

# Forms of Aggressive Behavior in Middle Schools in Egypt as Perceived by Teachers

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the middle school teachers' perception about the forms of aggressive behavior in their schools. Data was collected from 100 (male/female) middle school teachers in Tanta, Egypt in the academic year 2017/2018. The participants were teaching four different subjects (Arabic/English/Science/history) at the time of the study and were between 27 and 57 years old. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) indicated that there were no significant differences in the mean survey score, between genders in the perception of aggressive behavior. The study examined differences in physical and verbal aggressive behavior according to school type. The results indicate Physical aggression was higher in all different schools and mixed school showed the lowest rate of both physical and verbal aggression.

**Keywords:** Student; school; aggressive behavior; teachers.

## Introduction

School violence has transcended the institutional context to become a major public health problem because of both its magnitude and the negative impact on the health of children involved (Shetgiri, 2013). Studies in some European countries (Toldos, 2005), in Egypt (Ismail, 2005) and in USA (Mishna, 2004) show that aggressive behavior is common and makes schools unsafe as perceived by students and teachers.

An aggressive act is defined as any form of behavior designed to harm or injure a living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment (Dula, & Ballard, 2003). Working independently from each, Whitney & Smith (1993) and Owens et al., (2000) have examined the various forms of aggression. The results of these researches determine that the most common and frequent forms of aggressive behavior are: insults, name-calling, yelling at others, theft, hitting, threats, and social exclusion. The study findings of Crick & Grotpeter (1995) also confirm that verbal abuse; hitting; gestures threats and destroying others' property are considered as major forms of aggressive behavior. Smith & Shu (2002) are also of same view about aggression form and they added rumors, exclusion from play, and putting down, as major forms of verbal aggression.

## Literature Review

Although young infants get angry and may occasionally strike people, it is difficult to think of these actions as having an aggressive intent (Sullivan & Lewis, 2003). Yet Marlene Caplan and her colleagues (1991) found that 1-year-old infants could be quite forceful with each other when one infant control a toy that the other wants. Even when duplicate toys were available, 12-month-olds occasionally ignored these unused objects and tried to overpower a peer in order to control that child's toy. Moreover, the intimidators in these tussles appeared to be treating the other child as an adversary rather than an inanimate obstacle, implying that the seeds of aggression have already been sown by the end of the first year. Although 2-year-olds have just as many (or more) conflicts over toys as 1-year-olds do, they are more likely than 1-year-olds to resolve these disputes by negotiating and sharing

than by fighting, particularly when toys are in short supply (Alink et al., 2006; Caplan et al., 1991). Conflicts need not be training grounds for aggression and can even be adaptive, serving as a context in which infants, toddlers, and preschool children can learn to negotiate and achieve their aims without resorting to shows of force—especially when adults intervene and encourage harmonious means of conflict resolution (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2001; Perlman & Ross, 1997).

## Developmental Trends in Aggression

The character of children's aggression changes dramatically with age. In her classic study of the development of aggression among preschoolers, Florence Goodenough (1931) asked mothers of 2- to 5-year-olds to keep diaries in which they recorded the details of their children's angry outbursts. In examining these data, Goodenough found that unfocused temper tantrums become less and less common between ages two and three as children began to physically retaliate (by hitting or kicking) when playmates frustrated or attacked them. However, physical aggression gradually declined between ages three and five, only to be replaced by teasing, tattling, name-calling, and other forms of verbal aggression.

A more recent study sought to characterize developmental change in physical aggression across the span from toddlerhood to middle childhood (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2004). This study used mothers' reports of the children's levels of physical aggression, assessed each year from when their children were 2 years old to when they were 9 years old, and 1,195 children were included in the study. Consistent with Goodenough's findings, most of these children declined in physical aggression over the preschool years.

## Aggression in Schools

The aggressive behavior or victimization along with other factors also depends on school. According to Hoover & Olson (2000), aggression affect school and communities. They suggested some characteristics of schools that generate aggression. The students studying in such schools feel: a) unsafe; b) overt behavior; c) Mistrust. Students spend much of their time in activities associated with their

school, and the school’s social, psychological and learning climate have a strong impact on the emotional and social development of young people (Currie et al., 2004).

Fredericks et al. (2004) argue that school activity engagement is a multidimensional construct comprising behavioral, emotional and cognitive factors. Engagement is a sign of school success including academic achievement, but it has been increasingly identified as important in reducing health-compromising behaviors as well.

Konishi et al. (2010) examined the relation between school violence and academic achievement and student teacher relationships in Canadian schools. The sample of the study was 28 thousand 15-year-old students participating in the Program for International Student Assessment administrated by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 2006. The multilevel analyses findings showed that students who reported suffered some form of peer mistreatment showed lower academic achievements than their non-victimized peers did. Students who reported a better rapport with their teachers also showed higher academic achievements.

### Sex Differences

Boys and men are identified as being more physically and more verbally aggressive, on average, than are girls and women (Harris, 1992; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Yet, recent studies reveal that very young boys are not more aggressive than girls (Hay, Castle, & Davies, 2000). Marlene Caplan and her colleagues (1991), for example, found that forceful, aggressive resolutions of disputes over toys were more numerous among 1-year-olds when girls dominated the playgroups! Even at age 2, groups dominated by boys were more likely than those dominated by girls to negotiate and share when toys were scarce. It is not until age 2½ to 3 that sex differences in aggression are reliable, and this is clearly enough time for gender typing to have steered boys and girls in different directions (Fagot, Leinbach, & O’Boyle, 1992). The reason for that could be that parents play rougher with boys than with girls and react more negatively to the aggressive behaviors of daughters than to those of sons (Mills & Rubin, 1990; Parke & Slaby, 1983). Furthermore, the guns, tanks, missile launchers, and other symbolic implements of destruction that boys often receive encourage the enactment of aggressive concepts—and actually promote aggressive behavior (Feshbach, 1956; Watson & Peng, 1992). During the preschool years, children come to view aggression as a male attribute in their gender schemas; and by middle childhood, boys expect aggressive acts to provide them with benefits that are more tangible and to elicit less disapproval from either parents or peers than girls do (Hertzberger & Hall, 1993; Perry et al., 1989). Therefore, even though biological factors may contribute, it is clear that sex differences in aggression depend to no small extent on gender typing and gender differences in social learning.

### Objectives of the Study

If the community aims to develop intervention programs in order to assist victimized children and early intervention programs one should determine and explain the size and form of the problem addressed.

The objective of this study is to examine the middle school female/male teachers’ perception about the forms of aggressive behavior in their schools in Tanta, Egypt in the academic year 2017/2018

### Method

The present study used a descriptive survey design through which the researcher attempt to quantitatively describe the middle school teachers’ perceptions on students’ forms of aggressive behavior. To this

end, a questionnaire was administered to bring forth how male and female middle school teachers depict the students’ behavior.

### Participants

The study subjects were teachers in public middle schools in Egypt, both men (50) and women (50), ranging from (24-49). There were three categories of teachers: teachers working in 1- boys’ schools, 2- girls’ schools, and 3- mixed school. Written consent form was unitized. All responses were anonymous and confidential.

### Procedures

After contacting with several public schools’ teachers, acceptance to participate in the study was granted either by E-mail or face-to-face from (n=139) teachers. The middle school aggressive behavior questionnaire that was developed by Temer Shehet (2015) was used. One hundred teachers (100/139, 72) returned the completed questionnaire. Teachers were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert-type scale (from 1 = never to 5 = always) their perceptions and experiences about verbal and physical aggressive behavior they witness at school. The questionnaire was distributed and returned during the fall semester of the academic year 2017/2018. Table 1 summarizes the demographics of participating teachers.

### Instrument

The middle school aggressive behavior questionnaire (Shehet, 2015) is an 18- item instrument designed to examine physical and verbal forms of aggressive behavior of (6-15) years old students. Shehet reported internal consistency reliability for the instrument at .86 (Cronbach’s alpha) and an 89% overall agreement between experts about the relevance of the instruments’ items. The researcher chose this instrument because of its designation that capture the constructs of interest (i.e., teachers’ perceptions and the presence of aggressive behavior) and age appropriateness (6-15). The aggression questionnaire consisted of physical and verbal forms of aggression. The demographic questionnaire, completed by the teachers, was helpful to gather information about the teachers’ age, teaching subject, and gender. The question of hitting, kicking, punching other kids and taking others’ property by force represented the physical aggression type (8 items), whereas question of yelling at others or calling them mean names, insulting or teasing other kids represented the verbal type (10 items). Participant teachers were supposed to rate on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = a lot, and 5 = always) their perceptions and experiences about verbal and physical aggressive behavior they depicted at school from students inside or outside the class.

### Results

#### Forms of Aggressive Behavior in Middle Schools

Teachers where asked to answer a questionnaire about the aggression behavior they perceive at their school. Table 2 of one-sample t-test reveals significant statistical differences

**Table 1.** Demographic of participating teachers (n=100)

| Non-continuous variables    | Frequency        | Percentage %     |
|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>               |                  |                  |
| Male/ Female                | 50/50            | 50/50            |
| <b>School type</b>          |                  |                  |
| Boys’ school                | 39               | 39               |
| Girls’ school               | 25               | 25               |
| Mixed school                | 36               | 36               |
| <b>Continuous Variables</b> | <b>Min / max</b> | <b>Mean ± SD</b> |
| Age                         | 24/49            | 34.27 ± 5.28     |

SD: standard deviation

Table 2. One-sample t-test comparing the test assumed mean with the mean of students answers on physical aggressive items at ( $p > .05$ ) between test assumed mean and students answers on verbal aggressive items. Such results reveal occurrence of physical aggressive behavior taking place in schools.

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Table 3. One-sample t-test comparing the test assumed mean with the mean of students answers on verbal aggressive items declares statistical differences  $t(99)=4.078, p < .001$ . Such results reveal occurrence of verbal aggressive in school community.

### Aggressive Behavior Perception According to Teachers' Gender and School Type

No statistically significant differences were found in gender perception of aggressive behavior in school. Table 4 shows the t-test results for perception of aggressive forms according to gender. Both male and female teachers showed no difference in their perception of the aggressive behavior (verbal/physical) they detect in their schools.

Results from Table 5, shows that aggressive behavior (physical/verbal) is higher in boys school than girls or mixed school.

## Discussion

This study examined the teachers' perception of aggressive behavior forms in their school and the results obtained indicated that

**Table 2.** One-sample t-test comparing the test assumed mean with the mean of students answers on physical aggressive items

| Mean | SD  | df | t     | Sig.  |
|------|-----|----|-------|-------|
| 2.33 | .29 | 99 | 8.077 | 0.000 |

SD: standard deviation df: degree of freedom

**Table 3.** One-sample t-test comparing the test assumed mean with the mean of students answers on verbal aggressive items

| Mean | SD  | df | t     | Sig.  |
|------|-----|----|-------|-------|
| 2.20 | .34 | 99 | 4.078 | 0.000 |

SD: standard deviation df: degree of freedom

**Table 4.** Perception of aggressive forms According to T-Test Results for Gender

| Aggressive | Gender | mean | SD  | T       | P     |
|------------|--------|------|-----|---------|-------|
| physical   | male   | 2.27 | .40 | -0.698  | 0.469 |
|            | female | 2.39 | .49 |         |       |
| verbal     | male   | 2.25 | .51 | 1.125   | 0.258 |
|            | female | 2.15 | .42 |         |       |
| total      | Male   | 2.26 | .29 | -1.2492 | 0.217 |
|            | female | 2.27 | .37 |         |       |

**Table 5.** Distribution of One-Way ANOVA Results of aggressive forms for different school types

| Aggressive | Gender       | Mean Square | df | F      | P     |
|------------|--------------|-------------|----|--------|-------|
| physical   | Boys school  | 2.47        | 95 | 13.383 | 0.000 |
|            | Girls school | 2.23        | 4  |        |       |
|            | Mixed school | 2.26        | 99 |        |       |
| verbal     | Boys school  | 2.33        | 95 | 11.731 | 0.000 |
|            | Girls school | 2.24        | 4  |        |       |
|            | Mixed school | 2.05        | 99 |        |       |

physical aggressive behavior ( $t(99) = 8.077, p < .001$ ) is higher than verbal aggressive behavior ( $t(99) = 4.078, p < .001$ ). Physical aggression included hitting, kicking, punching and taking other students' property by force. Hitting other kids was the prevailing forms of physical aggressive behavior. On the other hand, verbal aggression included yelling at others or calling them mean names, insulting or teasing other kids, and the prevailing form of aggressive behavior shown was yelling at other students. These findings replicate the findings from other studies, which were conducted in other cities in Egypt (Bahnasawy & Hassan, 2015; Ismail, 2010).

The frequency of physical aggression is reported to decrease from early childhood on (Cairns, et al., 1989; Romano, 2005). Such findings contradict with this study's results; the physical form of aggression is employed in higher rate than verbal form. One of the hypotheses that still needs further investigation concerns the claim of increased aggression. Aggression may not be increasing but rather the capacity for Meta cognition; hence, older children are more able to express their inner states and acts upon it.

Lower levels of aggression and other conduct problems reflects a good relationship between students with their teachers (Ochoa et al., 2007). Consistent with these findings the study suggests further researches on the school climate and other factors affecting students' aggressive behavior. This might highlight the importance of the link between school context and aggression and intensify the role schools can play in reducing the likelihood of physically aggressive behavior.

The results showed no significant differences according to teachers' gender. Both male and female teachers shared similar perception of the aggressive behavior (physical/verbal) in their schools. The study findings confirm previous research results (Alikabri et al., 2013). More research is needed to determine whether female and male teachers share the same prospective of aggression in different school grades as well as their concerns and insights about the behavior attribution and its frequency. The perception of aggression should not be contingent on the occurrence of frequent events of severe violence; hence, the frequency of the violent behavior should be a factor to explore in future researches.

Though both male and female teachers could indicate aggressive behavior in their schools, the intensity and severity level of such behavior should be further investigated. It is likely that teachers are not aware of much of the aggression that occurs at school. Aggression is likely perpetrated most often out of the view of teachers, and victims will not be willing to report such incidents (Bendixon & Olweus, 1999; Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000).

Mixed findings have been reported about sex differences regarding school aggression. Some studies reported that boys are more often the victims of aggressive behavior than girls (Solberg & Olweus, 2003), whereas other researches show contradicted results (Cerezo & Ato, 2006; Veenstra, et al., 2005).

Sex differences in victimization rigidly take place when research examine the type of victimization suffered by students in school. Boys seems to be the victim of physical forms of aggression, whereas girls are suffering more from verbal aggression (Craig, Pepler & Blais, 2007; Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Owens et al., 2000). The study findings extend previous researches to include the school type. The study examined boys and girls in three different contexts: boys' school, girls' school, and mixed school. The results revealed that boys tended to use physical aggression where girls used verbal type of aggressive behavior. This could be explained in terms of gender development. Boys are socially direct and endorse more agentic goals than girls, who, in turn, are

relationship-oriented and embrace more communal goals than boys (Ojanen, et al., 2005).

There was a significant difference among aggression forms of boys, girls and mixed schools. Physical aggression was higher in all different schools and mixed school showed the lowest rate of both physical and verbal aggression. An explanation for that could be explored in terms of gender developments perspective. Both genders experience a state of opposite sex attraction and each gender attempt to amicable and appreciated in the way the opposite sex picture and trying to be in a trouble-free context is one way to do so. Moreover, above that, with mixed school there is less chances to find partners of the same gender to victimize.

## Conclusions and Future Study

The main objective of this study was to compare difference in aggressive behavior perception between male and female middle school teachers in Egypt. A literature survey was conducted to form the theoretical premise for the study. The study examined differences in physical and verbal aggressive behavior and school type and gender difference in aggressive behavior was examined. The study contributes to the growing literature on aggressive behavior. It provides the empirical evidence to support theoretical models that suggest difference in aggressive behavior of boys and girls in school. The current study showed there is an urgent need from all stakeholders to support prevention and intervention programs of school aggression protection. Given the growing number of students becoming involved in school violence, school intervention programs need to change their approach to the planning of intervention strategies. An early intervention programs with a focus on parental involvement and provide access to support including counseling, training programs, or regionally located group support associations is also needed.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Ethical Approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

## Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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