

Impact of Parental Care and Separation on Aggressive Behaviour of Adolescents in Owerri

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Abstract

The study investigated impact of parental care and separation on aggressive behaviour of adolescents in Owerri, Imo state. Bandura's Social Learning theory was used to examine the influence of parental care and separation on aggressive behaviour of adolescents. Cross sectional survey research design was adopted while questionnaire was data collection tool for the study. The sample size consisted of two hundred and twenty (220) male and female secondary school students selected from eight (8) schools in Owerri. Their ages ranged from 13 to 17 years, with a mean and standard deviation ages of 14.8 and 1.34 respectively. A multi-stage (purposive and convenience) sampling method was adopted for the study. Parental care scale and Buss-Perry aggression scale were the instruments used for data collection. Both descriptive and inferential (2-way ANOVA) statistical methods were used for data analysis and were computed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. Results showed that; irrespective of parental care and separation, no aggression was found among adolescents in Owerri; Parental care had no impact on aggressive behaviour of adolescents; Parental separation had no impact on aggressive behaviour of adolescents. Finally, no statistical significant interaction influence of parental care and parental separation on aggressive behaviour of adolescents was found. Suggestion was made that other variables which may lead to aggression among adolescents in Owerri be examined in further studies.

Keywords: Parental care; Parental separation; Aggressive behaviour; Adolescents; Owerri

Introduction

Most social psychologists and sociologists have in time past defined aggression in terms of the intent and purpose behind the behaviour. According to Berkowitz, [1] aggression is intentional injury or harm to another person. The behaviour may represent a normal development stage or indicate a serious ongoing mental health disorder that possesses a safety concern. It can be either impulsive (reacting to a trigger) or proactive (premediated) and may interfere with family or peer relationships and school performance [2]. During the course of normal development, families may experience periods when a child exhibits temper tantrums during toddler years or rebellion during adolescent years. These behaviours when limited in time are considered normal developmental occurrences, but when they form pattern overtime they are considered to be psychiatric disorders [3].

Some individuals believe that aggression is innate or instinctive. Social theorists suggest that breakdown in commonly shared values, changes in traditional family patterns of child rearing and social isolation leads to an increase in aggression in children, adolescents and adults [4]. Aggression can also be a by-product of the inability to deal with emotion, especially frustration [1]. Social psychologists and sociologists have identified a variety of factors which can trigger or influence aggressive behaviours in adolescents. These factors may include; family structure, relationship with others, work or school environment, societal or socio-economic factors, individual characteristics, health conditions, life experiences, parental care, parental divorce or separation and others [5,6]. However, two variables of interest in this study are: parental care and parental separation.

Both in popular belief and in scholarly works, parental care has been seen as a source of happiness, relaxation and confidence while parental separation is often seen as a cause or contributing factor to depression, lack of self-confidence and aggression in children, as well as later delinquency [7-9]. Naturally, parents provide a nurturing

and constructive environment which is basically known as care that promotes growth and development in a child or children. Nowadays, some parents seem not to provide the necessary care, love and protection needed by their children, due to low socio-economic status, low education (ignorance) and other factors. Children (adolescents inclusive) who come from families where love and care are sufficient tend to be relaxed, happy and in turn exhibit more of prosocial behaviours. Meanwhile, children who lack parental care most times may feel neglected and abandoned by their parents that may lead to frustration and aggression in them. Baumrid, [10] in his work identified three parenting care styles namely: authoritative, in which parents have clear expectations and consequences and are affectionate towards their children. The authoritative parents allow for flexibility and collaborative problem solving with the children when dealing with behavioural challenges. This is the most effective form of parenting; authoritarian, in which parents have clear expectations and consequences, but show little or no affection towards their children. This is a less effective form of parenting and permissive, in which parents show lots of affection towards their children but provide little or no discipline. This is a less effective form of parenting. Schunk [11] in his study found out that individuals who have proper parental care and who have been verbally encouraged in their homes to set their own goals are happier and are less aggressive than individuals who lack parental care. Bolge and Richard [12] in their work on 'role of parental

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care and gender on aggressive behaviour' revealed that children that are at home did not differ from children in the day care on aggression level. Also James and Wilshere [13] in their work on the 'relationship between parental care and aggressive behaviour in the United States noted that parental care had no relationship with aggressive behaviour. However, Melin [14] in his study on the impact of parental care and domicility on aggressive behaviours of adolescents using two hundred and seventy (270) participants drawn from three high schools, revealed that parental care and domicility had significant influence on aggressive behaviour as students who live in the urban cities and those coming from homes which lack care and love exhibited more aggression in behaviour than their counterparts. Also in his study on impact of age, parental care and family size on aggressive behaviours of adolescents, Nelson [15] revealed that parental care and family size had significant influence in aggressive behaviour of adolescents, while age had no influence on aggressive behaviour of adolescents.

Furthermore, parental separation has also been noted as one of the factors that influence aggressive behaviour in adolescents [16]. Parental separation mostly takes place when parents no longer love each other and decide to live apart. According to Catherine and Karen, [17] many children go through parental separation each year that are not included as stated above but as their parents were not married. Barak [18] observed that parental separation predicts aggression in children (teenagers inclusive) who are unfortunate to find themselves in such homes. While aggressive behaviour may not be exclusive to adolescents whose parents are separated, children from broken homes also may share some characteristics that, even though not influenced by the separation itself, still increase the propensity for aggression [19]. Adolescents who have experienced parental separation display a range of emotional and behavioural reactions such as; aggression, display of anxiety and depressive symptoms, appear more irritable, demanding and non-compliant, experience problems in social relationships and school performance [20]. In a study of one hundred and eighty three (183) participants drawn through convenience sampling technique and comprised of hundred and two (102) males and eight-one (81) females, who were from separated homes and homes where parents are still living together; Annia [21] revealed that parental separation and socio-economic status significantly influenced aggressive behaviour of the participants. Hetherington and Elmore [22], a psychologist of the University of Virginia and her graduate student found that many children experience short term negative effects from parental separation especially anxiety, anger (aggression), shock and disbelief. Those reactions typically diminish or disappear by the end of the second year; only a minority of children suffers longer. Contrary to the above, Amato [23] at Pennsylvania State University examined the possible effects of parental separation on children. The study compared children of married parents with those who experience separation at different ages. On average, the students found only very small differences in all these measures between children of separated parents and those from intact families, suggesting that parental separation had no influence on psychological well-being of children (aggression).

For the purpose of this article, the researchers examined the impact of parental care and separation on aggressive behaviour of adolescents in Owerri, Imo State.

Theoretical Review

Bandura' [24] Social Learning Theory posits that individuals learn from the environment through the process of observation. Individuals observe others' behaviours, attitudes, and outcomes of

those behaviours. This was illustrated during the famous Bobo doll experiment by Bandura as noted by McLeod [25]. Individuals that are observed are called models. Bandura also outlined; attention, retention, motivation and reproduction as four necessary conditions for effective modeling. This follows that when an individual pays attention to another individual who exhibits any form of behaviour, consciously or unconsciously, the observer may retain the observed behaviour, and there is likelihood that the observed behaviour may be reproduced depending on the observer's level of motivation. Generally, most human behaviour is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.

Practically in our society, children (adolescents inclusive) are surrounded by many influential models, such as parents within the family, characters on children's TV, friends within their peer group, teachers at school and significant others. These models provide examples of behaviour to observe and imitate, e.g. masculine and feminine, pro and anti-social (aggression) etc. Children pay attention to some of these people (models) and encode their behaviours. At a later time they may imitate (i.e. copy) the behaviour they have observed. They may do this regardless of whether the behaviour is gender appropriate or not, and pro social or anti-social. Furthermore, children who copy behaviour may come from diverse family background such as: separated or non-separated homes; permissive, authoritarian or authoritative parenting care homes. Also, the rate of imitation in children/adolescents may depend on the child'/adolescent' nature of family back ground. According to Bowlby, [26] parental separation leads to lack of parent-child bond which in turn may lead to lack of parental care. It follows that when a child is separated from either of the parents especially the mother, the child tends to be exposed to another care giver other than that biological parent. Such a child, however, might acquire new learning from the person obviously through observation and imitation which Bandura, [27] explained in his social learning theory. The adolescents from separated homes may observe aggressive behaviour and can easily learn to behave in like manner since either the mother or father is not there to put a check of such behaviour.

Methods

The study was conducted in Owerri city which is capital of Imo State, Nigeria. Owerri is a city in South-Eastern Nigeria with a population of about 231, 789 and approximately 40 square miles (100 km²) in area. It is located in the latitude of 5° 29' 1.1" (5.4836°) north and longitude of 7° 1' 59.7" (7.0333°) east. Owerri is made up of mainly literate population who are mostly civil servants, students and traders.

Cross sectional survey research design was adopted while questionnaire was data collection tool for the study. The population of this study includes all junior secondary school one (JSS1) to senior secondary school two (SSS2) students in Owerri. The sample size consisted of two hundred and twenty (220) male and female secondary school students selected from eight (8) schools.

A multi-stage sampling method was adopted for the study. Firstly, purposive sampling method was used to select both junior and senior secondary school students from Holy Ghost College Secondary School, Owerri Girls Secondary School, Emmanuel College, Holy Rosary International College, Ikenegbu Girls Secondary School, Owerri City School, Government College and Federal Government Girls College who are from both separated and non-separated homes, within the ages of 13-17 years. Their mean age was 14.8 and standard deviation

age was 1.34. Purposive sampling technique was employed because teenagers from separated homes must be identified and this was done after permission was obtained from the principals. Finally, convenience sampling method was used to administer two hundred and twenty structured questionnaire to the participants. This is because not all students were willing to participant as a result of the sensitive nature of the study.

Two instruments were used in the study: parental care scale (PCS) and Buss-Perry aggression scale (BPAS). The first instrument, Parental care scale (PCS) was developed by Baumrid [28]. The scale is a 20 item inventory, designed to measure what children perceive as the styles or approaches that their parents dominantly use in taking care of them. The scale is scored by awarding one (1) point for a “YES” response in each parenting styles. The following are the items of the categories. Authoritarian style: items 2, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 19. Permissive style: items 3, 4, 6, 7, 13, 16, 18. And Authoritative style: items 1, 5, 8, 10, 17, 20. Baumrid [29] reported an internal consistency alpha coefficient of 0.86 similarly; Omoluabi [30] obtained a concurrent validity coefficient of 0.73 by correlating PCS and index of family relation (IFR) [31]. The African norms or mean scores of the scale are the basis for interpreting the scores of clients. The norms are 7.80, 13.20 and 7.44 for Authoritarian, permissive and authoritative respectively. Scores higher than the norms indicate the dominance of the particular parenting style.

The second independent variable (IV) which is parental separation was categorized on parental care scale (PS) for the participants’ indication.

The second instrument is the Buss-Perry aggression scale (BPAS) developed by Buss and Perry [32]. The instrument is a twenty-six (26) item used to measure aggression. The scale has been validated extensively, but the validation focused on various narrowly selected populations, typically on samples of college students. The scale was scored in five likert format, ranging from 1 – agree to 5 – strongly disagree. It has direct and reversed score items. The reversed scored items are 6 and 16, while others are directly scored. The psychometric properties of the scale are divergent validity, measured with Rathus assertiveness scale at=0.152, $p > 0.05$, with the coefficient reliability of cronbach’s alpha of 0.858. The norm is 79.57, after scoring, the directly and reverse score items are added up and any score above the norm indicates that the person is high on aggression.

Both descriptive and inferential (2-way ANOVA) statistical methods were used to analyze data collected. The analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. Ethical principles of informed and voluntary consents, confidentiality, non-injury and beneficence were fully observed throughout the data collection process. Written permission was obtained from the principals of the schools. Furthermore, individual consents were given by the students before administering the questionnaire.

Results

The study considered variables such as respondents’ age, gender, adolescents’ educational level, and parental separation (Table 1).

From the above data, it can be deduced that majority of the respondents representing 55.9% are from 13-15 years while minority (44.1%) are from 16-17 years. In terms of gender, male were (45.9%) while female were (54.1%). Furthermore, over 51% of the participants representing majority of the respondents indicated that their highest educational level were JSS1 to JSS3 while minority representing

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Age		
13-15 years	123	55.9
16-17 years	97	44.1
Total	220	100
Gender		
Male	101	45.9
Female	119	54.1
Total	220	100
Adolescents’ educational level		
JSS1-JSS3	114	51.8
SSS1-SSS2	106	48.2
Total	220	100
Parental separation		
Separated	71	32.3
Non-separated	149	67.7
Total	220	100

Table 1: Socio-Demographic characteristics of respondents.

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Parental care			
Authoritative	77.06	12.71	35
Authoritarian	74.70	8.57	156
Permissive	71.79	20.37	29
Parental separation			
Separated	74.44	12.10	106
Non-separated	74.92	10.96	114

Table 2: Summary table of mean and standard deviation for parental care and parental separation on adolescents’ aggressive behaviour.

48.2% noted that their highest educational level were SSS1 to SSS2. Finally, 67.7% of the respondents representing majority of the sample size revealed that they are from ‘non separated’ homes while 32.3% representing minority of the sample size noted that they are from separated homes.

Table 2 indicates a difference in aggressive behaviour of adolescents for authoritative parenting, aggressive behaviour was higher ($\bar{x} = 77.06$) compared to authoritarian ($\bar{x} = 74.70$) and permissive parenting ($\bar{x} = 71.79$). However, since none of the means of parenting style was up to the norm (79.57) given by Buss and Perry’ [33] aggression scale, no aggression was found among the adolescents. In addition, standard deviation score of adolescents from permissive parenting care varies more (SD=20.37) than the other parenting care styles; Authoritative (SD=12.71) and Authoritarian (SD=8.57). This implies that adolescents from permissive parenting care style have variant ways of expressing aggression than adolescents from the other two parenting care styles (authoritative and authoritarian). Also, adolescents who have authoritarian type of parenting care style are most likely to express aggression in a particular way than those from the other types of parenting care (authoritative and permissive) [1].

Furthermore, aggressive behaviour did not differ from participants from separated and non-separated homes with mean scores of 74.44 and 74.92 respectively. Since none of the means of parental separation was up to the norm (79.57) given by Buss and Perry’ aggression scale, no aggression also was found among the adolescents. Furthermore, the standard deviation scores; separated (SD=12.10), non-separated (SD=10.96), supports the mean scores, no clear difference was found. This implies that adolescents from both types of homes (separated and non-separated) have similar way of expressing aggression [22].

Source	Type II Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Parental Care (A)	457.274	2	228.637	1.730	.180
Parental Separation (B)	30.308	1	30.308	.229	.633
A x B	192.822	2	96.411	.729	.483
Error	28282.354	214	132.161		
Total	1256266.00	220			

Table 3: Summary table of two-way ANOVA (statistics) for parental care and separation on adolescents' behaviour.

In other to inquire more into parental care and separation on adolescents' aggressive behaviour, an inferential statistics analysis was conducted which is shown in table two.

Table 3 shows no statistical significant difference between parental care and aggressive behaviour of adolescents [$f(2,214)=1.730, P=0.180$]. This implies that parental care had no impact on aggressive behaviour of adolescents. Similarly, no statistical significant difference of parental separation was found on aggressive behaviour of adolescents [$f(1,214)=0.229, P=0.633$]. This implies that adolescents from separated and non-separated homes did not defer on aggressive behaviour. Finally, no statistical significant interaction influence of parental care and parental separation on aggressive behaviour of adolescents was found [$f(2,214)=0.729, P=0.483$].

Discussion of Findings

This study investigated the impact of parental care and separation on aggressive behaviour of adolescents in Owerri. It has been discovered that both parental care and separation have no influence on aggressive behaviour among adolescents in Owerri.

From the descriptive analysis, no aggression was found among adolescents in Owerri based on the three parenting styles. This could be as a result of non-violent culture and Christianity influence among Owerri indigenes. Also, it was found that adolescents from permissive parenting care style have variant ways of expressing aggression than adolescents from the other two parenting care styles (authoritative and authoritarian). In the view of the researchers, because of the laissez-faire nature of discipline and decision making in the family, adolescents from permissive parenting care homes tend to express feelings, emotions, aggression etc in their own ways unlike adolescents from either authoritative or authoritarian where parents instill discipline and have major influence in decision making.

The study also revealed that adolescents who have authoritarian type of parenting care style are most likely to express aggression in a particular way than those from the other types of parenting care (authoritative and permissive). In the view of the researchers, the reason for low variation of the standard deviation of authoritarian parenting care style than others may be because feelings or emotions of adolescents from authoritarian parenting care homes are not put in consideration when decisions are made by their parents. Since they have little or no option in the family and absolute compliance is expected from them, they tend to express aggression in a similar way. This may be because they do not want to disobey their parents and be termed deviants.

From inferential analysis, results show that there is no statistical significant difference between parental care and aggressive behaviour of adolescents. This implies that parental care had no influence on aggressive behaviour of adolescents. This is in line with the studies conducted by Bolge and Richard, and James and Wilshere on parental care and aggressive behaviour of children [31]. Their findings revealed no significant difference on aggressive level of

children reared with different parental styles. Also, the present result agrees with the social learning theory by Bandura who posited that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social contest and can occur through observation. This simply means that adolescent/adolescents do not necessarily need parental care to either become or not become aggressive. However, the works of Nelson and Melin did not support the above finding. Their results showed that parental care had significant influence on aggressive behaviour. The differences in this present finding and others revealed could be as a result of the geographical location where the study took place, family size and the ages of the adolescents selected for the study.

Furthermore, there was no statistical significant difference found on parental separation and aggressive behaviour of adolescents in Owerri. This means that participants from separated and non-separated homes did not differ on aggressive behaviour. The result corroborates with the study of Amato who found that there is no significant impact of parental separation on aggressive behaviour. On the contrary, the findings of Annia, Barak and Hetherington and Elmore did not support the result of this present study. Their results showed that parental separation had significant influence on aggressive behaviour [32].

Finally, no statistical significant interaction influence of parental care and separation on aggressive behaviour of adolescents was found. This implies that parental care and separation in conjunction do not influence adolescents' aggressive behaviour. It follows that aggressive behaviour of adolescents in Owerri may have been copied from peers, Television programmes or elder neighbours, which McLeod, tried to explain in Bandura's social learning theory. To him, aggressive behaviours could be gotten through observation. When an adolescent watches or pays attention to other individuals in his/her environment who exhibit aggression, he/she may imitate such aggressive behaviour in similar cases

Conclusion

This study examined impact of parental care and separation on aggressive behaviour of adolescents in Owerri. It has clearly shown that parental care and separation do not have any statistical significant influence on aggressive behaviour of adolescents in Owerri. Though aggressive behaviour was not found among the participants, the researchers conclude that parental care and separation cannot determine aggression level of adolescents in Owerri. Therefore, further studies are recommended to determine other variables that may lead to aggression among adolescents in Owerri.

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