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Sharun P

M.Phil. Scholar, SRMIST,
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Dr. K Vaithianathan

Director, Department of
Physical Education, SRMIST,
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Aggression

Sharun P and Dr. K Vaithianathan

Abstract

Aggression is overt, often harmful, social interaction with the intention of inflicting damage or other unpleasantness upon another individual. It may occur either in retaliation or without provocation. In humans, frustration due to blocked goals can cause aggression. Human aggression can be classified into direct and indirect aggression; whilst the former is characterized by physical or verbal behavior intended to cause harm to someone, the latter is characterized by behavior intended to harm the social relations of an individual or group.

Keywords: Aggression

Introduction

In definitions commonly used in the social sciences and behavioral sciences, aggression is an action or response by an individual that delivers something unpleasant to another person. Some definitions include that the individual must intend to harm another person. Predatory or defensive behavior between members of different species may not be considered aggression in the same sense.

Aggression can take a variety of forms, which may be expressed physically, or communicated verbally or non-verbally: including anti-predator aggression, defensive aggression (fear-induced), predatory aggression, dominance aggression, inter-male aggression, resident-intruder aggression, maternal aggression, species-specific aggression, sex-related aggression, territorial aggression, isolation-induced aggression, irritable aggression, and brain-stimulation-induced aggression (hypothalamus). There are two subtypes of human aggression: (1) controlled-instrumental subtype (purposeful or goal-oriented); and (2) reactive-impulsive subtype (often elicits uncontrollable actions that are inappropriate or undesirable). Aggression differs from what is commonly called assertiveness, although the terms are often used interchangeably among laypeople (as in phrases such as "an aggressive salesperson")

Aggression can have adaptive benefits or negative effects. Aggressive behavior is an individual or collective social interaction that is a hostile behavior with the intention of inflicting damage or harm. Two broad categories of aggression are commonly distinguished. One includes affective (emotional) and hostile, reactive, or retaliatory aggression that is a response to provocation, and the other includes instrumental, goal-oriented or predatory, in which aggression is used as a mean to achieve a goal.¹ An example of hostile aggression would be a person who punches someone who insulted him or her. An instrumental form of aggression would be armed robbery. Research on violence from a range of disciplines lend some support to a distinction between affective and predatory aggression. However, some researchers question the usefulness of a hostile versus instrumental distinction in humans, despite its ubiquity in research, because most real-life cases involve mixed motives and interacting causes.

A number of classifications and dimensions of aggression have been suggested. These depend on such things as whether the aggression is verbal or physical; whether or not it involves relational aggression such as covert bullying and social manipulation. whether harm to others is intended or not; whether it is carried out actively or expressed passively; and whether the aggression is aimed directly or indirectly. Classification may also encompass aggression-related emotions (e.g. anger) and mental states (e.g. impulsivity, hostility). Aggression may occur in response to non-social as well as social factors, and can have a close

Correspondence

Sharun P

M.Phil. Scholar, SRMIST,
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

relationship with stress coping style. Aggression may be displayed in order to intimidate.

The operative definition of aggression may be affected by moral or political views. Examples are the axiomatic moral view called the non-aggression principle and the political rules governing the behavior of one country toward another. Likewise in competitive sports, or in the workplace, some forms of aggression may be sanctioned and others not (see Workplace aggression). Aggressive behaviors are associated with adjustment problems and several psychopathological symptoms such as Antisocial Personality Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, and Intermittent Explosive Disorder.

Biological approaches conceptualize aggression as an internal energy released by external stimuli, a product of evolution through natural selection, part of genetics, a product of hormonal fluctuations. Psychological approaches conceptualize aggression as a destructive instinct, a response to frustration, an affect excited by a negative stimulus, a result of observed learning of society and diversified reinforcement, a resultant of variables that affect personal and situational environments.

Factors Influencing Aggression

Hormonal imbalance

Hormonal imbalance in the body can contribute to aggressive behaviors in individuals. High levels of testosterone are associated with aggression in all species. Generally, there are high levels of testosterone in males and this explains why males are more aggressive than females. A reduction of testosterone even through castration reduces aggressive behavior. Another hormone associated with aggression is serotonin. Individuals augmented with artificial serotonin saw reduced aggressive behaviors (Sante, 2004).

Genetically influenced

Aggressive behaviors are believed to be inherited thus being passed on from generation to generation through the DNA of individuals. This has been witnessed where both a father and son display aggressive behaviors. Genes or the genetic component of individuals influence personality and trait disorders thus determining the behaviors of an individual. If there is a biological background for aggressive behavior, then the risk of aggressive behavior in children will be high (Jones, 2005).

Blood chemistry

Blood chemistry can contribute to aggressive behaviors. Alcohol in the blood encourages deindividuation. This is the decrease of self awareness of individuals which leads to the decreasing ability to accurately perceive the outcome of aggressive behaviors. It discourages the normal brain function by weakening brain mechanism which normally holds back impulsive behaviors such as aggression (Glicksohn, 2002, pp. 120). In addition, low blood sugar can result to aggressive behaviors.

Physiological illnesses and Temperament

Serious illnesses such as cancer may affect the behavior or moods of individuals. Due to stress brought about by such illnesses, the individual may be aggressive. Such conditions therefore play an indirect role in the aggressive behavior of some individuals. In addition, temperament may also be associated with aggression. People who lose their tempers quickly tend to be more aggressive than people who have

deliberate temperaments.

Psychosocial Factors

Drive/Psychological frustrations

When people are blocked from achieving their goals it leads to frustration which can consequently lead to aggression. It is an expression to the frustration of a goal oriented behavior by an outside source. Such goals include basic requirements like food, shelter, food, water, sex, love or recognition. Individuals stuck in negative situations where they only see negativity feel threatened and as a result respond in aggressive manners. Therefore, aggressive manner in this case is a result of a reaction to a situation in which an individual is in.

Social learning

People may acquire aggressive behaviors through experience or observational learning processes. This provides guidelines for describing beliefs as well as expectations that channel social behaviors. The social influences such as role models, reinforcements and situational factors contribute to expression of aggressive behaviors. Children learn to be aggressive when they observe violence in mass media and therefore learn aggressive scripts. Moreover, observation of violence in the family may result to aggressive behaviors in children (Anderson & Bushman, 2002) ^[5].

Health Causes of Aggressive Behavior

Many mental health conditions can contribute to aggressive behavior. For example, these conditions include:

- Autism spectrum disorder
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Bipolar disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Conduct disorder
- Intermittent explosive disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Brain damage can also limit your ability to control aggression. You may experience brain damage as the result of:

- Stroke
- Head injury
- Certain infections
- Certain illnesses

Different health conditions contribute to aggression in different ways. For example, if you have autism or bipolar disorder, you might act aggressively when you feel frustrated or unable to speak about your feelings. If you have conduct disorder, you will act aggressively on purpose.

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