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Aggression among Juvenile and Non-Juvenile Delinquents: An Empirical Analysis

Preeti Sharma

Counselor, Academy of Well-being, Udaipur & Research Scholar, Pacific University, Udaipur

Mustafa Nadeem Kirmani

Licensed Clinical Psychologist trained at NIMHANS, Bangalore, India

Abstract

Aggression is a behavior that intends to harm others either physically or in any other form. Maladaptive and dysfunctional aggression often occurs during adolescence. Juvenile means a child who has committed an offense which if done by an adult would be considered as a crime. The age of juvenile differs from country to country and state to state. Delinquent means who has been neglected by the parents and is involved in harmful and wrong activities.

The aim of the current paper is to examine aggression in juveniles and non-juvenile delinquents. The objectives of the current paper are to examine

- I. Reactive and proactive aggression in a group of juvenile and non-juvenile delinquents.*
- II. Total aggression in a group of juvenile and non-juvenile delinquents.*

Sample: *One hundred and twenty juvenile and non –juvenile delinquents from different juvenile homes and senior secondary schools were selected using purposive random sampling for the purpose of the current study. The measures used were.*

*i) **Socio Demographic Data Sheet:** This was prepared by the investigator for collecting information about subjects' name, age, and education.*

*ii) **Reactive-Proactive Aggression Questionnaire:** It was developed by Raine, Dodge, Loeber, Gatzke-kopp, Lynam and Reynolds in 2006. The results indicated that juvenile delinquent group differs significantly from non-delinquent group on reactive aggression dimension. Delinquent delinquents have been found to be high on reactive aggression. The two groups, however, did not differ on the dimension of proactive aggression and total aggression. The study has implications for providing anger interventions for the delinquent groups.*

Key Words: *Aggression, delinquents, juveniles, non-juveniles.*

Introduction: World Health Organization (WHO) identifies adolescence as the period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19. It represents one of the critical transitions in the life span and is characterized

by a tremendous pace in growth and developmental changes. Biological processes drive many aspects of this growth and development, with the onset of puberty marking the passage from childhood to adolescence. The great majority of adolescents are, therefore, included in the age-based definition of “child”, adopted by the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*,⁴ as a person under the age of 18 years. Other overlapping terms used in this report are *youth* (defined by the United Nations as 15–24 years) and *young people* (10–24 years), a term used by WHO and others to combine adolescents and youth.

The word delinquency is derived from the Latin word “delinquere” meaning de i.e. away and linquere i.e. to leave thus, meaning to leave or to abandon. Originally, the word had an objective meaning as it referred to parents who neglected and abandoned their children. In present day, it is used and applied to those children who indulge in wrongful and harmful activities.

Juvenile can be defined as a child who has not attained a certain age at which he, like an adult person under the law of the land, can be held liable for his criminal acts. The juvenile is a child who is alleged to have committed /violated some law which declares the act or omission on the part of the child as an offence. Juvenile is a child who unlike an adult person, having not attained prescribed age, cannot be held liable for his criminal act. The age criteria for being a juvenile vary from country to country, state to state.

Juvenile Justice Act, 1986 defined a juvenile or child to be a person who in case of a boy has not completed age of 16 years and in case of a girl 18 years of age. The JJA Act, 1986 was repealed by 2000 Act and the distinction with regard to age between male and female juveniles has been done away with by the Government of India in performance of its obligation to the international obligations. Now age of juvenile in conflict with law for male and female has been fixed at 18 years. A juvenile in conflict with law under the JJ (C & P) Act, 2000 is a juvenile who is alleged to have committed an offence and has not completed 18 years of age as on the date of commission of such offence.

Aggression: Nature and Definitions: According to Gomez-Jarabo (1999), aggression is a natural form of behaviour based on biology. It is adaptive, intentional, purposeful and common to the entire animal kingdom.

Bushman and Anderson (2001) define aggression as follows: “Hostile aggression is impulsive, angry behavior that is motivated by a desire to hurt someone. Instrumental aggression is premeditated, calculated behavior that is motivated by some other goal (e.g. obtain money, restore one’s image, and restore justice) (p.273). Aggression can be defined as an act that injures or agitates another individual. Anderson and Bushman (2002) have offered an integrative explanatory framework for aggression, in which cognitive, emotional and personal variables interact with situational and environmental factors to give rise to aggressive behavior. Anger implies physiological activation and represents the emotional component, while hostility involves feelings of opposition and injustice thus representing the cognitive component. Apparently, anger acts as a psychological bridge connecting instrumental and cognitive components.

Aggression could be seen as a normal response to adverse circumstances within the limits of self-control and at times positive, justifiable and beneficial to the survival of an individual or an entire species. Aggression could be described as a force that enables a person to be healthily self-assertive and autonomous and to control the environment and the self. When the use of this force becomes unacceptable and goes beyond the limits then it become maladaptive and pathological. Aggression can vary from problems with emotional regulation and manipulative behaviors. There are various behaviours, indicating aggression, such as stating rumors; excluding others; arguing; bullying, both verbally (name-calling) and physically (pushing); threatening; striking back in anger; use of strong-arm tactics (to get something they want); and engaging in physical fights.

Aggression may not always involve physical contact with another person. Verbal aggression in elementary school years can be part of a developmental trajectory later leading to adolescent delinquency. Baron (1977) has described aggression as "any form of behaviour directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment". This definition expresses the interpersonal and social nature of organism. It has emphasized upon three aspects. These are: (1) aggression is goal directed behaviour, (2) intention of injuring another person is there; and (3) it involves a victim motivated to avoid such treatment by an aggressor.

Aggression is an interpersonal behaviour. It represents a social nature. It is accompanied by certain emotions and attitudes towards a target person or group. Aggression involves intent to cause harm directly or indirectly to the target person. It is a threat or the violation of social norms. It is directed towards safeguarding the basic right of the weaker persons or groups or victims from stronger one. A large number of studies have dealt with these aspects of aggression. Keeley (1996) showed that aggression is embedded in human nature. People express their aggression differently. This difference is due to factors such as race, gender, age, culture, moral values and situational factors.

Aggression can be seen as one maladaptive pathway in the developmental processes that may result in antisocial and criminal behaviour. Presence of psychological disorder in certain psychosocial contexts seems to facilitate the expression of maladaptive aggression among adolescents. Psychological problems and behaviours may interfere with an adolescent's social adaptation and personal competence. Further, it can create a set of circumstances that increase the likelihood of certain behaviours and cognitions and put adolescents at risk for persistent delinquent behaviour.

Types of Aggression: There are several forms of aggression: relational aggression (e.g. spreading rumors and social isolation), verbal aggression (e.g. arguing and name-calling), and physical aggression (e.g. physical attacks). Aggression is typically categorized as hostile or instrumental and can be perpetrated either overtly or covertly. Hostile aggression is an *intentional hurt* to someone either verbally or physically. In instrumental aggression, the motive is not to hurt rather to achieve some other motive

Reactive and proactive aggression: Aggression is seen as a stable characteristic that can be observed and defined across contexts (Kempes, Matthys, de Vries, & van Egeland, 2005). On the basis of the underlying function or motivation, researchers have distinguished between two types of aggressive behaviour, reactive and proactive. Reactive aggressive behaviors are unplanned and impulsive, and are usually a response to feelings of fear, anger, or a need to retaliate against someone. Reactive aggression has been conceived as a reaction to some perceived provocation, as being impulsive, thoughtless (i.e., unplanned), driven by anger, and having the ultimate motive of harming the target. It is sometimes called affective, impulsive, or hostile aggression. Proactive aggressive behaviors are planned, calculated, and have some motive other than harming someone. It is considered as a premeditated means of obtaining some goal and being instrumental rather than impulsive (Berkowitz, 1993, Geen, 2001).

Overall, purely reactive aggressive behavior is more associated with serious consequences at least in childhood and with higher rates of school discipline problems (Merk, De Castro, Koops, & Matthys, 2005). In terms of family variables, evidence suggests that reactively aggressive children are more likely than proactively aggressive children to be victims of maltreatment by parents (Connor, Steingard, Cunningham, Anderson & Melloni, 2004).

Proactive aggression is a planned and calculated behavior, based on some motive and is executed without remorse (Dodge, Lochman, Harnish and Bastes, 1997). Manifestations of this type of behavior include bullying or intimidating others for some gain.

Method: The aim of the current research was to examine aggression and its dimensions in juvenile and non-juvenile group of delinquents.

Objectives: The objectives of the current investigation were to examine

- i) Reactive and proactive aggression in a group of juvenile and non-juvenile delinquents.
- ii) Total aggression in a group of juvenile and non-juvenile delinquents.

Sampling: Purposive random sampling was used to collect the data.

Research Design: The present study used cross-sectional design to examine the variables.

Participants: One hundred twenty juvenile and non-juvenile delinquents served as participants for the present study. All of them were taken from Udaipur City. Sixty of them were drawn from juvenile homes and sixty from three different senior secondary schools. The mean age and SD of the sample was 21 years and 3.47 respectively.

Measures:

- a) **Socio Demographic Data Sheet :** This was prepared by the investigator for collecting information about subjects' name, age, and education.
- b) **Reactive-Proactive Aggression Questionnaire:** It was developed by Raine, Dodge, Loeber, Gatzke-kopp, Lynam and Reynolds in 2006. It measures reactive and proactive aggression among children and adolescents. It consisted of 26 items and gives separate

measure of reactive, proactive and total aggression for each respondent. The internal consistency of reactive and proactive aggression scale was found to be 0.85 and 0.89 respectively.

Procedure: The researcher met the school and juvenile center authorities and explained the purpose of the study. The confidentiality of the results was reassured. The data was collected in group of 20-25 and took approximately one hour in collecting it.

Data analysis: Mean and SD of each of the protocol was calculated. Independent t-test was used to examine differences in reactive, proactive and total aggression in juvenile-delinquent and non-juvenile delinquent group.

Results and Discussion: The present investigation was aimed at studying the pattern of aggression in a group of Juvenile Delinquents and Non-juvenile Delinquents.

Table-1: Mean SD, t value and p value of Scores on various Dimensions of Aggression for Juvenile Delinquents and Non –juvenile Delinquents.

S.No.	Dimensions of Aggression	Juvenile Delinquents		Non-juvenile Delinquents		t-value	p-value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	Reactive Aggression	7.58	4.91	4.85	4.40	3.21	0.02**
2	Proactive Aggression	4.11	4.48	4.20	4.46	0.12	0.90
3	Total Aggression	11.70	8.39	9.06	8.39	-1.71	0.09

** Significant at .01 level

The present study was based on the sample of adolescents belonging to two different groups i.e. Delinquents and Non Delinquents. Both the groups were assessed and compared on the basis of their scores on various psychological tests which measured Reactive and Proactive Aggression.

The results as shown in table 1 indicate that juvenile delinquent group differs significantly from non-delinquent on reactive aggression dimension. Delinquent adolescents have been found to be high on reactive aggression. The two groups, however, did not differ on the dimension of proactive aggression and total aggression.

These results could be discussed in the light of the general aggression model by Anderson and Bushman (2002). This model suggested that the frustrations arise due to provocation, the situational variables, and give rise to aggressive behavior in the presence of an immediate factor. In most of the cases on the present study, frustration might have been a trigger for the aggressive behavior in the presence of a situational cue.

The reactive aggression of the delinquents could be related to the frustration aggression hypothesis which says that aggression is an angry and hostile reaction to a perceived threat. According to frustration- aggression hypothesis (Miller et al, 1939), perceived threats or anger perceived threats or anger responses were considered factors that precipitate aggressive behavior. The average level of total aggression in the delinquents can be further

explained through the integrated approach of general aggression model. According to the general aggression model (Anderson & Bushman, 2002), aggressive behavior is the result of interactive effect of personal and situational factors mediated by the cognition, affect, and arousal.

Conclusions: The results indicated that juvenile delinquents were found to be high on reactive aggression than non-juvenile delinquents.

Implications: The current study has significant implications for providing anger counseling by trained counselors to delinquent group. Adolescents preparing to enter secondary and senior secondary schools need to develop the socially important skills of being assertive which include asking others for information, initiating conversation, or being able to respond to peer pressure. There is a strong need that adolescents need to be trained in frustration tolerance skills by mental health professionals to learn handle aggression more effectively.

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