

Relationship between Peer Group Influence and Aggressive Behaviour among Senior Secondary School Students

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Abstract: *The study explored the relationship between peer group influence and aggressive behaviour among senior secondary school students. The study has two purposes, two research questions and two hypotheses. The population was five thousand seven hundred (5,700) students from two hundred and twenty two (222) public schools. Two hundred students formed the sample. They were drawn from ten co-educational schools through simple random sampling. The Aggressive questionnaire (AQ) and Peer Group Influence Questionnaire were instruments used for the study. They were validated by research experts. The reliability of the instruments were 0.72 for PGIQ and 0.78 for AQ. The instruments were administered to the students by the researcher. The research questions were answered using mean scores while the hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The result revealed there was a positive relationship between peer group influence and aggressive behaviour of male and female secondary school students. It was recommended among other things that parents should advise their children on the kind of friends they keep.*

Keywords: *Aggressive behaviour, Peer group.*

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I. Introduction

Aggression is an overt behaviour exhibited by an individual with the intention to inflict pain on another person. It is therefore a hostile, purposely unfriendly attitude which deliberately tries to make another person feel intimidated or threatened (Steinberg, 2010). It can be a response to stimuli, or frustration or “the fulfilling of a socially learned role requirement” (Bandura 2004: 23). It includes all behaviours that result in both physical and psychological harm to oneself and others (Berkowitz, 1993). Based on the above definitions aggression can be said to be an individual response that consciously or unconsciously delivers something unpleasant to another person. The interaction is focused on harming another person physically, mentally, verbally and emotionally. Physically, aggression entails kicking, hitting, fighting, spitting, pinching, biting, throwing objects or using weapons (Durbury, 2002); verbally, aggression entails calling names, nicknames, and spreading rumors that lead to social stigmatization and exclusion (Farel, Bobrowski & Bobrowski, 2006). Intimidating or verbal berating are examples of mental and emotional aggression.

Aggression can be classified as impulsive, (Onukwufor, 2012) or instrumental (Berk 1999), emotional and relational (Brehm, Kassin & Fein, 2005). Impulsive aggression is the type intended to harm a person psychologically or physically. Instrumental aggression is a proactive, carefully planned, purposeful harm against others. Emotional aggression is carried out at the heat of the moment while relational aggression appears to be an indirect aggression targeted at a person’s relationship and social status in order to stop friendship. The focus of the present study is on physical and verbal aggression (harassing, molesting, stabbing, shooting, fighting, bullying, pushing, threatening, calling names, intimidating words and engaging in malicious teasing). The development of the above aggressive behaviours is most pronounced during adolescence as a result of peer influence (Thornberry, & Krohn 1997).

Adolescents are prone to various forms of behaviour disorders. Some of them have a pattern of hostile aggressive or disruptive behaviour while relating with the peers. They sometimes engage in kicking, fighting, and violent interactions in the school. Such behavioural problems can negatively affect their academic performance in school; it can also lead to increased risk of injury, and social deprivation. While experiencing such problems adolescents prefer turning to friends who appear to understand and sympathize with them for advice. While experimenting the new ideas with peers they seem to have less fear of being ridiculed (Vishala, 2008).

The peer group is a social group of people with similar interest, social status, and age group. They can comprehend new skills, defend themselves in any attack and solve problems in a social context (Barbour, Barbour & Scully, 2008). They have less supervision as they discuss about school, career, sex and interpersonal

relationship with their groups, hence their influence on behaviour gradually becomes more dominant than parental influence (Steinberg, 2010).

Some peers appear to often feel frustrated. Such frustration might account for why they change their behaviours to match that of their friends. Behaviours like smoking, fighting, sexual and drug abuse, stealing, hitting and biting, if not properly handled, have negative influences on the tone of the school and can cause a breakdown of relationship with other peers and the school society (Berger, 2012). When a student develops high level of aggressive behaviour chances exist that the student might affiliate with aggressive peers.

Many theories of aggression, example, instinct theory, drive, evolutionary and social learning theories explain individual aggressive behaviours. The instinct theory (Uda, 2017) holds that aggression stem from innate fighting with instinct which is spontaneously and continuously transferred within a person (Peterson and Davies, 2005); the drive theory holds that aggression is an impulse created by an innate need which was rooted in external factors. The evolution theory by Charles Darwin states that aggression is determined by evolution in humans through adaptive behaviours that help the survival of humanity. The social learning theory holds that aggression is acquired through direct experience or observation. (Bandura, 2004).

Aggressive behaviours have multidimensional causes. There are social factors which centre on exposure to violence through mass media, socio-economic pressure, and frustration, uncomfortable home environment among others. Recent researches (Uda, 2017) have revealed that biological factors (internal stimuli) cause aggressive behaviours. These factors are brain dysfunction (Poor functioning of the frontal and temporal regions of the brain), birth complications, serotonin, nutrition deficiency, and genetics. Nelson (2006) also indicated that genetics, stimulus and situational factors, stress, drug use, molecular biology are some of the causes of aggressive behaviours. The negative life events adolescents experience, lower perceived family and teacher support further lead to aggressive behaviours.

In some cultures male aggression is more pronounced than female aggression. However, low financial budget for researches, attitudes towards female aggressive behaviour, and the presence of patriarchal opinion in the societal institutions especially in undeveloped countries have made the study of peer group influence and aggressive behaviour in females to appear no longer required. Crick and Nelson (2002) noted that as boys mature they use direct aggression while girls use indirect aggression (calculated acts like gossiping, teasing and spreading rumors). Fanel, Meyer, Sullivan and Kung (2003) revealed lack of agreement as to whether males expressed aggressive behaviour more than females. However, Ortega and Monks, (2005) discovered that male and female students often resort to direct aggression (use of physical acts of kicking, hitting and pushing) and rarely make use of indirect or relational aggression,. What appears to be certain is that mild and moderate rate of aggressive acts are expressed by both males and females.

Some strategies have been employed by the school to curb aggressive behaviours. Some of them include the use of discipline and rules, social skill training, the use of security apparatus, policies, anger coping programmes and parental monitoring. Others include the school, climate-oriented strategies whereby the classroom environment, interaction between students and teachers, and among students themselves, interaction between the parents and the school help to determine students attitude, beliefs, feelings about school rules and norms, especially in relation to resolving interpersonal conflict (Cook, Murphy & Hunt, 2000).

The extent of aggressive behaviours evidenced among the students has become issues of concern by teachers and parents because male and female students are all involved. This is more especially pronounced when senior students are given posts as school projects. Flogging, picking pin, frog jump, slapping, hitting, kicking, pulling the ears including other verbal aggressive acts are rampant among the students. Some of the above aggressive acts appear to be acquired from their peer group through interacting and observing the peers. Consequent on the above aggressive behaviours, some students drop out of public schools and enroll in private schools. Notwithstanding the use of different strategies to stamp out aggressive acts, aggressive behaviours still persist among students. It is not however certain the extent to which the peer group influence relate to aggressive behaviours. The problem of the study therefore is, what is the relationship between peer group influence and aggressive behaviours among secondary school students.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between peer group influence and aggressive behaviours among male students?
2. What is the relationship between peer group influence and aggressive behaviour among female students?

Two hypotheses were tested. They are:

1. There is no significant relationship between peer group influence and aggressive behaviours among male students.
2. There is no significant relationship between peer group influence and aggressive behaviours among female students.

The design adopted for the study was co-relational research design. The area of the study was Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State. The State is located in the south Eastern part of Nigeria. It is bounded in the North by Benue State, in the North East by Enugu, in the South East by Abia and Cross River in

the East. The Zone has four Local Government Areas. The inhabitants of the Zone are mostly farmers, traders and civil servants. The population of the study was 5, 700 senior secondary school students in 222 public secondary schools in the zone. Out of the above number 1,992 were males while 3, 708 were females. Multistage sampling procedure was adopted. Ten co-education schools and 200 students were sampled for the study. The schools were stratified, according to Local Government Areas. In three Local Government Areas four co-educational schools were sampled purposively while in one Local Government Area six co-educational schools were sampled. This is because the Local Government Area has more number of schools than the other three Local Government Areas. From each of the co-education schools 20 students in senior secondary school class II (SSS II) were sampled for the study. The small number of students sampled was because of the cultural and social homogeneity of the population of study (Uda, 2017).

Two Instruments were used for the study. They are the Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) and Peer Group influence questionnaire (PGIQ). The AQ was adapted for the present study while the PGIQ was adopted. The AQ was developed by Buss and Warren (2000) and has 34 items in a 5 point scale. It covers physical aggression, verbal aggression, Anger, hostility and indirect aggression. The PGIA was developed by Clasen and Brown (1985). It has 22 item statements in pairs. Each item is scored from -3 to +3 thus “no influence as zero, 3 = a lot influence from peers; 2 = some what, bit of influence; 1 = little, little influence from peers and 0 = no influence. In addition, -1 little, friends do not encourage you to do something, -2 = somewhat, -3 = a lot. The response pattern for AQ was Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree while the response pattern for PGIQ was, A lot, somewhat, little, and no influence.

The instruments were originally validated for construct and content validity; Tojib & Sugianto 2000). In the present study the items were validated for grammatical errors and ambiguity of words by three experts, two from educational psychology, and one from measurement and evaluation.

The original reliability index for AQ was .38 while that of PGIQ was .70. The reliability for the present study was tested for internal consistency with an index of 0.72 for PGIQ and 0.78 for AQ. Three research assistants helped to administer the instruments. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) was used to answer the research questions while the hypotheses were analyzed using t-test

II. Results

The results of the study are presented in the tables below according to the research questions and the hypotheses tested.

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between peer group influence and aggressive behaviour among male students?

Table 1: Relationship between Peer Influence and Aggressive Behaviour among Male Students

Computed r	r ²	Adjusted r ²	Standard error
0.9311	0.86698	0.86562	3.58833

The Table above revealed the index of the relationship between peer group influence and aggressive behaviour among male SSS students to be 0.93. The coefficient of determination (r²) was 0.86698. It means that approximately 87% of aggressive behaviour of male students is attributable to peer group influence.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between peer group influence and aggressive behaviour among female secondary school students?

Table 2: Relationship between Peer Group Influence and Aggressive Behaviour of Female Secondary School Students

Computed r	r ²	Adjusted r ²	Standard error
0.9621	.92565	0.92489	3.11662

Table 2 above showed that the computed r was 0.96 indicating high positive relationship between peer group and aggressive behaviour among female students. The coefficient of determination (r²) was 0.92565 meaning that approximately 93% of aggressive behaviour of female students could be attributed to the peer group influence.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between peer group influence and aggressive behaviour among male students.

Table 3: t-test Significance of relationship between Peer Group Influence and Aggressive Behaviour among Male Students

Computed r	r ²	Adjusted r	Std error	Beta	t	sig of t
0.9311	0.86698	0.86562	3.58833	0.909086	25.273	0.0000

The above table revealed that the alpha level 0.05 is less than computed significance of t value (25.273). Based on that the null hypothesis is rejected. It means there is a significant relationship between PGI and aggressive behaviour among male students.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between peer group influence and aggressive behaviour among female students.

Table 4: t-test Significance of relationship between Peer Group Influence and Aggressive Behaviour among Female Students

Computed r	r ²	Adjusted r ²	Standard	Beta	T	T probability
0.9621	0.92565	0.92489	2.61162	1.021204	34.930	0.0000

The above table reveals that t-value is 34.930 while the t-probability value at 0.05 is 0.0000. Since the calculated t-value is greater than the t-probability value (0.0000) the null hypothesis is rejected. It means there is a significant relationship between peer group influence and aggressive behaviour among female students.

III. Discussion of Findings

The result in table 1 revealed that the coefficient of determination (r^2) was 0.86698. it means 87% of aggressive behaviours among male secondary school students can be attributed to peer group influence. Hypothesis 1 table 3 sought to know whether a significant relationship exists between peer group influence and aggressive behaviours among male secondary school students. Data on table 3 revealed that the table value was less than the t-calculated, it means there is a significant relationship between peer group influence and aggressive behaviour among male students. The result reveals that male students who relate with aggressive peers will learn to be aggressive. It follows that aggressive behaviours could stem from the interaction with peers who can be easily provoked and find it difficult to control their temper. The acts of slapping, kicking, hitting, pushing and other acts of aggression among male students are therefore influenced by their peers. Bandura (2004) had earlier discovered that aggressive behaviours are acquired through direct experiences or observation of other peers behaviours. Snyder, Schrep, Ferman and Patterson (2005) while supporting Bandura’s ideas discovered that threatening and fighting among some male students are consequent on the degree of interaction (time) existing between the male students and the deviant peers. The result of the present study therefore lend additional evidence of peer group influence on aggressive behaviour among male students.

Research, question 2, table 2 revealed that the coefficient of determination (r^2) was 0.92565. It means that approximately 93% of aggressive behaviours of female students could be attributed to their peer group influence. Moreover, hypothesis 2 table 4 showed that the t-value is 34. 930 while t probability at an alpha level of 0.05 was 0.0000. Since the t probability value is less than the calculated r the null hypothesis is rejected. A significant relationship therefore exist between peer group influence and aggressive behaviour among female students. Aggressive behaviour in females could be learnt from some peers who are unable to cope with parental expectations, or peers who are frustrated or who feel depressed. Because the peers are less supervised by parents their influence on behaviours gradually become more dominant than parental influence (Sternberg, 2010). The result of the present study therefore reveal that females like males indulge in aggressive behaviours such as hitting , slapping, verbal abuse, kicking and pushing as a result of interacting with peers who exhibit the same aggressive acts . The result confirm the findings of Ortega and Monks (2005) and Gara and Dans (2006).

IV. Conclusion

Aggressive behaviours manifested by male and female students reveal the quality of interaction existing between them and their peers. The rampant manifestation of aggressive behaviours among students in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State confirms that peers interact more with themselves and have less supervision by parents; moreover, it shows that peers trust themselves more for role models, advice and solution to problems. It means that the interaction existing among the students expose many of the students to challenges of learning or controlling aggressive behaviours. High positive relationship therefore exist between peer group influence and aggressive behaviours among male and female students.

Educational Implications

The educational implications of the findings are

1. There is poor quality of interaction existing between male and female students and their peers.
2. There are more role models for male and female students among their peers than among the teachers and parents.
3. The peer group influence is an underlying cause of aggressive behaviour among male and female students.

V. Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. Parents should guide against the negative influence of peers on their wards in order to reduce the aggressive behaviours among male and female students.
2. Every secondary school should have a professional counselor who would help to counsel students and thereby reduce the incidences of aggressive behaviours among students.
3. Anti-aggressive club should be formed by the school authorities to help monitor, discourage and report aggressive behaviours among students.

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