

Original Research Article

The family as a risk factor for aggression and violence at school

Tsvetelina Tarpomanova

Abstract

Educational and Research Sector of
Inspector of Public Health and Social
Activities, Medical College, Medical
University of Varna, 9002 Varna,
Bulgaria

E-mail: dr_tarpomanova@abv.bg

Aggression at school has a multifactorial genesis. One of the most important factors is the family environment. The purpose of this work is to analyze the relationship between the family environment and the aggressive behavior of students of 7th and 8th classes (13-14 years) and to propose approaches to work with the families. The study included 822 students from the 7th and 8th classes of 11 schools in the city of Varna. A survey was carried out after a complex methodology. The results were processed through mathematical and statistical methods and a graphic analysis. There is a substantial difference in the aggressive behavior of students, which is influenced by the relations in the family. The physical aggression is strongly influenced by the type of family relations, as moderate in a case of a united family turns into increased one when the relations are insupportable. Verbal aggression is also influenced by the relations in the family. This also applies to the aggressive irritability, jealousy and hatred, in total for the aggression and lie. Other acts of aggression, such as indirect aggression, oppositional behavior, aggressive mistrust and guilt after the aggression are due to factors other than the relations within the family.

Keywords: Aggression and violence at school, aggressive behavior and co-existence, family relations

INTRODUCTION

The acts of aggression and violence are common in modern society. If these two concepts must be distinguished, aggression is any deliberate behavior that ends with a physical or mental harm to a human or a damage to their property. (Ivanov, 2013) Violence is total eradication of the alternatives for action of the subject. The person is treated as an object deprived of choice, vulnerable to pain and suffering. The aggressor chooses what will be done and the goals are achieved upon concomitant disobedience. The immediate contact of both persons is obligatory and violence is always intentional.

There are various types of aggression – physical and verbal, active and passive, direct and indirect, etc. The violence between children at school covers a wide range of acts. Bulgarian word that most correctly corresponds to the phenomenon is harassment (Kaltshev, 2003; Stamatov, 2008). The traditional idea of harassment is that

it is an expression solely on the relations between the aggressor and the victim. There is an imbalance at a physical or mental level between them and the conflict results from this to a large extent. (O'Connell, 1999, 86-97; Swearer, 2001). The studies have been focused on the characteristics and the interactions between the aggressors and the victims (Salmivalli, 1999). But there are a number of other factors that affect the acts of harassment. In view of this, the dynamic system theory addresses the harassment as a process that takes place within the socio-ecological context (Atlas, 1998; O'Connell, 1999, 440-451).

There is a number of theories of aggression that may be examined as a series of dysfunctional stages in human development (Andreeva, 2003; Heckhausen, 1986). So, before getting their realization at school, children must be sufficiently prepared for the live by their parents by getting

an illustrative example of virtues, values and behavior in the family environment. This is where child grow, become physically stronger and form themselves as personalities (Bojadzhieva, 2008). The family can stimulate the whole range of human qualities, from the best to the worst. Authoritarian parents believe that the development of the child is best channeled and directed by strong discipline. Severity and restrictions not only prevent intuitiveness, but, depriving the children of gentleness and caresses, they stimulate frustration that unlocks the aggressive behavior. There is a similar effect of the negligent attitude to the child by parents uncaring of his or her problems. This loss of support in the tender age is the reason for the child to fight to overcome the difficulties, the aggression being the easiest and most affordable way to.

Bad families are another, worse category to stimulate aggression to children. Insults, scandals, thrashing are an important condition precedent to develop child's aggression. Most aggressive children and aggressors are formed in families of alcoholics, drug addicts or parents with criminal records. (Tshavdarov, 2008)

More than 80% of the schools in Bulgaria have recorded cases of violence in the 2014/2015 school year - 4,117 cases of aggression between students, 310 cases of aggression by students or parents to teachers and 92 cases of violence by teachers or parents to children. These figures have seriously increased compared to the previous year. The cases of verbal aggression have most increased - from 286 to 1,603, a growth rate of 460%. This growth rate is 174% in the physical aggression - from 606 to 1,662 cases of thrashing. The cases of psychological harassment have increased by 131 of 497 and those of virtual harassment - from 22 to 51. They may have been more, in the opinion of the experts, but similar situations are most difficult to detect and least reported.

Due to the exclusive topicality of the problem, a municipal program Stressless Education has been implemented for five years in Varna, within which a survey was carried out of students from the 7th and 8th classes (13 to 19 years) from 13 schools.

The purpose of this work is to analyze the relationship between the family environment and the aggressive behavior of students of 7th and 8th classes (13-14 years) and to propose approaches to work with the families.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was implemented during a period of three consecutive years in the last of which included 822 students from the 7th and 8th classes from 11 schools of the city of Varna. A survey was carried out after a complex methodology including an Aggressiveness Measurement Questionnaire after A. Buss, A. Darke) and a combined questionnaire providing information on: value orientations, psychosocial status, family climate, use of psychoactive substances. The results were processed through

mathematical and statistical methods and a graphic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following distribution is obtained when asking the question on whom the students live with (Figure 1).

As the figure shows, the basic percentage of respondents live with their parents, as 75.10% of the total group live with their both parents and 16.90% live with one of their parent only. This can be explained by the age of the respondents. In terms of gender, it can be said that there is no significant difference between boys and girls.

The analysis of how the coexistence affects the aggressive behavior is received the following resulted in the following (Table 1).

No significant differences were observed in the average values of the various acts of aggressive behavior and living together. It may be said that whether the respondent lives with both their parents, with one of them or alone, no significant differences are observed in terms of aggressive behavior.

The following results were obtained in the analysis of the impact of living together on some psychopathological characteristics such as depressive acts, acts of sthenic/maniac/dysphoric behavior, anxiety and neuroticism (Table 2).

Upon a further analysis of the differences in the results, it can be said that there are significant changes in terms of depression caused by various types of living together ($\chi^2 = 10.88$; $p < 0,05$), the respondents living with both parents are still those who are most depressive - 65.90%.

As to the characteristics of the family relations in students' opinion, the results are as follow (Figure 2).

As the diagram shows, more than 80% of respondents have answered that their family is united and here, there is no significant difference between the answers of boys and girls. In comparison with a previous study on the same topic on students from the 10th class (17 years), where the girls giving this answer are 70,89% and the boys are 75,15%, now this percentage is higher by 5 points for the girls and 11 points for the boys. Another interesting and impressive fact is that in the previous survey, conflicting relations were indicated by 23.13% of the girls and 17.75% of the boys, while now, this percentage is reduced to 9.90% and 10,90%, respectively, which shows a positive trend. The results of both studies remain relatively the same in terms of the other types of relations.

There is a substantial difference in the aggressive behavior of students, which is influenced by the relations in the family. The physical aggression is strongly influenced by the type of family relations ($\chi^2 = 13.76$; $p < 0.05$), as moderate in a case of a united family turns into increased one when the relations are insupportable. Verbal aggression is also influenced by the relations in the family ($\chi^2 = 8.83$; $p < 0.05$). This also applies to the

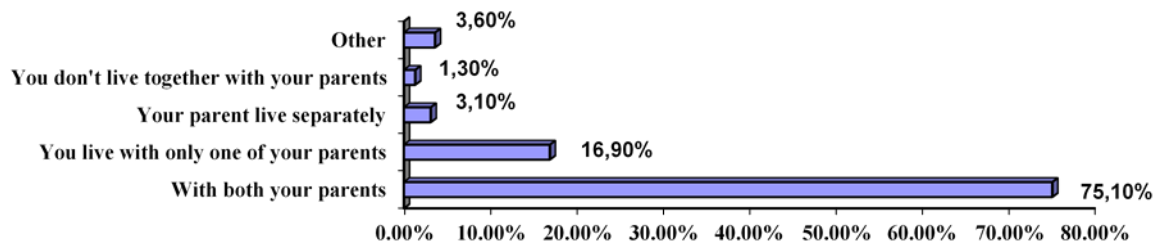


Figure 1. Whom the student live with

Table 1. Connection between living together and aggression

Indicator	Both parents	With only one of the parents	The parents live separately	You don't live with your parents	Other
Physical aggression	48.72 ± 0.99	52.39 ± 2.00	48.66 ± 5.15	50.66 ± 7.13	58.96 ± 3.15
Verbal aggression	61.44 ± 0.78	64.56 ± 1.61	63.73 ± 4.11	63.17 ± 6.15	64.17 ± 3.33
Indirect aggression	54.19 ± 0.86	53.81 ± 1.68	53.67 ± 4.94	59.72 ± 4.92	54.40 ± 3.55
Oppositional behavior	54.43 ± 1.09	52.51 ± 2.29	58.00 ± 5.29	49.00 ± 9.48	54.48 ± 4.75
Aggressive irritability	52.46 ± 0.85	57.66 ± 1.63	57.88 ± 4.17	60.15 ± 5.52	49.53 ± 3.21
Aggressive mistrust	58.88 ± 0.81	58.00 ± 1.64	61.20 ± 4.74	62.00 ± 5.54	55.17 ± 3.60
Jealousy and hatred	46.87 ± 1.09	53.36 ± 2.29	55.50 ± 5.26	52.50 ± 8.49	46.98 ± 4.63
Guilt after the aggression	52.80 ± 1.01	52.63 ± 2.01	47.11 ± 4.85	54.66 ± 5.95	50.95 ± 5.39
Total	54.29 ± 0.57	56.37 ± 1.07	56.37 ± 3.33	57.85 ± 3.65	56.24 ± 2.62
Lie	47.11 ± 0.77	43.10 ± 1.47	40.53 ± 3.63	44.19 ± 5.71	46.44 ± 3.58

Table 2. Connection between living together and some psychopathological characteristics

Indicator	Both parents	With only one of the parents	The parents live separately	You don't live with your parents	Other
Depression	65.90%	22.15%	3.97%	2.27%	5.71%
Sthenicity/mania/dysphoria	75.13%	16.48%	3.24%	0.81%	4.34%
Anxiety	72.94%	17.39%	3.62%	1.69%	4.36%
Neuroticism	72.82%	18.47%	4.37%	2.17%	2.17%

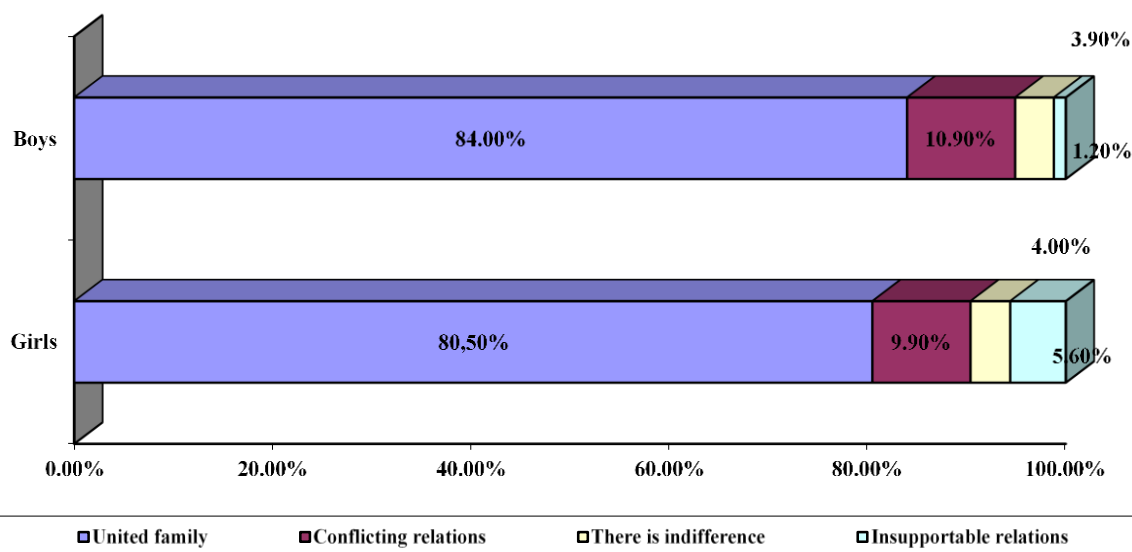


Figure 2. Characteristics of the family relations

Table 3. Impact of family relations on the types of aggression

Indicator	Your family is united	Your relations are conflicting	There is indifference	The relations are insupportable
Physical aggression	48.11 ± 0.94	54.59 ± 2.47	57.42 ± 4.35	62.86 ± 5.22
Verbal aggression	61.38 ± 0.74	66.79 ± 1.94	65.75 ± 3.75	63.66 ± 4.16
Indirect aggression	53.59 ± 0.80	54.40 ± 2.06	56.47 ± 4.69	63.78 ± 5.22
Oppositional behavior	53.66 ± 1.05	55.91 ± 3.08	53.55 ± 4.48	61.96 ± 4.62
Aggressive irritability	52.05 ± 0.80	59.90 ± 2.14	60.40 ± 2.99	61.95 ± 3.95
Aggressive mistrust	57.65 ± 0.77	61.22 ± 2.26	66.77 ± 3.26	67.14 ± 3.67
Jealousy and hatred	45.97 ± 1.03	57.62 ± 2.92	58.47 ± 4.96	63.93 ± 5.35
Guilt after the aggression	52.54 ± 0.96	50.89 ± 2.78	54.47 ± 4.84	54.13 ± 4.40
Total	53.80 ± 0.53	58.53 ± 1.46	59.37 ± 2.19	62.37 ± 3.50
Lie	47.14 ± 0.73	41.21 ± 1.94	40.05 ± 2.83	42.74 ± 3.91

aggressive irritability ($\chi^2 = 7.85$; $p < 0.05$), jealousy and hatred ($\chi^2 = 24.26$; $p < 0.05$), in total for the aggression ($\chi^2 = 9.75$; $p < 0.05$) and lie ($\chi^2 = 7.79$; $p < 0.05$). Other acts of aggression, such as indirect aggression, oppositional behavior, aggressive mistrust and guilt after the aggression are due to factors other than the relations within the family (Table 3).

The connection between the aggression at school and the family environment is unquestionable. Therefore, the best way to address the issue would be a targeted work with the families. The basic activities in this field are parent awareness, their involvement in school activities, parent support to the program objectives, consulting offices for parents, etc. (Ascher, 1994; Banks, 1996; Jewett, 1995; Walker, 1993).

Suggestions for working with families

The family remains one of the most important factors for the educational impact on the personality. Parents usually do not have the basic knowledge on which to rely on and act intuitively, in the huge number of cases, relying on their past experience which, unfortunately, is not always a good model to follow.

In view of the fact that the events from childhood have an impact on the formation of the personality, the planned interventions for preventive work with parents should be carried out sufficiently early- in the ideal case- before they become parents.

The work with the families could be structured in the following way:

- Introduction of a compulsory training course for pregnant women.
- Opening of units for psychological support to parents. (Jankulova- Tsvetkova, 2006) The purpose of these units will be to offer an approach in two directions: to provide empathy and support to the parents while teaching them how to pay attention to and be more sensitive to their child. The parents will be helped to pay quality attention to their

children, by providing quality emotional attention to the parents themselves.

- Opening of units to nurseries and kindergartens to work with the parents and the staff by setting a mandatory minimum of visits. In addition to the mandatory visits an opportunity must be ensured for consultations on request by the parents. The main purpose of these units will be prevention, information and education, to help them to be good parents. The other function of the units will be evaluation and guidance to the specialist services where issues have already arisen.

- Opening of units to the schools to work with their parents and teachers. (Gergova, 2007) At the very beginning of the school year, all parents can be informed of the mandatory minimum of visits and the opportunities for consultations upon request. The functions of these units will be prevention, information and education and redirecting to specialists where a problem occurs.

- Inclusion of a subject in the curriculum that will provide basic knowledge on human mental development, the phases of development, psychological needs. (Dimitrov, 2007) The knowledge must be practically oriented and give a good basis for future parents.

CONCLUSION

Aggression at school has a multifactorial genesis. One of the most important factors is the family environment. It may have an impact on the behavior of the child in many ways. Not being a good parent usually generates aggressive and problematic behavior not only at the school age but also for the lifetime. The study shows a strong correlation between the family relations and the physical, verbal and indirect aggression. There is definite dynamics in the level of aggression depending on the nature of family relations. So, all interventions with families must be complex and to start on time. They should be laid down in programs approved by the Ministry of Education and to be performed on a regular basis.

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