

## PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ADOLESCENTS AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOURS IN GENDER-SPECIFIC SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE.

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### Abstract

*Aggression among adolescents today is on the increase and one continues to hear reports of violent acts and aggressive behaviour such as pushing, hitting, fighting, bullying, molesting junior ones as well as indirect aggression which include telling lies to get colleagues in trouble in male secondary schools in Anambra state. The study sought to find out the teachers and guidance counselors perception on the influence of social media on aggressive behaviours of adolescents in gender-specific schools. The design of the study was descriptive survey. The population for the study comprised 172 teachers and 48 guidance counselors. A researcher- developed instrument titled 'Influence of Social Media on Students Aggressive Behavior' (ISMSAB) was used for the study. The instrument was face and content validated. Frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the three research questions that guided the study. Results obtained revealed that exposure to violent television programs, violent video/video games, social sites eg facebook, instagram, whatsapp, twitter etc encourage aggressive behaviours among male adolescents. Recommendations were made among which is that parents should monitor what their children are watching on the television, limit their television time, as well as turn off the television when violent/aggressive programs comes on.*

**Key words:** Adolescents, aggression, aggressive behaviours, social media.

### Introduction

In this era of digital technology, people including students access all types of information with ease through various social sites/platforms. The last decade has seen a rise in technological progression and the social media platform. Sites like facebook, twitter, whatsapp, instagram are meant to encourage social behaviour and a sense of community but, it has actually succeeded in doing the opposite.

Despite the numerous advantages that media has, the depiction of violence has become a thing of serious concern to all and sundry. Social media has become a contemporary and global issue which constitutes serious hazard not only to the adolescents but to the entire populace. Social media is an interactive media that allow users to read and write content. Social media allow people to be more creative as it gives the users freedom to produce content that they can share with their peers. In social media, the internet users become creators and consumers of the content (Strasburger, Wilson and Jordan, 2013).

Social media is a collective term for websites and applications which focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Social media has become larger and more accessible with some examples of social media including twitter, facebook, LinkedIn (whatis.techtarget.com). Social media is a tool we use to keep connected with the people in our lives. It is a way to strengthen relationships and to make new ones. Social media is a world of human interactions driven by content and supported by the use of technology (heidicohen.com). One factor that may influence behaviour is the tendency of adolescents to model themselves after people or characters with whom they identify. Adolescents through various social media platforms/sites get connected to friends and in trying to maintain such relationship often adopt those influencers' opinions and acts. In psychology, several theories have been used to explain how children model their behaviour with whom they identify. Two of the most widely used theories are social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001) and desensitization theory (Jones In Hirst, 2018).

Bandura, (2001) in his social cognitive theory assert that children learn behaviour not only through their own experiences but also by observing others. When children see others behave in a certain way and subsequently being punished or rewarded for this behavior, children learn which behaviours are acceptable and which ones are not. These social cognitions as observed by Bandura, then help guide the actual behaviour of children. On the other hand, Desensitization theory states that repeated exposure to violence in media leads to a gradual habituation in response to displays of aggression. Over time and with increased exposure to media violence, children become more accustomed to aggressive behaviour which subsequently impacts moral judgements and behaviours. What adolescents watch in social media no doubts affect their behaviour. Social media has played a significant role in development of children. Our children are future leaders, hence the society is anticipating a lot from them in terms of good psycho-social behaviours, good morals, interpersonal relationships, all round excellence.

When our youths are exposed to violent television programs and violent video/video games plus internet access which comprised of millions of evidence of aggression and violence, they try to model via such behaviours as children are very good in imitating. Adolescent stage as noted by Mawson, Bestwith, Dingle and Lubman (2015) is a critical time periods in human development as many harmful and often-times lifelong behaviour patterns stem during them.

Merikangas and McClair (2012) also noted that the young person (adolescent) progressively frees himself from parental dependence, seeks new experiences, which often include resistance to established rules. Supporting the above adolescence can be characterized as a period of becoming more independent (Strasburger, et al, 2013). As adolescents mature, the role of parents in the family decreases. Larson in Strasburger etal also noted that the time adolescents spend with their families decreases from 33% to 14%. This condition gives adolescents more time to explore new things by themselves, including expressing themselves and finding identity in social media.

Adolescence also constitutes a phase of curiosity, risk taking and defiance. Most students in upper basic cadre (ie senior secondary) are in their adolescent stage – a period when they are filled with life and energy. At this period, many are yet to develop proper self identity and many draw their identity from peer group perceived “tough guys” criterion as they seem to be doing presently and more often exert their physical energy in aggressive acts/behaviours. Psychologically, aggression is a term which refers to a range of behaviours that can result in both physical and psychological harm to yourself, others or objects in the environment. This type of behaviour centers on harming another person either physically or mentally. Aggression can take variety of forms including: physical, verbal, mental and emotional. The American Psychological Association defined aggression as behaviour aimed at harming others physically or psychologically. When such behaviour is purposively performed with the primary goal of intentional injury or destruction it is termed aggression (dictionary.apa.org).

On the other hand, aggressive behaviour is a type of behaviour where people attempt to stand up for themselves or exert power over others in ways that are hostile and violate the rights of others (Williams, 2015). Ames and Fiske (2013) defines aggressive behaviour as behaviour that is intended to harm another who does not wish to be harmed. Ames etal assert that because it involves the perception of intent, what looks like aggression from one point of view may not look that way from another and the same harmful behaviour may or may not be considered aggressive depending on its intent. They further observed that intentional harm is worse than unintentional harm, even when

the harms are identical. In the context of this research work, social media include films, television, video/video games, movies and sites like facebook, whatsApp, instagram, twitter etc. Adolescents are exposed to increasingly higher doses of aggressive images in the media as they spend a considerable portion of their time watching television, movies, playing video games as well as assessing various social sites. Violence in social media has a detrimental effect to all round development of the adolescent. Majority of social media and sites are loaded with what could be described as new digital media culture and demands that affects adolescents' behaviour.

The more a student uses these social media, the more he is exposed to dangers there and most likelihood of imitating/copying what they see and read. For example, adolescents who look to the social media for models will find plenty of tough male warriors, wrestlers, boxers, super heroes who resolve conflicts using aggression show no remorse for their actions and are rarely punished for acting aggressively and thus model after them. The researchers' experience having taught in secondary school, observed that often students resort to violent acts like fighting, hitting, beating, pushing, molesting junior ones at the slightest provocation. They see these acts as the first resort to solving conflicts. This is serious because often serious injuries are sustained and casualties rushed to the hospital. This is worrisome. So many reasons could be given for such aggressive acts like parenting styles, parents' socio-economic status, mental or health conditions, substance use disorder, spiritual problems among others. It is against this background that the researchers want to investigate empirically the influence of social media on adolescents' aggressive behaviours in gender-specific schools in Anambra state.

Cases/incidence of fighting, hitting, bullying, molesting younger ones as well as pushing seems to be on the increase in secondary schools in Anambra state. These aggressive acts are often witnessed in the face of slightest provocation as most adolescents see it as the first resort to solving conflicts. In this era of digital technology, adolescents seem to be engrossed in social media where they see and listen to all manner of aggressive and violent acts. Psychologically, we know going by Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory that much of human learning is directly by observation of a model. The researchers now wish to find out if what adolescents see and hear from the social media influences their aggressive acts/ behaviours. The study is guided by three research questions which include:

- What forms/types of aggressive behaviours are common among male adolescents in secondary schools in Anambra state?
- What is the prevalence of aggressive behaviours among male adolescents in secondary schools in Anambra state?

- What are the teachers and guidance counselors perception on the following:
- The influence of violent television programs (boxing, wrestling, rape, murder etc) on the aggressive behaviour of students.
- The influence of violent films, videos/video games on the aggressive behaviour of students.
- The influence of social sites eg facebook, twitter, whatsApp, instagram etc on the aggressive behaviours of students.

### **Method**

The study was conducted using a descriptive survey design. This type of research design is aimed at collecting data on, and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population (Nworgu, 2015). The study was carried out in Anambra state and it covered all the 48 boys/male public secondary schools from the six educational zones. The population therefore, consist all form/class teachers (172) from all the various arms of SS2 classes and (48) guidance counselors, all from the chosen schools. However, there was no sampling because the entire population (220) was used for the study. The choice of gender-specific male secondary schools is predicated upon the fact that review of related literatures affirms that male adolescents are more aggressive than their female counterparts because they dare risky behaviors and will always like to be seen as 'big boys'. Senior secondary 2(SS2) classes were used because interview schedule with the teachers and guidance counselors revealed that majority of disciplinary cases comes from the senior students. The researchers also choose SS2 students based on the fact that majority of them fall within the adolescent age range.

Finally the class/form teachers and guidance counselors were considered appropriate because the form teachers are closer to the students more than their various subject teachers. Again every disciplinary case is first reported to them. The guidance counselors' handles disciplinary and other behavioral cases, counsels the students and reports back to the principal for implementation of decisions taken. Three research questions guided the study. A researcher-developed instrument titled 'Influence of Social Media on Students Aggressive Behaviour' (ISMSAB) was used for data collection. The instrument has 15 items. It was structured on a 4-point likert scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Three experts in the department of educational psychology and measurement and evaluation from Nnamdi Azikiwe university, Awka validated the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined using cronbach alpha with overall

reliability coefficient of 0.80. The researchers administered the questionnaire directly to the chosen sample for the study. A total of 220 copies of the questionnaires were given out and all were successfully completed and returned. The research questions were answered using frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation.

## Results

**Table 1: Teachers and guidance counselors responses on forms/types of aggressive behaviours common among male students in secondary schools in Anambra state.**

Teachers =172, Guidance counselors =48

S/N	Aggressive Behaviours	Teachers Frequency	Percentage	Counselors Frequency	Percentage
1	Karate	155	90.1%	37	77.0%
2	Hitting	170	98.8%	45	93.8%
3	Fighting	172	100%	48	100%
4	Heading	169	98.3%	44	91.6%
5	Bullying	172	100%	48	100%
6	Molesting Younger ones	170	98.8%	48	100%
7	Pushing	170	98.8%	46	95.8%
8	Intimidating or verbally berating.	170	98.8%	48	100%
9	Indirect aggression which include telling lies to get colleagues in trouble.	170	98.8%	40	83.3%

The above table revealed that both the teachers and school counselors agreed that the 9 forms of aggressive behaviours are common among students in male secondary schools in Anambra state.

**Table 2: Teachers and guidance counselors responses on the prevalence of aggressive behaviours among male adolescents in secondary schools in Anambra state.**

Teachers = 172, Guidance counselors = 48

Prevalence	Teachers Frequency	Percentage	Counselors Frequency	Percentage
Never	-	-	-	-
Sometimes	12	6.97%	2	4.16%
Often	160	93.1%	46	95.8%

The result in Table 2 above revealed the teachers and counselors agreement on the prevalence of aggressive behaviours in male secondary schools in Anambra state.

**Table 3: Mean and standard deviation scores of teachers and guidance counselors on the influence of violent television programs on aggressive behaviour of students.**

Teachers =172, Guidance counselors =48

S/N	Items	Teachers x	SD	Counselors x	SD
1	Television violence increases aggressive behaviour particularly boys.	3.39	0.81	3.45	0.74
2	Adolescents who view television media violence are more likely to have an increased feelings of hostility that lead to violent behaviours.	2.65	0.88	2.76	1.03
3	When adolescents see individuals they connect with in media including television movies, they are more likely to adopt those influencers opinions and acts.	2.78	0.94	2.80	1.02
4	Mass media eg television is having a colossal impact on our values, behaviours and perception.	3.45	0.74	3.54	0.95
5	Watching violent television programs like wrestling, boxing, rape, murder encourages aggressive behaviours.	3.46	1.06	2.63	1.37

The five items in Table 3 has a mean score above 2.50 for both the teachers and counselors. This simply shows that both the teachers and counselors in male secondary schools in Anambra state are of the opinion that violent television program influence aggressive behaviours of male adolescents.

**Table 4: Mean and standard deviation scores of teachers and guidance counselors on influence of violent films, videos/video games on aggressive behaviour of students.**

Teachers =172, Guidance counselors =48

S/N	Items	Teachers x	SD	Counselors x	SD
1	Exposure to violent films has a deep impact on the adolescent.	2.60	1.50	2.82	1.38
2	Adolescents learn violent and aggressive behaviours by watching /playing violent movies, films, videos /video games.	3.52	0.58	2.63	1.37
3	Adolescents who play violent games do demonstrate increased physical aggression over time.	3.45	0.74	3.67	0.59
4	Via watching aggressive films, videos,	2.64	0.88	3.39	0.81

	adolescents model after them.				
5	Adolescents who viewed violent films are more likely to commit serious crimes and increased potential for violence.	2.79	0.97	2.99	1.06

Table 4 reveals the teachers and counselors positive opinions that violent film, videos/video games influences aggressive behaviours of students in male secondary schools in Anambra state. This is evidenced by the mean score of 2.50 and above for the 5 questionnaire items.

**Table 5: Mean and standard deviation scores of teachers and guidance counselors on influence of violent media sites eg facebook, whatsApp, twitter, instagram on aggressive behaviours of students.**

Teachers =172, Guidance counselors =48

S/N	Items	Teachers x	SD	Counsellors x	SD
1	Aggressive behaviour in social sites promotes aggressive behaviour in adolescents.	3.08	1.05	2.98	1.09
2	Viewing so much violent sites can encourage an imitative behaviour.	3.71	0.65	3.77	0.54
3	What adolescents watch in social media no doubts affects their behaviour.	3.30	0.98	3.80	0.62
4	comparing yourself to other people is a sure path to anxiety and social sites has only made this easier thus resulting in aggressive behaviours.	3.46	1.06	2.63	1.37
5	While social sites makes it easier to meet new people and make friends, it also enables cruel people to tear into others with little effort.	2.86	1.10	2.45	1.04

The items in Table 5 had mean scores of 2.50 and above for both teachers and counselors. This implies that both the teachers and counselors in male secondary schools in Anambra state agreed that assessing different media sites like facebook, whatsApp, twitter, instagram influence aggressive behaviours among male students.

## Discussion

Findings of this study revealed that aggressive behaviours/acts such as bullying, hitting, fighting, pushing, molesting younger ones, intimidating or verbally berating are prevalent among male secondary schools in Anambra state. Both the teachers and guidance counselors agreed that aggressive behaviours are learnt from exposure to violent television programs, violent



videos/video games as well as various social media sites. From social media negative and contrary behaviours like fighting, violence in a little provocation are copied. Exposure to social media violence is associated with aggressive/violent behaviour, bullying, desensitization to violence. This is not different from the findings of Anderson (2004) who noted that playing violent video games can increase aggressive thoughts, behaviours and feelings in both short-term and long-term. Anderson suggested that the degree of exposure to violent video games directly leads to an increase of aggression.

The findings of this study is further confirmed by the report of Webmd.com(2018) who affirmed that these days, just about every time you turn on the television, you are met with a barrage of violent images including depictions of rape, robbery, murder etc. They noted that Nigerian children watch an average of between 3 and 4 hours of television daily and extensive viewing of television violence may cause children to become more aggressive and anxious. Children who watch many hours a week of violent television may become inured to violence and begin to see the world as a scary and unsafe place.

The researchers are not surprised with the findings of the study because in a situation where most parents in pursuit of their daily career/business relegates their Gods ordained duty to bring/train up a child in the way he should go, to the hands of older ones, nannies and house helps etc fails to monitor/regulate what their children watch on televisions as well as the various social sites they visit every day. This results in the children's asses to all manner of violent acts/behaviors which they copy/imitate.

Young children who play violent video games do demonstrate increased physical aggression over time (<https://www.children's.com.do.vid-->). There is no doubt that video games are popular among children and adolescents. Violent video games may affect some children behaviour over time.

Onwuekwe, Njemanze, Njoku and Obia (2017) also supported the result of this study as they noted that mass media is having a colossal impact on our values, behaviours and perception, violent movies has detrimental effects on adolescents. The daily courgar.com (2016) also noted that social media encourages antisocial, aggressive behaviour. Sites eg facebook, twitter, instagram, among others are meant to encourage social behaviour and a sense of community, but it has actually succeeded in doing the opposite.

This is true to the best of knowledge of the researchers because you often see people on social media platforms like facebook, wassap etc, reacting to information/write-up aggressively using words like: 'idiot', 'bastard', 'monster' etc. Yes, it is true that everyone as far as Nigerian constitution is

concerned is entitled to freedom of speech. That's ok. You have an opinion to share but sometimes the line between freedom of speech and cyber bullying can be very thin. What we are saying in essence is that adolescents' by constantly assessing these platforms with time develops aggressive behaviours thinking that it is normal way of life.

Gansner (2017) supporting the result of this study also noted that violent video game exposure was associated with an increased composite aggressive score, increased aggressive behaviour, increased aggressive cognitions. Gansner opined that increased number of hours on social media, increases aggressive behaviour. He argued that internet provides unfettered access to images of real-life violence eg recent videos of murder, gang violence uploaded to facebook live –overall exposure to, and potential for, imitated violence/aggression may be increased.

In line with the above, Desmond, Hong, Ranney, Patel, Kelly, Eschmann & Washington (2014) said that social media has become recognized as a vehicle through which youths perpetuate acts of violence against their peers such as bullying, harassment, dating aggression etc. Strasburger et al (2013) noted that the main ways that media violence exposure increases aggression in short term are: direct imitation of the observed behaviour, observational learning of attitudes, beliefs and expected benefits of aggression. They assert that for at least a brief period after viewing or playing violent media, the exposed person thinks in more aggressive ways, feels more aggressive, perceives that others are hostile towards him/her and sees aggressive solutions as being more acceptable and beneficial.

### **Conclusion**

Exposure to violent television programs, violent films, video/video games as well as social media sites such as facebook, twitter, whatsApp and instagram among others have provided unmonitored and uncensored environments which can easily expose adolescents to violent/aggressive behaviours. Continuous exposure to media aggression can result in increased acceptance of aggression as an appropriate means of solving problems and achieving one's goals.

### **Recommendations**

Social media seems to have greater medium of shaping young people attitudes and actions than do parents/teachers replacing them as educators, role models and primary sources of information about the world and how one behaves in it. The researchers therefore recommends as follows:

1. Parents should pay attention to what their children are watching on the television, limit their television time, turn off the television when violent/aggressive programs comes on and tell your child why you are doing so.
2. Teachers should increase the mental task of take home assignment, projects, given to students so they will spend much time on academics than assessing various social media sites, playing video games and watching television.
3. From the first days, children watch the behaviour of those around them and try to imitate what they see. Any mistake made at childhood stage is likely to be carried to other /later stages in life. Parents are therefore admonished to discourage any early manifestation of aggressive behaviour so the child does not grow with it. This has to do with parenting style. Avoid over pampering the child and so, permissiveness in child rearing is highly discouraged.
4. Teachers/school authorities should properly and wisely punish students who exhibit aggressive acts so it will serve as deterrant to others thereby reducing the prevalence of aggressive behaviours in secondary schools. There should be no preference to the child's socio economic background. Parental status notwithstanding, equal punishment should be administered on all defaulters/offenders.

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