ABSTRACT

The study assessed gender differences in aggressive behaviours among junior secondary school students. The purpose of the study was to determine if there exist gender differences in aggressive behaviours among junior secondary school students in Awka-South LGA of Anambra State, Nigeria: Counselling Implications. One research question and one hypothesis were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of all the 1,345 junior secondary school students in Awka- South LGA of Anambra State. A total of 366 students were sampled using non-probability sampling technique. The instrument used for data collection was Aggressive Behaviour Checklist (ABC). The validity of the instrument was done by three experts, two from Measurement and Evaluation and one from Counselling Psychology. The reliability of the instrument was 0.73, determined using Cronbach alpha method. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research question while t-test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Results showed that there is a significant gender differences in the display of direct aggression form, where boys exhibit higher direct aggressive behaviours than girls. In verbal and indirect forms of aggression there are no significant differences between boys and girls. It was concluded that counsellors’ intervention is a panacea to curb aggressive behaviours especially direct aggression among adolescents regardless of the gender. Recommendations were made among which is that parents and guardians should act as models for their children by not being aggressive.

KEYWORDS: Gender, Aggression, Behaviours

INTRODUCTION

Aggression is an anti-social behaviour that is most prevalent and perturbing in the society. 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. It is displayed in the neighbourhood, schools, village squares and meetings, churches and in fact everywhere people meet.

Aggressive behaviours appear replete in secondary schools. According to Shekarey, Ladani, Rostami and Jamshidi (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 is overt or covert, often harmful, social interaction with the intention of inflicting damage or other unpleasantness upon another individual. It may occur either reactively or without provocation. Aggression has been variously defined by scholars. According to Brehm, Kassin and Fein (2005), it is behaviour that is intended to harm another individual. Based on the definitions, aggression refers to any intended and deliberate act that hurts harms or destroys someone physically or psychologically.

The manifestations of the behaviours that constitute aggression are known as aggressive behaviours. These behaviours vary from mild to severe, and it can be manifested against oneself or others around. Aggressive behaviours have been explained by different theories like the Social Learning Theory, Frustration theory, Instinct Theory, among others.

Frustration theory by Miller and Dollard hypothesized that aggression is always a consequence of frustration. They believe that human beings by nature are not aggressive but frustration leads to aggressive behaviour. If a human being cannot satisfy one of his motives, he becomes frustrated and this makes him to become aggressive; so frustration causes the aggressive behaviour.

Instinct theory by Sigmund Freud postulated that all instincts work to minimize stress and anxiety. Freud held that all human behaviour including aggressive behaviour stem from the complex interaction between the instinct of Eros and Thanatos and the constant tension between them. The instinct theory therefore, views aggression as originating primarily from the redirection of self destructive death instinct away from the person towards others. This work adopts the social learning theory which postulates that aggressive behaviour is a learned behaviour through imitating the aggressive models. Bandura’s social learning theory indicated that individuals learned the aggressive behaviours from the social environment and from the social factors around them in order to achieve personal goals.

Human aggression can be classified into direct and indirect aggression. Whilst the former is characterized by physical or verbal behaviour intended to cause harm to someone, the latter is characterized by behaviour intended to harm the social relations of an individual or group.

**Direct aggression:** Direct aggression is characterized by physical or verbal behaviours which are intended to cause harm or injury to another person.

**Physical aggression:** This is under the direct 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, and shooting (Sameer & Jamia, 2007).

Verbal aggression: This is also under direct aggression and 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. Verbal aggression, according to the Prevention Research Centre (2002) includes behaviours such as yelling, teasing, using bad words, hurtful remarks, making threats among others.

Indirect aggression: Indirect aggression is characterized by behaviour intended to harm the social relations of an individual or group. These behaviours are indirect methods to cause harm by manipulating the social environment to hurt the target, sometimes without the aggressor being identifiable. Relational aggression and social rejection are examples of indirect aggression.

Relational Aggression: Relational aggression is an aspect of indirect aggression. It 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).

Gender has been described as the social behaviours, lifestyle, and personality characteristics that women and men are expected to exhibit. The sex role theory of socialization describes gender as ‘fixed’ and categorizes individuals as either feminine or masculine. The social constructionist theory explains that women and men think and behave in certain ways because of the concepts about femininity and masculinity that they adopt from experiences with their family, peers, community, among others while growing up. Research has shown a fairly consistent association between gender and traditional physical bullying, with many researchers reporting that males are more likely than females to perpetrate physical aggression and bullying, while females engage more in indirect forms of bullying such as psychological/relational bullying, emotional harassment and verbal aggression (eg, gossiping). There is evidence that males are more likely than females to express their aggression physically (Bjorkqvist, 1994). However, when considering indirect forms of aggression, such as relational aggression and social rejection, females and males are equally aggressive (Card, Stucky, Sawalani & Little, 2008).
Lagerspetz, Kirsti, Kaj and Tarja (1988), studied the gender differences in aggressive behaviours in 167, 11-12-year-old school children, through peer rating techniques supported by self-ratings and interviews. The principal finding was that girls made greater use of indirect means of aggression, whereas boys tended to employ direct means. Gender differences in verbal aggression was less pronounced. Gender differences in aggression have frequently been reported, such that men and boys show more aggression than women and girls, especially in terms of physical aggression. However, Rachel Simmons the author of the New York Times best seller odd girls, the first book to explore the phenomenon of bullying between girls suggest that females are not necessarily less aggressive, but tend to express through not only physical aggression, but also through nonphysical means. Onkwufor (2013) observed 360 adolescent students in Obio/Akpor LGA of Rivers State, Nigeria on physical and verbal aggression, and concluded that prevalence of physical aggression and verbal aggressions were higher among males than females.

Although most aggressive behaviours tend to be associated with more male students, it is not really known if male students are more aggressive than their female counterparts. It is therefore the aim of this study to determine if there exist gender differences in aggressive behaviour among male and female students, with specific objectives of identifying if aggressive response is more among male students over the female students and investigate how different components of aggression that is physical aggression, verbal aggression and danger relates to aggression of both gender of students.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The study investigated gender differences in aggressive behaviours among junior secondary school students. The purpose of the study was to determine if there exist gender differences on aggressive behaviours among junior secondary school students in Awka-South LGA of Anambra State, Nigeria: Counselling Implications. This was achieved through the following specific objective:

1. To find and compare the differences in aggressive behaviours among male and female students of junior secondary schools in Awka South LGA of Anambra State.

**RESEARCH QUESTION**

1. What is the difference in aggressive behaviours among male and female junior secondary school students in Awka-South LGA of Anambra State?

**HYPOTHESIS**

HO: There is no significant difference in aggressive behaviours of male and female junior secondary school students in Awka South LGA of Anambra State.
METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population for this study comprised all 1,345 JS students of Awka -South LGA of Anambra State, Nigeria. A sample of 366 students using a non-probability sampling technique was utilized for this study. The participants were both males and females. Out of the 366 participants, 196 were males and 170 were females. The researcher approached the schools for permission to meet the teachers of the JS students of the respective schools. The researcher met the class teachers either one on one or in a group, to explain to them the study objective and their roles in identifying and rating the children who display aggressive behaviours. The teachers were provided with an Aggressive Behaviour Checklist (ABC) and each of the behaviour in the checklist to observe and identify students in their respective classes was explained. The teachers were instructed to observe the students’ behaviour in their classes for a week and then to shortlist the students who would be displaying six or more behaviours consistently for more than 3 months, out of the 24 behaviours in the checklist. The teachers were also instructed to observe and notice both male and female behaviours in their classes with the checklist in mind. They were also briefed about the inclusion and exclusion criteria’s for selecting the children. They were told to identify and select as far as possible, one girl, for one boy identified and selected, so that in the total sample both boys and girls are equally represented. After this, the researcher met the teachers again after one week, as decided. The teachers who had identified and selected the students in their classes were provided with a rating scale, with the same behaviours to mark the frequency and intensity, with the rating from 0 to 4 that is from never to always, to mark for each student identified and selected. The teachers who had not identified or selected any student with aggressive behaviours were given one extra week to complete the activity. After the teacher rated each student identified on the rating scale, the researcher then shortlisted the children who displayed 25%, or more than 25% of the total score, that is a score of 24 or more on the total score of 96.

The instrument used for data collection was Aggressive Behaviour Checklist for teachers. The checklist provided by the researcher to the teachers contained a list of 24 behaviours of children which are extracted from the scale described. These checklist behaviours helped class teachers to observe the students in their classes for some days and then to rate them on the rating scale provided and Direct-Indirect Aggression Scale (DIAS), by Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz and Osterman (1992). This scale investigates the aggression of a child as rated by the peers or teachers. This study used a teacher rated scale, which is a likert type scale from 0 to 4. The sub scales are: Direct physical aggression-This subscale has 7 items like;
pushing, shoving, and kicking among others. Direct verbal aggression—This sub scale has 5 items which would include behaviours like; yelling, insulting, teasing, calling names, and threatening. Indirect aggression—This sub scale has 12 items like taking revenge, ignoring others, gossiping, planning to bother others, telling secrets among others.

The content validity of the instruments was done by two experts in Measurement and Evaluation and one expert in Counselling Psychology. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha which yielded 0.73 reliability coefficient. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research question and t-test for the hypothesis.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the difference in aggressive behaviours among male and female junior secondary school students in Awka—South LGA of Anambra State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on Aggressive Behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct Aggression</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>11.96</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>15.54</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect Aggression</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>16.88</td>
<td>9.83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>15.48</td>
<td>9.77</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Aggression</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>9.33</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>9.90</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results in Table 1 showed that male students have higher level of indirect aggression than the female students with mean difference of 1.4.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in aggressive behaviours of male and female junior secondary school students in Awka South LGA of Anambra State.

Table 2: t-test on Gender Aggressive Behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>196</td>
<td>11.96</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>15.54</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>16.88</td>
<td>9.83</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>15.48</td>
<td>9.77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Verbal Aggression</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>9.33</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>9.90</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results in Table 2 showed that there is a significant difference in the mean scores for direct aggression for girls (M=11.96, SD=5.98) and boys (M=15.54, SD=5.65) conditions; t=4.964. The results suggest that males and females are significantly different in the display of direct aggression, where males are seen to be displaying significantly higher direct
aggression than females. The mean differences however showed that in indirect aggression, females are marginally higher, which is not significant. While on verbal aggression, males are marginally higher, which again, is not significant.

DISCUSSION

It is seen that there is a significant difference in the display of direct aggression, where males are higher in the display of direct aggression than females and there is not as much significant difference in the display of indirect and verbal aggression in both males and females. This finding is in tandem with that of Bjorkqvist et al. (1992), who reported that at the age cohort of 8 years, there is a significant gender difference between the direct aggression boys displaying more of it. On indirect aggression, there was only a slight (insignificant) difference, the girls scoring somewhat higher. In the same study, Bjorkqvist (1994), in the age cohort of 15 years, found that boys again scored significantly on physical aggression, while girls in this age, scored significantly higher in indirect aggression. This shows that on indirect aggression, although there is a tendency for girls to be more on indirect aggression, it might start much later in their age through their pre adolescence and adolescence. In a meta-analytic review of 148 studies on child and adolescent direct and indirect aggression by Card et al (2008), results confirmed the prior findings of gender differences favouring boys in direct aggression and trivial gender differences in indirect aggression. From a socio-cultural point of view, it can be seen that girls are trained to be less overt and timid, compared to boys. It is always expected that girls do not exhibit their anger or disapproval in an overt way. Since being physical or showing overt forms of aggression is not an approved and accepted behaviour for girls, hence the significant difference seen in only physical aggression form.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

The findings of this study have some implications for counselling practice in Nigeria. Although aggression is a universal problem, counselling psychologists have an important role to identify and counsel students who exhibit aggressive behaviours in their homes, neighbourhood, and schools. There is no gainsaying the fact that these students need assistance in dealing with aggression. This assistance may include; learning problem-solving skills, conflict management resolution techniques, anger management, and development of positive self-concept.

Counsellors can adopt interdisciplinary efforts with parents, teachers, school administrators and communities to achieve the best strategies for prevention of aggressive behaviours among secondary school students. Counselling being a social service that aims at helping people resolve their numerous challenges or concerns, can be used to help students
with aggressive behaviours to change their undesirable behaviour. Most students with behaviour problems experience a lot of social and psychological trauma characterized by loneliness, rejection, conflicts and others. Counsellors can communicate with these students with love, respect, and genuine empathic understanding at all times.

Through counselling, students with aggressive behaviours could be assisted through behaviour modification to this end. There are many behaviour modification techniques counsellors can employ to help students who consistently exhibit aggressive behaviours to change to appropriate personalities, manifesting desirable behaviours. Such techniques include: fading, shaping, modeling, reinforcement, and reward, behavioural contract, stimulus control, and others. Above all, counsellors can apply value clarification counselling techniques that act on beliefs and behaviours to alter the undesirable behaviours of adolescents who manifest aggression so that they can become self-fulfilled by redirecting their behaviours to an acceptable standard in the society.

CONCLUSION

Aggression is an antisocial behaviour that is inimical to intra and interpersonal relationship. The manifestation of aggressive behaviours among adolescents will likely affect their growth and development in terms of personality. Therefore, it is concluded that counselling intervention is a panacea to curb aggressive behaviours, especially direct aggression among adolescents irrespective of gender difference.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, these recommendations were provided:

1. Parents and guardians should act as good models before their children by not being aggressive. This is because adolescents watch and imitate the bad behaviours of their parents/guardians.
2. The school authorities should provide a conducive learning environment for learning like the providing adequate physical space, getting students to cooperate, creating communal atmosphere among students and developing a positive classroom climate and culture so as to reduce the incidences of aggression.
3. Guidance and counselling services should be provided for the students. This will empower aggressive students with such skills: assertive skills, problem solving skills and anger management among other interpersonal relationship skills.
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