

An Investigation of Self-Image and Aggressiveness in Children

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Abstract: This study aims to determine whether gender, socio-economic level and parental education level lead to any differences in self-image and the aggressiveness levels of 4 and 5th grade primary school children and whether a meaningful relationship exists between self-image and aggressiveness. The study was conducted on 288 children attending 4th and 5th years of primary school and coming from different socio-economic levels (i.e., low, middle, high). The general information form developed by the researchers was used in order to obtain information about the children and their families, the offer self-image inventory was used to identify the self-image and the Aggression Scale was used to identify the aggressiveness levels of children. Data from the research were analyzed with t-Test and ANOVA. The results showed that children's socio-economic levels and parents' education levels make a significant difference ($p < 0.05$, 0.01) while gender does not ($p > 0.05$). It was also found that a meaningful relationship exists between self-image and aggressiveness levels ($p < 0.01$).

Key words: Investigation, self-image, aggressiveness, socio-economic level, children

INTRODUCTION

Self-image is the totality of an individual's emotions and views about self, a way to know and evaluate the self. It plays an important part in the psychological well-being of children as well as in the relationship that children establish with society. Children develop positive or negative thoughts about themselves as a result of their interaction with the environment. The thoughts and attitudes related to self are thus shaped by the attitudes of people in the immediate environment. Children observe their parents and siblings at home to imitate them, as a result of which they internalize similar behaviours. During this period of association, healthy familial relationships enable children to develop healthy personalities and thus develop a positive self-image (Aral, 1997; Baran, 1999; Collins, 2002; Sparrow, 2005).

The characteristics of children and their parents are also important in the development of a positive self-image. Studies emphasize the importance of factors such as gender, parent-child relationship, the socio-economic level of family, the education level of parents and peer relationships in the development of self-image (Baran, 1999; Collins, 2000; Landy, 2005; Fraser *et al.*, 2005; Flouri, 2006).

Self-image, which is a dimension of personality and develops through interaction with the environment, is also reflected in children's behaviors. Therefore, rejection by family or friends, which may lead to the development

of a negative self-image, may also lead to aggressiveness, introversion and addictions (Leary, 2004; Rudy and Joan, 2006).

A negative self-image causes aggressive behavior as these children are in need of attention, love and support (Dodge and Petit, 2003; Leary, 2004). Galen and Underwood (1997) investigated the relationship between self-image and aggressiveness and showed that negative self-image affects children's social status and friend relationships.

Aggressiveness is a natural instinct that arises as a result of life events. Defined as destructive and hurtful behaviors (Fraser *et al.*, 2005) aggressiveness may be divided into several different types such as physical, social, verbal and non-verbal behaviors (Reid *et al.*, 2002).

Aggressive children basically have negative personality traits and try to feel powerful by exerting physical power on others. Behaviours such as breaking rules, hitting, damaging objects and challenging adult authority give these children a temporary feeling of power. They are cruel to younger and weaker children while they display doubtful and cowardly behaviour when confronted with older and stronger ones. Even when aggressive children get embarrassed by their own behavior, they cannot stop the urge to repeat such behavior. They are either not affected by punishments or may only appear to be so for a short period of time (Başar, 1996; Dizman, 2003; Hugles, 2003; Harman *et al.*, 2005).

Factors such as violence towards children in the family, negative modeling by parents, failure to meet children's needs and low level of parental education play a role in the emergence of aggression. Positive self-image emerges in children with the influence of family and the environment and thus they learn how to wait and suppress their reactions. As positive behaviors replace rebellious ones, children start to feel their parents' love, trust, interest and support (Hugles, 2003; Öz, 2003; Saygılı, 2004; Rudy and Joan, 2006).

The well-being of a society is determined by the personality traits of the individuals it comprises. Therefore, it is important for society to provide children with an environment conducive to the development of healthy personalities. Taking this as a starting point, the present study has been conducted to discover, whether the variables of gender, socioeconomic level and the education level of parents make a difference in the self-image and aggressiveness of fourth and fifth graders aged between 10 and 12 and whether a meaningful relationship exists between self-image and aggressiveness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of the study was to determine, whether the variables of gender, socioeconomic level and the education level of parents make a difference in the self-image and aggressiveness of fourth and fifth graders and whether a meaningful relationship exists between self-image and aggressiveness.

Participants: The study population comprises 4 and 5th graders ($M = 11.30$ $SD = 2.71$) from low, medium and high socio-economic level primary schools in the center of Ankara. It was conducted on 144 male and 144 female pupils ($n = 288$) aged between 10 and 12 (aged 10 = 87, aged 11 = 126, aged 12 = 75 and $M = 10.82$ $SD = 4.81$) who volunteered to take part in the research. Disabled volunteers and those from single-parent homes were excluded from the study. The random sampling method was used to determine the sample and consequently, 288 4 and 5th graders aged between 10 and 12 from 4 different socio economic primary schools were included in the study. The socioeconomic classification of downtown Ankara was determined by the Turkish Statistical Institute.

Instruments: The researchers made use of a General Information Form in order to collect data about the pupils and their parents, the Offer Self-Image Inventory in order to determine the self-image of pupils and the Aggression

Scale to evaluate tendencies for aggressive behavior. These tools were completed by the pupils without a time restriction.

Designed to identify the factors that may influence children's self-image and aggressive tendencies, the General Information Form consisted of questions related to children and their families. More specifically, the questions were about the socio-economic level of the family, gender of the respondents and the education level of parents.

Offer Self-Image Inventory reflects respondents' personality traits and measures self-perceptions. The inventory has been tested for validity and reliability. The intra reliability coefficients were found to vary between 0.48 and 0.84 depending on the sub-dimensions. The total self-image reliability coefficient was 0.73. The validity of the inventory was tested by correlating it with other personality tests and a high correlation was observed. The inventory was translated and adapted into Turkish and tested for validity and reliability by Inanç. Correlations for sub-dimensions were found to be between 0.68 and 0.78. The inventory consists of 33 positive and 41 negative statements. As positive and negative statements co-exist in the inventory, the points of negative statements were subtracted from 7 and then transformed into positive so that only one type of point could be obtained. The lower the point obtained, the higher the self-image (Offer *et al.*, 1988; Inanç, 1989).

Designed by Sears (1961) the Aggression Scale was adapted into Turkish by Uluğtekin (1976). For reliability studies, the scale was divided into two parts as even and odd items and the Pearson Correlation coefficient was computed between them. The reliability coefficients which were corrected according to Spearman-Brown formula, except the self aggressiveness scale, were found to be $r = .61$ for aggressiveness depression, $r = 0.61$ for projected aggressiveness, $r = 0.63$ for prosocial aggressiveness and $r = .64$ for antisocial aggressiveness. The self-aggressiveness scale reliability coefficient was found to be $r = 0.15$. The aggression scales consist of five different Likert-type scales for measuring different aspects of aggressiveness. The items are given in statements and the answers range on a five point scale from "I strongly agree" to "I strongly disagree". Points are awarded in line with the statement and the highest point may sometimes be awarded to "I strongly agree" whereas it may at other times be awarded to "I strongly disagree". Points obtained from each item range from 1-5. The total points for each sub-scale are then calculated by adding the total points obtained from the items in that scale. In this study, the total aggressiveness points were taken.

Data analysis: In analysing the data, t-test was used to determine whether gender creates a meaningful difference in children's self-image and aggressiveness, one-way Variance Analysis (ANOVA) was used to determine whether socio-economic level and parents' education level create a meaningful difference in children's self-image and aggressiveness. When an omnibus significant difference was found, a Scheffe test was performed to see which specific groups differed. Pearson Correlation Test was used to determine whether there is a relationship between children's self-image and aggressiveness (Büyükoztürk, 2002).

RESULTS

Of all the children included in this study, 30% were 10 years old, 4% were 11 and 24% were 12. Further, 36.7% were single children, 52.3% had 2 siblings and 11% had three or more siblings. It was also found that 43% of the respondents were first-born children, 34% were middle and 23% were the youngest in their family.

The t-test results from Table 1 reveal that although no meaningful difference exists between self-image ($t_{286} = 0.956$, $p > 0.05$) and aggressiveness ($t_{286} = 0.441$, $p > 0.05$) according to gender, girls have more positive self-image ($M = 246.27$, $SD = 26.33$) and aggressiveness ($M = 153.23$, $SD = 18.79$) averages when compared to boys ($M = 248.89$, $SD = 29.54$ for self esteem $M = 154.19$, $SD = 18.76$ for aggressiveness).

Table 2 shows that children in the lower socio-economic level display the self-image average of $M = 252.66$, $SD = 16.13$, whereas those in the middle level display the average of $M = 251.51$, $SD = 32.94$ and those in the upper level display the average of $M = 237.78$, $SD = 26.68$. As for aggressiveness points, the children in the lower socio-economic level have the average of $M = 159.17$, $SD = 17.11$, those in the middle level have $M = 153.19$, $SD = 17.44$ and those in the upper level have $M = 148.77$, $SD = 19.26$. Additionally, the variance analysis showed a meaningful difference between the children's self-image ($F_{2,285} = 8.867$, $p < 0.01$) and aggressiveness ($F_{2,285} = 8.113$, $p < 0.01$) according to socio-economic level. The Scheffe test revealed that the difference in self-image averages related to children in the lower level socio-economic group as well as the difference between the points of the children in the middle and upper socio-economic levels. On the other hand, the difference in aggressiveness averages was caused by the grade point averages of the children in the lower and upper socio-economic groups.

As can be seen from Table 3, the self-image averages of children whose mothers are illiterate or primary school graduates, high school graduates and college graduates

Table 1: Self-image and aggressiveness grade point averages, standard deviation by gender

Gender	n	Self image		Aggressiveness	
		M	SD	M	SD
Male	144	248.89	29.54	154.19	18.76
Female	144	246.27	26.33	153.23	18.79

Table 2: Self-image and aggressiveness grade point averages, standard deviation by socio-economic level (Sel)

Sel	n	Self image		Aggressiveness	
		M	SD	M	SD
Lower ¹	96	252.66	16.13	159.17	17.11
Middle ²	96	251.51	32.94	153.19	17.44
Upper ³	96	237.78	29.68	148.77	19.26
General	288	247.31	27.98	153.71	18.40
Meaningful		1-2,1-3		1-3	

Note: -Means with different superscripts in the same column are statistically significantly different $p < 0.001$

Table 3: Self-image and aggressiveness grade point averages, standard deviation by mother's education level

Mother's education level	n	Self image		Aggressiveness	
		M	SD	M	SD
Illiterate or primary school graduate ¹	57	255.73	28.10	159.31	17.64
High school graduate ²	61	251.88	35.09	153.49	21.46
College graduate ³	170	242.85	24.06	151.91	17.22
General	288	247.31	27.98	153.71	18.40
Meaningful		1-3		1-3	

Note: -Means with different superscripts in the same column are statistically significantly different $p < 0.001$ and $p < 0.05$

are $M = 253.73$, $SD = 28.10$, $M = 251.88$, $SD = 35.09$ and $M = 242.85$, $SD = 24.06$, respectively. Besides, those children whose mothers are illiterate or primary school graduates have an aggressiveness average of $M = 159.31$, $SD = 17.64$, those with high school graduate mothers have an average of $M = 153.49$, $SD = 21.46$ and those with college graduate mothers have an average of $M = 151.91$, $SD = 17.22$. The variance analysis results revealed that there is a meaningful difference in the self-image ($F_{2,285} = 5.734$, $p < 0.01$) and the aggressiveness ($F_{2,285} = 3.515$, $p < 0.05$) averages of children depending on the education level of their mothers. Additionally, the Scheffe test results have shown that this difference is caused by the averages of children with primary school and college graduate mothers.

It can be seen from Table 4 that children with illiterate or primary school graduate fathers have a self-image average of $M = 256.96$, $SD = 31.79$, those with high school graduate father have an average of $M = 246.87$, $SD = 31.71$ and those with college graduate fathers have an average of $M = 242.22$, $SD = 22.33$. As for aggressiveness, the averages of children with illiterate or primary school graduate fathers, high school graduate fathers and college graduate fathers are $M = 158.42$, $SD = 21.03$, $M = 156.46$, $SD = 14.83$ and $M = 149.96$, $SD = 17.52$, respectively. The

Table 4: Self-image and aggressiveness grade point averages, standard deviation by father's education level

Father's education level	n	Self image		Aggressiveness	
		M	SD	M	SD
Illiterate or primary school graduate ¹	40	256.96	31.79	158.42	21.03
High school graduate ²	62	246.87	31.71	156.46	14.83
College graduate ³	186	242.22	22.33	149.96	17.52
General	288	247.31	27.98	153.71	18.40
Meaningful		1-3		1-3	

Note: -Means with different superscripts in the same column are statistically significantly different $p < 0.001$

Table 5: Pearson correlation test results of the respondents' self-image and aggressiveness

Self image	n	Pearson correlation	Aggressiveness
			0.615
	288		

Note: -Means with different superscripts in the same column are statistically significantly different $p < 0.001$

variance analysis results showed a meaningful difference between the self-image ($F_{2,285} = 7.502$, $p < 0.01$) and aggressiveness ($F_{2,285} = 6.590$, $p < 0.01$) averages of children depending on fathers' education level. The Scheffe test showed that this difference was caused by the difference between the averages of children with primary and college graduate fathers. The table also reveals that as fathers' education level decreases, children's aggressiveness increases and thus they adopt a negative self-image.

Table 5 shows a positive meaningful relationship between the self-image and aggressiveness averages ($r = 0.615$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that as aggressiveness increases, self-image becomes more negative. Self-image develops as a result of children's relationship with the environment and is reflected in their behavior.

DISCUSSION

Girls tend to be more sensitive and emotional than boys and they observe social learning and social rules more frequently. Further, girls are more at peace with their physical appearance and social relations, which affects their self-image positively and stops them from anti-social behavior such as aggressiveness (Davies and Lindsay, 2001).

Bulut (2000) showed that girls submit more to social learning and social control whereas boys are more aggressive and inclined to criminal behavior. Örgün (2000) in a study of eighth grade girls and boys' self-image, found that girls have a better self-image than boys. Likewise, Twenge and Campbel (2002) studied the self-image of children from the beginning of school to adolescence and found that girls have a more positive self-image than boys and therefore, they establish more harmonious relationships with the society and display more socially accepted behaviors.

The socio-economic conditions of the family seriously affect children's personality and behavior. A negative self-image and aggressiveness may be triggered by failure of parents to meet children's needs, poor environmental conditions and the inferiority complex caused by feeling less privileged than peers (Xie *et al.*, 2002; Prinstein and Cillessen, 2003). Landry *et al.* (2000) found that the family income affects children's psychological condition to a great extent and is reflected in children's behavior. White and Rodger (2000) emphasized in their study that the economic resources of a family play an important part in the emotional development and thus self-image of children. Schoon *et al.* (2002) showed in their study that the socio-economic level of the family affects children's personality and that socially disadvantaged families have children with negative self-image who also display aggressive behavior as a means to punish the people around them.

A mother's education level affects her attitudes and behaviors towards her children. Mothers with inadequate education lack knowledge about child development and education and therefore treat their children authoritatively rather than treat them with love. Under pressure and parental control, children sometimes blame themselves and develop a negative self-image or resort to aggressiveness as a way of expressing themselves (Sprarrow, 2005; Flouri, 2006). Dizman (2003) claimed in a study about aggressiveness that there is a close relationship between mothers' educational level and children's aggressiveness by showing that children with primary school graduate mothers display more aggressive behavior when compared to others. Yıldız Bıçakçı and Gürsoy (2004) emphasized in a different study that mothers' education level is influential in their attitudes towards and the self-image of children. Çelik (2003) in a study about marital harmony and children's self-image, found that as mothers' educational level increases, so does the self-image of children. Similarly, Horell *et al.* (2001) contended in their study that mothers' education level has a big role in the life of children.

As an associative model, fathers play an important role in the development of child personality and the shaping of behavior. A positive relationship between

fathers and children is essential for the development of a healthy personality in children. Becoming similar to one's father plays an important role in the development of a super ego. The super ego helps children with their social and moral development and it also helps them build a value system. When the father has a low education level, he lacks the adequate knowledge about child development, which may affect children's psychological and physical health negatively and thus lead to certain behavioral disorders (Broude, 1999). Celik (2003) mentioned in a study conducted on children aged between 9 and 11 in the middle socio-economic level that children display more positive self-image as fathers' education level rises.

Children with a positive self-image establish harmonious and healthy relationships with the environment and display socially accepted behaviors (Sparrow, 2005). Harman *et al.* (2005) emphasized in their study that self-confidence, self-image and anxiety are related to social behavior.

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