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**Psychological Determinants of Aggressive
Behaviour among Adolescents in Secondary Schools
in Anambra State**

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Abstract

The study was aimed at investigating the psychological determinants of aggressive behaviour among adolescents in secondary schools in Awka South L.G.A. of Anambra State. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. Expost facto design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all the public secondary school students totalling 13296 while the sample size was 450 students drawn through simple random sampling technique. The instruments for data collection were aggressive behaviour scale (ABAS) and Psychological Assessment Scale (PAQ). The instruments were validated by experts in Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability coefficient of 0.84 was obtained for ABAS while reliability coefficients of 0.74, 0.85 and 0.88 were obtained for sections B, C and D of the PAQ respectively. The data obtained were analyzed using mean scores to answer the research questions and t-test to test the null hypotheses. The result obtained showed that stress significantly influenced aggressive behaviour among secondary school adolescents while self-concept and locus of control did not significantly influence aggressive behaviour among them. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were made which include that counselling psychologists should counsel the students to reduce or eliminate aggressive behaviour among them.

Key: Psychological, Aggression, Adolescents, Behaviour

Introduction

Manifestation of aggressive behaviour is one of the major problems associated with adolescents in the secondary schools today. The pervading incidence of aggressive behaviour among secondary school students is alarming. Gould's study, cited in Eziyi and Odoemelam, (2005:17) revealed that aggressive behaviour is "one of the most frustrating issues parents and teachers face, and that is normal in young children who do not yet understand that it is wrong and more importantly why it is wrong". Obviously, some adolescents in the

secondary schools exhibit one form of aggressive behaviour or the other. This act of aggression against persons or property takes place very frequently in the secondary schools in Nigeria today.

Aggressive behaviour has been defined by experts in educational psychology in various ways. Wood, Wood and Boyd (2005:579) defined it as “the intentional infliction of physical or psychological harm on others”. From this definition, it is obvious that for an act to be classified as an aggressive behaviour, the infliction of physical or psychological harm on others has to be intentional. Hence, unintended and accidental infliction of harm on others may not be rightly classified as aggressive behaviour.

Aggressive behaviour among adolescents in secondary schools takes various forms. It can be physical or verbal. Physical aggression refers to inflicting injury on others, while verbal aggression entails using words that are intended to harm another person. Aggressive behaviour among adolescents in secondary schools sometimes takes the form of an over-reaction, screaming, shouting or becoming very agitated as a result of a very minor setback (Eziyi & Odoemelam, 2005). It also takes the form of quarrelling, insubordination, bullying, revolution, destruction of school property, protest, angry shouts of rebellion etc.

Adolescents in the secondary schools tend to be aggressive for different reasons. Some exhibit aggressive behaviours in order to gain an elevation of status (Wikipedia, 2010), while some others exhibit aggressive behaviours in order to be feared by other students. Furthermore, some adolescents in the secondary school are aggressive to maintain their membership to a certain peer group, while some are aggressive to show superiority and to be respected by other students. Aggressive behaviour may also be as a result of innate drives, frustration or as a form of defence mechanism when the ego is threatened (Freud, cited in Carson, Butcher & Mineka, 2000).

Bandura in Wood, Wood and Boyd (2005) informs that people learn to behave aggressively by observing aggressive models. Many works have been done on the influence of biological factors on aggressive

behaviour. Obviously, there are other determinants of aggressive behaviours among adolescents which have not been given sufficient and adequate attention in the academic arena. Among such determinants are issues relating to psychological dimension of human life. Obviously, most aggressive behaviours exhibited by adolescents in the secondary schools today are determined by psychological factors. Hence, the researchers wish in this work to investigate the psychological determinants of aggressive behaviour among adolescents in secondary schools in Awka South Local Government Area.

Psychological factors, with regard to aggressive behaviour and other abnormal behaviours, are “those developmental influences that may handicap a person psychologically, making him or her less resourceful in coping with events”. (Carson, Butcher & Mineka, 2000:122). Adolescents in the secondary schools have to interact with the school environment, administrators, teachers and fellow students. Also, they have to interact with parents and siblings at home. Negative or adverse experiences they encounter in the course of these interactions could trigger negative psychological feelings which may lead to aggressive behaviours in the schools. Hence, this research work aims at investigating the determining effect of psychological factors such as stress, self-concept and locus of control on aggressive behaviours among adolescents in Awka-South Local government Area.

Stress is one of the variables to be studied in this work. Wood, Wood and Boyd (2005) defined stress as the physiological and psychological response to a condition that threatens or challenges an individual and requires some form of adaptation or adjustment. Stress is often associated with aggression and other maladaptive behaviours.

Also, self-concept and Locus of control are other variables to be investigated in this study. Self-concept refers to “how an individual sees himself in terms of ability, interest, aptitude and other personality characteristics” (Nwankwo, 2007:178). One may have either high or low self-concept and this has serious effect on one’s behaviour. Locus of control is a personality trait that governs individuals to attribute

their failures or successes to either internal or external factors (Nwankwo, 2007). One can have either internal or external locus of control and this has serious impact on one's behaviour.

These variables may have serious effects on aggressiveness among adolescents. Hence, it will be revealing to investigate in this study the influence of these psychological variables on aggressive behaviour among adolescent in secondary schools.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to identify the psychological determinants of aggressive behaviour among adolescents in secondary schools in Awka-South Local Government Area. The specific objectives of the study include:

- 1) To identify the influence of stress on aggressive behaviour among adolescents in secondary schools.
- 2) To find out whether self-concept influences aggressive behaviour among secondary school adolescents.
- 3) To find out whether locus of control influences aggressive behaviour among secondary school adolescents.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

- 1) To what extent does stress influence aggressive behaviour among adolescents in secondary schools?
- 2) To what extent does self-concept influence aggressive behaviour among secondary school adolescents?
- 3) To what extent does locus of control influence aggressive behaviour among secondary school adolescents?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses, which were tested at 0.05 level of significance, were formulated to guide the study.

- 1) Stress does not significantly influence aggressive behaviour among secondary schools adolescents.
- 2) There is no significant difference in aggressive behaviour of adolescents with high and low self-concepts as measured by their mean scores.
- 3) There is no significant difference in aggressive behaviour of adolescents with internal and external locus of control as measured by their mean scores.

Methodology

The study adopted ex post facto design. The study was carried out in Awka South Local Government of Anambra State. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study consists of all the students in the 38 public secondary schools in the area of the study. Statistical data collected from the statistical department of the Ministry of Education Anambra State put the number of the population at 13, 296. Simple random sampling technique was used to draw the 10 schools and 450 senior secondary school students that constituted the sample for the study.

The instruments for data collection were Aggressive Behaviour Assessments Scale (ABAS) and Psychological Assessment Scale (PAQ). The ABAS was a 20 item questionnaire designed by the researchers to assess the aggressive behaviour of the respondents while the PAQ was a 40 item questionnaire designed to assess the psychological variables as they affect the respondents.

The items in ABAS were developed in the pattern of a 4 point instruments with the following response options; always, sometimes, rarely and never while the PAQ items were developed in a 5 point instrument with the response options; All the time, Most of the time, Some of the time, Not very often and Not at all. These response options were weighted 4, 3, 2, 1 and 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively. The instruments were validated by experts in Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Measurement and Evaluation based on

face and content validity. The reliability of the instruments were established through Cronbach Alpha technique and the correlation coefficient obtained were 0.84 for ABAS and 0.74; 0.85 and 0.88 for sections B, C and D of PAQ. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The results of the data analysis were presented in the tables below. Data analysis was done in relation to the research questions and hypotheses.

Table 1: Summary of z-test on the influence of stress on aggressive behaviour of secondary school adolescents

Stress level	(No)	Mean (X)	Standard deviation	Df	Z-cal value	Z-crit value	Result
High	249	41.46	6.39				
Vs				448	5.59	1.960	Significant
Low	201	38.33	5.376				

Data of table 1 indicated that the calculated z-value of 5.59 is greater than the critical value of z (1.960) at 448 degree of freedom and .05 level of significant. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. The result is that stress significantly influences aggressive behaviour among secondary school adolescents in favour of high stress level. Also students with high stress level had a mean score of 41.46 which is higher than the mean score of students with low stress level 38.33. Therefore, secondary school adolescents with high stress level are significantly more aggressive than their counterparts with low stress level.

Table 2: Summary of z-test comparison of mean scores of secondary school adolescents with high and low self-concepts on aggressive behaviour.

Self concept	(No)	Mean (X)	Standard deviation	Df	Z-cal value	Z-crit value	Result
Low self concept	190	40.62	6.69				
Vs				448	1.64	1.960	Not Significant
High self concept	260	39.65	5.46				

Data of table 2 indicated that the calculated z-value of 1.64 is less than the critical value of z (i.e. 1.960) at 448 degree of freedom and .05 level of significance for a two-tailed test. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. The result is that self-concept does not significantly influence aggressive behaviour among adolescents. However, students with low self-concept scored higher in aggression with the mean score of 40.62 than those with high self-concept with the mean score of 39.65. This shows that students with low self-concept tend to be more aggressive than those with high self-concept but the difference in aggression is insignificant.

Table 3: Summary of z-test comparison of mean scores of secondary school adolescents with internal and external locus of control on aggression

Locus of control	(No)	Mean (X)	Standard deviation	Df	Z-cal value	Z-crit value	Result
External	178	40.58	6.16				
Vs				448	5.59	1.960	Not Significant
Internal	272	39.72	5.81				

Data of table 3 indicated that the calculated z-value of 1.51 is less than the critical value of z (1.960) at 448 degree of freedom and .05 level

of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. The result is that locus of control does not significantly influence aggressive behaviour among secondary school adolescents. However, the mean score on aggression (40.58) of adolescents with external locus of control is higher than that of those with internal locus of control (39.72). This shows that adolescents with external locus of control tend to be more aggressive than those with internal locus of control, but the difference in aggression is not significant.

Discussion of Results

Result in table 1 showed that the calculated z-value of 5.59 is greater than the critical value of z (1.960) at 448 degree of freedom and .05 level of significance. This result led to the rejection of the null hypothesis which states that stress does not significantly influence aggressive behaviour among secondary school adolescents. This study discovered that stress has significant influence on aggressive behaviour of secondary school adolescents. Students with high stress level were found to be significantly more aggressive than their counterparts with low stress level. The findings of this study agreed with the view of Grohol (2004) that stress and aggression feed off each other, thus contributing to a circle of violence that can be tragic. Also, Kruk and Meelis (2004) discovered that under stress, human beings are often quick to lash out and find it hard to cool down. The result of this study is not surprising because when one is challenged or threatened, the stress hormones seem to prepare the physiology of the body to fight. Secondary school adolescents with high stress level are more aggressive than their counterparts with low stress level, while those with low stress level are calmer and less aggressive.

The result in table 2 on self-concept indicated that the calculated z-value of 1.64 is less than the critical value of z (1.960) at 448 degree of freedom and .05 level of significance for a two-tailed test. Thus, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference in aggressive behaviour of adolescents with high and low self-concepts as measured by their mean scores, is accepted. This means that self-concept does not significantly influence aggressive behaviour among

secondary school adolescents. The findings of this study partly agrees with the study carried out by Nwaogu (2007) who discovered that there was no significant relationship between self-concept and delinquency among secondary school students in Imo State. However, the present study is a bit different from that of Nwaogu (2007) because it focused on aggression which is only an aspect of delinquency and also it was carried out in Awka – South L.G.A. of Anambra State. This present study discovered that the way secondary school adolescents perceived, thought or evaluated themselves did not have a significant influence on their aggressive behaviour. On the contrary, the findings of this study contradicted the study carried out by Baumeister, Smart and Boden in Bryant (2010) who discovered that self regard is linked to violence and found out that murderers, rapists, wife beaters, and aggressive nations are marked by strongly held views of their own superiority. The present study is different from that of Baumeister, Smart and Boden in Bryant (2010) because this present study focused on secondary school adolescents and not on murderers and rapists.

Though the influence of self-concept on aggressive behaviour of secondary school adolescents did not appear significant in this study, it does not mean that self-concept has no effect on aggression at all. Secondary school adolescents with low self-concept scored higher in aggression with the mean score of 40.62 than those with high self-concept with the mean score of 39.65. This shows that adolescents with low self-concept tend to be more aggressive than their counterparts with high self-concept. However, the influence self-concept had on aggressive behaviour of secondary school adolescents is insignificant.

The result of the study on table 3 revealed that locus of control did not have significant influence on aggressive behaviour of secondary school adolescents. The calculated z-value of 1.51 obtained which was less than the critical value of z (1.960) at 448 degree of freedom and .05 level of significance, showing that aggression among secondary school adolescents did not depend on their locus of control. The

findings of this study is a bit different from that of Osterman, Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, Capara and Pastorelli (1997) who in the study carried out in Finland discovered that physical, verbal and indirect aggression correlated significantly with external locus of control in the case of boys, but did not significantly correlate in the case of girls. The present study is different because it did not study physical, verbal and indirect aggression separately and besides, it was carried out in Awka-South L.G.A. of Anambra State, not in Finland. Also, this present study was carried out among adolescents and not among children; and did not compare boys and girls on the correlation of physical, verbal and indirect aggression with external locus of control. However, the findings of this study agreed with the study carried out by Nwaogu (2007) who discovered that there was no significant relationship between locus of control and delinquency among secondary school students in Imo State. Though the influence of locus of control on aggressive behaviour of secondary school adolescents was insignificant in this study, adolescents with external locus of control scored higher in aggression than those with internal locus of control. Those with external locus of control had the mean score of 0.58 in aggression, while those with internal locus of control had the mean score of 39.72 in aggression. This agrees with the view of Kegan and Havermann (1980) who stated that people with external locus of control are readily influenced by the opinion of others and are inclined to be reckless. Secondary school adolescents with external locus of control tend to blame and attack others for their failures, and thus tend to be more aggressive.

Conclusion

From the results of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- Stress has significant influence on aggressive behaviour of secondary school students.
- Self-concept and locus of control have no significant influence on aggressive behaviour of secondary school students.

- Knowledge of psychological variables that influence aggression is of great importance to the students, teachers, counselling psychologists and so on.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers made the following recommendations.

- The counselling psychologist should assist the students to adjust to challenging and threatening situations and reduce high stress level which may expose them to aggression.
- Parents should try their best not to expose the students to unnecessary stress situations.
- Teachers should stop calling the students names that will make them develop low self concept but rather they should be properly corrected when they misbehave.
- Both teachers and counselling psychologists should assist students not to attribute the causes of their failures to external factors but rather to themselves. This will motivate them to work harder and reduce their tendency for aggression.

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