



Aggressive Behaviour Among Adolescents in Arab Schools: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Numerous studies have focused on the individual characteristics of aggressive behaviour with the studies not making a careful examination of contextual factors that might influence the aggressive behaviour among adolescents in the Arab world. This paper is a literature review that identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the previous studies; it aims at providing a strategy to reduce the level of aggressive behavior among adolescents in Arab schools. Furthermore, it gives full explanation of the issues and difficulties that provide meaningful information as guidance for researchers and counselors in this field.

Key Words: Aggressive, Behaviour, Adolescents

الملخص

ركزت العديد من الدراسات على الخصائص الفردية للسلوك العدواني مع عدم قيام الدراسات بفحص دقيق للعوامل السياقية التي قد تؤثر على السلوك العدواني بين المراهقين في العالم العربي. هذه الورقة هي مراجعة الادبيات التي تحدد نقاط القوة والضعف في الدراسات السابقة ؛ ويهدف إلى توفير إستراتيجية للحد من مستوى السلوك العدواني لدى المراهقين في المدارس العربية. علاوة على ذلك ، فإنه يقدم شرحًا كاملاً للقضايا والصعوبات التي توفر معلومات مفيدة كدليل للباحثين والمستشارين في هذا المجال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: عدواني، سلوك، مراهقين

Introduction

Schooling is a vital role in a person's development, as schooling provides students with the skills they need to have to become productive citizens. School is a place where Students ought to be able to concentrate on learning in a safe environment. It also ought to be a safe place for teachers and other staff members so that they can devote themselves to teach and perform other school activities without fear of any harm coming to themselves or to their students. Moreover, aggressive behaviour is a serious problem identified in recent times to have increased at a dramatic rate among adolescents (Ahmed, 2005). And the increased level of aggression throughout Arab schools undermines the whole perception and reality of school as a safe place for students and teachers (Al-Husaini, 2004).

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Furthermore, aggression is relatively stable over time. Studies have revealed that adolescents can neither express nor understand themselves within their home atmosphere, nor they can express relationships with their friends. As a result, adolescents choose aggression as a means of self-expression and argue with their friends; a matter that causes serious problems at school (Karats, 2009). Accordingly, school teachers and specialists have witnessed violence as a dangerous act increasing at a gradual rate among the students (Akiba, 2001; Lee A, 2002; cited in Al-Husaini, 2004).

Aggressive behavior

Aggression as a concept has been interpreted by different investigators to involve a wide range of behaviours. Subsequently, due to myriad of trends and orientations, there has been a disagreement about the most suitable way to define and measure the construct of aggression. However, aggressive behaviour has been defined in numerous ways over the years from the physical or relational aggression point of view (Murray, et al., 2007). Most of the operational definitions of physical aggression include physical harm or threats of harm, including behaviours such as hitting, pushing, or threatening to beat up a peer (Brook et al., 2001; Casas et al., 2006; Ostrov & Keating, 2004; Murray, et al., 2007; Pellegrini & Roseth, 2006). On the other hand, definitions of relational aggression include harming by damaging relationships (Casas et al., 2006; Swearer, 2008; Coyne et al, 2006; Ostrov & Keating, 2004; Pellegrini & Roseth, 2006). Examples include rumour spreading with the intent to damage one's reputation, popularity or peer standing; gossiping; giving the silent treatment; intentional exclusion from activities or events; and the explicit or implied threats to a relationship if the threatened party does not comply with the aggressor's wishes (Gomes, 2007). Furthermore, aggressive behaviour has been defined as "any form of behaviour directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being, which is motivated to avoid such treatment" (Baron & Richardson, 1994; cited in Byrd, 2011). Likewise, aggression has been defined as a behaviour that is intended to injure or irritate another person leading to a costly social problem for which it is important society finds means to address and reduce the rate of aggression.

More particularly, aggression has been defined as verbal, nonverbal, or physical behaviour that injures another indirectly or directly and/or results in extraneous gains for the aggressor (Zirpoli, 2005). According to Archer and Coyne (2005), several types of aggression have been referred to throughout the literature: indirect, relational, and social aggression. Each of these types is defined by both the acts they include and by their outcomes. Indirect aggression refers to the fact that the aggression is covert; it is often done

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behind the backs of its victims. Relational aggression is defined by its outcome; it involves damaging other's relationships and can be done through either overt or covert means. Social aggression is also defined in terms of its outcome; it involves affecting another's social acceptance or social standing within the group. It also can be done through covert or overt means (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

Accordingly, what we can review is that through these definitions aggressive behavior is conduct that consists of two general parts, direct manner intended to injure or irritate another person leading and as previously stated to a costly social problem and an indirect manner through which physical behaviour injures another indirectly or directly. Moreover, in some cases, aggression is thought to involve acts for example as shouting at or hurting another person in a relatively minor way, say by pushing individuals or pulling their hair.

Furthermore, what is important in these definitions is that the act of aggression is not only limited to physical acts but can include any behaviour acted out with the intention to cause harm to another such as, spreading vicious gossip or damaging someone's property. Accordingly, in the current paper we take into account Buss and Perry definition in 1992 who defined aggressive behavior as behavior intended to inflict hurt or emerge superior to others, does not necessarily involve physical injury, and may or may not be regarded as being underpinned by different kinds of motives. It is not always negatively sanctioned" (Buss & Perry, 1992).

Effects of Aggressive Behaviour in Arab Schools

Aggressive behaviour is considered a serious challenge affecting the well-being of communities and educational processes. Aggressive behaviour is one of the problems that had attracted the attention of the scholars of the previous studies (Ahmed, 2005). Some Arab studies have witnessed a gradual increase in the aggressive behaviour among Arab school students. Examples of these studies include Altif, (2005 Kamel (2002); Al-Garni (2001) in Saudi Arabia; and Naceur (2001) in Algeria.

In accordance with Arab researchers, it has been shown that there is a continuous interest in investigating aggressive behaviour and the effects of the delinquent behaviour. Examples of these studies are that of Aljorshy (2007); Naceur, 2001; Abo Mustafa & Najah (2008); Abo Mustafa (2009); and Awad, 2002. Furthermore, several studies such as (Altif (2005); and Aljorshy (2007) observed an obvious increase of violent among adolescents, which in return have caused a huge problem such as psychological, academic, social, and economic damages. In addition, these studies revealed that adolescents have difficulty in appropriately expressing their emotions and managing their anger and aggression (Aljorshy, 2007).

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In response to the gradual increase of violence and aggressive behaviour among adolescents, several studies have been conducted over the last two decades to determine the reasons and the correlated variables of this phenomenon. Examples are the studies of Hedia (1998); and Al-Garni (2001).

Furthermore, aggression among adolescents has negative implications for the adolescent's social and emotional development. Not only are aggressive adolescents negatively affected by their behaviour, there is also the cost to others and to society and those costs are significant (Kazdin, 1995). For instance, victims of aggression suffer negative consequences, which include emotional, behavioural, and academic problems (Lopez & Dubois, 2005). Problems experienced by aggressors lead to an increasing need for interventions and psychotherapy services; hence, it incurred a substantial cost to society (Mccarthy, 2005). Gaining a better understanding of the mechanisms that influence aggression is important for the development and improvement of interventions to prevent or modify aggressive behaviour among adolescents. Thus, improving interventions for aggression requires a better understanding of the different types of aggression and of their associated etiological, behavioural, cognitive, and social aspects.

However, in this respect, some studies of anti-social children and adolescents showed that when untreated and disruptive adolescents grow into adults, they would contribute disproportionately to the rate of substance abuse, violence, car accidents, job trouble, crime, financial problems, divorce, and vagrancy, dependence on welfare support, antisocial behaviour, and mood problems (Rutter, 2000; Waschbusch, 2002).

Only a handful of adolescents with conduct disorder will be able to achieve satisfactory social functioning as adults (Zoccolillo, et al., 1992). Therefore, aggression has become a persistent behaviour among adolescents (Robins & Price, 1991). Conduct disorders and oppositional behaviours are difficult to live with because of their persistence over time (Cicchetti & Richter, 1993). An adolescent with aggressive behaviour is costly and devastating to the society. Thus, the symptoms of aggression, which may include being across multiple settings, ought to be examined and treated as a disorder that might be developed into more severe and chronic problems in the future.

Therefore, to intervene during adolescence may be the final chance to prevent long-term social maladjustment and probable criminality. For this reason, adolescents ought to receive immediate assistance and support to develop behavioural patterns allowing them to become mature adults, who are needed by, and can contribute in a positive and constructive way to society in the future.

Measures for Controlling Aggressive Behaviour in the Arab World

Whilst the dangerous problem of aggressive behavior in adolescents has spread throughout Arab schools, limited attention has been given to strategies to reduce these behavioural problems; strategies, for instance, the measuring and creation of art therapies. Some researchers have developed some measures and scales to assess aggressive behaviours in schools. For instance, Al-Huessani (1997) has developed a scale for assessing the practical instinct impulsiveness. Some Arab researchers have shown interest in assessing aggressive behavior in mentally retarded children. Such as Debais (1999) who developed a scale for rating aggressive behavior among mild mentally disabled Saudi children, with the study aimed at assessing four aspects of aggressive behavior:

- 1) explicit aggressive behaviour;
- 2) general aggressive behaviour;
- 3) choastic behaviour; and
- 4) the lack (or the inability) of self-control.

In this vein, several Arab studies tried to design some programmes to modify the level of aggression, especially in children and adolescents. One of the Arab studies in this field was the one conducted by Altif (2005), who applied the Drawing Method to reduce the range of aggression. Other earlier studies in this regard include that of Farghli (1979), who used the Competitive Athletic Activity to modify aggression in a group of adolescents, and of Sheban (1996), who applied a programme for developing social skills to reduce the aggressive behaviour of a sample of primary school boys and girls aged between 9 to 12 years of age.

However, subsequent reports on these studies showed the ineffectiveness of these programmes in reducing antisocial behaviours. These reports further shed light to the fact that the alternative psychotherapies in this facet were extremely scarce (Kazdin, et al, 1990). In addition, some Arab researchers have shown an interest in counseling programmes aimed to reduce aggressive behaviours (Abdel- Khalek, 2002; Azab, 2002).

In 1989, for instance, Gaber developed a treatment based on play therapy to reduce psychological disturbances, such as hostility, aggression, anxiety, and introversion. This treatment was adopted to improve self-confidence, social participation, interaction, and intellectual levels for a sample of boys and girls; whose age ranged between 6 to 12 years.

Saltz (1977) found that aggression was reduced by using training activities that involve the techniques of play therapy and role-playing. Role-playing is a derivative of psychodrama. Techniques like role-playing and rehearsing are more adaptive behaviours, and they may provide a maladjusted

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adolescent with opportunities to learn long-term strategies for self-control (Cossa, 1992).

Al-Khatib and Hamdy in (1997) investigated the efficiency of the Good Behaviour Game in reducing inappropriate disruptive and aggressive behaviours in two separate samples. It was shown that using the Good Behaviour Game technique, as a procedure for reducing inappropriate and aggressive behaviours for a short period, is not effective. Rather, it was believed that it is necessary to use this technique for a long period in order to achieve an effective and long lasting positive change in children's behaviour.

Moreover, it was suggested that using the Good Behaviour Game with children should not be stopped suddenly; instead, it should be decreased gradually and systematically.

Recommendation

The authors proposed the following:

- 1) Arab research studies on aggression among school students should move a step forward to develop some techniques and design programs that could prevent aggressive behaviour;
- 2) Investigations on aggressive behaviour among school students in Arab countries should be more in-depth, in that violent/ aggressive behaviour should be seen from a panoramic view. The latter should include searching for the roots of violence and aggression in the entire society and trying to interpret them in an integrative way;
- 3) Arab schools need to provide models and methods that help treat and deal with aggressive behavior;
- 4) Arab research should have continuity of studies in the same field of aggression behaviour; and
- 5) Arab research should create a more proper theoretical framework to guide the researchers in the establishment of proper hypotheses, and to obtain appropriate tools and samples.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that serious attention is required to address widespread aggression in adolescents in Arab schools, with an immediate collaboration to reduce the level and rate of aggression. As previously mentioned, a great number of these research studies on aggression among adolescents had focused on either the correlations between aggressive behaviour or on some other variables, such as personality traits of parents and children or on children's perception of parental behaviour. Moreover, there has been no clear plan or pathway to conduct research on aggression among school students in Arab countries. Furthermore, there is an absence of a proper theoretical framework, which could guide Arab researchers to

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establish accepted hypotheses, to acquire appropriate tools and samples, and to use suitable statistical methods. It has also been noticed that Arab research studies on aggressive behaviour among school students suffered from a great ambiguity when handling psychological terms.

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