



**Home Environment, Peer Group Influence and
Aggressive Behavior Among Secondary School
Students in Abia State, Nigeria**

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to investigate home environment and aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Abia State, Nigeria. Aggression is a pervasive problem for Nigerian youths. It is at times expressed in the most unlikely places under unexpected and unsettling conditions. It is usually expressed at home, in school, in the neighbourhood or in community settings. To achieve the purpose of this study, three hypotheses were formulated. A survey research design was adopted. A sample of six hundred students was randomly selected using the simple random sampling technique. This was to give equal and independent opportunities to all the respondents to be selected for the study. The questionnaire used for data collection was subjected to face validation by experts in measurement and evaluation. The reliability estimate of the instrument was established through the split-half reliability method and its associate Spearman Brown Proficiency formula. The hypotheses were tested using independent t-test analysis. The results of the analysis reveal that family size, family structure and family type significantly influence students' aggressive behaviour. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that parents should be encouraged to live together as partners and show love and concern to their children.

Introduction

Aggression is a pervasive problem for Nigerian youths. It is at times expressed in the most unlikely places under unexpected and unsettling conditions. It is usually expressed at home, school, in the neighbourhood or in the community. In the secondary school system the expression of aggressive behaviour is evidenced in the numerous and untold cruelties that some children inflict on their fellow learners. Over the years, a lot of blood lettings, massacre, maiming's and killings have been observed in secondary schools (Kingsley, 2005). At different-occasions students have been observed damaging school property, harassing their fellow students, threatening teachers who try stop them, especially in cases of examination supervision Ukoha (2002).

Ukoha (2002) considered the actions explained above as confrontational and distractive. He further stated that, they could hinder individuals in a group from meeting up with the demands of their goals. Again such actions could potentially make the learning environment threatening and uncondusive to learning, which, according to Denga and Denga (1998), could limit the learning performance of students. It could be argued that when students perceive threat arising from one form of aggression or the other, they may become destabilized as they would tend to spend the time meant for studying in finding ways to cope with the perceived threats. Clearly, any form of distraction within a learning setting is counter-productive. It is the researcher's belief that such distractions could constitute a hindrance to Nigeria's ability to achieve the national goal of self-reliance over the years. Students' violence has occasionally caused some secondary schools in Abia State and in the nation as a whole to be shut down spontaneously thereby stalling academic activities.

Adolescence is the period of psychological, social and physical transition from childhood to adulthood (Adewode, 2003). According to Smart and Smart (1970), this period lasts from ages of 11 to 18 years. It is recognized as both a cultural/social phenomenon and a standardized human development phase.

Nigeria as a nation understands and appreciates the fact that education is a precursor to nation building (National Policy on Education, 2004), and therefore considers education to be a catalyst for all aspects of development. In view of this, and in acknowledgment of the fact that the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow, a great deal of resources has been directed toward providing education at the secondary school level much as it is done at the primary school levels. But rather than students of secondary schools devoting their times to learning, there is a tendency for many to spend their energy on the perpetuation of violence. This reduces the amount of time and level of concentration they put into their studies. It has been noted that students who experience stressful conditions are susceptible to go through unstable lives. This condition is not only experienced when aggression such as violence breaks out on campus, but also within the periods of calmness. Students also feel distressed in times of calmness; as such times are used in reminiscing and thinking about the next occurrence of aggression. This indeed is an unhealthy development because it reduces study time. Hence, the conditions under which students study are considered as threatening. Apparently, not much can be achieved under such circumstances. Government, parents, religious groups and other stakeholders in education have made some effort at curbing the menace of aggression among secondary school students. Disciplinary measures, which include rustication in some cases, have been used to check the use of aggression by students as a means of achieving their goals. In spite of such steps, aggression in campuses has continued unabated. This research has become imperative as an effort at helping particularly the school system.

The family is an important unit in any society for children's upbringing. The family background has a great influence on students' behavioural tendencies; this can be either

positive or negative. In recent times in Nigeria, the use of aggression in achieving ones goals has become much more rampant among secondary schools students than was the case decades ago. Nwokoroku (2001), noted that the nation's institutions of learning have been turned into battle fields by students. She reported that in the campuses students engage in aggressive acts towards one another and even towards teachers and non-teaching staff.

Students have been observed to engage in such acts of aggression as violence, rape, extortion, burglary, killing, maiming and sexual harassment. They are also frequently associated with vulgarities, abduction and insults at one time or another. In 2010, students in Afara Technical Secondary School, Umuahia of Abia State were reported to have beaten up a teacher for carrying out his legitimate duty (supervision of examination). According to Haggai (2003), aggression in school intrudes not only on the rights of others, it also impairs the normal operation of classroom interaction, school communal life (hostel living) as well as other social settings; such as sports and other extra curricula activities. This in effect militates against development. Obasanjo (2006) identifies cultism (an aggressive act) as one of the factors that have compromised the integrity of the education system in Nigeria. Obviously, aggression works against governments desire to inculcate in students and the citizenry, the right types of values and attitudes through education for the survival of the individual and nation at large.

Over time, the Nigerian government, parents, religious groups and other concerned education stakeholders have made some efforts at curbing the menace of aggression among students. Disciplinary measures based on laws of the land have been applied in checking students' aggressiveness to no avail. There have been cases where students were rusticated to serve as deterrent to others, all in a bid to control students use of aggression as a way of self-expression. In spite of the efforts made to curb aggression, this situation has persisted. This is what provided the impetus for the researcher to carry out this study for the objective of determining the factors that push students into displaying aggressive behaviours.

The study seeks to determine if home environment and peer group has any impact on aggressive behaviour among secondary school students in Abia State.

Literature Review

Family Size and Students Aggressive Behaviour

A family with too many children may not be able to adequately monitor the behaviour patterns of its children, especially during their teenage years when youngsters begin to forge their own ways in life. One child may be involved in premarital sex without the parents taking note of his or her activities for eventual correction. Family size studies have shown that size may exert influence on children and adolescent behavior Hurlock (2002).

Hurlock (2002) observed that a large family size reduces parental care given to the children in the family. Again, in a large family particularly if the children are not well spaced in age, sufficient time and attention could not be given to all the children by their parents. The above situation most often results in unguided development which in turn may lead to misguided 'positive' attitude towards life and events including a tendency to engage in premarital sex.

Petertomode (1999) posited that a large family is negatively related to a child's behavioural tendencies. In comparison, an only child receives a great deal of parental attention, and he/she is spared sibling rivalry. He further states that there is some evidence that the first born child appears to mature in behaviour, speech and attitude faster than children born later within the same family. This was appears to be due to the amount of time and care devoted to guiding and instructing the child on social mores and norms.

Douglas (2004) believes that the prospects of healthy attitudes progressively degenerate as the family increases in size. He remarked that given the same circumstance only families with four and above members are potentially in danger of losing control of their children's behaviour.

Gidlens (1996) posited that family size has a corresponding influence on child and adolescent attitudes, which may be positive or negative towards particular events, objects or activity. Moreover, Gidlens argues that as family size increases, the level of individual parental attention to the offspring tends to decline. This may cause the children to depend on and emulate peers and other adults around whose attitude, with the added danger that these may be considered antisocial.

Kellaghan's (2001) study of the family factor affecting verbal behaviour development of children, discovered that birth order contributed significantly to adolescent sexual behaviour. He also noted that the first born tend to have more socially desirable attitudes than children born later; and that attitude of children toward socially accepted norms tend to deteriorate rather than improve as the size of the family increases.

Family structure and students' aggressive behaviour

The family institution is as old as man on earth; little wonder that its role in man's general existence is taken for granted. The family is the basic unit of the society. It provides for union of male and female to produce offspring and to ensure their nurturing and training. The neutral family life, the psychological unity of the family is continuously molded by its natural organization and conditions external to it.

Landis (2006) asserts that the structure of the family and the relationship between its members (intact and broken homes) have positive or negative impact on the sexual life of their children.

Children living in the shadows of a divorced home are often bewildered by the comings and goings and by the mere fact that essential relationships and emotions are not promoted or are broken off and lead to deviant behaviours which are a manifestation of insecurity stemming from an unstable family. Parson (2004) emphasized the fact that socially accepted human behaviour is not inherently innate at birth, but are learned through early childhood socializing process. Hence, the family is an essential institution for the production or building of attitudes and personalities.

Johnson (2006) observed that divorce causes children to concentrate their attention on the remaining parent. If this attention is not reciprocated the child feels rebuffed and unwanted. The parent who may be pre-occupied with the grief of divorce, especially if he or she did not initiate in it may not notice the problem and this may further compound the issue. The child may be forced to look outward and may fall into the wrong hands, and develop a deviant attitude towards people, events and norms. The child in a divorced family unit according to Jurich (1998) may turn to drugs and unpleasant behaviours such as premarital sex as a means to cope with low self-esteem, personal stress, and external locus of control and feelings of disillusion.

Gidlens (1999) observed that children from an exceptionally caring family, and especially a monogamous family, are likely to be well taken care of by their parents more than children from divorced or patchwork families. He also noticed that only children from monogamous families receive care from both parents (fathers and mothers) as such are hardly misled into antisocial activities such as drug abuse, premarital sex.

Douglas (2004) noticed that children from divorced families especially, those living with female parents tend to be involved heavily in premarital sex. The reason he suggested is that mothers tend to be more liberal than fathers thus allowing much more freedom and

autonomy. Conversely, Denga (1983) reports that premarital sex is more frequent with children who are raised by fathers. Giving reasons for such behaviour, he agreed that such children's school progress is never monitored by the parents, as much as their school attendance and other out of school activities. Children, who are aware that their movements and activities are not being monitored, appear to engage in anti-social behaviours such as alcoholic and drug abuse more frequently than those who are monitored.

Family type and students' aggressive behaviour

The type of family and the relationship between its members varies depending on whether the family type was monogamous or polygamous. It could be argued that the emotional stability of the home and parental style of child rearing could greatly influence a child's psychological adjustment and attitude to life (Bohannon, 1999).

In his study of the relationship between family type and adolescent attitude towards drug abuse and premarital sex, Bardis (2002) discovered that most of the adolescent children who were involved in drug abuse and premarital sex were from polygamous families. He also discovered that many of the children from polygamous homes were not given the same care as children from monogamous families.

Travers (1997) believes that emotions within the polygamous family unit are likely to be tense and the relationship between husband, wife and children may be intrinsically unstable depending on the parental mode of discipline. This usually affects children's psychological and social adjustment to life and their attitudes in general, especially as it relates to deviant behaviour such as premarital sex and drug abuse. Smath (2006) observed that a monogamous family survives only as long as its two focal members (the husband and wife) live together as husband and wife, simply because the conjugal relationship is what binds the group. However, if the family is not broken either by death, divorce or separation, a well bounded family endures because mutual understanding and planning are dominant attitudinal virtues. Such a monogamous family will enhance good interaction, co-operation and ensures that their children are not involved in bad activities such as drug abuse and premarital sex.

Hurlock (2002) noticed that children from polygamous homes are much more frequently involved in premarital sex as a means to earn their living. He discovered that this was because most polygamous parents (especially fathers) were hardly able to cater for all the needs demanded by their children. As such, these children resort to other means to provide for these needs, which can be essential for their general well-being.

Methodology

An ex-post facto research design was adopted for the study. This was because the researcher has no control over the independent variables. A sample of two hundred students was randomly selected for the study through the simple random sampling technique. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled "Home environment and aggressive behaviour". Before using the instrument the items developed were given to experts in research and statistics for screening which ascertained the face validity. To determine the reliability of the instrument, a trial testing was done using twenty (20) students. A split half reliability method was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument.

Results and Discussion

In this section each hypothesis is re-stated in the null form. The variables are identified and the result of the statistical analysis carried out to test the hypotheses are

presented and interpreted. The .05 level of significance was used for the statistical testing of each hypothesis.

Hypothesis one

Family size influences students' aggressive behaviour. The independent variable in this hypothesis is family size (small and large); while the dependent variable is students' aggressive behaviour. To test this hypothesis, students' aggressive behaviour from small and large family sizes was compared using Independent t-test analysis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1:Independent t-test analysis of the influence of family size on students' Aggressive behaviour (N=200)

Family	N	X	SD	t-value
Small	80	19.56	2.31	6.92*
Large	120	17.36	2.03	

* Significant at .05 level, critical t-1.96, df = 198

The result of the analysis as presented in Table 1 revealed that the calculated t-value of 6.92 is higher than the critical t-value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance with 198 degree of freedom. With this result and this analysis, the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant influence of family size on students aggressive behaviour is rejected. This result implies that family size has a significant influence on aggressive behavior among students.

Hypothesis two

Family structure influences the aggressive behavior of students. The independent variable in this hypothesis is family structure (intact & broken); while the dependent variable is students' aggressive behaviour. To test this hypothesis, students' aggressive behaviour from intact and broken family structure was compared using Independent t-test analysis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2:Independent t-test analysis of the influence of family structure on students' aggressive behavior (N=200)

Family structure	N	X	SD	t-value
Intact	101	19.14	2.33	8.06*
Broken	91	16.56	2.09	

* Significant at .05 level, critical t-1.96, df = 198

The result of the analysis as presented in Table 2 revealed that the calculated t-value of 8.06 is higher than the critical t-value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance with 198 degree of freedom. With this result and this analysis, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant influence of family structure on students' aggressive behaviour is rejected. This result implies that, family structure has a significant influence on students' aggressive behaviour.

Hypothesis three

Family type influences aggressive behavior of students.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is family type (polygamous and monogamous); while the dependent variable is students' aggressive behaviour. To test this hypothesis, students' aggressive behaviour from intact and broken family type was compared using Independent t-test analysis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3Independent t-test analysis of the influence of family type on students' aggressive behaviour (N=200)

Family type	N	X	SD	t-value
Monogamous family	100	19.71	2.09	8.67*
Polygamous family	100	17.13	2.12	

* Significant at .05 level, critical t-1.96, df = 198

The result of the analysis as presented in Table 3 revealed that the calculated t-value of 8.67 is higher than the critical t-value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance with 198 degree of freedom. With this result and this analysis, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant influence of family type on students' aggressive behaviour is rejected. This result implies that, family type has a significant influence on students' aggressive behaviour.

Discussion of Findings

The result of the study revealed that family size, family structure and family type have significant influences on students' aggressive behaviour. The finding is in line with the view of Hurlock (2002) who observed that large family size reduces parental care given to the children in the family. Again, in a large family particularly if the children are not well spaced in age, sufficient time and attention would not be given to the children by their parents. The above situation most often results in unguided development which in turn leads to misguided 'positive' attitude towards life and events including tendency towards premarital sex. Petertomode (1999) also asserted that a large family is negatively related to the child's behavioural tendencies. To him an only child gets a great deal of parental attention and he/she is spared of siblings' rivalry. He further states that there is some evidence that the first born child appears to mature in behaviour, speech and attitude faster than children born later from the same family. This he stated was due to the amount of time and care devoted to guiding and morally instructing the child.

Landis (2006) also asserted that the structure of the family and the relationship between its members (intact and broken homes) have positive or negative impact on the sexual lives of their children. Children living in the shadows of a divorced home are often bewildered by the comings and goings and by the mere fact that essential relationships and emotions are not promoted or are broken off and lead to deviant behaviours which are a manifestation of insecurity stemming from an unstable family. Parson (2004) also opined that socially accepted human behaviour is not inherently innate, but is learned through early childhood socializing processes. Hence, the family is an essential institution for the production or building of attitudes and personalities. Johnson (2006) also observed that divorce causes children to concentrate their attention on the remaining parent. If the attention is not reciprocated the child feels rebuffed and unwanted. The parent who may be pre-occupied with the grief of divorce, especially if he or she did not initiate in it may not notice

the problem and this may further compound the issue. The child may be forced to look outward and may fall into the wrong hands, and develop deviant attitude towards people, events and norms.

Similarly, the finding also proved that family type has a significant influence on students' aggressive behaviour. The finding is in line with the view of Bohannom (1999) who observed that the type of family and the relationship between its members changes depending on whether the family type was as monogamous or polygamous. It could be argued that the emotional stability of the home and parental style of child rearing greatly influence children's psychological adjustment and attitude to life. Bardis (2002) also observed that the relationship between family type and adolescent attitude towards drug abuse and premarital sex, discovered that most of the adolescent children they found involved in drug abuse and premarital sex were from polygamous family. He discovered that, most of the children from polygamous homes were not given proper care like children from a monogamous home/family.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the result of the study it was conclude that; family size, family structure and family type significantly influence students' aggressive behaviour. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

- 1) Parents should be encouraged to maintain small family size that they are more likely to be able to cater for.
- 2) Government and non-governmental organizations should embark on public enlightenment campaign on the need for parents to adopt family planning practices.
- 3) Parents should be encouraged to live together as partners and show love and concerned to their children.
- 4) Parents should always ensure that they maintain a very good atmosphere of cordiality in their homes.
- 5) Parents should be encouraged to avoid the old practice of polygamy in order to help reduce students' aggressive behaviour tendencies.

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