of rejection. In a similar vein, aggressiveness or despair also preceded rejection sensitivity. Our model indicated a bidirectional relationship till late adolescence, since rejection sensitivity also predicted future depression, even though depression started the cascade that led to rejection sensitivity [4].” Sebastian et al. present proof from numerous studies on structural and functional imaging that the brain regions engaged in social cognition undergo developmental changes during adolescence. Writers “examined this quickly developing field of neuroscience and discussed recently developed models of neurocognitive development. These models suggest, among other things, that typical teenage phenomena like being sensitive to peer rejection and susceptible to peer influence are really the result of brain development [5].” Of course, the article also recognises the paucity of experimental behavioural evidence on rejection sensitivity during adolescence.

It has also been shown that “exclusion also increases aggression, and decreases helping behavior toward the excluder [6].” According to a study done by Rajchert J., Żółtak T et al. “Less is known about emotions and behavior after rejection by a friend for someone else [7].” In two experimental studies, it was discovered that “rejection from a closest friend, particularly in comparison, felt more painful than other situations. Additionally, the study demonstrated that, compared to aggressive behaviour amongst strangers, reconnection behaviour was more likely to prevail among individuals in close connections. The multimotive model of rejection is the primary framework in which the results are examined [7]. This is why some individuals are hesitant to decline requests from close friends or loved ones, as they fear potential physical or emotional harm. The fact that there is a greater chance of a violent response to rejection in a tighter relationship just serves to increase this dread. Aggression in response to rejection also depends on a variety of conditions. Aggression, for instance, is more common among those who value the relationship, think the rejection was harsh, and think the relationship is irreparable [8].

In response to these more violent reactions from people, it can be categorised as social ostracism, or more specifically interpersonal exclusion. Jonathan Gerber and Ladd Wheeler conducted a meta-analysis of experimental research on rejection, sampling 88 studies. “The findings are not compatible with a numbing explanation, which holds that rejection results in both physical and emotional numbness, but rather with a needs account, which holds that rejection frustrates fundamental psychological needs. Rejection flattens affect and moderately decreases mood ( $d = -0.50$ ) and self-esteem ( $d = -0.70$ ), but it has little effect on arousal. Rejection frustrates both control ( $d = 1.16$ ) and belonging ( $d = 0.69$ ) [9].” Another study extended “prior studies on implicit ideas of romantic relationships were extended to a broader realm of interpersonal relationships, and the study looked at the psychological effects and sociocultural reasons of growth and destiny beliefs [10].” Experimental conclusions were drawn: “The socio-ecological environment, in particular relational mobility, influenced individual differences in relationship beliefs and rejection sensitivity [10].”

In conclusion, the aforementioned factors influence high school students' psychology and behaviour while declining others. Certain questionnaires' findings align with theories in the literature. For example, it is reasonable for respondents to feel psychological pressure when refusing, which also explains why numerous high school students express fear of hurting others' feelings when declining.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Research Object

The participants were secondary school students from six classes across two schools. Out of the 200 questionnaires completed, 80 respondents identified as male and 120 as female (see Figure 2).

### 3.2. Questionnaire Design

During their time in high school, adolescents typically experience a significant degree of personal growth, becoming increasingly mature and developing a greater awareness of their rights and interests. To explore this topic in more detail, the authors have created a questionnaire that covers a broad range of different scenarios relevant to campus life, including participation in on-campus activities, involvement in extracurricular pursuits, and interactions with teachers and other students (see Table 1). Not only in campus life, but also in the future. When high school students enter society, they are often unwilling to assert their rights because of various factors. This reluctance could lead to greater harm to their interests. After conducting research and analysis, these factors can be specifically categorised into innate and acquired conditions. Inborn traits, such as introversion, good upbringing, a prosperous family background, or ample social resources. Coupled with external factors, such as moral persuasion, advances from the opposite sex, a good reputation among acquaintances, or undue expectations, can influence one's decision to refuse. In practical terms, it is evident that refusal can safeguard one's rights and interests and proficiently resolve various issues. Upholding one's rights is a duty, and declining is the optimal means.

Table 1: Questionnaire List

1	Your gender?
2	Do you ever come across situations in your life where you have to decline?
3	Are you good at politely rejecting people?
4	What have you been told to do since childhood, when met with others' request?
5	Are you afraid to say no to people because you are "embarrassed" or "afraid of damaging the relationship"?
6	Do you point out the bad habits or bad behaviour of your friends and roommates?
7	What are your usual reasons for rejecting people?
8	What is your usual state of mind when rejecting someone?
9	What is the one thing you are most anxious about when you reject someone?
10	From personal experience, when was it harder for you to reject someone?
11	When would you firmly refuse someone's request?
12	Which of the following rejection strategies do you agree with?
13	You want to take part in a particular event at this year's sports meeting, unfortunately it turns out that one of your classmates have also signed up for the same event. There's only one place available, but both of you have the confidence to get a higher score than the other. What would you do?
14	You are making arrangements to go out with your friends. When discussing the timing, it is clear that everyone would prefer to leave a few hours earlier, but you are not available for an earlier time. What would you do?
15	You signed up for an expensive 1-to-1 lessons, after a few lessons you got a closer relationship with the teacher. Each lesson had a fixed time, so after each lesson you arranged other things for yourself. However, one day the teacher asked you if it's possible to adjust your class schedule. What would your response be?

### 3.3. Questionnaire Distribution

The survey was disseminated manually for 24 hours, with a total of 320 copies circulated. 206 questionnaires were retrieved, out of which 6 were deemed invalid, and the remaining 200 were subjected to statistical analysis for research purposes.

### 3.4. Statistical Methods

The responses from the paper questionnaire were inputted into an Excel spreadsheet and subjected to analysis and collation through the use of SPSS.

## 4. Findings and Analysis

The authors group their findings and analyses into three categories, derived from the combined data of the questionnaire and survey content.

The initial questionnaire questions served the purpose of eliciting basic respondent information. Out of the 200 questionnaires collected, 80 were completed by male respondents and 120 by female respondents. Over 70% of the participants reported only rarely encountering situations in their lives that they need to refuse, yet approximately 80% of them feel that they struggle with rejecting people's requests.

### 4.1. Common Factors That Prompt High School Students to Engage in Assertive Refusal Behavior

#### 4.1.1. Innate Factors

As depicted in Figure 1, most high school students have received appropriate education, which promotes a case-by-case approach to agreeing to other people's requests (C). Approximately one in five individuals is taught to accept requests from others (A). This teaching may stem from misinformed teachers and parents, or the children may have overlooked the prerequisites when initially taught.

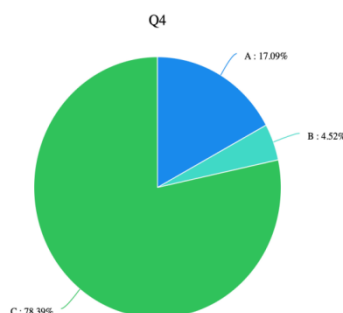


Figure 1: Q4 Pie Chart (Picture credit: Original)

#### 4.1.2. Internal Factors

Many people are reluctant to refuse my requests because of their relationship or facial problems, even if they know that it will harm their own interests. Of course, there are some people who choose to do the same thing when their interests are compromised, but the data show that these people are in the minority.

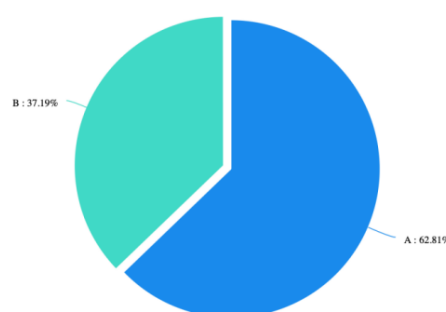


Figure 2: Q5 Pie Chart (Picture credit: Original)

Through data analysis of Q10 (From personal experience, when was it harder for you to reject someone?), it was found that individuals often struggle to overcome psychological barriers, resulting in a reluctance to engage in advocacy refusal behaviour. Some of the most prevalent psychological impediments include the apprehension that denial may affect the relationship and the notion that demands from the opposite gender may appear as an obligatory undertaking among secondary school students (see Table 2).

Table 2: Response to Question 10

Question Numbers	Question items	Response		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Q10 (multiple) Option1	Strong request from others, stalker.	114	22.27%	57.29%
Q10 (multiple) Option2	Thought rejecting will hurt the relationship with others.	138	26.95%	69.35%
Q10 (multiple) Option3	Requests from the opposite sex, too embarrassed to refuse.	42	8.20%	21.11%
Q10 (multiple) Option4	Requests from family members and relatives.	89	17.38%	44.72%
Q10 (multiple) Option5	Requests from friends when you're not available.	73	14.26%	36.68%
Q10 (multiple) Option6	Other.	56	10.94%	28.14%
Total		512	100.00%	257.29%

More than half of the participants selected all the available options for situations in which they would unequivocally decline a request (A. beyond capacity; B. unavailable; C. in a bad mood; D. related to the subject of the request; E. other). The most common refusals were when the request was beyond one's strength or when one did not have the extra time to complete the request, rather than for a more specific reason related to the subject of the request. This indicates that secondary school pupils are indeed capable of refusing, yet often their motives are compulsory rather than voluntary and neither satisfactory nor unsatisfactory (see Table 3).

Table 3: Response to Question 11

	Response		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Q11 (multiple) Option1	160	29.91%	80.4%
Q11 (multiple) Option2	105	19.63%	52.76%
Q11 (multiple) Option3	99	18.5%	49.75%
Q11 (multiple) Option4	111	20.75%	55.78%
Q11 (multiple) Option5	60	11.21%	30.15%
Total	535	100%	268.84%

#### 4.1.3. External Factors

Q6(Do you point out bad habits or bad behaviour of your friends and roommates?) is a question that is close to high school growth. As Figure 3 shows, certain individuals may reproach the unruly conduct of their housemates (A). However, a majority of high school students tend to tolerate the behaviour due to the bond shared with their housemates (C).

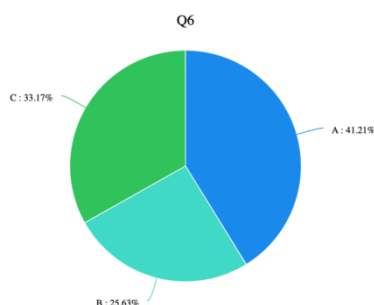


Figure 3: Q6 Pie Chart (Picture credit: Original)

Several external factors can make it challenging for senior secondary school students to decline requests. These may include the persistence of the other party, as well as requests from family and friends. Consequently, high school students often find themselves accepting these requests even when it goes against their own interests and desires.

#### 4.2. Refusal Strategy

Q7.(What are your usual reasons for rejecting people?)is investigating common justifications for refusing requests, almost 50% of those surveyed claimed "I have a lot of work to do" as their excuse. Conversely, only 20% opted for a direct refusal without explanation (see Figure 4).



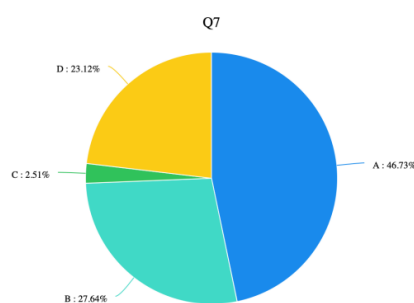


Figure 4: Q7 Pie Chart (Picture credit: Original)

For Q12. (Which of the following rejection strategies do you agree with?), every senior secondary school student selects a unique approach to refusal, which could be connected to their personality and gender. Though, based on the comprehensive data, it is clear that individuals are more prone to decline requests that contradict their interests politely instead of bluntly (see Table 4).

Table 4: Response to Question 12

Question Numbers	Question items	Response		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Q12 Option1 (multiple)	A clear refusal. Don't want to be annoyed.	71	10.69%	35.68%
Q12 Option2 (multiple)	Be gentle when rejecting people and smile to show respect.	130	19.58%	65.33%
Q12 Option3 (multiple)	Statement of reasons or reasons for refusal.	136	20.48%	68.34%
Q12 Option4 (multiple)	Refusal is accompanied by an offer of other help.	108	16.27%	54.27%
Q12 Option5 (multiple)	Use a more subtle language to express refusal.	109	16.42%	54.77%
Q12 Option6 (multiple)	Affirm and then refuse (affirming the substance without agree to help).	48	7.23%	24.12%
Q12 Option7 (multiple)	Clarify the properties of things before considering rejection strategies.	62	9.34%	31.16%
Total		664	100.0%	333.67%

The previous three queries were presented in a contextual format, considering the circumstances prevalent among senior secondary school students, and prompting the participants to determine their



own viable resolutions in practical situations. As an illustration, in Q13, the majority of respondents opted to settle any disputes with their peers through negotiation or reaching a certain level of compromise. When confronted with authority figures such as teachers, high school students typically refrain from openly criticising their behaviour of arbitrarily changing classes and instead quietly put up with it or relay concerns through intermediaries like their parents. Based on the overall data, 60% of respondents preferred a compromise option for each scenario presented, rather than the more assertive alternatives (see Table 5, Figures 5-7).

Table 5: Response to Question 13, 14, 15

Question Numbers	Question Items
Q13	You want to take part in a particular event at this year's sports meeting, unfortunately it turns out that one of your classmates have also signed up for the same event. There's only one place available, but both of you have the confidence to get a higher score than the other. What would you do?
Q14	You are making arrangements to go out with your friends. When discussing the timing, it is clear that everyone would prefer to leave a few hours earlier, but you are not available for an earlier time. What would you do?
Q15	You signed up for an expensive 1-to-1 lessons, after a few lessons you got a closer relationship with the teacher. Each lesson had a fixed time, so after each lesson you arranged other things for yourself. However, one day the teacher asked you if it's possible to adjust your class schedule. What would your response be?

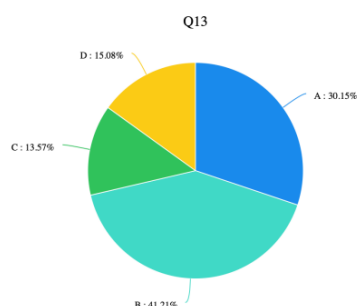


Figure 5: Q13 Pie Chart (Picture credit: Original)

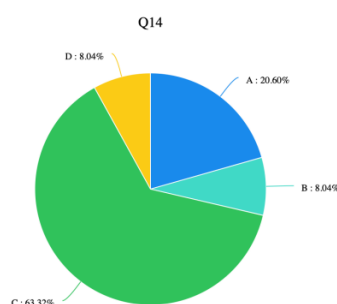


Figure 6: Q14 Pie Chart (Picture credit: Original)

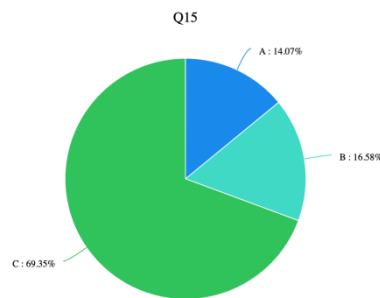


Figure 7: Q15 Pie Chart (Picture credit: Original)

#### 4.3. Different Psychology after Making Rejection

For Q8. (What is your usual state of mind when rejecting someone?) some individuals experience feelings of guilt when declining another person's request, whereas others seem to do so effortlessly (see Figure 8).

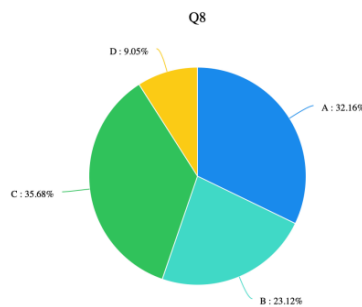


Figure 8: Q8 Pie Chart (Picture credit: Original)

For Q9.(What is the one thing you are most anxious about when you reject someone?), some individuals worry that declining someone's request may negatively impact their relationship with that person, or that their refusal may be misconstrued. However, a few people feel unfazed by these situations and do not experience any psychological distress (see Figure 9).

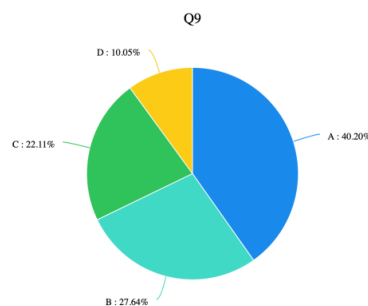


Figure 9: Q9 Pie Chart (Picture credit: Original)

## 5. Conclusion

After analysing questionnaire data, the authors discovered that the majority of senior secondary school students opt for a relatively compromising or mild manner when it comes to assertive refusal behaviours. This conclusion is evident from the feedback collected from all questions posed (Q5-7, Q10-12, Q13-15). Conversely, high school students were proficient in exhibiting the appropriate

affirmative refusal behaviours. However, the data indicates that 60% of the respondents experience psychological burden after refusing, and most of them are concerned about potential damage to the relationship. The questionnaire study identified various factors that impede high school students from refusing assertively. This research can aid in exploring how high school students should utilise refusal behaviours to secure their rights and interests in the future.

The study is limited by the small number of questionnaires and the inadequate size of the audience. Furthermore, the thesis lacks comprehensiveness. The term "rights-based refusal behaviour" is a defined term created by the authors for research purposes, which is not commonly used or easily understood. In addition, the authors encountered difficulty in searching for authoritative literature using the term "rights denial" as a keyword. In British English, the term can only be translated as "rejection", "rejection behaviour", or the colloquial expression "how to decline others." The literature on "rejection behaviour" encompasses an array of fields, including psychology and sociology, and involves topics such as pleasing personality and rejection sensitivity.

Further research suggestions are available. Through an analysis of existing literature and the use of questionnaire surveys and other research methods, a deeper understanding of the distinction between pleasing personalities and rights-based refusals can be gained. This will enable a more pertinent summary of behaviours related to rights-based refusals. Readers can supplement their study with the questionnaire data provided by the authors and conduct further research. For example, what methods can enhance high school students' capacity to firmly decline others when their rights are infringed, and are there additional factors deterring high school students from utilising rejecting behaviour to safeguard their rights/adopt a de-escalating approach to rejecting others?

### Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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