

EFFECT OF A MODIFICATION STRATEGY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGGRESSION IN SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN.

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Abstract

This study is a practical work generated to study a particular child in order to establish the effect of parenthood in the development of aggression and to test a modification strategy using social learning theory. A girl by name Bebi, a pupil of class two in primary school was used as study sample. A frequency distribution of occurrences of aggression and graphs were used for data analysis. Bebi was found to be aggressive after a careful observation of her social interaction behaviour. The strategy used to modify her behaviour thus proved successful.

Introduction:

As is probably already apparent, a large portion of the work of Bandura and his associates has examined how aggressive behaviour could be encouraged through the action of a model. Their research set the stage for the continuing debate whether violence on television make the people who watch it more violent. However, most researches conducted on television and violence by people like Elyenk and Nias (1978) Edger (1977). Gerber, Gross, Eleey, Jackson, Teffies-Fox, and Signoriel (1977) found that heavy viewers (those who average over six hours of TV viewing a day) have different perceptions of the world than less frequent viewers. Based on their responses to questionnaires. It seems that heavy viewers see the world as a meaner place inhabited by more violent and selfish people. They are also likely to own a gun and to say that it is alright to hit people when you are angry at them.

Regardless of the relationship between television and violence, Bandura and Walters (1963) have shown that parent's behaviours can influence the aggressive behaviour of their children in conflicting and seemingly paradoxical ways. The apparent paradox is that parents who use the most severe punishment for aggressive behaviours tend to produce more aggressive children. This result was obtained in a number of different studies (Sears, Macceby and Levin, 1957). Glueck and Glueck (1950) found that the use of severe punishment was correlated with juvenile delinquency in children. Bandura and Wallers (1963) pointed out this apparent paradox is resolved when we realized that parents who use physical punishment with their children are providing their children models of aggressive behaviours.

Further studies (Bandura and Walters, 1959) supported this theory by showing that children whose parents punished aggressive behaviour usually avoided aggressive behaviours when their parents were present, but they were aggressive in their interactions outside the house. As Brown (1965) has put it, these children apparently learned a fairly sophisticated distinction by observing their parents. In addition, the children of parents who make use of severe force (often termed "child abuse") are more likely to resort to physical punishment and child abuse when they become parents (Lefkowitz, Huasman and Eron, 1978; Silver Dubin and Loune 1969). All these results are consistent with the view that when parents discipline their children, they are serving as models as well as controlling agents.

Review Of Literature

The development of aggressive behaviours can be explained under two phenomena, biological and environmental. Sigmud Freud in Linda (1987) took the position that human beings have aggressive instincts. People, he felt, are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love, or who simply defend themselves if they are attacked but have a powerful measure of aggression as part of their instinctual endowments. If individuals have no outlet, Freud believed, the aggressive instincts

Dikko Suleiman accumulate and eventually overflow, erupting in sudden violence. Some observers of animals behaviour believe that Freud was right. Konrad and Lorrrenz (1966). Lorenz's stand was more precise as he noted that, all creatures (peoples included) are born with aggressive instincts, which help them survive". Dangerous animals, Loreenz assumed,, inherited inhibitions against seriously injuring members of their own kind.

Environment is another influencing factor on the development of aggression. In some cultures aggression is well accepted by condoning physical combat in settling dispute. People accepted aggression probably and teach it to their children. Some parents give explicit instructions on how to fight so that their sons or daughters can defend themselves. The more condition that favours aggression in the child's situation, the more aggression we tend to see (Huesman, largerspex, and Eron 1984; Huesman, Eron, Lefkowitz, and Widder (1984b).

Garbarino (1984) Huesman et al (1984a, 1984b) opined that, seeing violent parents is one condition that predicts violence in the young. Again and again parents rejection, neglect, harsh discipline, and cruelty against the child or others in the family are linked with aggression in offspring in children through observation. Garbarino (1984) further gathered that striking out is legitimate and powerful. The aiiger that is aroused by heated exchanges seems to be contagious. Further, if treated harshly youngsters may fail to form attachments to parents. Without such bonds they may have little for others and little motivation to control aggression.

Frustration and failure at school appear to contribute to aggression. As Allan Berman, (1978) sees it, these youngsters, at school, fear inadequacy, think poorly of themselves and lack of adaptive skills. One important deficit may be self-control. Spivack, (1983) said, these boys blame others for their problems and behave in a defiant disruptive manner.

As children mature two forms of aggression appear (Hartup, 1974). These he said are the, "instrumental aggression" (which is directed at obtaining something desirable, for example, threatening or hitting another child in order to obtain a toy) and the "Hostile aggression", (sometimes called "person oriented" aggression, is more specifically aimed at hurting another person, either for ravenge, or as a way of establishing dominance, which, in long run, may gain the aggressor possessions).

Study Procedure

The Researcher visited the home of the target child-Bebi, to assess the parenting style prevalent in the home of the child. The following areas were studied by the research; child's autobiography, home environment and social climate. The parents were interviewed to assess their parenting style, the frequency of aggression on the child (Bebi), and Bebi's frequency of aggression on the younger ones.

Autobiography. Bebi is a young girl, born on 24th February 1992 at General Hospital, Katsina. She is fair in complexion and of medium height. She speaks fluent Hausa language with little English words of simple nouns and verbs. Bebi attended a private nursery Police Children School, and is currently in class two. She is of average intelligence with low academic performance due to her hyper-kenetic emotional dispositions. She was discovered to be aggressive by the researcher, after careful observations of her social interactions with other children, particularly those that are below her chronological age.

Home Environment

Bebi's home environment is neat and hygienic, everything is placed in order. There is no much noise from modern electrical gadget despite their presence in the sitting room. Bebi and her three year old brother spend most of the day playing with toys. The young brother plays more with toy guns or imaginary guns. Bebi likes playing with baby doll. On the other corner of the house, there hangs a horsewhip (Bulala) which the younger brother always asks the father to use on Bebi as a revenge for an offence she committed against him.

Social Climate

My observation of the social interaction in the Bebi's home revealed that there was a mixed parent-child relationship, Viz - love and strict control, where in the former, Bebi's parents provide

their children with their primary needs and some other social needs, such as, playing toys, clothes and varieties of social amenities. However, what seems lacking or low in Bebi's home is emotional security due to the absence of 'contact-social-relations' meaning, things like, embracing, petting, lifting, kissing and comforting the child. Naturally children need affection and approval and need for personal admiration and want admiration of his over-estimated personal worth and wants. Bebi's mother is very rigid and strict with rearing. She often uses punishment and verbal assault to correct her children's misbehaviour. That is why at the end of the day she would lose her voice as a result of series of shouting to control her children's major and minor misbehaviours. She is too strict on her children's behaviour because she too received similar parenting, which was believed to be the effective method for moral training. Bebi's father is less rigid, where he overlooks minor misbehaviour, but severely punishes major offences.

The conclusion on parenting style in Bebi's home is that of strict control, where physical and verbal punishment were used to correct misbehaviour. The effect of rigid parenting is the development of aggressive behaviour in the children. And this is true to Bebi and her brother who showed some signs of aggression in the daily interactions with themselves or other children. If Bebi's aggressive behaviour was inborn (which the researcher has no evidence) it must be aggravated by parenting experiences and perpetrated by her local environment, where she mixed with other children who were aggressive towards each other. It is a common belief that a harsh and quarrelsome parents breed similar offspring. My observation revealed the truth of the above statement. The one month old baby of Bebi's mother received aggressive jokes from his three year old brother. He violently pulled the hands and legs of the baby when playing with him.

Observation

The researcher used behaviour check-list chart to observe the frequency of Bebi's parent's aggression against her, and her aggression frequency against other children, and the result below was obtained.

Table 1a Parents Aggression Per Week

Behaviour Description	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun	Total
Physical Assault	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	2
Verbal Assault	4	5	6	3	2	-	2	22
Unfavourable Comparison with Other Children	3	2	3	-	-	3	2	13
Total	7	8	10	3	2	3	4	37

Figure 1: Frequency Graph of Bebi's Aggression per week

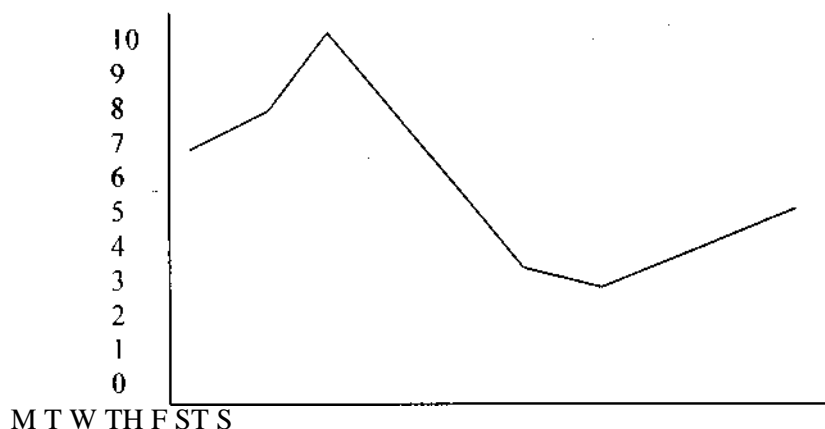
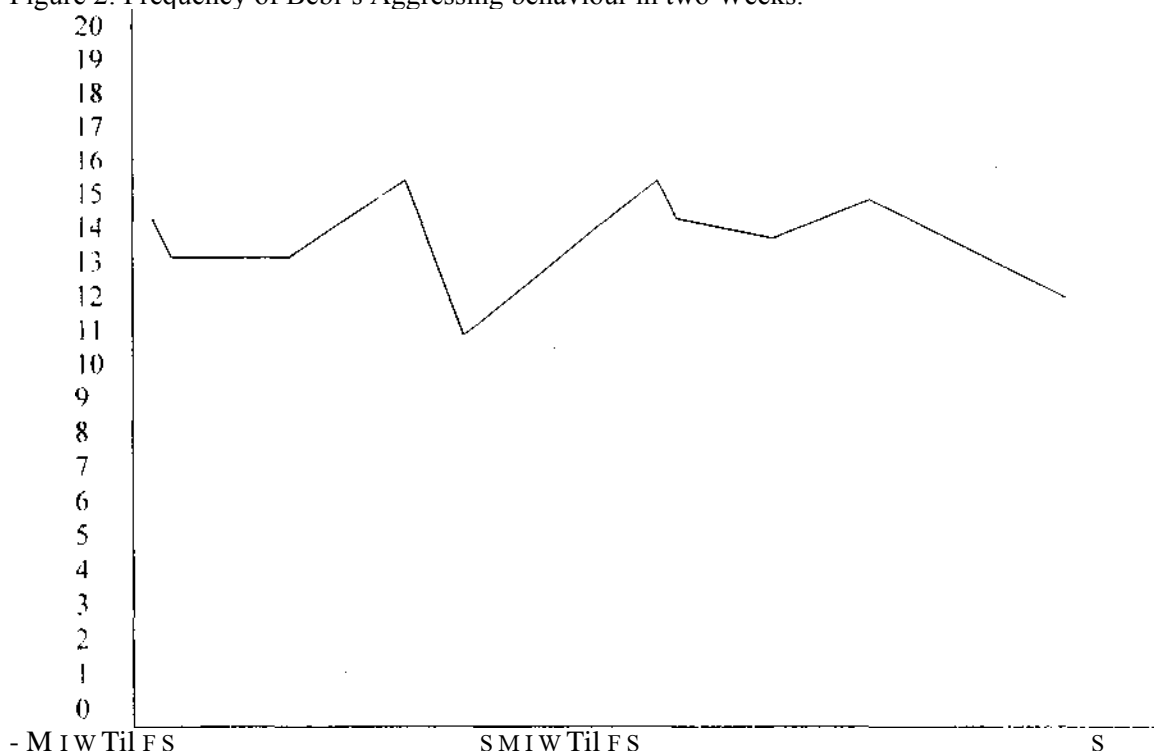


Figure 2: Frequency of Bebi's Aggressing behaviour in two Weeks.



The researcher visited Bebi's school in an effort to observe how she interacted with other children, and how she was perceived by her teachers. The data gathered showed that Bebi's was a quarrelsome girl, fighting or aggressive to her school mate everyday. "She is indeed a problem child", exclaimed her teacher.

From the information gathered, through interviews with Bebi's parents and her teacher and through personal observation of her home school situation, the researcher was led to draw a conclusion that the whole problem lies within Bebi's home. The harsh parenting style in which excessive disciplinary measures were always used to correct misbehaviour gave rise to the development of aggressive behaviour in Bebi. Freud's aggressive theory said that the aggressive instinct is aroused and put in motion through harsh disciplinary measures.

Modification Strategies

The following strategies were used by the researcher to modify Bebi's aggressive behaviour.

Step I: Parents Counselling

Bebi's parents were properly counselled by the researcher on correct parenting style. The researcher advised them to reduce the use of severe disciplinary measure in correcting child's misbehaviour. They should avoid the use of physical and verbal assault on their children. The researcher was able to convince Bebi's parents, that improper parenting (discipline) was responsible for Bebi's aggressive behaviour. With this conviction the researcher proceeded to counsel Bebi's parents on how to modify Bebi's behaviour.

Step 2: Reinforcement And Punishment

The researcher proposed the following behaviour modification strategies for Bebi's parents.

(a) **Positive Reinforcement**

Positive reinforcement is the presentation of a pleasurable reinforce after a behaviour has been exhibited. Bebi should be encouraged to respect other children's feelings, and she should be rewarded

whenever she does not aggress children during their play. And she should be told why her parents appreciate her attitude change, for example, the parents should address Bebi thus: "Belli, you are a very good girl and I am proud of you because throughout you play with children you did not aggress them. I will buy you a big doll if you stop aggressing children". They should add with embracing and kissing Bebi. because this will give Bebi further psychological satisfaction of her new behaviour. These reinforces, or consequences of behaviour tend to increase or sustain the frequency with which the original behaviour is exhibited in the future.

(b) Negative Reinforcement

Negative reinforcement is the removal of an already operating aversive stimulus. As a consequence of the removal of the aversive stimulus, the target behaviour is strengthened. In Bebi's case, her parents should minimize the excessive use of corporal punishment, or verbal assault, or the use of an defamatory statement, or the use of harsh language in controlling Bebi's misbehaviour. Thus physical punishment and verbal assaults are negative reinforcers. However, if they were used judiciously and wisely it will help modify aggressive behaviour. They (punishment and assault) should be replaced with love and understanding. Bebi's parents were advised to be kind, receptive, tolerant and gentle on her. They should always suppress their anger and use more explanations in correcting Bebi's misbehaviours, rather than physical assaults.

(c) Punishment

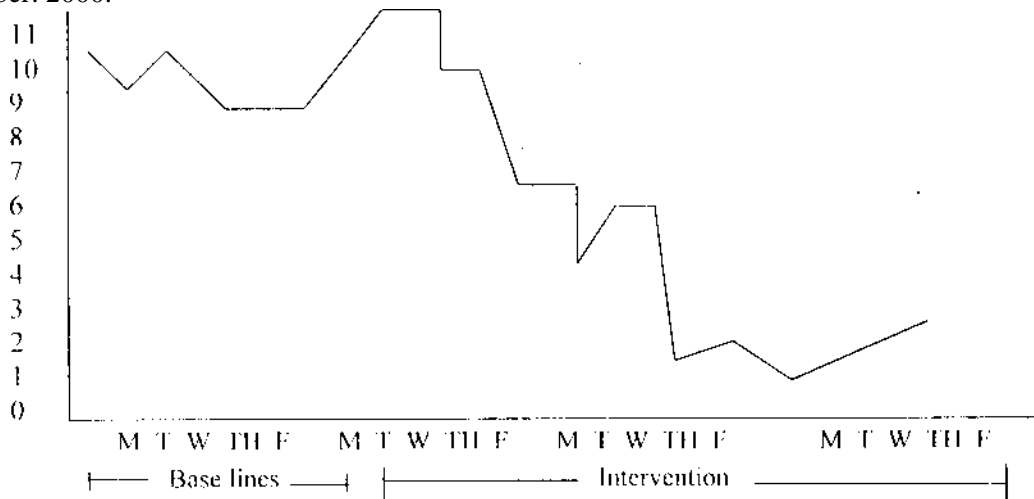
Although Bebi's parents were asked to stop the use of punishment in their child rearing method. However, punishment can be used when necessary and it should be mild. In behaviour modification, punishment should be accomplished by the addition of an aversive stimulus to the environment.

Bebi's parents were therefore, advised to use punishment (physical or verbal) only as the last resort: and it should be things like knelling, seclusion or detention. And statements like am annoyed and disappointed with your behaviour. You are no longer I'aviourile. I will not buy you toys again. You must apologies for what you did, before I trust you again, etc. Both Bebi's parents and her teacher were advised by the researcher to use these techniques to modify her behaviour. They were also advised to be very patient and consistent with the techniques.

Modification Outcome

The whole month of December 2000 was used for the modification exercise. And both parties, (the school and the home) cooperated for the exercise. While the researcher monitored and recorded the results. After a month of intensive modification exercise at school and at home the, following results were obtained as shown in figure 3, below.

Figure 3: Frequency of Bebi's aggressive behaviour before and during the intervention in the month of December, 2000.



Summary

From the data collected throughout the study, it was established that poor parenting style was responsible for Bebi's aggressive behaviour. This was supported by the result of an observation of Ik'bi's parents temperament when dealing with their children's behaviour. This was supported by the result of an observation of Bebi's parents temperament when dealing with their children's behaviour problem (See Table 1 and Figure 1). According to Bandura's social learning theory, a child learns aggression when he is being aggressed, or when he watches aggressive behaviours. This theory is proved correct by the researcher when he recorded Bebi's aggression frequency (See Figure 2) for two weeks and found a significant correlation between her parents record in figure 1, and her record in figure 2.

However, the methods for behaviour modification which were suggested by the researcher and tested by Bebi's parents and teachers to be very effective, as recorded in table three (see Table 3).

The result on figure 3 shows a record of Bebi's aggression frequency for one month (December). The first two weeks show her aggression frequency before the start of the modification technique. While the third and the fourth weeks show the frequency after the use of techniques. There is a rapid drop of aggression frequency at the start of the modification process and continued to drop up to two aggression per day with two day free of aggression. Although the behaviour was not wiped out completely the result shows that with patience and consistency it will be removed completely. It may take four to six month to do the job well.

Conclusion And Recommendations

Going by the outcome of the research a conclusion can be drawn that there is a relationship between parenting style and the development of aggression in children. Many child-rearing patterns which encourage the use of force to secure children's conformity to cultural norms and values will set in motion the aggression instinct which will transform into a practicing behaviour. This was the case with Bebi, our study child. She was exposed to strict control parenting where she was always forced to conformity. This use of force to secure conformity made her to believe in the use of aggression to satisfy one's desires. She therefore internalises it as part of her behaviour.

However, with proper behaviour modification strategies an aggressive child can be helped to improve.

Following the outcome of this study, the following strategies are recommended as prevention and cure for aggression.

1. Neurotic Needs of the child:

Parents and Teachers should take cognizance of the cardinal role the neurotic needs of the child play in coping with anxiety, which causes aggression. These are:

- i) ***Needs that Involve Moving Toward People:***
They include, the need for affection and approval, where a child seeks to please everyone and be liked by everyone. He also needs a partner who will listen to his complains and console him.
 - ii) ***Needs that Involve moving against other people:*** Such as the need to dominate play mates, need to exploit, need for prestige and parents and teacher's recognition and admiration, need for personal admiration and need for independence.
 - iii) ***Needs that involve moving away from people.*** These include the needs for freedom and self-sufficiency, the need to attain perfection against elders criticism and the need to explore the world.
2. Parents and teachers should minimise the use of physical punishment and verbal assault in controlling children's abnormal behaviour (bad behaviour).
 3. Parents should always appreciate and reward good behaviours. And punish bad behaviours with temporary withdrawal of reward after explaining to the child reasons for the withdrawal of the reward and what conditions shall restore it.
 4. Teachers should make use of varieties of teaching methods to include painting, story telling, athletics, drama, plays, and group work. These will help relief aggressive feeling in the children.

5. Parents should control their children's television viewing time and should restrict them to those programmes that do not show aggressive actions. Because Bandura's study of the influence of

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television on the development of aggression in children shows that, children who watch aggressive films showed similar behaviour.

6. Parents and teachers should be models to their children by being kind, loving, charitable, and sympathetic to everybody.

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