

Research Article

Aggression in School Students: An Intervention Focused Approach

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Abstract

Introduction: The present research was conducted as a part of a series of multicentric youth studies to study aggression in school children followed by intervention programs for the school to prevent violence. Aggression in young children is an important precursor to how they perceive and process a variety of experiences through the course of their lives. It influences and underlines their emotional, behavioral, social, and psychological wellbeing. Identifying the prevalence and strength of beliefs and attitudes towards aggression among young, school-going students' is thus fundamental, and would help in designing targeted interventions for those at-risk.

Sample: In the present cross-sectional study of 988 students, a total of 602 boys and 386 girls of grades 5th to 12th in a private, co-ed, English medium school in Delhi were administered a self-rated questionnaire adapted from CDC Compendium of tools measuring aggression.

Results: Greater rates of aggressive beliefs ($p=0.018$) and violent attitudes ($p \leq 0.001$) are seen in higher grades (VIII-X std. students) as compared to younger batches of V and VI graders, who show higher rates of aggressive behaviors comparatively ($p \leq 0.001$). There was a statistically significant difference in girls and boys, where boys in younger grades (V-VI std.) show more aggressive behaviors, whereas girls show increased aggressive behaviors by the IX std. ($p \leq 0.001$). Regression analysis showed that aggressive beliefs are a strong predictor of aggressive behavior. Correlation with age showed the prevention should begin at V Std.

Conclusions: The roots of aggressiveness are present early in school years, and strengthen as students' progress through secondary grades. Early, targeted interventions are thus essential in helping children and adolescents attenuate and channelize their impulses in a healthier mode of expression.

Keywords: Aggression; Aggressive beliefs; Aggressive attitude; Aggressive behavior; School children

Abbreviations

Std.: Standard (Grades); CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; ABF: Aggressive Belief; AA: Aggressive Attitude; AB: Aggressive Behavior

Introduction

The APA Dictionary of Psychology defines Aggression as 'behavior aimed at harming others physically or psychologically [1]. The origins of aggression have been identified in some form or the other in children as young as preschoolers, and past literature suggests that aggression starting at an early age continues throughout the developmental period. Aggressive beliefs are gradually built up, which translate into aggressive attitudes, and ultimately result in aggressive behaviors. Hence, any prevention of aggressive behavior needs to be initiated in the early stages where aggressive beliefs are being formed in a young mind. These beliefs are often a combination of the personality, parenting, psychosocial factors, environmental

factors and experiences while growing up.

An Aggressive belief is a strongly held opinion or conviction about aggression which is often deep rooted. An Aggressive attitude is a settled way of thinking or feeling, reflected in a person's verbal and/or nonverbal behaviour. Aggressive behaviour is an overt, observable, action or reaction. Aggressive behaviour is a disposition often hostile and attacking, which may be physical, verbal or both.

Factors that result in aggressive behaviour are often low socioeconomic conditions; lower intelligence, poverty, neglect and deprivation, abuse of different types physical, mental or sexual, corporal punishment, juvenile delinquency, poor parenting, drug abuse etc., [2]. In psychiatric problems like conduct disorders, oppositional defiant disorder etc aggressive behaviour is part of the condition and parents and teachers need to be aware and educated on this aspect. Children who exhibit a lack of empathy and fearlessness are more prone to aggressive behavior [3]. To this end, mechanisms of identifying those at-risk, and delivering targeted interventions at different levels of development throughout childhood may aid in helping children learn healthier ways to channelize their aggression, and contribute towards building a future that is safe for all.

Children spend a good majority of their time with peers at school. Each school differs from the another in the domains of environmental factors, socioeconomic situations, school discipline and parent-teacher interaction, all of which may potentially affect the degree to which aggressive attitudes and behaviors are manifested [4]. Measuring self-reported aggressive behavior is fundamental in school violence prevention because knowledge, attitude, beliefs, and behavioral intentions of aggression are frequently associated with related risk behaviour. Changing attitude or knowledge is important to reduce the frequency of aggressive behaviours. It is thus necessary

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to analyze and understand the prevalence of aggressiveness in students in different grades, which will aid in developing programs customized for children at different stages of schooling, and development.

Objectives

1. To assess, beliefs support aggression, attitude towards violence, and aggressive behavior by standardized scales amongst school going adolescents in a private co-educational school Central Delhi.
2. To understand age and gender-based correlations with aggressive behavior.
3. To conduct intervention programs in school for parents, teachers and students after sharing the results of the survey with school management.

Materials and Methods

Sample

The present cross-sectional study consisted of secondary school students in a private, middle and upper middle socio-economic status school in Central Delhi. The school was co-educational, with English as the primary medium of instruction. The students were contacted in their school classrooms between July 2013- August 2013, and all the data from std V to XII was collected and analysed in this period. Based on the prevalence of 69% violence ever experienced by school adolescents in a previous study [5] and taking absolute error of 5% with 95% confidence interval, minimum estimated sample size was calculated to be 342 students. However, all the 988 students studying in this school from V-XII standard were included in the study.

Exclusion criteria

There are no exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria

All 988 children studying in this school V-XII std. filled up the questionnaires.

Ethical clearance

This project was cleared by an Institutional ethical committee. The objective and purpose of the survey was discussed with the school authorities, and their due permission was obtained. Written consent of children was taken while filling the forms. Parental permission was taken through the school authorities authorizing the study. All participants were explained the purpose of the study, and assured privacy and confidentiality of the information provided by them as no names were asked. The teachers were trained to get the scale filled from the students.

Tool

A validated self-reported, pre-tested 23-item questionnaire containing a scale to assess aggression (11 items), beliefs supporting aggression (6 items) and attitude towards violence (6 items) was used for data collection. This questionnaire is based on CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) Compendium of tools measuring aggression [6]. The original version of the scale was used as the students were comfortable with reading and writing in English.

Results

Data were entered into excel sheet and analyzed by SPSS version 18 software. Out of the total of 988 students who participated, there were 602 boys (60.9%) and 386 girls (39.06%). Chi square test for frequency showed that there is equal distribution of male and females

in this sample (483).

For statistical analysis, the sample was divided into 3 groups:

Group A- Age 9 to 13 years, V-VII Std. n=309 (31.3%). These percentages are out of a total 180 boys (29.9%), and 129 girls (33.4%).

Group B- Age 14 to 15 years, VIII-X Std. n=362 (36.6%). These percentages are out of a total 227 boys (37.7%), and 135 girls (35%).

Group C- Age 16 to 18 years, XI-XII Std. n=317 (32.1%). These percentages are out of a total 195 boys (32.4%), and 122 girls (31.6%).

Of the total sample, Mean and SD of total Aggressive Belief (ABF) score was 13.17 ± 3.12 . Mean and SD of total Aggressive Attitude (AA) score was 17.87 ± 3.54 . Mean and SD of total Aggressive Behaviour (AB) score was 13.38 ± 10.58 .

On analysis of our total sample (Table 1), Group B (VIII-X) showed higher values in the aggressive Beliefs score ($p=0.018$) and aggressive attitude score ($p<0.001$) than Group A (V-VII) but lower scores on Aggressive Behaviour ($p<0.001$). In boys, both Aggressive beliefs ($p=.047$) and Aggressive attitude ($p<0.001$) were higher in Group B (VIII-X) but Aggressive behaviour were lower than Group A (V-VII) ($p<0.001$). Girls from group B showed higher scores only in the Aggressive attitude ($p=0.002$). No significant difference was seen between Group B (VIII-X) and Group C (XI-XII).

On intragroup class wise analysis of Group A: V-VII (Table 2), we found that there was no significant difference on all three scores between class V and VI. However, on comparing classes VI and VII the Aggressive Beliefs score was higher in class VII ($p<0.001$). This difference was statistically more significant in girls ($p<0.001$). There was no significant difference in the scores of Aggressive Attitudes as well as Aggressive behaviour scores of both boys and girls from VI and VII.

On Intragroup analysis of Group B VIII-X (Table 3), Class IX had higher scores in aggressive beliefs ($p=0.015$) and aggressive behaviors ($p=0.021$) as compared to VIII Std. The boys showed increase in beliefs ($p=0.030$) whereas girls showed increase in aggressive behavior ($p<0.001$). There was no difference in aggressive attitude scores in both boys and girls on comparison of Class IX and X.

On intragroup analysis of Group C XI-XII (Table 4), class XII students showed significantly higher scores across all factors-aggressive beliefs ($p=0.015$), aggressive attitudes ($p=0.032$) and aggressive behavior ($p=0.001$) than class XI. Among boys, there was no significant difference seen in aggressive beliefs or aggressive attitudes, but aggressive behaviors were comparatively higher in class XII boys ($p=0.002$). Whereas, among girls, higher scores were seen in Class XII students across all three factors, Aggressive Beliefs ($p=0.046$), Aggressive Attitudes ($p=0.002$) and Aggressive Behavior ($p=0.002$).

On class wise analysis of boys in all groups (Table 1-6) showed there was significant increase in all scores starting from Std V rising till VII, with a dip in VIII-X std. with again a significant increase in from Std. XI- XII. Class wise analysis of girls from all groups (Table 1-4) showed that the aggressive attitudes increased in Std. VII; aggressive behavior became higher in Std. IX and further increased in Std. XII.

On multiple regression analysis, aggressive beliefs scores were found to be significant predictors for aggressive behavior across all three groups ($p<0.001$). In group A (V-VII std.), Male gender was an

Table 1: Aggressive Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behavior-Mean and SD of Total Sample across all groups.

Groups Classes Age	No. of Students (n=988)	Aggressive Beliefs Score (Mean ± SD)	t-test	p-Value	Aggressive Attitude Score (Mean ± SD)	t-test	p-Value	Aggressive Behavior Score (Mean ± SD)	t-test	p-Value
Total Group A V, VI, VII (9-12 years)	309	12.78 ± 2.95			16.77 ± 3.21			15.24 ± 11.34		
Total Group B VIII, IX, X (13-14 years)	362	13.33 ± 3.12	-2.367	0.018*	18.31 ± 3.73	-5.687	<0.001**	12.28 ± 9.27	3.714	<0.001**
Boys Group A V, VI, VII (9-12 years)	180	13.08 ± 2.86			17.04 ± 3.38			18.73 ± 12.37		
Boys Group B VIII, IX, X (13-14 years)	227	13.68 ± 3.12	-1.996	0.047*	18.71 ± 3.77	-4.7	<0.001**	12.96 ± 9.45	5.169	<0.001**
Girls Group A V, VI, VII (9-12yrs)	129	12.35 ± 3.02			16.38 ± 2.94			10.37 ± 7.41		
Girls Group B VIII, IX, X (13-14 yrs)	135	12.75 ± 3.04	-1.07	0.286	17.63 ± 3.57	-3.113	0.002**	11.13 ± 8.90	-0.753	0.452

There was no statistically significant difference between the Total students and both boys and girls from Group B (VIII-X) and Group C (XI, XII). *Significant at 0.05 significance level; **Significant at 0.01 significance level.

Table 2: Class-wise analysis of Group A (V, VI, VII)-Mean and SD of Aggressive Beliefs, Attitudes and Behavior.

Classes	n=309	Aggressive Beliefs Score (Mean ± SD)	t-test	p-Value	Aggressive Attitude Score (Mean ± SD)	t-test	p-Value	Aggressive Behavior Score (Mean ± SD)	t-test	p-Value
Total sample VI	90	12.24 ± 3.15			16.39 ± 3.85			13.99 ± 10.84		
Total sample VII	123	13.79 ± 2.79	-3.708	<0.001**	17.21 ± 3.32	-1.668	0.197	15.02 ± 11.31	-0.672	0.502
Girls VI	42	11.48 ± 2.87			15.81 ± 3.45			9.24 ± 6.92		
Girls VII	46	13.8 ± 3.02	-3.695	<0.001**	17.11 ± 3.20	-1.835	0.07	12.3 ± 8.91	-1.791	0.077

There was no statistically significant difference in Total students and the girls of Std V and VI. There was no statistically significant difference in the Boys of Std V, VI and VII hence scores not included.

*Significant at 0.05 significance level; **Significant at 0.01 significance level.

Table 3: Class wise analysis of Group B (VIII, IX, X)-Mean and SD of Aggressive Beliefs, attitudes and behavior.

Classes	n=309	Aggressive Beliefs Score (Mean ± SD)	t-test	p-Value	Aggressive Attitude Score (Mean ± SD)	t-test	p-Value	Aggressive Behavior Score (Mean ± SD)	t-test	p-Value
Total VIII	101	12.71 ± 3.27			18.73 ± 4.36			10.12 ± 8.82		
Total IX	127	13.77 ± 3.23	-2.448	0.015*	18.06 ± 3.48	1.257	0.21	13.01 ± 9.94	-2.321	0.021*
Boys VIII	56	13.02 ± 3.22			19.5 ± 4.50			12.702 ± 9.96		
Boys IX	83	14.26 ± 3.35	-2.188	0.030*	18.29 ± 3.27	-1.727	0.087	13.13 ± 10.04	-0.252	0.802
Girls VIII	45	12.33 ± 3.32			17.78 ± 4.01			6.91 ± 5.81		
Girls IX	44	12.84 ± 2.79	-0.78	0.438	17.64 ± 3.86	0.169	0.866	12.77 ± 9.86	-3.407	<0.001

There was no statistically significant difference in Total students, both boys and girls between Std. IX and X h. *Significant at 0.05 significance level; **Significant at 0.01 significance level

Table 4: Class wise analysis of Group C (XI, XII)-Mean and SD of Aggressive Beliefs, Attitudes and Behavior.

Classes	n	Aggressive Beliefs Score (Mean ± SD)	t-test	p-Value	Aggressive Attitude Score (Mean ± SD)	t-test	p-Value	Aggressive Behavior Score (Mean ± SD)	t-test	p-Value
Total XI	153	12.91 ± 3.19			18.02 ± 3.54			10.04 ± 9.30		
Total XII	164	13.8 ± 3.27	-2.449	0.015*	18.83 ± 3.21	-2.152	0.032*	15.4 ± 11.82	-4.495	0.001**
Boys XI	91	13.77 ± 3.17			19.09 ± 3.48			12.20 ± 10.03		
Boys XII	104	14.39 ± 3.59	-1.429	0.155	19.18 ± 3.25	-0.196	0.844	17.40 ± 12.32	-3.208	0.002**
Girls XII	62	11.65 ± 2.80			16.45 ± 3.02			6.89 ± 7.08		
Girls XII	60	12.77 ± 3.59	-1.929	0.046*	18.23 ± 3.07	-3.232	0.002**	11.92 ± 10.08	-3.18	0.002**

*Significant at 0.05 significance level; **Significant at 0.01 significance level.

Table 5: Regression analysis of aggressive behaviors score with socio-demographic variables, aggressive beliefs and attitudes scores.

Groups	Variables	Beta	SE	t-test	p-value	95% CI
GROUP A V, VI, VII	Age	-0.972	0.541	-1.797	0.073	(-) 2.036-0.092
	Sex (Male)	7.844	1.202	6.525	<0.001*	5.478-10.210
	Belief Score	0.854	0.223	3.822	<0.001*	0.414-1.292
	Attitude Score	0.066	0.201	0.329	0.743	(-) 0.329-0.461
GROUP B VIII, IX, X	Age	0.933	0.46	2.027	0.043*	0.028-1.839
	Sex (Male)	0.4	0.934	0.429	0.668	(-) 1.436-2.236
	Belief Score	0.999	0.171	5.86	<0.001*	0.664-1.335
	Attitude Score	0.281	0.143	1.967	0.05	0.000-0.562
GROUP C XI, XII	Age	1.472	0.689	2.138	0.033*	0.117-2.827
	Sex (Male)	2.144	1.161	1.847	0.066	(-) 0.14-4.427
	Belief Score	1.09	0.193	5.662	<0.001*	0.711-1.469
	Attitude Score	0.598	0.182	3.281	0.001*	0.240-0.957

*Correlation is Significant at 0.05 significance level.

Table 6: Regression analysis of aggression scores.

DEPENDENT Variable	Independent Variable	R2, P Value		
		GP A	GP B	GP C
Total Aggression Score	Total Belief Score	0.064 < 0.001 *	0.165, < 0.001 *	0.210, < 0.001 *
	Total Attitude Score	0.019, 0.015	0.086, < 0.001 *	0.143, < 0.001 *
	Gender	0.132, < 0.001 *	0.009, 0.069	0.062, < 0.001 *
	Age	0.001, 0.523	0.014, 0.025	0.007, 0.125
	Total Belief Score & Total attitude score	0.065, < 0.001 *	0.173, < 0.001 *	0.241, < 0.001 *
	Total Belief Score & Total attitude score, Gender	0.176, < 0.001 *	0.174, < 0.001 *	0.251, < 0.001 *

*Correlation is Significant at 0.05 significance level.

additional predictor, while in both Group B (VIII-X std.) and Group C (XI-XII std.), age was an additional predictor of aggressive behavior. In Group C, attitude was also a significant factor.

On correlation of the gender with the three scores and classes, we find that Boys have a higher score in most classes.

1. Aggression belief score is higher in boys than girls in Group A ($p=0.030$) (Std. V- $p=0.226$, Std. VI- $p=0.030$, Std. VII- $p=0.962$); Group B ($p=0.006$) (Std. VIII- $p=0.297$, Std. IX- $p=0.017$, Std. X- $p=0.344$); Group C ($p=0.001$) (Std. XI- $p<0.001$, std. XII- $p=0.002$).
2. For aggression attitude score no difference was seen across all 3 groups.
3. Aggression behavior score was higher in boys than girls in all classes of Group A ($p \leq 0.001$), in group B ($p=0.069$) and Group C ($p<0.001$).

This detailed analysis has helped us to make an intervention strategy plan to present to the school and decide in which classes we will have specific focus on girls and boys.

Discussion

Evidence suggests that the prevalence of aggression among adolescents in India is high [7], manifesting differently in both boys and girls. In the present study, it was found that students, particularly boys, in grades V-VII (9 to 12 years) score higher in aggressive behaviors as compared to their senior classes, which is in-line to prevalent notion that boys in this age group are higher in display of direct, overt aggression [8]. It is hypothesized that this could be due to the yet-underdeveloped neurological substrates of self-regulation and response inhibition in young children [2].

As students' progress to VIII-X grades, they were found to endorse more aggressive beliefs and attitudes. They can be harbored, but may not manifest as aggressive behaviors if there is good discipline in school, and it is not acceptable to the peer group. The adolescent may curb overt aggression and even try and mask attitudes. But since their beliefs make them want to hurt others, this can express through verbal and non-verbal behaviors. Besides, beliefs about violence are modulated by a number of school environmental factors as well- students in private and co-educational school tend to endorse aggressive attitudes and beliefs more than students in government schools [4].

However, students in higher secondary grades (std. XII) showed a pattern of increase in aggressive beliefs, attitudes as well as behaviors. This pattern was similar for both girls and boys. This increase in aggressive traits of Class XII may be attributed to the fact that as they are senior most in school, they may feel a sense of superiority and control over other school mates. This being their last year in school, inhibitions and fear of repercussion from teachers also may be low. The results highlighted that aggressive beliefs and attitudes are

significant predictors for aggressive behaviors, emphasizing the need to modulate aggressive tendencies early in childhood.

Analyzing traits of aggressions between the two genders, the study found overall higher rates of aggression in boys as compared to girls. This has been repeatedly found to be true. Boys tend to be more physically and verbally abusive [4,6], whereas girls show higher indirect aggression in later years of adolescence [9-11]. From the findings, we can say that boys tend to develop higher aggressive beliefs and attitudes from VIII to IX with increased aggressive behavior which rises from XI onwards. This may be due to the relative shift to the senior school from middle school. Bullying and teasing are most frequently reported in these classes. Thus, an intervention program at an early stage when children or adolescents are still forming the beliefs will prevent the development of aggressive attitude and behaviors and will be most effective strategy in reducing violence.

In contrast the girls showed higher scores only in attitudes towards aggression until class X, but lower aggressive behavior scores. The girls seem to have a tendency to develop stronger aggressive beliefs and attitudes with progressively increasing with age as they start harboring anger and resentment but probably with social learning, they are able to control their aggressive behavior. Girls may be conditioned to be docile in expression in society hence are not able to channelize their anger which starts forming into stronger negative beliefs. This thus emphasizes the need for assessment of non-physical aggression in girls.

Besides gender, age, socio-economic status, education, parental modeling, social learning are all predictors of the expression of aggression in students. School type was also found to contribute significantly to aggressiveness. In a similar study, using CDC scales to quantify aggression, researchers Anand et al. [4] contrasted the rates of aggressive behaviors in children studying in a private school to those studying in a government school. Their results highlighted that private school students tend to have higher aggressive tendencies ($p<0.001$).

Salimi et al. [11] in 2019 proposed a Social Cognitive Theory based intervention program to address the many factors influencing student's views of aggressiveness, predicting a 37% change in aggressive behaviors in adolescents. With a background understanding of Indian urban and rural school students, designing a comprehensive intervention plan, targeted to the needs of each grade in schools, would help in addressing and re-defining adolescents' expression of aggressiveness presently, as well as in the long run.

Strength and limitations of methods

Strength: These scales are well validated and easy to use and gives good assessment to see aggressive beliefs, attitudes and behavior in a school which can help us to plan specific intervention strategies for reduction of various aspects aggression in that particular school. Since we had not asked for any names only age and gender, to keep

anonymity, the responses are generally to be honest. We have collected data from all the students 984 from V-XII in a single school, ensuring uniformity of environment.

Limitations: However self-report measurements may not be exactly accurate for many reasons. The students may have wanted to have their answers confirm to social desirability and responding what they thought the organization or school wanted to hear.

Implications of these findings in future research

We had mainly studied physical aggression and our studies show much higher scores in boys. Since girls have shown less aggressive behavior scores but high scores on beliefs and attitudes, we need to use additional scales which categories various forms of aggression for girls in our future studies.

Conclusions

- Our data clearly shows that an aggressive belief is a significant predictor of aggressive behavior across all age groups in this school. In addition, age was an important predictor from Std. VIII-XII. Hence intervention plan made specially to help children to form a positive belief system needs to be started as early as possible. On intraclass analysis we find that aggressive score showed variation with increasing age. We need to do further analysis to find out various other factors associated with age.
- Though both boys and girls build up aggressive beliefs and attitudes as they go in higher classes, the physical expression of aggression is far higher in boys may be due to gender stereotyping and society norms. But both girls and boys need intervention as girls are known to channelize aggression into other forms like verbal bullying, teasing etc.
- The male gender was an important predictor in Group A and Group C. Hence in this school, boys in these groups need extra focus to prevent increased aggression.
- We also need to further analyze the girls in VII std. Group A, to assess if they have non-physical forms of aggression by other scales as they showed higher belief scores and low physical aggression scores.
- In older girls' aggressive behavior increased in Std. IX -XII. So, in our sample, older girls also manifested with physical aggression as they built up aggressive beliefs and attitudes. This is a matter of serious concern specially with increasing incidence of bullying and ragging and associated deaths in many all-girls' colleges in our country.
- Additional interventions at Std. XI and XII are crucial in this school which shows high level of aggression in this group, to help both boys and girls to prepare them for college and adulthood with positive ways to handle aggression. Rebelliousness which is normal developmental milestone at this stage needs to be channelized into positive aggression. If measures are not introduced at this level, it may lead to an increase in aggression and violence as they will enter college as there is much more freedom and less supervision.
- Intervention programs should include life skills training, handling peer pressure, anger management, understanding adolescence and transition into adulthood etc. Holding similar programs for awareness and educations of parents and teachers to become better role models is the need of the hour. These will substantially change attitudes, beliefs reducing aggressive behaviour towards aggression.

Author Contributions

SYB conceived and designed the study contributed substantially to the writing of the paper, including interpretation of the statistical analysis and critically evaluated the manuscript for intellectual content and was responsible for the final version. She will act as guarantor of the study. SM collected the data and contributed substantially to the writing of the paper including review of Literature and discussion collecting and summarizing references. KN helped in formatting manuscript and updating review of Literature. AR did the interpretation of the statistical analysis and contributed to writing of the paper for the discussion section. AS helped in interpretation of the data and critically review the final manuscript. SJ helped in interpretation of the data and critically review the final manuscript.

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