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Psychological Variables of Aggression at Teenagers

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Abstract

Manifestation of aggression in schools has become a major issue lately and teachers' unanimous opinion is that this is a phenomenon that is likely to grow in the field of formal education. The study aimed to identify significant differences between adolescents who exhibit aggressive behaviour and those who did not manifest these behaviours regarding self-esteem and certain personality traits. The results of the study showed significant differences in terms of self-esteem and extraversion - introversion between subjects perceived as aggressors and as victims.

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1. Theoretical framework

The study of human aggression causality is a concern of all social sciences. Some have focused attention on the common widely shared causes of the fight (eg. history and political science), others, on the contrary, have focused on individual aggression (eg. social psychology).

From the literature review, but also from empirical observations, frequent misconceptions on two concepts can be stated: aggression and violence. This phenomenon is due to the large number of terms used in this thematic area: aggression, violence, deviant behavior. In Anglo-Saxon literature there are even several concepts that only increase the confusion: aggression, aggressiveness, mobbing, bullying, violence, etc. Therefore, we considered necessary the procedure of conceptual delimitation. Thus, after the analysis of specialists position vis-a-vis the definition of the

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two concepts I could hold that aggression presupposes an intention to cause harm to one / some people, and sometimes the intention is ethically acceptable: overcoming obstacles, solving a problem is a potentiality of the human being that may underlie violent behavior, although not every aggressive act must become violent and it has a wider area but with less intensity of the manifestations than violence. Aggression is considered a "destructive and violent behavior directed toward people, objects or the self" (Popescu Neveanu, 1978). Most authors emphasize the intentionality when defining aggression. Barron (1977) defines aggression as "any act that intends to produce a prejudice to the target.

Ethologists argue that aggression is a trait present in the animal world throughout its evolutionary ladder. They point out that in the human being case beyond its usefulness to the success of an action, aggression has evolved from an innate sense of reaction in order to adapt to that of "destructive and violent behavior directed toward people, objects or the self" (Ferreol & Neculau, 2003, p. 120). Thus, the spectrum of human aggression became wider as ethologist I. Eibl - Eibesfeldt stated (Eibl - Eibesfeldt, 1995), ranging from direct manifestation of an object or being (by hitting, verbal insult or irony) to indirect (by speaking ill of someone or refusing to communicate or social contact).

One intensively discussed issue is that on the nature of innate or acquired aggression. In other words, an individual is born aggressive or forced by the circumstances. In other words, an individual is born aggressive or forced by the circumstances. Proponents of the theory of innate character of aggressiveness talks about "an instinct of aggression" This position is supported by psychoanalysts and ethologists. Proponents of the received character of the aggressiveness argue that it occurs in the context and it is the individual's response to environmental conditions. In this respect, the most popular theory is formulated by the American researcher at Yale University, Dollard, who explains the nature of aggressive behavior by assuming the hypotheses of "frustration-aggression".

In relation with aggression, violence is considered "the brutal and prolonged disruption of a personal, collective and social system and it is translated into a loss of integrity which can be physical, mental or physical. This disruption may operate through aggression, use of force, consciously or unconsciously, but violence can exist only in terms of the victim, without the abuser having the intention of doing harm "(Debarbieux, 1991).

While „the aggression means passing from the potentiality to the proper act, this act being defined as a behavior with the target of partially or fully destruction of an object or of a person” (Preda, 1998, p.38), the notion of violence refers to an aggressive act characterised by using the physical brutal force being one of the major ways of manifesting aggressivity (Preda, 1998; Florea, 2003). Aggressivity is located at the dispositions level, being the tension that puts the organism in action till the motivation of the behaviour is diminished or satisfied. (Doron & Parot, 1999).

Based on the results of the research on the relationship frustration / aggression that took place over time, the researchers believe that in this relationship "must take into account the maturity/ emotional and moral immaturity of the persons and the degree of tolerance to the frustration determined by, among other things, the character and temper, education and life experiences" (Preda, 1998, p. 46).

Among the causes of aggressive behavior can be mentioned the existing on the subject some temperamental traits, individual belonging to one of the types of tempers. Temperamental traits represents basis for aggressive behavior adopted immediately. Therefore knowing the temperament can become a starting point for how to manage impulses and aggressive behavior. It has established a clear link between the level of self-esteem and aggressive tendencies, meaning that the lower the self-esteem, self-confidence and capabilities are, the stronger the aggressive component is. The concept of self-esteem is related to the sense of responsibility and awareness of their own values. Individuals with low self-esteem usually focus to impress others, have a low confidence in themselves, have doubts about their value and social acceptance, do not take risks and try to avoid failure , seek confirmation of their own values, of their own decisions to others and are easily influenced .

2. Design of Research

2.1. Objectives

The idea behind the development of this study was based on the empirical finding that students who exhibit aggressive behaviour have certain personality traits that distinguish them from others.

The overall objective of this paper is to identify adolescents' aggressive behaviour and personality traits that underlie aggressive behaviour, both of the girls and of the boys from different residential areas at different age levels. It has been followed to show the degree of association between aggressive behaviour, image/ self-esteem, extraversion/ introversion, neuroticism, gender and residential environment of the subjects.

From this perspective we assume that there are significant differences between adolescents who exhibit aggressive behavior and those who did not manifest like this regarding self-esteem and certain personality traits.

2.2. Participants

The study was conducted on a sample of 147 subjects in high school students with chronological age between 14 and 19 years (95 girls and 52 boys, 61 subjects residing in rural and 86 urban subjects). The choice of classes was made on the principle of random selection.

2.3. Materials

To identify the degree of manifestation of aggressive behaviour of adolescents we have used *The objective personality assessment method* (Zapan, 1984), a method of "peer-report" which is based on the assumption that people make assessments of their peers include various information about their real life personality. Subjects were asked to rank descending the names of their colleagues whom they consider as having aggressive behaviour (most aggressive first and on the last place, the least aggressive), then those whom they consider as being victims of peer aggression (first place the most victimized, and on the last place the least victimized). Data from the subjects who are asked to make their own assessments on their colleagues will be more objective as the subjects know better one another, they live longer together. Based on the findings that subjects made about the behaviour of their colleagues (including self-esteem) it has been built the following contrastive groups of subjects: bullies, victims and not involved/ very little involved in aggressive acts (indifferent). Quoting the five nominated subjects by each fellow in the classroom as the most aggressive, the least aggressive and the victim of aggressive acts was being done by giving points from 5 to 1 (5 points is given to the nominated student on first place and 1 point to the nominated on the fifth place). The quotes have been summed for each nominated student and it has been selected five students from each class who achieved the highest scores thus forming three groups of subjects: offenders, victims and not involved / very little involved.

The evaluation of self-esteem was achieved by the sample prepared by Rosenberg, called Self Esteem Scale, sample that includes 10 items, each with four possible answers, listed as follows: 4 points - absolutely agree, 3 points - agree; 2 points - disagree; 1 point - absolutely not. By summing the points will get the total score of the measured sample.

Eysenck Personality Questionnaire determines two basic factors: extraversion/ introversion and neuroticism. The first factor is bipolar and represents the individual - psychological characteristics of human personality, extremes corresponding to the orientation to the outside world (extraversion) or to the subjective world, inward (introversion). It is considered that extraverted are sociable, impulsive, flexible and adaptable. Introverts, on the contrary, are passive, unsociable, and sometimes meet social adjustment difficulties. The second factor - the neuroticism - describes acquisition - the state that characterises man in terms of emotional stability, anxiety, etc. This factor is also bipolar and forms a scale on one of those poles that are the persons who are very stable, adaptive and at the other pole are the persons who are extremely unstable, neurotic and nonadaptive. Major part of the people lies between these two poles closer to the center.

The intersection of these two bipolar features allows the human to report quite net to one of the 4 temperamental types.

As statistical methods were used percentage distribution of subjects into categories like bullies, victims, and uninvolved and Pearson Correlation Coefficient was calculated.

2.4. Procedure

The application of the samples was conducted within schools that subjects attended ensuring confidentiality of responses to get opinions as objective as possible. Scores obtained from the applied samples were analyzed according to the variables chronological age (14-16 years and 17-19 years), gender (girls - boys), environment (urban – rural).

3. Results – Discussion

Analyzing the aggressiveness of subjects in our study based on the estimates made by them on the behaviors of peers and their behavior shows that the aggressive behavior frequency is increased (68.8 % of subjects are characterized as having aggressive behavior) . According to assessments, the frequency of students who were victimized in the last period is high (24.3 % of subjects are perceived as victims of aggressive behavior of their colleagues).

Results on gender differences reveal that girls tend to aggress colleagues more than boys: 43.2 % of girls are considered aggressive behavior, compared with 22.3 % of boys. Regarding victimization it has not been identified significant differences between girls and boys. Regarding the distribution of aggressive behavior with subjects' age we have found that girls aged between 15 and 16 have aggressive behaviors to a greater extent than boys (46.3 % of the girls characterized by aggressive behaviors were that age and only 21.7% of boys have such behaviors) . Girls between 17 and 18 years are characterized as victims of aggressive behavior of their peers. These findings in contradiction with the results of other studies that showed that boys exhibit aggressive behavior more frequently than girls, this can be explained by the different ways in which girls and boys perceive aggressive behavior. Regarding the residential environment of the aggressors and the victims it can be stated significant differences between the subjective perception from rural areas and those from urban areas. Subjects living in urban areas are perceived as having a greater aggressive behavior than those in rural areas who are perceived as victims (76.3% of the subjects are urban and 78.1% of the victims are from rural areas).

Evaluation of self-esteem led to the finding that 43.2% of subjects have a low self-esteem, 37.5% have moderate self-esteem, and 19.3% have a high self-esteem. Girls considered bullies have low self-esteem (54.6%) than boys bullies who have extensively high self-esteem (52.1%). Regarding victims both girls (34.2%) and boys (42.1%) have moderate or low self esteem.

After processing the data from the Eysenck Personality Inventory it has been found that there are no significant differences in the percentage distribution of subjects, both girls and boys, in the categories of types of personality (extraversion, introversion, neuroticism). In terms of percentage distribution of subjects characterized as bullies, we note that both girls and boys can be included in the highest proportion in the category extroverted - instable (girls - 31.7% , boys - 17.1 %) and category introverted - instable (girls - 28.3 % boys , 24.7%), and most subjects - victims in class introverted - stable (girls - 32.2% , boys - 27.4%)

To verify the hypothesis we calculated the Pearson Correlation Coefficients between the values of self-esteem scales and the test EPI for the subjects perceived as aggressors and victims by their peers. For the category of aggressors subjects it has been achieved a significant negative correlation between aggression and self-esteem variables ($r = -0.65$, $p < 0.001$), which implies that subjects who have achieved a high score on variable aggressiveness (they were considered by their peers as having aggressive behavior, frequent expressed) have low self-esteem. In the same category of subjects - bullies – it was awarded a significant correlation – statistically talking- between the variables aggression and introversion ($r = 0.52$, $p = 0.001$) and for aggression and extraversion variables it was obtained significant positive correlation ($r = 0.66$, $p = 0.001$), which means that subjects considered strong aggressive are both extroverts and introverts . What sets them apart of the subjects victims is the emotional instability/stability - there is a significant negative correlation- statistically talking- between the variables aggression and emotional stability - $r = -0.42$, $p = 0.023$, $p < 0.05$ (both aggressors subjects extroverts and introverts are characterized by signs denoting emotional instability). There are no significant correlations- statistically talking-between variables self-esteem and aggression ($r = 0.18$, $p = 0.33$, $p > 0.05$) nor between the variables self-esteem and extraversion ($r = 0.27$, $p = 0.17$, $p > 0.05$) in subjects considered victims.

Regarding self-esteem correlation variables analysis - gender indicates that girls are statistically significant negative correlation between the expression of aggressive behavior and self-esteem ($r = -0.34$, $p = 0.001$) and for boys there was no significant correlation ($p = 0.12$, $p > 0.05$) between these variables. Girls' aggressive behavior is due to a low self-esteem, these events are explained by compensatory behavior. In the case of girls extraversion/emotional instability correlates significantly positively with aggression ($r = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$) and significant positive correlation for boys ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$) is found between introversion/ instability and aggressive behaviors (introverted and emotionally unstable boys have no frequent aggressive behaviors but have a high intensity leading to their characterization as highly aggressive by peers).

4. Conclusions

Adolescent aggression is a rich and complex area of research that requires special attention to be diminished. The study demonstrated in the first place the existence in the group of teenagers to a large percentage of subjects who are perceived as having aggressive behavior and a lower percentage of subjects who are perceived as victims.

Following statistical analysis it was observed that there is significant correlation between self-esteem and aggressive behavior and between extraversion / introversion and aggressive behavior in subjects perceived as aggressors. In the case of the subjects perceived as victims there were not perceived significant correlations for any of the psychological variables examined. Correlation analysis according to gender variable revealed the existence of significant correlations between girls' aggressive behavior and self-esteem, on the one hand and extraversion and emotional inability the other hand. For boys significant correlations were found between aggression and introversion / emotional instability only in the case of those who were considered aggressors.

According to the data obtained in terms of the residential environment correlations are not different from those of the whole group of subjects. We conclude that a person's aggression is very much made in relation to how he is self esteem, with self-image that each builds of himself, with his personality traits and the evaluation of his behavior by the others in different situations. We must take into account the fact that in addition to self-esteem and analyzed personality traits aggressive behavior is determined by a number of factors involved in everyone's life , such as family environment , school failure , relationships with others, the financial, stress, group membership , but taking by imitation or learning models that exhibit this behavior .

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