

Influence Of Covert Aggression On Academic Achievement Of Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

The rate of students' aggression at all levels of education in Nigeria remains a major concern. Psychologists, Counselors and Educationists in general have tried in different forms to find solutions to this aggression problem which is an act of violence and cruelty committed by students intentionally in order to harm or destroy other students. This study examined the influence of covert aggression, specifically Passive and Relational aggressions, on undergraduate students' academic achievement. Two research questions and two null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study. The study applied Expost- Facto research design. A structured questionnaire was developed by the researchers and used in collecting data from a sample of 326 first year students in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Data collected were analyzed using Mean and Standard Deviation while t-test statistics was applied to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Results revealed that covert aggression influenced low academic achievement of students and that female students were covertly more aggressive than male students.

Keywords: Aggression, covert aggression, passive aggression, relational aggression, academic achievement

Introduction

Generally, as children grow up, most parents hope that they would learn to become independent and achieve their needs without hurting others around them. Hence parents try as much as possible to preach against harming others intentionally. They tend to project pro-social behaviours, such as ability to share, care, console, comfort and help others who need help. All these are done to enable children to distinguish or differentiate between right and wrong behaviours. However, despite these, some children still exhibit the propensity of manifesting aggression which sometimes results in violence against other students.

Violence is aggression that has to do with extreme harm, injury and possibly death. A student who is involved in hitting, kicking, shooting, fighting, stabbing, and at the extreme, killing another student has committed an act of violence. Violence could be against one's spouse, children, neighbours, office mates, friends, classmates, or total strangers. It has no limit or boundary to its victims. Violent behaviours are intended to cause pain or hurt to other persons (Rathus, 2008). For Ramalingam (2006), violence is the use of force in order to damage or injure people. It is seen as rough injurious acts performed by students. Rebellon and Van Guddy (2010) and Martins and Castro (2010) study reported that educational success was negatively associated with violent offending. The implication is that violence lowers academic achievement of students and that not all violent acts involve aggression but all aggressive acts are not always violent.

Aggression manifests as a result of interactions among students and environment. In a situation whereby there are too many stressors to handle, students may handle stress situations by manifesting aggression. For Bandura (1986) aggression is a learned behaviour acquired in the same way as other behaviours. This implies that aggression is like every other type of social behaviours. It is usually manifested as a response to something within the students' environment. It often manifests as reaction to what others have done or said. According to Baron, Branscombe and Byrne (2009), students aggress because of words or deeds of others towards them that are irritating and provoking. Implicitly, aggression does not manifest on its own. It is done out of frustration and annoyance. It involves the act of violence and cruelty committed by individuals to others. This implies that aggression does not give joy rather it gives sadness. It is an assault that is caused by frustration. It is a hostile behaviour which may be physically or verbally directed to others or self (Ramalingam, 2006). It could also be seen as a natural response to unpleasant events. According to Baron and Richardson (1994) aggression is any behaviour intended to harm another person who is motivated to avoid the harm. In other words, aggression is intentional and not an accidental behavior in which the aggressor is on the offensive while the victim is on the defensive position. It is possibly a way by which students try to alter the behaviour of others in order to achieve their purpose.

Findings, by researchers indicate that aggressors have the confidence that aggression will pay off in tangible ways as well as enhances their self-esteem by dominating others who submit to them before they could act out (Frick, Cornell, Bodin, Dane, Barry & Loney 2003). The indication of this is that aggressor' manifestations of force as an instrumental strategy enable them to achieve their personal objectives among their friends, classmates, peer groups and neighbours. Aggression can manifest in different forms. According to Baumeister and Bushman (2008) aggression is of two major forms overt and covert. These forms vary among students. United State (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (2001) findings indicate that aggression reflects some negative outcomes such as child neglect, child abuse and low academic achievement in schools. Kaukiainen, Salmivalli, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, Lahtinen, Kostamo, & Lagerspetz (2001) see overt aggression to include making threats and swearing or yelling, while covert aggression involves withholding information or silent ill- treatments.

The researchers in this study are interested in Covert aggression, which includes Passive aggression and relational aggression. Passive aggression is the process of expressing emotions in an indirect and subtle manner. It involves making inductive comments with a smile in order to achieve ones purpose. It has to do with the tendency to oppose the good ideas and viewpoints of others. Passive aggression is a deliberate and covert way of manifesting or showing anger which purpose is meant to destroy others. It is a hidden and subtle way of expressing anger to get back at someone. For Anderson and Dill (2000), passive aggression always involves impulsive act which is regretted after a short time. Passive aggressors derive genuine pleasure in frustrating others. That is why they often show angry smile. In line with this, Kaukiainen et al (2001) found that this group of aggressive persons manifests their behaviours by withdrawing from conversations while expressing their thoughts and feelings indirectly with masked or hidden anger. Students of this behavioral disposition pretend to be innocent but at the same time undermine or weaken the feelings to destroy plans, ideas and views points of other mates and ensure that rejection and arguments are used to foil, frustrate or thwart the wishes of others. Apart from this group of students that manifest passive aggression, there are others who show relational aggression to other students. Relational aggression involves damaging someone's relationships or social status. It appears to be motivated by the desire to maintain an exclusive relationship with someone else. It is the type of (covert) aggression that is interpersonally related and has to do with negative influence on students' relationship with their classmates,

peer groups and room-mates among others. Relational aggression could be gender-related. For Zins (2001), Relational aggression in girls becomes more subtle and malicious during the adolescent years while teenage boys become more inclined to express their anger and frustrations indirectly through truancy, thefts and substance abuse. Xie, Swift, Cairns and Cairns (2002) and Crick and Grotpeter (1995) argue that Relational aggression is meant to destroy social relationships through covert or hidden manipulation. It is the type of aggressive behaviours that damage students' friendship. It includes behaviours such as social exclusion, isolation, withdrawal, threatening to withdraw, spreading rumors, ignoring, stopping talking to friends and peddling gossip. From all indications, relational aggression is usually indirect, because it involves a third party. However, in some cases it could be direct: that is one on one interaction. Ellis, Crooks, and Wolfe (2009) indicate that Relational aggression creates more damage than physical aggression among youths. It is a non-physical type of aggression which objective is mainly to inflict or destroy relationships between and among others, harming social status and reputation of others. The Ophelia Project (2005) observed that Relational aggression can lead to higher frequencies of depression and school drop-out. It involves the drawing of affection in order to achieve what one wants by excluding other circle of friends while at the same time gossiping about them. Dailey, Frey and Walker (2015) study on Relational aggression in school settings indicated that anti bullying programmes are not effective intervention strategies against Relational aggressive behaviours. Indeed, it is serious form of aggression that affects students' academic achievement.

Achievement has to do with successful accomplishment or attainment of goals. In specifics the term Academic achievement is the ability to obtain gain through learning experiences that are measured practically or theoretically through tests or examinations. Academic achievement under formal education is acquired through the efforts of professionals such as teachers at all levels of education. Essentially, it is the outcome of acquired experiences or knowledge. According to Uludag (2013) Academic achievement is the academic gain made by students at the end of the academic session. It depicts the extent to which students, teachers and institutions have achieved their stated goals which could be in short term or long term objectives. Uludag's (2013) study on the influence of aggression on students' academic achievement found that aggression had negative significant influence on students' academic achievement.

The association between Academic achievement and Aggression has been documented in literature for decades. In line with this, Stipek and Miles (2008) carried out a study on effect of aggression and academic achievement. Results indicated that relationship exists between the two variables and that the relationship is complex and reciprocal. This implies that the more students manifest aggressive behaviour the less they participate in academic activities. This eventually leads to poor academic achievement. Results also revealed gender differences in favour of the male students. However, the fact that the result revealed a complex and reciprocal relationship between Aggression and Academic achievement of students implies that aggressive behaviours are linked to poor academic achievement among students irrespective of their gender.

The foregoing literatures presented in this paper by the researchers tend to reveal that some researches have been carried out on aggression and academic achievement. However, literatures available to the researchers tend to show that no work has been done on relationship between covert aggression (Passive and Relational) and academic achievement. It is this gap that motivated the researchers to carry out this study, in order to fill it.

In pursuit of the objective of this study, the following purposes, research questions and null hypotheses were stated. To ascertain the influence of covert (Passive and Relational) aggression on students academic achievement. To determine the influence of gender on students academic achievement. What is the influence of covert (passive and relational) aggression on students' academic achievement? What is the

influence of gender on students' academic achievement? Hypotheses: Ho₁: Covert aggression has no significant influence on undergraduate students' academic achievement. Ho₂: Gender does not significantly influence undergraduate students' academic achievement.

Method

The study adopted the Ex-post Facto research design. A total sample of 326 first year undergraduate students, made up of 166 female and 160 male students was used for the study. Multi-stage sampling technique was applied. First, in the Faculty of Education, with nine Departments, three Departments (Art Education, Science Education and Adult Education) were randomly sampled. Second, out of the three Departments the first year students were selected purposively based on the fact that they are new students from various societies who have not been influenced by university environment. Third, 160 male and 166 female students were randomly sampled from the two departments to ensure gender representation. In order to elicit information on the influence of aggression (Passive aggression and Relational aggression), a questionnaire designed by the researchers and titled Covert Aggression Behaviours was developed. The questionnaire contained 20 items put in two clusters. Cluster A had 10 items which elicited information regarding Passive Aggression while Cluster B also had 10 items which elicited information on the influence of Relational Aggression to students. This questionnaire was developed by the researcher after extensive review of related studies on aggression. These questionnaires had responses that were based on a four point scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points, Agree (A) = 3 points, Disagree (D) = 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point. Three experts, two from Educational Foundations and one from Science Education validated the instrument. The instrument was subjected to reliability test using Cronbach Alpha to determine the internal consistency. The scores obtained were computed and the internal consistency reliability estimate of 0.88 and 0.90 were obtained for Passive and Relational aggression respectively. The researchers personally administered copies of the questionnaire to the students and retrieved all the copies after the completion. In analyzing the data Mean and Standard Deviation were used in answering the research questions. A criterion mean score of 2.5 was used for decision rule mean scores above 2.5 Passive aggression, while mean scores below 2.5 revealed Relational aggression. The null hypotheses testing was done using t test statistic. Students' academic achievement was determined using the grades obtained in the courses registered in first and second semesters of 2018/ 2019 academic session. The students' course grades of A (Above Average), B (Good), C (Average), D (Below Average) were scored and weighted as 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. A criterion mean of 2.50 was also set, with mean scores of 2.50 and above being for high academic achievement while mean scores of below 2.50 goes for low academic achievement

Results

The following Tables presented the results of the study based on the Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

Table 1: Mean response of students' Passive aggressive behaviours

S/N	Cluster A: Passive Aggressive Rating Scale (PARS)	Mean \bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	I like expressing my feelings indirectly by saying fine when I am not fine	2.83	.88	Agree
2	I find pleasure in neglecting others	2.17	1.01	Disagree
3	I enjoy being subtle in order to achieve my purpose	3.25	0.86	Agree
4	Whenever I am upset by friends I tend to hide my feelings	2.56	1.01	Agree

5	I do not easily get over provocation until I take vengeance	2.57	0.97	Agree
6	I like showing offensive smile	2.65	0.95	Agree
7	I use my influence to weaken others views	2.73	0.90	Agree
8	I undermine others views to ensure rejection	2.82	0.80	Agree
9	I argue against others' ideas to frustrate them	2.94	0.94	Agree
10	I enjoy thwarting the wishes of others	2.72	0.95	Agree
Cluster Mean		2.72	0.75	Agree

From the result on Table I it can be observed that nine items on passive aggressive behaviour have the mean rating between 2.56 and 3.25. These items indicate Agree for Passive Aggression because they scored above 2.50 benchmark of 'agree' set for the study and above. On the other hand, items 2, has means score 2.17 which indicates that the mean score is below the benchmark of 2.50 making it to stand for 'disagree'.

Table 2: Mean Response of students' relational Aggression

S/N	Cluster B: Relational Aggressive Rating Scale (RARS)	Mean \bar{X}	SD	Decision
11	I confuse people to isolate them from their friends	1.93	.01	Disagree
12	I sometimes spread unfounded rumors against friends	2.69	1.03	Agree
13	I enjoy coming between relationship to manipulate them	2.60	.81	Agree
14	I find pleasure in destroying others reputation	2.50	.82	Agree
15	I like causing enmity between friends in order to achieve my purpose	3.25	.82	Agree
16	Whenever I am upset by my friends I stop talking to them	2.33	.96	Disagree
17	My intention is always to exclude my friends from our study group	1.93	.96	Disagree
18	I like revealing secret behind my friends	2.67	.92	Agree
19	I lash my friends in the presence of others	2.40	.87	Disagree
20	I tend to degrade others with gossip	2.91	.90	Agree
Cluster mean		2.58	.66	Agree

Table 2 on Relational Aggressive behaviours indicates that items 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, and 20 have means (x) score between 2.50 and 3.25 which fall within the benchmark of 'agree'. The table also reveals that items 11, 16, 17 and 19 have means ranging from 1.93 to 2.40 which fall below the benchmark of 2.50 interpreted to be 'disagree'.

Table 3: t-test analysis of students' relational and passive aggression influence on academic achievement

Covert aggression	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig	Decision
Relational aggression	152	45.47	10.14				
Passive aggression	174	47.95	9.82	2.24	324	-0.02	Not Accepted
Total	326	92.42	19.96				

Table 3 shows the cluster mean score of students that manifest relational aggression is 45.47 with standard deviation of 10.14. For passive aggression, it is 47.95 with standard deviation of 9.82. The indication is that students with passive aggressive behaviours scored higher than students with relational aggressive behaviours. The null hypothesis was subjected to t-test and the result as recorded on Table 3 shows that the associated probability of -0.02 is significant because it is lower than the set level of significance of 0.05. Hence the null hypothesis was not accepted. This reveals that Covert aggression (Passive and Relational) has a negative significant influence on student academic achievement. Implicitly, the higher students manifest covert aggression the lower their academic achievement.

Table 4: t-test analysis of students' covert Aggression based on academic achievement based on gender.

Covert Aggression	N	Mean	SD	t	Df	Sig	Decision
Male	160	41.58	10.84				
Female	166	46.20	11.14	1.35	324	-0.01	Not Accepted
Total	326	87.78	21.98				

Table 4: shows that the cluster mean score of male students that manifested covert aggression was 41.58 with Standard Deviation of 10.84, while female students who manifested covert aggression was mean score of 46.20 with Standard Deviation of 11.14. The indication is that female students rated higher on covert aggression behaviours than male students'. The result also indicated on table that Covert aggression is not significant at -0.01 because the associated probability of -0.01 is less than the set 0.05 level of significance. This indicated that covert aggression (Passive and Relational) has negative significant influence based on students' gender. Hence the null hypothesis was not accepted. This implies that both male and females students show manifest covert aggression among themselves.

Gender does not significantly influence students' academic achievement

Discussion

The findings in the study indicated that university undergraduates manifested aggressive behaviours towards their fellow students with passive aggression manifesting more than Relational behaviours. (See tables 1 and 2). The students' passive aggressive behaviours were exhibited by being subtle in order to achieve their purposes; arguing against others' ideas to frustrate them; saying 'fine' when they are not 'fine'; undermining others' views or ideas to ensure rejection; thwarting the wishes of others, showing offensive smiles, pretending not to be provoked until they take vengeance; among others. From all indications, majority of the items showed that passive aggression is common among the students. This is in line with Martins, and Castros' (2010) findings that students with aggressive behaviours are linked with violence of different types ranging from physical to passive aggression. In line with this Uludag's (2013) study which revealed that aggression had significant negative effect on students' current academic achievement negatively. In a similar study on effect of aggression on achievement, Stipek and Miles (2008) showed that the relationship between aggression and achievement is reciprocal, and that reduction in academic task is significantly related to active participation in aggressive behaviours.

The study further indicated that there is a negative significant influence of students' covert aggression on academic achievement. In other words the higher the students' covert aggressive behaviour the lower the academic achievement. Similarly, the study found that gender was no significant factor of

influence to covert behaviour and academic achievement. Although the females showed more covert aggression than the males. These findings are interesting because aggression is a factor of influence often imbibed from society which both gender are exposed to. These findings corroborate with Stipek and Miles (2008) which indicated that gender is not a significant factor of influence of aggression on academic achievement. However, Crick, Nicki, and Grotpeter (1995) study is at variance with this study findings as males were found to be more aggressive than female students and achieved less academically than the female students, This variance in finding could be explained as a result of generational gap. This female students of 21st century are exposed to gender equality issues and refuse to be intimidated by their male counterparts. It is not equally, far from the orientation given to female children of the present generation.

Conclusion.

Violence and aggression have been recurrent issues in Nigerian educational system with the aim of injuring and causing pain to others. Aggression in the school system is an act of violence and cruelty committed by students purposely with the capability of hurting other students. Covert aggression in forms of Passive and Relational aggression is found to be negatively significant among students. The findings of the study actually confirmed that covert aggressive behaviours negatively influence students' academic achievement irrespective of their gender. However, it is commonly manifested among female students.

Recommendations.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

Students should be oriented on the importance of controlling their aggressive behaviours no matter how subtle they may be.

Students should be exposed to practical demonstration of operating within the acceptable and appropriate behaviours.

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