AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR AMONG SWAZI UPPER PRIMARY AND JUNIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR ONGOING EDUCATIONAL REFORMS CONCERNING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Swaziland is planning to introduce inclusive education as part of education for all. The innovation may benefit learners with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD). A purposive teacher sample (N = 47) was used to generate and identify behavioural problems that are prevalent in Swazi schools. Aggression was one of the many conduct disorders cited. Using a purposive sample of 300 students, the study found aggression to be indeed a problem among upper primary and junior high school students. The type of school attended was found to be correlated with aggression. Students with moderate to severe aggressive behaviours were found on all categories of learners used in the study. However a significant difference in the number of aggressive students was obtained on only two variables, the type of school students attended and the kind of guardians students lived with at home. There were more students with aggressive tendencies in government schools than other types of schools. Furthermore, aggressive students lived mainly with both biological parents. Teachers rely mainly on punishment to deal with aggressive students. The findings have implications for the ongoing educational reforms concerning inclusive education in Swaziland. Three major recommendations were made to address them. Teacher skills in handling aggressive cases need to be enhanced by both preservice and inservice courses. School counselors need to be appointed to provide suitable psychological intervention. Finally, a more detailed investigation using qualitative procedures was recommended to gain in-depth insights into the problem and its solutions.

The need to study students' behavioural disorders is increasing in the world these days as more psychotic incidents of students fatally wounding or killing teachers and fellow pupils in schools for various reasons are being reported by the news media. Such reports portray teaching as an unsafe, dangerous and security-risk profession. Students with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD), learning disabilities (LD), and those who live under at-risk or difficult circumstances constitute newer categories of exceptional learners in Swaziland. Although these students tend to be the majority in exceptional populations of learners in Swaziland and other developing countries, their education is usually accorded a low status along with the education of those who are gifted / talented. For example there are no special schools and centres for EBD, LD, the at-risk, and gifted students in Swaziland and many developing countries. On the contrary top priority is often accorded to the education of students in the older traditional categories of disabilities (blind, deaf, physical, intellectual, and communication) and there are many special schools and centres for learners with such special needs in most developing countries. Consequently as a result of these problems there

are few or no incidence statistics about people with EBD, LD, or those living in unusual conditions in some developing countries such as Swaziland. The objectives of the present study were to:

- Determine the student behavioural problems prevalent in Swazi upper primary and junior secondary schools.
- Measure the relationship between aggression and selected demographic variables.
- Assess the nature and extent of student aggression.
- Find out if there are differences in aggression between various categories of students.
- Identify the strategies teachers frequently use to manage student behaviour problems.

Types of Aggressive Behaviour

There are many different kinds of behavioural disorders. Aggression is just one of the several known categories of conduct problems. The behavioural disabilities that are related to aggression can be divided into two main groups: verbal and physical. Verbal aggression includes acts such as using insulting language, displaying anger, threatening, swearing, and being sarcastic, all in order to cause emotional or psychological pain. On the other hand physical aggression aims to cause bodily damage and includes bullying, destructing, vandalism, gangsterism and fighting. According to Shaffer (2002) an aggressive act is any form of behaviour designed to harm or injure a living being. In aggression, the desire to harm is intentional rather than accidental (Sdorow, 1995; Matlin, 1998). Longitudinal research on the long-term stability of aggression shows that the trait is a reasonably stable attribute. However research also indicates that the rate of physical aggression (fighting) tends to decline from middle childhood through adolescence (Shaffer, 2002). Aggression is different from and should not be confused with rough-and-tumble play that does not have any harmful intent (Humphrey and Smith, 1984; Shaffer, 2002). The following are some of the numerous types of aggression commonly found in the literature.

- Relational aggression (also known as social aggression). This occurs where a person, usually a female, behaves maliciously with the intention of damaging an adversary's self-esteem, friendship, or social status (Shaffer, 2002). Other forms of relational aggression include: snubbing or ignoring another person to make him / her feel bad; not talking with a person following an argument; and spreading malicious gossip / lies about others (Shaffer, 2002). An example of relational aggression happened in Brunei Darussalam when a teenage girl gave a false story accusing a man of raping her (Ezam, 2003). Relational aggression is most common among females.

- Verbal abuse (nonphysical aggression). The examples of this form of emotional or expressive aggression include name-calling, teasing, quarreling, extortion, intimidating, vicious gossiping, and cruel rumour campaigns (Christie and Christie, 1999; Nicholson & Ayer, 1997). The intention here is to harm or injure another persons' feelings indirectly.

- Physical aggression. There are many examples of this form of hostile aggression that include, but are not limited to bullying, kicking, molesting, harassing, biting, hitting, pushing, and torturing. Other examples of hostile aggressives are street gangsters, school bullies, and children who repeatedly attack their peers (Shaffer, 2002). Shaffer adds that the incidence of bullying by school age girls occurs just as frequently as is true for boys. Habitual bullies however aggress mainly those who are provocative, passive, weak, and socially isolated / withdrawn (Olweus, 1993). Violence is used to cause destruction and the aggression is both direct and overt.

- Retaliatory (reactive) aggression: making an attack in return for a similar attack occurs where a person behaves aggressively when there is a real or imagined provocation

from another or other people (Shaffer, 2002). This is often done in form of self-defense or revenge.

- Instrumental (proactive) aggression: occurs when a person behaves aggressively, not necessarily, to revenge, but to get a reward to satisfy specific personal goals such as gaining access to a certain object, space, or privilege and the aggressor is quite confident that aggression will pay off (Shaffer, 2002; Mussen, Conger, Kagan, & Huston, 1984). An example of this type of aggression are bullies who beat up other kids because they get payoffs of various types from their actions.

Causes of Aggressive Behaviour

There are many possible causes of aggression in humans. The causes can, however, be divided into two broad categories: biological (chromosomal, genetic and hormonal), and environmental (classical and operant conditioning, social learning or modeling, child-rearing practices, parental / teacher leadership style, and reinforcements). The following are examples of some casual factors from this wide range of sources.

- Biological factors. Although biology is implicated in the causation of human aggression, many studies on this issue have had either inconclusive or inconsistent results (Pinel, 1990). For instance the inconsistent evidence that testosterone affects the aggressive behaviour of humans is, according to Pinel (1990), attributable to two factors. First, hormones have less of an effect on human aggression than they do on aggression in other species. Second, the tests of aggression that have been used to study human aggression are markedly different from those that have proven successful in the study of aggression in other species such as rats. Despite this limitation a few points can be noted from sources such as Pinel (1990) about the role of biological factors in human aggression. First, studies of human patients in clinical settings indicate that brain stimulation can elicit aggressive affect. Second, the stimulation of the lateral hypothalamus has been shown to elicit predatory, defensive and social aggression in all species. Third, the fact that social aggression in many species occurs more frequently between male than between females is often attributed to the organizational and activation effects of testosterone. Biologically, males are more aggressive physically and verbally than females (Carlson,1987; Mussen, Conger, Kagan, & Huston, 1987). However the tendency for boys to act more aggressively than girls is least in toddlers (Shaffer, 2002). Females use more social (relational) aggression than overt aggression. Fourth, those who advocate psychosurgery for the treatment of human aggression usually recommend lesions to the amygdala. Fifth, it is possible that violent criminal behavior is hereditary because it tends to run in families (Matlin, 1998).

- Individual characteristics. The main possible contributing factors to aggression here include having a difficult temperament, inappropriate social skills, misinterpreting other people's behaviour as hostile, and inability to find nonaggressive solutions to conflicts (Salvin, 1994).

- Home and school environments. The possible source or cause of aggressive tendencies here is the negative influence of parents and teachers whose parenting and leadership styles are dictatorial, coercive, or oppressive (Mwamwenda, 1995). Children model these undesirable aggressive behaviours. Out-of-control children are typically reared in coercive home environments (Shaffer, 2002). In addition, factors such as being cold and rejecting, ignoring aggression among children, constant or erratic use of physical punishment to control aggression, nuturing aggressive tendencies, high permissiveness toward aggressive acts, and low punitiveness to aggressive behaviours can all facilitate the development of aggression among children (Shaffer, 2002). Shaffer further says that child rearing in low income families encourages violence in three ways: encouraging children to respond forcibly

to provocations; applying physical punishment such as spanking; and lack of parental monitoring of children.

- Peer influence. Making friendship with antisocial peers or belonging to deviant-oriented peer groups whose members have antisocial attitudes and behaviours can lead to the development of aggressive tendencies through modeling violent peers.

- Exposure to media violence. A lot has been researched and written on this matter. Many studies have confirmed the contribution of the electronic media (television, video and internet) to the development of aggression and violence among young people from infancy to adolescence (Shaffer, 2002). Young people love watching too much action – packed violent programs on television, video and internet. They also like playing violent television, video and internet include Meeky Mouse, Akira, Spyderman, Mutant Ninja Turtles, Counter Strike, Mortal Kombat, Batman, Karate, boxing, and wrestling. Many young people see aggressive figures in these brutal programs as their heroes. They model their aggressive behaviours and get reinforced vicariously while watching or playing the program / game on the television, video, or internet.

- Community and social factors. Tolerance and acceptance of aggression and violence in the community or society increase the likelihood that children brought up in these contexts will become aggressive and violent. This is because aggressive behaviour is largely learned and maintained in a manner similar to the other learned behaviours (Craig, 1980). According to Shaffer (2002) aggression is socialised in three main ways. First, parents play rougher with sons than with girls. Second, parents discourage daughters' aggression more than sons' aggression. Third, physically rough play is part of the androgynous gender role.

Prevention of Aggressive Behaviour

Aggression has many psychological effects and social costs on both the perpetrator and victim. For instance the aggressor may be isolated due to peer rejection, have no long – term friend(s), and be expelled from school. The victim looses freedom, forfeits self – assertion, becomes submissive and lives under fear. Aggression can disrupt the school's educational processes and disturb group and intergroup relationships in the school community. Because of its many adverse impacts, aggression should be prevented or minimized in all social contexts (home, school, and work). The best programs to reduce aggressive behaviours are those which are preventative and family-focused. Parents and teachers can reduce aggression by removing aggressive toys, videos, and games from the playrooms thereby creating non aggressive environments (Shaffer, 2002). Aggression can be reduced by addressing most of the non biological factors that cause it. Parents and teachers can, for example, also control the type of programs and games children watch and play on television, video and internet at home and school. Unfortunately most parents and teachers in developing countries are still not very computer literate and can not effectively use programs or applications such as "Stop Pop Up" that can block access to unwanted internet sites with aggression, violence, sex or pornography (Lefrencois, 2001). Although aggression can not be reduced to zero, there are many procedures that can decrease it significantly. These include the cognitive behaviour modification scheme, schedules of reinforcement and behaviour shaping under operant conditioning, the aggression replacement training, ART model (Glick, 1996), and the whole school approach to bullying (Olweus, 1993). Anti-violence intervention programs in schools have been shown to be effective as early as kindergarten (Shaffer, 2002).

Method

Design

The study adopted the field survey approach to investigate the problem. Field survey research has many limitations which are known by both researchers and users of research results. For instance, the presence of the researcher during data collection (by interview, observation or

questionnaire) may have effects that can sensitise the research participants to give socially desirable responses to research items. In addition, the outcomes of a survey study might not show cause-and-effect relationship among the variables probed. Several ethical measures and precautions were taken during the conduct of the study to reduce researcher effects. Despite the weakness, the rationale for using the field research method was three-fold: first, to involve as many students as possible in exploring the problem; second, to give on-the-spot assistance to research participants who needed help about completing the research instrument; and third, to generate research questions or hypotheses for further detailed investigation.

Samples

The study used two nonprobability samples: teachers and students. The purposive teacher sample consisted of 47 serving and highly experienced teachers. The purpose of this sample was to generate and identify behavioural problems that were deemed to be prevalent in Swazi primary and secondary schools. The teacher sample consisted of 20 males and 27 females. Most of them taught in primary schools (28) while the rest (19) were secondary school teachers. They represented both rural schools (26) and urban schools (21). All taught at coeducation schools. Each had a diploma qualification in education. The teachers' age ranged from 25 to 54 (mean = 34.86; SD = 6.93). Their teaching experience ranged from 5 to 20 years (Mean = 11.50; SD = 4.76).

According to the last education census statistics, Swaziland has about 539 primary schools with 213,041 students and 51 junior high schools with 4,943 students (Central Statistics Office, 2000). The study could not use all these schools and students due to lack of time and other constraints. Instead, a sample of 300 students was selected purposively from 15 schools for use in the study. There were only three criteria for inclusion of schools and students in the study sample. First, research participants were drawn from schools with ease of access in terms of transport. Second, students were recruited from a variety of schools (upper primary, junior secondary , urban and rural schools, and government, mission and private schools) to have a wide range of opinions on the research problem. Third, both genders were represented in the study. The student sample consisted of an equal number of males (150) and females (150). They were in both rural schools (170) and urban schools (130). The students represented three types of schools: government (165); church / mission (86); and private (49). Of the 300 students, 141 were in upper primary school while 159 were in junior secondary school.They originally came from all parts of Swaziland: Hhohho (119); Manzini (96); Shiselweni (10); and Lubombo (75). The age range of the students was 10-20 years (Mean = 15.42; SD = 2.17).

Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect the data for the study. The first self-report instrument administered to the teacher sample was constructed by the researcher. This instrument was a checklist. The checklist had three sections collected teachers' biodata, their ratings of aggressive behaviours prevalent in schools, and strategies teachers use to solve them. Although the instrument did not lend itself calculable to quantitative evidence of reliability, five former colleagues of the researcher at the University of Swaziland judged it to have had adequate content validity.

The second self-report instrument administered to the student sample was adapted from Townend (1994). The instrument had a demographical section which collected students' biodata using eight items. The rest of the instrument consisted of 80 mixed items measuring passiveness, manipulativeness, assertiveness, and aggressiveness (20 items for each behavioural trait). A linguist at the University of Swaziland was used to adapt 11 of the 80 items to suit the education level and language skills of the students. This modification was done without altering the original meaning of the effected items. Of the 80 items, only 20 measuring aggression were relevant for this study. The other 60 items were allowed to remain in the instrument to control classical measurement errors, social desirability and to

prevent students from developing a response set. The instrument was pretested using a class of 41 Grade 7 students at one of the upper primary schools. The Cronbach alpha reliabilities ranged from .77 for aggressiveness to .83 for assertiveness items (passiveness .79 and manipulativeness .80). The instrument was also rated to have had high content validity by five former colleagues of the researcher at the University of Swaziland. In addition, interscale correlations were all negative and mostly low (aggression vs. assertiveness: rho (41) = - .111, $p > .05$; aggression / passiveness = - .356, $p > .05$; aggression / manipulativeness = - .044, $p > .05$). Aggression was thus different from assertion, passivity and manipulativeness.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed in a variety of ways to meet the objectives of the study stated earlier. To describe the two samples adequately biodaata were analysed by descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. The teachers' checklist of behavioural problems thought to be prevalent in Swazi schools was scored by frequencies and percentages to determine the major problems. Spearman's rank-order correlation (rho) was used to assess the relationship between the students' demographic characteristics and aggression. This analysis was performed to identify variables that could be investigated in future in-depth studies for possible causal connections with aggression. Descriptive statistics (Mean, Mode, Median and standard deviation) were used to analyse the students' aggression data. This analysis was conducted to give insights into the extent of aggression among the students as one whole group. After this, aggression data were put into three score intervals recommended by Townend (19944). Using cross tabulation, frequencies in each score interval were obtained per subsample or category of each demographic variable. This information enabled the researcher to compute chi-squares to find out if there were any significant differences in aggression between subsamples of students based on demographic variables. The justification for using the descriptive and nonparametric statistics (rho and x^2) was based on three reasons. First, both samples were nonprobability. Second, nonprobability samples provide data sets that are distribution-free in terms of the statistical assumptions of normality and random errors. Third, only non-inferential statistics can be used to analyse non-random data.

Results

Aggressive behaviour in schools

According to the teachers surveyed, there seems to be a considerable number of behaviour problems in Swazi primary and junior secondary schools (Table 1). Of the fourteen conduct disorders presented in the checklist, three (fighting, destructiveness, and bullying) are highly related to aggression. Among these three, fighting and bullying feature prominently as major problems.

Table 1
Behavioral problems common in schools (N = 47)

Behaviour	Frequency*	Percentage*
Jealous	22	46
Stealing	45	96
Fighting	43	89
Disruptive / hyperactive	37	79
Attention-seeking	37	79
Cheating / lying	47	100
Drug abuse	27	57
Destructive	17	36
Sex offences	29	61
Truant	30	64
Complainants	24	51
Bullying	44	93
Smoking	29	61
Gambling	14	29

* Non-additive frequencies and percentages.

Relationship between aggression and demographic variables

The literature reviewed in this study revealed that behaviour problems are caused by many factors. In some cases, factors interact to cause a single or multiplicity of behaviour disorders. From eight biographical variables used in this study, only one (type of school attended) was found to be significantly associated with aggression (Table 2). The connection is however inverse and being a correlation no cause and effect are implied at this stage. Only one variable (guardians) neared significance at the .05 level.

Table 2

Relationship between aggression and selected demographic characteristics (N = 300)

Variable	rho
Gender	.112
Age	.087
Location of school attended	.014
Type of school attended	-.196**
Region of origin	.076
Guardians	.045
Practicing religion	.060
Level of education enrolled	.027

** P < .01 (two tailed)

Amount and extent of student aggression

The study did not find much evidence of severe aggression in the students surveyed contrary to the views of the teacher sample. For instance there were only few students in the 14-20 (severe aggression) score interval and the largest aggression score was only 16 rather than 20, the highest possible maximum (Table 3). The distribution of aggression scores was approximately normal as indicated by central tendency measures. Despite this there was a large number of students in the mild-to-moderate range of the scale (7-13 score band) who were potentially aggressive. The commonest score (mode) fell in this range.

Table 3

Analysis of Student Aggression scores (N = 300)

Attribute	Score	Frequency*	Percentage*
Lowest aggression score	1.00	1	0.30
Highest aggression score	16.00	2	0.70
Mean	9.00	23	8.00
Mode	8.00	37	12.30
Median	8.00	37	12.30
Little or no aggression	0-6	80	26.70
Mild to moderate aggression	7-13	202	67.30
Severe to profound aggression	14-20	18	6.00

* Non-additive frequencies and percentages

Differences in aggression between various subsamples

In terms of the aggression categories recommended by Townend (1994) two points were noted. First, there were a few students with severe aggressive behaviours (14-20 score range) in all the subgroups (see Table 4). Second, there were more students with moderate aggressive behaviours (7-13 score range) among the males, in 16-20 year-olds, in urban schools, in government schools, at junior secondary school level, in students who stay with both parents, and among those who claimed to be practicing religion. Significant differences in aggression between various categories of students were, however, obtained on only two variables: location of the schools attended and the students' guardians (Table 4).

Table 4
Differences in aggression between various groups (N = 300)

Variable	Group	(n)	Frequencies in Score Categories 0-6	7-13	14-20	Chisquare (df)
Gender	Males	(150)	37	103	10	0.75
	Females	(150)	43	99	8	(2)
Age	10-15 years	(140)	41	88	11	2.97
	16-20 years	(160)	39	114	7	(2)
Location of School	Rural	(170)	46	110	14	3.69
	Urban	(130)	34	94	4	(2)
Type of School	Government	(165)	32	117	16	18.16**
	Church / Mission	(86)	33	51	2	
	Private	(49)	15	34	10	(4)
Level of education	Upper Primary	(123)	38	77	8	2.18
	Junior secondary	(177)	42	125	10	(2)
Region of origin	Hhohho	(119)	39	77	3	8.04
	Manzini	(96)	19	69	8	
	Shiselweni	(10)	2	7	1	(6)
	Lubombo	(75)	20	49	6	
Guardian(s)	Both parents	(135)	41	86	8	15.85*
	Father	(27)	3	19	5	
	Mother	(90)	27	61	2	(8)
	Grand parent(s)	(36)	6	27	3	
	Other people	(12)	3	9	0	
Practicing religion	Yes	(237)	65	159	13	0.75
	No	(63)	15	43	5	(2)

* $p < .05$
** $P < .01$

Control of student behaviour problems in schools

Swazi teachers appear to use a variety of techniques to address behaviour problems in schools. A representative list of some of the strategies employed is presented in Table 5. Unfortunately punishment, an aversive or negative reinforcement that is supposed to be used sparingly and as a last resort, is overused. The more desirable procedures of discussing the problem with the student, parents, and school counsellor (in form of counselling and guidance) are underutilised. One of the factors contributing to this problem is that schools lack trained and experienced counsellors / school psychologists to help with the management of behavioural cases especially aggressives.

Table 5
Teacher strategies to behaviour management (N = 47)

Action(Percentage*)	Frequency*
Ignore the problematic student (25)	12
Refer the student to the headteacher (71)	33
Discuss the problem with the student (43)	20
Punish the student (93)	44
Discuss the problem with the parent(s) (54)	25
Discuss with the school counsellor (7)	3

*Non-additive frequencies and percentages.

Discussion

The list of behavioural problems used in the checklist for this study represented mainly physical conduct disorders. Only two (cheating / lying and complaining) were nonphysical.

There are probably more different types and categories of behaviour problems in Swazi schools (both physical and nonverbal). Future research can identify additional behavioural disabilities particularly the nonverbal and nonphysical types.

A significant relationship between aggression and the demographic variables used was obtained by correlation on the type of school attended. Apart from age, the rest of the variables were categorical. It is possible the variables might be related to aggression interactively. Further research could use more sophisticated statistical procedures such as multiple regression analysis to probe the joint relationship of two or more of these variables to aggression. Variables such as the type of school attended that are identified to be highly related to aggression should be investigated for both statistical and practical significance. The latter would be insightful in determining the causes of aggression and the effects of such aggression in schools. More in-depth qualitative research should investigate the reasons why there are more students with moderate to severe aggressive tendencies in government schools (X^2 (df = 4) = 18.16, $p < .01$) and in families with both biological parents (X^2 (df = 8) = 15.85, $p <. 05$).

The number of students with moderate to severe aggressive inclinations should also be a source of concern to both Swazi teachers and school authorities because of the disruptive effects that aggression can have on educational processes. This finding calls for teacher education (both inservice and preservice) to address aggression with a long-term solution. Current teacher reliance on punishment to solve behavioural problems in schools is unsatisfactory for two main reasons. First, previous research in the literature indicates that punishment does not have a durable or long- lasting effect. Second, punishment is only effective if administered soon after the misconduct / offense and when the reasons for its application are properly explained to the recipient at the time of using it. Third, punishment may aggravate the aggression problem due to the effects of conditioning.

Conclusion

According to evidence emerging from this study there are student behaviour problems of many kinds in Swazi schools. Aggression is one of the potential major problems. The study recommends that more detailed investigations, both quantitative and qualitative, be conducted to gain deeper perceptions into the nature of the problem, its possible causes, and solutions that are likely to be most effective in addressing it. An enhancement of teacher skills in handling behaviourally aggressive cases needs to be given high consideration and priority by relevant authorities in the present circumstance. Teachers ought to use approved forms of punishment sparingly as a last resort. Research indicates that punishment does not have a long-term effect and it tends to worsen the undesirable behaviour rather than reduce or eliminate it.

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