

## PHYSICAL AND VERBAL AGGRESSION AMONG ADOLESCENT SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN RIVERS STATE OF NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study was conducted to ascertain the prevalence, gender and level of schooling difference in adolescent secondary school students' physical and verbal aggression. The study was conducted in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study, while stratified random sampling technique was used to select 360 adolescent students from three secondary schools to constitute sample for the study. The respondents were selected on the basis of gender and level of schooling. The physical and verbal aggression segments of Buss-Perry Scale were adopted for the study. Six research questions and four hypotheses guided the study. The results were as follows: 20.8% of the secondary school students were physically aggressive, while the prevalence of verbal aggression among the students was 48.3%. Prevalence of physical aggression and verbal aggression were higher among males than females. Prevalence of physical aggression was higher among JSS students (28.3%) than among the SSS students (13.3%), while prevalence of verbal aggression was higher among SSS students (56.7%), than among JSS students (40%). There was significant difference between male and female students physical aggression. There was significant difference between JSS and SSS students physical aggression. Among the recommendations was that Anti-Aggression Club should be established in schools, to monitor, discourage and report aggressive behaviours to school authorities.*

**KEYWORDS:** Aggression, Physical Aggression, Verbal Aggression, Adolescent.

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### INTRODUCTION

Among deviant human behaviours in the society, aggression appears to be the most prevalent and perturbing. This is because aggressive behaviour is displayed everywhere in the society. It starts from the home in the form of physical or verbal aggression between couples, siblings, or parents using it as a corrective measure towards the children. Neighbours often display aggression among themselves due to one misunderstanding or the other. Various meeting places including village meetings are not spared of the exhibition of aggression. In the society hoodlums perpetrate aggressive behaviour in the form of robbery, kidnapping, rape and even murder. Sometimes churches are not even spared of verbal aggression.

Aggressive behaviours appear replete in our secondary schools. According to Shekarey Ladani & Rostami (2013), aggressive behaviours are common in schools. In the same vein, Aluede (2011)

stated that violence in schools was an issue that had become more prominent in the last few years, as news articles about violent deeds within the school setting are now on the increase. Aggression among secondary school students is an issue of concern among stakeholders in education essentially because a school is an institution designed for teaching and learning. Unarguably, teaching and learning can only successfully take place in a conducive environment devoid of intimidation, harassment, insecurity and fear. In secondary schools the use of weapons such as; knives, dagger, bottles, axes and clubs for fighting among students is common especially during inter-class fights and inter-school sports competitions. Many students sustain injuries during such clashes. Physical fight between one student and the other including bullying are frequent occurrences in secondary schools. According to Aluede (2011), bullying, a subcategory of aggressive behaviour, is encountered regularly by children and adolescents in the context of schools worldwide.

### **Concept of Aggression**

Scholars have defined aggression from diverse perspectives. However, there appears to be a consensus that aggression is a deliberate act intended to cause harm to another person. Bernstein, Penner, Clarke-Stewart & Roy (2006:721) defined aggression as “an act that is intended to cause harm to another person”. In his own definition, Colman (2003:18) defined aggression as “a behaviour whose primary or sole purpose or function is to injure physically or psychologically”. Myers (2005) in his own submission defined aggression as “physical or verbal behaviour intended to hurt someone”. Also Brehm, Kassin & Fein (2005:398) saw aggression as behaviour that is intended to harm another individual. Based on the above definitions, aggression refers to any act that hurts, harms or destroys which must be intended or deliberate. This presupposes that injuring someone accidentally or for the person’s wellbeing cannot be construed as aggressive behaviour. For example, a nurse who gave a painful injection to a patient cannot be considered to be aggressive because there was no intent to harm. On the other hand, a student who threw stone at another student but missed, is aggressive because there was intent to harm. Words uttered to offend someone amount to aggressive behaviour. It should be noted that extreme acts of aggression are referred to as violence. It is intended to hurt and kill (Behm, Kassin & Fein 2005; Fraser & Burchell 2001; Myers 2005).

### **TYPES OF AGGRESSION**

**Hostile Aggression:** Hostile aggression takes place when the aggressor’s primary intension is to harm the victim as a result of anger (Onukwufor 2012).

**Instrumental Aggression:** This is aggression that is a means to some other end. Thus instrumental aggression occurs when there is an intent to injure, but the aggression is mainly a means towards achieving some other non-injurious goals such as to win social approval or to get money. Robbery, kidnapping and terrorism are examples of instrumental aggression (Onukwufor 2012).

**Emotional Aggression:** In emotional aggression harm is inflicted for its own sake. Emotional aggression is often impulsive and it is carried out at the heat of the moment. For example, the jealous lover strikes out in rage, while fans of rival soccer teams go at each other with fists and clubs (Brehm, Kassin & Fein 2005).

**Relational Aggression:** Relational aggression is an aspect of indirect aggression, relational aggression is mainly concerned with targeting a person's relationships and social status such as threatening to end a friendship, engaging in gossip, backbiting and trying to get others dislike the target (Brehm, Kassin & Fein 2005).

According to Sameer and Jamia (2007) the behavioural cases related to aggression can be divided into two broad groups namely: Physical and verbal aggression. This postulation is in consonance with Myers definition which sees aggression as "Physical or verbal behaviour intended to hurt someone. This research will therefore be concerned with physical and verbal aggression.

### **Physical Aggression**

Physical aggression is hostile form of aggression. Its aim is to cause bodily damage. It includes kicking, molesting, harassing, biting, pushing, torturing, fighting, bullying, vandalism, destruction and gangsterism, shoving, hair pulling, stabbing, shooting (Sameer & Jamia 2007; National Youth Violence Prevention Research Centre 2002).

### **Concept of Verbal Aggression**

Verbal aggression includes acts such as insulting with bad language, displaying anger, threatening, swearing and being sarcastic all in order to cause emotional and psychological pain (Sameer & Jamia 2007), while National Youth Violence Prevention Research Centre (2002) state that verbal aggression includes such behaviours as threatening, intimidating others and engaging in malicious teasing and name-calling.

### **Concept of Adolescence**

There are essentially three major stages in human post natal development namely childhood, adolescence and adulthood. According to Colman (2003) adolescence is the period of development from the onset of puberty to the attainment of adulthood, beginning with the appearance of secondary sexual characteristics usually between 11 and 13 years of age continuing through the teenage years and terminating legally at the age of majority, usually 18 years of age. Whereas an adolescent is a person in a period of adolescence. Adolescence is essentially characterized by a sudden spurt in physical growth. All adolescents undergo significant changes in size, shape and physical capacities. Many also experience substantial changes in their social lives, reasoning abilities and views of themselves (Bernstein, Penner, Clarke-Stewart & Roy 2006). Based on the age at which adolescence starts and ends, it is apparent that most secondary school students are adolescents.

### **Prevalence of Aggression**

Egbochukwu (2007) cited in Aluede (2011) found that four in every five secondary school participants (78%) reported being bullied and 85% of the respondents admitted bullying others at least once. In a similar study by Aluede and Fajoku cited in Aluede (2011) 62.4% of the respondents have been victims of bullying, while 29.6% indicated that they have bullied others. In a study conducted by Asamu (2006) bullying behaviour was found to be more peculiar to junior secondary school students (22.5%), while 21% of the male students had bullied others. Research conducted by Omoteso (2010) showed that prevalence of aggression among students was 67.2%. Thus 88.1% has been bullied while 33.1% were bullies.

In a national survey of crime and safety in Nigeria by Cleen Foundation (2012), it was discovered that aggressive behaviour was on the increase in Nigeria. For example, physical assault increased by 19% from 2011 to 2012, armed robbery increased from 11% in 2010 to 17% in 2012, domestic violence increased from 17% in 2010 to 31% in 2012.

### **Gender Differences in Aggression**

Research findings tend to suggest that gender variation exist in aggression. According to Myers (2005), in surveys men admit to more physical aggression than the women. Shaffer (2005) stated that data from more than 120 countries around the world revealed that boys and men are more overtly, that is physically and verbally aggressive than girls and women are. In their study, Imhonde, Aluede and Obiote (2009) found that adolescents who witnessed domestic violence scored high on the aggression scale than those who do not witness domestic violence. In their own study, Sameer and Jamia (2007) found that there was no significant difference between male and female students aggression.

### **Level of Schooling Differences in Aggression**

Level of schooling refers to the junior and senior categories of students in Nigerian secondary schools. Junior secondary school (JSS) refers to the first three years in secondary school which is made up of JSS I, JSS II, and JSS III, while senior secondary school (SSS) refers to the last three classes of secondary education in Nigeria. Senior secondary comprises SSS I, SSS II and SSS III.

Previous researchers had found some differences between JSS and SSS students level of aggression. In their research Sameer and Jamia (2007) found that SSS students have greater amount of aggression. In the same vein, Omoteso (2010) found that older students bully younger ones. Similarly, Asamu (2006) observed that a good deal of bullying is carried out by older students toward younger ones. He further highlighted that bullying is peculiar to JSS than SSS. In addition students in middle grades of 6 and 8 reported greater frequency of bullying than the students in grades 9 and 10 in USA (Omoteso 2010).

### **Statement of Problem**

Aggression in Nigeria has been a perturbing issue to all and sundry due to the frightening increase in violent demeanour such as kidnapping of foreigners and prominent citizens including suicidal attacks on government establishments, banks, and churches. Arson, homicide and rape are other dimensions of aggression in Nigeria. Each of the geopolitical areas of the country is affected by a peculiar nature of aggression in the Northern Nigeria, there is the menace of Boko Haram which bombs public and private buildings and send many to their untimely grave through shooting and suicidal attacks. Since the emergence of Boko Haram in 2010, Nigeria has not been the same anymore. People in the country live in constant fear especially in the Northern part of the country. In the North Central Zone, the issue of inter-communal conflict which has claimed many lives is prevalent.

Within the South-South and South-East, there is the problem of vandalization of oil pipelines, rape and kidnapping of not only the expatriates but prominent Nigerians, while in the South Western Nigeria cases of assassination, rape, arson and domestic violence are rampant. Most of

the acts of aggression highlighted above are prevalent in almost all the parts of Nigeria including armed robbery.

Recently, kidnappers committed unimaginable sacrilege by kidnapping a renowned man of God in the person of Most Reverend I.C.O Kartey the Dean of Nigerian Anglican Communion and the Archbishop of the Niger Delta Province. Most of these aggressive behaviours are committed by adolescents and youths who are either still in secondary schools or products of secondary schools. This study therefore was conducted to ascertain the prevalence of physical and verbal aggression among secondary school students based on their gender and level of schooling.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study was conducted to ascertain the prevalence, gender and level of schooling differences in students physical and verbal aggression.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the prevalence of physical aggression among secondary school students in Rivers State?
2. What is the prevalence of verbal aggression among secondary school students in Rivers State?
3. What is the difference between male and female students physical aggression in Rivers State?
4. To what extent is the difference between male and female students verbal aggression?
5. What is the difference between JSS and SSS students physical aggression?
6. To what extent is the difference between JSS and SSS students verbal aggression?

### **Hypotheses**

The study was guided by the following null hypotheses at 0.5 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference between male and female students physical aggression.
2. Significant difference does not exist between male and female students verbal aggression.
3. There is no significant difference between JSS and SSS students' physical aggression.
4. There is no significant difference between JSS and SSS students' verbal aggression.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research design adopted in this study is descriptive survey method. The study was conducted in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The LGA is a semi-urban area in that it has tarred roads and electricity. It shares boundaries with Port-Harcourt local government, Ikwerre and Emohua LGAs. The population of the study was made up of all the adolescent secondary school students in Obio/Akpor local government Area of Rivers State. The sample of the study was made up of 360 secondary school students drawn from three schools through stratified random sampling. Stratified method was adopted because the study investigated gender and level of schooling difference in students' physical and verbal aggression. The sample comprised 180 (50%) male and 180 (50%) female students. In terms of level of schooling the sample was made up of 180 (50%) Senior Secondary School (SSS) and 180 (50%) Junior Secondary School (JSS) students. The number of students drawn from each school was 120. The instrument used for the study was the Buss-Perry (1992) aggression scale. The instrument is made up of 24 items. However, the first 14 items which covered physical aggression (1-9 items) and verbal aggression (10 to 14 items) were adopted for the study. The instrument is standardized and its validity was determined by the authors. The reliability coefficients of the questionnaire for internal consistency were determined. The subscale test-retest for physical aggression was .80 while that of verbal aggression was .72. The instrument's five point scale was

modified to four point scales from extremely uncharacteristic of me 1 point, uncharacteristic of me 2 point, characteristic of me 3 points, and extremely characteristics of me 4 points. Criterion mean was used to determine the prevalence of physical and verbal aggression. The calculated criterion mean for physical aggression was 23 while that of verbal aggression was 13 points. All the respondents who scored 23 and above proved to be physically aggressive while those who scored 13 points and above proved that they were verbally aggressive. Their percentage of the number (N) was calculated to determine the prevalence for the groups. The minimum score for physical aggression was 9, while the maximum score was 36 points on the other hand the minimum score for verbal aggression was 5 points, while the highest was 20 points. Percentage, mean, standard-deviation and t-test were the methods of data analysis adopted for the study.

## RESULTS

The results of the study are presented below.

**Research Question 1:** What is the prevalence of physical aggression among secondary school students in Rivers State of Nigeria?

**Table 1a:** Percentage Analysis of the Prevalence of Physical Aggression among Secondary School Students

Variable	N	Physically Aggressive	Percentage of Physically Aggressive	Non Physically Aggressive	Percentage of Non Physically Aggressive
Students	360	75	20.8	285	79.2

Source: Researcher's field work 2013.

Table 1a above shows that 20.8% (75) of the respondents were found to be physically aggressive.

**Table 1b:** Students Gender and Level of Schooling Prevalence of Physical Aggression

Variables	N	Physically Aggressive	Percentage of Physically Aggressive	Non Physically Aggressive	Percentage of Non Physically Aggressive
Male	180	48	26.7	132	73.3
Female	180	27	15	153	85
Total	360				
SSS	180	24	13.3	156	86.7
JSS	180	51	28.3	129	71.7
Total	360				

Source: Researcher's field work 2013

It is observable from table 1b that the prevalence of male physically aggressive students is 26.7%, while the prevalence of female physically aggressive students is 15%. Also the prevalence of SSS physically aggressive students is 13.3% while that of JSS students is 28.3%.

**Research Question 2:** What is the prevalence of verbal aggression among secondary school students in Rivers State of Nigeria?

Table 2a: Percentage Analysis of the Prevalence of Verbal Aggression among Secondary School Students in Rivers State of Nigeria

Variable	N	Verbally Aggressive	Percentage of Verbally Aggressive	Non Verbally Aggressive	Percentage of Non Verbally Aggressive
Students	360	174	48.3	186	51.7

Source: Researcher's field work 2013

Table 2a above shows that 48.3% of the students were found to be verbally aggressive.

Table 2b: Students' Gender and Level of Schooling Prevalence of Verbal Aggression

Variables	N	Verbally Aggressive	Percentage of Verbally Aggressive	Non Verbally Aggressive	Percentage of Non Verbally Aggressive
Male	180	93	51.7	87	48.3
Female	180	81	45	99	55
Total	360				
SSS	180	102	56.7	78	43.3
JSS	180	72	40	108	60
	360				

Source: Researcher's field work 2013

Table 2b shows that 51.7% of the male students were found to be verbally aggressive, while 45% of the female students were found to be verbally aggressive. On the other hand, 56.7% of the SSS students proved to be verbally aggressive while 40% of the JSS students were found to be verbally aggressive.

**Research Question 3:** What is the difference between male and female students physical aggression?

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference between male and female students physical aggression.

Table 3: A t-test Analysis of Male and Female Students' Physical Aggression

Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	DF	t.cal	t-crit	Result
Male	180	18.4	4.8	358	4.33	1.96	Significant
Female	180	16.06	5.1				

Source: Researcher's field work 2013

Male physical aggression  $\bar{x}$  is 18.4 while that of female is 16.06.

Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value (4.33) is greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at 358 DF and .05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference between male and female students physical aggression.

**Research Question 4:** To what extent is the difference between male and female students verbal aggression?

**Hypothesis 2:** Significant difference does not exist between male and female students' verbal aggression

Table 4: A t-test Analysis of Male and Female Students Verbal Aggression

Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	DF	t.cal	t-crit	Result
Male	180	12.03	3.19	358	2.98	1.96	Significant
Female	180	10.95	3.62				

Source: Researcher's field work 2013

Male verbal aggression mean is 12.03 while that of female is 10.95

The above table 4 shows that the calculated t-value (2.98) is greater than the value of t-critical (1.96) at 358 DF and alpha level of 0.05. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. The result therefore is that there is a significant difference between male and female students verbal aggression.

**Research Question 6:** What is the difference between JSS and SSS students' physical aggression?

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant difference between JSS and SSS students' physical aggression.

Table 5: A t-test Analysis of JSS and SSS Students Physical Aggression

Schooling Level	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	DF	t.cal	t-crit	Result
SSS	180	16.2	4.6	358	4.24	1.96	Significant
JSS	180	18.4	5.2				

Source: Researcher's field work 2013

Table 5 shows that JSS physical aggression mean is 18.4 while SSS mean is 16.2. This shows a mean difference of 2.2. The calculated t-value of (4.24) is greater than the t-critical value (1.96) at alpha level of .05. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference between JSS and SSS students' physical aggression.

**Research Question 6:** To what extent is the difference between JSS and SSS students' verbal aggression?

**Hypothesis 4:** There is no significant difference between JSS and SSS students' verbal aggression.



**Table 6:** A t-test Analysis of the JSS and SSS Students' Verbal Aggression

Schooling Level	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	DF	t.cal	t-crit	Result
JSS	180	11.98	3.33	358	1.23	1.96	Not Significant
SSS	180	11.52	3.7				

Source: Researcher's field work 2013

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Table 6 above shows that the JSS verbal aggression mean is 11.97 while that of SSS students is 11.52. The mean difference between JSS and SSS verbal aggression is 0.45. The table further revealed that the value of t-calculated (1.23) is less than the value of t-critical (1.96) at 358 DF and .05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is, therefore accepted. The result therefore is that there is no significant difference between JSS and SSS Students verbal aggression.

#### Summary of Results

1. It was found that 20.8% of the secondary school students were physically aggressive
- b. Prevalence of male physical aggression was 26.7% while the prevalence of female physical aggression was 15%.
- c. The prevalence of SSS physical aggression was 13.3% while that of JSS student was 28.3%
2. The study showed that 48.3% of the adolescent, students were verbally aggressive.
- b. Prevalence of verbal aggression among male was 51.7%, while verbal aggression prevalence among female was 45%
- c. The prevalence of verbal aggression among SSS students was 56.7% while 40% of the JSS student proved to be verbally aggressive based on their self report.
3. There was significant difference between male and female students physical aggression.
4. There was significant difference between male and female students verbal aggression.
5. There was significant difference between JSS and SSS students physical aggression
6. There was no significant difference between JSS and SSS students verbal aggression.

#### DISCUSSION

Result of this study showed that the prevalence of physical aggression among adolescent secondary school students was 20.8%. In group classification, it was found that physical aggression was more prevalent among male (25.7%) than among female (15%). Physical aggression was found to be more prevalent among Junior Secondary School Students (JSS) (28.3%), than among the senior secondary school (SSS) students (13.3%). The results of the study in this regard are consistent with the findings of previous researchers. Omoteso (2010) found that 46.5% of the students were involved with physical bullying. Also a study with Spanish University Students showed that boys reported more physical aggression and hostility than girls (Ramirez 1991). Myers (2005) found that in surveys, men admitted physical aggression than women. The finding concerning JSS and SSS Students is in agreement with Omoteso (2010) and Asamu (2006) that bullying is peculiar to JSS than to SSS students.

The prevalence of verbal aggression among secondary school students was found to be high. The result showed that 48.3% (174) of the adolescent secondary school students proved to be verbally aggressive. The categorization showed that 51.7% (87) of the male students reported to be verbally aggressive, while 45 % (81) of the female students were found to be verbally aggressive. The prevalence of verbal aggression among senior secondary school students was 56.7% (102), while the prevalence of verbal aggression among JSS students was 40%. The finding of this segment of the study is consistent with Omoteso (2010) who found that 58.2% of students engaged in verbal bullying. The result also corroborates Atkin, Smith, Robertson, Fredin and Wagner (2002) who found that verbal aggression is widespread. The result is also in agreement with a study conducted in Spain, by Ramirez (1993) who found that boys justified verbal aggression more than girls, the result is also consistent with Sameer & Jamia (2007) that senior secondary school students have a greater amount of aggression. However the result is inconsistent with Fares, Ramirez, Cabrera, Lozamo & Salas (2011) who found that there is no difference between sexes in verbal aggression.

Significant difference was found between male and female students' physical aggression. Thus male students were found to be more physically aggressive than female students. This result is consistent with Bernstein, Penner Clark-Stewart and Roy (2006) that boys are more physically active and aggressive than girls. The reason for this result may be due to girl's awareness that they are weaker sex and the need to avoid physical aggression for their safety.

There was significant difference between JSS and SSS students' physical aggression. The JSS students were found to be more physically aggressive than the SSS students. This is in consonance with Asomu (2006) that bullying is peculiar to JSS than to SSS students. However the result is at discord with Sameer and Jamia (2007) who found that senior secondary school students have a greater amount of aggression. The reason for the present result is that human physical aggression decreases with increase in age.

Significant difference was found between male and female students verbal aggression. The male students were found to be more verbally aggressive than the female students. This result was not expected because females appear to be more verbally oriented than the males. The result of this study is in consensus with Harris (1992), Maccoby and Jacklin cited in Shaffer (2005) who stated that data from more than 100 countries reveal that boys and men are more physically and verbally aggressive than girls and women, while Fares, Ramirez, Cabrera, Lozamo and Salas (2011) found no difference between sexes in verbal aggression.

There was no significant difference between JSS and SSS students' verbal aggression. The result was in agreement with Fares, Ramirez, Cabrera, Lazamo and Salas (2011) who found no difference in regard to verbal aggression. Even though there was no significant difference the JSS mean (11.98) was slightly higher than SSS mean (11.52) which showed that younger adolescents are more verbally inclined during disputes.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. In view of the prevalence of physical and verbal aggression among secondary school students, teachers should pay greater attention to the students both in the classroom and at the play ground

where such aggressive behaviours are usually displayed and aggressors should be adequately punished.

2. Formation of anti-aggression club in schools: The club will monitor, discourage and report aggressive behaviours where necessary to teachers, school administrators and the culprits should be adequately punished.
3. Disciplinary committee should be set up in schools to handle problem involving aggressive behaviour, especially physical aggression.
4. A situation where senior students are at liberty to punish junior students should be abolished in schools. This is because most senior students unjustifiably punish their juniors just to show their seniority.
5. Students involve in aggression cases should in addition to other measures be referred to the school counsellor for remediation.
6. Due attention must be given to all reported cases of aggression by school authorities so as to encourage the aggrieved students to report offences against them instead of retaliation.
7. Every school should have a code of conduct document which should be given to every student on admission.

## CONCLUSION

Physical and verbal aggression among secondary school students are very serious problems due to their inherent dangers. Aggression in schools could inhibit students from going to school due to the fear of being intimidated or harmed. Aggression in school can as well hinder students' academic achievement. This is because if students learn with fear due to intimidation and harassment received either in the classroom or outside, their level of concentrations and assimilation may decline and this may result in academic underachievement. It therefore becomes imperative that every necessary measure should be taken so as to eliminate or mitigate aggression in our secondary schools.

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