

CHILD ABUSE AS A CORRELATE OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT: *This study was carried out to examine the relationship between child abuse and aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Ekiti State, Nigeria. A descriptive research design of survey type was adopted for the study. The population for this study comprised all public secondary school students in Ekiti State. The sample consisted of 200 students drawn from five secondary schools through simple random sampling. A self- designed questionnaire tagged “Child Abuse and Behavioural Problems Questionnaire” (CABPQ) was used to collect data. Expert judgments were used to ensure face and content validity. Test-retest method was used to determine the reliability and a reliability coefficient of 0.70 was obtained. Data collected were analysed by using frequency counts and percentages for descriptive analysis. The hypothesis was tested by using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between child abuse and aggressive behaviour among the students. Based on this finding, it was recommended among others, that policy makers in the country should embark on policy actions that would facilitate the prevention of aggressive behaviour and that there should be a regular series of lectures for the students on the topic “Aggressive behaviours and its implications”. Also, it was recommended that regular talks should be given to parents on proper ways of treating one’s child, during Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meetings.*

Keywords: Child Abuse, Aggressive Behaviour, Maltreatment, Parents, Family.

INTRODUCTION

Aggressive behaviour is a behaviour that causes physical or emotional harm to others, or threatens to. It can range from verbal abuse to the destruction of a victim’s personal property. People with aggressive behaviour tend to be irritable, impulsive, and restless. Aggressive behaviour is intentional, meaning it is done on purpose, violates social norms, and causes a breakdown in a relationship. Emotional problems are the most common cause of aggressive behaviour. Occasional outbursts of aggression are common and even normal. Aggressive behaviour is a problem because it occurs frequently or in a pattern. Generally speaking, aggressive behaviour stems from an inability to control behaviour or from a misunderstanding of what behaviour are appropriate.

According to Wikipedia (2015), aggression is overt, often harmful, social interaction with the intention of inflicting damage or other unpleasantness upon another individual. It is virtually universal behaviour among animals. It may occur either in retaliation or without provocation. In humans, frustration due to blocked goals can cause aggression. Submissiveness may be viewed as the opposite of aggressiveness. Aggression is an action carried out by an individual with the intention to damage, destroy or cause injury or harm or anxiety to others or even to oneself or the devastation of one’s property or that of another person (Nnachi, 2003). Sunmi (1980) described it as an intention to do harm, an overt act which is either physical, verbal or

psychological intent to injure or harm a target. Aggressive behaviour includes but not limited to biting, yelling, name calling, fighting, temper tantrums, threatening to more serious types like bullying, assault, mugging, arson, kidnapping, deviant negativism and murder among others (Madu, 2002; Haggai, 2003). Imhonde (2014) referred to aggression as behaviour between members of the same species that is intended to cause humiliation, pain, or harm. In their own way, Ferguson and Beaver (2009) defined aggressive behaviour as “behaviour which is intended to increase the social dominance of the organism relative to the dominant position of other organism”. Predatory or defensive behaviour between members of different species is not normally considered aggression.

Aggressive behaviour can be reactive or in retaliation. It can also be proactive as an attempt to provoke a victim. It can be either overt or secretive. Aggressive behaviour can also be self-directed (Gabbey, 2013). Aggression takes a variety of forms among humans; it could be physical, mental or verbal. The term “aggression” has been variously defined and tends to generate some amount of confusion. This is because the concept of aggression differs depending on one’s perspective and orientation. For instance, a layman may say that a person is an aggressive salesperson in a complimentary way to mean that the salesperson does not take no for an answer and would keep at a person until he gets what he wants. It excludes every intent of the salesperson to cause any physical or psychological harm to his customers. Aggression differs from what is commonly called assertiveness, although the terms are often used interchangeably among laypeople. Aggression is a term used by psychologists to describe any behaviour put up by an individual against another with the sole aim of inflicting pain (physical or psychological).

In definitions commonly employed in the social sciences and behavioural sciences, aggression is a response by an individual that delivers something unpleasant to another person (Buss, 1961). Some definitions include that the individual must intend to harm another person (Anderson and Bushman, 2002). Social psychologists, however, define aggression as any behaviour that is intended to inflict harm, psychological or physical on another organism or object. Feldman (1994) defined aggression as the verbal or physical attack on another person to destroy or humiliate him/her to satisfy a purpose. From this definition, one infers that there is always a crucial element in aggression which is intent. A person must have intended to harm another for the act to be classified as aggressive. Therefore, if a person accidentally hits another fellow with a hockey stick while playing, it is not considered aggressive until during an argument, he is hit with the same stick. From the definition also it follows that harm intended must not only be physical but also verbal.

Aggression and violence can be found anywhere humans gather-in the home (domestic violence), in the workplace, in schools and on campus, and on the road, (Wood and Wood, 2002). Aggression among youths generally, and those in educational institutions in particular, has become a behaviour pattern which has degenerated into a topical global issue. The aggressive trend portrays man’s negative side of social development. In some occasions, properties worth millions of naira have been vandalized and razed down by aggressive youths. At its lower level, acts such as name calling, slugging others, destroying other people’s properties, fagging and bullying are rampant. Aggression, an excessive conduct disorder behaviour is fast becoming a defining characteristic among learners in our institutions of learning (Nnodum, Agbaenyi and Ugwuegbulam, 2014). Referencing media reports, Nnachi (2003) availed that evidence of its high prevalence in recent times is both directly and indirectly felt in almost all communities and institutions of learning in the country.

In recent times, it is common to hear complaint of students' behavioural problems and persistent cases of indiscipline in some secondary schools across Nigeria. This may be the reason why the course towards amelioration of cases of students' behavioural problems has been re-echoed in national seminars and conferences. There are reported cases of wanton destruction of properties and the likes, by students. Many teachers have been beaten up by their students, principals have been chased out of their offices by rioting students. Also, beating of younger students seems to be the culture in some students.

Various types of aggression are displayed by these students. Reactive aggression is hostile and impulsive behaviour in response to frustration or a perceived threat while proactive aggression involves commission of aversive acts that are often unprovoked and directed toward possessing objects or controlling others (Dodge and Cole, 1987). Aggression has been variously classified. Sunni (1990) dually categorized it as reactive and instrumental aggression. Hilgard, Atkinson and Atkinson (1991) classed it as direct and displaced aggression. On their own part, Gleitman, Fridlund and Reisberg (2004) noted that relational aggression focuses on altering social alliances such as trying to harm another's friendship. Physical aggression involves physical abuse of another person's property, while verbal aggression involves insults, invective and so on. 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.

According to Gabbey (2013), a variety of factors can influence aggressive behaviour. These include family structure, relationship with others, work or school environment, societal or socio-economic factors, individual characteristics, health conditions, psychiatric issues and life experiences. Imhonde (2014) made inferences into what types of people are more likely to exhibit aggression and the factors that perpetuate an aggressive personality. He stated that aggression is most predominant under three condition; under high levels of frustration; when there is a payoff in response to acting out and when it is learnt through observation.

One could see that a child can be frustrated in relationships within the family. A child can also imbibe aggression if it is a common occurrence in the home. A child that is abused can become aggressive in his/her relationship with others. In fact, most of the aforementioned behavioural problems could be direct consequences of child abuse.

Child abuse can be physical, sexual or emotional. Not providing for a child's need is also a form of abuse. Child abuse and neglect are integral part of modern world including African society and Nigeria in particular. Corporal punishment is widely prescribed and given in the African Society for disobedience in a child. This includes brutal caning, and in some communities in Nigeria, painful punishment such as rubbing pepper into the genital region are practised. So also, there exist child labour such as domestic services, shop attendance, catering service, head-loading factory workers, hawking and prostitution. All these are exploitative in nature. For example, in south Eastern Nigeria, children are annually taken to some parts of Nigeria and Africa to work as house helps and factory workers. All these constitute a great hazard to child's future development.

Bates, Pettit and Dodge (1990) in their study found that physical abuse of young children at home is more powerful by far than any other home influence on the development of aggressive behaviour. Most abused children suffer greater emotional damage than physical damage. An abused child may become depressed. He or she may become withdrawn, think of suicide or become violent. An abused child may use drugs or alcohol, try to run away or abuse others. The immediate markers of abuse and neglect are obvious - bruised and battered bodies and in

its most severe form, death. However, research has shown that child abuse and neglect - collectively known as "child maltreatment" are also associated with a broad array or less visible negative outcomes that may emerge at different stages of children's lives. (Chalk, Gibbons and Scarupa, 2002). According to Kaufman and Cicchetti (1989) and Maxfield and Widom (1996), antisocial behaviour and physical aggression are two of the most consistent outcomes of physical child abuse. In the same vein, Aber, Allen, Carlson and Cicchetti (1990) reported that maltreatment can have a negative impact on children's emotional stability and self-regulation, problem solving skills, and the ability to cope with or adapt to new or stressful situations.

In a study conducted by Hussey (2008), it was found that children who are neglected before their second birthday display higher levels of aggressive behaviours between ages 4 and 8. He said that a child was considered neglected if his parents or caregivers did not provide adequate supervision or failed to meet the child's minimum physical needs for food, clothing and shelter. He reported that aggression exhibited during this period includes arguing, cruelty to others, destruction of property, disobedience, threatening people and fighting or physically attacking others. Alink, Cicchetti, Kim and Rogosch (2011) in their own study, stated that if children has been maltreated, then they showed higher levels of disruptive/aggressive behaviour. Bates, Pettit and Dodge (1990) found that abuse predicts aggressiveness even after you control for factors such as social class, family disruption and exposure to spousal violence. They reiterated that youngsters who has been abused were more apt to respond to all provocative social situations aggressively.

Connor, Doerfler, Volungis, Steigard and Melloni (2003) investigated the relationship between a lifetime history of traumatic stress, defined as physical and / or sexual abuse; and aggression and psychosocial functioning. They found out that clinically referred abused children scored higher on measures of aggression and significantly higher on measures of reactive aggression and verbal aggression than clinically referred none abused children. Also, Kolla, Malcolm, Attard, Arenovich, Blackwood and Hodgins (2013) conducted a study where they documented experiences of childhood maltreatment among violent offenders with antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) and determined whether maltreatment is associated with proactive and reactive aggression. They found that childhood physical abuse was associated with reactive aggression, even among violent offenders. This finding suggests a strong influence of childhood physical abuse on the development of reactive aggression that persists over the lifespan.

Associations between maltreatment in childhood and criminality in adolescence and adulthood have been found in many studies, despite considerable variability in the definitions and severity of maltreatment (Maughan and Moore, 2010). The cycle of violence - the experience of childhood physical abuse and violent behaviour in adulthood - has often been reported (Widom, 1989). However, other prospective, longitudinal studies have failed to detect an association between maltreatment in childhood and subsequent criminal offending (Thornberg, Ireland and Smith, 2001; and Yun, Ball and Lim, 2011).

The consequences of childhood physical abuse differ depending on the severity, duration, and age of the child. According to Ford, Fraleigh and Connor (2010), several studies suggest that childhood physical abuse, but not other forms of maltreatment, is a risk factor for reactive aggression among children and adolescents. Convicted violent offenders and men who engage in violence toward their intimate partners report high levels of childhood physical abuse (Lansford, Miller-Johnson and Berlin, 2007). The results of the above aforementioned studies have thrown more light on the concept of child abuse. These results are important for the

appreciation of the problem of abused children in Nigeria. It should be noted that a child needs a healthy dose of love, care, discipline, nurturing and support so that he or she will develop into a confident well-adjusted adult.

Statement of the Problem

There are reported cases of aggression in Nigeria schools. 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. The consequences of aggression are numerous and has implications for the aggressors, their victims, the school, family communities, educational system and the society at large. It affects the overall development of the individual by affecting their mental health, academic achievement and growth, psychosocial functioning and adjustment among others (Asuquo, 2000; and Ezeyi, 2003).

Carson and Butcher (1992) also remarked that aggression affects both personal and social functions of the aggressors and their victims, as it intrudes on their rights and impairs normal classroom functioning and other social issues. The victims of aggression usually experience long-lasting social, emotional, psychological and academic problems ranging from resentment, truancy, fear, bitterness, depression, lack of concentration, low self-esteem, academic failure, change of school to even dropping out of school in some severe cases (Haggai, 2003).

One of the causes of aggression in children and adolescents could be traced to the home. It is observed that most of the damage that occurs to a man's psychological life during that occur to a man's psychological life during the course of this earthly existence are pretty well associated with the factors arising from childhood experiences; especially those that arise from errors in parenting and relationship with significant others in the family. To this end, the researchers set out to investigate the relationship between child abuse and aggression among secondary school students in Nigeria and in Ekiti State in particular.

Hypothesis

Specifically, the following hypothesis was tested.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between child abuse and aggression among public secondary school students in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used descriptive research design of survey type. The plan of study involved the use of questionnaire to collect data in order to test the hypothesis generated in the study. The target population for this study was made up of public secondary school students in Ekiti State Nigeria who were in Senior Secondary School.

Simple random sampling was used to draw out the sample. Five schools were chosen randomly from both rural and urban areas. In each school, 40 students of both sexes were selected, making a total of 200 students.

A self-designed questionnaire called "Child Abuse and Behavioural Problems Questionnaire" (CABPQ) was used for the study. Part A was designed to collect information on background

characteristics of respondents. Part B consisted 22 items on child abuse and behavioural problems including aggression.

The methods used in validating the instrument were face and content validity. Experts judgments were used to determine both. A reliability test was also carried out on 20 Senior Secondary School students who were not part of the sample. The scores obtained from two administrations of the questionnaire at two weeks interval were correlated by using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 was obtained. The instrument was found to be suitable for data collection.

Copies of the questionnaire were distributed by the researchers and school counsellors to a sample of 200 students in five schools. Researchers' presence during administration enhanced better understanding of the items in the instrument. Copies of the questionnaire were collected back immediately after completion by the researchers.

The data generated were analysed by using frequency counts and percentages for descriptive analysis; and by using Pearson Product Moment correlation for testing of hypothesis. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Descriptive Analysis

Question: Will there be any relationship between child abuse and aggressive behaviour among secondary school students?

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of child abuse and aggression among secondary school students.

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	U	MEAN	SD
1	A child who experiences brutal corporal punishment will be aggressive in nature	61 (30.5)	81 (40.5)	30 (15.0)	21 (1.05)	7 (3.6)	3.84	1.08
2	Lack of parental care leads to aggression	72 (36.0)	84 (42.0)	22 (11.0)	17 (8.5)	5 (2.5)	4.01	1.02
3	Exposure to violent environment leads to aggressive behaviour	63 (31.5)	95 (47.5)	24 (12.0)	10 (5.0)	8 (4.0)	3.97	1.00
4	Making a child to work for money in order to meet family's needs leads to aggression	35 (17.5)	63 (31.5)	61 (30.5)	33 (16.5)	8 (4.0)	3.42	1.08
5	Experience of sexual abuse leads to exhibition of aggressive behaviour	74 (37.0)	65 (32.5)	40 (20.0)	16 (8.0)	5 (2.5)	3.92	1.06

*Percentage responses are enclosed in parenthesis

Table 1 showed that majority of students agreed that experience of brutal corporal punishment would make a child to become aggressive (71%), lack of parental care would lead to aggression (78%), exposure to violent environment would lead to aggressive behaviour (79%), making a child to work for money in order to meet family's needs leads to aggression (49%), and experience of sexual abuse would lead to exhibition of aggressive behaviour (69.5%).

Using a cutoff mean of 3.00 for the 5-point rating scale, all item responses had mean scores above 3.00. The responses indicated that child abuse is related to exhibition of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students.

Testing Hypothesis

H0: There is no significant relationship between child abuse and aggression among public secondary school students in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

In testing this hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation of child abuse and aggressive behaviour among Secondary school students.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	rcal	rtable
Child Abuse	200	41.57	5.98	0.841*	0.195
Aggressive Behaviour	200	19.18	2.87		

*P<0.05

Table 2 showed that the mean total score of child abuse is 41.57 with standard deviation of 5.98 while the mean total score of aggressive behaviour is 19.18 with standard deviation of 2.87. Since r-calculated (0.841) is greater than r-table (0.195), the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between child abuse and aggressive behaviour among public secondary school in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

The result of this hypothesis which shows a significant relationship between child abuse and aggression is not surprising. An abused child who does not experience love and affection at home would not know how to relate to other people in love. This result is in line with the findings of Bates, Pettit and Dodge (1990); and Maxfield and Widom (1996) which say that antisocial behaviour and physical aggression are of two of the most consistent outcomes of physical child abuse. The result also conforms with the findings of Aber, Allen, Carlson and Cicchetti (1990) which says that maltreatment can have a negative impact on children's emotional stability and self-regulation, problem solving skills, and the ability to cope with or adapt to new or stressful situations. It also agrees with the report of Alink, Cicchetti, Kim and Rogosch (2011) which says that if children had been maltreated, then they showed higher levels of disruptive/aggressive behaviour.

On the other hand, this result of significant positive relationship between child abuse and aggression contradicts the findings of Thornberry, Ireland and Smith (2001); and Yun, Ball and Lim (2011) which failed to detect an association between maltreatment in childhood and subsequent criminal offending.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Evidence from this study has led the researchers to conclude that aggressive behaviour is one of the negative outcomes of child abuse. The finding of this study has a number of policy implications. Aggressive behaviour is an important problem to be taken seriously by the entire society and thus, needs 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 students. School counsellors should be empowered to help individuals who have been identified to be aggressive. Furthermore, there should be a regular series of lectures for the students on the topic 'Aggressive behaviour and its implications'. Also, regular talks on proper ways of treating one's child should be given to parents during Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meetings.

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