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Understanding the Relationship Between Verbal Aggression and Social Withdrawal in Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence represents a crucial stage of social and emotional development, during which behaviors such as verbal aggression and social withdrawal can emerge as significant challenges. Verbal aggression involves the use of language to harm or intimidate others, while social withdrawal is characterized by the avoidance of social interactions. This study examines the relationship between these behaviours in a sample of 62 adolescents aged 16-20, using the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (VAS) and the Hikikomori Questionnaire (HQ-25) as assessment tools. Statistical analysis revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.441$, $p < 0.01$) between verbal aggression and social withdrawal. These findings suggest that adolescents displaying one of these behaviors are at an increased risk of exhibiting the other, highlighting potential difficulties in social functioning. The study emphasizes the need for early interventions to address these issues, focusing on emotional regulation, social skills training, and fostering supportive environments to improve adolescents' mental health and social relationships.

Introduction

Adolescents frequently face complex social dynamics as they transition from childhood to adulthood. This period is marked by rapid emotional, psychological, and social changes, often accompanied by increased sensitivity to peer relationships and external influences. Within this context, two significant behavioral challenges—verbal aggression and social withdrawal—can emerge, both of which may profoundly impact an adolescent's development and social functioning. Verbal aggression is characterized by using words to harm, demean, or intimidate others, is often a reaction to internal struggles such as frustration, anxiety, or low self-esteem. It can serve as a defense mechanism or a misguided attempt to assert dominance and cope with

perceived threats in social settings. However, such behaviors can lead to damaged relationships, social rejection, and emotional distress for both the aggressor and their peers.

Social withdrawal manifests as a tendency to avoid social interactions. It often stems from anxiety, fear of rejection, or low confidence in one's ability to navigate social situations. While some degree of solitude is natural, persistent withdrawal can signal underlying emotional or psychological difficulties, such as depression or social anxiety disorder. Prolonged isolation can exacerbate feelings of loneliness, further hindering personal growth and the development of meaningful relationships. Though verbal aggression and social withdrawal might appear to be opposite behaviors, research suggests that they are often interconnected. Adolescents who are verbally aggressive may struggle with social anxiety or a lack of confidence, using aggression to mask their vulnerabilities. Conversely, those who withdraw socially might experience frustrations or internalized anger that could eventually manifest as verbal aggression. These behaviors can create a cycle of emotional and social difficulties, impacting academic performance, family relationships, and overall well-being.

Understanding the interplay between verbal aggression and social withdrawal is critical for developing targeted strategies to address these challenges. Interventions aimed at improving emotional regulation, building social skills, and fostering supportive environments can help adolescents navigate this crucial stage of development. By addressing these behaviors early, it is possible to reduce their long-term impact on mental health and social relationships, setting the foundation for healthier and more resilient individuals.

Review of Literature

Research shows that verbal aggression and social withdrawal are interconnected. Holt (2014) found a positive correlation between these behaviors, while Toprak (2018) identified social anxiety as a predictor of verbal aggression. On the other hand, studies such as Dodge et al. (2003) suggest that verbal aggression may not always lead to withdrawal, as aggressive adolescents can sometimes gain peer acceptance. These mixed findings highlight the need for further exploration, particularly in the context of adolescents, who are at a formative stage of social development.

Methodology

Participants

This study comprised 62 adolescents, including 30 males and 32 females, within the age range of 16 to 20 years. Participants were drawn from higher secondary and college institutions, representing a diverse yet focused demographic that captures the transitional phase of adolescence. This age group was selected as it marks a critical period of social and emotional development, where behaviors like verbal aggression and social withdrawal often surface.

Tools Used

1. Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (VAS):

Developed by Dominic A. Infante and Charles J. Wigley III, the VAS is a validated tool used to assess the frequency and severity of verbal aggression. It comprises 20 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 ("Never") to 4 ("Always"). Items such as name-calling, sarcasm, and insults are used to evaluate the participant's predisposition to use verbal aggression. The total score ranges from 20 to 100, with higher scores indicating a greater tendency toward verbal aggression. The VAS has been widely recognized for its strong reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81) and validity.

2. Hikikomori Questionnaire (HQ-25):

The HQ-25, developed by Alan R. Teo and colleagues, assesses the phenomenon of social withdrawal across three dimensions: socialization, isolation, and emotional support. It consists of 25 items, with participants rating their behaviors and feelings on a 4-point Likert scale. Scores range from 0 ("Never") to 3 ("Almost Always"). The total score ranges from 0 to 75, where higher scores signify greater levels of social withdrawal. The HQ-25 has been proven reliable and effective in identifying varying degrees of withdrawal, with a sensitivity of 94% and specificity of 61% at a cutoff score of 42.

Procedure

1. Recruitment and Consent:

Participants were recruited through online announcements targeting higher secondary and college students. Informed consent was obtained digitally, ensuring participants understood the purpose, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of the study.

2. Data Collection:

Participants were provided with an online form containing the VAS and HQ-25 questionnaires. The digital format facilitated ease of participation while ensuring anonymity.

Demographic information, including age and gender, was collected alongside responses to the scales.

3. Administration Guidelines:

Participants were instructed to respond honestly, with assurances that their data would remain confidential. The average completion time for the survey was approximately 15 minutes.

4. Data Analysis:

Collected data were entered into SPSS software for analysis.

Statistical Tests:

- Pearson Correlation: Used to evaluate the relationship between verbal aggression and social withdrawal.

- Independent Samples t-tests: Conducted to examine gender differences in verbal aggression and social withdrawal.

Results and Discussion

1. **Correlation Between Verbal Aggression and Social Withdrawal**

A significant positive correlation ($r = 0.441$, $p < 0.01$) was found, suggesting that as verbal aggression increases, so does social withdrawal. Adolescents exhibiting aggressive verbal behavior might use it as a defense mechanism against social anxiety or rejection, while those who withdraw socially may do so due to a lack of confidence in navigating social interactions.

Table1. Correlation between verbal aggression and social withdrawal

VARIABLES		VAS	HQ-25
VERBAL AGGRESSION	Pearson's Correlation	1	.441**
	Sign. (2-tailed)		0

	N	62	62
Social Withdrawal	Pearson's Correlation	.441**	1
	Sign. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	62	62

2. Gender Differences

Verbal Aggression: No significant differences were found between male (M = 2.70) and female adolescents (M = 2.42).

Social Withdrawal: Similarly, no significant gender differences were observed, though male adolescents scored slightly higher (M = 47.8) than females (M = 42.09).

These findings align with studies suggesting both genders experience similar pressures, though social norms and individual personality traits may influence their behavior differently

Table 2. Mean and Standard deviation for verbal aggression between male and female

VARIABLES	GROUP	N	MEAN	SD	T value	Sig.
VERBAL AGGRESSION	Male	30	2.6957	0.61494	1.729	0.089
	Female	32	2.4175	0.61494	1.732	0.088

Table 3. Mean and Standard deviation for social withdrawal between male and female adolescents

VARIABLES	GROUP	N	MEAN	SD	T value	Sig.
	Male	30	47.8	16.5204	1.249	0.217
	Female	32	42.0938	19.2426	1.255	0.214

3. Comparative Insights

Studies like Archer and Coyne (2005) corroborate the absence of gender differences, while others, such as LaFrance et al. (2003), highlight nuanced variations in how aggression manifests. These discrepancies point to the multifaceted nature of these behaviors.

Implications

- This study highlights the need for proactive interventions to address verbal aggression and social withdrawal in adolescents.

- For Educators and Parents: Programs fostering emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills can mitigate aggression and promote healthy communication.

- For Mental Health Professionals: Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and social skills training can help adolescents manage anxiety and build self-confidence.

- By addressing these behaviors early, we can reduce their long-term impact on mental health and social development.

Limitations

- Small sample size and reliance on self-reported data: The study's small sample size limits the generalizability of its findings, as it may not adequately represent the larger adolescent population. Self-reported data is prone to biases such as social desirability or inaccurate recall, potentially affecting the validity of the results.

- Online data collection may have affected response accuracy: Conducting the survey online might have led to distractions or misunderstandings among participants, which could compromise the quality of responses. Moreover, the absence of direct researcher supervision may reduce the reliability of the data collected.

Future Research

- Expanding the sample size and including diverse cultural contexts: A larger and more diverse sample size would provide more robust and generalizable results, ensuring a broader representation of adolescent behavior. Including participants from varied cultural contexts can shed light on the cultural influences affecting verbal aggression and social withdrawal.

- Exploring the role of external factors like peer relationships and family dynamics: Future research can delve deeper into how external influences, such as peer interactions or

familial support, shape these behaviors. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to verbal aggression and social withdrawal in adolescents.

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