

## Physical and Verbal Aggression among Rafsanjan Preschoolers

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** The violence and aggression is a major problem that its physical and mental impact on the individual and social levels is considered. This study aimed to investigate the aggression and its dimensions in children 3 to 6 years old and its relation to age, gender, employment status of the mother, absent parents, the tendency to violence in computer games and TV programs and duration to deal with computer games and watching TV.

**Materials and Methods:** This is a sectional descriptive study. The study's population includes infants and children 3 to 6 years old who were randomly selected in health centers and the questionnaires were completed by parents sample tested. Data were analyzed by software SPSS. For statistical relationships, T-test and ANOVA test was used.

**Results:** The study considers aggression and its dimensions in children 3 to 6 years and 160 samples were analyzed. Samples were selected in Rafsanjan health centers. The average age of the samples  $4.61 \pm 1.74$  years with a range of 3 to 6 years. The average age of parents accountable  $31.47 \pm 6.11$  years range from 20 to 50 years. Average score of aggression  $39.01 \pm 13.5$  to range from 11 to 80 (of 84 points), respectively.

**Conclusion:** Based on this survey, aggression in children established a significant relationship with tendency to violence in computer games and television, and also with the mother's employment status.

**Keywords:** Aggression; Physical Aggression; Verbal Aggression

### Introduction

Aggression is a very complex concept. This behavior is affected by the situation and psychology on the one hand, and on the other hand, genetic and environmental factors play a very important role in its establishment and development. Therefore, it is difficult to provide an accurate and objective definition of this structure. Despite Baron and Richardson (1994), in defining aggression, he showed that the purpose of this type of behavior is to destroy and harm a living being and his property, a behavior that causes defensive and executive reactions on the part of the victim.

Aggression is one of the most important disorders in clinical and psychiatric psychology. About one-third to one-half of those referred to psychology and psychiatric centers have aggressive problems and antisocial behaviors. Affected children at high risk of peer rejection,

poor academic performance, and gradual increase in aggressive behavior (Patterson, Reed, and Dishion, 1992), as well as predisposition to mood disorders, substance abuse, delinquency, and social personality disorders in adulthood. Are (Zadok and Zadok, 2006, translated by Rezaei and Rafiei, 2008). The English word "aggress" in the beginning meant presumed attack because in war it is said to go forward and start an attack. Aggression is defined as moving toward a goal without vision, hesitation, or unreasonable fear (Forum, 1977; Saburi, 1984). Kaplan and Zadok (2003, translated by Pourafkari, 2009) have stated that aggression is behavior that is intended to harm a living being. This is done while the perpetrator is avoiding such behavior. Baron and Richardson (1994) define aggression as a directional behavior that is directed toward a goal that is destructive and harmful to others. Psychologists generally do not agree on the definition of aggression. The main question is whether aggression should be defined in terms of visible consequences or in terms of the intentions of the individual who expresses it. Some see aggression as behavior that hurts or can hurt others. Aggression may be physical, such as kicking, biting, or verbal; Whether shouting, hurting, or violating the rights of others, such as forcing something from another, aggressive behavior leads to negative reactions that exacerbate the adolescent's own unpleasant feelings (Baron and Richardson, 1994). Regarding the definition of aggression, it is a question of whether aggression should be defined in terms of its visible consequences or in terms of personal intentions, because some people see aggression as behavior that harms others. The type of aggression may be physical or verbal or in violation of other rights. One of the important characteristics of this definition is its objectivity, i.e. it includes that part of behaviors that are observable [17].

Anger and aggression are one of the most common problems of children and also one of the most important reasons they are referred to counseling and psychotherapy. Unfortunately, at the moment due to the inability of parents against the aggressive child, this matter has become one of parents' problems [1].

For years researchers have found the importance of early childhood aggression in predicting their future adjustment psychological-social problems [2].

Aggression can be defined as a behavior that results in injury or harm to others [3] and children as one of the vulnerable age groups are at the risk of different kinds of psychological disorders [4].

Preschool years are proper years for diagnosis of children problems, early intervention and prevention of their future emotional, social and educational problems. In this critical period, early intervention and change in children incompatible behavior, increase social skills and popularity among peers and adults and this can prepare children to accept the responsibilities of school education [5].

Verbal aggression is an aggression which is operating a verbal attack, insult or dispute for the superiority of one over the other. Non-verbal aggression or physical aggression is an attack on a human or non-human subject using a body or other material instruments [6]. Boys are more physically aggressive than girls (especially when excited). This difference is seen in all cultures which is evident from the early stages of child development [7].

Physical aggression is an aggression in which there is an intention to harm or injury a person through injuring or annoying pain (For example, hitting another child) and this kind of aggression is more seen in boys than girls [7].

Hadley in 2002 studied aggression in about 800 male and female students and teachers in Seattle. The results showed that both the teachers and classmate have shown high levels of aggression and boys are more aggressive than girls [8].

Peter and Creek studied 491 American high school students (the sixth year) in 1995 and revealed that boys showed more physical aggression (hitting, pushing, kicking) than girls, and girls showed more communication aggression (spreading rumors, refraining from continuing friendship, removing the person from the Group of Friends) than boys [9].

Shahim, in 2006, on the subject of the relational aggression in preschool children in Shiraz did show that most of preschool children, three years of age, in relation to peers used relational aggression and eliminated some children from the group or force others to cut their relationship with them. Gender difference was not statistically significant in this regard. She indicated that children who used relational aggression had more popularity among peers [10].

Another study in 2012 by Torshizi and Saadatjoo, about the aggression prevalence and some associated factors, in Birjand secondary school students did concluded that 54.1% of boy students and 52/8% of girl students were aggressive. The aggression in students who spent more time watching television was more. But there was no significant difference between the aggression and occupation of parents, parents' education, the average of the previous half year and in birth order [11].

In a study in 2007 by Vahedi and his colleagues about the aggression in Urmia preschool children, it was shown that the average of boys' scores in agents of aggressive-verbal aggression and aggressive -physical aggression was more than girls' scores. But gender differences were not statistically significant in relational aggression and impulsive anger [12].

### Type and Method of Study

This is a cross-sectional study and uses correlational methodology.

### The sample size

The sample was selected randomly. Participants of the health centers in the city were selected randomly. Referring to selected centers, the list of 3 to 6 year old children was taken and by sequential method and according to the desired sample size, subjects were selected. The sample size of 160 was considered by the Statistical Consultant.

### The study population

The study included children between 3 and 6 year old referring to health centers in the city of Rafsanjan.

### Inclusion criteria

3 to 6 years old children referring Rafsanjan health centers.

### Exclusion criteria

3 to 6 years old children referring to Rafsanjan health centers whose parents worked in response to all the questions.

### Data collection method

The data for this study were collected by filling in two questionnaires by parents of 3 to 6 year old children referring to Rafsanjan health centers. Questionnaires included:

- Shahim School children Aggression Questionnaire that is used to assess aggression. The questionnaire which is consisted of 21 questions of multiple choices, was invented by Shahim in 2006, and its reliability and validity were assessed for school children in the city of Shiraz [13].
- Demographic questionnaire included parents' age, sex, death or loss of a close relative or parental divorce, maternal employment status, and children's tendency to violence by measuring children's tendency to watch programs with high violence or digital games with violence.

### Place and time of the study

The study was carried out January 1393 to March 1393, in health centers in the city of Rafsanjan.

### Methods

In this study, the questionnaires were completed by parents who had brought their 3 to 6 year old children, for annual assessments and vaccination to health centers in the city of Rafsanjan.

### Methods of data analysis

Data after being collected and being controlled in software SPSS 017, were given to computers. The needed tables and tests were determined and for statistical test, T-test and ANOVA were used.

### Results

This study examines the various aspects of aggression and also influential factors in its aggravation and mitigation in 3 to 6 year old children referring to health centers in Rafsanjan city.

In this study, 160 children 3 to 6 years old were studied. Of these, 71 were male (44/4%) and 89 female (55/6 percent).

The average age of subjects is  $4.61 \pm 1.74$  years with a range of 3 to 6 years.

The average age of parents who answered the questionnaires is  $31.47 \pm 6.11$  years with a range of 20 to 50 years. 28 (17.5%) of the respondents were male and 132 (82.5%) were female.

12 (7.5%) of the children had lost their parents by deaths. The number of maternal death is 1 and the number of paternal death is 11. And there was no child losing both parents. Furthermore 9 were child divorce.

107 (67.3%) of the mothers were housewives, and 52 (32.7%) were employed, of which 32 were employees and 20 were self-employed. 1 mother also had died.

Average total score of aggression was  $39.01 \pm 13.5$  with a range from 11 to 80 (of 84 points).

The number in the age group of 3 - 4 years was 40.41, in the age group 4 - 5 years was 39.76 and in the age group of 5 - 6 years was 37.63. This difference was tested by ANOVA test and it was not significant with P-value = 0.502. It means that age is not associated with the score of aggression (Table 1).

Age	F	Mean	Std	Min	Max
3 - 4	49	40.41	13.2	19	64
4 - 5	40	39.75	11.2	20	59
5 - 6	71	37.63	14.8	11	80
Total	160	39.01	13.5	11	80

**Table 1:** Average total score of aggression according to the age.

*P-value = 0.502.*

The average score of reaction-verbal aggression was  $12.03 \pm 4.65$  with the range of 5 to 24 (of 24 scores).

Confident table of 95% of relative mean reviews was 11.3 to 12.75. This number in boys was 12.6 and 11.58 in girls. The difference was tested by the T-test and the test is not significant with P-value = 0/169. It means that gender is not associated with the score of reaction-verbal aggression.

The mean score of physical aggression was  $11/04 \pm 5/38$  with a range from 0 to 28 (of 28 scores). Confident table of 95% of relative mean reviews was 10/2 to 11/89. The number in boys was 11/79 and in girls 10/45. The difference was tested with The T-test and it is not significant with P-value = 0/118. It means that sex is not related to the score of physical aggression.

The average score of Relational Aggression was  $15/94 \pm 5/55$  with the range of 6 to 30 (of 32 scores). Confident table of 95% of relative mean reviews was 15/08 to 16/81. The number in boys was 16/51 and in girls 15/49. This difference was tested by T-test and it was not significant with P-value = 0/523. It means that Sex is not associated with The Relational Aggression (Table 2).

Dimensions of aggression	Sex	F	Mean	Std. deviation	p-value
Reaction-verbal	Male	71	12.6	4.5	0.169
	Female	89	11.58	4.7	
	Total	160	12.03	4.65	
physical	Male	71	11.79	5.41	0.118
	Female	89	10.45	5.32	
	Total	160	11.04	5.38	
Relational	Male	71	16.51	5.03	0.523
	Female	89	15.49	5.92	
	Total	160	15.94	5.55	

**Table 2:** Average score of dimensions of aggression according to sex.

The average score of reaction-verbal aggression was  $12/03 \pm 4/65$  with the range of 5 to 24 (of 24 scores). This number for the age group of 3 - 4 years was 12/57, for the age group of 4 - 5 was 11/55 and for the age group of 5 - 6 years was 11/92, respectively. This difference was tested by ANOVA test and was not significant with P-value = 0/570. This means that age is not related to reaction-verbal aggression.

The mean score of physical aggression was  $11.04 \pm 5.38$  with a range from 0 to 28 (of 28 scores). This number for the age group of 3 - 4 years was 11/29, for the age group of 4 - 5 was 11.55 and for the age group of 5 - 6 years was 10.59. This difference was tested by ANOVA test and it was not significant with P-value = 0.623. It means that age is not related to physical aggression.

The average score of Relational Aggression was  $15.94 \pm 5.55$  with the range of 6 to 30 (of 32 scores). This number for the age group of 3 - 4 years was 16/55, for the age group of 4 - 5 years was 16/65 and for the age group of 5 - 6 years was 15/13. This difference was tested by ANOVA test and it was not significant with P-value = 0/251. It means that age is not related to the relational aggression (Table 3).

Dimensions of aggression	Age	N	Mean	SD	p-value
Reaction-verbal	3 - 4	49	12.57	5	0.570
	4 - 5	40	11.55	3.3	
	5 - 6	71	11.92	5.05	
	Total	160	12.03	4.65	
Physical	3 - 4	49	11.29	4.99	0.623
	4 - 5	40	11.55	4.78	
	5 - 6	71	10.59	5.97	
	total	160	11.04	5.38	
Relational	3 - 4	49	16.55	5.46	0.251
	4 - 5	40	16.65	5.53	
	5 - 6	71	15.13	5.58	
	total	160	15.94	5.55	

**Table 3:** Average score of dimensions of aggression according to age.

The average total score of aggression was  $38/92 \pm 13/47$  with a range of 11 to 80 (of 84 scores). This number was 33/91 for low tendency, 40/13 for moderate tendency and 49/7 for high tendency. This difference was tested by ANOVA test and it was significant with P-value = 0/000. It means that there are a relation between the inclination to watch violence on TV and aggressive score. Also, there is a

meaningful relationship between the inclination to watch violence on TV and reaction-verbal aggression with P-value = 0/000, and physical aggression with P-value = 0/000 and relational aggression with P-value = 0/000.

For binary relation (LSD) was used and it was concluded that there is no difference between low tendency and moderate tendency with P-value = 0/171. But there is a meaningful relationship between high and low tendency with P-value = 0/000. Also there are meaningful differences between moderate and high tendency with P-value = 0/001 (Table 4).

Dimensions of aggression	Inclination to watch violence on TV	N	Mean	SD	p-value
Reaction-verbal	Low	77	10.81	4.22	0.000
	Moderate	52	11/88	4.05	
	High	30	15/23	5/24	
	Total	159	11/99	4/65	
Physical	Low	77	8/87	4/18	0/000
	Moderate	52	11/4	4/82	
	High	30	15/9	5/89	
	Total	159	11/03	5/39	
Relational	Low	77	14/23	5/36	0/000
	Moderate	52	16/85	5/49	
	High	30	18/57	4/77	
	Total	159	15/91	5/54	
Total	Low	77	33/91	11/49	0/000
	Moderate	52	40/13	12/31	
	High	30	49/7	13/64	
	Total	159	38/92	13/47	

**Table 4:** Average score of dimensions of aggression according to the inclination to watch violence on TV.

The average score of dimensions of aggression according to the death or divorce of parents was 39/01 ± 13/47 with a range from 11 to 80 (of 84 scores). This number for the children without parent al death or divorce was 39/43, and for those who suffered from death or divorce of parents was 36/24. This difference was tested by T-test and it was not significant with P-value = 0/313. This means that there is no connection between aggression and the death or divorce of parents.

Reactive-verbal aggression with P-value = 0/327 has no connection with the death or divorce of parents.

Physical aggression with a P-value = 0/194 has no connection with the death or divorce of parents.

Relational aggression with P-value = 0/711 has no connection with the death or divorce of parents (Table 5).

Dimensions of Aggression	Death or Divorce of Parents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	P-Value
Reaction-verbal	Without parent al death or divorce	139	12/17	4/72	0/327
	With parent al death or divorce	21	11/1	4/12	
	Total	160	12/03	4/65	
Physical	Without parent al death or divorce	139	11/26	5/54	0/194
	With parent al death or divorce	21	9/62	3/96	
	Total	160	11/04	5/38	
Relational	Without parent al death or divorce	139	16/08	5/54	0/711
	With parent al death or divorce	21	15/52	5/7	
	Total	160	15/94	5/55	
Total	Without parent al death or divorce	139	39/43	13/76	0/313
	With parent al death or divorce	21	36/24	11/29	
	Total	160	39/01	13/47	

**Table 5:** The average score of dimensions of aggression according to the death or divorce of parents.

## Discussion

Peter and Creek studied 491 American high school students (sixth year) in 1995, and showed that boys are more physically aggressive than girls, and girls more than boys showed Relational Aggression [9]. This research revealed that reactive-verbal aggression, physical aggression and relational aggression were more in boys than in girls, but it was not significant in all three dimensions and aggression had no connection with sex. Indeed, the results of this study were not consistent with Creek's and Peter's result. This might be because the subjects of this study were children and due to their low age, boys and girls occur in the same aggressive manner. Peter's and Creek's study subjects were older and probably due to hormonal and environmental effects, physical aggression was more in boys than in girls. On the other hand, it might be because in societies the physical aggression in boys is more acceptable than physical aggression in girls in a way that if the girls use conflict in their relations, their social aspect is hurt. Therefore, they have preferred relational aggression to physical aggression. On the other hand, in the boy's competitions the person who has greater physical strength and can bring additional physical damage to his opponent is superior and stronger. So boys prefer physical aggression to prove their superiority. The other issue that can lead to the differences in our results and that of Creek and Peter is different cultures. In our society children grow in the warm embrace of their family, are controlled by the family, if a problem occurs for one of the children other family members are trying to fix it. But it is possible that in America these relationships between children, especially boys and family, have become fading. There is less dependence on the home and family and they spend more time with friends outside the home rather than with their families. On the other hand, may be our content and media culture is different from America's. The media in our society has less violent than Hollywood's. And because American boys are very interested in watching these films as a result the effects can be observed in their behavior.

Hadley in 2002 studied aggression in about 800 male and female students and teachers in Seattle. The results showed that boys are more aggressive than girls [8]. This was not identical with our results. It means that in our research sex had no connection with aggression. This might be because Hadley in his study used a broad group of people with 800 samples. But the number of samples in our study was 160 and this number is much lower than Hadley's. The difference may be due to age differences in our study and Hadley's. Hadley has done her research on older samples and likely hormonal effects as well as the social expectations of male, has led to the result that boys are more aggressive than girls. However, our review samples included children aged less (3 to 6 years old) who have not yet blurt hormonal effects. In the meantime, in pre-school ages, in the family as well as in nurseries, boys and girls play together and under the influence of each other, show more similar behaviors. But later in life, because of such reasons as culture and separated schools for girls and boys, this friendly relationship becomes less and both sexes, spend most of their time playing and being with the iron sex.

In her study in 2006 about the relational aggression in preschool children in the city of Shiraz, Shahim showed that gender differences were not meaningful in the field [10] which was consistent with our results. Also, in our study there was no significant difference between boys and girls. This maybe because the age of our subjects and Shahim's are nearly similar. Our research samples aged 3 to 6 years and that of Shahim's 3 to 7 years. Boys and girls in this age group have high correlation with each other, go to the same nursery and play with each other. In our society, families do not have much severity to separate boys and girls in this age period. As a result, there are many behavioral similarities between boys and girls. On the other hand, because in these age groups, hormonal effects have not yet blurted, in both our research and Shahim's, gender did not interact with aggression. Furthermore, the number of our samples is closer to that of Shahim's than to Hadley's. We had 160 samples and the number for Shahim was 258. Also the percentage of boys and girls in our study and Shahim's were very close together. So that the percentage of boys in our study was 44/4 and the percentage in Shahim's study was 46/12. The percentage of girls in our study was 55/6 and in Shahim's was 55/88. And perhaps this similarity in the percentage of girls and boys in the both studies has led to similar results. It also should be noted that our samples and that of Shahim's both were selected from adjacent provinces. And also maybe cultural similarities have led the two studies to similar results. In fact, perhaps the culture of our samples and that of Shahim's were very similar in behavior, family upbringing and training in nurseries.

In Anderson's study in 2000 and Abdulkhaleqi's in 2003, students who spend more time dealing with computer and video games, showed more aggression states [14,15]. But in our study, the total score of aggression, as well as its dimensions (physical, relational and reactive-verbal) had not a meaningful relationship with the duration of dealing with computer games. And our results were not consistent with the results of Anderson and Abdul Khaleqi. This maybe because our subjects were in the lower ages. Although children spent a

long time dealing with computer games, the game content was not much violent. And perhaps because Anderson's and Abdul Khaleqi's samples were older, were more interested in the games that had a lot of violence. On the other hand, during the interval between our study and that of Anderson and Abdul Khaleqi, our samples' families acquired more awareness through the media, reading books, as well as through observing the behavioral effects of video games on their children; therefore they had more control over the content of their children's video games in a way that they dealt with the games with less violence. And maybe in previous years, the families did not have this awareness and had no control over their children's games and this has led our study to the result that in our time dealing with computer games is not related to aggression. But there is a meaningful relation between the two in Anderson and Abdul Khaleqi.

Kajal and his colleagues in 2009 conducted a study on 40 children 6 to 9 years old, in the city of Sanandaj. The results showed that children of divorce are more aggressive than normal children aggression and the difference between the two groups was statistically significant [16]. In our samples, aggression score and its dimensions (physical, relational and reactive-verbal) in children with no parent (death or divorce) was lower than normal children but it did not establish a significant relationship and the results were not consistent with Kajal and his colleagues. It is perhaps for this reason that our samples belonged to the age 3 to 6 years, and because these children have not yet gone to school so they do not have a true understanding of the words death or divorce. And this might be true that these children are less aggressive because they feel a lack of parent because of divorce or death so they are alone and isolated and show less aggressive behavior. In our samples the number of children with divorced or dead parents is less than the number of normal children. Kajal and his colleagues studied the age group 6 to 9. This age group, being educated in schools, thus have a greater understanding of the terms of death and divorce, which can disturb the child's mind and lead to improper and aggressive behaviors in children.

Another study in 2012 by Torshizi and Saadatjo about the prevalence of aggression and associated factors in secondary school students of Birjand and Concluded that students who spent more time watching television were more aggressive [11]. The result was not consistent with our research. In our study, the total score of aggression, as well as its different dimensions (physical, relational and reactive-verbal) did not have a meaningful relation with time spent watching television. This is perhaps because the content of television programs in Tarshizi's and Saadatjo's samples due to their higher age, puberty and hormonal effects have been more violent. And vice versa in our sample due to the lower age the content was less violent. In fact, the level of violence differs in the programs.

In our samples, aggression score and its different dimensions (physical, relational and reactive-verbal) had a meaningful relation with the tendency to violence in watching television and computer games. This maybe because children who are more willing to violence in watching television programs and computer games modelled on the aggressive warrior character in TV and computer games who are often the heroes of the stories and games. In fact they are legends in their minds. And children try to act like such characters to be heroes and myths like them and be of interest to everyone. However, in recent years video games have become more and more diverse. Probably violent content, militancy and fighting in video games are more compared to previous years. Today, there is the possibility of video games not only in the home but also outside of it as well. During the last decade many recreational and cultural centers are built in the cities. These centers with the most up to date computer games in which the level of violence is increasing day to day, is the gathering place for children and young people in their leisure time. On the other hand, because families want their children to grow up with the best and most advanced facilities, they easily provide for them computers and other devices of violent games.

## Conclusion

Aggression and its dimensions (physical, relational, and reactive-verbal) do not have a meaningful relation with sex, age, lack of parent (death or divorce), the duration of time watching television and playing computer games. But there is a meaningful relation between aggression and the tendency to watch violence in television and in computer games. Aggression and its physical and relational dimensions established a meaningful relationship with the mother's employment status but it did not established a significant relation with action-verbal dimension of aggression.

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## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict among authors.

## Authors' Contribution

NA did study. MSH, EFSH and RB wrote the manuscript. TS revised it. RB supervised the study, revised manuscript and submitted it.

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