



Impact of cognitive behaviour modification strategy on youths' aggression in Nigerian universities: Implications for youths' counselling and development

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Abstract

The study was conducted to investigate the impact of cognitive behaviour modification strategy on youths' readiness attitude to curb aggression in the universities. The population of the study included all youths in Nigerian universities. University of Port Harcourt was selected through purposive sampling technique and a sample of 80 youths was randomly drawn. The study adopted pre-experimental one group pretest posttest research design. The researchers designed questionnaire instrument was used at the pre-test and post-test stages. One research question and hypothesis were posed and postulated respectively for the study. Data generated were analyzed using percentage and t-test statistics for related sample. The data were analyzed using percentages and t-test statistic for related sample. The findings of the study showed that cognitive behaviour modification strategy had a positive and significant effect on youths' readiness aptitude to curb restiveness and aggression. The study discovered that there was significant difference in the mean achievement score of the youths at the pre-test stages. It was recommended among others that counsellors should be posted to various student affairs departments to offer counselling services to all students in the universities.

Keywords: Cognitive, behaviour modification, strategy and aggression

Introduction

Aggressive behaviour among youths generally, and those in Nigerian tertiary institutions in particular has become a behaviour pattern which has further degenerated into a topical global issue. This negative trends portrays man's wrong aspect of social development. This phenomenon has worsened in recent time with the ubiquitous increase in the rate of living in Nigeria (Wag, 2014) ^[14]. This is an unfortunate development that has become one of the many challenges facing man in our contemporary society.

It is crystal clear that aggressive action has left many students' academic and non-teaching staff and others outside the campuses dead or maimed for life. Properties worth millions of Naira have been vandalized and seized down by aggressive youths. Aggressive behaviour at its lower level is noticed in name calling, slugging others, destroying other people's properties, flogging and bullying (Chang, 2011) ^[3].

Aggression has overtaken communicable disease as the leading cause of death among the youths and has continued to grow steadily (Westem, 2012). However, in as much as we have noticed the incidence of alarming and shaking rate of aggression in Nigerian universities, they represent only the tip of the iceberg of youths' aggression acted out on daily basis in all society.

Horowitz & Borden (2010) ^[7] in confirmation note stated that epidemic of aggression is not limited to America but occur worldwide.

The term "aggression" has been seen by various people as the act that tends to generate some amount of confusion in the society. This is because the concept of aggression defers depending on one's perspective and orientation. For instance, a layman may say that a person is an aggressive sales person in a complimentary way to mean that the sales person does not take no for an answer and would maintain his stand until he gets what he want. It excludes every intent

of the sales person to cause any physical or psychological harm to his customers.

Aggressive behaviour however has been defined by social psychologist as any behaviour that is intended to inflict harm, psychological or physical on another organism or object (Blatchford, 2015). Nwankwo (2015) ^[9] defines aggression as the verbal or physical attack on another person to destroy or humiliate him/her to satisfy a purpose. This definition infers that there is always a crucial element in aggression which is intent. For an act to be classified as aggressive a person must have an intent to harm somebody. Therefore, if a person accidentally hits another fellow with a hockey stick while playing, it is not considered aggressive until during an argument, he is hit with the same stick. From the definition also it follows that harm intended must not only be physical but also verbal. For instance a male teacher who continuously and verbally harasses a female student causing her stress, anxiety or depression is also considered aggressive.

Epal (2016) elaborated that aggression is any intent by a person to verbally and physically abuse or harm another person, or destroy his belongings. However, it can be seen the many contradiction in the conception of the term. To take these contradiction in their stride, psychologists have noted several types of aggression through hostile instrumental, symbolic, social and sanctioned aggression.

The different types of aggression occurs from the varying underlying motives and intentions for the act. Any form of aggression which starts from anger and hostility is referred to as Hostile Aggression while instrumental aggression arises from the desire to achieve certain goals. Symbolic or social aggression also exist although it does not cause any physical harm, rather the victim is harmed verbally through gossip, propaganda, slander, deformation, character assassination and damage. Sanctioned aggression is the one which the society deduces acceptable or mandatory in

certain conditions any way. For instance, a soldier killing an enemy soldier in a battle field is engaged in sanctioned aggression. Sanctioned aggression typically is instrumental in nature to saving one's life or others.

It is an unfortunate development that our youths embark on aggressive act in our universities that is supposed to be cital of learning where future crops of leaders are trained and initiated into good leadership and followership styles. However, what is observed rather with the escalating incidences of aggression is disruption of academic activities in the campuses, closures of institutions for indefinite periods of time, suspension and expulsion of youths and corpses of not only youths but staff and even others not in the campuses. All these have negative consequences and take their tolls on all in the society emotionally, psychologically, financially, politically, physically and economically. Unequivocally, it brings about retrogression and underdevelopment at the national level (Carter, 2016) [2].

This trend as a matter of fact requires urgent and timely intervention to curb its manifestation. There has been several decrees and policies from Nigerian governments in a bid to curb the incidence of aggression. However, it appears that the efforts have not yielded the desired results with the waves aggressive acts still reported in the media in recent time. It is evident that preventive measures must also be included in the efforts to curb aggression. There is the necessity for counselling intervention as a measure to compel youths in Nigerian society, if they must achieve optimal level of development in all spheres of life. The use of cognitive behaviour modification as a counselling strategy appears expedient because youths as bonafide members of the Nigerian society have important roles to play in group dynamics for effective national development. They must definitely learn to eschew aggression if they must play their roles adequately.

Cognitive behaviour modification strategy is a practical, didactic and systematic application of the principles of psychology in changing undesirable behaviour to a desirable one (Echebe, 2018) [4]. It is an enabling service offered to aggressive youths in order to assist them attain optimal level of functioning to be able to fit in as responsible and respectable members of Nigerian's teeming citizens. The cognitive behaviour modification strategy is expected to help aggressive youths change their perception of the world as a hostile place, help them manage their aggressive impulses and learn new socially acceptable skills for dealing with interpersonal problems and relationships (Olayinka, 2016) [11]. However, this study sets out to discover the impact of cognitive behaviour modification strategy on youths aggression in the university. The study also discusses the implications of this for youths' social and behavioural change through counselling for development in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The constant and frequent chaos, armed conflict, killing, wanton destruction of properties, social and economic insecurity, incessant closures of higher institutions are taking their toll on Nigerian university campuses and elsewhere in other places. Youths, family members, teaching and non-teaching staff of universities and the whole nation suffer from the effects of youths' aggressive acts. Lives are frequently destroyed, economy of parents

and guardians get stretched above expectations, students spend less time studying, spent more years in schools and institutions get shot down on several occasions.

The effects of this act is that the quality of graduates turn out appears to be diminishing with its devastating impact on human and invariably national development. This does not augur well for a nation that is in dear need to get industrialized in order to be among the twenty most economically strong nations in the world and which is also in the bid to achieve millennium development goals (MDGs). There is the need for an indept study to discover how aggression can be curbed among Nigerian youths generally and especially those in our universities. This is very crucial if we expect our universities to be bastions of enlightened discourse from which Nigerian future leaders are produced.

The Nigerian government obviously aware of youths' aggression on human and national development has come with some laws and decrees aimed at curbing the ugly trend. Unfortunately, these decrees to the best of my knowledge do not appear to have been effective in eradicating aggression in the universities. Riots, robberies, armed robberies, killings, cultism, open arm-conflicts among cultists and other vices are still rampant on the university campuses.

Reducing aggression among students should not necessarily be only through punitive measures but primarily through more pro-active and prevention oriented measures. Counselling has a lot to offer in devising pro-active or preventive techniques to curb aggression. Counselling services therefore, must be systematically brought to help youths in the universities. Behaviour modification strategies have been found to be very significant and relevant in changing bad human behaviours and dissocializing individual's aggressive behaviours.

In view of the above discuss, therefore, the problem of the study is to discover the impact of cognitive behaviour modification strategy (CBMS) on youths' aggression and draw implications for youths' counselling for effective human development.

Purpose of the Study

This paper is to discover the impact of cognitive behaviour modification strategy on youths' aggression in Nigerian universities. Other objectives are to discover the implications of youths' behavioural and social counselling and development.

Research Question

In order to strengthen the study, one research question was asked:

1. Will cognitive behaviour modification strategy facilitate youths' readiness to curb aggression?

Research Hypothesis

Ho1: the mean achievement pre-test score of youths exposed to cognitive behavioural modification strategy will not defer significantly from their post-test score.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted pre-experimental one group pre-test post-test research design. This required giving a pre-test to 80 students before a treatment was carried out. The treatment given was a didactic programme consisting of 5 sessions of

2 hourly per session spread over five weeks. A post-test was then administered using the same instrument although the items were re-arranged to serve control purposes. The content of the treatment programme given is summarized below.

Summary of the Content of the Treatment Programme

In the first session, participants were cheerfully welcomed before introductions were made. After the introductions, the researchers explained the aims of the programme. They went further with enlightened and an in-depth discussion on the following topics.

1. Conception of the term “aggression”
2. Levels and types of aggression
3. Factors that contribute to aggression

During the second section an indepth discussion on the effects of aggression was carried out under the following sub-headings:

1. Social effects on students, and non-teaching staff of the universities, family members, the nation and significant other.
2. Economic effects on students, parents, universities, the nation and significant others.
3. Physical effects on individual members of the community.
4. Education effects on students’ education when the universities close down.
5. Why should aggression be curbed in our universities?

During the third section, cognitive restructuring strategy was introduced. This was directed towards helping youths develop the ability to:

- Belief in self
- Counter and manage aggressive impulses.
- State their thoughts in non-frustrating and non-threatening manner.
- Replace aggressive scripts with more positive interpretations of their social environment and not perceiving the world as a hostile place to live.
- Learn and develop new social skills for dealing with interpersonal problems.
- Establish and enforce rules in a non-confrontational manner.
- Imbibe pro-social and social skills.

The fourth section dealt with self-instruction training. This section as to direct the youths to learn how to;

- Stop, confront or control unproductive self-defeating thoughts.
- Develop capacity for adequate internal dialogic to guide right decision making.
- Reinforce self when in frustrating and threatening situation.
- Stop self from watching aggressive movies and behaviours.

In the second part of the section, audio-visual, therapy was used. This included video clips that modeled aggression in different situations. This was followed by discussions on:

- How youths felt about the characters shown
- What the personalities depicted could have done either to avoid aggressive situation arising or responding non-aggressively.

During the second part of the section, video clips that show positive non-aggressive models who did not respond aggressively even the face of frustration and threatening situations. This was followed by discussions on.

- How youths felt about the characters shown
- What the personalities displayed did that they admired in the face of threatening, annoying and frustrating situations.
- What benefits arise from responding non-aggressively at every occasion.
- What lessons they have learnt.

The final part of the section was the administration of post-test followed by expression of appreciation by the researchers.

Population and Sample

The population of the study is made up of youths in various universities in Nigeria. University of Port Harcourt however, was selected as the area of study.

The sample of the study was drawn from fourth year students because they had stayed long enough to understand all the intrigues in the university. Random sampling technique was used to select the departments that its students would participate in the study, as the university population was already officially stratified into many faculties. Each student was asked to pick one department from the folded pieces of paper of each faculty. In the end, 8 departments were selected. They are Educational Psychology, Guidance and counselling, Anatomy, Pharmacy, Accounting, Theatre and Communication Arts, Civil Law, Chemical Engineering and Dentistry. From these departments, 10 students were selected from the list of fourth year students as respondents using simple random sampling scale. At the end of the selection, 80 respondents were randomly selected i.e. 40 males and 40 females.

Instrument

The instrument for the study was researchers’ designed questionnaire titled “Youths’ Questionnaire on Aggression (YQA)”. The instrument consisted of two sections, the descriptive and analytical. The descriptive section contained personal information while the analytical had fifteen items. The items were of three-point scale. The researchers ensured that the instrument was validated by counselling psychology professionals of the university of Port Harcourt who made constructive criticisms on the items. The researcher also established the reliability of the instrument using Pearson’s product moment correlation statistic. The statistic entailed testing 10 youths that would not participate in the study with the developed instrument and retesting them using the same instrument after 2 weeks. A coefficient of 0.78 was obtained and the researchers adjudged it highly reliable for adoption.

Procedure for Data Collection

The Deans of the 8 Faculties in the university were met by the researchers to seek permission to carry out the study. They explained the reasons for the study. Having obtained the letters of permission from the Deans, the researchers met the Heads of selected Departments to notify them and solicit their assistance. The Head of Departments then introduced them to the students who were intimated with the aims of the study. They were then assured of the confidentiality of their responses to the questionnaire items. The researchers

adopted the face to face direct delivery technique in administering and selecting the questionnaire at the testing stages. This ensured a 100% return of correctly completed questionnaire items.

Method of Data Analysis

The data generated from the instrument were compiled, tallied and coded on the SPSS. The analysis of data was based on the formulated research question and hypothesis. The research question was answered using simple percentages while the t-test statistic was used to test the hypothesis.

However, the study found a significant difference in the mean scores at the pre and post-test stages. The difference must obviously be attributed to the treatment of cognitive behaviour modification strategy they received. This shows that the strategy is a good positive approach to help aggressive youths to curb aggression in our universities and the entire society at large.

Results

Research Question 1: Will cognitive behaviour modification strategy facilitate youths’ readiness to curb aggression?

Table 1: Data for computing the percentage scores on youths’ readiness to curb aggression

		Pre-test			Post-test		
		AG %	DA %	UD %	AG %	DA %	UD %
1	The world is a hostile place	70	20	10	70	85	0
2	Human beings are generally wicked	70	20	10	10	85	0
3	Aggression protects one from wicked ones	80	15	5	15	85	0
4	People will cheat you if you are not aggressive	90	5	5	5	95	5
5	Injustice, inequity must be stopped	75	20	5	5	90	5
6	Living conditions are harsh	65	15	20	5	90	5
7	It is the only way to survive	80	10	10	5	90	5
8	Parental ineptitude leads to aggression	70	20	10	5	90	5
9	Retaliatory aggression is good	65	30	5	0	95	5
10	It is an acceptable way to solve interpersonal problems	80	15	5	0	100	0
11	Youths are exposed to acts of aggression	50	30	20	10	90	0
12	Child abuse and neglect	70	20	10	20	70	10
13	Dashed expectations precipitate aggression	85	15	0	20	80	0
14	Of frustrating conditions in Nigeria	85	10	5	5	90	5
15	Parental aggressive child-rearing techniques	90	10	0	20	75	5
	*AG = Agreed DA = Disagreed UD = Undecided						

Hypothesis 1: The mean achievement pre-test score of youths exposed to cognitive counselling strategy will not differ significantly from their post-test score.

Table 2: Summary for t-test analysis of youths’ mean achievement scores at pre-test and post-test stages

Variables	N	\bar{x}	S2	Df	Cal-t	Cri-t	$\alpha = .05$
Pre-test	80	72.2	48.72	459	6.50	2.617	S
Post-test	80	64.5	24.81				

Testing at the alpha level of probability of p=0.05, the calculated t of 6.50 and critical t of 2.617 were obtained. Since the calculated t of 6.50 is higher than the critical t of 2.617 at 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. It is, therefore, concluded that there is a significant difference between the mean scores at the pre- and post-test stages.

Discussion of Findings

Analysis of data on table 2 shows that youths benefited immensely from the cognitive behaviour modification strategy. The findings show that the strategy is a very effective counselling tool for curbing aggression in youths. This is buttressed by the remarkable differences between the re-test and post-post scores on almost all items. By all indications, respondents showed through the post-test they were more positively inclined to curb aggressive acts. For instance, at the pre-test stage, 90% of respondents were in agreement that aggressive behaviour is necessary for man in order not to be cheated, at the post-test stage only 5% indicated they are still in for man in agreement. 85% of youths had changed their views probably because of the treatment. Again while at the pre-test stage, most youths i.e.

85% agreed that one must react aggressively to frustrating situations, at post-test 90% thought otherwise. There is no doubt that the Cognitive Behaviour Modification Strategy has made much impact on the youths’ readiness to curb aggression. Besides, from the trend of responses to the questionnaire items at the pre-test stage, it could be inferred that most of them believed that aggression should be attributed to external factors like bad parenting techniques, hostile environments and frustrating conditions while excusing themselves. However, at post-test stage their perceptions had changed and they were now ready to take responsibility for their actions and inactions. However, the study found that there was a significant difference in the mean scores at the pre and post-test stages. The difference must obviously be attributed to the treatment of cognitive behaviour modification strategy they received. Invariably, this shows that the strategy is a positive approach that should be adopted in efforts made to assist aggressive youths to curb aggression in our society. The findings of this study is in line with those of Kendall, Roman & Epps (2014) ^[8] who discovered that aggressive youths benefited immensely from a systematic programme of cognitive behaviour modification strategy. Similarly,

Smith (2010) ^[13] reported on the efficacy of the strategy on aggressive children. This is not a surprise since the strategy gives an opportunity to youths to talk about themselves, how they feel, what informs the exhibition of aggressive behaviours in them and also to learn new ways they perceive things. The findings also corresponds with that of Pepler, King & Byrd (2011) ^[12] found that cognitive strategies help improve humans processing of information. To them cognitive strategies teach application of rational or emotional and logical reasoning to youths. However, it can be concluded, based on the data generated that cognitive behaviour modification strategies has produced encouraging results on youths' readiness aptitude to curb aggression. Therefore, the study, supports the inclusion of counsellors as permanent staff of the students' affairs departments of the universities to provide relevant counselling services to all students.

Implications for Youths' Counselling and Human Development

The major findings of this study shows that cognitive behaviour modification strategy is very vital reducing the horrendous acts of youths' aggression in our universities. This behaviour has serious implications for counselling and human development. There is the urgent and mandatory need to use and apply counselling strategies in to curb the recurring decimal of youths' aggression in our institutions of learning. The ever-changing complex nature of the society makes it imperative for issues of aggression in youths to occupy centre stage in counselling services. It is expedient, therefore, to evolve workable strategies to resolve present and emergent aggression to forestall its tragic consequences. This is absolutely necessary if the human development index is to be increased. It is unequivocal for national development to improved if the human development is neglected.

Counselling services is an indispensable factor and is concerned with human development. It has the consultative capacity to help the youths consultative capacity to help the youths in our universities achieve new critical superior level of reasoning. It is expected to help them to adjust more easily to new ways resolving conflicts among themselves and others without expressing aggressive behaviour.

Counsellors will help in no small measure to reinforce and add impetus, stride and spice in developing youths to ably take their place in the scream of things in the nation and all over the world by accomplishing these tasks.

Having discovered that cognitive behaviour modification strategy can enhance youths' readiness aptitude to curb aggression, counsellors must be included among the staff of the students' affairs departments in our universities. The counsellors are expected to carry out need assessment of the university youths as concerned aggression. The youths from this point would be able to adopt workable strategies like the one proposed here to enshrine the necessary competencies required to curb aggression in them. It is only when this is effectively done that adequate human development and in effect national development can be realized.

Recommendation

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study.

1. More emphasis to be placed on pro-active and preventive counselling strategies in dealing with youths' behaviour disorders such as aggression.
2. Counselling units should be created in the students' affairs department with well experienced and professional counsellors drawn into them. This group of professionals should be permanent members of the staff of the Department.
3. Proper orientation of newly admitted university students should be planned and systematically carried out. Cognitive behaviour modification strategy must be employed during the orientation of newly admitted students of universities. Thus is especially useful for identifying those students who are prone to be aggressive so that they can be followed up.

Conclusion

The constant acts of aggression among youths in Nigeria universities have grievous consequences. These has negative effects on every citizen and impede the rate of human and inevitably national development. For a nation in pursuit of achieving the millennium development goals (MDGs) the effect of youths' aggression are abysmal. Counselling intervention strategies become very relevant because of their enabling capacity in eliminating aggression among the youths, since they can produce expected desired results. Pro-active and preventive counselling services become especially expedient. Although the researchers believe that the most fruitful, specific and time proven counselling approach of cognitive behaviour modification is the best strategy youths in Nigeria and beyond. CBMS targets youths' emotional, rational and logical reasoning. Therefore, this strategy will help youths most especially the aggressive ones to change their views of the world as a hostile place. It will help them learn how to manage their aggressive impulses and learn new pro-social and social skills for dealing with interpersonal relationships. As a matter of fact, all youths can benefit from the cumulative behaviour modification strategy since counselling will help make them become better individuals.

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