

Psychological Characteristics Of The Manifestation Of Aggressive Behavior In Younger School-Age Children

Konratbaeva Ayjamal Bazarbaevna

Teacher at the Department of Psychology at the Uzbek National Pedagogical University named after Nizami, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Psychological Sciences, Uzbekistan

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Abstract: The article explains the psychological characteristics of the younger school-age period and the external factors that influence the manifestation of aggressive behavior in children. In particular, it describes the impact of such factors in the system of parent–child relations as the mother’s optimal emotional contact with the child, excessive emotional distance from the child, and excessive attention to the child. The study also presents a description of the research findings obtained on the influence of mass media as a key determinant in the emergence of aggressive behavior in younger school-age pupils.

Keywords: younger school-age period, aggressive behavior, mass media, parent–child relations, “Non-existent Animal” technique, PARI technique, “Questionnaire for identifying pupils’ motives of aggressive behavior”.

Introduction: The study of aggression in younger school-age children is a relevant topic and continues to attract the attention of researchers who seek to reveal the true nature of this phenomenon. Defining the concept of aggression itself poses a number of difficulties, as this term encompasses many forms of behavior. Pupils at this age are impressionable and emotional; higher feelings such as aesthetic, spiritual and moral feelings are formed in them, while moral instability and the inconsistency of experiences are evident. At the same time, as inexperienced viewers, they become victims of the mass media, especially of the Internet. A child’s system of value-related attitudes is not yet sufficiently developed to evaluate events taking place on a television or phone screen. In many cases, the aggressive actions of the character in the scene watched by the pupil (robbery, quarrel, murder, shooting, beating and others) and his “victory” may lead the pupil to fail to understand the difference between good and evil.

Aggressive behavior has been studied by many scholars. In particular, Emil F. Coccaro [2] has investigated anger-related psychopathologies in the field of psychiatry and clinical psychology. His recent works focus on psychopharmacological methods of treating aggression. Brad J. Bushman has extensive experience in studying aggressive behavior in children

and adolescents; he has examined the links between media violence, video games, television and aggression [1].

An analysis of psychological and pedagogical works on teachers’ understanding of aggression in younger school-age pupils allows us to speak about the existence of certain pedagogical stereotypes and their impact on the teacher’s perception and understanding of the pupil’s personality and behavior. In this regard, studying the teacher’s views about the pupil is of particular interest, since the reflexive diagnostics of the teacher’s own behavior and attitude towards the pupil helps to better understand the pupil’s personality and behavior.

METHODS

The aim of the study is to identify the determinants of aggressive behavior in the younger school-age period. In the course of the research, we used observation, interview, the projective technique “Non-existent Animal,” the PARI technique for studying parent–child relations, and the “Questionnaire for identifying pupils’ motives of aggressive behavior.” These techniques were administered to 2nd- and 4th-grade pupils of primary school, and the PARI technique for studying parent–child relations was applied to their parents.

The purpose of administering the PARI technique is to study the relationship between parents and children

and to determine its influence on aggressive behavior. The PARI (Parental Attitude Research Instrument) technique is designed to examine parents' (primarily mothers') attitudes toward the family role; it was developed by American psychologists E. Schaefer and R. Bell and adapted by the Russian researcher T. V. Nechsheret. The PARI test questionnaire contains 115 statements about family life and parenthood and includes 23 scales related to various aspects of parents' attitudes toward the child and family life, with 5 questions in each scale. Eight of these scales describe attitudes toward family life, and fifteen relate to parent-child relations [4; p.108].

In order to study more comprehensively the aggressive behavior of younger school-age pupils, we used the "Questionnaire for identifying pupils' motives of aggressive behavior" developed by V. S. Sobkin and A. S. Fomichenko. To investigate how teachers understand the causes of pupils' aggressiveness, V. S. Sobkin and A. S. Fomichenko developed a special method based on the principle of motivational attribution. The essence of this method consists in assessing the probability of certain causes, given as motives, that determine pupils' aggressive actions directed at the teacher. For this purpose, teachers of general education schools are offered a 7-point rating scale: 1 point – absolutely insignificant, 2 points – not important, 3 points – practically insignificant, 4 points – of uncertain significance, 5 points – moderately significant, 6 points – important, 7 points – very important. For assessment, respondents are given 42 causes of pupils' aggressiveness selected on the basis of an analysis of studies on pupils' aggression. However, taking into account the correspondence of these causes to our mentality, we selected 34 of them. These causes can be conditionally divided into the following five main groups: (1) individual characteristics of pupils; (2) ideological disagreements; (3) situations in which pupils' aggressiveness is directly provoked by the teacher himself/herself; (4) causes related to the social aspects of learning activity; (5) social factors [5; pp.137–147].

RESULTS

Aggressive actions in children are observed especially during their transitional periods. In other words, in any difficult situation the child's age-related crisis is filled with problems. Violence is closely linked with the concept of aggression, since its real form of manifestation appears in aggressive acts. Violence against women is regarded as a result of socio-cultural norms that reinforce women's unequal status in various spheres of social life. The central point of this approach is the idea that men hold power in society and are thereby allowed to control women's behavior.

Domestic violence itself has a historical and cultural character and reflects the influence of patriarchal norms that support male dominance in marriage, tolerated by society's permissiveness [6; p.13].

In our study, we administered this methodology to teachers and class leaders who teach 2nd- and 4th-grade pupils in general education schools. When the results of the methodology were analyzed using Student's t-criterion, differences between grades were found for the motive "watching scenes of violence on television" ($t = 4.17$; $p > 0.001$). According to the analysis of the results, compared to 2nd-grade pupils, 4th-grade pupils watch violent scenes on television more often, and this is caused by the crisis of transition from the younger school-age period to adolescence. During this period, 4th-grade pupils strive to be grown-up and try to act independently and do whatever they want.

Among 2nd-grade pupils, differences can be seen in terms of gender. A gender difference was observed only on the scale "watching scenes of violence on television" ($t = 2.57$; $p > 0.01$), and it corresponded to the law of normal distribution; no differences were found on other scales. The analysis of the results shows that 2nd-grade boys watch scenes of violence on television more often, and communication with undesirable peer groups is also observed precisely among them.

During the administration of the methodology, teachers evaluated the possible probability of 13 proposed causes of aggressive actions for boys and girls in 2nd and 4th grades. It should be noted that such a methodology makes it possible to obtain results that confirm the teacher's understanding of the significance of the causes of aggressive manifestations in pupils of different ages and allows comparison of the motivational characteristics of aggressive behavior in both boys and girls. In boys, aggression is manifested more openly and roughly; it is more difficult to control, and physical aggression predominates. In girls, aggression is more often expressed in verbal form.

Some psychologists argue that the regular viewing of scenes of violence by preschool children weakens emotional sensitivity, fosters cruelty, and leads to the formation of scripts of aggressive behavior; when entering society, the child recalls the aggressive patterns observed on the screen and begins to imitate what he or she has seen [3; p.108].

During the administration of the projective technique "Non-existent Animal," when we asked pupils to draw an animal that does not exist anywhere in the world, some of them depicted characters from the American TV series "Wednesday," in particular the frightening walking and talking hand, while others drew Huggy

Wuggy, the main character of the horror computer game "Poppy Playtime."

The results show that 45.4% of the participants depicted the imaginary animal with teeth. This indicates that these respondents display a verbal type of aggression. In 18.7% of the drawings, the animal's head was drawn with horns or growths, which suggests that such behavior appears as a psychological defense reaction in difficult situations. In 11.7% of the respondents' drawings, the presence of claws and fur indicates a high level of aggressiveness. In 10.3% of the drawings, the animal was depicted with a shield, shells, or a beak, which is also manifested as a form of self-defense. In 5.4% of the respondents, the strongly pressed contour lines indicate fear of something, anxiety, and physical aggression. In 4.9% of the respondents' drawings, pointed objects such as needles and bladed weapons were depicted, which reflects the child's need for protection from persecutors and those who force them (adults in the family, teachers, parents). In 3.6% of the drawings, ascending lines were present, which also indicate aggressiveness.

In our research, we studied precisely those scales of parent-child relations that may influence the formation of aggressive behavior in the child. These are: optimal emotional contact with the child, excessive emotional distance from the child, and excessive attention to the child. According to the interpretation of this methodology, scores of 18 and above on a scale are considered high values, whereas scores from 5 to 8 are low. As can be seen from the data presented below, the mean values of most measurements fall within the medium range on the three scales. The average score for parents' optimal emotional contact with the child was 13.22 in 2nd grade and 10.81 in 4th grade. This scale includes indicators such as giving the child the opportunity to express their own opinion and maintaining a friendly relationship between parent and child. The average score for excessive emotional distance of the parent from the child was 14.19 in 2nd grade and 14.59 in 4th grade. This scale comprises such aspects as excessive strictness of the parent, irritability, and avoidance of communication with the child. Excessive attention to the child scored 13.38 in 2nd grade and 13.88 in 4th grade. This scale reflects excessive care for the child, suppression of the child's will, fear of harming the child, suppression of the child's aggression, and the parent's intrusive involvement in the child's "life."

CONCLUSION

When a teacher observes aggressive behavior in younger school-age pupils, the negative emotions they

experience may lead to emotional burnout. Such a condition will inevitably affect the quality of pedagogical activity and may reduce its effectiveness [3]. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to prevent the escalation of aggression and its transition into deviant or delinquent behavior by timely identifying aggressive behavior in younger school-age pupils and competently organizing corrective work.

The study revealed that the formation of aggression in the child is influenced by adults' indifference to the child, their being in a state of nervous tension in front of their children, and the lack of mutual understanding between the parents themselves. In the research, parents scored high precisely on the scales reflecting interference in the child's "life," excessive care, fear of harming the child, refusal to communicate with the child, and excessive strictness in upbringing. The results of the study show a correlation between mothers' parental position and emotional contact with the child, on the one hand, and the indicators of children's aggressive behavior, on the other. A child's anger, nail-biting and similar manifestations represent aggression directed toward adults. Parents' anger, harsh words, shouting and physical punishment may lead to the formation of aggressive behavior in the child. From the research findings we can see that such parents themselves were aggressive in childhood and transfer their own psychological difficulties onto their children. Therefore, it is advisable for school practicing psychologists to conduct psychotherapeutic and counseling work with the parents in order to eliminate aggressive behavior patterns in pupils.

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