

Clinical study of aggression among high school students



Psychiatry

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ABSTRACT

Aggression affects academic learning and emotional development, which damages the personality and precipitates extreme violence, if not controlled early. The study aimed to determine the magnitude, types and the influence of age and sex on aggressive behaviour. It was a cross-sectional study of 400 participants who were asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire (Buss and Perry; Direct and Indirect aggression scales). Overall, 62.49% of the students were physically aggressive, 61.25% were verbally aggressive. Verbal aggression was higher in girls (70%) than in boys (57.5%), direct active aggression was more common among boys (48%) than girls (33%). Physical aggression was found more in boys while verbal aggression was found more in girls. As the age/class increased, physical direct active aggression decreased while physical indirect passive and verbal indirect passive aggression increased.

Introduction

Aggression is an extremely complex concept and very hard to define. It could be classified either by its intention or its orientation, we can find instrumental aggression (orientated towards accomplishing specific goal), constructive aggression (orientated towards construction), destructive aggression (orientated towards destruction, harm) and frustration aggression (orientated towards releasing energy or frustration). It also includes expression, factors influencing it and intention to cause harm to another or self.

Aggression is a stable personal trait lasting from childhood, through adolescence to adulthood⁽¹⁾. As proven in many studies, it is a stable trait and when observed in children, it is a good predictor of later adult criminal behaviour^(2,3,4). Therefore, the only sensible thing is to try to influence it in childhood by identifying more aggressive individuals and trying to modify their aggression. That is especially important since aggression predicts future social, psychological, behavioural and educational problems^(5,6). Since school is an important factor in the process of socialization, the aim is to find correlates of aggression in school and try to influence aggression through them.

Persistent aggression is related to a variety of negative outcomes in adulthood, including low socioeconomic status and unemployment, criminal behaviour and social isolation. The great heterogeneity of aggressive behaviour still hampers our understanding of causal mechanisms. Still, over the past years, the identification of specific subtypes of aggression has opened possibilities for new and individualized treatment approaches. This article provides information on different subtypes of aggression in adolescents.

The types of aggression were categorized as per Baron 1977^(7,8) which were as follows:

1. Physical-active-direct: Stabbing, punching or hitting.
2. Physical-active-indirect: Setting a booby trap/hiring an assassin to hurt another person.
3. Physical-passive-direct: Physically preventing another person from obtaining a desired goal or performing a desired act (as in a sit-in demonstration).

4. Physical-passive-indirect: Refusing to perform necessary tasks (e.g., refusing to move during a sit-in).

5. Verbal-active-direct: Insulting or derogating another person.

6. Verbal-active-indirect: Spreading malicious rumors or gossip about another person.

7. Verbal-passive-direct: Refusing to speak to another person, to answer questions.

8. Verbal-passive-indirect: Failing to make specific verbal comments (e.g., failing to speak up in another person's defense when he or she is unfairly criticized).

Materials and Methods

Study design and setting

A cross-sectional study was conducted in Vidyanagar High School, Ahmedabad.

Study participants

Four hundred students (200 boys and 200 girls) of classes 9 to 12 participated in the study.

Period of data collection

August 2016.

Method of data collection

Students were asked to complete a pre-designed, anonymous, self-administered questionnaire indicating types of aggressive behaviour by them in the previous month. Students were also asked to assess themselves with reference to statements indicating verbal/physical aggression as per the Buss and Perry aggression questionnaire⁽⁹⁾ and direct and indirect aggression scales⁽¹⁰⁾

Statistical tests

Z-test and Chi-square test for trend were applied.

Results

Table 1: Physical aggression

	Boys(n=200)		Girls(n=200)		Total (n=400)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Direct Active	108	59	59	29.5	167	41.75
Indirect Active	51	25.5	32	16	83	20.75
Direct Passive	45	22.5	39	19.5	84	21
Indirect Passive	42	21	17	8.5	59	14.75
Any type	148	73.8	102	51.1	250	62.5

Table 1 shows overall, 62.5% of the children were physically aggressive in the previous month: Boys 73.8%, girls 51.1% (p = 0.001). Physical direct active aggression was more common among boys (59%) than among girls (29.5%) (p = 0.002). Physical indirect active (p = 0.001), direct passive (p = 0.074) and indirect passive aggression (p = 0.004) were also more common among boys than among girls(25.5% vs 16%, 22.5% vs 19.5% and 21% vs 8.5% respectively). Any type of physical aggression was high among boys than among girls(73.8 vs 51.1%).

Table 2: Verbal aggression

	Boys(n=200)		Girls(n=200)		Total (n=400)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Direct Active	96	48	66	33	162	40.5%
Indirect Active	74	37	62	31	136	34%
Direct Passive	82	41	57	28.5	139	34.75%
Indirect Passive	40	20	93	46.5	133	33.25%
Any type	105	52.5	140	70	245	61.25

Table 2 shows overall, 61.25% of the children had been verbally aggressive in the previous month. Although any type of verbal aggression was higher in girls (70%) than in boys (57.5%) (p = 0.04), direct active aggression was more common among boys (48%) than among girls (33%) (p = 0.29). Verbal indirect active aggression and direct passive aggression was more common among boys than among girls(37% vs 31% and 41% vs 28.5% respectively) and passive aggression was more common among girls than among boys, especially verbal indirect passive aggression, which was 46.5% among girls compared with 20% among boys (p=0.00).

Table 3: Aggression level based on class

Class	Physical direct active		Verbal direct active		Physical indirect passive		Verbal direct passive	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
9th(n=100)	52	52	41	41	2	2	5	5
10th(n=100)	43	43	38	38	12	12	7	7
11th(n=100)	28	28	33	33	18	18	21	21
12th(n=100)	18	18	21	21	26	26	35	35

Table 3 shows as the age increased, the physical and verbal direct aggression decreased and the indirect and passive aggression increased. 26 and 35 percent respectively of physical indirect and verbal direct aggression levels were found among 12th std students while the same was 2 and 5 percent respectively among 9th standard

students.

DISCUSSION

In our study, 62.49% of the children (73.8% boys, 51.1% girls) were physically aggressive and 61.25% were verbally aggressive (girls 70%, boys 52.5%) in the previous month. The aggressive behavior tends to appear in the order of: (1) direct physical, (2) direct verbal, and (3) direct passive aggression (both verbal and physical). Verbal indirect passive aggression was more common among girls (46.5%) than among boys (20%) (P =0.00). Boys more frequently resorted to physical aggression, (73.8%) as compared to girls.(51.1) (P =0.001) These finding in our study are similar to other studies in the literature like dutt et al⁽¹¹⁾ and Bjorket et al.^(12,13)

According to Dutt et al,overall, 66.5% of the children were physically aggressive in the previous month: Boys 75.8%, girls 58.2% (p= 0.001); 56.8% were verbally aggressive: Boys 55.2%, girls 61% (p = 0.97). Verbal indirect passive aggression was more common among girls (55.3%) than among boys (22.3%).Most studies in India have found males to be more aggressive than females^(14,15)

As the age increased, the physical and verbal direct aggression decreased and the indirect and passive aggression increased. 26 and 35 percent respectively of physical indirect and verbal direct aggression levels were found among 12th standard students while the same was 2 and 5 percent respectively among 9th standard students. The prevalence of physical and verbal direct active aggression was found to be 52 and 41 percent among 9th standard students and 18 and 21 percent among 12th standard students.

According to Dutt et al⁽¹¹⁾, with increasing age/class, there was a statistically significant decrease in physical direct active aggression, while verbal direct active aggression remained much the same. Physical and verbal indirect passive aggression increased with age/class, although the increase was not statistically significant.

In a study conducted in Uttar Pradesh, India,⁽¹⁶⁾ the proportion of physical aggression among boys, from the age of 8 years to the age of 11 years, decreased from 45% to 35%, while verbal aggression increased from 30% to 34% and indirect aggression increased from 25% to 31%. In the same study, from the age of 8 years to the age of 11 years for girls, the proportion of physical aggression decreased from 38% and 31%, verbal aggression increased from 32% to 34% and indirect aggression increased from 30% to 35%.

Absence of verbal skills and skills for manipulation in young children leads them to use gross physical direct active aggressive techniques such as hitting, kicking or pushing. As age increases, their verbal ability develops and verbal threats, shouting and other forms of direct verbal active aggression are added. With development of social intelligence and skills, manipulative behavior in terms of indirect and passive aggression appears where the aggression is hidden and less risky.

As social intelligence develops earlier in girls, indirect aggression is likely to appear earlier among them. Also, because of other reasons like physical weakness, females are likely to use indirect rather than direct forms of aggression. In our study, girls were found to resort to more of verbal aggression (70 vs 52.5) and indirect and passive aggression than boys.

Conclusion

Aggressive behavior was common among both boys and girls, starting as direct physical aggression (more among boys) and gradually changing to more of verbal and then to indirect and passive aggression (starting earlier in girls).further research need to be done on the factors associated and reasons for aggression. Life skills education and counseling strategies should be advocated to channelize aggressive behaviors into healthier behaviors.

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