

# THE HOME AND SCHOOL DETERMINANTS OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOURS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN PLATEAU STATE

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## **Abstract**

*Aggressive behaviours among secondary school students are expressed in a number of ways such as bullying, seizure of provision from juniors, name-calling and violence. A number of factors can be used to explain students' aggressive behaviours. This research aimed at investigating the home and school related factors associated with aggression among students in secondary schools. The sample was made up of 460 students randomly drawn from ten boarding secondary schools in Plateau State. Data were analyzed using Chi-square. The result showed a significant association between family background variables like home stability, socio-economic status, family discipline methods and aggressive behaviour but school leadership style was not significantly associated with aggressive behaviour. A number of strategies were suggested to curb aggression in secondary schools which include parent-training, counselling aggressors, creating students' council, using playlets and encouraging victims to speak out.*

Aggression no matter the form it takes is outrageous for students who have suffered it. Unfortunately schools do not seem to see it as a priority conduct problem. Aggression intrudes on the rights of others and impairs the normal functioning of classroom, hostel life and other social settings. Aggressive behaviours may range from minor yet challenging issues as whining, yelling, temper tantrums, name-calling, threatening, sarcasm, ridiculing and teasing to serious issues like bullying, assault, mugging, and defiant negativism.

The magnitude and menace of aggression among students is revealed by the reaction of aggrieved parents of victims who speak their minds and

and express their feelings during Parent-Teachers' Association (PTA) meetings. At such meetings, school authorities often express dismay that such cases of aggression perpetrated in the schools are not brought to their knowledge. The problem is that victims are juniors who are so scared of intensified aggression on them that they only tell parents their problems. Aggression, particularly bullying is a serious social and psychological problem that often results in the alienation of victims from school.

Although aggression is a very serious educational problem, it is not taken seriously by school authorities who may feel that parents of victims are over-reacting to the problem. Only victims know what they suffer in the hands of bullies. Some aggressive behaviours have resulted in permanent physical damages such as scar on the body and deformity.

Such was the case of one student who died in one of the schools in Jos, Plateau State in May 1999. The death brought the school authority, other school principals and the state ministry of education face to face with the realities of the complaints of junior students which they had hitherto taken lightly. Junior students often suffer such maltreatment as continuous punishment, beating, seizure of personal provision, money and cloths. Most of the atrocities senior students inflict on fellow junior students are done in the hostel and at night. Aggression is likely to affect the attitude of victims toward school. They may become resentful, embittered and depressed.

The problem of aggression by senior students on the juniors seems to continue unabated in boarding schools in particular. The situation prompted a study into the factors that cause aggression in schools with particular interest in the home and school related factors

### **Statement of the Problem**

Students' hostility to one another is a menace in schools, to the extent that it can result to truancy, fear, lack of concentration, failure, transfer or even dropout of schools by the victims. Bullying and other forms of aggression seem to be established traditions in some schools such that junior students even see it as some of the ordeal they have to go through as juniors at school. The problem is that most bullies are not caught and so few are punished. Bullies may have underlying problems triggering their behaviours and bullying and other forms of aggression are not likely to stop unless these problems are tackled. The problem this research set out to investigate is to identify the factors that trigger off or contribute to aggression in schools and

what can be done to alleviate or stop the ugly incidence.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to find out the home and school related factors that contribute to aggressive behaviours in students.

### **Hypotheses**

The following research hypotheses were formulated and tested to guide the study:

1. There is no significant association between home background and aggressive behaviour of students in secondary school.
2. There is no significant association between socio-economic status of parents and aggression among secondary school students.
3. There is no significant association between academic performance and aggressive behaviour in students.
4. There is no significant association between leadership style of school authorities and aggressive behaviour in students.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Some students often engage in terrorising fellow students. Craig (1994) called these categories of students bullies. Bullies use threatening manners to intimidate others usually smaller or of weaker status than themselves. They keep a mental grip over victims or perhaps use physical violence to extract provision and money from victims. Craig (1994) found that as the problem lingers, the victim becomes more and more scared.

### **Forms of Aggressive Behaviours**

Sweeny (1997) reported that aggressive behaviours often perpetrated in schools are:

- a. Physical aggression such as bullying, cruelty to peers, assault and mugging.
- b. Behaviour directed particularly towards adults which include hostility, verbal abuse, impatience, defiance and negativism.
- c. Destructiveness and stealing such as vandalism, setting fire and breaking of lockers and boxes.
- d. Behaviours outside the home involving confrontation with the victim like extortion, purse snatching and armed robbery.

Moorji (1998) similarly found that the following assertive behaviours constitute conduct problems in schools. These includes.

- a. Disruptive behaviours which involve misdemeanours such as verbal abuse, disorderly behaviour and bullying.
- b. Intentional damage to property which includes theft, vandalism, harassment, blackmailing and use of offensive weapons.
- c. Per-mediated physical violence. This is the deliberate planning and use of actual physical violence involving the use of weapons in school and elsewhere. It also include initiation of sexual harassment of girls.

### Causes of Aggressive Behaviours

Theories of aggression have attributed aggression to the following:

- a. **In built tendency in the organisms:-** The Freudian theory postulates that the urge to violence is a pressure from our irrational instinct.
- b. **A constant potential in virtually all organisms:-** The ethnological theory by Konrad Lorenz held that organisms have constant potential to aggress and that if proper release occurs, the potential for aggression will be translated into action. Lorenz stated that aggression has survival value for the specie since aggression acts both to reduce the size of population and to spread people over a larger area.

Ethnology also states that aggression emanates from a fundamental territorial need, that all organisms have an innate drive to own, defend and gain territorial areas.

- c. **Frustration:-** According to Miller - Dollard frustration - Aggression hypothesis, Aggression occurs as a result of being frustrated or having one's goal blocked. People become angry and sometimes irrational when their goals are blocked. However, Sprinthal, Sprinthal & Oja (1994) found that some cultures promote aggression while others do not. Aggression thrives where a society reinforces it. According to this theory, aggression is determined by group norms.

Sweeny (1997) found family variables as significant antecedent of aggressive behaviours. He found that anti-social and aggressive behaviours tend to run in families, in that violent and aggressive parents tend to have aggressive children. Secondly he found that conduct - disordered children,

particularly aggressive children, tend to often experience disruption in early life that interfered with the development of attachment. He reported that most of his aggressive respondents came from homes without a father. Sweeny observed that much of children's conduct - problems like aggression is an expression of an emotional need. Traumatized, abused, neglected or emotionally starving children, will often express their needs in the best way they know, unfortunately their expression will be inappropriate and disturbing.

Craig (1994) and Sweeney (1997) have identified school performance as one of the major triggers of aggressive behaviour. They found that aggressors tend to have academic/school problems than non-aggressors.

Even though the literature has attributed aggressive behaviour mainly to the family factors of modelling, this research would like to investigate other factors within the family such as the socio-economic status of the family and the family structure. Also, the literature reviewed showed performance of students as the major cause of aggression in school. But this study investigated leadership styles and school culture as important causes of aggression in secondary schools.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study was a survey of the home and school factors contributing to aggression among students of boarding schools in Plateau State. The state has fifty - two (52) boarding schools made up of 20 governments - owned school and 32 voluntary Agency / individual privately own schools. Of this number, the researcher randomly selected ten (10) schools using the hat and draw method of random sampling. Here, all the names of the boarding schools were written on piece of paper and kept in a hat. A neutral person was asked to pick ten of them one at a time after shaking the hat with every picking. The respondent sample was made up.

### **Research Design**

A survey research design was adopted.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

A total of 460 students were used for the study. Thus, out of the 52 boarding schools in the state, made up of 20 government - owned and 32

voluntary agency / individually - owned schools, ten (10) schools were obtained through balloting.

In each of the 10 schools, 46 students were again obtained from both the junior and senior classes through balloting. This gave rise to 460 students on the whole

### **Instrument**

The instrument used for the data collection was self-report measure (SRM). 40-item self report scale comprising two sections was constructed by the researcher. Section one sought general information on individual respondent. This section sought information on respondent's school, class, age, family background (whether the respondent is from intact or broken home, parental occupation and income) while section two sought information related to pattern and causes of aggression among students. Students responded to a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Independent variable on the part of student includes socio-economic status, family structure and class, parental style and academic performance.

The instrument was validated by experts in educational research and educational psychology and by a test-retest reliability of two - weeks interval. The reliability coefficient of 0. 86 was obtained.

Data were collected by the researcher in each school with the help of teachers and clean of studies in the schools. Copies of the questionnaire were collected back the following day from the schools. The data were analyzed using chi-square and percentages.

### **RESULTS**

**Hypothesis one:-** There is no significant association between family background and aggressive behaviour among students in secondary school.

The result of the test is shown in table 1.

**Table 1. Chi-square Analysis of the Association between Home Background and Aggression**

<i>Home Background</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>X<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Critical value 0.05</i>
	<i>Aggressive</i>	<i>Not Aggressive</i>				
Intact families (stable homes)	74(88.5)	277 (262.5)	351			
Broken families (unstable homes)	42 (27.5)	67 (81.50)	109	1	12.7	3.84
Total	116	344	460			

The calculated value is 12.7 while the critical value is 3.84 at 0.05 alpha level. Since the calculated value is greater than the critical value, the null hypothesis is rejected leading to the conclusion that there is an association between home background and aggressive behaviour of students in secondary schools.

**Hypothesis 2** There is no association between the socio- economic status of parents and aggression among students. The result of the test is shown in table 2

**Table 2 Chi-square Analysis of the Association between Parental Socio-economic Status and Aggression among Students.**

<i>Socio Economic Status</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>X<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>crit. value</i>
	<i>Aggressive</i>	<i>Not Aggressive</i>				
High	20 (12.1)	28 (35.9)		48		
Middle	50 (71.4)	233 (211.6)	282			
Low	46 (35.5)	83 (96.50)	129	2	20.4	5.99
Total	116	344	460			

The calculated value of 20.4 is greater than the critical value of 5.99. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This implies that there is a significant association between the socio-economic status of parents and the aggressive behaviours of secondary school students.

**Hypothesis 3** There is no significant association between academic performance and aggressive behaviours among secondary school students. The test of the hypothesis is shown in table 3

**Table 3:- Chi - square Analysis of the Association between Academic Performance and Aggression among Students.**

<i>Academic performance</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>X<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Critical value 0.05</i>
	<i>Aggressive</i>	<i>Not Aggressive</i>				
High	68(82.7)	260(245.2)	328			
Low	48(33.2)	84(98.7)	132	1	12.3	3.84
Total	116	344	460			

The calculated value of 12.3 is higher than the critical value of 3.84. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This implies that academic performance is associated with aggressive behaviour.

**Hypothesis 4** There is no significant association between school leadership style and aggression in students. The result is shown in table 4.



**Table 4 Chi-square Analysis of the Association between School Leadership Style and Aggressive Behaviour.**

Leadership style	Behaviour		Total	df	X <sup>2</sup>	Critical value 0.05
	Aggressive	Not Aggressive				
Democratic	22(21.2)	62(62.8)	84			
Authoritarian	60(67.6)	208(200.4)	268	2	3.41	5.99
Permissive	34(27.2)	74(80.8)	108			
Total	116	344	460			

From table 4, the calculated value is 3.41, while the critical value is 5.99. The null hypothesis is therefore not rejected, implying that there is no association between school leadership style and aggressive behaviour among secondary school students.

### Major findings

1. There is a significant association between family background and aggressive behaviour among students in secondary schools. Aggressors reportedly come mostly from unstable family backgrounds such as single parent families, families that use punishment a lot in discipline and quarrelsome families.
2. There is a significant association between socio-economic status and aggression. This explains why the most occurring aggression against junior students is the forceful seizure of provisions.
3. Academic performance is also significantly associated with aggressive tendencies in students. Aggressors tend to have difficulties in performance and repeating classes.
4. There is no significant association between aggression and leadership style in schools.

## **DISCUSSION**

This researcher found family variables as significant causes of aggression among students. She found unstable family structure where only one parent is present in the family a major contributor to bullying. Similarly it was found that aggressive parents who use harsh methods of punishment in disciplining their children tend to have children who are aggressive to fellow students at school. These children tend to model their parents

The association of socio-economic status to aggressive behaviour is a finding new in this study. Aggressors tend to come from low socio-economic families or large families. Consequently the most occurring aggressive behaviours is the seizure of provision such as soap, beverages, biscuit, corn flakes, butter, body cream, perfume, mattress, bucket, blanket, and toothpaste from junior students. Some schools have now made it a policy for returning students to show their provision on resumption before acceptance into the hostel. This measure is aimed at minimizing the incidence of seizing provision from junior students.

Leadership style in a school was found to be an insignificant factor in contributing to aggression. Authoritarian leadership was the most common leadership style in most schools.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The problem of aggression in secondary schools has to be tackled from the source which is the family. Parenthood education should be given to parents when their children are still young and to persons who hope to be parents. This kind of education will equip parents with child - care techniques and teaching them their responsibilities as parents. They school also be educated on the implications of divorce, separation, death, quarrelling and harsh punishment on the development of children. Parenthood education should also teach parents the psychological needs of children and how to meet them in the family setting.

These needs include love, praise, acceptance, responsibility, discipline, security and the need for God. This recommendation is a long-term measure. But for parents with aggressive children, parent training is required as a solution in curbing the problem. Parent - training involve the development of parent-child relationship. One of such parent - training approaches is the filial therapy approach. This approach teaches behaviour management and offering new disciplinary skills in addition to improving the parent-child relationship. In this therapy, estbalishing a cordial parent-child relationship is fundamental.

Poverty alleviation programme should identify families with economic problems and help them. Families can be given family up - keep grants through special social welfare services in their localities. More industries and employment opportunities should be created for parents in this country to enable them cater adequately for their families. There should be training of parents to equip them with self - employment skills to empower them earn good living for the family. Aggressive behaviour can be modified using role play, simulation and playlets, where the aggressor acts the role of victims and experiences what their victims go through.

Training in assertiveness is one method of dealing with aggressive behaviour in school. Bullies tend to enjoy harassing people who don't stand up for them. If a victim is assertive, the chances are that the bully will turn out to be a coward and back down. After all, they are human beings. Victims should be encouraged to speak out and talk to someone in the school as a first step.

Counselling should also be done with bullies and their victims. Counsellors should talk to the bully and allow him to freely talk about how he feels when he is bullying. He should be led to suggest solutions to the problem in the school. Students council should be created in schools where students themselves discuss, debate, dramatize and campaign against aggression in school. The council may award badges to individuals or houses that within an interval, discouraged or fought against bullying in their hostels. Students can even form the anti-bullying club to curb aggression in their school. The club can organize panel discussion, drama, posters, print caps and T-shirts with anti-bullying slogans.

## **CONCLUSION**

The incidence of aggressive behaviour in the form of bullying is high in our schools. This study found that unstable family background and low socioeconomic status as well as poor academic performance at school are major factors contributing to the behaviour. The researcher recommended parenthood education, parent training therapy approach as both long-term and short-term solution to the problem. In addition, the economic base of families of low socio-economic status need to be improved through training in self reliant skills and giving grants to poor families.

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