



PERSONALITY TRAITS, FAMILIAL-FACTOR AND NEGLECTFUL BEHAVIOR AS PREDICTORS OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR AMONG STREET CHILDREN

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Abstract

The emergence of street children in Nigeria comes as a result of family breakdown. With the increasing individualistic society such children quickly learn to survive on their own. Some studies have been carried out to establish factors predicting aggressive behavior among street children with varied results. This study investigated personality traits, familial factors and neglectful behavior predicting aggressive behavior among street children in Lagos. The study adopted cross-sectional survey design using purposive sampling technique to select six areas with high concentrations of street children. Data were collected from 384 participants using validated questionnaires. Data were analyzed using hierarchical multiple regression and tested one hypothesis at $p < 0.05$ level of significance. The result revealed that personality traits, familial factors and neglectful behavior predicted aggressive behavior among street children. Also, neuroticism, agreeableness and neglectful behavior independently predicted aggressive behavior among study participants. The novelty of this study is that it is the first time psycho-demographic factors are used to analyze aggressive behavior among street children in the emerging mega city of Lagos State. It is recommended that government and non-governmental organizations should put programs in place to reduce incidence of street children and alleviate endemic poverty among the populace.

Keywords: *personality traits; familial-factor; neglectful behavior; aggressive behavior; street children.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Aggression is any act meant to cause harm to one person or the others. Aggression could be both psychological and physical. Psychological aggression involves the use of words to cause harm which ranges from shouting aloud to a child, accusing, blaming, lecturing, shaming, commanding, and ordering (Le et al., 2023). On the other hand, physical aggression is when psychological aggression is taken too far resulting in action that can cause injuries to the other persons such as fighting, throwing of stones, or the use of dangerous weapons in self-defense

(Soremi, 2022). Aggression could be reactive which is emotionally charged, poorly controlled, and impulsive or proactive which is or more controlled and non-emotional (Le et al., 2023).

One group of individuals whose aggressive behaviors that need to be studied is the street children also referred to as ‘teenage beggars’, ‘street kids’, ‘homeless kids’, ‘street boys’, ‘parking boys’, ‘city nuisance’, ‘children in difficult circumstances’ and ‘street-connected children’. There is no universal definition for street children. However, the study adopted definition proffers by Inter-NGO (cited by Theirworld, 2024) where street children is described as “any girl or boy who has not reached adulthood [...] for whom the street has become his or her habitual abode/or sources of livelihood and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults”. Street children is further delineated into street-working children, to mean “those who have homes to which they return at night but stay on the street as a means of sustenance, begging or engaging in petty trading and sometimes other vices” (Consortium for Street Children, 2023). On the other hand, street living children refers to “those who for the majority of the time sleep on the street and remain in limited or no contact with their family of origin” (Consortium for Street Children, 2023). Street children are more or less “abandoned” by would-be primary caregivers or themselves “abandoning” their families and homesteads to live or to stay in the street (Ozoh et al., 2022).

The total number of street children varied from one continent to another and from one country to another. UNICEF (2020) put the global estimates of street children at more than 150 million, in sub-Saharan countries at 80 million, while in Nigeria, it is estimated at about 20 million (Alabi, 2022). The prevalence of street children comes with attendance problems such as stealing, pick pocketing, burglary, vandalism, cultism, kidnapping, cybercrimes, substance abuse, prostitution, child trafficking, etc.

Some factors predicting aggressive behavior among street children have been investigated. This study investigated three factors. First considered is personality trait which is described as a consistent behavioral pattern of an individual over time (McCrae & Costa, 2008). The big five personality traits of neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience and conscientiousness formulated by (Costa & McCrae, 2017) have been used as a working template to explain human personality make up. Neuroticism is about individuals who are nervous, moody, emotional, insecure, and have unstable character (Costa & McCrae, 2017). Extraversion refers to individuals who are sociable, talkative, gregarious, assertive, active, ambitious and expressive (Costa & McCrae, 2017). Agreeableness characterizes individuals who are kind, cooperative, sympathetic, helpful, courteous, and warm (Costa & McCrae, 2017). Openness to experience conceives of individuals who are curious, imaginative, creative, complex, refined, sophisticated (Costa & McCrae, 2017). Finally, conscientiousness characterizes individuals who are dependable, organized, reliable, ambitious, and hardworking (Costa & McCrae, 2017; Olu, 2020).

Pabbathi et al. (2014) found personality traits as a predictor of crime and aggressive behavior among different populations and across different samples.

Individuals' tendency to engage in aggressive behaviors is rooted in their personality traits (Costa & McCrae, 2008; Levine & Jackson, 2004; Listwan, 2001). Specifically, extraversion and neuroticism have been found to be the prime causes of aggressive behavior (Levine & Jackson, 2004). High level of neuroticism leads to higher propensity to behave aggressively (Rantanen et al., 2005; Levine & Jackson, 2004). Also, the combined effect of high extraversion and high neuroticism interferes with learning social rules and conditioning, increasing the likelihood of aggressive behavior (Levine & Jackson, 2004). Thus, personality traits predicting aggressive behavior among street children would reflect global family conflict.

The second factor considered is familial factor which has to do with family relationships that exists among family members. It describes the symbolic interaction that exists between individuals recognized to be a member of a family unit (Bowen Center for the Study of the Family, 2016). Familial factors in terms of family relationship tend to predict the prevalence of aggressive behavior among street children. According to the theory, the family is the unit of social integration. Through identifying social-emotional distress and harms and good parenting methods, the family is likely to have a significant role in reducing and preventing aggressive behaviors. Considering the significant relationship observed between the roles dimension of family relationship and aggression, it noted that families are healthier if the family members feel more satisfied with their roles and responsibilities and when the tasks are fairly divided among them.

Studies investigating familial factor of family relationship as the cause of aggressive behavior among street children or whether their aggressive personality leads to the strain in their family relationship confirmed that the presence of aggressive personality makes the strain in family relationship worse (Ismail et al., 2017; Zakaria et al., 2021; Vaughn, 2020). Another line of study on the causes of aggressive behavior is the type of relationship between the parents and their children. The desirable and undesirable behaviors of the family members affect each member. If proper behavioral patterns are set in the family, the children also grow up with healthy behaviors. Moreover, given the significant relationship observed between affective responsiveness and affective involvement, it can be said that families that properly respond to each other's emotions and understand each other's values and interests can create a suitable emotional atmosphere at home and thus prevent the suppression of the children's emotions and its subsequent harmful effects (Vaughn, 2020).

Finally, neglectful behavior is considered as a factor likely to predict aggressive behavior. Neglectful behavior describes form of abusive behavior of caregivers (e.g., parents) that results in depriving a child of their basic needs such as the failure to provide adequate supervision, food, healthcare, clothing, or housing as well as other physical, emotional, social, educational, and safety needs (psycnet, 2022). Neglected children are reported to exhibit aggression in form of argument, cruelty to others, destruction of property, disobedience, threatening people and fighting or physically attacking others (Pabbathi et al., 2014). Alink et al. (2012) stated that when children have been maltreated, then they showed higher

levels of aggressive behavior. This was echoed by Connor et al. (2003) who investigated the relationship between lifetime histories of neglectful behavior defined as physical abuse and aggression behavior. They found that clinically referred abused children scored higher on measures of aggression and significantly higher on measures of reactive aggression and verbal aggression than clinically referred none-abused children. Also, neglectful behavior shown in childhood was found to predict aggressive behavior even well into adulthood (Kolla et al., 2013). This finding suggests a strong influence of childhood neglect (physical abuse) on the development of aggression that persists over the lifespan. Therefore, there is a strong association between neglectful behavior (maltreatment) in childhood and aggressive (criminal) behavior in adolescence and adulthood across many studies (Dewi & Kyranides, 2022; Kolla et al., 2013; Pabbathi et al., 2014).

The psychological causes of aggressive behavior among street children have become an emerging theme that need to be investigated. Some studies that have investigated causes and problems of street children's behavior have produced varied results. Also, studies that examined psychological and familial factors on aggressive behavior among street children in Nigeria tends to be scanty thus leaving left gaps in knowledge that need to be filled.

2. OBJECTIVES AND HYOTHESIS

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate personality traits, familial factors and neglectful behavior as predictors of aggressive behavior among street children in Lagos, Nigeria. The research questions raised to guide this study were: Would personality traits, familial factors and neglectful behavior predict aggressive behavior among street children in Lagos, Nigeria? And would there be gender difference on aggressive behavior among street children in Lagos, Nigeria?

The finding of this study would help to explain personality traits, familial factors and neglectful behavior contribution to the emerging issues of aggressive behavior perpetuated among street children in Lagos, Nigeria. In addition, understanding the personality traits and familial factors predicting aggressive behavior among street children would help government, NGOs and other stakeholders in planning for the re-integration of this vulnerable group of adolescents back into the society as useful citizens.

The hypothesis raised and tested in this study was: Personality traits, familial factor and neglectful behavior would jointly and independently predict aggressive behavior among street children in Lagos, Nigeria.

3. METHOD

The study was conducted to explore how personality traits, familial factor and neglectful behavior contribute to aggressive behavior among street children in the cosmopolitan city of Lagos, South-west Nigeria. Lagos is the commercial nerve center of Nigeria, a mini Nigeria where nearly 250 ethnic groups are represented at least with one individual. The study adopted cross-sectional survey research design

while data were collected using validated questionnaires. The study was conducted in six Local Government Areas (LGAs): Agege LGA, Oshodi/Isolo LGA, Mushin LGA, Amuwo-Odofin LGA, Lagos Mainland LGA and Kosofe LGA. These LGAs were purposively selected because of the high concentration of street children. Also, the participants for data collection were conveniently selected for the distribution of research questionnaires. The study calculated sample size by using Cochran formula $N = \frac{z^2pq}{e^2}$, where confidence level was 95%, margin error was +/-5% and standard deviation used was .05 to arrive at the sample size of 384.

Participants

The study collected data using four validated questionnaires.

The Brief Family Relationship Scale (Fok et al., 2011) was used to measure an individual's perception of the quality of their family relationship functioning. The scale consisted of 19-item with 3-subscale of Cohesion (8-item), Expressiveness (4-item) and Conflict (7-item). The scale was presented in a 3-point Likert's format ("Not at all, Somewhat," and "A lot."). Sample items include: "In our family, we really help and support each other" and "In our family we spend a lot of time doing things together at home". The Cronbach's alpha for the subscales calculated were Cohesion (0.83) and Conflict (0.80) and Expressiveness (0.65) while for the full BFRS (0.88) while for the current study, composite Cronbach's alpha of 0.81 was calculated.

In addition, the Big Five Inventory 10 (Rammstedt & John, 2007) which was used to assess the five components of personality traits of openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion- introversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. Each factor contains two items which were presented in a 5-point Likert's format ranging from 1—strongly disagree to 5—strongly agree. Sample items include: "I see myself as someone who is reserved" and "I see myself as someone who is generally trusting". The authors Cronbach's alpha reported varied between 0.65 and 0.75 and for this study, Cronbach's alpha of .61 and .69 was calculated.

Furthermore, the study used the Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale (Straus et al., 2011) to evaluate neglectful behavior. The scale consisted of 20-item presented on a 7-point Likert's format ranging from 1 = Once that year , 2 = Twice that year , 3 =3-5 times that year ,4 = 6-10 times that year ,5 = 11-20 times that year , 6 = More than 20 times that year,7 = Not that year ,but it happened before, 0 =This has never happened. Sample items include: "Took me places where I could learn things, like a Zoo or library" and "Paid no attention to me". The Cronbach's alpha for the original scale was 0.69 and in the current study, Cronbach's alpha of 0.65 was calculated.

Finally, Aggression Scale (Orpinas & Frankowski, 2001) was used to establish aggressive behavior which measures behaviors that might result in psychological or physical injury to other individuals such as verbal aggression (teasing, name-calling, encouraging students to fight, threatening to hurt or hit) and physical aggression (pushing, slapping, kicking, hitting) as well as information about anger (getting angry easily, being angry most of the day). It consisted of 11-items presented on a 6-point Likert's format ranging from 0 times through 6 or more

times. Sample items include: “I teased students to make them angry” and “I got angry very easily with someone”. These components were summated into a single scale. The author reported Cronbach’s alpha of 0.85 and for the present study, Cronbach’s alpha of 0.81 was calculated.

Permission to carry out this study was sought for and obtained through the letter of introduction from the Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria used by the researchers to identify themselves by the relevant individuals in the course of data collection. Since many of the potential participants were illiterates, the researchers sought the assistance of the few of them who were able to read and understand Pidgin English. Two of the researchers were fluent in Yoruba and Hausa language which was an added advantage in approaching and discussing with the potential participants. Wherever the potential participants were met, the researchers interacted with them and sought their permission to participate in the study. They were briefed on the purpose of the study. Those who agreed to participate in the study and were unable to read and write were interviewed using the questionnaires and their responses were recorded by the researchers. Those who were able to read and write were given the questionnaire to complete with the guidance of the researchers.

It was after the interviews and filling of the questionnaires by those who voluntarily participated in the study that the researchers asked them whether they would take snacks and sachet water. At no time were the participants aware that there was any incentive for them before they participated in the study. The interviews and the administrations of the questionnaires went for 12 days in order to have representative samples of street children in the six local government areas selected for the study. A total of 389 questionnaires were administered both in interview format and in self-completion. During the final screening and coding, five questionnaires were not properly filled and were removed thus left with 384 valid questionnaires used for the analysis.

The study used IBM SPSS version 23 software to analyze data collected where both descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. The hypotheses were tested using stepwise multiple regression analysis. All hypotheses were accepted at $p < 0.05$ level of significance.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, a preliminary evaluation of the relationships among study variables was executed using zero-order correlation and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Inter-correlation among study variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Aggr-Bhr	14.00	1.12	-						
2 Negl-Bhr	26.98	8.02	.414*	-					
3 Extra'sion	.89	.05	.012	.073	-				
4 Openness	.79	.01	.103	-.108	.278*	-			
5 Agreeable	.74	.02	-.321*	.217*	.179*	.301*	-		

6 Neuro'ism	.86	.03	.439*	-.164*	-.293*	.113*	-.381*	-
7 Con-ness	.82	.02	-.091	.044	.192*	.189*	.101*	.127*

NB Aggr-Bhr = Aggressive Behaviour, Negl-Bhr = Neglectful Behaviour, Con-ness = Conscientiousness, Extr'sion= Extraversion, Neuro'ism = Neuroticism
* Significant at 0.05

Table 1 presents results of the zero-order correlations on the relationship among personality traits, familial factors and neglectful behavior and aggressive behavior. The result indicated that neglectful behavior significantly and positively correlated with aggressive behavior ($r = .414, p < .05$). This implies that neglectful behavior leads to more aggressive behavior among street children. In other words, aggressive behavior of street children increases with increase in neglectful behavior. Also, the result showed that neuroticism personality trait ($r = .439, p < .05$) and agreeableness traits ($r = -.321, p < .05$) had significant relationships with aggressive behavior among study participants. This means that aggressive behavior of street children increases with neuroticism but decreases with agreeableness. Because of the significant and positive relationship obtained among the study variables, the data were used to run the hierarchical multiple regression analysis.

Personality traits of extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience, the familial factor of family relationships and neglectful behavior would jointly and independently predict aggressive behavior among street children in Lagos, Nigeria. The hypothesis was tested using hierarchical multiple regression analysis and the result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Hierarchical regression analysis showing the joint and independent prediction of personality traits, familial factor and neglectful behavior on aggressive behavior among street children in Lagos, Nigeria

Predictors	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
Family relationship	.042	1.136	.038	1.09	.029	1.02
Extraversion			.068	1.10	.041	1.00
Openness			.116	1.32	.102	1.09
Agreeableness			-.312	3.562*	-.286	3.21*
Neuroticism			.358	3.72*	.306	3.27*
Conscientiousness			.103	1.07	.087	1.01
Neglectful behavior					.341	3.61*
R		.090 ^a		.182 ^b		.254 ^c
R ²		.008		.033		.065
ΔR^2		.008		.025		.032
Df		1,215		6, 210		7,209
F		3.424		7.129**		9.588**
ΔF		3.424		10.753**		14.061**

*Statistical Value significant at the 0.05level (2-tailed). Source: Authors' field work (2023)

Table 2 presents the hierarchical multiple regression analysis of personality traits, familial factors and neglectful behavior on aggressive behavior among street children in Lagos, Nigeria. The results in Model 1 of Table 2 revealed that familial

factor of family relationship did not predict aggressive behavior among street children in Lagos [$R^2 = 0.008$, $F(1, 215) = 3.424$, $p > .05$]. This means that family relationship was not a determinant of aggressive behavior among study participants. When the children had left home, nobody to take care of them, as the common parlance in Nigeria is: *You are on your own!* Definitely the street children had no control but to do what they like, being aggressive in behavior would be a best alternative. This supported the family system theory that when there is no relationship in the family, children or adults go their respective ways. Deviant behavior tends to be readily practiced. This finding supported work by Soremi (2022) that lack of family relationship did not help to knit individuals together. Also, the study contradicted Vaughn (2020) and Zakaria et al. (2021) findings that family relationships tend to be a significant predictor of aggressive behavior.

When personality traits were introduced into the regression analysis (See Model 2), the result showed an increase in the joint influence on aggressive behavior. Thus, familial factor of family relationship and personality traits (extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, neuroticism and conscientiousness) jointly predicted aggressive behavior among street children in Lagos [$R^2 = .033$, $F(6, 210) = 7.129$, $p < .05$]. The introduction of personality traits increased the percentage variance to 3.3% indicating that personality traits contributed a significant 2.5% of the variance observed in the aggressive behavior among street children [$F\Delta(1, 217) = 10.753$, $\Delta < .05$, $R^2\Delta = .025$]. This finding connotes the importance of personality traits in aggressive behavior. Personality trait of neuroticism independently predicted aggressive behavior in this study. Street children who are neurotic stand to display aggressive behavior at the slightest provocation. They are nervous, moody, emotional, insecure, and have unstable characters. This finding lent credence to previous results where aggressive behaviors were traced to adolescents who were profiled as neurotic (Costa & McCrae, 2017; Pabbathi et al., 2014; Zakari et al., 2021).

Furthermore, when a neglectful behavior factor was introduced into the regression model (See Model 3), the result indicated an increase in the joint prediction of aggressive behavior. Familial factor of family relationship, personality traits of extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, neuroticism and conscientiousness and neglectful behavior jointly predicted aggressive behavior among street children ($R^2 = .065$, $F(7, 209) = 9.588$, $p < .05$). Hence, the introduction of neglectful behavior increased the percentage variance to 6.5% indicating that neglectful behavior contributed a significant 3.2% to the variance in the aggressive behavior among street children ($F\Delta(1, 216) = 14.069$, $p < .01$, $R^2\Delta = .032$). Neglected children become a problem to themselves, their family and the society at large. Children lacking care and attention tend to be grieved and unhappy. The frustration of not having food, shelter, being bully by others would lead to aggression which support Berkowitz (1989) revised frustration-aggression theory: What would generate aggressive behavior would depend on the extent to what would produce negative affect (p.71). This finding supported the result by Taiwo (2023) who found that adolescents in urban environments were lure into crimes due to their migration to the urban settings with

no means of livelihood.

5. CONCLUSION

The novelty of this study is that it is the first time psycho-demographic factors are used to analyze aggressive behavior among street children in the emerging mega city of Lagos State. This study was on personality traits, familial factors and neglectful behavior as predictors of aggressive behavior among street children in Lagos, Nigeria. It is concluded that neuroticism and agreeable personality traits coupled with neglectful behavior significantly contributed to aggressive behavior among street children in Lagos, Nigeria. The study recommends that stakeholders such as international organizations, orphanage homes and NGOs should be sensitized about the potential harm that neglectful behavior, unfavorable family relationships (or support systems) and personality traits of neuroticism and agreeableness are having on street children at any stage of their development. Also, counselors and other mental health professionals should pay close attention to the mental health development of these street children which would have affected their mental stability and psychological well-being.

Despite the contributions of this study, some limitations were identified which need to be attended to in further studies. For example, data for the study were collected using self-reported questionnaires which were not free of response bias. Further studies should employ focus group discussions and observation methods to triangulate data collected using self-report. Furthermore, six out of 20 LGAs with the sample size of 364 would not allow for the generalization of the study findings beyond these LGAs. Further studies should include more LGAs and increase sample size to allow for generalization beyond the study population. Finally, the three independent variables investigated in this study were not exhaustive; therefore, further studies should include social support, self-esteem, and learned helplessness.

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