

Factors influencing aggression



Introduction

Aggression is acting in a manner with the intention of hurting another person to whom the behavior is directed. These actions may be verbal or physical and they occur suddenly with no apparent reason or they can result from a frustrating situation. There are three theories that attempt to explain aggressive behavior. The first one explains that aggression is an instinct which was developed by Sigmund Freud stating that people instinctively direct anger towards others to avoid aggressing against themselves. The second theory states that aggression is stimulated by external sources, the stimuli being frustration while the third one states that aggression is a learned behavior (Dugan, 2004). However, the factors that influence aggressive behaviors can be broadly categorized into psychosocial and biological. This paper will analyze the biological and psychosocial factors that contribute to aggressive behavior.

Altruism and diffusion of responsibility

Altruism is unselfish behavior towards the welfare of others with no obvious gain for the provider. The different reasons for altruism are empathy, guilt as well as other emotions or relieving the negative state (Cardwell & Flanagan, 2003, pp. 43). Diffusion of responsibility is the concept that each individual in a group is responsible for an equal proportion of effort depending on the number of people in that group. This means that each individual will contribute much less effort than if the person was acting alone. Unlike aggression, these are pro-social behaviors and instead of causing harm or damage to individuals, they promote the well being of other people.

Latane's theory of psychology

According to Latane's theory of social impact, there are three principles that explain the social influence of behaviors of individuals. The first one is that the stronger the source, the greater the influence. For example, a respected senior in an organization giving advice to the employees will be listened more and thus have a greater impact than an intern. The second principle is that the impact of the influence will increase as the number of sources increase. The final principle is that the closer the source, the greater the impact, for example, in a performance the smaller the audience, the greater the impact of the performer to the audience present (Coates, 2000). This theory has helped in shedding light to the social factors that influence the aggressive nature of some individuals.

Factors that contribute to Aggressive Behavior

Biological Factors

Instinctive

According to Sigmund Freud, the death instinct named thanatos is a reservoir for aggressive behaviors of people and must be released periodically in order to remain mentally healthy. This theory suggests that aggression will build up whether or not there is an outside source to provoke it until in the end, it results to aggressive behavior. Sometimes people are able to suppress their aggression because they have other survival instincts and when these instincts are present, they are able to put their aggressive instincts under control (Dugan, 2004).

Hormonal imbalance

Hormonal imbalance in the body can contribute to aggressive behaviors in individuals. High levels of testosterone are associated with aggression in all species. Generally, there are high levels of testosterone in males and this explains why males are more aggressive than females. A reduction of testosterone even through castration reduces aggressive behavior. Another hormone associated with aggression is serotonin. Individuals augmented with artificial serotonin saw reduced aggressive behaviors (Sante, 2004).

Genetically influenced

Aggressive behaviors are believed to be inherited thus being passed on from generation to generation through the DNA of individuals. This has been witnessed where both a father and son display aggressive behaviors. Genes or the genetic component of individuals influence personality and trait disorders thus determining the behaviors of an individual. If there is a biological background for aggressive behavior, then the risk of aggressive behavior in children will be high (Jones, 2005).

Blood chemistry

Blood chemistry can contribute to aggressive behaviors. Alcohol in the blood encourages deindividuation. This is the decrease of self awareness of individuals which leads to the decreasing ability to accurately perceive the outcome of aggressive behaviors. It discourages the normal brain function by weakening brain mechanism which normally holds back impulsive behaviors such as aggression (Glicksohn, 2002, pp. 120). In addition, low blood sugar can result to aggressive behaviors.

Physiological illnesses and Temperament

Serious illnesses such as cancer may affect the behavior or moods of individuals. Due to stress brought about by such illnesses, the individual may be aggressive. Such conditions therefore play an indirect role in the aggressive behavior of some individuals. In addition, temperament may also be associated with aggression. People who lose their tempers quickly tend to be more aggressive than people who have deliberate temperaments.

Psychosocial Factors

Drive/Psychological frustrations

When people are blocked from achieving their goals it leads to frustration which can consequently lead to aggression. It is an expression to the frustration of a goal oriented behavior by an outside source. Such goals include basic requirements like food, shelter, food, water, sex, love or recognition. Individuals stuck in negative situations where they only see negativity feel threatened and as a result respond in aggressive manners. Therefore, aggressive manner in this case is a result of a reaction to a situation in which an individual is in.

Social learning

People may acquire aggressive behaviors through experience or observational learning processes. This provides guidelines for describing beliefs as well as expectations that channel social behaviors. The social influences such as role models, reinforcements and situational factors contribute to expression of aggressive behaviors. Children learn to be aggressive when they observe violence in mass media and therefore learn

aggressive scripts. Moreover, observation of violence in the family may result to aggressive behaviors in children (Anderson & Bushman, 2002).

Deindividuation

When people are in large groups or crowds, they tend to lose a sense of their individuality or self awareness. They instead take the identity of the group in which they are in and as a result stop thinking as an individual and instead think as a group. This leads to committing acts of aggression and violence that they would normally not do when they are alone. They do not take responsibility for their aggressive acts since they have lost their individual sense that others are aware of them and also their own sense and thus not being aware of their thoughts or actions (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2003).

Conclusion

Aggression is an emotional reaction and therefore very hard to measure. As a result, there are many explanations of the causes of aggressive behaviors. The factors that contribute to aggressive behaviors can be divided into biological and psychosocial factors. Biological factors can occur from the brain and its nervous system, through genetics or as a result of bio chemicals which include those that are ingested such as alcohol or the natural body chemicals such as hormones. Psychosocial factors are influences from the environment of an individual that affects their social behaviors and these include frustrations, peer groups thus causing deindividuation or social learning. Ways of reducing aggression include psychological skill training, character education, values clarification as well as moral education.