

# Personality of Children and Classroom Bullying: The Role of Parental Physical and Psychological Aggression

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** To explore the impact of parental aggression (physical and psychological) on classroom bullying and to explore the effect of parental aggression on personality traits viz. neuroticism, extraversion, and agreeableness factors of personality of secondary school students.

**Method:** A survey was conducted in the secondary schools of Mansehra, Abbotabad, and Haripur districts of Hazara Division from October, 2013 to March, 2014. A sample of 1438 students was selected to collect data by using three questionnaires. One questionnaire was about bullying while the other was about parental aggression. The third questionnaire was about the big five factors (BFF) of personality and focused on only three factors of personality viz. extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness. This questionnaire was adopted. Analysis of collected data was done through descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, whereas for the prediction of effect of independent variable on dependent variable, multiple regression model using SPSS version 20.

**Results:** The mean and standard deviation value of physical aggression of parents was  $(3.96 \pm 1.23)$  while that of psychological aggression was  $(3.97 \pm 1.08)$ . Additionally, the education level of father was negatively correlated with their physical aggression ( $r = -0.29$ ,  $\alpha = 0.000$ ) as well as psychological aggression ( $r = -0.28$ ,  $\alpha = 0.000$ ). Similarly, mothers' level of education was significantly negatively correlated with both physical aggression ( $r = -0.16$ ,  $\alpha = 0.000$ ) and psychological aggression ( $r = -0.14$ ,  $\alpha = 0.000$ ). The results further indicated that parental physical aggression ( $\beta = 0.16$ ,  $t = 5.20$ ,  $\alpha = 0.000$ ) positively predicted classroom bullying. Moreover, parental psychological aggression proved as significant negative predictor of extraversion ( $r = -0.067$ ,  $\alpha = 0.021$ ), whereas parental psychological aggression demonstrated significant positive predictor of neuroticism ( $r = 0.106$ ,  $\alpha = 0.001$ ).

**Conclusion:** A high level of aggression both physical and psychological is expressed by parents against their adolescent children. Among them, more educated parents use less aggression towards their children. This physical and psychological aggression from parents cause damaging effects on extraversion factor of personality while psychological cause neurotic tendencies in secondary school students.

**Keywords:** Bullying, extraversion, neuroticism, aggression, personality.

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## Introduction

Bullying is a form of aggression where one or more children constantly and deliberately threaten, annoy or physically harm a victim<sup>1</sup>. Family environ-

ment, peer relationship, community, and culture play an important role in this regard<sup>2</sup>. Bullying, having many dimensions which are linked to school environment as well, is observed in many countries of the world<sup>3</sup>. Globally 20% to 25% of the children are involved in bullying<sup>4</sup>. Bullying raises important questions amongst many researchers and they have found that social skills of the children play an important role<sup>5</sup>. These social skills may be affected by home environment. Due to these reasons, researchers remain interested in the impact of home environment on classroom bullying and personality<sup>6</sup>.

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The individual or peer group may become a source of aggression upon the victims<sup>7</sup>. The family environment of those children who are bullied is usually adverse<sup>8</sup>, and parents of victims rely on shouting, hitting, and hostility<sup>6</sup>. They become victims of peer bullying because they experience the same behaviour inside their homes<sup>9</sup>, while such problems are avoided by the children whose parents adopt a desirable behaviour towards them<sup>10</sup>. Few studies have been conducted on the effect of parental aggression on classroom bullying and personality in Pakistan<sup>11</sup>. In this research, three of the big five factors of personality viz. neuroticism, extraversion, and agreeableness are included. Neuroticism characterises the lack of confidence in taking initiative, negative self-esteem, and pessimism<sup>12</sup>. Internalising problems can be caused by parental practices such as withdrawal of love, and humiliation<sup>13</sup>.

Making relationship with others and helping them in the solution of their problems are the characteristics of agreeableness<sup>14</sup>. Lack of trust and belief in competition indicate the lack of agreeableness<sup>15</sup>.

Extroverts are outgoing and have positive attitude towards life<sup>16</sup>. Antisocial behaviour in children can be caused by harsh and inconsistent parental behavior<sup>17</sup>.

To what extent parental aggression is used in Pakistan and whether such aggression becomes a cause for the children to become victims of bullying at school is still a question to be answered.

So, the current research was conducted to explore the level of physical and psychological aggression used by parents against their children of secondary level and the relationship of parental level of education with their physical and psychological aggression. Also, the study was carried out to find the effect of parental physical and psychological aggression on bullying and three of five factors of personality in classrooms of students at secondary level and thus, answer the question.

## Subjects and Methods

This survey research study was conducted in secondary schools of Hazara Division, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). A sample of 1438 students was selected from three Districts viz. Abbottabad, Haripur, and Mansehra of Hazara Division. The se-

lected students aged from 13 to 18 years. Only those students who appeared in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade annual examination as regular candidates and promoted to grade 10 were included in the study. Students who participated in the pilot study were excluded from the study. This sample of students was collected from 84 randomly selected secondary schools of Hazara Division. The schools were selected by using simply random sampling technique. The required data was collected from October, 2013 to March, 2014.

Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample of the study. The strata comprised of male/female, science/arts, rural/urban and private/public-sector students.

The required information from the students was obtained by using questionnaires about parental aggression (both physical and psychological). Physical aggression was measured by including items about physical aggression displayed by parents like throwing things in anger, remaining engaged in violence at home, physically punishing their children if they make any mistake, locking them at home, or forcing them out of home as punishment. The psychological aggression was measured by including items on parents cursing their children, shouting at them, and keeping distance from them. Information about bullying was collected by including items on students stealing the money from victims, they spread rumours about the students, or some students physically hit or kick the victims. Questionnaires about parental aggression (both physical and psychological) and classroom bullying were developed as a result of thorough review of the related literature. These questions were validated by the experts of the field, whereas the researcher adopted the big five factors extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness of personality tool developed by Tom Buchanan<sup>18</sup>. All the three questionnaires were translated into Urdu from English by using back translation method by employing experts in both languages.

To validate the content of the self-developed questionnaires, the experts were requested to check the content validity and face validity of the questionnaires. These experts were requested to check whether these questionnaires were suitable to local environment and whether the items of English and Urdu communicated the same meaning or

not. All the suggestions proposed by the experts were incorporated in the questionnaires.

For the purpose of finding the reliability of the instruments, 100 students were selected to conduct a pilot study. The purpose was also to find out whether the students understand the questionnaire or not. The questionnaires were improved in light of the responses of the students included in the pilot study. The data collected from the students included in the pilot study was not made a part of the major study. As a result of pilot study, Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of parental aggression (comprising of both physical and psychological aggression) was 0.93 and that of classroom bullying was 0.72.

The randomly selected schools were personally visited to collect the required data. The ethical approval of the study was given by ethical research committee. The students were approached after the formal consent of the school heads/principals. The students were requested to fill in the questionnaires with options 'always' to 'never'. These options were for the two questionnaires viz. parental physical and psychological aggression questionnaire and classroom bullying questionnaire. Whereas the options for the factors of personality viz. agreeableness, extraversion, and neuroticism were 'very accurate' (VA)= 5, 'moderately accurate' (MA)= 4, 'neither accurate nor inaccurate' (Neither A nor I)= 3, 'moderately inaccurate' (MI)= 2, 'very inaccurate' (VI)= 1.

The students were ensured that all information provided by them will remain confidential and will be used for research purpose only. In the same way, they were requested to provide data on the extent of presence of bullying in their class. They had to rate the information about parental aggression (both physical and psychological) bullying from "Always" to "Never". While, respondents had to rate their responses ranging from "very accurate" to "very inaccurate".

The collected data was analysed by using, mean, standard deviation, correlation coefficient, and multiple regression model. Mean and standard deviation was used to explore the level of parental physical and psychological aggression, classroom bullying, extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness. The correlation coefficient was used for exploration of relationship between parental level of education and their level of physical and psycho-

logical aggression. Furthermore, to find out the effect of parental physical aggression and parental psychological aggression on factors viz. agreeableness, extraversion, and neuroticism of personality, and classroom bullying, multiple regression model was used. SPSS version 20 was used for the analysis of the data.

## Results

Of the total survey, 50.4% comprised of the public-sector schools while 49.6% of the students comprised of the private sector. 50.4% of students consisted of the female students whereas 49.6% of the students belonged to male students. Science group consisted of 74% of the total survey, whereas remaining 26% of students came from the arts group. The ratio of 50:50 was maintained in case of representation of stratum of rural and urban school students.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics including parental aggression (physical and psychological), classroom bullying and personality traits viz. neuroticism, extraversion, and agreeableness factors of personality of secondary school students of Mansehra, Abbotabad.

Predictors	N	M ± SD
Parents' physical aggression	1438	3.9 ± 1.20
Parents' psychological aggression		3.8 ± 1.10
Bullying		3.9 ± 0.80
Extraversion		3.19 ± 0.58
Neuroticism		3.07 ± 0.64
Agreeableness		3.89 ± 0.71

Table 1 depicts the standard deviation and mean of physical and psychological aggression of parents, and practices of bullying in classrooms as well as extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness factors of personality. The mean value of physical aggression of parents is 3.9 and the standard deviation is ±1.20. Similarly, the mean value of psychological aggression of parents is 3.8 and its standard deviation is ±1.10. The mean value of bullying in the class is 3.9 and its standard deviation is ±0.80. Similarly, the mean value of extraversion is 3.19 and its standard deviation is ±0.58. The mean value of neuroticism is 3.07 and its standard deviation is ±0.64. The mean value of agreeableness is 3.89 and its standard deviation is ±0.71. These results indicate that both physical aggression and psychological aggression is high in the target population.

Similarly bullying in classroom is also on the increase.

**Table 2.** Relationship of parental level of education and their physical and psychological aggression

	Fathers' education	Mothers' education
Physical aggression	r= -0.29 ( $\alpha=0.000$ )	-0.16 ( $\alpha=0.000$ )
Psychological aggression	r= -0.28 ( $\alpha= 0.000$ )	-0.14 ( $\alpha=0.000$ )

The results of table 2 highlight the correlation coefficient for the fathers' and mothers' education and their relationship with their physical and psychological aggression. The results indicate that fathers' education is negatively related with their physical aggression  $r= -0.29$  ( $\alpha= 0.000$ ) as well as psychological aggression ( $r= -0.28$  ( $\alpha= 0.000$ )). These results show that as parental education improves, they are less likely to rely on aggression for the regulation of their behaviour.

The results of table 2 describe that mothers' education is negatively related with their physical aggression ( $r= -0.16$ ,  $\alpha= 0.000$ ) as well as psychological aggression ( $r= -0.14$ ,  $\alpha= 0.000$ ). These results show that as mothers' education improve, they are less likely to rely on aggression for the regulation of their behaviour.

**Table 3.** Multiple regression analysis of parents aggression (physical and psychological) showing variation in the class room bullying

	B value	St. Error	t- value	$\alpha$ - value
Parents' physical aggression	0.20	0.03	5.2	0.000
Parents' psychological aggression	0.10	0.04	1.7	0.09
R= 0.19 R <sup>2</sup> = 0.04 Adj. R <sup>2</sup> = .03 F= 26.3 $\alpha=0.000$				

Dependent variable: bullying

Table 3 indicates that 3 percent variation in the classroom bullying is explained by the parental physical aggression and parental psychological aggression (adj. R<sup>2</sup>= 0.03). When beta values were observed, both parental physical and psychological aggression were found to significantly predict classroom bullying ( $\beta= -0.07$ ,  $\beta= -0.067$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

So, parental physical aggression and psychological aggression has a significant positive effect on classroom bullying.

**Table 4.** Multiple regression analysis of personality by parental physical aggression and parental psychological aggression

Dependent variable	$\beta$	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	F value	$\alpha$
Extraversion	-0.07	0.03	26.7 ( $\alpha= 0.000$ )	0.003
	-0.067			0.02
Neuroticism	0.04	0.020	7.23 (0.000)	0.27
	0.11			0.001
Agreeableness	-0.014	0.010	5.9 (0.003)	0.60
	-0.040			0.17

Table 4 indicates that 3 percent variation in the extraversion factor of personality is explained by parental physical aggression and parental psychological aggression (adj. R<sup>2</sup>= 0.03). When beta values were observed, both parental physical and psychological aggression were found to significantly predict extraversion factor of personality ( $\beta= -0.07$ ,  $\beta= -0.067$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

Table 4 also indicates that 2 percent variation in the neuroticism factor of personality is explained by the parental physical aggression and parental psychological aggression (adj. R<sup>2</sup>= 0.02). When beta values were observed, both parental psychological aggressions were found to significantly predict Neuroticism factor of personality ( $\beta= 0.11$ ,  $p<0.05$ )

### Discussion

The current research was conducted to explore the level of physical and psychological aggression used by parents against their children of secondary level, the relationship of parental level of education and their physical and psychological aggression as well as to find the impact of parental physical and psychological aggression on factors of personality and bullying in classrooms of students at secondary level. The results found a high level of aggression both physical and psychological expressed by parents against their adolescent children. These results were in line with the results of Connolly and O'Moore et al.<sup>19</sup>. Classroom bullying was also found high in the target population. The results are in line

with Craig et al.<sup>20</sup> who found that the victims face 77% physical and verbal bullying. The results imply that there is a great proportion of children coming to school who are victims of both physical and psychological aggression from parents and at the same time they are the victims of bullying in the classrooms. These results also imply that parents are unaware of the negative consequences of the physical aggression and psychological aggression towards their children. It is possible that children who face aggression have negative effects on their confidence. Their confidence is shook and as a result they cannot deal with the bullying problem in classrooms.

It is further elaborated in results that more educated parents use less aggression towards their children and children brought up under the guidance of educated parents are less likely to become victims of bullying in classroom as they are able to deal effectively with such problems. These results also imply that if educated parents rely on aggression, they are likely to use it as an instrument for the regulation of behaviour of their children. Thus, educated parents are likely to develop a balanced personality of their children where they will be confident, bold and social and lead a group. Such adolescents will also be free from neurotic tendencies and possess the qualities of cooperation and obedience towards their elders and teachers. On the other hand, the children of low educated parents remain at greater risk of becoming victims of bullying<sup>21</sup>. The results indicate that parental aggression has intense effects on classroom bullying. It is evident that parents who support their children have a tender feeling towards them to help deal effectively with such problems<sup>22</sup> while parents who rely on aggression increase their chances of becoming victims of aggression<sup>23</sup>.

The neurotic tendencies in secondary school students have been demonstrated due to parental psychological aggression in results of this research study. These results are consistent with those of Pease & Lewis<sup>24</sup> who found negative relationship of aggression and neuroticism. It is possible that when parents use psychological aggression such as calling names and cursing their children, it will develop anxiety and depression among their children. Furthermore, as a demonstration effect the children adopt the aggressive behaviour of parents which is usually less likely to be effective in resolv-

ing problems and as a result they face bullying in classrooms.

The results further found that physical as well as psychological aggression of parents has profound negative impact on extraversion trait of personality. These results obtained in this study are in accordance with the results of McGinley & Carlo et al.<sup>25</sup>. It implies that enthusiasm, concentration, and perseverance of the children is negatively affected by parental aggression. Furthermore, negative emotions expressed by parents towards their children cause behavioural problems in their children as well.

Our results also highlight that parental physical as well as psychological aggression has insignificant but negative effects on agreeableness factor of personality. These results reflect that as parental physical aggression increase towards their adolescent children, it leads to make their children antagonistic. Similar effect is shown by the parental psychological aggression that as psychological aggression from parents increase, their children become less cooperative.

## **Conclusion**

A high level of aggression both physical and psychological is expressed by parents against their adolescent children. Among them, more educated parents use less aggression towards their children. This physical and psychological aggression from parents cause damaging effects on extraversion factor of personality while psychological cause neurotic tendencies in secondary school students.

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## **Conflict of interest**

Authors have no conflict of interests and no grant/funding from any organisation.

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