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Aggression and the Family
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ABSTRACTS

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APPLICATION OF THE AGGRESSION QUESTIONNAIRE BY OLWEUS TO THE ITALIAN
SAMPLE

The aim of this paper is to give a contribution to the self-prediction of the aggression in boys and girls with ages from 14 to 19 years.

The questionnaire was set up for preadolescent by Olweus in 1970, and was translated and adapted in Italy for an adolescent population.

A factor analysis carried out on the items of the questionnaire evidences three factors : verbal aggression against the parental images, physical aggression and inhibition. The factor scores evidence differences in the age levels and in the sex.

The questionnaire was submitted to 239 adolescents 14 to 19 years old.

APPLICATION OF THE AGGRESSION QUESTIONNAIRE BY OLWEUS TO THE ITALIAN SAMPLE.

Paola Venuti - Germano Rossi

Our work carries on some research already effected in Italy on the basis of Olweus' questionnaire.

Olweus, rather than defining aggression, takes into consideration the aggression response and defines it as any act or behaviour which implies, can imply and/or can be regarded as meant to inflict damage or affliction (either physical or mental). Among aggression responses, Olweus also includes any manifestation of individual inner reactions, that are presumed to be meant to cause damage or affliction to either people or things. For further details, see the complex model worked out by Olweus to explain aggressive behaviour that results from an individual's inner process.

Besides cognition factors, situational and contextual components and an individual's habitual dispositions, such a process entails two particular tendencies: aggressive tendency and inhibitory tendency.

On the basis of what previously said, an aggressive behaviour is not the result of one single factor, but of a series of different factors that may - or may not - produce behaviour definable as aggressive. Among these factors, the most notable ones are social habits, that differ, in different cultures, according to age and sex. It is therefore necessary to assess whether the Italian sample reacts in the same way as the Swedish sample. In view of that, we have adopted a sample differing from that utilized in the original survey.

For his research Olweus (1975) used two Swedish male samples whose age ranged between 12 (twelve) and 14 (fourteen), belonging to the low or lower-middle class. Besides the questionnaire, Olweus utilized special ratings for the evaluation of manifest aggressive behaviour, a check-list and a set of data collected by teachers on school adjustment.

A first Italian research availed itself of the same tools, on a similar sample, living in a Southern Italian town.

A second Italian research utilized, besides Olweus' inventory, another prepared by the authors and the Survey of Interpersonal Values questionnaire. The sample consisted of 91(ninetyone) subjects, some attending a Technical School and some the Science stream of a High School in a town in Northern Italy, belonging respectively to the high and to the low socio-economic class.

Another research on a male and female sample utilized Olweus' questionnaire only.

Our sample comprises 202 subjects of both sexes, aged between 10 and 18, attending either a Lower Secondary School or the Science stream of a High School, in a small industrialized Northern Italian town and is therefore different from all those in the previous Italian studies. The chosen sample is heterogeneous both as concerns the socio-economic class to which the students' families belong, and to the parents' education level.

Procedure.

The questionnaire was translated trying to keep the original meaning of each item in Olweus' research. There are 62 items in the questionnaire, grouped by Olweus in different classes: some of them represent manifestations of physical aggression against peers, some of them verbal aggression against adults and teachers, while some imply aggressive impulses and others a tendency to inhibit any display of aggression.

Hypothesis.

1) With regard to the validity of the questionnaire and its items, it is presumed that also in the Italian translation the statements which make it up carry, for the Italian sample, the same meanings as for the Swedish sample. Therefore one expects, from the factor analysis carried out on the total sample, to recognize the same factors already met in the original survey (as a verification of internal consistency among the items), that is to say: Verbal aggression (against adults), Physical aggression (against peers), Aggressive impulses, Aggression

inhibitory responses, Positive self-reports.

2) A second set of hypothesis, concerning behaviour differences in the sub-samples, can be worked out also with reference to one of the most classical models for the explanation of aggression, i.e. that of frustration and aggression by Dollard (Dollard, Dobb, Miller, Mowrer and Sears, 1939; Dollard, 1944).

According to this model, school can be regarded as a source of frustration for students, who will incline to react aggressively especially against those imposing prohibitions, that is their teachers. Such behaviour, in turn, is illicit and therefore a student must learn to avoid and inhibit it, or else to replace it with more legitimate attitudes.

Pre-adolescents might consider their aggressive behaviour against peers to be legitimate, while adolescents might regard forms of verbal aggression against teachers and adults as legitimate.

Social breeding, besides, tends to consider aggressive manifestations by members of the female sex more illegitimate in any case. It follows that:

a) pre-adolescents will display more physical aggression than adolescents, and above all against peers; on the contrary, adolescents will display greater verbal aggression against teachers than pre-adolescents;

b) adolescents, due to their greater adjustment to school and social convention, will be inclined to stronger inhibition;

c) generally speaking, the female sample will be less aggressive than the male sample and will tend to express aggression mainly in the verbal form.

Processing of data.

For the processing of ^{the} acquired data, besides a factor analysis, necessary to verify questionnaire validity and item exactness in the Italian translation, factor analyses were carried out on sub-sample obtained by subdividing the sample according to 1) type of school, 2) sex and 3) type of school and sex. The factor analysis followed the principal components and Varimax criterion.

Analysis of data.

The factor analysis carried out on the total sample, enabled us to interpret only 4 of the 6 factors extracted; the two remaining ones comprise a few significant loadings, corresponding to items having a heterogeneous meaning. We regarded loadings above the absolute value of .45 as significant.

The items collected in the first factor show aggressive behaviours of a physical nature, mainly addressed against either peers or objects. Such items are the ones that, in Olweus' work, were taken as indicative of Physical aggression (peers) and Aggressive impulses (objects).

In the second factor, there are two types of item: some pointing at a guilt feeling, others at a wish to be socially accepted. The situation described by these items implies that a subject tends to either inhibit or control his/her aggressive behaviour when in social conflict with an adult or a teacher.

The third factor items comprise situations where the subjects show self-esteem and assurance, by stating either their well-being and personal peace, or a positive evaluation of their social image in the eye of society.

The fourth factor items point at Verbal aggression, mainly shown against people in an authoritative role. It is interesting to note the presence of item "I generally listen to music" that appears, with only slightly lower loadings, also in the similar factors of all subsequent factor analysis and that might be an indication that, for adolescents, listening to music is a licit way of showing aggression against adults.

By comparing our results with those obtained by Olweus, we find that his five interpretable factors (not considering the one grouping physical sports) have become four in our survey; in fact, our Physical aggression factor includes, besides the items of Olweus' corresponding factor, also the factors he defines as Aggressive impulses. This does not seem particularly significant to us, because the items in both Olweus' factors imply an intention of displaying aggression. It is worth noting, however, that also the previous Italian studies had not isolated this factor.

Subsequently, our total sample was subdividing according to the following variables: "school", "sex", "school and sex". All factors analysis carried out on these sub-samples showed the same factors as the analysis carried out on the total sample.

Analysis of variance.

An analysis of variance was carried out for each of the four factors identified in all factor analyses. We utilized the factor scores concerning the four groups of subjects, and applied a 2-way ANOVA.

The main goal of the analysis was to verify whether the two variables (sex and school age) and their interaction had significantly influenced the responses. As regard Physical aggression against peers and objects, both variables and their interaction are significant. Males tend to give physical expression to their aggressive impulses more than females. Pre-adolescents result to be more physically aggressive than adolescents. Interaction shows that pre-adolescent males are the most aggressive group, while adolescent females are the least aggressive one. The situation is similar concerning Verbal aggression against teachers and adults. Both variables are significant; it results, therefore, that girls are less aggressive than boys and pre-adolescents are less aggressive than adolescents.

In the Aggressive inhibitory responses, the only significant variable is "sex". The females issues a greater number of inhibitory responses than the males. There is no significant difference between samples subdividing according to school age.

"School" is the sole significant variable as concerns Positive self-reports. Pre-adolescents tend to more positive self-evaluation than adolescents.

With regard to our hypothesis 2a is fully confirmed; according to it, pre-adolescents were expected to show more physical aggression and less verbal aggression than adolescents. Hypothesis 2c is only partially verified; as a matter of fact, while girls display less physical aggression than boys, they are not verbally more aggressive. 2b is not verifiable on the basis of collected data, because from both the pre-adolescent and the

adolescent sample a factor of Aggressive impulses alone does not emerge; besides, there is no significant difference concerning Aggression inhibitory responses.

Conclusions.

Olweus' questionnaire, in the version we translated, has proved very interesting and well applicable.

In our survey, "Aggressive impulses" and "Physical aggression" come out as a single factor. This is probably characteristic of the Italian sample, since "Aggressive impulses" never emerged as a separate factor all along our research, not even in the factor analyses we carried out on subsamples. This factor never appeared in the other previous Italian surveys as well.

The analysis of response modalities in the four sub-groups of the sample showed that girls tend to display their aggression less than boys, by issuing a greater number of aggression inhibitory responses. Pre-adolescents tend to display their aggression preferably in a physical form against peers or inanimate objects; adolescents, on the contrary, tend to verbal aggression against adults and teachers.

The present Italian version of Olweus' questionnaire, therefore, is applicable - with little technical changes - to Italian subjects, both pre-adolescent and adolescent, in school or community living situations.