Aggressive Behavior Among Adolescents in Arab Schools:

A Review Paper

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Abstract

Adolescence aggression is an important focus for educators and parents owing to its relative stability over time and consistent link to a variety of negative outcomes later in adolescence, including crime, substance use, conduct problems, poor adjustment, and academic difficulties. However, aggressive behavior may represent a normal developmental stage or indicate a serious ongoing mental health disorder that poses a safety concern.This article, discussed 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 a full explanation of the issues and difficulties that provide meaningful information as guidance for researchers and counselors in this field.

Keywords: Aggressive Behavior, Adolescence, Arab schools

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1. 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 behavior 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). 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).

2. Aggressive behavior

Aggression as a concept has been interpreted by different investigators to involve a wide range of behaviors. 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 behavior 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 behaviors 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 todamage 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 arelationship if the threatened party does not comply with

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the aggressor's wishes (Gomes, 2007).Furthermore, aggressive behavior has been defined as "any form of behavior 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 behavior 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 behavior 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 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 behavior 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 behavior 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).

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3. Effects of Aggressive Behavior in Arab Schools

Aggressive behavior is considered a serious challenge affecting the well-being of communities and educational processes. Aggressive behavior 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 behavior 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 behavior and the effects of the delinquent behavior. Examples of these studies are that of Aljoroshy (2007); Naceur, 2001; Abo Mustafa& Najah (2008); Abo Mustafa (2009); and Awad, 2002. Furthermore, several studies such as (Altif (2005); and Aljoroshy (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 studiesrevealed that adolescentshave difficulty in appropriately expressing their emotions and managing their anger and aggression (Aljoroshy, 2007).

In response to the gradual increase of violence and aggressive behavior 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 behavior, 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, behavioral, 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 behavior among adolescents. Thus, improving interventions for aggression requires a better understanding of the different

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types of aggression and of their associated etiological, behavioral, 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 behavior, 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 behavior among adolescents (Robins & Price, 1991). Conduct disorders and oppositional behaviors are difficult to live with because of their persistence over time (Cicchetti & Richter, 1993). An adolescent with aggressive behavior 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 behavioral 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.

4. Efforts, Measures, and Procedures Used to Reduce Aggression and Violence among Arab Students

Whilst the dangerous problem of aggressive behavior in adolescents has spread throughout Arab schools, limited attention has been given to strategies to reduce these behavioral problems; strategies, for instance, the measuring and the creation of art therapies. Some researchers have developed some measures and scales to assess aggressive behaviors 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:

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a) Explicit aggressive behavior,

b) General aggressive behavior,

c) Choastic behavior, and

d) 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 behavior 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 behaviors. These reports further shed light on 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 behaviors (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 in 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 behaviors, and they may provide a maladjusted 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 Behavior Game in reducing inappropriate disruptive and aggressive behaviors in two separate samples. It was shown that using the Good Behavior Game technique, as a procedure for reducing inappropriate and aggressive behaviors 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 behavior. Moreover, it was suggested that using the Good Behavior

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Game with children should not be stopped suddenly; instead, it should be decreased gradually and systematically.

Another study was the one carried out in Mecca, Saudi Arabia (Awad, 2002). This study compared personality traits of samples of secondary school female juvenile delinquents, who was serving a punishment period in an institution for rehabilitation at the time of the study, with their non-delinquent peers. The study illustrated that the delinquent subjects ranked significantly higher on neurosis and extroversion but lower on self-esteem than their non-delinquent peers. Moreover, Kamel and Al-Fakherani (2002) found that while 19-20 year old males ranked higher in the total score of hostility and overt hostility, female counterparts ranked unexpectedly higher in hostility toward others.

In the same vein, Omar (2001) investigated the impact of some demographic and social variables on violence in a sample of male and female Egyptian secondary school students. He arrived at the fact that male students, and also students with a higher socioeconomic status ranked significantly higher than females and lower economic status students on a violence assessing scale. Al-Husaini (2004) examined the relationship between social affiliation and school violence among male public high school students in Kuwait. Specifically, this study investigated the characteristics of violent behavior of tribal and non-tribal male public high school students in Kuwait and the relationship between family structure, family type, and student age of those students and school violence. Six hundred male students from the public high school were given the Aggression Questionnaire, which consisted of four subscales: physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility. His study has pinpointed that family structure and family size are not significant predictors of violent behavior of the selected sample.

As it is shown, a great number of these research studies on aggression among adolescents and children have focused on either the correlations between aggressive behaviors or on some other variables, such as personality traits of parents and children or on children's perception of parental behavior. Further, so far there has been no clear plan to conduct research on aggression among school students in Libya as well as in Arab countries. In addition, most of Arab research studies on aggression among school students have been carried out for academic purposes, such as to obtain M.A. and/or Ph.D. degrees or to promote higher academic ranks. Furthermore, there is an absence of a proper theoretical framework, which could guide Arab researchers to establish

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accepted hypotheses, to acquire appropriate tools and samples, and to use suitable statistical methods. In other hand, investigations of aggressive behavior among school students in Arab countries should go much deeper, and this violent/ aggressive behavior 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 (Ewis, 1968).

5. Findings and recommendation

The findings of this article provide additional support for the idea that a broad dispositional factor contributes to the emergence of a wide range of externalizing problems as well as to disinhibitory personality traits that have been linked to such problems. In addition, the findings of this work have important implications for the conceptualization and understanding of aggressive behavior. The findings of this research are consistent with the idea that differing types of aggressive behaviors are interrelated not expressively distinct from one another.

The author 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 behavior;

2. Investigations on aggressive behavior among school students in Arab countries should be more in-depth, in that violent/ aggressive behavior 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 behavior; 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.

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6. 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 behavior or on some other variables, such as personality traits of parents and children or on children's perception of parental behavior. 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 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 behavior among school students suffered from a great ambiguity when handling psychological terms.

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