



Role of Self Esteem In Influencing Aggressive Behaviour Among The Internally Displaced Children In Nasarawa State

Ogwo Agatha Ogechi (PhD)

Department of Psychology

Nasarawa State University, PMB 1022, Keffi Nasarawa state

E-mail ogegbu@yahoo.com ; phone 08035003954

Abstract

The study examined the role of self esteem in the manifestation of aggression among the internally displaced children. Participants drawn from two communities in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, namely, Bassa and Igbirra, were the participants for the study (N=445), aged 11 -16 years old. Index of self esteem, originally developed by M.A. Hudson in 1982 and was modified to suit the Nigerian sample in 1996, by M.A. Onighaiye, was the instrument used to measure self esteem, while aggression in children was measured by a 19-item questionnaire developed by the researcher. It was hypothesised that there will be no statistically significant difference in the manifestation of aggression between internally displaced children who have high self esteem and those who have low self esteem. Result of the ANOVA summary model showed that displacement status and self esteem significantly contributed to children's aggression $F(1,444) = 168.02, P < .001$, but the beta coefficient table showed that only displacement status has significant beta value $B(1,444) = -.72, P < .05$. Findings of this study support some of the earlier research findings on the relationship between self esteem and aggression and also, contradict some.

Keywords: *Self esteem; Internal displacement; Aggression*

Introduction

Aggression is a behaviour that is commonly exhibited by children in a variety of forms. Brehm & Kassin (1990) defined it as a behaviour that is meant to hurt or harm others. It could also be defined as a form of behaviour which is characterised by physical or verbal attack (verbal in the sense of a deliberate unfriendly behaviour designed to hurt another person through words or other non physical means). Aggressive behaviour is defined by Ferguson and Beaver (2009) as a behaviour which is intended to increase the social dominance of the organism relative to the dominance position of other organisms. Trembley (2000) suggests that physical aggression is mostly not a learned behaviour and that development provides opportunities for the learning of the self regulation. Bongers, Koot, der ende & Verhulst (2004), however asserts that a small subset of children fails to

acquire the necessary self regulatory abilities and tends to show a typical levels of physical aggression across development. This may be a pointer to violent behaviour later in life. Aggression may be triggered by physical fear of others, family difficulties or psychological trauma and corporal punishment (Taylor, Manganello, Lee, & Rice, 2010).

Bandura (1973) found that children who were exposed to an aggressive adult model acted more aggressively than those who were exposed to a non aggressive adult model. This suggests that anyone who comes in contact with and interacts with children can have an impact on the way they react and handle situations.

Self-esteem has become the third most frequently occurring theme in psychological literature: as of 2003 over 25,000 articles, chapters, and books referred to the topic (Rodewalt & Tragakis, 2003).

Self esteem has been defined in terms of a stable sense of personal worth or worthiness, measurable by self-report testing. This became the most frequently used definition for research, but involves problems of boundary-definition, making self-esteem indistinguishable from such things as narcissism or simple bragging (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). It has also been defined as the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness. This two-factor approach, as some have also called it, provides a balanced definition that seems to be capable of dealing with limits of defining self-esteem primarily in terms of competence or worth alone (Mruk, 2006). Branden's (1969), description of self-esteem includes the following primary properties: Self-esteem as a basic human need, i.e., it makes an essential contribution to the life process", it is indispensable to normal and healthy self-, and has a value for survival." Self-esteem as an automatic and inevitable consequence of the sum of individuals' choices in using their consciousness; and something experienced as a part of, or background to, all of the individual's thoughts, feelings and actions. Some researchers have linked high self esteem to aggression, while others believe that low self esteem causes aggression.

Self esteem is a term in Psychology to reflect a person's overall evaluation or appraisal of his or her own worth. Low self esteem on the other hand according to Spencer & Myers (2006) could lead to self imposed isolation, feelings of rejection, dejection, dissatisfaction with social relationships etc.

Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell (2000), observed that the traditional view of the relationship between self-esteem and aggression has been that low self-esteem give rise to aggression, but recent researches have proved otherwise.



Seligman (1998), for example found that it is high self esteem that is related to aggression. Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell (2000), found that a pathway to aggression may consist of a child having unrealistically high self-esteem paired with high exposure to violence, a cognitive bias to attribute aggressive intent to others, and an impulsive temperamental style, a pattern that may lead to chronic bullying. Coie and Dodge (1997), in reviewing research on aggression in children, reported that aggressive boys do not have low self-concept and tend to blame others rather than themselves for negative outcomes.

Research findings also depicts that people with low self esteem are usually uncertain and confused about themselves, oriented toward avoiding risk and having tendencies toward depression and anxiety, submitting readily to other people's influence and lacking confidence in themselves (Baumeister, 1993). Baumeister, Smart & Boden (1996), found that favourable self- regard is linked to violence in one sphere after another. Murderers, rapists, wife beaters, violent youth gangs and aggressive nations and other categories of violent people are all marked by strongly held views of their own superiority. When large groups of people differ in self esteem, the group with the higher self esteem is generally the more violent one.

Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay (1989), found that people with high self esteem tended to cluster at both the hostile extremes. The difference lay in stability of self esteem, which the researchers assessed by measuring self esteem on several occasions and computing how much variability each individual showed over time. People whose self esteem was high as well as stable were the least prone to hostility. These findings suggest that violent individuals are one subset of people with high self esteem. High self esteem may well be a mixed category, containing several different kinds of people. One of those kinds is very nonaggressive, whereas another is quite aggressive (Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1989).

Internal and external wars are the order of the day in most parts of the world today and Nigeria is not exempted from these wars. Violence is used by most aggrieved groups in Nigeria to destroy or to seek redress as a result of contradictions which arise from differences in perception of behaviour especially the communal, religious or political problems. These conflicts have led to large scale internal population displacement. Communities in the sub-region have been truncated, families have been displaced; women and children have been badly affected, since they are usually the most vulnerable. Children are vulnerable emotionally, physically and psychologically. They need care and there is a great need to respect their rights. In the words of Alli, Galadima & Wabare (1998), a recent development in the political history of Nigeria is the agitation of ethnic

minorities, nationwide for the redress of oppression and marginalization. Many combatants and civilians are killed by direct military action, other means of violence, as well as by famine and starvation. Many others die from inadequate medical care and the shock of the fighting. Women, children and the aged are the major victims. Even those who survive the violence often retain its physical and psychological scars. Apart from children who are mentally deformed as a result of severe malnutrition, others become alienated from society, including those forced to migrate from their homes either as refugees or internally displaced persons (Egwu, 1999).

In order to avoid being killed during such violence, people leave their homes and seek refuge elsewhere within or outside the country. Those who leave the country entirely are called refugees. They cross international boundaries and are governed by international laws. Others leave their homes for refuge in safer areas within the country. They are referred to as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

Internally Displaced Persons as used in this paper refer to people who have fled persecution from one region or location of their country to the other. Such people might be fleeing from religious, ethnic and other persecutions. They are not recognized in international law and therefore, do not enjoy any legal rights guaranteed by the world community. In most cases, Internally Displaced Persons (and refugees) go beyond individuals and households to include entire communities, clans and ethnic groups. The involvement of such large populations and the tendency for them to leave their homes in a hurry often means that they leave under much more difficult conditions than economic, political and even ecological emigrants. Often they need an array of international organizations to sustain them, at least in the short-run. But then, international refugee law does not provide for assistance to prospective refugees while they are still within their own country. During the course of leaving the areas of violence, Internally Displaced Persons face various difficulties. Many of their problems stem from the spontaneous, hurried and unorganized nature of their departure. Consequently, their flight out of the conflict zone is quite often chaotic. Families are often times separated. These emigrants are forced to trek very long distances to their destinations. In some cases, they do not even know where they are going to before leaving their homes. They leave their homes to live in makeshift tents far away from their homes.

In the face of these violent crises, children usually suffer a lot of stresses. Most of them become orphans, some are left with various psychological wounds which results directly or indirectly from exposure to conflicts, they are usually traumatized, their young minds are oftentimes filled with and hardened with



unhealthy thoughts. According to Machel (1996), opposing fighters more or less see these children as future soldiers and potential parents of enemies and not as the innocent citizens they are and as such, targeting them is a perfect way of sowing the seeds of terror among current enemies and reducing the number of future components.

This work thus examined the role of self esteem in the manifestation of aggression among the internally displaced children in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Nasarawa state like most states in Nigeria have consistently experienced communal and ethnic conflicts over the years and thousands of people are killed in the course of these conflicts and many families are intermittently forced to flee from their homes to safer regions within the country .It is hypothesized that there will be no statistically significant difference in the manifestation of aggression between internally displaced children who have high self esteem and those with low self esteem

Method

Data for this study come from four hundred and forty five internally displaced school children who are indigenes of Nasarawa State in Nigeria. They were selected from communities in the federal capital territory towns of Abaji, Gwawalada and Bwari area council where some of them fled to as a result of the conflict in Toto local government area. Fifty six children who had the opportunity to be enrolled in school were drawn from displaced families in Gwagwalada. They were made up of twenty nine male children and twenty seven females. Fifty four displaced children comprising twenty six male children and twenty six females were randomly selected from Abaji, fifty five displaced children comprising twenty eight males and twenty seven females were randomly selected from Bwari area council. Fifty seven children who were displaced from the communal Clashes in Toto local government area were randomly selected from three schools in Keffi local government area of Nasarawa state. Others were randomly selected from secondary schools in Keffi and Bwari. Ninety six participants comprising forty six male children and fifty female children were randomly selected from Bwari, while fifty seven participants comprising twenty seven male children and thirty female children were randomly selected from Keffi. All the participants were drawn from junior secondary classes. Their ages were between 11 and 16 years with a mean age of 15. Children as used in this study were defined as persons not more than 18 years old in conformity with the definition of children established by the United Nations convention on the rights of the child (UN, 1989).

Method

Aggression in children was measured with a 19-item questionnaire developed by the researcher. This was done by creating a list of verbal and physical aggressive acts which are common among adolescents. The list was partly derived from literature on aggression and partly from overt Aggression Scale (OAS) by (Hellings, Nickel, Weckbaugh, McMarter, Mossier & Schrorder, 2003). The OAS was originally validated on general adults in the Western Culture and later performed on children and adolescents. The list was phrased into questions to get 25 questions that were refined into a questionnaire. The items of the questionnaire were reviewed by some university professors and secondary school teachers. The pilot questionnaire was later administered to 40 students in two secondary schools in Suleija Niger state Nigeria. The initial 25 items gave a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.79. 19 items which had correlation indices of 0.30 and above were retained, while 6 items which had correlation indices of less than 0.30 were dropped since they seem not to be reliable. The 19- item questionnaire that was retained gave a Cronbach's Alpha value reliability coefficient of 0.81. Self esteem on the other hand was measured by index of self esteem (ISE), originally developed by Hudson (1982) and modified for use in Nigeria by Onighaiye (1996).

Procedure

The school authority first gave consent for their students to be used and then the students who were used as participants voluntarily agreed to respond to the questionnaire. Copies of the questionnaire were administered with the help of the school teachers. The participants were left under the supervision of their various form teachers who played the role of research assistants. Participants were encouraged to respond to the questionnaire at their own pace. No time limit was given for the completion of the questionnaire. Completed copies of the questionnaire were submitted to the research assistants who handed them over to the researcher.

Result

The result of the multiple regression using enter method showed that the adjusted R^2 after controlling for gender is .53 showing that the displacement status and self esteem significantly contributed to 53% of the relationship with aggression. $F(1,444) = 168.02, P < .001$. The beta coefficient table showed that only displacement status has significant beta value $B(1,444) = .05$. Also, among the internally displaced only, self esteem was not a significant predictor of aggressive behaviour, $B(1,222) = .08, P > .05$.



	Df	Adjusted R	F-ratio	Beta
Model 1: Displaced and non displaced	3,443	.53	168.02	
Gender				.04
Displacement status				-.72*
Self esteem				.05
Model 2: Displaced				
Gender				.05
Self esteem				.08

Discussion

The study has established that children's displacement status significantly predicted aggression in children, with children in displacement camps manifesting more aggressive behaviour than those who are not in camps. However, the beta table showed that children's level of self esteem alone did not significantly contribute to the manifestation of aggression among children in Nasarawa state who participated in the study.

Result of this study supports the findings of Bushman & Baumeister (1998) that self esteem by itself, whether high or low, had no effect on aggression. It however contradicts the traditional view of relationship between self-esteem and aggression, as reported by Baumeister, Bushman, and Campbell (2000) that low self-esteem gives rise to aggression. This is not very surprising as researches on self-esteem and aggression had reported that the relationship is quite complex and rarely gave support to the traditional view.

This study has also shown that aggression was more prevalent among children who are internally displaced and living in camps and that self esteem level of the children did not significantly predict aggression. The assertion of Fisher, (1998), that children who grew up living in violence are more likely to turn to violence themselves as a method of problem solving is supported by the result of this study. The circumstances of the internally displaced children are such that they are deprived of home and family protection. They walk on long journey in their search for safety amidst various kinds of torture and other forms of inhuman treatment. Even when they are "fortunate" to get a place to lay their heads in camps, the torture they face continues, ranging from sexual abuse and hunger, as the relief materials promised by government and other humanitarian agencies for their upkeep hardly get to them. The violence, grief and anxiety experienced by the children during armed conflict according to (Fisher, 1998), have both long and short term effects on their mental health, quality of life and subsequent behaviour

as adults .These harms and inhuman treatment suffered by these children resulting from neglect, malnutrition, sexual abuse as well as growing up under conditions which threaten their physical, emotional and psychological survival is enough to destroy their childhood and make them manifest disturbed behaviour and in this case aggression as shown by the current study. Again, by growing up in troubled areas and watching the display of violence and aggression from adults during the conflict that led to their flight, and the manner in which people are brutally murdered, it is little wonder that internally displaced children whose lives are spent in the theatre of bloodshed and various forms of brutality turned out to be aggressive since children basically learn by observation and imitation according to (Bandura, 1973).

Conclusion

Against this background, it is extremely important and urgent that the government should set adequate machineries in place to make sure that internally displaced children, especially those living in camps are adequately protected. They should also provide mechanisms for reporting violence and other violations of human rights. This could be achieved by making their camps more conducive for living, providing security and patrol vans and also providing a channel of getting feedback from the victims on the today to day challenges they may be facing. Measures should also be taken to reorient these children and youths by having resident health workers to take care of their health needs and more importantly, organising special education and rehabilitation programmes by psychologists, sociologists, social workers as well as special education instructors. These efforts will go a long way in restoring their dignity and bringing them back on track as normal citizens. While these are going on, government should put machineries in place to pacify aggrieved parties and forestall repeat of violence and armed conflict.

References

- Alli , W.O.,Galadima,H.S.,& Wabare, P.(1999). Population displacement in Bassa-Igbirra communal conflict. In Nnoli O., (ed.) *Communal Conflict and Population displacement in Nigeria: A Research Report*. Enugu: PACREP Books
- Bandura, A. (1973). *Aggression: a social learning analysis*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall
- Baumeister, R. (1993). *Self esteem*. New York: Plenum press.



- Baumeister, R., Smart, L., & Boden, J. (1996). Relation of threatened egotism to violence and aggression: The dark side of high self esteem. *Psychological review*, 103, 5-33.
- Baumeister, R. F., Bushman, B. J., & Campbell, W. K. (2000). Self-esteem, narcissism, and aggression: Does violence result from low self-esteem or from threatened egotism? *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9, 26–29.
- Branden, N. (1969). *The psychology of self-esteem*. New York: Bantam.
- Brehm, S. S., & Kassin, S. M. (1990). *Social Psychology*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Bongers, I. L.; Koot, H.M.; der Ende, J.; Verhulst, F.C. (2004). "Developmental trajectories of externalizing behaviors in childhood and adolescence". *Child Development* 75 (5): 1523–1537.
- Bushman, B., & Baumeister, R. (1998). Threatened egotism, narcissism, self esteem, and direct and displaced aggression: does self love or self- hate lead to violence? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75, 219-229.
- Coie, J. D. & Dodge, K. A. (1997). Aggression and antisocial behavior. In W. Damon & N. Eisenberg (Eds). *Handbook of Child Psychology*, Vol. 3: *Social, emotional and personality development*.
- Egwu, S., (1999). *Agrarian Question, politics and Ethnic Conflict in Rural Nigeria*, CASS Monograph Series. Portharcourt: Center for Advanced Social Science.
- Ferguson, C. J. & Beaver, K. M. (2009). "Born killers: The genetic origin of extreme violence". *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 14 (5): 286-294.
- Fischer, K. W., & Ayoub, C. (1996). Analyzing development of working models of close relationships: Illustration with a case of vulnerability and violence. In G. Noam & K. W. Fischer (Eds.), *Development and vulnerability in close relationships (JPS Series on Knowledge an Development, pp. 173–199)*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hellings, J. A., Nickel, E. J., Weckbaugh, M., McCarter, K., Moiser, M., Schroeder, S. R. (2005). The Overt Aggression Scale. *Journal of Neuropsychiatry a Clinical neurosciences* 17:29-35
- Hudson, W.W. (1982). *Index of self-esteem. The clinical measurement package: a field manuel*. Chicago: Dorsey press
- Kernis, M., Grannemann, B., & Barclay, L. (1989). Stability and level of self esteem as predators of anger arousal and hostility. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 56, 1013-1022
- Machel, G. (1996). *The impact of war on children: A Review*. Toronto. Macmilliam.
- Mruk, C. (2006). *Self-Esteem research, theory, and practice: Toward a positive psychology of self-esteem (3rd ed.)*. New York: Springer.

- Onighaiye, M.A., (1996). *The impact of the length of time in the University, on ego identity, self esteem and stress manifestations in students*. Unpublished B.Sc Psychology Department, University of Lagos.
- Rodewalt, F. & Tragakis, M. W. (2003). "Self-esteem and self-regulation: Toward optimal studies of self-esteem". *Psychological Inquiry*, 14(1), 66–70.
- Taylor C. A, Manganello J. A, Lee S. J. & Rice J. C (2010). "Mothers' spanking of 3-year-old children and subsequent risk of children's aggressive behavior". *Pediatrics* 125 (5): 1057–65.
- Tremblay, R. E. (2000). "The development of aggressive behaviour during childhood: What have we learned in the past century". *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 24: 129–141.
- Spencer D. G., & Myers, S. (2006) *Social Psychology 3rd ed. Toronto McGrawhill Ryerson. United Nations (1989) Article 1. United Nations Treaty Collection. Conventions on the rights of the child*. Retrieved, 21st may, 2009.

AUTHORS BIOGRAPHIES

Ogwo Agatha Ogechi Ph.D is a Developmental Psychologist and a senior lecturer at Nasarawa State University Keffi Nigeria. Her research interest is on psychological problems resulting from armed conflict, insurgency/terrorism in Nigeria with special emphasis on the plight of displaced women, and children and general gender issues