

## Managing and Preventing Aggressiveness in Primary School Children

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### ABSTRACT

Increased aggressiveness is one of the most common problems in the children's collective. Different forms of aggressiveness are typical for the majority of primary school pupils. Almost all the children quarrel, fight, call names, say bad things to each other, etc. But learning the rules of conduct children usually change their direct aggression in favor of pro-social behavior. However, some children not only stay aggressive, but develop and make aggressive manifestations a strong personality trait. This in turn reduces the productive potential of children, limits the opportunities of adequate communication and puts their personal development at risk. An aggressive child causes a lot of problems, not only to others but also to him/herself. Studying facts shows that it is among primary school students that most conflicts take place, it is during primary school when antisocial habits are formed and aggressive behavior is manifested. The aim of the study was to develop, justify and experimentally verify the content, forms and methods of managing and preventing aggression in primary school children. The experiment included 40 students aged 7-8 (16 girls and 24 boys) of Maskara Comprehensive Secondary school (Kukmor region of the Republic of Tatarstan). The following leading methods were applied in the study of the problem: theoretical (analysis of psycho-pedagogical and methodological literature, comparison, generalization); empirical (ascertaining, forming and control experiments) and the methods: questionnaire for parents, personality test "Know yourself" and a graphical method "The crocodile". On the basis of the ascertaining experiment there was developed the program "Let's be friends", containing such forms and methods as "game", "role playing", "exercise", "conversation", "story". Statistical analysis of the data of the empirical research was carried out by means of standard techniques of mathematical statistics (Student's t-criterion and G-criteria). On the basis of the results obtained we give recommendations on the organization of special psychological and educational work to prevent and reduce the level of aggression in primary school pupils. Article findings are of practical value to psychologists, class masters and vice principals for educational activity, since the collected and tested materials can be used in the educational process with the children of primary school age in educational institutions.

### KEYWORDS

Aggression, aggressiveness, primary school children, causes and forms of aggression, prevention of aggression

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## Introduction

### *Urgency of the problem*

The problem of aggressiveness in primary school children is one of the most important in modern psychology and pedagogy. The whole history of humanity proves convincingly that aggression is an integral part of life of the individual and society. Moreover, aggression has an attractive power and is contagious - the majority of people deny using aggression, but frequently demonstrate it in their everyday life.

It should also be noted that the current economic and social situation in the Russian society causes the growth of various deviations in behavior and personal development of the young generation. Of particular concern in this regard is the children's aggression. The phenomenon of children's aggressiveness worries parents, psychologists, teachers, educators, thus attracting more and more interest among researchers. The question of adequate self-regulation of behavior is especially important for children of primary school age, as upon arrival to school they find themselves in a new social situation of development, where it is especially important to defend oneself as well as to protect one's own psychological borders.

The relevance of this theme is also caused by the fact that in everyday life we often use the word "aggression" to denote a number of specific forms of behavior, from sarcastic comments to brutal murders. Translated from the Latin, "aggression" means "attack". Recently, the topic has become increasingly urgent due to juvenile delinquency increase, various manifestations of aggressiveness, cruelty in children's subculture and family. The current challenging and unstable social, economic, environmental conditions in the Russian society create increased anxiety, cause spiritual emptiness in children, entailing violence and aggressiveness. Aggressiveness in children is not just an alarming phenomenon, but a very serious social, psychological and pedagogical problem. Aggressive children are pugnacious, easily excitable, irritable, touchy, intractable, stubborn and hostile to others. Their relations with family, peers and teachers are always tense and ambivalent.

The aggressiveness of primary school children and children of different age categories has been widely discussed and debated in scientific works, the media, scientific publications, etc. Sociologists, teachers, psychologists, parents note that at present the number of children prone to aggression has increased significantly, which is a risk factor for their unlawful conduct in the future.

In this respect the study of the aggressiveness in primary school age is an actual problem of modern psychology and pedagogy.

Analysis of psychological and educational researches has shown that the issues of managing and preventing aggressiveness occupy a significant place in the scientific studies of the Russian and foreign scientists.

In recent years, scientific interest in the problem of children's aggressiveness has dramatically increased. The problem of aggression is addressed in the fundamental works of foreign scientists: A. Adler (1908), A. Bandura & R. Walters (2000), A.G. Bass (1976), L. Berkowitz (2002), R. Baron & D. Richardson (2001), Z. Freud (1912), H. Heckhausen (1986), V. Hollicher (1975) and others.

In the Russian science aggressive behavior of children is studied in the wide range of aspects. Theoretical and methodological bases of the phenomenon of aggressive behavior are presented in the writings of L.O. Andrushina (2003), L.I.

Bozhovich (1995), L.S. Vygotsky (1984), I.S. Zimina (2003), S.L. Kolosova (2004), S.L. Rubinstein (1988), T.G. Rumyantseva (1992), etc.

The dependence of aggressive behavior on the surrounding society is revealed in the studies of L.A. Alekseeva (2000), T. Yu. Andryushchenko & N.V. Korobleva (1993), E.E. Chernukhina (2002) and others.

The analysis of aggressive behavior from the perspective of non-violence pedagogy is carried out in the works of Sh. A. Amonashvili (1998), I.V. Vachkov (2000), M.P. Guryanova (2004), L.N. Kostinova (2003), E.A. Yamburg (2002) and others.

The typology of aggressive behavior of children is highlighted in the works of A.G. Asmolov (1984), P.P. Blonsky (1997), B.S. Bratus (1988), Yu.B. Gippenreiter (2002), L.F. Obukhova (1996), etc.

Features of mental development of children in primary school age are studied in the works of L.I. Bozhovich (1995), V.S. Mukhin (2000), D.B. El'konin (1989), etc.

However, paying tribute to research scientists, revealing the essence of aggression and aggressiveness, ways, conditions, forms and methods to overcome them, it should be noted that the issue of managing and preventing aggressiveness in primary school children is not sufficiently studied.

### **Methodological Framework**

The aim of the research was to study and diagnose aggression in primary school children, as well as to develop and implement the program aimed at managing and preventing aggressiveness in primary school children.

In compliance with the goal, theoretical (analysis of psycho-pedagogical and methodological literature, comparison, generalization) and empirical (ascertaining, forming and control experiments) methods have been selected.

Statistical analysis of the data of the empirical research was carried out by means of standard techniques of mathematical statistics (Student's t-criterion and G-criteria).

To diagnose the level of aggressiveness in primary school students, we conducted a study by means of three methods: diagnostic testing, using such techniques as: questionnaire for parents (Lavrent'eva & Titarenko, 2015), a questionnaire "Know yourself" (Podlasyi, 2002), and a graphical method "The crocodile".

The questionnaire "Know yourself" helps determine whether a person is quite tactful interacting with others and how easy it is to communicate with him/her. The participants were asked to answer a series of questions to determine the aggressiveness indicator. Each response was given a certain number of points.

For the more reliable research of aggression in primary school children, we applied the method of instant assessment of aggressiveness by means of the method "The crocodile". According to experts on the projective drawing, this animal is a symbol of aggression. Crocodile image helps to identify propensity to aggressiveness in a person. The picture projects such character traits as rancor, suspicion and hostility. When interpreting the results of the "Crocodile" method the parameters characterizing standardized projective drawing tests are acceptable ("Non-existent animal" and others). This technique is easy to perform, available and interesting to children, does not cause their resistance. Undoubtedly, the "Crocodile" method should be used as the additional one in combination with other tests.

In order to determine the aggressiveness of the students, we also used the questionnaire to parents, developed by the Russian psychologists G.P. Lavrent'eva & T.M. Titarenko (2015). Parents were asked to answer a series of questions. Each response was given a certain number of points.

Maskara Comprehensive Secondary school (Kukmor region of the Republic of Tatarstan) served as the trial infrastructure of the research. The experiment included 40 students aged 7-8 (16 girls and 24 boys). The study was conducted in three stages: ascertaining, forming and control experiments.

The ascertaining experiment. The purpose of the ascertaining experiment is measuring the level of aggressiveness in primary school children. The ascertaining experiment was organized as part of extracurricular activities. Stages of the ascertaining experiment: 1. The preparatory stage that covered the selection of methods, preparing motivational materials and informing primary school children about the objectives and progress of the experiment. 2. The main stage - diagnosing. 3. The final stage is the generalization of test results. On the basis of these results there was compiled the program containing a variety of forms and methods for managing and preventing aggressiveness.

The forming experiment. The purpose of the forming stage of the experiment: prevention and correction of the level of aggressiveness in primary school children. At this stage, we tested various forms and methods ("game", "role playing", "exercise", "conversation", "story") to manage and prevent aggressiveness in primary school children.

The control experiment. The purpose of the control experiment was to test the effectiveness of preventive and correctional programs to reduce aggressiveness indicators in primary school children. At this stage there were carried out repeated, diagnostic assessments and identified the dynamics in the levels.

Experimental work we began involved determining the level of aggression in primary school children. We applied I.P. Podlasyi's test (2002) "Learn Yourself" to study aggression at the ascertaining stage of the experiment. Questionnaire "Learn Yourself" allows for determining whether a person is tactful towards others, and if he or she is open for communication. The testees were asked to answer a series of questions in order to rate the aggressiveness indicator. Each response was assessed according to a certain number of points.

The graphical method "The Crocodile" was used while performing instant assessment of aggressiveness to ensure accuracy, adequacy, and consistency of the study. Primary school children's drawings are of major interest in terms of analyzing evident signs of aggressiveness. Most pupils properly used a color palette. Deviations from the commonly used colors were not observed.

Aggressive children in most cases resort to drawing using a plain pencil. Similarly to all the drawing techniques, such features of aggressiveness as rubbing off, delineating details, resuming drawing of various unfinished parts of the picture, hatching were observed during our study. This fact can be explained by the children's desire to meet school rules and regulations, because the drawing is perceived by them as an assignment for submission but not as a way of self-expression. At the same time, all the corrections may be regarded as a necessity using pictorial means to reduce the feeling of aggression and fear it generates.

It should be noted the drawing is not only a reflection of sustainable traits of a person but of his condition as well at the time of experiment. There might appear

situational anxiety evoked by communication with a stranger (researcher), psychological environment, and other causes. That is why it is essential to consider personal features of the assessor: sex, age, etc. Children's drawings demonstrate two types of aggressiveness manifestation: a condition of a pupil himself, as well as the way the child perceives the surrounding community as a hostile environment.

To determine children's aggressiveness, we applied special questionnaire for parents designed by Russian psychologists G.P. Lavrent'eva & T.M. Titarenko (2015). The parents were offered to answer a series of questions. Every answer was assessed following a certain number of points.

To reduce aggressiveness of primary school pupils, we designed and implemented preventive corrective program "Let's Be Friends" featuring such forms and methods of managing and preventing aggressiveness of primary school children like game, role play, exercises, discussion and story-telling.

Program mission is to develop non-aggressive interaction in the community. The given program is intended for primary school children. Aggressiveness managing and preventing program comprises 30 lessons. The recommended length and periodicity of the class is 45 minutes once a week.

The same target group underwent subsequent assessment in order to detect any variations in the level of aggressiveness over the period of time.

## Results and Discussions

After conducting the questionnaire "Know yourself", it turned out that in the group of younger students, consisting of 40 people, 14 people scored low aggressiveness indicator (two younger students have the aggressiveness indicator that equals to 0), below average - 2 people, average - 10 people, above average - 8 people and a high level aggressiveness - 6 people. This suggests that 35% of younger students have low aggressiveness level, 5% have the level of aggressiveness that is below average, 25% demonstrate the average level of aggressiveness, 20% - higher than the average, and 15% - a high level of aggressiveness.

Next, we present some results of the study by means of the method "The crocodile".

For example, G. Emil's crocodile has sharp teeth, big eyes, there are also many sharp shaded spikes. Emil's crocodile is in water. In the survey, the boy said, that the crocodile he drew, turned out to be too big for such a small lake, it is not comfortable for it in there. Creative work and the story of Emil reflect the conflict situation caused by the need to express aggression and at the same time the desire to conceal it (by drawing water).

The teacher points out boy's extreme dissatisfaction concerning his social role, and material surroundings. The boy is said to have frequent outbreaks of aggression followed by depressed mood. The boy is obviously aggressive, as we could see it at the previous stages of the experiment. Emil G. is a child with a high level of aggressiveness.

R. Salavat's drawing showed the presence of an average level of aggressiveness. The boy did not start painting for a long time. After being coaxed, he hesitantly took a pencil. The boy got distracted while drawing. While drawing he spent most of the time on thorough image of teeth that characterizes the presence of the boy's verbal aggression. It should also be noted that the drawings of both G. Emil and R. Salavat

have the image of sky, it means that boys seek to control expression of their aggression.

T. Guzel's drawing should be noted. Her crocodile is also in water and there is fish nearby. Additional elements (water, wood, earth, etc.) are interpreted as the desire to structure the situation and, consequently, to control it. Water (lake, river, swimming pool ...) in conjunction with a crocodile disguised in it has its own symbolic. It demonstrates the latent form of aggression. Spikes on the top of a crocodile say that the girl is afraid of "the attack from above", that is from adults. Guzel got to work immediately, and was the first to complete the task. Therefore, all these indicators show that the girl has low level of aggressiveness.

From all the above, we can conclude that many children demonstrate varying degrees of aggressiveness. Someone has higher level of it and someone has less vivid degree of aggressiveness. After analyzing all the data, we can conclude, that the most common causes that affect aggressiveness are: neglect of a child, spending with children less amount of time, parents' negative example, the absence of one or both parents. These results can also be explained in terms of social and personal development of pupils, their age peculiarities and features of mental characteristics.

In order to determine students' aggressiveness, we used a special questionnaire for their parents. Parents were asked to answer a series of questions. Each response was assessed by a certain number of points. 18 parents (45 %) reported that their children have a low level of aggressiveness, 12 parents (30 %) reported that their children have an average level of aggressiveness, 10 people (25 %) believed that their children have a high level of aggressiveness.

All the results obtained from the ascertaining experiment were analyzed and helped to develop school children tolerance and development program, which was implemented at the formative stage of the experiment.

To reduce aggression of primary school children, we have developed and implemented preventive and intervention program " Let's be friends ", in which the following forms and methods of prevention and overcoming of aggression of primary school children were used: a game, a role play, an exercise, a conversation, a story.

The aim of the program is the formation of non-aggressive interactions in the surrounding society.

This program is designed for children of primary school age. Preventive and intervention program includes 30 lessons. The recommended duration of lessons is 45 minutes and 1 time per week.

In order to identify the changes in the behavior of primary school children with a high level of aggressiveness in relation to the above mentioned activities, we conducted a re-measuring of their levels of aggressiveness.

In order to find out whether there were any changes in the levels of aggressiveness, we conducted a repeated measurement in the same studied group.

After the preventive and correctional program aimed at reducing the level of aggressiveness, and on the basis of the received control experiment data, as described in "Know yourself" questionnaire, we can make the following conclusions.

The high level of aggressiveness of younger students decreased from 15% to 0%, the above average level - from 20% to 0%, the average level - from 25% to 15%, the below average level increased from 5% to 45% and the low level of aggressiveness increased from 35% to 40 %.

Following the procedure of "Questioning parents" we can draw the following conclusions. The high level of aggressiveness decreased from 25% to 0%, the average level of aggressiveness dropped from 25% to 0%, and the low level of aggressiveness increased from 45% to 70%.

The results of a drawing test "Crocodiles" at the control stage of the experiment.

G. Emil's drawing. At the control stage of the experiment Emil's crocodile is characterized by the following features: sharp teeth and shaded spikes are still present, but their number has decreased, which indicates a decrease in the degree of aggressiveness. In contrast to the first drawing, the minor elements such as clouds, water, are in the picture. It proves some positive results of the organized preventive and correctional program.

Interpretation of R. Salavat's drawing. The boy did not get distracted during the task. He began drawing immediately after being given the instructions. The crocodile's teeth are prominent at the control stage of the experiment. There is also another difference - there is no sky in this drawing but we could see it at the first stage of the experiment.

Studying T. Guzel's drawing, we noted the following features. As in the first drawing, the crocodile is in water and there is fish nearby as well. So, the desire to structure the situation remains. But the crocodile has obviously got less spikes and it shows the reduction of aggressiveness level.

Positive changes were confirmed by Student's t- criterion and G-criteria.

To check the reliability of the differences before and after the forming experiment we used the Student's t - criterion. This parametric method used to test hypotheses on the reliability of differences in the analysis of secondary quantitative data. Student's method is different for independent and dependent samples. In our experiment the samples are dependent, so we conducted a statistical comparison of the mean for the Student's t-criterion for dependent samples.

Meaning  $t_{cr}$  is of special tables of distribution of the critical values of Student's t-criterion, depending on the number of degrees of freedom. In our experiment, the number of degrees of freedom will be equal to 39.

If  $v = 39$ , the critical values for the experimental group will be equal to:

$$t_{cr} = 2.03 \text{ to } P \leq 0,05$$

$$t_{cr} = 2.72 \text{ to } P \leq 0,01$$

The hypotheses are :

H0 - the difference between the average sample values before and after converting experiment are unreliable.

H1 - the differences are reliable

Differences in the mean values are considered to be reliable if the calculated value or an empirical Student's t- criterion (temp) exceeds a critical value of  $t_{cr}$  of a specified level of confidence. So, we need to find out whether the differences are reliable between the mean values of the sample before and after the converting experiment. Having made calculations by the technique "Know yourself", we got the following results.

Our empirical value  $t = 5$  lies in the area of importance. In this case, we reject the hypothesis  $H_0$  and accept the hypothesis  $H_1$ , that the differences are credible, as the  $t_{emp} > t_{cr}$ .

By the method of "Questioning parents" we got the following results.

Our empirical value  $t = 4,7$  is in the area of value, that is,  $t_{emp} > t_{cr}$ , which allows us to accept the hypothesis  $H_1$  of the credibility of differences.

We have also decided that it is necessary to make distinctions on the studied subjects indicators at the beginning and at the end of the experiment. To do this, we used the G - criterion marks, which is designed to determine the general direction of the shift of the investigated trait.

The hypotheses are:

$H_0$  - a shift towards the reduction of aggression and aggression after the psychological and educational events is random and unreliable

$H_1$  - the differences are trustworthy and not random.

The study of the data revealed the following. Following the procedure "Know yourself" we got the following results:

$n = 34$   $G_{emp} = 5$   $G_{cr} = 6$  when  $p \geq 0,05$

$G_{cr} > G_{emp}$

$G_{cr} = 7$  at  $p \geq 0,01$

We accept  $H_1$  hypothesis that a shift towards reduction of aggressiveness after the psychological and educational events is credible and not random.

By the method "Questioning parents" we obtained the following results:

$n = 32$   $G_{emp} = 6$   $G_{cr} = 7$  at  $p \geq 0,05$

$G_{cr} > G_{emp}$

$G_{cr} = 7$  at  $p \geq 0,01$

We accept  $H_1$  hypothesis that a shift towards reducing the aggressiveness after the psychological and educational events is credible and not random.

Thus, by analyzing and comparing the results of summative and control phases of the experiment, we can conclude that the forms and methods used in it, are indeed effective for the prevention and reduction of aggressiveness of younger students because the results showed a positive dynamic and the impact of a set of forms and methods, that demonstrates the effectiveness of the completed research.

## Conclusion

Having analyzed the works of scientists studying the issue of aggressiveness, we came to the conclusion that there may be several causes of aggressiveness in primary school children:

1. salient emotional disturbances caused by various problems of perinatal or natal period. These children are usually weak, active, unstable;
2. family disadvantages;
3. stresses, changes or any other changes;
4. extremely strict methods of up-bringing, permanent bans or refusals;
5. or, on the contrary, excessive nurturing, indulging any whim.
6. copying behaviors of a parent.

Among the various, interrelated factors that lead to the manifestation of aggressiveness, there can be defined the following ones:

- individual factor acting on the level of psycho-biological prerequisites for antisocial behavior impeding social adaptation of an individual;

- psycho-pedagogical factor manifested in defects of school and family education;

- socio-psychological factor revealing disadvantaged features of a student's interaction with the closest people in the family, in the street, in the educational team;

- personality factor that is primarily manifested in the highly-selective character of the individual's relation to the preferred medium of communication, the norms and values of the environment, pedagogical influences of family, school, community, personal value orientations and personal ability to self-regulation of one's behavior;

- social factor determined by the social and socio-economic conditions of society's existence.

In the framework of the educational process there can be used various forms and methods of prevention and correction contributing to reducing the level of aggressiveness. These include stories, discussions, games, role plays and exercises. The confirmation was given in the experimental work.

### Recommendations

On the basis of the results obtained there were given recommendations on the organization of special psychological and educational activities to prevent and reduce the aggressiveness in primary school children. The article findings are of practical value to psychologists, class masters and vice-principals for education since all the data and materials collected and tested can be used in educating primary school children in educational institutions.

Preventive and correctional work aimed at reducing aggressiveness of primary school children should incorporate three sets, each of which covers basic field of activity with specific categories of people involved (teachers, pupils, parents).

The first set of the system is designed to organize the pedagogical interaction "teacher - pupils" and is performed as a way of communication between the teacher and the pupils aimed to identify and analyze the actual or potential problems of a child, and to jointly develop possible solutions to the aforementioned issues.

The second set of the system is directed to the organization of pedagogical interaction in the field "teachers - parents." Provision of pedagogical interaction is predetermined by the importance of family education. Numerous scientific evidence suggest that frustration, occurring due to the absence of parental love and constant application of punishment by either of parents, is an important condition for the development of asocial aggression. If both parents constantly punish the child, it can become a decisive driver incepting child's aggression.

The third set of the educational system is designed to organize pedagogical interaction in the context of the following social patterns "child - child", "child - a group of children", "child - adult" and is structured as a gradual preparation of a child for adaptation to school community as a new social environment. The immersion of a primary school child into the world of adults as a new social environment demands pupil's compliance with certain rules, discipline and diligence

requirements, and acquiring new skills. And all this happens to every primary school pupil experiencing increased social and psychological strain as part of natural process of his or her development.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### Notes on contributors

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