

A Psychological Relationship between Emotional Deprivation and Aggression among Children in care

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Abstract: The present study aimed to identify the levels of emotional deprivation and aggressive behavior among children in care, and confirm the assumption of a statistical significant correlative relationship between the two of them. The study sample consisted of 46 children in care, 27 of whom males and 19 females, all aged between 6 and 12 years, and the method adopted to test the study hypotheses is the statistical descriptive method.

The main measurement tools of the study were the emotional deprivation questionnaire and the aggressive behavior rating scale. The end result of the study was the confirmation of the hypothesis that there is a significant correlative relationship between emotional deprivation and the manifestation of aggressive behavior among children in care. It also confirmed the existence of a significant correlative relationship between emotional deprivation and the occurrence of aggressive behavior in all its forms, among child in care.

Index Terms— Aggressive behavior, Child in care, Emotional Deprivation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Emotional Deprivation can have serious implications on the mental health of children in residential care that might lead to the manifestation of various behavioral disorders and complications to compensate for the emotional void. Anna Freud defines emotionally-deprived children in care with as those separated from their families due to force majeure and left in nurseries, care institutions and shelters, being thus denied a regular emotional connection with their parents. (Kasim et Suhair, 1998: 115).

Among the behavioral disorders suffered by this category of children is Aggressive Behavior. Parentless children can resort to self-harm and aggression towards others to express their unhappiness at their condition. Indeed, various studies reaffirmed that parental deprivation leads to a state of emotional imbalance in the deprived child who will subsequently suffer personality disorders such as withdrawal, avoidant personality (AvPD) and low self-esteem, resorting eventually to aggression as a way of expunging the deprivation and heartache he had been himself subjected to.

Given all the above, the present study has come to contribute to the topic by shedding light on the most common mental health disorders that affect this particular group of marginalized and vulnerable members of our society, impacting negatively their overall development. It is also an attempt to draw the attention of the authorities to the necessity of providing these children with an appropriate living environment. Such endeavor can only be efficaciously carried out with the prior knowledge of the type of care provided to the children within the care institutions and its impact on their development. Tentative solutions would then be suggested to remedy such festering situations, for a better care. We stated our research problem as follow:

- Is there is a statistically significant correlation between Emotional Deprivation and Aggressive Behavior in children in care?

Sub-questions:

- Is there is a statistically significant correlation between Emotional Deprivation and self-directed Aggressive Behavior in children in care?
- Is there is a statistically significant correlation between Emotional Deprivation and Aggressive Behavior toward others, in children in care?
- Is there is a statistically significant correlation between Emotional Deprivation and Aggressive Behavior toward property of the care facility, by children in care?

Research hypotheses:

- There is statistically significant correlation between Emotional Deprivation and Aggressive Behavior in children in care.

Sub-hypotheses:

- There is statistically significant correlation between Emotional Deprivation and Aggressive Behavior directed by the children toward themselves.
- There is statistically significant correlation between Emotional Deprivation and Aggressive Behavior directed by the children toward others.
- There is statistically significant correlation between Emotional Deprivation and Aggressive Behavior directed by the children toward property of the care facility.

Research objectives:

- Try to determine the nature of the relationship between Emotional Deprivation and Aggressive Behavior in children in care.
- Try to identify the nature of the relationship between children's Emotional Deprivation and self-directed Aggressive Behavior.
- Try to identify the nature of the relationship between children's Emotional Deprivation and Aggressive Behavior directed toward others.
- Try to identify the relationship between children's Emotional Deprivation and Aggressive Behavior toward property of the care facility.

Operational definition of research terms:

1. Child Emotional Deprivation:

can be defined as the:

- Emotional neglect felt by children, in terms of warmth, affection and attention;
- Feeling of being rejected and unloved or not getting cared for or talked to enough;
- Loss of trust and parental care.

2. Aggressive Behavior:

Refers to any inappropriate and unruly behavior displayed physically, verbally, directly or indirectly by the children in care, with the intention of harming themselves or the others or damaging equipment and property. It manifests itself in various forms:

- Aggression directed towards the self:** refers to behavioral disorders (self-injurious behavior (SIB), nail-biting, hair-pulling, excessive and continuous crying) that children inflict on themselves. A behavioral rating scale is used to identify and assess this type of behavior.
- Aggression directed towards others** is the behavioral disorder that leads the child to harm those around them. A behavioral rating scale is used to identify and assess this type of behavior.
- Aggression directed at property** points to the behavioral disorder that pushes a child to destroy or vandalize school property, such as breaking chairs or tables, or writing on walls...etc). A behavioral rating scale is used to identify and assess this type of behavior.

3. Child in care

designates any 6 to 12 years-old child who is being looked after in care facilities. These children have no particular health problems, such as mental disorders, and are raised and taken care of from birth by the local authorities, with the State catering to their basic material, educational and social needs. They are simply referred to from here on as 'child' or 'children'.

II. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

A. Emotional deprivation

"J. Ajuriaguerra" defines emotional deprivation as the lack of motherly love, affection and care, due to illness, death or divorce or the mother's rejection of her child, and with no viable alternative to fill the role. (Ali, 2005: 6).

According to Elkind, a deprived child is "a child not properly cared for by his family and whose life is mired in a web of interactional patterns, with the result that personality development is impaired." (Salwa, 2001: 87).

The Dictionary of Mental Illnesses defines it as "the absence or interruption of the emotional support which often leads to the inability to fulfill the societal obligations, as a result of the moral disorientation and disadvantage they have to go through. The severity, duration and repercussions of these conditions differ and change according to objects and circumstances (Françoise, 1989: 14).

To sum up the above definitions, emotional deprivation is the lack and inadequacy of parental care, or the absence, for varying reasons, of any interest and affection by parents towards their children. The consequences of this

non-satisfaction of children's basic psychological needs could seriously and negatively impact the progress toward a stable and healthy overall development.

B. Aggressive behavior among children in care

- **Aggression:** is defined as any physical or verbal behavior carried out by an individual, with the aim of causing harm to oneself or others.

Sanchez-Martin defines it as a behavior that aims to physically or verbally abuse or harm a person or damage a thing. (Abdel Moati et Houda, 2004: 718).

Freud himself saw aggression as rooted in a death instinct, a drive directed inward first as a self-destructive tendency and then turned outward in the form of the aggressive instinct. (Fayed, 2001: 09).

- **Children's aggression in care homes:**

Other than the nature of their place of abode, the reasons that trigger aggression in children in care may differ from the others', such as the way they react to insults and taunts about their condition (in conservative societies, the worst name-calling refers to a child's unknown parentage, such as being called a bastard).

Their reactions vary between kicking, hurling insults back and stealing, harming other children and caregivers, stealing food from others while causing mayhem by damaging property, lying and making up stories. Others got into the habit of absconding from residential institutions and schools and setting bad habits and attitudes to the rest of the children. (Khawla, 2003: 189).

Some of the young residents are more prone to acts of vandalism, such as glass breaking, tearing and breaking toys, damaging plants, leaving the classroom, smashing objects to make noise, running around aimlessly and screaming. (Abdel Moati et Houda, 2004: 42).

We conclude from the above that aggressive behavior in children in care differs from that of other children, due to the dissimilitude of the factors driving it and to the target of the aggression.

III. THE PRACTICAL ASPECT OF THE STUDY

A. Defining the spatial-temporal framework

The core study went operationally ahead with the gathering of data through varied Data Collection Tools, from March 21 to April 13, 2017. The study was limited to the following institutions:

- ✓ Child Care Institution in Frigo, Tiaret Province.
- ✓ Child Care Institution in El Biar, Algiers Province.
- ✓ Child Care Institution in Saint-Pierre, Oran Province.

B. Study sample

The main study sample consisted of purposefully selected 46 abandoned children between the ages of 6 and 12 years.

C. Study Methodology

We estimated the descriptive method to be suited best for our study. This method is known to rely on observations to gather data on behaviours and phenomena and is often used by researchers in Psychology to test hypotheses, models or theories.

D. Study Methodology

1. Aggression questionnaire:

Designed by the initiators of this study after reviewing previous studies on similar topics, the questionnaire contains 39 items related to aggressive behavior, equally divided into 3 dimensions:

- Self-directed aggressive behavior.
- Aggressive behavior targeting others.
- Aggressive behavior targeting property.

2. Emotional deprivation questionnaire

Also designed by researcher, the questionnaire consists of 28 negative and positive items. Three (3) possible response options are also included in the form (Yes, Often, No).

E. The statistical methods used in the study

- Pearson's correlation coefficient: to measure validity.
- Cronbach Alpha coefficient: to measure reliability.

IV. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

1. Presentation and analysis of the general hypothesis test results:

The general hypothesis states that there is a correlation between emotional deprivation and aggressive behavior in children in care:

Contingency table (I): Statistical treatment of the general hypothesis

Variable	Sample (N)	Coefficient of correlation (R)	significance level
emotional deprivation	46	0.54	significant 0.01
Aggressive behavior			

The above value of Pearson's coefficient of correlation (0.54) validates the general hypothesis, indicating a moderate positive correlation between emotional deprivation and aggressive behavior in children in care.

We therefore accept the alternative hypothesis and reject the null hypothesis. The hypothesis put forward is thus verified; in other words, there is a correlation between the two variables of the study, that is the independent variable (emotional deprivation) and the dependent variable (aggressive behavior) move in tandem (in the same direction).

Our study concurs with Rabee's study (1993) that parental deprivation can cause emotional dysregulation in deprived children and often leads to Avoidant Personality Disorders and low self-esteem, with the child resorting to aggression to vent his frustrations at having been hard done by in his earlier life.

In addition to this, Al-Buhairi's study (1991) study reached the conclusion that there's a link between failure to satisfy love, affection and security needs and manifestations of aggressive behavior.

Correlation between aggressive behavior and the absence of a libidinal object is asserted by psychoanalytic theory. The infant having gone through a spell of indistinguishability between the object and the outer world, in his first months, as his mother's diligence to fully cater to his needs leaves him in a comfort zone. The relationship with the primary libidinal object leads to the formation of internal object representations that would act as template for social interactions. Consequently, any loss or degradation of the relationship with the object creates an imbalance in the conceptualization of relationships and the psychological imagery the infant has of his mother and his surroundings, leaving him without guidance. Melanie Klein stated that this deprivation pushes the infant to move into depressive position, as the part-objects become one libidinal object and the child's aggressive intentions are projected outwards.

According to Freud, aggression is an instinctive drive rooted in a death instinct; a way of satisfying the urge of discharging one's overflow of innate aggressive energy. Object loss in looked-after children can provoke an intense venting of this aggressive energy (Mustapha, 2006: 175).

For their part, Dollard and Miller stated in their aggression-frustration theory that aggression is an inevitable result of the frustration felt by children as their efforts to reach specific goals are thwarted or their craving for love, affection and compassion is not (or only partially) met. As frustration increases so does aggression (Badra, 2003: 174).

Bowlby suggested in his evolutionary theory of attachment that children come into the world with an innate need to form attachments with others, especially parents, considering it a requisite for a healthy psychological development. Failure to satisfy it or its continual disruption could therefore result in social and emotional disorders that may lead to aggression.

During my field visits to care institutions in Algiers, Tiaret and Oran, we witnessed clear acts of self-harm, aggression towards others and acts of vandalism against properties. And while we were conducting the assessment interviews, tussling, swearing and name-calling between children, some of it for trivial reasons, took place before our eyes. Other children acted aggressively by pulling their hair and slapping their head to vent anger at not getting what they wanted. Some of them also displayed a rebellious behavior, as evidenced by the acts of vandalism such as tearing down posters or writing on walls.

Further to that, aggressive behavior in Algiers and Tiaret institutions has been observed to not be as bad as in Oran, due to the quality of care and support provided, thus the moderate level of correlation.

a. **The first partial hypothesis** states that there is a correlation between emotional deprivation and self-directed

aggressive behavior in children in care.

Table (II): Statistical treatment of the first partial hypothesis

Variable	Sample (N)	Correlation coefficient (R)	Significance level
emotional deprivation	46	0.54	Significant 0.01
Self-aggressive behavior			0.000

The above value of Pearson’s correlation coefficient (0.54) confirms the existence of a moderate positive relationship between emotional deprivation and self-directed s aggressive behavior in children in care. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Analysis of the first partial hypothesis:

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to test the hypothesis and its value equaled 0.54. The responses to the questionnaire indicate a correlation between emotional deprivation and self-directed aggressive behavior.

The results are in agreement with findings in previous studies, such as Spitz’s in 1958, notably that the absence of a libidinous object deprives children of a channel to vent their frustrations, making them resort to harming themselves.

Freud theorized that human beings are driven by life and death instincts. The former is sustained by libidinal energy and focuses on self-preservation and satisfaction of life needs, such as health, safety, the creation and nurturing of new life, while the latter channels itself towards self-destruction. Children whose emotional ties have been severed with an object would hence be prone to self-harm (death drive) by venting aggressive energy on themselves, for lack of any other object.

b. The Second partial hypothesis test results:

states that there is a correlation between emotional deprivation and aggressive behavior directed towards others, in children in care.

Contingency table (III): Statistical treatment of the second partial hypothesis.

Variable	Sample (N)	Correlation coefficient (R)	Significance level
Emotional deprivation	46	0.41	Significant 0.01
Aggressive behavior towards others			

The value of Pearson's coefficient above (0.41) confirms the existence of a moderate positive relationship between emotional deprivation and aggressive behavior towards others, in children in care. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

The analysis of the second partial hypothesis:

The existence of this correlation among the study sample can be a reaction to their stigmatization by society and the abuse and humiliation they are subjected to.

This analysis is confirmed by the frustration-aggression theory which states that aggression is a result of frustration. Frustration is described as an individual's emotional response when faced with an obstacle preventing him from achieving the desired goal or expected result and often leads to aggression.

It is consistent with Salwa’s study (2001) which indicated that males were more likely to engage in aggressive behavior than females, adding that it’s the needs of children in care institutions, in terms of safety, belonging and independence, that push them to engage in this type of aggression.

c. **The third partial hypothesis** states that there is a correlation between emotional deprivation and aggressive behavior, in children in care, leading to damage to property belonging to the care facility.

Contingency table (IV): Statistical treatment of the third partial hypothesis

Variable		Sample (N)	Correlation coefficient (R)	Significance level
Emotional deprivation		46	0.53	0.01
Aggressive behavior towards care facilities				
				0.000

The value of Pearson coefficient (0.53) confirms the existence of a moderate positive relationship between emotional deprivation and aggressive behavior leading to property damage by the children. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

The Analysis of the third partial hypothesis:

The results are in agreement with the Dr Alfred Adler’s findings. A colleague of Freud, A.Adler believed that aggression is a way to overcome feelings of inferiority, inadequacy and fear of failure. Aggression becomes a compensatory response when these feelings are not surmounted (Houssine,2001: 74).

Melanie Klein added that aggression is an expression of destructive and hateful feelings and is fueled by the aims to:

- Amass more wealth than any other, for one's own selfish interest (greed).
- Express the discontent and resentment generated by the desire for the possessions, qualities, or achievements of others (envy).
- Direct one’s resentment at any individual in a better social standing or attempting to take away, or seen as capable of taking away, the affections of a loved one (jealousy).

All three aims involve ill-intentioned means to satisfy desires. If not fulfilled, frustration sets in, engendering hatred in its path (Khawla, 2003: 187).

Bandura was of the same opinion when he pointed out in (1973) that aggression is a behavior that aims to produce disruptive or hateful results, or control others through physical or verbal force, resulting in harming a person or destroying property. He established three criteria for determining aggressive behavior:

- The offender’s profile (age, gender and behavioral history).
- The aggression target’s profile.
- Type of aggression (psychological abuse, insults, damage to property...) (Zola and Mokhtaria, 2003: 37).

Conclusion:

The relevance of our study lies in its attempt to clarify the phenomenon of emotional deprivation among children in care, and the negative impact it has on their physical and mental health, as well as their academic performance and every day activities. In the present study, we endeavoured to shed light on the nature of the relationship between emotional deprivation and aggressive behaviour, in children in care. We ultimately confirmed the existence of a positive correlation between the degree of deprivation and aggression, in children in care; the higher their deprivation is the more diverse their aggressive behavior (directed towards self, the others or property).

Most psychological studies dealing with the topic of child care, such as ours, have emphasized the importance of parental care and the negative effects of the child’s separation from their parents and the subsequent lack or loss of emotional warmth and affection. Child-parents separation leads to multiple behavioral disorders of varying degrees severity that may impact negatively the normal development of the child's personality. The protective environment that parents provide to their children offers opportunities for a safe and healthy upbringing, shielding them from the multiple behavioral disorders they may resort to, to compensate for the lack of love and affection.

Children end up in care as a result of being deprived of their primary source of love and affection, their parents. Their absence can have devastating consequences for all aspects of the child’s life, especially the psychological side of it which contribute most towards the development of a balanced personality.

Thankfully, there are nowadays dedicated facilities, to instil the right values into this unfortunate category of children, helping them develop a compassionate, cooperative and responsible personality, while taking the necessary measure to provide them with an inclusive mental health care, regardless whether they are parentless or

not.

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