

Self-Concept as a Correlate of Aggressive Behaviour among Undergraduate Students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

Abstract

Aggressive behaviour is a menace that has lasting consequences on the victims and the perpetrator, which could result in school avoidance, poor academic performance, dropout, and others. Thus, the study investigated the correlation between self-concept and aggressive behaviour among undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. The stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select 720, with 386 male and 334 female participants. An instrument titled “Self-concept and Aggressive Behaviour Questionnaire (SABQ)” was used to collect data for the study. The instrument was subjected to test-retest reliability, and a value of $r=0.77$ was obtained. The research questions were answered using mean summation and average, while the hypotheses were tested with Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation and the t-test statistics. The results revealed a low level of self-concept among respondents; males have a lower self-concept than female undergraduate students. There was a high level of aggressive behaviour among respondents; males have more aggressive behaviour than females. There was significant mean difference between male and female respondents in their self-concept and aggressive behaviour. It was recommended that school guidance counsellors design and implement programmes that could enhance self-concept and reduce aggressive behaviour among undergraduate students of universities.

Keywords: *self-concept, aggressive behaviour, correlates, undergraduates, university*

Introduction

Aggressive behaviour can be viewed as any act resulting in physical and psychological harm to oneself, others or objects in the environment. Aggressive behaviour is a common trend in society, particularly among the youth in higher learning institutions. This behaviour may manifest in different forms ranging from physical (overt) to non-physical (covert) features. Whichever way aggressive behaviour is perpetrated, the consequences are often adverse on the victim on the one hand and the perpetrator on the other hand. Some victims of aggressive behaviour may drop out of school, exhibit school avoidance behaviour, imitate perpetrators and get involved, and develop suicide ideation, to mention a few. Different factors could account for aggressive behaviour among students, of which self-concept may be significant. Since self-concept plays an important role in the overall behaviours of the individual because it forms a person's self-assessment, it is often relevant when considering determinants of aggressive behaviour.

Self-concept is the image one develops about personal ability, potential, and behaviour. This image develops in many ways, including interaction with significant individuals in one's life. According to Beldwin and Hoffmann (2012), self-concept refers to an individual's view of himself or herself in domains where achievement or success is paramount to such a person. Thus, an individual's views about self would interplay with the ability to relate with people and events in the environment where he or she finds self. Onukwufor and Ugwu (2017) viewed self-concept as a person's perception of self, which suggests how one thinks of the ability to carry out specific social tasks and relationships. In this direction, therefore, self-concept may determine the level of social interaction and predict different elements of behaviour such as assertiveness, aggressiveness, bullying, nagging, and anger. People develop and maintain their self-concepts by taking action and then reflecting on what they have done and what others tell them about what they have done. It implies that self-concept emanates from self-evaluation in relation to one's perception of personal potential and judgement of other people. One may infer that when one's self-concept seems inadequate, there is likely to be internal feelings of disappointment which could form violent reactions to other people and objects in the environment, thus referred to as aggression.

Aggressive behaviour is a general social phenomenon because it cuts across ages and statuses. However, aggressive behaviour could be more prominent among undergraduates of higher (university) education owing to many factors which may have to do with their stage of development (adolescence), demanding academic engagements, inadequate learning environment, the influence of media, and poor

welfare structure (such as transportation) on campuses. Aggressive behaviour affects the perpetrator as well as the target.

According to Williams and Chapel (2021), aggressive behaviour is a type of confrontational behaviour in which an individual exerts hostile power that violates the rights of others. This type of confrontation could reflect in verbal or physical expressions. In the school system, aggressive behaviour is a type of behaviour whereby students attempt to stand up for themselves or exert power over others in hostile ways that violate the rights of other students and any person in the school environment. Victims of aggressive behaviour usually feel dominated, embarrassed, guilty, or shamed due to the consequences of the situation. Because aggressive behaviour is a reactionary and impulsive behaviour that often results in violating school rules and regulations and breaking society's norms, it is often considered unacceptable on campuses.

The three types of aggressive behaviour are reactive-expressive (i.e., verbal and physical aggression), reactive-inexpressive (e.g., hostility), and proactive-relational aggression (i.e., aggression that can break human relationships by circulating malicious rumours) (Yamasaki & Nishida, 2009). These three types of aggressive behaviour have their patterns and fundamental effects on the victims and indirectly on the perpetrators. Although the victim sustains physical and emotional damages in most cases, the perpetrator is likely to be socially maligned and isolated. Yamasaki and Nishida (2009) found that higher scores of relational aggression were significantly associated with higher scores of all peer relations difficulties and that higher scores of inexpressive aggression were significantly associated with lower scores of all peer relations. These findings indicate a positive association between aggression and peer relations. Thus, aggressive behaviour could make undergraduate students experience isolation (both psychologically and physically), which in turn might result in depression, school skipping, truancy, poor academic performance and dropout.

Several studies have analysed the relationship between self-concept and violent behaviours such as aggressiveness, bullying, cultism, stealing and vandalism. Torrerrosa, Ingles and Garcia-Fernandez (2011) conducted a study on aggressive behaviour as a predictor of self-concept of a sample of Spanish Compulsory Secondary Education Students. The findings on a sample of 2,022 participants, with 51.09% males, 48.91 females and age ranging from 12 to 16 years, revealed that adolescents with aggressive behaviour were more likely to have lower self-esteem than their non-aggressive peers. Further, adolescents with highly aggressive behaviour also showed higher emotional instability than their non-aggressive counterparts. Thus, there was an association between aggressive behaviour and

students' self-esteem. Taylor et al. (2007) studied self-esteem, academic self-concept, and aggression at school. The study found that students with low self-concept achievement domains were likelier to aggress at school than those with high self-concept. Devi and Chanu (2019) studied the relationship between self-esteem and aggressive behaviour among youths. The study was conducted on 300 participants in Manipur's Imphal-East and Imphal-West areas, with 150 female and 150 male respondents, 150 lower-grade and 150 upper-grade classes. The findings revealed that physical aggression and hostility were significantly associated with self-esteem. Respondents' self-esteem was significantly low, but verbal aggression and anger did not correlate with self-esteem. Ahmed et al. (2016) investigate self-concept and aggression among institutionalised orphans of Kashmir. The study revealed that most of the adolescent orphans have above-average level of self-concept, and most were found to have moderately high level of aggression. It revealed that the self-concept at the moderate level of aggression is adequate. The study further revealed a significant mean difference in the self-concept of male and female adolescent orphans. However, no significant mean difference was found in the aggression level of male and female respondents.

Self-concept and aggressive behaviour are important variables that are germane to not only the moral standard of the students but also the academic activities. One of the major determinants of patterns of interaction among university students is the level of their self-concept. It is because the outcome of an individual's self-assessment forms the springboard of reactions to the environment. Thus, aggressive behaviour may result from self-concept among adolescents in higher educational institutions. Therefore, this study considered it imperative to investigate self-concept as a correlate of aggressive behaviour among undergraduate students at university.

Problem Statement

Aggression describes various socially unacceptable behaviours undertaken to exert dominance or cause fear or threat. Aggressive behaviour is a serious phenomenon that hampers school attendance and academic activities among students. Moreover, this behaviour is debilitating because it strains and ruins interpersonal relationships among students, thereby preventing and limiting the possibility of group learning, consultation and other worthwhile engagements that require interpersonal relationships. The interplay between self-concept and aggressive behaviour cannot be underrated. Perhaps, the measure of self-concept

could be the same as the level of aggressive behaviour among university students. In addition, the variables of gender might be of significance to the self-concept, aggressive behaviour and relationship between the dependent and independent variables of this study. Thus, this study investigated self-concept as a correlate of aggressive behaviour among undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of self-concept of undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria?
2. What is the level of aggressive behaviour among undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

- H0₁:** There is no significant correlation between self-concept and aggressive behaviour among undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria.
- H0₂:** There is no significant difference in the self-concept between male and female undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria.
- H0₃:** There is no significant difference in aggressive behaviour between male and female undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria.

Method

Population and Sampling: This study adopted the descriptive survey of correlation type. The study used the quantitative approach to data collection and analysis. The total population of undergraduate students across the 15 faculties and 90 academic programmes as of 2021 was 48,000 (The World University Ranking, 2022). The stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select 720 respondents from the University of Ilorin faculties. Both male and female students were included in the study's sample.

Instrument: The researcher designed a structured questionnaire titled “Self-Concept and Aggressive Behaviour Questionnaire” (SABQ) and adopted it for data collection in this study. The questionnaire has three sections: Section A sought respondents’ personal information, while sections B and C, with 10 items each, measured self-concept and aggressive behaviour among the respondents, respectively. The instrument was patterned after the four 4 – 1 point.

Scoring: The highest average mean score in sections B and C was 4, while the lowest was 1. The average of mean summation was determined in sections B and D. The mid-point mean average was 2.50 (i.e., $4+3+2+1 = 10/4$). Thus, the mean average from 2.50-4.00 implied high self-concept and aggressive behaviour, respectively, while the mean average from 1.00-2.49 indicated low self-concept and aggressive behaviour, respectively.

Ethical Procedure: A consent form seeking voluntary participation was attached to each questionnaire form: participants were required to read through the consent form and tick “Yes” for voluntary participation and “No” for decline. Therefore, out of 831 questionnaire forms distributed, 720 received voluntary responses and were used for the study.

Data Analysis: The frequency counts and percentages were used to analyse the respondents’ personal information, while mean analysis was used to answer research questions 1 and 2. Pearson’s Product Moment Coefficient and t-test statistics were used to test the three hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level.

Results

Table 1. Personal Information

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	386	53.61
Female	334	46.39
Total	720	100.0

Table 1 shows that more males (53.61%) participated than females (46.39%). It is a fair representation of the university’s population distribution of undergraduate students by gender, which is 41:µ Kwara state, Nigeria µ59 ratio of females to males (The World University Ranking, 2022).

Research Question 1: What is the level of self-concept of undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria?

Table 2. The mean and mean average showing the level of self-concept of undergraduate students

I believe	\bar{x}
I am better than other students	2.60
I am emotionally accurate	2.59
I have the confidence to overcome challenges	2.56
I have the ability to perform excellently	2.51
I can relate moderately to others	2.50
I am always optimistic	2.48
My life has great value	2.44
I can always express myself anywhere	2.40
I am reliable	2.31
I have control over my life	2.11
	$\Sigma \bar{x} = 24.50$
	$\mu = 2.45$

The result in Table shows that the mean summation was 24.50 while the mean average (μ) was 2.45. Since the instrument was a four-point Likert scale format, the mid-point was 2.50. Thus, with a mean average of 2.45, the results imply that undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Nigeria have a low self-concept.

Research Question 2: What is the level of aggressive behaviour among undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria?

Table 3. Mean and mean average of aggressive behaviour among undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

I do express my feeling to other students in the following ways:	\bar{x}
Sending threatening messages	3.72
Retaliating when being hurt	3.70
Speaking angrily	3.67
Using derogatory language	3.65
Isolating course mates	3.61
Hitting others when being hurt	3.58
Dominating others in the classroom	3.55
Teasing others to catch fun	3.50
Yelling at other students	3.47
Spitting on other students	3.46
	$\Sigma \bar{x} = 35.91$
	$\mu = 3.59$

Results in Table 3 reveal that the mean summation was 35/91 while the mean average (μ) was 3.59, which is higher than the mid-point mean of 2.50. Thus, the level of aggressive behaviour among undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin is sending threatening messages, retaliating when hurt and speaking angrily.

H0₁: There is no significant correlation between self-concept and aggressive behaviour among undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Table 4. Correlation between self-concept and aggressive behaviour among undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

Variables	\bar{x}	SD	Df	Cal r.	Crit r	p-val
Self-concept	32.16	9.79				
Aggressive behaviour	28.13	6.08	718	0.13	0.17	*0.00

*Sign., $p < 0.05$

The result in Table 4 shows that the p-value 0.00 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, which implies that the hypothesis was rejected. Thus, a significant correlation exists between self-concept and aggressive behaviour among undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. It implies that the self-concept of undergraduate students at the university will always correlate with aggressive behaviour among them.

H0₂: There is no significant difference in the self-concept between male and female undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Table 5. The Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test between male and female respondents

Variables	N	\bar{x}	SD	Df	Cal r.	Crit r	p-val
Male	386	27.15	7.92				
Female	334	25.19	5.17	719	4.13	1.96	*0.00

*Sign., $p < 0.05$

The results in Table 5 reveal that the p-value 0.00 is less than the alpha level of 0.05. Hence, the hypothesis was rejected. There is a significant difference in the self-concept between male and female undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin. Since the study generally revealed a low level of self-concept, it implies that male respondents, with a mean of 27.15, have more low self-concept than their female counterparts, with a mean of 25.19.

H0₃: There is no significant difference in aggressive behaviour between male and female undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

Table 6. The Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test between male and female respondents

Variables	N	\bar{x}	SD	Df	Cal r.	Crit r	p-val
Male	386	31.14	8.74	719	2.14	1.96	*0.02
Female	334	28.03	7.11				

*Sign., $p < 0.05$

The results in Table 6 show that the p-value 0.02 is less than the alpha level of 0.05, which implies that the hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant difference between male and female respondents' aggressive behaviour. Further, male respondents, with a mean of 31.14, exhibit more aggressive behaviour than their female counterparts, with a mean of 28.03.

Discussion

The results of the respondents' self-concept measure indicated a low level. All the ten items on self-concept were worded in a positive direction, but the mean average of 2.45 was below the mid-point value of 2.50. This finding is not in tandem with Ahmad et al. (2016), which found self-concept above average level among institutionalised orphans in Kashmir. One may adduce the reason for the fact that institutionalised orphans might receive special attention and care that could contribute to the development of a high level of self-concept, unlike undergraduate students in a conventional university environment with general experiences of systemic inadequacy. In most cases, undergraduate students of universities face numerous challenges ranging from the learning environment to interpersonal relationships, which could contribute to having low self-concept.

The result of the measure of aggressive behaviour showed that respondents exhibited a high level of aggressive behaviour. The mean average of 3.59 against the mid-point value of 2.50 and the maximum point of 4.00 indicates a high level of aggressive behaviour. Ahmad et al. (2016) found a high level of aggression among institutionalised orphans of Kashmir. Thus, the present study corroborates the earlier finding. Since the undergraduate students (in the present study) have low self-concept, one may not be surprised that their aggressive behaviour is high

because aggressiveness could be a response to feelings of inadequacy embedded in low self-concept. Torregrosa et al. (2011) reported that adolescents with aggressive behaviour were likelier to have lower self-esteem than their non-aggressive counterparts.

The result of hypothesis one revealed that the self-concept of undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin, Nigeria correlated with aggressive behaviour. It implies that self-concept will always predict aggressive behaviour among undergraduate university students. This result corroborates the findings of Taylor et al. (2007), which established that students with low self-concept were likelier to aggress at school than those with high self-concept. Devis and Chanu (2019) also found that physical aggression and hostility were significantly associated with self-esteem. The reason for the correlation between self-concept and aggressive behaviour could be that the latter is premised on the expression of the former, whereby individuals try to façade the feeling of inadequacy by protecting selves through aggressive actions. In particular, students with low self-concept might exhibit aggressive behaviour as protection against incompetence owing to self-evaluation, especially in interpersonal relationships.

Further, there was a significant difference in self-concept between male and female university undergraduate students. The result showed that male students have low self-concept than their female counterparts. Perhaps the reason could be that female folks are becoming more self-confident because of the various campaigns against gender discrimination. In addition, different policies are in place to protect female students at the University of Ilorin. Such regulation includes protection against sexual harassment and intimidation, whereas male students have no special protection or treatment.

There was a significant difference in aggressive behaviour between male and female undergraduate students. The difference indicated that male undergraduate students ($\bar{x} = 31.14$) have a higher level of aggressive behaviour than their female ($\bar{x} = 28.03$) counterparts. This finding disagrees with Ahmad et al. (2016), who found no significant difference in the aggression level between male and female respondents in Kashmir. Aggressive behaviour could be more prominent among male individuals in Nigeria owing to the domineering nature of men. The practice of patriarchy as part of the culture gives males much advantage to exert power and control in society, which invariably may increase the level of aggressive behaviour since the exercise of authority is more culturally permissive for males than females.

Conclusion

This study's findings show a low self-concept among university undergraduate students, which might be responsible for different maladaptive behaviours such as aggression and related acts on campus. Aggressive behaviour was found at a high level among undergraduate students of the university, particularly male students, which could be tantamount to peace and tranquillity on campuses if not checked. Self-concept significantly correlates with aggressive behaviour because the level of self-concept of undergraduate university students is low. Thus, finding solutions to low self-concept and aggressive behaviour among university undergraduate students is imperative.

Recommendations

- School counselling psychologists should design and implement programmes that could enhance the high level of self-concept among university undergraduate students.
- School guidance counsellors should conduct assertiveness training to reduce aggressiveness among undergraduate students.
- When working on programmes to enhance the self-concept of undergraduate students, attention should be placed more on males.
- Attention should be given to male undergraduate students whenever counsellors are working on reducing aggressive behaviour among undergraduate students.

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