

Effects of Self-esteem and Gender on Aggressive Behavior among Adolescents

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KEYWORDS Emotions. Self-esteem. Attitudes. Gender. Aggression

ABSTRACT The paper investigated the effects of self-esteem and gender on aggressive behavior among adolescents in selected secondary schools in Awka in Anambra state. The paper's objectives were to determine whether male and female adolescents differ in aggressive behavior, and to investigate whether adolescents with low self-esteem differ from those with high self-esteem in aggressive behavior. The paper adopted a quantitative research design, and a simple random sampling was used to select the respondents. A self-administered questionnaire was adopted for the collection of data. The paper findings revealed that gender is significantly related to aggressive behavior, as self-esteem is also related to aggressive behaviors. However, vital recommendations have been provided based on the findings of the study.

INTRODUCTION

Aggression is a widespread phenomenon that exerts negative effects on both victims and perpetrators (Amad 2015). It is also regarded as a major worldwide public health issue among adolescents, which produces serious social problems and substantial costs to society. Thus, prompting human development researchers to place enormous interest in peer relationship and aggression among teenagers (Berger 2007).

However, the exhibition of aggressive behavior has become a rampant occurrence and one of the major problems associated with adolescents in the secondary schools today. According to Eziyi and Odoemelam (2005), aggressive behavior is "one of the most frustrating issues parents and teachers face, which is normal in young children who do not yet understand that it is wrong and more importantly why it is wrong". Izuchi and Anetoh (2014) maintained that many secondary school adolescents today exhibit one form of aggressive behavior or the other. Nwokoroku (2001) supported that "this act of aggression against persons or property occurs frequently in secondary schools."

Wood et al. (2005) defined aggressive behavior as "the intentional infliction of physical or psychological harm on others." De Almeida et al. (2015) defined aggressive behavior "as overt, but mostly harmful, social interaction with

the intention to inflict damage or other unpleasantness upon another individual." Ferguson and Beaver (2009) added that aggressive behavior are "those behaviors that increase the social dominance of an organism relative to the dominance position of other organisms". Moreover, Nelson (2006) posited that "whenever there is an existence of conflict of interests between individuals there is a chance of the manifestation of aggressive behavior."

Moeller (2001) posited that "aggression and aggressive behavior are used interchangeably to refer to negative emotions and behaviors, respectively." They added that aggressive behaviors are part of anti-social behavior, which is viewed as something morally, ethically or legally unacceptable. Furthermore, Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2002) opined that aggression can be expressed through both "constructive and destructive behaviors." Constructive aggression refers to "when it is used for individual and collective welfare, whereas destructive refers to when it is used for individual and collective distortion."

However, many studies have identified several factors responsible for the manifestation of aggressive behaviors among adolescents. Self-esteem is identified as an important factor responsible for the occurrence of aggression among adolescents (Ostrowsky 2010). Self-esteem refers to the "overall evaluation of oneself in either a positive or negative way" (Malbi and

Reasoner 2000). It can also be referred to “as the degree to which an individual believes himself or herself to be competent and worthy of living” (Imohnde 2013).

Nevertheless, studies have also reported a negative relationship between “self-esteem and aggression” (Rosenthal et al. 2011). Similarly, other studies have attributed low and high self-esteem as the actual cause of aggressive tendencies (Walker and Bright 2009). Muller et al. (2012) posited that high levels of self-esteem might trigger aggressive behavior. Moreover, Falkenbach et al. (2013) maintained that instability of self-esteem is the unique predictor of aggressive behavior.

On the other hand, gender is singled out as another factor that contributes immensely to the exhibition of aggressive emotions among adolescents (Duncan 1999; Moroschan et al. 2009). Though, different studies have revealed that male adolescents display higher aggressive behavior than their female counterparts, whereas other studies have failed to find gender differences in aggressive behavior (Archer 2004; Leenaars and Rinaldi 2010; Osterman et al. 1994). Gender is said to have an impact on various levels of adolescence and can also affect changes in self-esteem during the adolescent years. Gender is defined as “an array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis” (Health Canada 2000).

Furthermore, concerning gender differences in aggressive behaviors, Crick (1996) and Crick and Grotpeter (1995) argued that aggressive behaviors in girls have been overlooked because it is seen from a different perspective than that of their male counterparts. However, many studies have reported that male adolescents have shown more aggressive tendencies than their female counterparts. It is against this background that the paper sought to investigate the effects of self-esteem and gender on aggressive behavior among secondary school adolescents.

Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the effects of self-esteem and gender on aggressive behavior among secondary school adolescents.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives in this paper include the following:

- ♦ To determine whether male and female adolescents differ in aggressive behavior.
- ♦ To determine whether adolescents with low self-esteem will differ from those with high self-esteem in aggressive behavior.

Hypotheses

Several hypotheses were formulated in this paper, which suggest that male and female adolescents are not different in terms of their aggressive behavior, that adolescents with low self-esteem are not different from those with high self-esteem, and that there will be no interaction effects between gender and self-esteem on aggressive behavior among adolescent. These hypotheses are presented here in this form.

H01: Male and female adolescents are not different on aggressive behavior among secondary school adolescents.

H02: Low self-esteem adolescents are not different from high self-esteem adolescents.

Review of Related Literature

The research findings and theories of aggression will be difficult to interpret without clear definitions of the variables employed in this research. Historically, many different definitions have been used to explain in clear terms the meaning of aggression. Consequently, Anderson and Bushman (2002) argued that many studies in aggression are difficult to meaningfully compare. Recently, aggression definitions among social psychologists have circled around the notion that “aggression is any behavior manifestation with the intention to harm another person who is motivated to avoid that harm” (Bushman and Huesmann 2010). Imhonde (2013) argued that aggression can manifest or be exhibited in different forms among individuals, such as physical, mental, or verbal manifestations.

On the other hand, Mruk (2013) defined self-esteem “as the ability to succeed in meaningful areas of life and the belief in one’s aspirations.” Reeve (2009) defined self-esteem as “the reflection of life activities, but not the source of motivation that allows people to make life go well”.

Thomson (2012) described self-esteem as a “person’s experience or image, developed through interaction with other people.” Thomson (2012) added that self-esteem is one’s value for oneself, as it is how individuals perceive their value to the world, and how valuable they think they are to others.

Brown and Dutton (1995) divided self-esteem into two forms, which are high and low self-esteem. They referred to low self-esteem as a disturbing condition that keeps individuals from meeting their full potential. Hence, an individual with low self-esteem experiences the feelings of unworthiness, incapability and incompetence. In other words, low self-esteem can exert serious impact on adolescents and provides a high risk factor for negative outcomes across their life cycle. On the other hand, high self-esteem is referred to as feelings of wholesome affection towards one another (Brown and Dutton 1995). Moreover, Kernis et al. (1993) argued that “individuals with high self-esteem such as feelings of self-worth can become susceptible to changes.”

Gender

Ghosh (2015) defined gender as “one’s own identification as male, female, or intersex. Gender may be viewed in perspectives of legal status, social interactions, public persona, personal experiences, and psychological setting.” Haig (2014) defined gender as “the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person’s biological sex.” He further referred to gender as “the range of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between, masculinity and femininity.” Based on this context, WHO (2015) posited that “these characteristics may include biological sex (that is, the state of being male, female or intersex), sex-based social structures (including gender roles and other social roles), or gender identity.”

Empirical Literature

According to a meta-analytic study of sex differences in aggressive behaviors, males were found to be more aggressive than females on the average (Eagly and Steffen 1986). The study further stated that “the magnitude of the sex differences was significantly related to various attributes of the studies.” In particular, “the tendency for men being more aggressive than

women was more pronounced for aggression that produces pain or physical injury than for aggression that produces psychological or social harm.”

Study by Donnellan et al. (2005) on the controversial link between “global self-esteem and externalizing problems” including aggression, antisocial behavior, and delinquency, found “a robust relationship between low self-esteem and externalizing problems.” Moreover, Fareeda and Jahan’s (2014) study on the role of self-esteem in development of aggression among adolescents, found a significant negative correlation between self-esteem and aggression.” On the part of gender, it was found that “male students scored significantly higher on self-esteem in comparison to female students.” It was also found that “male students scored significantly higher on different dimensions of aggression (physical, verbal, anger and hostility) in comparison to female students.”

Mokolapo and Dele’s (2014) study on the influence of gender and personality features of violent behavior among adolescents in Nigeria, found that “gender has no significant influence on violent behavior and personality traits (agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion and conscientiousness), but had a significant influence on violent behavior among adolescents.” Furthermore, study on family condition influences some demographic variables such as gender and age on adolescents’ aggressive behavior towards violent media found a significant difference on the influence of media violence on aggressive behavior on the basis of family condition.” The findings also stated “that there was no significant difference on the influence of media violence on aggressive behavior on the basis of gender.”

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This paper adopted a quantitative research design. The population for this paper comprises 197 secondary students, in which one hundred (110) of them were females while eighty-seven (87) of the students were males. This population was drawn from six secondary schools namely, Kenneth Dike Memorial Secondary School Awka, National Comprehensive Secondary School Awka, St. John of God Secondary School Awka, Federal Science and Technical College Awka, Community Secondary School Okpuno and

Nnamdi Azikiwe University Secondary School Awka.

A systematic sampling method was used to select the schools. The schools were selected through assigning of numbers to fifteen government secondary schools within Awka metropolis (1-15). Consequently, six even numbers were selected for the study. The respondents were selected through a simple random sampling technique. Structured questionnaire was adopted in this research because of its tendency to yield most satisfactory range of reliable data. Moreover, an aggression instrument developed by Buss and Perry (1992) was used in this research as one of the research instruments. It is a 29 items instrument that comprises "physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility." In addition, it consists of a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from "1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree." The instrument Cronbach alpha coefficient values for total aggression was 0.76, verbal aggression 0.46, physical aggression 0.76, anger 0.74, and hostility 0.72, respectively.

The Rosenberg self-esteem scale was also adopted in this research as the second instrument. This is a 10 items self-esteem instrument developed by Rosenberg (1965). The instrument contains 4-point Likert scale that ranges from "1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree." The instrument has a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.73. Both instruments were merged and demographic variables added to form a single questionnaire by the researcher.

Capturing of Data and Analysis

Data was coded and captured into Microsoft Excel. The data was imported into SPSS in order for statistical analysis to take place. All the proposed hypotheses were tested and analyzed using two by two (2x2) factorial design and the researcher used a two-way ANOVA test to analyze the collected data. The reason was that the researcher tested two independent variables under two conditions each, that is, gender (gender=male and female) and self-esteem (self-esteem=low and high) on one dependent variable (aggressive behavior).

RESULTS

The results of the paper are presented in this section. These include the summary of means and standard deviation of gender on aggressive

behavior, summary of means and standard deviation of self-esteem on aggressive behavior and summary of two-way analysis of variance on the influence of gender and self-esteem on aggressive behavior, respectively.

The result in Table 1 illustrates the descriptive statistics of the respondents, which indicate that $N=87$ for male respondents with mean score of 54.15 and standard deviation of $SD=15.20$, while $N=110$ for female respondents has mean score of 56.26 and standard deviation of $SD=15.22$. It also shows $N=197$ as the total of all respondents with mean score of 55.33 and standard deviation of $SD=15.21$.

Table 1: Summary of means and standard deviation of gender on aggressive behavior

Gender	Mean	N	Std. deviation
Male	54.15	87	15.20
Female	56.26	110	15.22
Total	55.33	197	15.21

The result in Table 2 depicts the descriptive statistics of the respondents, which indicates that $N=69$ of the respondents with low self-esteem have mean score of 53.01 and standard deviation of $SD=14.87$, while $N=128$ of the respondents with high self-esteem have mean score of 56.58 and standard deviation of $SD=15.29$. It also that $N=197$ of all the respondents with low self-esteem and high self-esteem have mean score of 55.33 and standard deviation of $SD=15.21$.

Table 2: Summary of means and standard deviation of self-esteem on aggressive behavior

Self-esteem	Mean	N	Std. deviation
Low self-esteem	53.01	69	14.87
High self-esteem	56.58	128	15.29
Total	55.33	197	15.21

Results from Tested Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

The result in Table 3 indicates the final findings of the first hypothesis of this paper, which stated that the male and female adolescents are not different on aggressive behavior. The result of the two-way analysis of variance for hypoth-

Table 3: Summary of two-way analysis of variance on the influence of gender on aggressive behavior

<i>Source</i>	<i>Type III sum of squares</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Gender	4.77	1	4.77	.02	.89

esis 1 shows a square sum of 4.77 with 1 degree of freedom and $F=0.02$, which is less than the alpha value. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis. This means that male and female secondary school adolescents differ on aggressive behavior.

Hypothesis Two

The result in Table 4 indicates the final findings of the second hypothesis of this paper, which stated low self-esteem adolescents are not different from high self-esteem adolescents on aggressive behaviors. The result of the two-way analysis of variance for hypothesis 2 shows a square sum of 448.12 with 1 degree of freedom and $F=1.98$, which is greater than 0.5 alpha value. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted and alternative hypothesis rejected. This actually means that adolescents having low self-esteem or high self-esteem do not determine aggressive behavior.

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1

The findings of the first hypothesis showed that there was significant gender difference on aggressive behavior among secondary school adolescents. This means that male and female adolescent students differ in their level of aggression. This result is in consonance with Mokolapo and Dele's (2014) findings, which posited that gender has significant influence on violent behavior. This is supported by Fareeda and Jahan (2014) who argued that in "gender differences, male students scored significantly higher on different dimensions of aggression (physical, verbal, anger and hostility) in comparison to female students." This implies that "the tendency for men to aggress more than women was more pronounced for aggression

that produces pain or physical injury than for aggression that produces psychological or social harm." These results emphasized that "sex differences in aggression are a function of perceived consequences of aggression that are learned as aspects of gender roles and other social roles" (Fareeda and Jahan 2014).

Hypothesis 2

The findings of the second hypothesis showed that adolescents having low or high self-esteem had significant effects on aggressive behavior among secondary school adolescents. This implies that "the student's level of self-esteem do not determine their level of aggressive behavior." In consonance with the findings, Diamantopoulou et al. (2007) posited that "both low levels of global self-worth are exaggerated but disputed self-esteem is related to aggression." It further argued that, aggressive children might appear to have low and high self-esteem depending on how self-esteem is conceptualized. Ostrowsky (2009) added that "individuals who have low self-esteem may blame others for their problems and failures to protect themselves against feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, and shame, which leads to aggression towards others."

In support of the result outcome, Bayraktar et al. (2009) argued that self-esteem predicts aggression in a negative way. That is, a high self-esteem level decreases individuals' aggression level. Moreover, "individuals who have high self-esteem show lower aggression compared to those who have low self-esteem" (Fergusson and Horwood 2002; Saylor and Denham 1993).

CONCLUSION

The paper investigated the effects of self-esteem and gender on aggressive behavior among secondary school adolescents. The paper raised some objectives, which are to deter-

Table 4: Summary of two-way analysis of variance on the influence of self-esteem on aggressive behavior

<i>Source</i>	<i>Type III sum of squares</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Self-esteem	448.12	1	448.12	1.98	.16

mine whether male and female adolescents differ on aggressive behavior, to determine whether adolescents with low self-esteem will differ from those with high self-esteem in aggressive behavior, and to determine whether there would be an interaction effect between gender and self-esteem on aggressive behavior among adolescents. Several hypotheses were also formulated. Having tested the hypotheses generated in this paper, using statistical tests such as descriptive statistics, two-analysis of variance amongst others, the objectives of this paper were achieved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommended that parents should educate their children (wards) to be conscious of behaviors that are likely to stimulate aggressive behaviors, the need for violent free society and be people with a balanced personality. Teachers should strive to encourage their students to engage in behaviors that will minimize violent behaviors especially in school since today's academic pursuit has taken the lead in the daily activities of the school child. The teacher also should motivate his or her students to believe in themselves and be self-dependent, and as such increase their level of self-efficacy and improve their self-esteem. In addition, school psychologists and counselors should work on the students by eliminating in them the fear of socializing with people, inclination to aggression so as to produce healthy and independent population.

LIMITATIONS

Some of the limitations encountered in this research include the research interest, which was restricted to secondary school and results from similar investigations using civilized institutions in the country, may or may not confirm the present findings. The major limitation of this study was unavailability of funds for transportation and other logistics. Due to this problem of finance, the study was limited to the Awka metropolis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher wants to use this medium to acknowledge all those who made this paper a reality, for their encouragement and unalloyed support throughout the period this paper was written. Ultimately all glory goes to the almighty

God for the wisdom, strength and divine health he granted the researcher throughout this period.

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Paper received for publication on September 2016
Paper accepted for publication on December 2016