

Counseling Intervention Methods for Children's Aggressive Behavior

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SUMMARY

Individuals are social by nature and cannot live in isolation from the group to which they belong. This belonging obliges them to follow certain obligations that cannot be crossed, whether they are adults or children. If an individual exceeds those obligations, they may be rejected, and their behavior may be described as maladaptive, deviant, or undesirable. Aggressive behaviour is considered one of those maladaptive behaviors that caught the attention of many studies from different fields and specializations. Many research and studies were conducted and covered various fields, whether familial, academic, professional, or social, starting from childhood to adulthood. There are many factors that intervene in the spread of this phenomenon, whether psychological, familial, academic, or financial. Many instructive, curative, and preventive methods were adopted, especially in the familial or school environment, to reduce it and prevent it from triggering relational, psychological, or physical disorders, specifically in children, while helping them to adopt healthy and socially approved behaviors.

Key words: A schooled child – Aggressive behavior – Maladaptive behavior – Instructive methods – Behavior modification.

1. Aggressive Behavior

The occurrence of aggressive behavior in an individual is empirical evidence of insufficient maturity that prevents them from establishing the internal self-regulation expected for socially acceptable norms, traditions, and values. In addition, the individual may be incapable of reaching the adaptation necessary for living in a society, and they may not have properly learned the behavioral habits necessary to achieve such adaptation and adjustment (Mohammed Ali Kotb Al-Hashri, 2000, p.8).

The definitions of aggressive behavior have varied based on the different theories that describe it. However, they all agree that the meaning involves harm to others. Across these definitions, we find:

1.1 The definition of “Albert Bandura” (1973)

It is defined as a behavior that ends in harm to people or damage to property. The harm may be psychological, such as mockery or humiliation, or physical, like kicking or pushing.

Bandura's description of aggressive behavior depends on three principles, which are:

a. Characteristics of the behavior itself

such as physical abuse, verbal assault, and destruction of property.

b. Intensity of the behaviour

intense behaviour is viewed as aggressive, such as addressing another person in an angry tone.

c. Characteristics of the aggressor

amongst these characteristics, we state:

- Sex and the past of the aggressor.

- Characteristics of the victim (Mohamed Ali Imara, 2007, p. 13)

1.2 Benton (1984)

Aggressive behavior is identified through the intentional motive behind the behavior, defined as the use of force and violence in interpersonal relationships without reasoning, or without using it as a defensive necessity (Mohamed Ali Imara, 2007, p. 17).

1.3 “Daniel K. Hall-Flavin”

In his definition, Daniel focuses on the affective dimension of aggressive behavior; it is regarded as the implicit habit of expressing negative emotions rather than expressing them clearly. There is a difference between what a passive-aggressive person says and what he does.

Although passive-aggressive behavior might be a sign of several mental health disorders, it is not considered a mental disorder itself; however, it can still affect interpersonal relationships and cause disturbances in work or school.

Thus, aggressive behavior manifests in different modes and aims to result in harm to others and their property. This aggressive behavior may be physical or verbal, direct or indirect, and may even lead to self-harming behavior (Ndji Abdel Azim Saeed Morshed, 2005, p.13). It may cause harm to a human being or an animal, and may also lead to damage to objects or property. The intention behind this act is usually internal, and it frequently occurs among children at varying levels of severity.

2. Forms of Aggressive Behavior

The forms and manifestations of aggressive behavior can appear in various shapes that often interrelate as follows (Abdelkader Chaachou, 2012, p. 132):

a) Verbal behavior

As forms of verbal aggressive behavior, we find shouting (screaming) and inappropriate language (insults, swearing, and threats), in addition to that certain gestural signs demonstrating aggression (spitting and fist gestures).

b) Physical aggression

It involves the use of body parts to harm others, such as hands, feet, head, teeth, and nails.

c) Direct aggression

It targets directly the root of frustration (satisfying a need via the use of physical strength or verbal expressions).

d) Indirect aggression

When it is out of reach to direct aggression at the real cause for some reason, it is shifted towards another target linked to the original source (a person or an object).

e) Intentional aggression

It is any behaviour meant to harm another person or oneself. It appears in two forms: either as direct aggressive behavior (impulsive aggression) or as normal behavior used as a way to attain self-harm or harm others (instrumental aggression).

f) Random aggression

It is the aggressive behavior that is unclear in terms of its motives, causes, or objectives.

3. Factors leading to aggressive behavior

The triggers of the aggressive behavior cannot be restricted to one factor, as the reasons leading to it are multiple and correlated. They involve the following (Gouaich Moughnia, 2017, pp. 37-46):

3.1. Physiological (internal) factors

These include physical causes, such as hyperactivity caused by dysfunction in glandular secretion processes (such as the thyroid or pituitary glands) accompanied with low intelligence, which hinders the individuals from channelling their hyperactivity into beneficial activities so they end up expressing it via aggression instead.

3.2. Psychological factors

Amongst the psychological factors, we state the following:

a) Frustration

constant frustration may force an individual to act aggressively. When an individual faces a challenge that stops them from fulfilling their goals, they may react in an aggressive manner.

b) Conflict

such as class conflict, racial conflict, and generational conflict. When individuals cannot solve these conflicts, they may show an aggressive response.

c) Trauma

such as natural disasters, experiences of aggression, and wars, may cause an individual to feel a sense of failure, as well as stress and anxiety caused by the traumatic experience.

d) Learning aggression

it appears through imitation, as it is an acquired behavior (according to Social Learning Theory)

e) Intense emotions

such as extreme anger, profound resentment, and intense fear. All of these can lead to the emergence of aggressive behaviour, along with a decreased capacity for self-control.

3.3. Familial factors (Parental Treatment Styles)

Among the family factors we find harshness, triggering psychological pain, softness, tolerance, over-guardianship, inequality, and inconsistency. Many Arabic and foreign studies have stated numerous factors leading to aggressive behavior, which can be narrowed in the following statements (Najia Ibrahim Mohammed, 2010, p. 55):

- a. There is a relationship and an effect between aggressive behavior and parental divorce.
- b. There is a relationship between aggressive behavior and the financial, social, and academic level.
- c. There is a relationship between aggressive behavior and the way parents treat their children.
- d. There is a relationship between aggressive behavior and particular factors; for instance, the loss of one parent, parental divorce, the educational level of the father and mother, family income, the size of the house, and the student's order among their siblings.

3.4. School-related factors

There are various factors that affect the school environment and contribute to the appearance of aggressive behavior among students, involving school administration, school activities, classmates, and rough treatment from teachers.

3.5. Cultural and media-related factors

Television programs and cinematic stories that display violence are seen as key factors affecting behavior among children and adults. Those aggressive scenes may affect individuals and encourage aggressive behavior, whether inside or outside the school or family environment.

3.6. Economic factors

Economic factors are considered as one of the influencing factors on the lives of families. Students may face academic problems or behavioral disorders, where difficult socioeconomic hardships often play a role. This may be caused by several factors like poverty, unemployment, severe deprivation at home, overcrowded living conditions, etc.

4. Guidance Approaches for Aggressive Behavior

Aggressive behaviour is considered one of the behaviors that can cause emotional, psychological, and physical disorders in the child. This demands cautious prevention through protective strategies that promote healthy and socially appropriate behavior in the child. However, if the child falls into aggressive behavior habits, this matter requires urgent involvement, as well as counseling and therapeutic care when necessary.

4.1. Biological Explanation of Modifying Aggressive Behavior

Lombroso is considered one of the best known pioneers of this theory, which suggests a biological explanation for aggressive behavior. It views human beings as aggressive by nature, meaning that aggression is not an acquired behavior.

Fellows of this theory emphasize the role of genetic factors in the emergence of aggressive behavior in children, and that aggression is the result of the biological characteristics carried by the individual.

Studies have also confirmed that there is a relationship between aggression and disorders of the nervous system and chromosomes on one side, and the level of electrical activity in the central nervous system on the other. This theory explains aggression as a result of physiological disorders; therefore, treatment should take into account this biological explanation of aggressive behavior (Tehane Mohammed Abdelkader, 2012, p. 34).

4.2. The Rational-Emotive Behavioral Approach (REBT) for modifying aggressive behavior

Ellis proved, through rational emotive behavior counseling, that individuals have the capacity to be reasonable. Therefore, they have the ability to avoid most emotional and behavioral disorders by teaching them to think logically. (Meftah Mohammed Abdelaziz, 2001, p. 50).

This approach helps in the reduction of illogical thinking and emotional disorders by teaching rational and logical ways of thinking via counseling, which aids individuals in replacing irrational thoughts and attitudes with more logical ones that play a role in modifying and changing behavior that was built upon those false, illogical, and irrational thoughts and beliefs.

This counseling process, based on the previously stated principles, depends on logical and rational discussion and dialogue between the counsellor and the patient within a plan of direct counsellor-centred leadership.

Ellis summed up the role of the psychological counsellor in Rational Emotive Behavioral Counseling as follows:

- a. Encouraging individuals to discover particular illogical thoughts that trigger aggressive behavior.
- b. Challenging the patient to freely express their thoughts.
- c. Using humour to face the irrational and illogical thoughts inside the patient's thinking.

- d. Proving that irrational thoughts are not affective, and explaining how they result in behavioural and emotional disorders.
- e. Explaining how it is possible to switch illogical thoughts with more logical ones.
- f. Teaching the patient how to use a scientific approach in thinking, so they are able to analyse and observe.
- g. Minimizing illogical thoughts in the present or the future.
- h. Using a range of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural methods to help the patient work directly on their feelings and work against their disorders.

Thus, the counselor uses logic, rational thinking, education, suggestion, encouragement, confrontation, persuasion, and discussion, to help the patient learn logical thinking and drop the illogical thoughts. The counselor here acts as a teacher and an instructor (Abdel Fattah Mohammed Saeed Al-Khawaja, 2002, p.292).

4.3. Cognitive Approaches to Modifying Aggressive Behaviour:

Cognitive behavior modification is considered an addition to understanding the cognitive developmental processes that traditional behavioural programmes did not focus on. In addition to that, it does not only concentrate on obvious behaviour as in behavioural counselling; instead, it aims to change maladaptive behaviour by modifying misconceptions. Therefore, it has proven effectiveness in the treatment of personality disorders and in social psychology.

Behavioral modification is “a self-directed process operation that relies on the reorganization of the cognitive field or in the changing of incorrect and irrational ideas in order to decrease or reduce maladaptive behaviours”.

When an individual wants to change their behavior based on the cognitive approach, they use self-monitoring and self-regulation procedures to control and organize themselves. In addition to that, when the individual detects this problematic behavior, they go through the following steps:

- a. Self-monitoring or self-observation.
- b. Self-evaluation, in which the individual compares their behavior to the acceptable behavior and becomes conscious of the difference between what they are actually doing and what they are supposed to do.
- c. Self-reinforcement is when the individual reinforces themselves whenever they get closer to reaching the targeted behavior (Qahtan Ahmed Al-Dhahir, 2004, pp. 229-231).

4.4 Psychoanalytic Approach to Modifying Aggressive Behavior:

In many cases, psychological counselling methods for modifying aggressive behavior have not dispensed with psychoanalytic concepts within their therapeutic procedures, such as unconscious motives, dream interpretation, causes of sexual conflict, and free association. The roots of psychoanalytic theory go back to Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis.

Supporters of the psychoanalytic approach believe that aggressive behavior and violence in its numerous forms, whether directed at oneself or others, come from the death instinct, as they regard that:

- ❖ If it is self-directed, it results in the individual’s self-destruction through different ways in which they harm themselves, such as drug abuse or suicide.
- ❖ If the aggression is directed towards others, it causes the destruction of society through acts such as robbery or crime.

Aggressive behavior appears in the following cases (Abdelkader Chaachou, 2012, pp. 140-142):

- a. When the individual feels inferior or belittled by others.
- b. When an individual feels threatened by dangers like death, it causes an imbalance in their psychological, physical, and social environment and a complete detachment of principles and values and a total disregard for them.
- c. When sadism becomes deeply rooted in an individual's mind, aggression becomes pleasurable to them.

What Freud confirms is that there is a co-relation between sexual instinct and aggression, especially in the early stages of childhood, where all forms of aggression have sexual origins and are directed towards controlling sexual desires.

These assumptions may not be therapeutically helpful in dealing with aggressive behaviour cases. However, it is still possible to generalize effective therapeutic strategies. Still, accepting those strategies does not enable the treatment of aggressive behaviour. Nevertheless, aggression can be shifted and guided towards constructive achievements instead of destructive and harmful ones (Qahtan Ahmed Al-Dhahir, 2004, p. 224).

4.5. Social Learning Approach to Modifying Aggressive Behavior

One of the most famous pioneers of this approach is Bandura, who determined that social behavior is a learned behaviour acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement from important people in the child's circle, such as parents, peers, and school, in addition to the media, within socialization.

"Habit" takes an important position in the social learning approach, as it is viewed as learned and acquired rather than inherited. Therefore, character structure can be modified and changed. This theory also highlights the importance of "the motives and drives" as factors that guide behavior. Thus, aggressive behavior is considered one of the learned styles that characterize an individual uniquely, and may eventually become a habit with its own motives and drives.

Bandura suggested a set of factors that help reinforce aggressive behavior in light of "Social Learning Theory", as follows:

a. Direct external reinforcement

this happen when parents or society praise an individual's aggressive behavior.

b. Self-reinforcement

the aggressor believes that their aggressive behavior benefits them and their family members.

c. Vicarious reinforcement

it is when an individual observes the material gains that the aggressor gained and their avoidance of potential danger. The individual then ends up imitating the aggressor's behavior.

In addition, media, especially television, plays a major role in the acquisition of aggressive behavior among children. Bandura confirms through his experiments that the constant exposure to violence and aggression on television encourages them to behave significantly in aggressive and violent ways (Tehane Mohammed Abdelkader, 2012, p.33).

Conclusion:

It can be said that the counseling methods used to guide such maladaptive behaviors, especially aggressive behavior, differ according to the theories that explain it. Some theories describe aggressive behavior as innate, and that it is unavoidable however; it can be redirected towards beneficial forms to serve others. On the other hand, other perspectives consider aggression an acquired behavior

created by numerous factors. Accordingly, it is necessary to deal with it through preservative or therapeutic counselling methods that help in changing or modifying the aggressive behavior to become socially appropriate so that it does not endanger the social environment.

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