

Conscientiousness Personality Traits as Correlates of Aggressive Behaviour among In-School Adolescent in Ekiti State

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Abstract

Adolescents especially those of them in the secondary schools have been found to involve themselves in a number of aggressive behaviours that are impacting on their personality, social and academic developments. This study focuses on conscientiousness personality traits as correlates of aggression among in-school adolescents. The descriptive research of the survey type was adopted for the study. The population of the study was all the adolescents, both male (mean=15.58) and female (mean=15.62), in all secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. A total of 240 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 years (mean=15.60) were selected using multistage sampling technique. A self-designed questionnaire titled "Conscientiousness Personality Trait and Aggressive Behavior Questionnaire" (CPTABQ) was used to elicit information from respondents. The instrument was validated and the reliability was ensured using test re-test method. The reliability co-efficient was 0.85 at 0.05 level of significance. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive analysis for the general question raised while the hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. The result showed that there is significant relationship between conscientiousness personality traits and aggressive behaviour among adolescents. It also revealed that the levels of aggression and conscientiousness personality traits are moderate and high respectively. Based on the findings, it was recommended that effective counselling methods should be put in place to enhance a high level of conscientiousness personality traits and dissuade the adolescents from exposure to media that promotes aggression among the adolescents.

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Introduction

Aggression is a form of behavioral and emotional response that is engaged by one person to inflict hurt on another person. It is purposely meant to harm, destroy or damage other people or things (Kim & Kim, 2007). This aversive stimulus manifest itself through behaviours that cause juvenile crimes, and hinders healthy interpersonal relationships (Cook, et al., 2010; Espelage, et al., 2013) among the adolescents, and these can develop into social maladjustment and criminal behavior in adulthood, if not addressed at this important stage of human development. This is because aggression has been found to be a stable personality trait lasting from childhood, through adolescence to adulthood (Loeber, Hay, 1997).

Experience shows that aggression is on the increase among the adolescents, especially in the secondary schools of Ekiti State, Nigeria. There are cases of various aggressive behaviours such as fighting, slapping, rape, bullying (physical, verbal and social), and other high risk behaviours among the in-school adolescents. Various forms of aggression such as social, verbal, physical aggression can be identified among the in-school adolescents. Physical aggression includes behaviors that threaten or cause physical harm, such as threats of bodily harm, physical fighting and violent crimes such as robbery, rape and homicide (Loeber, Hay, 1997; Yonas, O'Campo, Burke, Peak, & Gielen, 2005). Examples of social aggression include forms of non-physical aggression, such as indirect and relational aggression, in which behaviors are focused on damaging social relationships rather than inflicting or threatening physical harm (Archer & Coyne, 2005) Socially aggressive behaviors include gossiping, isolating or alienating someone socially (Xie, Swift, Cairns, & Cairns, 2002).

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) has long observed that the frequency of physical fighting among students at high school was on the increase with the highest incidence of 76% in Spain. In a study carried out in India, it was revealed that nearly 18.6% of students engage in serious fight during school hours, 14.1% participate in a group-against-group fight while 5.7% attack innocent fellow students with intent to cause harm (Manoj & Palaniappan, 2014). Studies have also shown that aggressive behaviour is a serious problem among secondary students who are mainly adolescents in European and American countries (McClanahan, McCoy, & Jacobsen, 2015; Smith, 2016; Vega-Gea, Ortega-Ruiz, & Sanchez, 2016; Salimi, et al., 2019). Given the increase in the incidence across the globe (Anand, Kishore, Grover, Bhave & Yadav, 2019), and the negative influence of aggression, it is imperative that efforts should not be spared to identify the factors that can help to reduce the incidence of aggression among the adolescents.

The adolescence has long been found to be a unique period that is characterized by rapid physiological and psychological changes in human development. Due to these changes the adolescents experience various crises and dilemmas that might impact on their mental and emotional health. Studies show that they experience greater confusion and dissatisfaction with the process of ego-formation, self-perception and other forms of development at this stage and this enhance the development of aggression (Ristić-Dimitrijević, Lazić, & Nenadović, 2011). Arising from their development, the adolescents have various things in their minds and feel immense energy which they can utilize to express themselves in various ways. Aggression can be one of these ways. They have also been particularly found to have a stronger tendency to express maximized levels of aggression that is stronger than other age groups (Wang, Iannott,, & Luk, 2012).

There are varying causes of aggression among the adolescents. Researchers have found out that these might include self-development (Silva, et al. 2014), the social environment, especially the school, friends, parents and so on (Rothbaum & Weisz, 1994; Estevez, Musitu, & Herrero, 2005; Jimenez & Estevez, 2017), self-development, psychological



factors (Park, Choi, & Lim, 2004) and biological factors (Kozina, 2007). These varying factors can be summarized into different groups, such as biochemical, chemical, psychological, and sociological factors (Kozina, 2007).

Also, researchers have agreed that personality variables are major factors that could influence aggressive behavior among secondary school adolescents. Aggression and personality theorists agree that personality variables are important predictors of aggressive behaviour (Cavalcanti & Pimentel, 2016). Also, while reviewing some literature, Tenibiaje and Tenibiaje (2014) observed that personality traits are positively associated with aggressive behavior. The five major personality traits, also called the Big-5, which have influence on aggression, are agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness (McCrae & Costa Jr, 1985). However, as many studies have identified the various personality factors responsible for the manifestation of aggressive behaviors among adolescents, conscientiousness is the focus of this study. Conscientiousness is of interest to the author because researches have shown that adolescents higher on conscientiousness scale experienced less victimization, better quality friendships, carefulness, self-discipline, reliability and higher peer acceptance (Jensen-Campbell, & Malcolm, 2007), which can be utilized to stem the trend of aggressive behaviour among the adolescents.

Aggression and personality theorists posit that personality variables are important predictors of aggressive behavior (Anderson & Huesmann, 2003). Personality characteristics like openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness were negatively correlated with all forms of aggression (Sharma & Raju, 2013). Conscientiousness personality trait is related to the degree of persistence, control, organization, being responsible, orderly, and dependable and motivation of the individual to achieve goals (McCrae & John, 1992; Benet-Martinez & John, 1998; Piedmont, 1998; John & Srivastava, 1999), and tends to be negatively related to aggression (Sharpe & Desai, 2001).

The self-control processes associated with conscientiousness are important in developing and maintaining relationships in adolescence. Baumeister and Vohs (2004) posits that self-control is critical for adolescents to be responsive to social self-regulation rules to be accepted in the larger peer group and to develop strong social bonds with close friends. Conversely, some other studies advanced that poor self-regulation is linked to poor emotional control, alcohol abuse, smoking, addictions, overeating, and behavioral control problems (Barkley, 1998; Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994; Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). In essence a highly conscientious adolescent will manifest less aggressive behaviour while those who are lower in conscientiousness are more likely to engage in social aggression (Tackett, Kushner, et al., 2014).

Several studies have shown an inverse relationship between conscientiousness and both anger and aggression (Burton, Hafetz, & Henninger, 2007; Lee & Dow, 2011; Miller et al., 2012). Other studies reveal that conscientiousness personality trait was negatively related to both reactive and proactive aggression (Jones, Miller, & Lynam, 2011; Miller et al., 2012), and to indirect aggression (Gleason, Jensen-Campbell, & Richardson, 2004).

From the foregoing, the study focused on the relationship between conscientiousness personality trait and manifestation of aggressive behaviour among in-school adolescents in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Two research questions were asked:

- i. What is the level of aggression among the in-school in Ekiti State?
- ii. What is the level of conscientiousness personality traits among the in-school adolescents?

Also, a null hypothesis was generated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀ There is no significant relationship between conscientiousness and aggressive behaviour among in-school adolescents.

Research Method

Descriptive research of the survey type was used for the study. This was considered appropriate because it focuses on the observation of the population. The population for the study consisted of all the adolescents, both male and female, in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The secondary schools used included all the government and privately owned schools as well as coeducational and non-coeducational schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The ages of adolescents that participated in the study were between 12 – 18 years (mean 15.60). The sample for this study consisted of 110 boys (mean 15.58) and 130 girls (mean 15.62). The method of selection was multistage sampling technique. The first stage involved the use of simple random sampling technique by balloting system to select six Local Government Areas (LGA) out of the sixteen LGAs in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The six LGAs thus selected were Efon, Ijero, Ado, Ekiti Southwest, Oye and Ikole Local Government Areas. The second stage entailed the use of purposive selection to select the government owned and private owned secondary schools in the LGAs. The third stage also involved the use of stratified simple random sampling technique to select the sample from the schools selected. In all, a total of 240 adolescents participated in the study.

A self-designed questionnaire titled “Conscientiousness Personality Trait and Aggressive Behavior Questionnaire” (CPTABQ) was used to elicit information from respondents. The questionnaire consisted of three sections A, B, and C. Section A contained information on demographic characteristics of the respondents, such as sex, age, and location. Section B contained fifteen (15) items to elicit information on conscientiousness traits of the respondents. All the items were rated on a modified 5-point Likert Scale 1 – 5 (1 Not Sure, 2 strongly Disagree, 3 Disagree, 4 Agree, 5 Strongly Agree) with the respondents picking the option that best describes them. The items were summed up to form a total score of 75. Respondents were categorized as having ‘Low’, ‘Moderate’ and ‘High’ levels of conscientiousness traits based on percentile formula - Low (18.75 – 24.98), Moderate (24.98 – 39.99) and High (49.99 – 75.00). Section C consisted of 4 groups of 5 items each on 4 different types of aggression, i.e. verbal, physical, hostility and cyberbullying. All the items were rated on a modified 5-point Likert Scale 1 – 5 (1 Not Sure, 2 strongly Disagree, 3 Disagree, 4 Agree, 5 Strongly Agree) with the respondents picking the option that best describes them. The items were summed up to form a total score of 100. Respondents were categorized as experiencing ‘Low’, ‘Moderate’ and ‘High’ levels of aggression based on percentile formula. Low (25.00 – 33.30), Moderate (33.30 – 66.63) and High (66.63 – 100.00). The instrument was subjected to Face, Content and Construct validity. The reliability of the instrument was established using test re-test method and the reliability coefficient of 0.85 was found to be significant at 0.05 level of significance. The instrument was administered to 210 respondents by the researcher but a total of 200 copies of the questionnaire were collected and collated at the end of the administration. The data generated was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics which include frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the questions raised while the hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (age and gender)

Gender	Age (min.)	Age (max.)	Percentage	Mean	SD
Male (n = 110)	12	18	45.8	15.58	9.93



Female ($n = 130$)	12	18	54.2	15.62	12.04
Total ($n = 240$)	12	18	100	15.60	10.99

From the above table, 240 respondents comprising of 110 males ($\% = 45.8$; mean = 15.58; SD = 9.93) and 130 females ($\% = 54.2$; mean = 15.62; SD = 12.04) participated in the study.

Question 1

What is the level of conscientiousness personality trait among the in-school adolescents?

In answering the question, scores on the different types of aggression among in-school adolescents were computed using items 1-20 in Section C of "Conscientiousness Personality Trait and Aggressive Behavior Questionnaire" (CPTABQ). The result is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Level of Social Supports among In-School Adolescents

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Low (25.00 – 33.30)	30	12.50
Moderate (33.30 – 66.63)	186	77.50
High (66.63 – 100.00)	24	10.00
Total	240	100.00

Table 2 shows that 30 respondents representing 12.50% of the total sample experienced low level of aggression, 186 (77.50%) had moderate level while 24(10.00%) had high level experience of aggression. This implies that a random sample of in-school adolescents in Ekiti State, Nigeria experience moderate level of conscientiousness.

Question 2:

What is the level of conscientiousness personality traits among the in-school adolescents in Ekiti State?

In answering the question, scores on the sub-traits of conscientiousness personality among in-school adolescents were computed using items 1-15 in Section B of "Conscientiousness Personality Trait and Aggressive Behavior Questionnaire" (CPTABQ). The result is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Level of Conscientiousness among In-School Adolescents

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Low (21.00-27.97)	36	15.00
Moderate (27.98-55.97)	90	37.50
High (55.98-60.00)	114	47.50
Total	240	100.00

Table 3 above shows that 36 respondents representing 15.50% of the total sample experienced low level of conscientiousness, 90 (37.50%) had moderate level while 114(47.50%) had high level experience of conscientiousness. This implies that a higher percentage of the in-school adolescents in Ekiti State Nigeria experience high level of conscientiousness.

Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between conscientiousness and aggressive behaviour among in-school adolescents.

In order to test the hypothesis, scores relating to conscientiousness personality trait and aggressive behaviour among in-school adolescents were computed using Items 1-15 in Section B and 1-20 in Section C of "Conscientiousness Personality Trait and Aggressive Behavior Questionnaire" (CPTABQ). These scores were subsequently subjected to statistical analysis involving Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis between Conscientiousness Personality Trait and Aggressive Behaviour

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r_{cal}	r_{table}
Aggressive behaviour	240	65.59	10.29	0.377	0.195
Conscientiousness	240	41.11	8.02		

$p > 0.05$

Table 4 shows that r_{cal} (0.377) is greater than r_{table} (0.195) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that conscientiousness personality trait and aggressive behaviour are correlated. In other words, the result revealed that there is a positive significant positive relationship between conscientiousness and aggressive behaviour among in-school adolescents in Ekiti State.

Discussion

The result of the study revealed that aggressive behavior is common among the in-school adolescents in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Though the level of occurrence is moderate, there are a number of the in-school adolescents who exhibit high aggressive behavior. This should still be a source of concern to the school counsellors and other stake holders. The occurrence of aggressive behavior among the adolescents might be due to their exposure to various aggressive media as most of them have access to internet compliant cell phones and other aggressive models in the society. This finding is consistent with the findings of Kumar, et al. (2016) which found out that there is high prevalence of aggression among adolescents in secondary schools but that boys are more aggressive than the girls.

The study also, revealed that there is a high level of conscientiousness personality traits among in-school adolescents, though some of them have the trait at low level. This might have arisen from the local believe of the Yoruba people in the concept of "omoluabi" which emphasizes inculcation of positive human values in the children as a major part of home training and the fact that the training is not left in the hands of the parents alone, but for the community, as they grow up. This agrees with the findings of Jensen-Campbell, and Malcolm (2007) which states that adolescents that are higher on conscientiousness scale experienced less victimization, better quality friendships, carefulness, self-discipline, reliability and higher peer acceptance, and less aggressive behaviour, while those who are lower in conscientiousness are more likely to engage in social aggression (Tackett, Kushner, et al., 2014). Also, the characteristics of conscientiousness personality trait such as showing a high degree of persistence, control, organization, being responsible, orderly, and dependable and motivation of the individual to achieve goals (McCrae & John, 1992; Benet-Martinez & John, 1998; Piedmont, 1998; John & Srivastava, 1999), are consistent with what the

adolescents must have gained from their homes in Ekiti State that is widely acclaimed as “the Land of Honour and Integrity”.

The study further revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between conscientiousness personality trait and aggressive behaviour among in-school adolescents in Ekiti. The reason behind this might be the fact that conscientiousness personality trait engenders sound mental health, positive affect, and good relations with others (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998; Piedmont, 1998; John & Srivastava, 1999). These traits might impact positively on the manifestation of aggressive behaviour among the adolescents. This moderating role might also be responsible why the level of aggressive behaviour is not too high among the sampled adolescents. However, some studies have shown an inverse relationship between conscientiousness and both anger and aggression (Burton, Hafetz, & Henninger, 2007; Lee & Dow, 2011; Miller et al., 2012). Also, other studies reveal that conscientiousness personality trait was negatively related to both reactive and proactive aggression (Jones, Miller, & Lynam, 2011; Miller et al., 2012), and to indirect aggression (Gleason, Jensen-Campbell, & Richardson, 2004).

Recommendation

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. School counsellors should design effective methods for improving the level of conscientiousness personality trait among the adolescents.
2. All stake holders, the parents, teachers and government should cooperate to dissuade the adolescents from exposure to social media that promote aggression among the adolescents.
3. Teachers can also be provided with specific in-service professional development training about managing aggressive students.

Conclusion

From the above we can draw the conclusion that aggressive behaviour is an issue among adolescents in Ekiti but the students' level of conscientiousness can be improved to help stem its negative impact on the adolescents' growth and development. This is because there is a significant relationship between conscientiousness personality trait and aggressive behaviour among in-school adolescents. The implication of this is that focus should be directed towards improving the traits to serve as buffer for aggressive behaviour.

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