

DIMENSIONS OF AGGRESSION, TERRORISM INCLINATION AND AREA BOYS OF LAGOS METROPOLIS

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Abstract: The inclination toward terrorism may find its root in the personality variable of aggression. Area boys mean many things to many people, but usually, they invoke negative emotions. Observation of the activities of area boys indicates a manifestation of physical and verbal aggression against the general public. This present study therefore examined the independent relationships between four dimensions of aggression and terrorism inclination among area boys of Lagos metropolis. The terrorism inclination scale and a four-dimension aggression scale were presented to 214 area boys to measure the variables of interest in the study. The location of the study consists of Yaba, Ojota, Agege and Ogba bus stops. The result revealed that all the four dimensions of terrorism namely anger, hostility, physical aggression, and verbal aggression correlated positively with inclination towards terrorism. The physical and verbal dimensions of aggression correlated more than the dimensions of anger and hostility. It is recommended that the government intensify efforts to create energy-diffusing and constructive engagements for the area boys.

Keywords: Aggression, Terrorism Inclination, Area Boys, Lagos Metropolis, Youth Violence

INTRODUCTION

Aggression is an age-long negative behaviour that has been linked to terrorism and according to Bogerts et al. (2018), may be linked to biological alterations in the brain. Möller-Leimkühler (2018) investigated the link between terrorism and male-gendered behaviour. Area boys of Lagos metropolis, a male dominated group of street boys have been described in various ways; violent, a menace and as criminals who extort money from citizens in different locations of Lagos metropolis at various hours of the day. The operations of area boys are locational because they operate within a familiar neighborhood whose terrain they manipulate to their advantage to commit various crimes, hence the name area boys. The name area boys have also been described as a theme that emanates from organized crimes and urbanisation among the youths in Lagos State (Boge, 2024).

Aggression has been conceived as behaviours that an individual exhibits with the immediate intention to inflict harm on persons (Anderson & Bushman, 2002) who do not demand to be harmed (Baron & Richardson, 1994). As popular as the acts of terrorism is globally, a widely accepted definition has eluded scholars. Terrorism has been described as an ideologically motivated violence, and according to (Stockhammer, 2023), war and terrorism are on a common level because they both involve violence. Borum (2004) posits that terrorism involves acts of violence whose roots can be traced to the fulfilment of some religious, political, and ideological

cause. All acts of terrorism can be termed aggression, but not all acts of aggression are violent (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). For instance, a barrage of marketing visits by a saleswoman may be described as aggressive marketing; however, the aim is not to cause harm but to make sales.

According to Agbo and Ezeuduji (2010), terrorism inclination refers to the propensity to engage in violent acts, usually against individuals or groups, with the intention of evoking fear and making the victims accept ideas proposed by another group or individual. In the case of area boys in the Lagos metropolis, going by their lifestyle and the activities they engage in, one is tempted to conclude that they are highly inclined to terrorism. Nevertheless, this needs to be empirically investigated. This is because their actions are unwarranted, illegal and a nuisance to society. Their mode of operation can be likened to manifestations of physical and verbal aggression, hostility and anger against members of the public. These are some of the dimensions of aggression. With the rate of terrorist activities in Nigeria, this study proposed to identify a link between aggression and terrorism inclination of the area boys of Lagos metropolis. The outcome of this study will enrich the literature on aggression and terrorism inclination, which may, in future, motivate studies on strategies to eradicate the tendency to be enlisted into any terrorist group. This is the focus of this paper. Hence this study sets out to investigate the relationship between four dimensions of aggression and inclination to terrorism among area boys in Lagos metropolis.

Area Boys

Area boys is a popular alias associated with youths and middle-aged persons who can be located in different areas of Lagos metropolis but are usually seen on the streets, under bridges, marketplaces and bus terminuses. These youths, whose ages range between 10 and the early 40s (Jaulmes, 2007), demand money illegally from road users, market women and the general population. Area boys mean many things to many people. To the car occupant who is stuck in traffic, area boys are extortionists who demand money for no genuine reason other than for food. A refusal to heed their request may lead to verbal and physical harassment and injuries on the part of the victim. To the traders or market women, the area boys are illegal tax collectors who demand for 'owo ile' (ground money, that is, rent on land where trading takes place).

To the intercity and intra-city commercial vehicle drivers, the area boys (*agbero*) have become a menace and are in the habit of demanding illegal levies for every trip made by the drivers. At major bus stops and busy roads in the Lagos metropolis, area boys extort money from commercial bus drivers and conductors. By this, they claim they are offspring of the land and house owners along the routes plied by the commercial bus drivers. All of these acts perpetuated by the area boys can usually be under the influence of some illegal substances (Salaam & Brown, 2012). Generally, area boys evoke a sense of insecurity in the general public (Cohen-Louck & Shechory-Bitton, 2019). This is true to the extent that these area boys look unkempt, have bloodshot eyes and move around with dangerous weapons hidden inside of them.

Thus, area boys may be described as hoodlums, jobless, delinquents, bullies and a nuisance to the public. In apparent fact, most of the area boys sleep under the bridges, a situation that may confirm the fact that they have no homes, no family relationships and no steady source of livelihood. The tendency to display aggression will be high by the lifestyle area boys live and the need to survive.

Thus, any attempt to lure them for negative motives may be met with little or no resistance if assured of monetary incentives.

How can concerned authorities explain the continued existence of area boys? Going by their activities, it is easy to blame the economic situation in Nigeria, which is characterised by high unemployment, inadequate housing, and the inability of parents to feed and support their children financially, among others. These conditions have resulted in a high rate of school dropouts who have become redundant. It is pertinent to understand the consequences of allowing this group of youths and able-bodied men to operate and harass citizens. The understanding of the Social Learning Theory propounded by Bandura is that the activities of these area boys are pointers or models to other youths who observe their behaviours on a daily basis. Thus, the possibility of an elevated population of boys in the area is high. This is dangerous, especially at a time when incidences of terrorism are becoming alarming. How readily, therefore, would area boys be inclined to acts of terrorism?

Terrorism

Terrorism can be said to have gained momentum in recent years, going by the number of terrorist activities being experienced around the world. The literature on terrorism has also received the attention of researchers (Carmel et al., 2021; Cohen-Louck, 2019). It has also been observed that various groups hitherto described as non-combatants have metamorphosed into terrorist groups, thereby highlighting the importance of factors leading to inclinations to the behaviour exhibited by terrorists. Many factors have been deduced as reasons for terrorist activities, but reasons generally adduced for terrorist actions are not without doubt. This has made it difficult to conclude that terrorism will cease in the near future confidently. Terrorism has direct and indirect consequences. According to Grossman (1995), it is noted that nations customarily measure the cost of violence in monetary terms, in lost production or in the number of people killed or wounded. But rarely do nations measure the cost of terrorism in terms of personal harm experienced, individual suffering, trauma inflicted, or psychiatric breakdowns. Psychiatric breakdowns remain one of the costliest items of violence and terrorism when expressed in human terms. Indeed, for every terrorist act carried out on non-combatants, there is a greater probability of becoming a psychiatric casualty (Grossman, 1995). In Umeh (2013), a study of the personality characteristics of area boys reported the existence of psychopathic deviation, interpersonal dependency and assertion of autonomy.

The acts of terrorism are imparted to individuals and society at large. The important question, therefore, is: what exactly are the factors that propel terrorist actions to the level of destruction of lives and properties? What are the motivating factors associated with terrorism, and are there social and psychological factors responsible for terrorist activities? In Nigeria, instances abound of terrorist activities. For instance, the several bomb blasts that have occurred in the Northern States of Nigeria are notable events. Additionally, the Boko Haram activities are very recent events associated with terrorist activities. The series of bomb blasts in the country recently (e.g. the Northeast bomb blast); and the Boko Haram crises have shown that Nigerians are already at the receiving end of the conundrum. The North Eastern part of Nigeria has been a battlefield as a result of terrorist activities, with bombings and killings reported frequently. It has become imperative to

continue to seek knowledge on the factors responsible for terrorism. Therefore, from a psychological point of view, this study attempts to investigate behaviours associated with aggression and their relationships with an inclination towards terrorism. It is the view of the current authors that the inclination to terrorism may find its root in the personality variable of aggression.

Some investigators have attempted to identify differences in the behaviours of terrorists and non-terrorists to gain an understanding of the subject matter. Taylor and Quayle (1994) explored whether some systematic differences might be discerned between those who engage in terrorism and those who do not, and their search led them to the conclusion that the active terrorist is not discernibly different in psychological terms from the non-terrorist. But in Umeh (2013), differences abound. These present authors, therefore, sought to investigate any significant relationship that may exist between aggression and inclination to terrorism among area boys in the Lagos metropolis.

Theoretical models of aggression

Psychologists describe two types of aggression in humans. One is hostile aggression; this originates from anger, and its goal is to cause injuries. The second type of aggression is known as instrumental aggression; and this aims to hurt only as a means to some other end (Franzoi, 2000). Social psychologists analyse the causes of these two types of aggression with the following views: aggression is inborn, aggression is a natural response to frustration and lastly, aggressive behaviour is learned.

The view that aggression is inborn, otherwise referred to as the instinctual view in the theory of aggression postulated by Sigmund Freud, explores the psychological aspects of aggression and the force behind it (Kaufman, 1970). According to Kaufman (1970), aggressive behaviours are obvious traits that manifest in individuals early in life. In the position of early psychologists, for instance, Lorenz (1996), aggressive energy is an innate trait from birth; it is instinctual, and if it is left unused, it builds up until a point where it explodes or a point where an appropriate stimulus causes it to be released. Beck (2002), however, discountenances the instinctual view due to a lack of theoretical foundation and empirical support.

The postulation that aggression is a natural response to frustration opines that aggression is nurtured and propelled by frustrating events in the environment. The process however is that frustration develops when a goal is set, but blocked from being achieved; this leads to anger, which then produces aggression. That is the hypothesis ascribing aggression to innate predisposition as a source of aggressive behaviour may not be totally so. Therefore, the frustration-aggression hypothesis deviated from innate predisposition as a source of aggression to external stimuli as the origin of aggressive behaviour.

Lastly, the level of aggression possessed by an individual can be a function of learning. This assertion, which combines the instinctual and frustrated views of the origin of aggression, was made popular by the social learning theory. According to the social learning theory, aggression is motivated or stunted through reward or punishment obtained from the environment. For instance, when either praise or acceptance reward aggressive acts, then it is reinforced, and the aggressor is

thus motivated to display aggression in future and vice versa. Aggressive behaviours can also be learned through observing significant others display aggression. All of these views may be related to the inclination to terrorism. The two types of aggression mentioned earlier may be associated with terrorist activities. This is because terrorists display hostile aggression through expression of anger and also cause injuries and death to their victims, mostly civilians. Sometimes, their behaviour reflects frustration. Terrorists also express instrumental aggression because they aim to hurt as a means to some other end.

Aggression is a trait. A trait is a pattern of emotions, thoughts and behaviour that is consistently being associated with an individual and which can be used to describe and predict a person's personality. The various levels of aggression possessed by individuals confirm that there are individual differences in behaviour (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Personality traits have consistently explained most types of human behaviours, including violent behaviours. Aggression is a strong emotional trait that can explain the tendency of an individual to resort to violence at the least provocation as measured by The Aggression Questionnaire (Buss and Perry, 1992). According to Buss and Durkee (1957), aggression is a trait that is enduring.

The Buss and Durkee Hostility Inventory developed in 1957 (BDHI) consists of dimensions that assesses the tendencies to be involved in Assault, Irritability, Negativism, Resentment, Suspicion, Indirect Aggression and Verbal Aggression. However, due to the short comings of the BDHI, Buss and Perry (1992) developed another instrument to measure aggression. This represents a modified version of the BDHI. The new instrument by Buss and Perry (1992) consists of four dimensions namely Physical Aggression, Verbal Aggression, Anger, and Hostility. According to Giancola and Parrott (2008), the results and conclusion made from administering the Buss and Perry (1992) questionnaires can predict greater amounts of behavioural aggression, such as louder and longer noise-blasts ostensibly administered to another person.

Studies have been documented (Björkqvist, 2018; Wells et al.2011b; Burton et al.2007) on the relationship between gender and aggression. In the study of Burton et al. (2007) involving a sample size of 134 (93 females, 41 male) university students, the study found that men reported more physical aggression than the women. In the study of Wells et al. (2011b), hyper masculinity and trait aggression were investigated to ascertain if men are predisposed to aggressive behaviours in bars. A sample of 675 young male participants who consume alcohol and whose age range between 19 and 25, and who had been to a bar or pub within the last 12 months was sampled. An online survey was administered to the participants who filled out forms in response to items assessing the number of times an individual has been physically aggressive towards them, and how many times they had been aggressive towards another person. The results of the analysis revealed that hyper masculinity and trait aggression are associated with acts of aggression and violence in bars but not with victimization. The study also identified a large number of unwilling victims of aggression who do not have the hyper masculine views and aggressive personality that were found among perpetrators of aggression and violence. This suggests that concerned authorities must pay adequate attention to aggressive acts in bars and similar places like on the streets. The findings also confirmed previous research that the combination of heavy alcohol consumers and exposure to unique risks in the bar room environment increases the likelihood of aggressive behaviours in addition to the role played by underlying individual characteristics of those who go to bars.

METHOD

The design adopted for this study was the survey research design in which paper and pencil tests consisting of valid instruments were administered to participants who were purposively selected for the study. The research setting was located in four different areas with similar characteristics. Firstly, data was collected at Ogba Bus Stop, Agege Bus Stop, Ojota Bus Stop and Yaba Bus Stop all in Lagos Metropolis. An initial preparation involving a meeting with the head of the motor parks was scheduled ahead of the study. This was for the purpose of intimating the leaders of the parks and the participants with the purpose of the study and permission to seek their consent to participate in the study. The authors ensured that consented participants could read and at least tick the responses on the survey instruments. A few of the participants needed help to interpret some of the items.

The participants for the study consisted of 214 area boys who were all males. For this study, the age of the participants ranged between 18 years and 60 years, with a mean age of 30.5. Validated instruments were used for data collection. In addition to demographic variables, participants were presented with two instruments; one measuring the independent variable, aggression and the other measuring the dependent variable, terrorism inclination.

The Terrorism Inclination Scale (TIS), the dependent variable, was developed by Agbo and Ezeuduji (2010) to measure the inclination to be involved in acts of terrorism. A total of ten items were developed by Agbo and Ezeuduji (2010). One item from the scale includes: “When the opportunity comes, I can frighten a group of people to adopt my opinion”. The TIS reported a Cronbach’s (1951) alpha reliability statistics of .78 for the composite scale. The item total correlation of the items of TIS ranged from .30 to .57. Response formats with 5 options from strongly disagree to strongly agree characterises the scale. A composite score of TIS was obtained by summing up the responses of the respondents to all the items. A high score obtained on the Terrorism Inclination Scale is interpreted as a higher inclination to terrorism.

Secondly, the aggression questionnaire, which was developed by Buss and Perry (1992) and which consists of 29 items, was administered as the second instrument. The Buss and Perry (1992) questionnaire was developed to measure aggression due to the shortcomings of the original Buss and Durkee Hostility Inventory (1957) (BDHI), which also measures aggression. The Buss and Perry scale has four dimensions – Anger (8 items, $\sigma=.83$), Hostility (8 items, $\sigma=.77$), Physical Aggression (9 items, $\sigma=.85$) Verbal Aggression (5 items, $\sigma=.72$). The reliability for the composite scale is .89. The authors of this present study conducted a pilot study with 40 Master of Science students of the psychology and sociology department in the University of Lagos to validate the scale since the scale has not been validated locally. The authors obtained a Cronbach’s (1951) alpha reliability statistic of 0.83. Examples of the items in the aggression questionnaire include: “once in a while, I can’t control the urge to hit another person”; representing physical aggression, “I tell my friends openly when I disagree with them”; representing verbal aggression, “I sometimes feel like a powder keg ready to explode”; representing anger and “I wonder sometimes why I feel so bitter about things”; representing hostility dimension. Participants who obtain a high score on the aggression questionnaire are described as having a high level of aggression, while those who obtain a low score are described as having a low level of aggression. The data collected were

analysed using SPSS version 20. Pearson moment Correlation was utilised to test the relationships among the variables

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the Variables of Study

Variable	N	Mean	SD
TIS	214	34.49	6.11
Anger	214	22.11	1.30
Physical Agr.	214	22.03	1.45
Hostility	214	21.41	1.43
Verbal Agr.	214	21.41	1.43

In Table 1, the descriptive statistics of each of the variables are revealed.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of TIS and Aggression Dimensions

Variables	\bar{X}	σ	1	2	3	4	5
1. TIS	34.49	6.11	1				
2. Anger	22.10	1.30	.144*	1			
3. Physical Aggr.	22.03	1.45	.202*	.927*	1		
4. Hostility	21.41	1.43	.180*	.434*	.404*	1	
5. Verbal Aggr.	21.42	1.47	.277*	.517*	.500*	.934*	1

Correlation is significant at $P < 0.05$ (1-tailed)

Table 2 reflects the inter-correlations among the variables of the study. All the different dimensions of the aggression questionnaire correlated positively and significantly with terrorism inclination among the area boys of Lagos metropolis. The values are anger ($r = .144, < 0.05$), physical aggression ($r = .202, < 0.05$), hostility ($r = .180, < 0.05$), verbal aggression ($r = .277, < 0.05$).

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis of this study stated that there would be a significant relationship between anger, physical aggression, hostility, verbal aggression and terrorism inclination among area boys in the Lagos metropolis. As indicated, significant relationships were revealed among the variables. Hence, the hypothesis was accepted. This means that from the result, the four dimensions of aggression (anger, hostility, physical aggression, and verbal aggression) have significant positive relationships with the inclination of the participants toward terrorism. The study of Nwankwo et al. (2014) is in agreement with this result though the composite scale was analysed in the study of Nwankwo et al (2014) instead of the individual dimensions.

Likewise, Shoshani and Slone's (2008) study is in agreement with the findings of this present study. The interpretation of the positive relationship between the dimensions of aggression studied and inclination to terrorism is that the possession of aggressive tendencies by the area boys is an indication of a high tendency to engage in terrorism when the situation arises. It is not surprising that in Table 2, physical and verbal aggression were highly correlated with terrorism inclination compared to anger and hostility among area boys.

Physical and verbal aggression are typical behaviours that are often exhibited by area boys in the Lagos metropolis. This assertion is also supported in the study of Buss and Perry (1992) where male participants reported a higher physical and verbal aggression. In this study, all participants were males; hence, the present authors could not make a gender comparison. Additionally, the high correlation on physical and verbal aggression with terrorism inclination can be attributed to the illegality of their demands from the general public; most commercial and private drivers would refuse or avoid giving the area boys money. This often leads to verbal and physical aggression by the area boys who are poised to display different types of aggressive behaviours. These might trigger acts of terror in the form of hitting the vehicles of victims who do not comply and, thus, may cause damage to the vehicles.

Going by the modus operandi of area boys, one may be tempted to suggest that environmental factors such as poor nurturing care from parents, inadequate affection and warmth during childhood, negative family socialisation, lack of appropriate disciplinary actions as at when due, and poverty may be responsible for their exhibition of aggression. However, in the study of Piazza (2007), poverty, malnutrition, inequality, unemployment, inflation, and poor economic growth were investigated as predictors of terrorism, along with a variety of political and demographic control variables. Piazza (2007) tried to test the popular hypothesis that poverty, inequality and poor economic development are causes of terrorism. The study examined terrorist activities in 96 countries from 1986 to 2002. The result of the study of Piazza (2007) revealed that none of the variables predicted terrorist incidents. The popular understanding is that when these factors are deficient in the environment, it could make people suffer and could also make them be prone to aggressive behaviour. Jager (2018) disproved the affirmation that poverty determines terrorism because factors such as religion and tribe also have influencing factors. Similarly, the family upbringing of children could also be a predisposing factor to engaging in acts of aggression, which may then incline them to terrorism if there is no adequate care and love in the family. Area boys are usually found on the streets and under bridges, an apparent sign that they are deprived of family affiliations and a conducive home with warmth and comfort. Their association with other people who possess negative tendencies could set in what Bandura (1986) described as environment-causing behaviour and behaviour-causing the environment (Bandura, 1973).

In view of the results obtained from this study, what should actually be the way forward? The current activities of these area boys must not be allowed to continue on the streets of Lagos metropolis. Firstly, the security situation of Lagos metropolis must be considered with utmost importance. People should be free to walk and carry on with their business anywhere in the city of Lagos any time of the day. This is the only condition that can motivate foreign investors to invest financially and contribute to the development of the Nigerian economy. Hence, the government should intensify efforts to create avenues through which the area boys can channel their aggressive

energy positively. For instance, the Lagos state government may invest funds for the purpose of rehabilitating the area boys not just for making them learn a trade but to encourage them to identify a sporting event that they are good at and one that they can channel their energy to. For example, athletics, table tennis and the sport of boxing are events that the area boys should be encouraged to try up to the professional level. By this, the area boys can earn income through competitive sports within and outside Nigeria.

Additionally, the area boys who are of school age should be encouraged to attend school with the assistance of government scholarship. Responsible citizenship behaviour should be part of the curriculum of their education. They could also learn skills and vocational trades that would be sources of income. These skills could be developed through training. Formal training should include knowledge of operating a business and strategies for handling finances. Soft loans should be made available for setting up businesses thereafter.

Counselling sessions for rehabilitation are essential for getting the area boys off the streets. Omoegun (2011) described counselling as “a relationship of trust whereby an individual is assisted to evaluate himself and his opportunities, make a feasible choice in the light of his unique characteristics and opportunities, accept responsibilities for his choice and initiate a course of action that is in consonance with his choice” (pg. 13). This description reflects a total turnaround of the entire individual and one that will benefit the area boys immensely. Professional counselling is capable of making people search their souls and minds in a way that would herald remorse towards past negative activities.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to investigate the correlation between dimensions of aggression and inclination towards terrorism. The result revealed that all four dimensions of terrorism, namely anger, hostility, physical aggression, and verbal aggression, correlated positively with an inclination towards terrorism. The physical and verbal dimensions of aggression correlated more than the dimensions of anger and hostility. The area boys of Lagos exhibit more of the physical and verbal dimensions of aggression whenever they approach their victims in public places. It is recommended that the government intensify efforts to create energy-diffusing and constructive engagements for the area boys. Funds may be expended in developing special schools to educate and intervene to bring about behavioural change. Sports activities can be organised, and talents can be identified.

Limitation of study

In the current study, the authors adopted survey research to obtain data from participants of the study. This method may be fraught with errors from social desirability responses, limited flexibility of responses and education of respondents. Future studies may adopt locally translated questionnaires and mixed method research to enable confirmation of results.

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