

Self-Esteem, Gender, Family-Communication-Style And Parental Neglect As Predictors Of Aggressive Tendencies among Secondary School Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of self-esteem, gender, family communication style, and Parental neglect on aggressive tendencies among secondary school adolescents' in Esan West Local Government Area of Edo State. A total of two hundred and forty (240) secondary school adolescents drawn from 9 private and 3 public schools in Esan West Local government Area of Edo state participated in the study. One hundred and forty of the participants were males, while one hundred were females. A questionnaire was used in collecting data. The questionnaire consisted of five sections; the demographic variables, Family communication style, Parental neglect, Self-esteem, and Aggressive tendencies. Results of the multiple regression analysis revealed that only self-esteem, independently predict aggressive tendencies. Family communication style, gender and parental neglect were not found to independently predict aggressive tendencies. However, self-esteem, gender, family communication, parental neglect jointly predict aggressive tendencies among secondary school adolescents. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the future of a successful intervention by therapist/service providers for students with aggressive behaviour in Nigeria lies heavily on knowing and identifying the personal and family characteristics of the individual. This no doubt would help the therapists in managing individuals with specific treatment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Aggression in schools intrudes not just on the rights of others but impairs the normal functioning of classroom and hostel life as well as other settings [1]. Aggression refers to behavior between members of the same species that is intended to cause humiliation, pain, or harm. Ferguson and Beaver (2009) defined aggressive behavior as "Behavior which is intended to increase the social dominance of the organism relative to the dominance position of other organisms" [2]. Predatory or defensive behavior between members of different species is not normally considered "aggression." Aggression takes a variety of forms among humans and can be physical, mental, or verbal. Aggression differs from what is commonly called assertiveness, although the terms are often used interchangeably among laypeople, e.g. an aggressive salesperson. Again aggression is a term use by Psychologist to describe any behavior put up by an individual against another with the sole aim of inflicting pain (physical and psychological).

Gleitman, Fridlund and Reisberg (2004) noted that relational aggression focuses on altering social alliances such as trying to harm another's friendship [3]. Physical aggression involves physical abuse of

another person's property, while verbal aggression involves insults, invective and so forth. Ellis (2004) categorise aggression into two, healthy and unhealthy aggression. He described healthy aggression as the aggressiveness that tends to abet the goals of remaining alive; being relatively happy; living successfully in a social group and relating intimately with some selected members of the group [4]. It could also mean decisively, vigorously and persistently going after a goal. On the other hand, he conceptualized unhealthy aggression as the form of aggressiveness which tends to undermine basic human goals. These behaviours are such that are based on what he calls "irrational masturbatory cognitions that block the fulfilling of the laudable values, goals, and aspirations of an individual as well as a group. Whether aggression is manifested by individuals or groups (including nations), it is the most destructive force in social relations and consequently an important social issue.

It's difficult to think about why people intentionally harm other individuals, however, several theories attempt to explain human aggression. Some hypothesize that aggressive behaviour is not simply an innate quality but a part of our personality that is learned. The belief that all humans are instinctively aggressive offers little insight into methods of reducing anti-social behaviour. By looking at how aggression is formed through experience, however, we can make inferences into what types of people are more likely to aggress and the factors that perpetuate an aggressive personality. I believe that aggression is most predominant under 3 conditions: (1) under high levels of frustration (2) when there is a payoff in response to acting out and (3) when it is learned through observation, because the frustration-aggression theory and the social learning theory offer insightful clues into the development of aggression.

There are two broad categories of aggression. These include hostile, affective, or retaliatory aggression and instrumental, predatory, or goal-oriented aggression. Both of these can be classified under Relational aggression. Reactive relational aggression (hostile, affective, retaliatory) is used in response to feeling attacked, threatened, or mad. Usually the person who exhibits this type of aggression feels provoked to do so. Instrumental relational aggression (predatory, goal-oriented) is used in order for an individual to get what they want. Empirical research indicates that there is a critical difference between the two, both psychologically and physiologically.

Taylor, Manganello, Lee, and Rice (2010) postulated that Corporal punishment, such as spanking increases subsequent aggression in children [5]. The Bobo doll experiment was conducted by Albert Bandura in 1961. In this work, Bandura found that children exposed to an aggressive adult model acted more aggressively than those who were exposed to a nonaggressive adult model. This experiment suggests that anyone who comes in contact with and interacts with children can have an impact on the way they react and handle situations [6].

Aggression may result from the early socialization of children. Families play an important role in the socialization of children. Invariably, parental characteristics and imitation of parents by children influence social development in subtle ways. The role of families in socialization is reflected in the literature of youth at risk [7]. This study demonstrates the importance of family processes and family dynamics in promoting and maintaining aggressive behaviours and attitudes, negative feelings of home, serious conflicts with parents and regular quarrels with parents are some of the home based factors reported to constitute risk for adolescent's aggressive behavior.

Bocco (2002), Nwokeroku (2001), and Farrington (1992), examined the association between aggressive behaviours in adolescent and family variables such as social learning, parenting style and exposure to violence [8]-[10]. Bjorkqvist and Osterman (1992) carried out a structural equation analysis examining the interaction between parental behavior, emotional relationship with parents and children's aggressiveness [11]. The findings revealed that a child's emotional relationship with the parent was the strongest single predictor of children's aggressiveness. The emotional climate of the family is determined to a large extent by what happens in the family, for example how family members feel about one another and the way they communicate such feelings affect the emotional climate of the home. In the same vein Imhonde, Aluede and Oboite (2009) found that children who witnessed domestic violence scored high on the aggression scale than those who do not [12].

Neglect of children by their parents is another key factor in family relationship. Parents owe it as a duty to their children to provide them with their developmental needs both physically and psychologically. Failure to do these amounts to neglect and abuse. Saner and Ellickson (1996) found that low parental support and affection predicted persistent hitting and predatory violence in the subjects. The relationship between low parental support and violence was however noted to be stronger in females than males. Research also found that parental victimization of children was significantly associated with their perpetration of violence against their parents and friends [13]. Further analysis using a stepwise multiple regression showed that 39 percent of the variance in the subject's perpetration of violence against parents was accounted for from the four predictors of sibling victimization, parent's victimization, friend's victimization and witnessing parental aggression. Disrupted family status has been found to be predictive of adolescent's aggression. Bane (1976)

found that children from disrupted families show more propensity towards delinquent and maladjustive behavior particularly in schools [14]. Amato (1987) found that children from broken homes where there is only one parent present have less support and more autonomy, more conflict and household responsibility, which influences their behavior negatively [15].

One variable found to have a significant role to play also in adolescent aggressive behavior is self-esteem. Self-esteem could be said to be one's attitude towards oneself along a positive-negative dimension. It could also be seen in the evaluation of self; having high self-esteem means that an individual likes himself or herself. On the other hand having low self-esteem means that an individual feels uncomfortable about himself. Usher (2000) found that low self-esteem is an emotional state that carries discomfort that can develop into behavior problem which includes delinquency, aggressive behavior and so on. He notes however, that the seriousness of the problem depends not only on the nature of adolescent's self-esteem but also on other conditions such as difficult school transition and a troubled family life [16].

Baron and Byrne (2005) found that the relationship between self-esteem and bullying and other aggressive behaviours tend to suggest that low self-esteem results in aggressive behaviours [17]. Bryant (2006) examined the relationship between self-esteem and dimensions of aggression. He collected data from 68 undergraduate students of Missouri Western State University through a survey. He found that self-esteem had a weak relationship with general aggression; as well as with physical aggression but it however showed a strong negative correlation with hostility [18]. Findings in studies of self-esteem have been inconsistent. Boxtel, De-Castro and Goosens (2004) noted that although high levels of aggression have long been assumed to be related to low self-esteem, empirical studies have never demonstrated any relation between low self-esteem and aggressive behavior [19].

One other influence on aggressive tendencies is sex-stereotype. Sex-stereotypes develop out of human values and expectations regarding being male or female. Generally, in our culture it is believed that men are more aggressive than women. Hence, people learn very early about the specific qualities that distinguish one sex from the other [20]. Sex stereotyping tends to make girls to be conformists and boys to be rebellious. However, with more and more advocacy for females getting involved in roles that were hitherto considered to be reserved specifically for the male species, the behavior of girls has changed towards issues such as standing up for their rights. Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson and Zak (1985) found differences in aggression of girls as against boys exposed to family violence. They noted that girls exposed to family violence reported higher rates of depression than boys [21]. Leschied, Cummings, Brunshet, Cunningham and Saunders (2004) reported that boys more than girls engage in physical aggression [22].

Males are historically believed to be generally more physically aggressive than females [23];[24], and men commit the vast majority of murders [25]. This is one of the most robust and reliable behavioral sex differences, and it has been found across many different age groups and cultures. There is evidence that males are quicker to aggression [26] and more likely than females to express their aggression physically [27]. When considering indirect forms of non-violent aggression, such as relational aggression and social rejection, some scientists argue that females can be quite aggressive although female aggression is rarely expressed physically [28];[29].

Although females are less likely to initiate physical violence, they can express aggression by using a variety of non-physical means. Exactly which method women use to express aggression is something that varies from culture to culture. On Bellona Island, a culture based on male dominance and physical violence, women tend to get into conflicts with other women more frequently than with men. When in conflict with males, instead of using physical means, they make up songs mocking the man, which spread across the island and humiliate him. If a woman wanted to kill a man, she would either convince her male relatives to kill him or hire an assassin. Although these two methods involve physical violence, both are forms of indirect aggression, since the aggressor herself avoids getting directly involved or putting herself in immediate physical danger.

The frequency of physical aggression in humans peaks at around 2–3 years of age. It then declines gradually on average [30]. These observations suggest that physical aggression is mostly not a learned behavior and that development provides opportunities for the learning of self-regulation. However, a small subset of children fails to acquire the necessary self-regulatory abilities and tends to show atypical levels of physical aggression across development [31]. These may be at risk for later violent behavior.

Some scholars believe that behaviors like aggression may be partially learned by watching and imitating the behavior of others. Some scholars have concluded that media may have some small effects on aggression [32] although increasing research is now questioning this view [33];[34]. For instance recent long-term outcome study of youth found no long-term relationship between playing violent video game and youth violence or bullying. In addition results from another study suggest there is a smaller effect of violent video games on aggression than has been found with television violence on aggression. This effect is positively associated with type of game violence and negatively related to time spent playing the games. The author

concluded that insufficient evidence exists to link video game violence with aggression.

There has been some links between those prone to violence and their alcohol use. Those who are prone to violence and use alcohol are more likely to carry out violent acts [35]. For example, Ted Bundy, an inherently violent individual, became more violent with his murders after much alcohol abuse [36].

Based on on these findings, this study seeks to examine the role of self-esteem, gender, family communication and parental neglect on aggressive tendencies among secondary school adolescents in Ekpoma. To actualize this we hypothesized that self-esteem, gender, family communication and parental neglect would independently and jointly predict aggressive tendencies among secondary school adolescents.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Participants

A sample size of two hundred and forty (240) secondary school adolescents drawn from 9 private and 3 public schools in Esan West Local government Area of Edo state participated in the study. One hundred and forty of the participants were males constituting 58.33% of the entire sample, while one hundred (41.67%) were females. One hundred and eighty (180) were drawn from private schools constituting (75%) of the entire sample, while sixty (25%) were drawn from the private schools. In drawing the sample, the purposive sampling technique was adopted to select 20 participants' from each of the 12 schools.

Instrument

The instrument use in gathering data for the study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was made up of five sections "A-E". Section 'A': This section of the questionnaire elicited social demographic information about participants. Specifically, information required from the respondents includes their Gender, Age, Name of school and Type of school.

Section 'B' dealt with the family communication style (FCS). It was a ten item scale designed by the author in line with existing literature. The scale tests the communication style of family members. It is measured on a five point, strongly Agree-strongly disagree. A reliability coefficient alpha of 0.72 was obtained for this study.

Section 'C' dealt with Parental neglect. It was a five item scale developed by the author. The scale measures neglect of children from family matters, being denied school fees, not sure of when the next meal will be available and no affection from parents. It has a likert response format of Strongly Agreed (5) to Strongly Disagreed (1). Item analysis for this study, revealed 5 internally consistent items out of the initial twenty. A coefficient alpha of 0.58 and Guttman split half reliability of 0.47 was obtained for this study.

Section 'D' consists of the self-esteem scale adapted by the author from existing literatures. It is a 10 item scale that measure individual self confidence. It utilizes the likert type response format of Very much like me (5) to somewhat unlike me (1). A coefficient alpha of 0.57 was obtained for this study.

Section 'E' consists of the Aggressive tendencies scale. It is a 21-item scales developed by the author in due consultation with existing literatures. The scale consists of three sub scales; Physical aggressive tendencies, Verbal aggressive and Relational aggressive tendencies. Each of the subscale was made up of 7-items. A general coefficient alpha of 0.67 was obtained for the study, while physical aggression had 0.67, verbal aggression 0.74 and relational aggression 0.61.

Procedures

The researchers with the help of a teacher from each of the schools visited, administered copies of the instruments to students. Prior to the administration of the instrument, the researcher duly informed and sought for permission from the principals of each school used. Each of the participants who accept to participate was assured of the confidentiality of their response. It took three weeks to administered and retrieve the questionnaire.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The result revealed a significant joint influence of self-esteem, gender, family communication style and parental neglect on aggressive tendencies among secondary school adolescents [$R^2=0.62$, $F = 4.925$, $P < .001$]. This indicates that self-esteem, gender, family communication style and parental neglect contributed significantly (62%) to aggressive tendencies among secondary school adolescents. In other words self-esteem, gender, family communication style and parental neglect are important in the understanding of aggressive tendencies. The independent contribution showed that self esteem, contributed significantly to aggressive tendencies ($\beta = 0.22$; $t = 3.43$; $P < .05$), this means that students with low self-esteem are more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior than those with high self-esteem. However, family communication style,

gender, locus of control and parental neglect was not found to independently contribute significantly to aggressive tendencies among secondary school students. This means that secondary school students, whether male or female, having good or poor family communication style or highly neglected by parents or not, reported comparable levels of aggressive tendencies. Results are presented on table 1 below.

Table 1: Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the Independent and Joint Influence of Self-esteem, Gender, Family communication style and Parental Neglect on Aggressive Tendencies

Predictor Variables	B	T	P	R	R ²	F	P
Self-Esteem	0.216	3.43	<.001				
Gender	-0.161	2.56	>.05	.278	0.77	4.925	<.001
Family Communication Style	-0.014	0.22	>.05				
Parental Neglect	0.053	0.84	>.05				

The result of the study indicates that there was a significant joint predictive effect of self-esteem, gender, family communication style and parental neglect on aggressive tendencies among secondary school adolescents. Only self-esteem, was found to independently predict aggressive tendencies among secondary school students, gender, family communication style and parental neglect were not found to be independently significant in predicting aggressive tendencies among students.

The findings that family communication style was not significant in predicting aggressive tendencies among secondary school adolescents negate the work of Lambert and Cashwell, 2004; Obogor, 2002; Eze, 1985 & Ayeni, 1983, who found that students from emotionally stable families have lower level of aggressiveness when compared to students from emotionally unstable families [37]-[40]. Heaven (1994) also found that there was a relationship between adolescents' perceptions of the quality of family communication styles and their self reported aggression [41]. Also this finding does not conform to the findings of Okon, Momoh, Imhonde, & Idiakheua, (2011) who found a great influence of family communication style and parental neglect on aggressive tendencies among undergraduates [42]. The differences in findings could have arisen from the method of study and the age and educational background of the sample.

The result that self-esteem contributed to aggressive tendencies was expected. The findings revealed that students with low self-esteem have greater tendency for aggression than students with high self-esteem. The work of Bentiz and Justica (2006); Usher, Zahn-Waxier (2000) and Nunn & Thomas (1999), supported this findings [43];[44]. Specifically, the work of Nunn and Thomas (1999) revealed that their subjects with low self-esteem when provoked by an experimental assistant expressed their anger outwardly [44]. D'Zurilla, Chang and Sanna (2003) also find relationship between low self-esteem and anger [45].

The most astonishing finding was that parental neglect did not independently influence aggression among secondary school students in Nigeria. Though astonishing, knowing that these students are in school and one way or the other they been imparted more on by peers and teacher in getting on with their schooling, parental neglect did not have a role to play. It may have been more pronounced if the sample population were children and adolescents who are out of school. Another reason may be attributed to individual's different coping threshold for endurance, patience and coping with situations.

Aggression was not found to be gender specific in this study. This support the work of Okon, Momoh, Imhonde, & Idiakheua, (2011), that gender did not independently predict aggressive tendencies among Undergraduates [42]. The finding did not support the findings of Leschied, Curnmings, Brunshchet, Cuninghams and Saunders (2004) who found that boys more than girls engage in physical aggression [22]. This finding again may be as a result of the methods employed in this study, as physical, verbal and relative aggression were collapse in one as aggressive tendencies. Viale-Val & Sylvester (1993), in collapsing these variables into one, neither boys nor girls were higher or lower in aggressive tendencies [46]. This means that other factors rather than gender has a greater influence in secondary school adolescents' aggressive tendencies. Richardson and Hammock (2007) found that gender has relatively weak effect on aggressive behaviour [47].

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have a number of policy implications. First that aggressive behaviour has a serious behavioural and physiological problem, which does not only affect the receiver of the aggressive act but the aggressor itself and the society at large. The aggressor tends to be destructive and most often perform poorly in academics and also face with psychological and health problems. Aggressive behaviour among adolescents is therefore an important problem to be taken seriously by the entire society and thus need an urgent attention of the school Counsellors, the Psychologists, school principals, Ministry of Education and teachers.

Policy makers in the country should therefore, embark on policy actions that would facilitate the prevention of aggressive behaviour or discourage aggressive behaviour among secondary school adolescents. School counsellors should be empowered to help individuals who have been identified to be aggressive. Furthermore, there should be a regular series of lectures on the topic Aggressive behaviour and its implications.

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