

Impact of Religiosity, Family Relations and Gender on Aggressive Behaviours among Undergraduates

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Abstract—Roles of religiosity, family relations and gender on aggressive behaviour of undergraduate students were explored using 259 (127 males and 132 females) undergraduate students drawn from Imo State University Owerri, South Eastern Nigeria. Their ages ranged from 19-34 years with a mean age of 25.49, $SD=3.94$. It was hypothesized that religiosity and family relations will independently predict aggressive behaviours. Also, aggressive behaviour will differ according to gender. The Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ), Religious Affiliation Scale (RAS) and Index of Family Relations (IFR) were utilized for data collection. The result revealed a joint influence of the variables on aggressive behaviour, religiosity had independent impact on aggressive behaviour while gender differences did not exist ($p > .05$). It was recommended inter alia that religious activities be encouraged on campuses in order to instill moral values in the students.

Index Terms—Aggressive behaviours, family relations, gender, religiosity.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background to the Study

In recent time, aggressive behaviours have been on the increase all over the world. There are no restrictions where these behaviours are exhibited. Such have been witnessed in work places, markets, recreational parks, railway stations, churches/mosques, schools/universities, and so on. Almost on daily bases, reports of aggressive acts grace newspaper headlines in Nigeria. For example, [1] reported that 39 persons were killed, 2000 houses destroyed as Boko Haram invades Borno. Aggression is a physical or verbal behaviour intended to hurt someone [2]. Similarly, [3] opined that aggression is any behaviour directed toward another individual that is carried out with the proximate intent to cause harm. There is a consensus in these definitions. It is obvious that every aggressive behaviour is a conscious effort and whose major aim is to inflict pain. This implies that any behaviour that causes pain/harm on another unintentionally can not be classified as aggressive behaviour. For the purpose of this study, aggression is defined as an antisocial behaviour directed towards another which has adverse physical and psychological effects on the individuals.

Various aspects of aggressive behaviours have been studied by Psychologists, Sociologists, Zoologists, Political scientists and Physiologists in an attempt to understand the causes as well as proffer ways of curbing it. Early psychologists such as [4] postulated that humans have an

innate drive towards destruction. This assertion can explain the senseless and irrational aggressive behavior some individuals display such as the gang rape of a school girl who was adopted and held for three days [5]. Majority of these behaviours were perpetrated by the youths. Every human according to Freud possess a destructive drive known as thanatos. This makes aggression or violence inevitable. Generally, researchers have identified two major factors that correlate with aggressive acts in humans: biological and situational factors. Twin studies comparing identical (Monozygotic, MZ) and fraternal (dizygotic DZ) babies have demonstrated a strong genetic component for aggressive behaviour [6]. Reference [7] conclude that genetic variation contributes to individual differences in virtually all behavioural domains.

Some situational/environmental factors that have influence on aggression include: interpersonal provocation [8], frustration [9], family relationship [10], religion [11] etc. Religiosity, gender and family influence on aggression are of concern to the researcher. Religion is expected to guide our moral action. It can improve world condition because it teaches a system of ethics that would be beneficial for all people [12]. Thus religious people are expected to be less angry and less violent. This concurs with an earlier assertion by [13] that religion aids in the maintenance of social order by offering a set of values and beliefs that can be collectively held. Many researchers have linked moral reasoning to religiosity [14]. This means that highly religious people should hold high moral standards.

Despite the increasing number of religious organizations and activities in Nigeria, there are still cases of Boko Haram menace, rape, assassination, kidnapping, armed robbery, corruption and the like. As observed by [15], rape incidents on university campuses have increased drastically in the last ten years. These occurrences lend support to [16] proposition that many Nigerians are religions without being righteous; they do not reflect the true teachings of their religion in their day to day interaction with their fellow citizens. Religion is expected to ensure and promote peaceful co-existence of the Nigerian Citizens irrespective of their tribal and religious differences. A study on religiosity and aggression using 476 college students revealed among other things that high scores on religious conflict and hostility to church yielded higher scores on aggression. Also, frequency of church attendance was a good predictor of hostility scores for both males and females [11].

Another variable that has received much attention is family influence on aggressive behaviour. The family is the first and most significant agent of socialization. Behaviourists believe that man is born a tabular Rasa (empty slate); all he would be

in life are installed in him within the formative period which often is spent within the corridors of the family [17], [18] reported that inconsistent parenting and the inability to set clear limits are among the prominent indicators of child aggressive behaviours. The behaviours if not checked are carried into adolescence and adulthood.

In a study on aggressive behaviour of university students, [10] revealed that poor family environment comprising of high conflict, less independence with less emphasis on morality, lack of cohesiveness and poor organization lead to aggression she also reported that less emphasis on ethical and moral issues lead to aggression. Higher family conflict and less cohesion were associated with frequent delinquent behaviour [19].

Family and personal characteristics of aggressive Nigerian boys were studied by [20], they discovered that little parental affection, crowding and corporal punishment were family predictors of aggression. [21] studied aggressive tendencies among undergraduates and discovered that family communication style independently predict aggressive tendencies, personal and family characteristics jointly predict aggressive tendencies while parental neglect was not found to contribute significantly to aggressive behavior among undergraduate students. Observational learning process is crucial in explaining the formation of aggressive behaviour. [22] examined aggression's many dimensions and possible determinants. He focused on whether children learn to be aggressive from watching other people be aggressive through his Bobo doll experiment. The result of his experiment showed that the children exposed to aggressive behaviour exhibited nearly twice as much aggressive behaviour as the control group.

Aggressive behaviour occurs in adults and children, but in different manifestation. It is a fact that aggressive behaviour begins early in life. However, parents do not take such behaviours serious as they believe the child will outgrow it. [23], [24] revealed that almost one third of children who were aggressive at five were still aggressive at fourteen. They summarized results from the Mater University Longitudinal study of 500 mothers and their children and reported that at age five; aggression was a strong predictor of delinquency than gender, poverty, maternal education and family structure.

Reference [25] found that children who were exposed to domestic violence scored high on aggression scale than those who do not. Children from emotionally stable family have been reported to have lower level of aggressiveness compared with students from emotionally unstable families. Other researchers have also underscored the importance of family variables on aggressive behavior [26], [27].

Researchers on aggression have also looked at gender differences in aggressive behaviour. Males have been reported to be more physically aggressive than females [2], [28] studied the prevalence, gender and secondary school students physical and verbal aggression in Rivers State, Nigeria. Among his finding is that prevalence of physical and verbal aggression was higher among males than females. Reference [29] reported that more young male adults than women commit dangerous acts of violence. Similarly, face – to – face verbal aggression is more common in boys than girls

[29], which continues and becomes more pronounced in young adulthood [30], while girls show greater tendency than boys to engage in indirect aggression within age 4-8 [31]. A sample of 181 senior citizens drawn from retirement homes in Tarragona (Spain) and surrounding area showed that men had higher levels of physical aggression and women higher in anger. However, no differences were found for either verbal aggression or hostility [21], [32] as well as [33] found no gender variation in aggressive behaviour among undergraduates. [34] found that gender has relatively weak effect on aggressive behaviour.

Against the backdrop of these findings, the researcher wonders if there are associations between religiosity, family relations and gender on aggressive behaviours of Imo State University students.

B. Hypotheses

- 1) Religiosity and family relations will jointly predict aggressive behaviour.
- 2) High scores on Religiosity will predict low scores on aggressive behaviour.
- 3) Poor family relations will correlate with aggressive behaviour.
- 4) Males and females will differ on all four sub scales of aggression.

II. METHOD

A. Participants

The participants for this study were 259 undergraduate students drawn from the Faculty of Social Sciences, Imo State University, Owerri, South East, Nigeria. They comprise of 127 (49.04%) males and 132 (50.96%) females within the ages of 19 and 34 and a mean age of 25.49, SD=3.94. The participants were drawn through convenience sampling.

B. Instruments

Four instruments were employed. They are: A short demographic questionnaire, Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ); Index of family relations; and Religious Affiliation Scale (RAS).

The [35] aggression questionnaire (BPAQ) is a 29 item 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 – extremely uncharacteristic of me to 5 – extremely characteristics of me. The scale measures four dimensions of aggression: physical aggression, verbal aggression, Anger and Hostility.

The authors reported internal consistency for the four subscales and total score ranging from .72 (verbal aggression) to .89 (total BPAQ score), and a nine weeks retest reliability with correlations ranging from .72 for Anger to .80 for physical aggression and for the total score. Some of the items read: “if somebody hit me, I hit back” (physical aggression), “I tell my friends openly when I disagree with them” (verbal aggression), “I have trouble controlling my temper” (Anger), and “I am sometimes eaten up with jealousy” (Hostility). The scale was revalidated and the following internal consistency reliabilities and norms were obtained (N=100): physical aggression .85 (norm=21.96), verbal aggression .73 (norm=16.86), anger .88 (norm=18.78), and hostility .64 (norm=23.71). The higher a participant's score is from the

norm, the higher his/her aggression.

The third scale: Index of Family Relations (IFR) is a 25-item inventory designed to measure the extent, severity or magnitude of problems that family members have in their relationships with one another [36]. IFR is also a 5 point Likert scale from 1 – rarely or none of the time to 5 – most or all of the time. Items 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23 and reverse items. A client’s score is obtained by subtracting 25 from the total score. [37] provided the psychometric properties for American samples while the researcher reported that of the Nigerian sample: M ($n=54$) = 24.48 for males and 24.75 ($n=51$) for females. Scores lower than the norms indicate appropriate family relations while higher scores imply poor family relations. The scale has an alpha coefficient of .95. “I feel left out of my family”, and “the members of my family really care about each other” are some of the items in the scale.

Religious Affiliation scale [38] assesses the extent to which individual clients engage in religious activities, hold strong religious views and believe in prescribed religious practices. It contains 21 (True-False) items. The author reported a retest reliability coefficient of .97 in an interval of three weeks. Some of the items state: “I regularly attend fellowship/prayer meetings”, “I believe in a Supreme God/Allah”. RAS is scored by counting the number of items in which the client shaded “true” and multiply the number by 3. Client’s scores would range from 3 to 63. The instrument has a norm of 38.82 for males and 43.08 for females. Scores higher than the norms indicate high religious affiliation.

C. Procedure

The consents of the participants were sought and the purpose of the research explained to them. The booklets containing the questionnaires were then distributed to willing participants met in their various lecture halls. It took an average of 25 minutes to respond to the instruments. The booklets were retrieved immediately.

D. Design and Statistics

The design is cross-sectional survey; multiple regression analysis and multivariate analysis of variance were utilized for data analyses.

III. RESULT

The first hypothesis was tested using the multiple regression analysis. The results are presented below.

TABLE I: SUMMARY RESULTS OF THE MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS SHOWING THE INDEPENDENT AND JOINT INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUSITY AND FAMILY RELATIONS ON AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOURS

| Variable | R | R ² | F | B | Df | T | P |
|------------------|-----|----------------|-----|-------|------|--------|------|
| | .21 | .04 | 4.0 | | 3,25 | | |
| | 3 | 5 | 2 | | 5 | | |
| Family relations | | | | .040 | | .677 | .499 |
| Religiosity | | | | -.226 | | -3.180 | .002 |

The result in Table I above reveals a joint influence of religiosity, and family relations on aggressive behaviours, $R^2 = .045$, $F(3,255) = 4.020$, $P < .05$. This implies that 4.5% of

variance in aggressive behaviour is accounted for by religiously, family relationship and gender.

Religiosity contributed significantly to aggressive behaviour, $\beta = -.226$, $t(255) = -3.180$, $P < .05$. The negative correlation indicates that as scores on the RAS scale increase (an indication of high religious affiliation) the lower the score on the BPAQ (low aggressive behaviour). Thus the more religious an undergraduate is, the less aggressive he would be. However, family relations did not predict aggressive behaviour ($\beta = .040$; $t = .677$, $P > .05$).

TABLE II: MANOVA SUMMARY TABLE WITH MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATION ON GENDER DIFFERENCES ON AGGRESSION SCORES

| Variables | Mean Score | | | |
|---------------------|------------|---------|-------|------|
| | Males | Females | | |
| Physical aggression | 22.84 | 21.99 | | |
| Verbal aggression | 16.48 | 17.15 | | |
| Anger | 17.15 | 18.92 | | |
| Hostility | 18.46 | 24.29 | | |
| Standard Deviation | | | | |
| | Males | Females | F | P |
| | 6.40 | 6.05 | 1.207 | .273 |
| | 3.85 | 4.55 | 1.639 | .202 |
| | 4.55 | 5.95 | .413 | .521 |
| | 5.55 | 5.98 | 2.507 | .115 |

From the result presented above, no gender difference was found on the four subscales: physical aggression, $F(1,257) = 1.21$, $P > .05$, verbal aggression, $F(1,257) = 1.64$, $P > .05$, anger, $F(1,257) = 0.413$, $P > .05$ and hostility, $F(1,257) = 2.51$, $P > .05$. Thus the fourth hypothesis was not upheld.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that religiosity contributed to aggressive behaviours. Participants who held high religious beliefs exhibited lower aggressive behaviours. This finding is consistent with the findings of [11] that high scores on religious conflict and hostility to church yielded higher scores on aggression. The finding also finds support in the work of [14] who reported that religiosity predicts moral reasoning.

The result of the multiple regressions on family relationship contradicted findings of [10], [20], [26]. They all reported a significant family influence on aggressive behaviour. The result is in line with part of [21] study that parental neglect was not a determinant of aggressive behaviour among undergraduate students.

A plausible explanation to this finding is the personal characteristics of the participants which included their ages (19-38 years). Quite a number of the participants were adults who to some extent depend on them selves and who must have devised better coping strategies of adjusting to situations in their families. As undergraduates, most of them are not always in close contact with family members. The researcher is of the view that if younger participants (children and adolescents) were used, family relations could have been significant.

Similarly, some of the students may have adequate peer relations which will compensate for their poor family

relations. Their involvement in social activities in school will also play down family influence on their behaviour. Another factor could be the scale used which measures general aspect of family relations unlike the specific measures of family influence utilized in the studies reviewed.

Gender was not significant in this study. It did not differ on the four subscales of aggression. This is in line with [33] finding of no gender variation on aggressive behaviour. [31] also reported that both gender are more likely to engage in verbal aggression.

This is not surprising as female undergraduates engage in cult activities likewise their male counterparts., [24] argued that much aggression in girls has been overlooked. Both the male and female undergraduates are in the same university environment thus the university climate is expected to influence both. The cognitive Neoassociation theory [38] proposed that aversive events such as frustration, provocations, loud noises, uncomfortable temperature and unpleasant odours produce negative affect. The negative affect produce unpleasant experiences which may give rise to anger or fear regardless of gender. Other studies revealed gender differences in physical and verbal aggression [33], [2].

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- 1) The university environment should be made conducive for learning.
- 2) Steps should be taken by university management to curb cultism in the university.
- 3) Disciplinary committee should be set up to handle problems involving physical aggressive behaviours.
- 4) There should be a handbook on code of conduct that will be given to each student upon admission into the university. This will continually guide their behaviours.
- 5) Finally, religious organizations and activities should be encouraged on campus as this will sensitize the students religiously, their by eliminating the need to act aggressively.

These recommendations are believed to reduce aggressive behaviours among undergraduates in Imo State University. Despite no difference on aggressive behaviours of males and females, they (especially the females) had higher scores on aggression compared with the norms of the sub scales. With the adoption and implementation of the above recommendations, aggressive behaviours on our campuses will decrease, thereby making it safe for learning.

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