

Family Interaction and the Development of Aggression in Adolescents: The Experiences of Students and Administrators

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Abstract

This is a qualitative study that investigated the impact of family interaction and the development of aggression in adolescents enrolled in an inner-city Junior High School. A purposive sampling approach was used to select the participants. The researcher interviewed two school officials and conducted focus group discussions with eight students. The majority of students were from female headed households. There were gender differences in aggressive tendencies with bullying being the most reported. Students experienced parental aggression, and interactions with parents were categorized as both positive and negative with most of the parents being aggressive. The family plays a significant role in the development of aggressive and pro-social behaviour in adolescents. This can guide educators as to what interventions to implement.

Keywords: Family Interaction, Aggression.

Introduction

Jamaica ranked sixth in 2013 as one of the most violent countries in the world (United Nations Office of Drug and Crime, 2014) amidst its lovely physical landscape, beaches. Jamaica is said to have some of the happiest people in the world (Jamaica Information Service - JIS, 2009), yet there is a high murder rate. Youth violence has increased worldwide and has done so dramatically in Jamaica. UNICEF, Jamaica (2011), reports that during the period January to October, 2010 approximately 25% and 27% of intentional injuries and stab wounds reported respectively were committed by adolescents ages 10-19. With such an increase in the number of violent acts committed by youths there are constant calls for the effective implementation and continuation of programmes aimed at reducing violence. There has been a suite of programmes aimed at addressing and reducing crime and violence in the schools. However, some of these programmes fail to capture the family and the homes in their implementation. As a result there is no lasting impact on positive change because teaching and exposing students to certain skills in one setting does not necessarily transmit to learning in an environment where students are socialized to use aggression as a means of survival and social exchange.

The family, being the first agent of socialization, can impact on a child both negatively and positively. One negative impact is the child being socialised to aggressive behaviours and tendencies. Research shows that aggression in adolescents is as a result of little identification of boys with their fathers, often seen in single parent 'mother headed' families where there is no father figure and a lack of father-son bonding (Coomarsingh, 2011; Schwartz, 2004). This is seen as well in children who grow up in homes where they witness conflicts between both parents and the authoritarian and permissive parenting styles employed. Parents who are not assertive enough or who use permissive parenting styles and parents who are very assertive and rigid, or who use authoritarian parenting styles in the rearing of their children are more likely to raise aggressive adolescents than authoritative parents (Archer, 2000; Megargee & Hokanson, 1970; Storr & Lane, 1971). Increased aggression in children has been seen in children who experience lack of love from caregivers and other significant persons with whom they come in contact (Montagu, 1976). Furthermore an only child without siblings, playmates and other peers or relatives may be more susceptible to developing aggressive behaviours (Storr & Lane, 1971). The display of aggressive behaviours in adolescents is associated with their environment, socialization, gender, physiological development and their frustration level.

The environment, which is the surroundings and conditions in which adolescents live, plays a significant role in the development of aggression in adolescents. They learn new behaviour by observation, models, reinforcements and punishment. These behaviours that are learnt contribute significantly to the development of aggressive or non-aggressive adolescents (Bandura, 1965).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Aggression Defined

Feldman (1998) defines aggression as “intentional injury or harm to another person” (p. 297). Cavell (2000) further posits that aggression is expressed in aggressive behaviours like threatening others, purposely disturbing others, being verbally combative, making derogatory remarks, hitting, shoving as well as the destruction of property. Furthermore, the harm done to someone can be physical and or psychological. Aggression can be divided into instrumental aggression and emotional aggression (Feldman, 1998). Instrumental aggression is harming or injuring someone to obtain something of value while emotional aggression is harm carried out to hurt someone. Aggression can be instinctive. Instinct, as explained by Freud in his instinct theory, is where the energy of the Thanatos¹ drives people to aggression and hostility (Liebert & Liebert, 1998). Bordens and Horowitz (2008) state that aggression is adaptive and that it is a destructive impulse. According to Lorenz, aggression helps animals to protect and preserve their territories, to weed out weaker animals allowing only the strongest to survive. Aggression can also be adaptive and seen as a means of survival (DeWall, Anderson & Bushman, 2011).

The goal of aggression is not so much for personal survival but for the survival of genes to be passed on to the next generation. From this socio-biological perspective aggression is not constant in behaviour because aggression is not perpetrated in species consistently (Bordens & Horowitz, 2008). There are times when aggression may be less important. For example, this is seen in the nurturing of one’s young and in courtship. One criticism of these approaches is that “they ignore the higher abilities of human beings” (Feldman 1998, p. 300). Aggression may also be seen and understood differently due to cultural differences.

Learning theories however, see aggression as learning from prior knowledge, from the social and environmental conditions and from the imitation of others. Learning from prior knowledge is associated with reward and punishment in one’s environment. This approach was put forward by John Locke a philosopher of the seventeenth century, who states, “...we enter the world as a blank slate.” Therefore, those we encounter in the environment teach us aggressive behaviours. It can also be said that people can be taught to be less aggressive (Baron, Branscombe & Bryne, 2009; Baron & Bryne, 2000).

A modern representation of Locke’s theory is in work done by Bandura (1965). Bandura saw aggressive behaviours as a consequence of social learning. According to Social Psychologist Albert Bandura we can learn any behaviour, whether aggressive or non-aggressive, from the conditions of our social and environmental situations. We learn through “direct reinforcement and punishment” (Bordens & Horowitz, 2008, p.381). Social learning starts as early as childhood when children realize that in order to get particular toys or rewards they may show aggressive tendencies or non-aggressive tendencies. This was further explained in Bandura’s (1965) study of the ‘Bobo Doll’ where the behaviours that were reinforced were more likely to occur while the behaviours that were punished were not likely to be exhibited. Therefore, some of these aggressive and non-aggressive behaviours can be modelled. When models are rewarded for aggressive acts, behaviours can be easily imitated. It may be the need in every individual to do what is accepted or what one gets rewarded for that influences aggression. This is typical of aggression in particular societies with high crime rates, where children or adolescents may see a greater reward in violence than being law abiding.

Van Hasselt and Hersen (2000) feel that frustration can also lead to aggression brought about by the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis. In this view...aggression satisfies an innate desire to harm other people when one is feeling bad or frustrated. People prefer to attack the source of the suffering, but if that is too costly, they displace their aggression onto someone else. Engaging in aggression reduces their aggressive drive and they experience catharsis (Van Hasselt & Hersen, 2000, p.11). According to Feldman (1998), Catharsis is the discharging of aggressive energy, which has been continually building up within individuals. Therefore, after experiencing catharsis people are less likely to engage in aggression. This type of behaviour is evident in many situations. For example, a teenager may be frustrated in class (school); this frustration may lead to deviant behaviours such as outbursts and fighting in school.

People use aggression when they think it will help them in achieving something of worth (Van Hasselt & Hersen, 2000). Some may avoid aggressive behaviours because it may seem wrong to them or that the consequences will be too costly. However, situations may cause violent encounters, because individuals are not thinking rationally. For example, one's emotions and the consumption of alcohol can induce aggression and limit thinking and processing, which may lead to the failure to consider the consequences, and alternatives to the behaviour. There is also habitual aggression where sometimes the circumstances and situation determine how one will act. Some mothers may reprimand a child violently in public while others will wait until they get home. People learn that aggression can exhibit control, as in the "desire to influence or control the behaviours of others" (Van Hasselt & Hersen, 2000, p. 14). Another motive for aggression is retribution, where people are punished so as to achieve justice. People also use aggression to enhance or protect their self-image. As Van Hasselt and Hersen explain, a young man may use violence to show that he is powerful, courageous and tough, and to increase his status among friends. Some other motives of aggression may be imagined, grievances and sexual coercion.

2.2. Development of Aggression

Aggressive behaviour is evident in all aspects of development. According to Coie & Dodge (1998) and Parke & Slaby (1983), during infancy (0-2 yrs.) some forms of aggression are expressed in anger and frustration that are seen in behaviours of shoving and pushing. Additionally, the differences in the temperaments of infants may be a predictor of aggression as the infant grows and develops. Furthermore, during pre-school (2-6yrs.) children are encouraged by members of the family in behaviours that may lead to aggression. At this stage children may exhibit more instrumental aggression where they will fight over toys. They rely on physical expression to show aggression. Boys use more physical aggression while girls use more relational and verbal aggression. For example, girls at this age will start gossiping about others with whom they may have conflict. As children get older the levels of aggression are exhibited in different behaviours. At ages 6-7 years there is a decrease in instrumental aggression. This is because as children begin to understand the intentions of others they develop more hostile aggressive tendencies towards others. At this stage they use more ridicule, criticism and name-calling.

At the elementary stage (ages 7-10 years) there is a distinct difference between boys and girls as it concerns aggressive tendencies. Boys tend to be more physically aggressive while girls are relational aggressive. At this stage levels of physical aggression in boys and girls are lower than relational aggression. A critical stage for early signs of delinquency is 7-12 years when children search for friends and want to become accepted members of a group. Some children, for whatever reason, tend to join groups that encourage antisocial acts. They tend to be drawn to a particular group because a friend is a member; it may be a sign of rebellion (my mother does not like those kids but I think they're neat); it may just seem a daring thing to do (Dacey & Travers, 2002, p.249). At this stage there is also the need for consistent and constant supervision by parents and caregivers to prevent poor school performance, peer conflict and delinquency. If this is not controlled and dealt with at this stage the adolescent is more likely to attach him/herself to deviant peer groups.

Research findings identify the development of aggressive behaviours from early childhood through to adolescence. The studies show that no single factor contributes to or causes aggression and anti-social behaviour in adolescents. Some of the factors are within the child while many are related to factors that exist in the social environment. Social influences include interaction in the family, at school and with peers (National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), 2000). These environments sometimes function to promote, mould, and maintain aggression. Aggressive behaviours also extend into the school system, where students who are aggressive tend to be friends with other students who are aggressive.

This is because being physically aggressive as adolescents is attractive to other peers who exhibit similar behaviours (Dukstra, Berger & Lindenberg, 2011). Boys are more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviours than girls (Archer, 2000; Talukdar & Deka, 2014). This is reflected in boys using more direct aggression and girls using more indirect aggression (Bjorkqvist, nd; Estévez, Povedano, Jiménez & Musitu, 2012; Kruti & Melonashi, 2015). In addition, girls are more likely to exhibit relational aggression than boys (Marshall, 2011). This is associated with gender socialization and physiological changes (Archer, 2000). It is also understandable that the physiological changes in boys during adolescence and the search for independence sometimes cause aggression and frustration. Frustration by itself can lead to aggression.

2.3. Parenting and Aggression

Research revealed that there is a strong relationship between parent supportive behaviour and the prosocial outcomes in children that are of all ages and are from different ethnic, social and cultural groups (Albert & Thilagavathy, 2013; Maccoby & Martin, 1993). Family interaction is one factor that contributes to the development of aggression. These types of interactions within the family are “such forces as weak bonding, ineffective parenting (poor monitoring, ineffective, excessively harsh, or inconsistent discipline, inadequate supervision), exposure to violence in the home and a climate that supports aggression and violence put children at risk for being violent in later life” (NIHM, 2000, p. 2). In addition, Matthies, Meeks-Gardner, Daley and Crawford-Brown (2008) argue that aggressive children may experience little affection, attention and supervision from home.

According to Hoskins (2014), children whose parents are inconsistent with discipline are more likely to exhibit behavioural problems. Such inconsistencies reinforce in the adolescent “aggressive and nonchalant behaviour” (p. 511). Parenting, which varies is important to children’s development. One aspect of parental influence cited by NIMH (2000) is that “inadequate supervision plays a stronger role in late childhood and adolescence than in early childhood.” (p.4). Studies show that parental use of physical punishment may contribute to the direct development of aggression and anti-social behaviours in youths. Less aggressive parents grow calm children by increasing the levels of positive social interactions (Davis, 1984). The National Institute of Mental Health (2000), reports that ...youths who engage in high levels of anti-social behaviours are more likely than other youths to have biological parents who also engage in anti-social behaviours. This association is believed to reflect both genetic transmission of predisposing temperament and the maladaptive parenting of anti-social parents. (p.4) One shortcoming of some parents is that most do not see these aggressive tendencies in their children as behaviours that should be discouraged (Yang, 2002). For example, some parents see fighting as defending one’s self. Incidents like these are seen as minor offences by such parents and they assume the children will outgrow the behaviours.

There is an association between particular parenting styles and children’s behaviour in identifying children who are likely to develop aggressive tendencies. According to Baumrind, (1973, as cited in Berkowitz, 1993) and Alizadeh, Abu Talib, Abdullah and Mansor (2011) there are three parenting styles that most often determine the behaviour patterns in children. The authoritarian parent is the rigid enforcer of rules that has no clear explanation. The methods of discipline are harsh and there is little or no warmth and involvement with child/children. Also this parenting style shows more displeasure and anger. Children with authoritarian parents tend to be irritable, fearful and apprehensive, easily annoyed, can move from aggressive to withdrawal behaviours and tend to be very unhappy. Parents’ use of controlling techniques, over reactive discipline contributes to aggression in adolescents (deHaan, Soenens, Deković & Prinzie, 2013).

However, authoritative parents tend to enforce rules that are clearly communicated to children. Such parents communicate to their children bad or disruptive behaviours that cause displeasure and good constructive behaviours that cause pleasure. Children who experience this parenting style tend to be friendly and energetic, self-reliant, can control them, have positive peer relationships, cooperative as adults and are more able to manage stress effectively. The third parenting style is one which is passive and indulgent. With the passive parenting style rules are not enforced and communicated clearly. Parents with this style will yield easily to children’s crying and coercion. There is a relationship between lax/permissive parenting style and adolescent girls’ relational aggression (Marshall, 2011). For these parents discipline is inconsistent and they tend to be warm and welcome “free expression of impulse. Some children in this environment tend to be ‘aggressive and impulsive’, exhibit anti-social traits by being resistant and non-compliant, low self-reliance and self-control and show signs of aggression.

2.4. The Jamaican Context

Jamaica is no exception where the most used parenting style is authoritarian, where there are high demands on children which are not matched with the level of responsiveness from parents. Children who are raised by authoritarian parents tend to do better at school and are less aggressive than those raised by permissive and uninvolved parents (Samms-Vaughan, 2006). Archer (2000), states that inconsistent discipline that is excessive and harsh administered by parents who tend to be hostile reinforce aggressive behaviours in children. Other research also states that child abuse and neglect are contributory factors for aggression in adolescents. According to NIMH (2000), children in these circumstances appear to be at an increased risk for delinquency, violent behaviours and get involved in crimes when they become adults. There is also the premise that aggression is related to antisocial behaviour, delinquency and violence.

It is also reported that anti-social behaviour is linked to “less parental monitoring at the lower levels of socio-economic status” (NIMH, p.4). According to Hoeve, et al. (2009) there is a strong relationship between parental monitoring and delinquency. This suggests that decreases in parental monitoring is associated with increased risk of violent behaviours. Therefore the findings of this research illustrate that effective parent monitoring may reduce youth violence which will also be effective for children living in high-risk neighbourhood.

Children and early adolescents who are exposed to parents fighting and quarrelling with each other tend to exhibit aggressive tendencies in late adolescence (Farrington 1991). Aggressive behaviour between parents is associated with adolescent aggression and their social problem solving skills (Duman & Margolin, 2007). Observing parental fights and quarrels affect the cognitive and affective processes of children and thus cause them to believe that they are the cause of the violence. Therefore children appraise themselves negatively and are likely to feel guilty and blame themselves for parental aggression. Such negative appraisals are likely to lead to adjustment problems (Green, 2001).

The overall picture, therefore, is one in which angry conflicts between parents, which can escalate into violence, can cause children to become emotionally maladjusted and possibly aggressive. This process is mediated by the ways in which the children interpret inter-parental violence, the extent to which they feel anxious, threatened and guilty, and their ability to develop coping strategies that help them to ward off such feelings. (Green, 2001, p.93).

Studies conducted in Jamaica show that there is a positive correlation between children experiencing domestic violence and involvement in gang warfare (Levy & Chevannes, 1996). What is also evident is that there is more beating than expression of love in these households. Furthermore, the absence of one or both parents makes children more susceptible to developing violent aggressive behaviours, and males exhibit more of these aggressive behaviours and violence. According to police records most of the violent crimes are committed by adolescent males (Crawford-Brown, 1999). Data presented by Chevannes (1999) showed that there was an increase in the number of young males between the ages 16-20 years arrested for major crimes between 1996 and 1997. For example, 77 males, 16-20 years were arrested in 1996 and in 1997, 111 males were arrested for murder.

In 2010 26% of all crimes reported were committed by children and adolescents and a total 1,815 children and adolescents were arrested for committing major crimes, of this number 89% of the perpetrators fall in the age-group 15-19 years (UNICEF, Jamaica, 2011). In addition, the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN) (2014) reported that during 2011 to 2013, based on the murder rate per 100,000, a total of 35, 30 and 29 were committed by adolescents between the ages of 15-19. Adolescents were also victims of major crimes, in 2010 there were 1,796 reported cases (UNICEF, Jamaica, 2011) while between 2012-2013 61% of youths ages 15 to 19 were victims of aggravated assault (STATIN, 2014).

Most of these males came from single parent headed households that were headed by females. Levy and Chevannes (1996) further state that “according to one of their respondent “They (the youths) mostly don’t grow with father and mother cannot control them” (p.49) which explains the link between the poor parenting and the entry of boys into gangs at an early age (Levy & Chevannes, 1996). McGregor (1992, as cited in Leo-Rhynie, 1993) stated that aggressive child-rearing practices of parents are associated with the aggression evident in young children. The research conducted by McGregor surveyed four year old children who revealed that they were beaten by their parents. The report stated that of the seventy-five mothers, fifty-nine of them abused their children. The children further state that their fathers and teachers also beat them. Leo-Rhynie (1993) further posits that, “it is well documented that abused children become abusive parents, and the cycle of violence continues and grows reaching outside the family unit and into the wider society” (p.38).

Being exposed to violence at home and in the community is strongly correlated to aggressive behaviours at school. The Planning Institute of Jamaica through their research conducted by Meeks-Gardner, Powell and Grantham-McGregor (2000) found that “community violence and corporal punishment are related to increased aggression” (p. 37). Data reported by Ward (2011) revealed that corporal punishment is the form of discipline frequently used in homes. In addition, 18% of Jamaican children and adolescents witnessed physical abuse between their parents and 60% of them experience parental physical abuse (Ward 2011). From the perspective of the Office of the Children Registry (OCR), in 2010 there were 4,500 reported cases of abuse, with 62% accounting for girls. Approximately 19% and 18% of reported abuse were physical and sexual abuse respectively (UNICEF, Jamaica, 2011).

These points to the levels of aggression that is being exhibited by some children; in particular adolescents who are exposed to violence, severe punishment and abuse.

3. Method

A Qualitative research approach was used in this study because it provides rich and descriptive data which takes into consideration each participant's reality and that the process of understanding is flexible and can respond to the changes in conditions (Merriam, 1998). Using qualitative approaches promote the drawing of conclusions throughout the research process (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). Additionally, qualitative methods are data enhancers, because whenever data are enhanced, there is a possibility of seeing the key aspects of the case more clearly (Neuman, 2006).

3.1. Participants

A total of eight students; five males and three females along with two administrators were purposively selected. The students were selected because they share the similar aggressive behaviours, anti-social tendencies and were identified as problem students by class teachers and administrators. Two administrators; Guidance Counsellor and the Vice-principal of the Junior High Department were selected because they had to speak with the children as a result of the students' aggressive behaviour towards other students.

3.2. Procedure and Data Collection

Permission to conduct the study was given by the school, administrators, parents and students. They were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and that they could stop at any time. In addition, anonymity was ensured by not reporting the participants name and the name of the school. Three unstructured focus group discussions and one interview were conducted with the students during the sessions after lunch (students reading time) because it was at this time that the researcher could have all of the student participants. Two focus group sessions were done by gender (male and female only) and one with both genders. The focus group discussions lasted for approximately fifty minutes. One unstructured interview was conducted with one female because she was not willing to talk in the company of the other students.

In addition, to the students participation administrators were also interviewed. The unstructured interview was conducted in the morning (before assembly) with the Vice-principal and after school with the Guidance Counsellor, because at these times they had limited contact with students. The interview lasted for approximately thirty (30) minutes for each person. Using three focus group discussions with students, interviews with student and administrators provided a better representation and understanding of students' experiences of aggression. Additionally, the researcher was able to check the consistency across all three focus group discussions and interviews as the students reported thoughts and feelings with regard to aggression and administrators' reports confirm and refute students' reports.

4. Data Analysis

The focus group discussions and interviews were recorded and typed verbatim to represent the exact thoughts and feeling of the interviewees. Descriptive coding was done using the research questions as guide. The information was read then reread, after which the relevant information was topic coded (according to research questions). They were then grouped into categories and themes. Additionally, anomalies were also coded because they may prove significant in the understanding of the findings. The findings were presented according to how the data was collected; the focus groups discussions followed by the personal interviews.

5. Data Presentation and Analysis

The analysis of the focus group discussions and interviews identified six factors that impact aggression; gender differences, family structure, parents aggression, parents interaction and contributors of parents aggressive behaviours.

5.1. Gender Difference and Aggression

There is gender difference in the type of aggression exhibited by adolescents. The reports by students, Vice-principal and Guidance Counsellor showed that males were more physically aggressive (use of violence) while females were more relational aggressive (name calling and sexual advances). The females reported that they were called names at school and at home. They further stated that because they do not do anything at home to hurt adults when they are called names at home they were more likely to react at school.

The girls said that that they like to gossip or call students they dislike names and restrict their friends from talking to them. One female reported that she ended up fighting because other girls were spreading rumours about her that she repeated the same output that she wore to the school at a party at a dance in their community. Additionally, females tended to exhibit aggressive behaviour whenever they were provoked. The findings were consistent with literature that, according to Bjorkqvist (nd) females tend to exhibit more indirect aggression.

The males reported that they have to protect their image, “not wanting to be seen as a weakling” they readily react to threats by being aggressive. They are most times provoked by their friends because they could not read a passage in class. Sometimes the aggression that leads to fights start from disagreements from their community. Males stated that when they are not understood and are disrespected by adults at home and at school they are forced to behave aggressively at school. Researchers support the view that provocation increased the level of aggression but when unprovoked, males were more aggressive than females (Baron, Branscombe & Bryne, 2009).

Socialization may also explain the levels and type of aggression exhibited by the genders. Males are likely to be physically aggressive (Archer, 2000; Talukdar & Deka, 2014). The findings were consistent with males since males were socialized to think that in order to be a ‘man’ they must be tough, violence is then a real part of some male’s lives (Brown & Chevannes, 1998). Females are normally thought to be docile which is somewhat inconsistent with what the Vice-principal says he was seeing in some of his female students. The Vice-principal reported that some females who wish to be in a relationship with certain males may aggressively pursue them and become physically aggressive with other females if they believe are intruding. He went on to say that this could account for females change in outlook where females have developed a sense of independence.

5.2. The family structure is related to the level of aggression in adolescents.

The students reported that their parents do not have the time to reprimand them whenever they fight and quarrel. Most times when they get into any fights the parents are not really there. In addition, they have limited contact with their father and their mother is tired and most times frustrated with their behaviour. One male said his mother would take him to the police station whenever he seriously hurt someone and she feels helpless. From the combined focus group discussion one female stated that her mother vowed to take her to “place of safety” state care because she is always involved in fights at school and in the community. It was revealed that more students were from single parent families headed by females and that the father figures were either absent, visiting or step-parents. Additionally, there were no appropriate models for students to emulate. One student reported that his mother was too busy or too tired to know what is happening at school. The “only time there is some show of concern or even serious use of abusive language is when she is called in by the school, the first thing she would say is what you do now?” The findings supported the existing literature that aggressive boys were more likely to come from common-law unions with mothers who were never married (PIOJ) and that aggressive boys showed less identification with their fathers (Megargee & Hokanson, 1970). According to Chevannes (1999) the number of arrests of males within the age group 16-20 for major crimes was mostly from single parent households headed by females. Levy and Chevannes (1996) further concluded that the mothers cannot control the males.

5.3. Parents of aggressive students tended to show levels of aggression themselves.

The students reported that their parents quarrel with them and beat them. It does not take much for parents to behave aggressively. One student said that her mother quarrels about everything, even the passing breeze. They also quarrel with others in their communities. From the focus group discussion the students were in agreement that there is always some quarrel or argument between their parents and other persons in the community and sometimes they are drawn into the arguments and quarrels. They sometimes try to defend their parents by fighting back or quarrelling with the persons who aggrieve their parent. One male student stated that “mi cuan mek dem dis my mada” (cannot allow them to disrespect my mother).

This finding was supported by Yang (2002) who reported that “aggressive adolescents tend to be raised in an environment in which the primary caregivers are either uninvolved or actively hostile toward him or her” (p.6). Additionally, some aggressive parents are tolerant to the aggressive behaviours of their children and do not have clear boundaries for what behaviours are appropriate or inappropriate (Yang, 2002). The findings from the Guidance Counsellor and the Vice-principal reinforced this view. Both principal and guidance counsellor reported that whenever parents are called in as a result of their children antisocial behaviour, some of them come in to defend their children undesirable behaviour or with the intention of hurting the individual/s who hurt their child. From the parents perspective their children were defending themselves. On the other hand, there are some parents

who will reprimand their children before school official but when they are outside of school they endorse their children behaviour. Although one may assume that most of these behaviours were learned behaviours. Students (children) imitated their parents while others imitated adults and peers. Furthermore these aggressive behaviours were reinforced and not punished. Archer (2000) posits that parents, who are abusive, use excessively harsh or inconsistent discipline and coercive and hostile parental approaches, are predictors of aggressive children.

5.4 Adolescents felt that their interactions with their parents were both bad and good depending on the situation.

Adolescents felt that they were most times misunderstood by their parents. Students reported that their parents do not understand them or try to understand how they feel. There was a lack of communication between some parents and their adolescent children. Further, added to the lack of communication and the misunderstanding, they felt that they were not respected. Their parents called them derogatory names that severely affected their interaction with their parents. This was further reinforced by the Vice-principal who mentioned that they “fight fire with fire” that if parents were aggressive to them they would intern be aggressive to their parents. The Guidance Counsellor also mentioned the lack of respect on the part of the adolescent to parent and the fact that many parents do not understand their adolescent children, most definitely impact on how they relate to their parents.

The females reported that their interaction was sometimes good and sometimes bad because they (adolescents) brought it up on themselves by being disobedient, doing what was asked when they felt inclined to and back talking to their parents. Males reported little problems with their interaction with their parents. They were in agreement with the females that they contributed to the lack of interaction between themselves and their parents. What were significant with the males were the problems that they faced with their father figures. Some of them tended to be disrespectful to the father figure in the house or those that visited the homes. There is limited identification with them and their step-fathers which further supported Megargee and Hokanson (1970) findings.

5.5 Parent aggressive behaviours were as a result of poverty and frustration.

Some of the students reported that their parents quarrel with other family members because of the living conditions. Inability to afford a bigger space may be directly linked to poverty. The Guidance Counsellor also mentioned that poverty was one of the reasons for parents being aggressive. Research reinforced both views because according to Nuttal and Kalesnik (1987) cited in Yang (2002) poverty was an important factor in aggression. They posit that “poverty decreases the essential resources necessary for social development and increase the stressors that impede effective parenting and problem solving” (p.7).

Additionally, most of the students were from inner city urban communities where they are exposed to crime and violence that affects the home and school environment. The violence could lead to some of the frustration felt by both parents and adolescents, notwithstanding that some of the frustration felt by parents were as a result of their adolescent children’s behaviour. According to research conducted by Berkowitz (1993) the degree of frustration can increase one’s aggressive responses. However, frustration does not always lead to aggression; it is also dependent on one’s social skills and control mechanisms.

Some students reported that their parents were ‘born’ aggressive. One reason could be their personal predisposition, which can explain their personality trait that may be associated with aggressive tendencies. According to Baron and Byrne (2000) some persons are “primed for aggression by their personal characteristics” (p.454). Therefore suggesting Type A personality trait may be associated with aggression. The Type A persons are normally competitive, always rushing (in a hurry) and tend to be irritable and aggressive. These persons readily lose their temper. In addition people have hostile attributional bias, where they may have the tendency to perceive intentions and motives from others whenever their actions are unclear (Baron & Bryne, 2000).

6. Conclusion

The findings have provided answers to the research questions thus asserting that the family is a significant factor in the development of aggression in children, in particular adolescents. More significantly if the family structure is not stable it would impact negatively on adolescents since it is at this time that some of them are faced with identity crisis.

Adolescents who are not exposed to loving, caring and stable home environments with consistent discipline and parenting patterns may develop behavioural problems. It was also evident that the father figure played an important role and that parents should explain to their adolescents why their biological fathers were absent. Being able to understand the reason for the absence of their biological fathers may reduce the animosity that they sometimes feel towards their step-fathers. This could help in the reduction of aggression among male adolescents since research point to aggression being positively correlated with weak bonding between boys and their fathers.

As an educator in Guidance and Counselling, Educational Psychology and School Management these findings will prove useful in developing interventions to address aggression, parenting and assigning aggressive adolescents with the appropriate mentors. Additionally, trying to understand them more will give them a voice that will improve and maintain a positive interaction between parents and their adolescent child/children.

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