

The Diagnosis of Aggression and Violent Behaviours in Classroom Setting in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper highlights some expert definitions of aggression and violence, and the aim of it was to explore and articulate the factors that necessitate aggressive and violent behaviours among people within the classroom setting. It focused on the intervention strategies to ameliorate the said behavioural menace confronting the entire human nature in our society today. Issues discussed among other things include factors that militate against aggression and violence in the classroom, implications of aggressive and violence classroom and the negative effects of aggressive and violence classroom. It was therefore concluded that, if psychologists expect a viable and relevant psychological intervention strategies regarding the reduction and management of aggressive and violent behaviours among people in the classroom, then the time is now. Some recommendations toward realizing the aim of this study were advanced, one of such was that Government at all levels starting from Local, State and Federal should train and employ qualified Educational Psychologists to Primary, Secondary and Unity Schools across the country.

Key words: Aggression, Behavioural Menace, Intervention Strategies, Negative Effects, Violent.

Introduction

Every nation all over the world has its unique problems as well as its own challenges and as such, Nigeria is not different hence, today she is facing with an incessant exhibition of aggressive and violent behaviours in the classroom where pupils and students learned. Aggression and violent behaviours are on the increase among children and youth in Nigeria's schools. Although many children and adolescents are occasionally exhibiting aggressive and sometimes antisocial behaviours in the course of their development, and this could be witnessed in a significant number of youths who confronted their parents, teachers and even their partners with persistent threatening and destructive behaviour (Rutherford and Nelson, 1995).

In recent times, Nigeria has witnessed an upsurge in the wave of myriads of aggression and violence ranging from teachers to pupils (students), pupils (students) to pupils (students), pupils (students) to teachers and so on. It is evidence that classroom environment can contribute to the socialization and promotion of childhood aggressive behaviour problem. Over the last

two decades, structural features of schools, such as large size, economic disadvantage among the student body and risky neighborhood conditions flanking school grounds, have been cited as variables associated with increased level of students' aggression (Colder, Mott, Flay, & Levy, 2000; Howley, Strange, & Bickel, 2000). Nigeria today, it is obvious that aggressive and violent behaviours are alarmingly exhibited by the youth which seemingly escalate to disorderliness in our society, all these are attributed to the fact that they were not properly handled while in the classroom.

Certain school and student demographics seem to increase child risk for exposure to high aggressive classrooms. Howley et al.(2000) reviewed several studies showing that large schools are more likely than small schools to contain a high proportion of acting-out students and greater behaviour management difficulties in classroom. Similarly, Stephenson and Smith (1989) found that the incidence of peer aggression increased as a function of school and classroom size and levels of socio economic disadvantage in the student body.

However, if this behavioural menace is not checked or properly addressed among our children exhibiting or living with aggressive and violence behaviours at classroom level and now, the extent of aggressive behaviours in our society would be so disastrous that one may not be able to explain. To this end, the researcher decided to embark on this study in order to proffer some solutions to address this dark side of some human nature.

Conceptual Clarification of Aggression and Violence

According to Baron and Richardson (1994), aggression is seen as any behaviour intended to harm another person who does not want to be harmed. This definition entails that aggression is a behaviour that one can see it. It is not an internal response, such as having angry feeling or aggressive thoughts (although such internal responses can increase the likelihood of actual aggression).

Violence can be seen as aggression intended to cause extreme physical harm such as injury or death. Thus, all violent acts are aggressive, but not all aggressive acts are violent for example, screaming and swearing at another person is aggressive, but not violent. Violence according to the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (20014) defined violence as any act that result in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering of a person, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary, whether occurring in public or in private life especially perpetrated by men, women, government or its agencies.

Aggression and violent tendencies are the defining characteristics of most students who have been identified as antisocial. Overt forms of antisocial behaviour are characterized by aggressive acts directed against persons and include verbal or physical assault, oppositional-defiant behaviour, use of coercion tactics, and humiliation of others (Walker, 1993). From a social learning perspective, aggression is defined as gestural, verbal, and physical behaviours that result in physical, material, or psychological pain or injury to another person. Younger

aggressive students demonstrate higher rates of such behaviours as humiliating, biting, being destructive, whining, yelling, teasing being non-compliant and being negative than their nonaggressive peers (Patterson, Ray, Shaw, & Cobb, 1969).

Factors that Militate Against Aggression and Violence in the Classroom

Human aggression is very complex and is caused by multiple factors. These are grouped into internal and external factors.

Internal Factors

Age: Toddlers (children between 1 to 3years old) often rely on physical aggression to resolve conflict and get what they want. In free play situation, researchers have found that 25 percent of their interactions are aggression (Tremblay, 2000). In most cases, toddler aggression is not severe enough to qualify as violence because they do not use weapons, such as guns and knives. As children grow older, they learn to inhibit their aggressive impulses and resolve conflict using nonaggressive means, such as compromise and negotiation. Some people become less aggressive over time, a small subset of people become more aggressive over time. The most dangerous years for this small subset of people and for society as a whole are late adolescence and early adulthood. For example, 18 to 24years old commit most murders (U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012).

Hostile Cognitive Biases: One key to keeping aggression in check is to give people the benefit of the doubt. Some people, however, do just the opposite. There are three hostile cognitive biases. The hostile attribution bias is the tendency to perceive ambiguous actions by others as hostile (Dodge, 1980). For example, if a person bumps into you, a hostile attribution would be that the person did it on purpose and wants to hurt you. The hostile perception bias is the tendency to perceive social interactions in general as being aggressive (Dill et al., 1997). For example, if you see two people talking in an animated fashion, a hostile perception would be that they are fighting with each other. The hostile expectation bias is the tendency to expect others to react to potential conflicts with aggression (Dill et al, 1997). For example, if you bump into another person, a hostile expectation would be that the person will assume that you did it on purpose and will attack you in return. People with hostile cognitive biases view the world as hostile place.

Gender: At all ages, males tend to be more physically aggressive than females. However, it would be wrong to think that females are never physically aggressive. Females do use physical aggression especially when they are provoked by other females (Collins, Quigleg, & Leonard, 2007). Among hetero-sexual partners, women are actually slightly more likely than men to use physical aggression (Archer, 2000). However, when men do use physical aggression, they are

more likely than women to cause serious injuries and even death to their partners. When people are strongly provoked, gender differences in aggression shrink (Bettencourt & Miller, 1996). Females are much more likely than males to engage in relational aggression, defined as intentionally harming another person's social relationships, feelings of acceptance or inclusion within a group (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Examples of relational aggression include gossiping, spreading rumors, withdrawing affection to get what you want, excluding someone from your circle of friends, and giving someone the silent treatment.

A teenage boy who pushes another boy up against a school locker as a group of fellow students to watch. Both Physical and relational aggression are serious problems in schools and among adolescents.

External Factors

Frustration and other unpleasant events: These are said to be external factors caused aggression and violence among people. One of the earliest theories of aggression proposed that aggression is caused by frustration, which was defined as blocking goal-directed behaviour (Dollard et al, 1939). For example, if you are standing in a long line to purchase a ticket, it is frustrating when someone, crowds in front of you. This theory was later extended to say that all unpleasant events, not just frustrations, provocations, social rejections, hot temperatures, loud noises, bad air and crowding can all cause aggression. These events automatically trigger a fight-flight response. Most of these are what exactly are obtainable in the classroom today.

Alcohol: Alcohol has long been associated with aggression and violence. However, in many cases alcohol is deliberately used to promote aggression. It has been a standard practice for many centuries to issue soldiers some alcohol disrupts cognitive executive functions that help us organize, plan, achieve goals, and inhibit inappropriate behaviours (Giancola, 2000). According to expectancy theories, alcohol increases aggression because people expect it to. In our brains, alcoholic and aggression are strongly linked together. Indeed, be it a teacher or a student who resort to drinking is expected to exhibit aggressive and violence behaviour in the classroom.

School and student demographics: certain school and student demographics may increase child risk for exposure to high-aggression classrooms. Howley et al. (2000) reviewed several studies showing that large schools are more likely than small schools to contain a high proportion of acting-out students and greater behaviour management difficulties in classrooms. Similarly, Stephenson and Smith (1989) found that the incidence of peer aggression increased as a function of school and classroom size and level of socioeconomic disadvantage in the student body.

Implications of Aggressive and Violence Behaviour in the Classroom

According to Bandura (1973) aggression is learned through the observation of aggression and its consequences and through experiencing the direct consequences of aggressive and non-aggressive behaviours thus:

1. Children learn many aggressive responses by observing models or examples.
2. The punishment of children by adults (teachers) may result in aggression when it causes pain, when there are no positive alternatives to the punished behaviour
3. Children are more likely to imitate aggressive models when the models are of high social status and when they observe the models receiving reinforcement or not receiving punishment for aggression
4. Children learn aggression when their aggressive acts do not lead to aversive consequences or succeed in obtaining reinforcement by harming others.
5. Aggression is more likely to occur when children are aversively stimulated by physical assaults or verbal threats, taunts or insults by thwarting goal-directed behaviour or by decreased positive reinforcement.
6. Aggression may be perpetuated by cognitive processes and rationales that justify hostile behaviour.

Negative Effects of Aggressive and Violence

Classroom

Theoretically, three different mechanisms may contribute to the negative effect of exposure to classrooms containing many aggressive and violence members

- i. According to the person-group similarity model (Tversky, 1977), social norms are heavily influenced by the prevalence of behaviours within groups. Groups with high concentrations of aggressive members may create a social milieu that normalizes aggressive behaviours, making them socially acceptable and decreasing social pressures to exhibit aggression or use alternative conflict management strategies (Henry et al, 2000). In addition, Henry et al. (2000) found increases in children's aggression over time in elementary school classrooms characterized by students with normative beliefs accepting aggression
- ii. Deviancy training models, based upon social learning principles, suggest that aggressive children, when paired, tend to model, provoke, and reinforce antisocial behaviour (Dishion et al., 1999). Asornow (1983) found that dyads containing two aggressive partners (compared with the mixed or non-aggressive partners dyads) tended to escalate in conflict situations, showing longer and more aggressive conflictual exchanges, oriented toward dominating rather than resolving their disagreements.

Similarly, Dishion et al., 1999 observed the interpersonal exchanges of antisocial youth in dyads, and found elevated levels of rule-breaking talk and higher levels of positive reinforcement (e.g. laughing) in response to rule breaking talk than in mixed or nondelinquent dyads. These studies suggest that grouping aggressive children together increases the rate of exposure to aggressive provocation and behavioural reinforcement for aggressive responding (Dishion et al 1999).

- iii. Third, research also suggest that classrooms that contain many aggressive- disruptive students make it difficult for teachers to forge positive relationships with students and use effective behaviour management strategies to maintain control of the classroom (Jackson, 1999). Under these three circumstances, teachers often resort to coercive and punitive discipline practices that, ironically, serve to increase rather inhibit student defiance (Hamre & Pianta 2001). These three processes (Social norms deviancy training and coercive teacher control strategies) may all occur in combination, contributing to the escalating effect of exposure to aggressive classrooms on student aggressive behaviours.
- iv. Primacy effects: according to social field theory model by Kellam and Rebok (1992), Postulated that exposure to classrooms with many aggressive members at the point of school entry has a critical and lasting effect on that child's aggressive behaviour at school, a primacy effect. They argue that, at school entry, children face new behavioural demands for school adaptation, including getting along with peers and teachers and following a broad range of classroom rules, children's mastery of these task demands is considered critical for their development of multiple competences (social, emotional, and cognitive) that are needed for their later behavioural adaptation and psychosocial well-being, and children who are unable to successfully navigate early social environment in school get off to a worse start and continue to suffer from] their experience as they progress through elementary school (Hamre and Pianta, 2001; Perry & Weinstein, 1998). Children may therefore be more susceptible to influence by peers at school entry than in later years, and those children who are placed in high aggression classroom and adopt aggressive responding in the school environment may place themselves into a socialization trajectory in which they are likely to sustain in their aggressive peer affiliations and aggressive behaviours in later school years.
- v. Recency effects: Developmental theory Suggests that, even after exposure to a significant negative socialization experience (in this case, exposure to high aggression classrooms), subsequent experiences often mitigate or exacerbate children's risk for maladjustment (Belsky & Mackinnon, 1994). To the extent that child aggressive behaviour is affected by the immediate interpersonal contingencies in the environment, proximal exposure to peer social norm accepting aggression, peer social norms accepting aggression, peer "deviancy training" and coercive teacher management may

shape child aggressive outcomes more than distal Classroom experiences (Barth et al., 2004).

Recent exposure to classrooms with many aggressive peers may also function as a stressor for children, contributing to heightened sensitivity to perceive threat and self-protective hostile reactivity (Dodge, 1980). The recency of exposure to stressful events is often a critical factor in determining their impact on child behavioural adjustment.

Dodge, 1980 found that Recent Experiences of peer rejection predicted elevated levels of aggressive behaviour, whereas more distal peer rejection did not. Hence, from the perspective of social norm models, social learning theory, and stressful life event models, more recent exposure to high aggression

Intervention Strategies of Aggressive and Violent Behaviours in the Classroom

1. **Social Skill Training:** The basic goal of social skills training is to help the student who behaves antisocially acquire the social skills needed to avoid interpersonal rejection and gain acceptance by significant peers and adults. Aggressive students often are at a serious disadvantage with regard to both peer and teacher social interactions because of their deficits in the areas of social perception and social skills. Walker et al (1995) conceived social skills for students as a set of competencies that allow students to initiate and maintain positive social relationships with others, contribute to positive peer acceptance and satisfactory school adjustment, and cope effectively and adaptively with the larger social environment.
2. **Teaching Alternative Behaviours:** This component of teacher-mediated intervention involves teaching alternative prosocial skills and anger-control strategies to replace aggressive and violence behaviours in the classroom and school. Anger can be reduced by reframing the situation or by distracting oneself and turning one's attention to more pleasant topics in the class. According to Baron (1976), opined that mental tactics can also reduce anger, such as by reframing the situation or by distracting oneself and turning one's attention to more pleasant topics.
3. **Differential reinforcement:** Four strategies have been developed for reducing undesired behaviours through differential reinforcement. Differential reinforcement of incompatible behaviour (DRI) and differential reinforcement of alternative behaviours (DRA) involves, as their names imply, reinforcing behaviours that are incompatible with or merely alternatives to problem behaviours. Differential reinforcement of low rates of behaviour (DRL) involves providing reinforcement when problem behaviour occurs less than a specified amount in a period of time. Differential reinforcement of the omission of behaviour (DRO) requires that the problem behaviour be suppressed for an entire interval of time. According to Deitz and Repp (1983) Differential reinforcement of incompatible behaviour (DRI) and differential reinforcement of alternative behaviours (DRA) have been effective with a variety of student populations and problem situations when the behaviours

that are incompatible with or alternative to aggression, for instance, prosocial skills and strategies for social interaction, have been systematically reinforced. Differential reinforcement of low rates of behaviour (DRL) has been used primarily to reduce minor classroom misbehaviours or to eliminate in a stepwise process the limited number of aggressive responses that may be initially tolerated.

4. **Punishment:** Most cultures assume that punishment is an effective way to deter aggression and violence. Punishment is defined as inflicting pain or removing pleasure for a misdeed. Punishment can range in intensity from spanking a child to executing a convicted killer. Parents use it, organizations use it, and government uses it too. Punishment is most effective when it is intense, prompt, applied consistently and with certainty, perceived as justified and possible to replace the undesirable punished behaviour with a desired alternative behaviour. The teacher is expected to administer reward and punishment to his students occasionally in the classroom. They ensure a repetition and maintenance of desirable behaviour. Punishment is expected to deter unwanted behaviour, it should however, be used sparingly since it is usually known to create behavior problems Okoro (2011).
5. **Catharsis:** The term catharsis dates back to Aristotle and means to cleanse or purge. Sigmund Freud revived the ancient notion of catharsis by proposing that people should express their bottled-up anger. Freud believed if they repressed it, negative emotions would build up inside the individual and surface as psychological disorders. According to catharsis theory, acting aggressively or even viewing aggression shows the feelings and aggressive impulses into harmless channels. Anger can be reduced by getting rid of the arousal state, such as by relaxing, listening to calming music, or counting 1 to 12 before responding to issues. Baron (1976) states that incompatible behaviours can help get rid of anger for instance, petting a puppy, watching a comedy, kissing your lover, or helping someone indeed, because these acts are incompatible with anger and therefore, they make the angry state impossible to sustain.

Conclusion

Aggression and violence are the greatest challenges confronting children, adolescents and adults alike, mostly at the critical moment of high rate of insecurity in Nigeria and the world at large. Based on the theoretical analyses of issues bothering on aggression and violence in the classroom for factors militating against aggression and violence, the implications, the effects and the intervention strategies were discussed. It is therefore concluded here that whoever would have access this paper would be able to diagnose and apply the appropriate intervention strategies to curb and reduce the rate of aggression and violence tendencies in the society.

Recommendations

- i. Government at all levels starting from Local, State and Federal should train and employ qualified Educational Psychologists to Primary, Secondary and Unity Schools across the country.

- ii. State government should formulate a policy that every pupil/student admitted into Primary and Secondary Schools should be subjected to psychological screening. By so doing, aggressive and violence behaviour can early be diagnosed and suppressed.
- iii. Local government should collaborate with State to establish at-least one psychological clinic in each of the Local Government Area throughout the Country. With this, every member of the society would have opportunity of being diagnosed of aggressive and violence behaviour thereby putting them on check for the general good of the society

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