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Preschool Educators' Views and Attitudes Regarding the Management of Aggressive Behaviour of Children

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Abstract: The research investigates aggressive behaviour in early childhood, explicitly analysing preschool educators' perspectives and attitudes regarding its prevention and intervention. The objectives were: a) To critically review and state the perspectives of early childhood educators on what constitutes the root causes of aggressive behaviour, b) to determine how the current intervention strategies implemented by educators are perceived to be effective in preventing and managing aggressive behaviour and c) to identify and analyse problems educators face when implementing intervention strategies planned to reduce aggressive behaviour in their classrooms. This study used a qualitative approach, based on semi-structured interviews with twenty experienced preschool educators in Greece, to examine attitudes toward aggressive behaviour while considering ethical issues and obtaining informed consent. The study identified crucial forms of aggressive behaviour, with a focus on physical aggression, and analysed various contributing factors, including technological influences, family dynamics, and the individual experiences of children. Educators widely agreed on the essential need to establish classroom rules to mitigate aggressive incidents. Nevertheless, they faced significant challenges in involving parents and nurturing positive relationships with children exhibiting disruptive behaviours. These findings highlight the complexity of intervention strategies in education, thereby revealing a multifaceted landscape that requires attention. This study is critical not only for its empirical

contributions but also for highlighting the intricate interplay of factors that affect aggression, and it offers concrete strategies for educators. This foundational study calls for expanded and diverse sampling to increase generalizability and effectiveness in addressing aggressive behaviours in early childhood education.

Keywords: preschool education, aggressive behaviour, classroom management, intervention strategies, gender differences.

Introduction

The onset of early childhood aggressive behaviour is a challenging issue for parents, educators, and mental health professionals. Early childhood, approximately the birth-to-eight age period is an early developmental stage where children begin to form an identity, develop social skills, and learn to conform to the norms of behaviour. Aggressive behaviour, which can be defined as behaviour intended to injure others, such as hitting, shouting, or bullying, can occur during this early developmental phase. Understanding the underlying causes of such behaviours is imperative to develop effective interventions that can steer children towards healthier social interactions and better emotional regulation.

The significance of research on early childhood aggressive behaviour extends beyond the realm of child development; it has implications for social institutions, educational practices, and public policy. Early aggression has been linked to a variety of adverse outcomes, including academic failure, poor peer relations, and long-term maladjustment. Consequently, early intervention to reduce aggressive behaviours can have far-reaching implications, not only for the targeted individuals but also for the communities and societies that benefit from raising healthier, better-adjusted citizens.

In recent years, numerous studies have attempted to explain the multifaceted interrelationships of factors that determine aggressive child behaviour. One study by Keikha et al. (2020) referred to the significant role of electronic media in the behaviour of children, indicating that greater exposure to violent content in television and video games may lead to aggressive behaviour. The present digital age, characterised by unprecedented access to the internet, raises questions about how the regulation of content and parental monitoring affect children's behaviour. In addition, Zhou et al. (2024) considered environmental factors that contribute to early aggression, including socioeconomic status, home life, and neighbourhood safety. Their findings showed that children who had experienced disadvantaged upbringings, either with a violent history or with unstable home lives, were at greater risk of exhibiting aggressive behaviour. The implications of these findings are profound: family involvement, neighbourhood safety programs, and funding may be necessary to buffer these adverse behaviours. Kuzhiyengal Mambra and Kotian (2023) drew attention to peer relationships, focusing on the fact that social experiences, as early as childhood, significantly contribute to behavioural outcomes. In their article, they showed how rejected or victimised children within their peer group can be more susceptible to aggression as a coping mechanism. Viewing this facet underscores the importance of creating inclusive environments in preschool and early childhood settings, thereby fostering healthy relationships among young children.

Despite the growing body of scholarly texts, there remains a significant imperative to synthesise evidence from all these different domains. Current studies focus on single variables, which leaves gaps in our understanding of how these variables interact to influence aggression. Future studies could benefit from taking an interdisciplinary approach, synthesising inputs from psychology, sociology, and media studies to formulate a more unified picture. Furthermore, the long-term implications of unbridled

aggressive behaviour require close attention. Research consistently indicates that aggressive children are more likely to suffer academic failure, social rejection, and an eventual path of delinquency. Such awareness of the effects underscores the imperatives of initiating early intervention and prevention efforts that can redirect aggressive patterns and foster healthy emotional and social development.

In summary, the aetiology of early childhood aggressive behaviour is a multifaceted and interconnected phenomenon with numerous causes, including exposure to electronic media, environmental factors, interactions with peers, and a predisposed biological propensity. The topic's importance extends beyond the isolated child to encompass broader societal issues, underscoring the need for collaborative efforts among policymakers, educators, and researchers in addressing these issues. Continuing research in this area will yield critical findings that will guide the development of successful intervention strategies, ultimately enhancing our ability to guide our youngest citizens toward healthier behavioural trajectories and, in turn, more harmonious social interactions. The whole-child strategy will be necessary in the future to create solutions that not only reduce aggression but also foster resilience and social competency in young children.

Research Problem

While existing research, including studies by Keikha et al. (2020), Zhou et al. (2024), and Kuzhiyengal Mambra and Kotian (2023), has dramatically enhanced our understanding of the complex factors that contribute to aggressive behaviour in early childhood, there are still several vital gaps that this paper aims to address. Firstly, much of the current literature mainly focuses on identifying correlations between aggressive behaviour and various contributing factors, often overlooking the subjective experiences and perceptions of preschool educators who play a crucial role in early childhood development. Gaining insight into educators' views on the causes of aggressive behaviour is essential, as their perspectives could offer a deeper understanding of how these factors manifest in the classroom and affect children's behaviour. Additionally, the analysis of current intervention strategies has predominantly been quantitative, highlighting their effectiveness without exploring the qualitative aspects that reflect educators' perspectives and experiences with these interventions. This gap limits the potential for thorough evaluations that consider the classroom context and the unique needs of children. Furthermore, existing studies have not adequately addressed the challenges educators encounter when implementing these strategies, leaving a significant void in our understanding of the practical realities within early childhood education environments.

Importantly, there is a lack of empirical research that includes the voices of preschool educators in discussions about managing aggressive behaviour. These educators are often frontline practitioners who observe aggressive incidents and are responsible for addressing them; their insights could uncover systemic issues in current methods and identify areas for improvement. Therefore, this study aims to bridge these gaps by focusing not only on identifying the causes of aggressive behaviour but also on gaining a nuanced understanding of educators' perceptions.

Research Focus

This study focuses on the perceptions and strategies of preschool educators regarding the prevention and management of aggressive behaviour. Specifically, it aims to understand educators' views on the causes of aggressive behaviour, examine the effectiveness of current intervention strategies, and identify challenges in their implementation.

Research Aim and Questions

The primary aim of this study is to explore the experiences and environmental observations of preschool educators in preventing and managing aggressive behaviour in early childhood. This study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex factors that influence aggressive behaviour and offer actionable recommendations for educators and policymakers to enhance early childhood education environments. The research questions are:

- What are the views of preschool educators on the causes of aggressive behaviour in early childhood?
- How effective are current intervention strategies in preventing and managing aggressive behaviour in early childhood, according to preschool educators?
- What challenges do preschool educators encounter in implementing intervention strategies to prevent and manage aggressive behaviour in early childhood?

The novelty of this study lies in its qualitative approach, which captures the nuanced experiences of educators in real-world settings, providing deeper insights that quantitative studies may overlook. This research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge, offering actionable recommendations for educators and policymakers to enhance early childhood education environments and effectively mitigate aggressive behaviours.

Literature Review

Aggression, by definition, is characterised as a reaction from an individual that inflicts something unpleasant onto another person, creating a detrimental experience for the recipient. This behaviour manifests in various ways, encompassing physical actions as well as verbal and non-verbal communication. While aggression can exist on a spectrum, violence is often identified as an extreme manifestation of such behaviour, encompassing instances of physical assault, severe threats, and even murder (Papageorgiou, 2018). According to Beaver et al. (2014), the roots of human aggression may well be evolutionary, serving several functional purposes within social contexts. For instance, aggression can play a critical role in establishing and negotiating status and power hierarchies within groups, effectively serving as a deterrent to challengers and rivals. Furthermore, it may act as a mechanism to discourage potential mates from engaging in sexual infidelity, thereby securing reproductive advantages and fostering stability within relationships (Flanigan & Russo, 2019). According to Freud, humans are born with aggressive tendencies and the death instinct, leading to violent acts. His drives provide energy that can cause tension, resulting in aggressive behaviour. In contrast, Bandura (1983) argues that aggression stems mainly from environmental factors. Thus, the development of aggression is related to both hereditary and environmental factors (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015). Hereditary factors include prenatal and neurological causes, such as maternal smoking during pregnancy, which is associated with aggressive behaviours. Also, hyperactive children are more likely to exhibit aggression (Kulesza, 2015). In addition, environmental factors such as gender, friends, media, school and family influence children's behaviour. The family, as the first role model, plays a crucial role in the child's development (Papageorgiou, 2018). Poverty and unfavourable living conditions, as well as the inability to develop close relationships with parents, promote bad behaviour. Parents who show aggression and lack of respect are likely to lead children to imitate violent behaviour. Punishments and rewards usually do not yield positive parenting outcomes (Crosnoe & Cooper, 2010). Research shows that children with well-developed emotional intelligence exhibit less aggressive behaviour (Neel et al., 2018). In addition, the presence or absence of siblings can influence a child's behaviour. Media further contributes to the development of aggressive behaviour as children imitate behaviours they watch on

television. Violent scenes familiarise children with aggression, considering it normal. In terms of gender stereotypes, aggressive behaviours differ between boys and girls. Research has shown that boys are more prone to physical and verbal aggression, while girls resort to relational aggression (Japar, 2015; Theodotou & Xanthopoulou, 2011). Finally, friendships at school influence aggression. Children with aggressive behaviour tend to interact with other aggressive children, thus promoting their behaviour. Early aggression can have serious consequences in the future (Taylor & Jose, 2014).

Preschool children spend a significant amount of their day in the school environment, a setting that is often unfamiliar and challenging as they strive to adapt. During this transformative period, children are not only grappling with new social dynamics but also navigating their desires in relation to those of their classmates. This balancing act can lead to conflicts as each child seeks to assert their individuality and claim their space within this new social landscape (Yue & Zhang, 2023). Conflict is an unavoidable part of this adjustment process. It is a significant learning experience that enables children to realise that aggressive behaviour is not the only way to resolve conflicts (Swit et al., 2024). Aggressive behaviours in pre-schoolers can be classified into different forms. Physical aggression includes acts like hitting, biting, pushing, and other actions that cause physical harm to others. Verbal aggression is delineated by threats, swearing, and other verbal assaults intended to demean or intimidate. Adding another layer to this discussion is relational aggression, which can cause emotional harm through tactics like social exclusion or ridicule, significantly impacting children's social relationships and emotional well-being (Ersan, 2020). By understanding the complex nature of aggressive behaviours in preschool children, educators and caregivers are better equipped to help young learners develop healthier ways of relating to their peers and thus create a more harmonious and supportive social environment. Encouraging constructive conflict resolution strategies and promoting empathy can play pivotal roles in guiding children towards more positive social interactions as they navigate their formative years.

The effects of preschool aggressive behaviour are significant, as they are likely to impact multiple areas of infant functioning and may worsen over time, extending into adulthood (Verhoef & de Castro, 2022). They affect both the child's psychological and emotional development, as well as their academic development. Preschool children who are subjected to aggressive behaviour are likely to develop psychosomatic problems. They may experience eating disorders, abdominal discomfort, sleep disturbances and night enuresis as well as headaches. In addition, these children often develop low self-esteem and may be reluctant to attend school, potentially leading to difficulties in learning.

Research shows that a child's positive relationship with school can reduce aggressive behaviour, as the child feels a sense of belonging and the likelihood of rejection is reduced. If a child with problem behaviour is excluded, they may later reject school and learning. Addressing school aggression requires collaboration between educators, principals and specialists to recognise the severity of the problem (Franco et al., 2023). Prevention is the basis for addressing aggressive behaviour. At the beginning of the school year, educators should work with children to create clear and realistic rules that are constantly reminded (Glock & Kleen, 2018). It is also essential to support children's emotional development by helping them recognise and manage their emotions. Encouraging children to discuss their conflicts and developing self-regulation of anger are crucial elements. Positive reinforcement of good behaviours appears to be the most effective practice (Flower et al., 2016). It is also necessary to combine teaching techniques and individualised interventions. The educator should provide support for children who display aggressive behaviour by positively managing stress and challenges (Poling et al., 2019). It is imperative to identify the underlying causes of the behaviour and collaborate with parents to develop suitable interventions. This calls for collaboration between parents and educators in developing an integrated approach to address behavioural challenges. If this is not done, the intervention may remain fruitless. Early childhood presents a critical window for the prevention and alleviation of aggressive behaviour, which, if left unattended, may intensify over time (Kwok, 2023).

In conclusion, the complex dynamics associated with aggressive behaviour in preschool children call for a thorough understanding and appropriate intervention. This multifaceted phenomenon, shaped by evolutionary, genetic, and environmental influences, manifests in various forms, ranging from physical and verbal aggression to relational aggression—each of which presents distinct challenges to child development and social interaction. These outcomes are not trivial because such behaviours indeed influence the child's psychosocial and emotional status, academic outcome, and relationships; hence, some consequences may linger even in adulthood. Therefore, a positive attitude toward the schooling system emerges as an invaluable protective factor for aggression. For instance, clear expectations of appropriate behaviour, emotional support, and constructive conflict resolution are some of the proactive strategies that can lead to a nurturing classroom atmosphere. Additionally, collaboration between educators and parents is crucial in implementing effective interventions that benefit each child. Early childhood is, therefore, a period of intervention; hence, aggressive behaviours should be identified and dealt with early enough to avoid long-term consequences and to establish better social interactions. Therefore, it requires a concerted effort on the part of educators, families, and experts to nurture the growth of empathetic, emotionally intelligent, and socially savvy individuals for a more harmonious educational environment.

Materials and Methods

The research design for this study on teachers' attitudes and views regarding the prevention and intervention of aggressive behaviour in preschool children is qualitative, using a case study approach. This design is particularly effective for the study's goals, as it enables a deep exploration of teachers' beliefs, experiences, and perceptions related to aggressive behaviour in early childhood education settings. The case study approach enables a thorough examination of aggressive behaviour as it occurs in specific preschool settings. By focusing on individual educators, the study aims to gather rich, contextual data that sheds light on the complexities surrounding the causes, characteristics, and impacts of aggressive behaviour in young children, as well as the effectiveness of various intervention strategies.

To gather data, the study used semi-structured interviews. This qualitative method is well-suited for fostering open dialogue, allowing educators to express their insights and experiences in their own words. The semi-structured format offers flexibility, enabling the researcher to follow up on specific topics and explore areas of particular interest that emerge during the interviews (Kallio et al., 2016). This approach not only captures the nuanced perspectives of preschool educators but also allows for an examination of the challenges they encounter when implementing interventions to address aggressive behaviour.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, a method that is effective for identifying recurring themes and patterns within the qualitative data (Cohen et al., 2018). By coding the interview responses, the researcher can systematically organise and interpret complex narratives, revealing how educators view aggressive behaviour, the perceived causes, the effectiveness of current interventions, and the challenges they face in putting them into practice.

Sampling and Participants

In this study, the sampling method used to select participants was purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling technique. The method was adopted because the original aim of the research focused explicitly on preschool educators and other related criteria, ensuring that the selected participants had the relevant experience and expertise in alignment with the research study's objectives. The participants targeting the desired population consisted of preschool educators with more than five years of experience. This criterion was selected to target the right participants, who are

likely to be sufficiently experienced in the field and thus may have a perceptive and informed outlook on practices in preschool education. The sample was recruited from several national locations and consisted of educators from various educational settings, including public schools, private institutions, and early childhood education programs. It is through this diversity that the researcher hopes to gather a wide range of experiences and practices, making the study even more valid. In qualitative research, the total sample size was ultimately set at 20. This was a comfortable number, allowing exploratory inquiry into the participants' work, beliefs, and practices as they pertain to preschool education. To be selected were purposively sampled individuals who had satisfied the experience criterion and were willing to give their opinions on this aspect. Although gender and geographic location were left unrestricted as selection criteria, the participants reflected somewhat varied demographics, which still needs to be noted. The diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the participating educators contributed to the diversification of the data for this work.

Instrument and Procedure

Qualitative interviews were employed for data collection, as this method enables a thorough investigation into the attitudes and perceptions of the participants. Interviews are one of the most commonly used tools in educational research, allowing for the exploration of opinions from a small number of participants while emphasising personal communication. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, allowing predetermined research questions while maintaining flexibility regarding content and sequence. This setup also allowed for the addition or removal of single questions whenever necessary (Busseto et al., 2020).

After the research focus was explained, participants were given detailed information sheets to obtain their informed consent before enrolling in the study. Interviews were conducted, during which participants' responses and the content of their answers were carefully noted (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth examination of the perceptions and attitudes of the individuals participating in the study. Moreover, direct contact with respondents enabled the clarification of emergent questions; however, this was a time-consuming and exhausting exercise that required careful planning and thorough analysis of the data. Good communication skills and flexibility were found to be crucial in this process. The consideration of ethical issues is of utmost importance. Potential ethical dilemmas include ensuring participant anonymity, as direct engagement with participants poses risks of bias and may compromise the researcher's objectivity.

Data Analysis

The next stage involved in-depth analysis of the data and findings collected from the interviews, followed by the formation of conclusions based on the insights gained from the sample. It should be noted that, due to the limited size of the sample, inferences about generations deduced from the results cannot be generalised. Nevertheless, this research endeavours to serve as a foundational basis for subsequent investigations incorporating larger cohorts. The methodologies employed in data analysis aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of educators' perceptions regarding the management of aggressive behaviour within early childhood education environments.

Results

Forms of Aggressive Behavior

All participants indicated that the predominant form of aggressive behaviour observed in their classrooms is physical aggression, specifically encompassing actions such as pushing, kicking, pulling, and biting. Notably, one participant articulated:

“What I frequently observe within the classroom is not primarily verbal aggression, that is, verbal violence towards their peers of this age, but rather the physical manifestation of aggression, whether through pushing, pulling, or occasionally biting” (Participant 6)

Two additional participants acknowledged verbal aggressive behaviour alongside notions of rejection and indifference. Existing literature delineates three categories of aggressive behaviour: physical, verbal, and relational. Physical aggression is understood as behaviour that inflicts harm on the body, expressed through outbursts of anger, hitting, pushing, and biting. Verbal aggression refers to hostile expressions conveyed through language, encompassing profanity, ridicule, labelling, threats, rejection, and similar behaviours. Lastly, relational aggression relates to social manipulation, wherein children socially isolate others, propagate rumours, and marginalise their peers. It is essential to note that while physical aggression may diminish as a child matures, relational and verbal aggression often remain stable (Evans et al., 2018). Additionally, there exists instrumental aggression, which is concerned with the acquisition of an object, and hostile aggression, which involves inflicting harm without any specific provocation (Ersan, 2020). Participant 2 stated: *“They might instinctively take heavy objects and throw them at another child merely because that child sat next to them, without any serious cause.”*

Management of Aggressive Behaviour

The research findings highlight the importance of dialogue as a fundamental approach to managing aggressive behaviour within the classroom environment. Participant 1 articulated that when instances of such disruptive behaviour arise, educators engage in collaborative discussions aimed at facilitating children's independent problem-solving capabilities. This approach aligns with the findings of several studies, which indicate that preschool teachers primarily prefer to address inappropriate behaviours through verbal explanations and warnings directed at the child who displays such behaviour (Aksoy, 2020; Gaffney et al., 2021; Türkoğlu, 2019). Another dominant theme that emerged in the interviews was the critical importance of collaboration with parents, working together to meet the child's developmental needs. Participant 1 provided detailed insights into the "Parents in School" program, which aims to encourage parental involvement in classroom activities alongside their offspring. *“This initiative offers parents a unique opportunity to observe their child's classroom dynamics and behaviour in real-time.”* Such participation is endorsed by Chatzihristou (2015), who asserts that there is a significant correlation between parental engagement in intervention and prevention programs and a decrease in aggressive behaviours within educational environments.

The partnership between parents and educators significantly enhances the learning experience for children, fostering a supportive environment where both can gain valuable insights into the child's behaviour, developmental progress, interests, and interactions with others. As children perceive the reinforcement and care derived from the cohesive efforts of both parents and educators, they are likely to exert more significant effort in their academic and social endeavours, both at home and in school (Massucco, 2020). Furthermore, this collaborative model empowers parents by informing them about their child's areas of growth and equipping them with strategies for effective intervention in their

upbringing. Therefore, it is evident that the synergistic relationship between educators and parents is essential for addressing and ameliorating undesirable behaviours in children, as highlighted by Panagakos (2014). This systematic collaboration not only addresses immediate behavioural concerns but also cultivates a holistic, supportive framework critical for fostering positive social and emotional development in children.

The educators' responses to aggressive behaviour play a crucial role in shaping the child's current and future behaviour, influencing both the perpetrator and the victim (Woods, Bosacki & Coplan, 2016). Kourkoutas (2015) emphasises that addressing aggressive behaviours in the classroom requires establishing a pleasant atmosphere and fostering communication and cooperation between educators and children. Moreover, collaboration with parents, the encouragement of children exhibiting undesirable behaviours, contributions from specialists, a tailored approach considering the child's comprehensive needs, and the establishment of rules are all essential elements. Participant 4 referred to the creation of a *"contract with rules co-developed with the children, including consequences for non-compliance, which the children themselves outline"*. Additionally, regarding the reinforcement of desired behaviour, Participant 13 points out that the educator can focus on the child's strengths and reinforce those strengths unexpectedly at opportune moments, such as: *"If I ask them to give me the books today or distribute papers or tasks they need to colour"*. Furthermore, the participant remarks on the use of indifference as a strategy sometimes deployed in response to certain inappropriate behaviours of the children. As Kazak and Kouyuncu (2021) note, some children exhibit undesirable behaviours to attract the educator's attention; thus, occasionally, the educator's indifference to such behaviour can be beneficial. By momentarily instructing the child to cease the current behaviour, they inadvertently provide the very attention the child seeks, potentially leading to a repetition of the undesirable conduct. Conversely, when educators disregard these behaviours, the child eventually realises the ineffectiveness of such actions and is likely to desist.

Some participants underscore the significance of attending to the victim of aggressive behaviour. More specifically, Participant 7 states,

"In every instance, the physical integrity of the children is paramount, so what I always strive to do is ensure minimal impact on the child who experiences such behaviour. For instance, if a child has been pushed, I make sure they haven't injured themselves in the process; if they have been bitten, I disinfect the area and assess the severity of the bite. Thus, primarily, I prioritise the safety of the children and intervene to prevent any incidents from escalating when I observe something about to occur."

Research indicates that by providing attention to the child who is victimised, reassuring them, and encouraging them to devise responses to such attacks while simultaneously ignoring the aggressor, aggressive behaviour in the classroom can be significantly mitigated (Rios-Gonzalez et al., 2019). Finally, Participant 18 emphasises the critical importance of observing a child displaying aggressive behaviour, underscoring the necessity for educators to explore all possibilities before deciding how to manage the situation. This view is corroborated by the literature, which argues that observation precedes decision-making and intervention (Marion, 2018). Observation highlights the unwanted behaviour of the child, making it easier to detect the problem and to probe to find the reason behind the same. Practitioners observe and attempt to interpret the behaviour, focusing on the child's capability and how best to provide targeted support to that individual. Management of aggressive behaviour in the classroom is essential to maintain a conducive teaching environment, maximise the effectiveness of educators, and, most importantly, affect the developmental trajectory of the child. Educators tirelessly employ a

multitude of strategies each time to help the child control such undesirable behaviours. Through observation, dialogue, the establishment of rules, and the reinforcement of positive behaviours, educators contribute to mitigating this phenomenon.

Causes of Aggressive Behaviour

The causes of aggressive behaviour can be classified into biological and environmental factors (Papageorgiou, 2018). Research indicates that children raised in secure environments characterised by familial love and efforts to enhance their social and emotional development exhibit a reduced likelihood of exhibiting aggressive behaviours. Conversely, children who are exposed to parental violence or experience neglect are at a heightened risk for such behaviours. Additionally, a lack of boundaries set by the family can lead children toward aggressive behaviours (Chatzihristou, 2015). The majority of participants emphasised that the familial environment and children's experiences have a significant impact on aggressive behaviour. Furthermore, the interview data highlighted the unchecked use of technological devices as a contributing factor to aggressive behaviour. The content children consume, as well as the duration spent in front of screens, affect their emotional and physical well-being. Bandura (1983) posits that children model behaviours; thus, continuous exposure to violent scenes drives them to replicate these methods in their daily interactions (Papageorgiou, 2018). Two participants highlighted child egocentrism and the desire to gain attention through such behaviours, as well as the jealousy that may arise and the general emotional immaturity characteristic of this age group. Specifically, Participant 7 noted, "Aggressive behaviour occurs when children want their way and have developed a significant sense of self, a pronounced 'want.'" Research has shown that from the ages of three to four, children begin to develop empathy and can follow rules (Vlachou et al., 2016). In addition to emotional immaturity, children at this age may also struggle with verbal expression. Two participants highlighted linguistic difficulties and communication challenges as potential factors that could lead children toward aggressive behaviour. Specifically, Participant 4 stated:

"When children lack effective communication skills, they struggle to express themselves adequately. They may respond negatively to peers due to this language barrier; hence, we must consider these elements. Can they communicate? Can they understand instructions, such as 'we will build this castle now'? Do they comprehend what is being said, or do they become engrossed in their activities, inadvertently disturbing others?"

Reduced cognitive, verbal, and emotional development in children may lead to manifestations of aggressive behaviour (Douvlos, 2019). At this stage of development, children require support and assistance from all directions.

Impact of Aggressive Behaviour

Almost all participants concurred that aggressive behaviour affects the entire classroom dynamic, inducing dysfunction, and they strive to prevent issues from arising during lessons. Educators who foster a positive atmosphere and establish trust within the classroom are more adept at preempting this undesirable behaviour (Türkoğlu, 2019). More specifically, they noted that such behaviour creates irritation in the classroom environment, which can influence some children to adopt similar aggressive responses (Participants 2 and 4). According to Vecchio et al. (2023), a child's aggressive behaviour can reinforce similar behaviours in other students within the classroom. Additionally, aggressive behaviour may instigate fear among peers and adversely affect social relationships. Participant 6 notably mentioned the anxiety she experiences when confronted with such behaviours, stating: "Anything that

disrupts the normal flow of the lesson and the general tranquillity *in the classroom is something that stresses me*". Conversely, Participant 3 remarked that aggressive behaviour does not affect her personally, stating that she is very familiar with such reactions.

Prevention of Aggressive Behaviour

The preschool age is the critical window through which aggressive behaviour can be successfully prevented, intervened upon, or assessed. Various organised activities appropriate for a child's developmental stage, through encouragement and support, can significantly assist in mitigating this phenomenon (Laghi et al., 2019). Regarding the prevention aspect of aggressive behaviour, all informants emphasised the importance of establishing clear rules in the classroom. Concurrently, various auxiliary interventions for this significant problem have emerged, including the observation and recording of behaviour, as well as the use of games and literature. Participants discussed the need for training not only for educators but also for parents, as well as the importance of collaboration between these two groups. Training parents to manage their children's emotions as well as their behaviours and fostering collaboration between parents and educators is likely to be productive (Taylor et al., 2017). Professional development and awareness-raising among teachers can facilitate the early detection of aggressive behaviours, thereby enabling both prevention and effective intervention. Teachers need to be trained in classroom management and in promoting children's social competencies. Teachers have the opportunity to observe children's behaviour in various situations, such as during play, interactions with peers, and interactions with teachers, making them an invaluable source of information on children's behaviour. They can identify children exhibiting aggressive behaviours and refer them to specialists when necessary (Evans et al., 2018). When society equips educators with the requisite knowledge about aggression, educators will feel more secure and effective in both preventing and managing aggressive manifestations (Yoon & Bauman, 2014).

Gender and Aggressive Behaviour

A significant theme arising from the interviews is the influence of gender on aggressive behaviour. Three participants noted that there are no discernible differences in the frequency of aggressive behaviours between genders. In contrast, the remaining three indicated that boys exhibit aggressive behaviour more frequently. This observation is corroborated by recent research conducted in Greece, which revealed that boys demonstrate aggressive behaviours more frequently than girls (Mouratidou et al., 2019). Additionally, gender influences the recipient of aggressive behaviour, as such behaviours are often targeted at peers of the same gender. According to Kung et al. (2018), physical aggression among girls aged three to four is minimally observed. Girls tend to mature more quickly than boys and exhibit more advanced social skills, resulting in a significant reduction in their aggressive behaviour after the age of four. Moreover, most studies suggest that girls tend to exhibit more verbal and relational aggression compared to physical aggression (Im et al., 2018). This distinction was highlighted by Participant 4, who noted that there are differences in how the two genders express aggressive behaviours.

Challenges for Educators

Various challenges arise for participants when dealing with the issue of aggressive behaviour, including developing a relationship with such children, identifying the actual cause, and cooperating with the parents. Participant 3 stated, "I believe that the greatest challenge is to help the child," and went

on to emphasise, “Thus, our challenge is to discern what is influencing the child's *behaviour*.” Concerning parental cooperation, Participant 4 indicated:

“We must also educate parents. It is a dual challenge; hence, I emphasise that it involves multiple facets. The focus extends beyond the child alone; parents must receive education as well, regrettably.”

Ultimately, Participant 6 recognised the effective application of technology as a significant challenge, explicitly mentioning:

“For me, the greatest challenge is to harness technology in a way that informs children of its benefits rather than it merely serving as a source of entertainment, often without regulation”.

Discussion

The findings from this study illuminate the multifaceted nature of aggressive behaviour in early childhood and underscore the critical role that educators play in addressing this pervasive issue.

1. What are the views of preschool educators on the causes of aggressive behaviour in early childhood?

This highlights that preschool teachers perceived aggression as either being raised from home or caused by exposure to technology. Educators observed less aggression in children from family backgrounds characterised by security, as noted by Kodak and Güzel (2024), because a child's context has a predominant influence on their behaviours. The use of technology, if not controlled, was, according to respondents, another cause of aggression in young children, aligning with the views expressed by İnanlı and Metindoğan (2023). Overall, these findings provide validation for established understandings while simultaneously calling for a multifaceted approach to enhancing technology use in the classroom.

2. How effective are current intervention strategies in preventing and managing aggressive behaviour in early childhood, according to preschool educators?

Preschool educators maintained that clear expectations regarding behaviour, along with strong communication with parents, provided some of the most effective ways for controlling aggression. This perspective is corroborated by emerging research by Graham-Clay (2024), which revealed collaborative relationships between parents and teachers that significantly reduced aggression by creating a more supportive atmosphere for children. However, while most teachers recounted success from the said strategies, they must develop ongoing reinforcement.

Interventions that specifically target the various manifestations of aggression, especially in distinguishing between physical aggression, verbal aggression, and relational aggression. It has been suggested by Grigoropoulos (2022) that gender-sensitive approaches to intervention should be adopted, with a core design that incorporates the socially constructed distinctions in the way aggression presents itself based on gender.

3. What challenges do preschool educators encounter in implementing intervention strategies to prevent and manage aggressive behaviour in early childhood?

Educators highlighted difficulties in forming meaningful relationships with aggressive children, pointing to gaps in the understanding of these behaviours' underlying causes. This concern is also reflected in the findings of Swit and Slater (2021), who state that a young child's aggression is an immensely complex issue for which teachers need a thorough understanding of psychology and environmental catalysts. There is an urgent need for ongoing professional development and training in these areas. In addition, the teachers collaborated with parents and community stakeholders on intervention strategies, which align with the perspective of Ng et al. (2023), emphasising holistic approaches to addressing emotional and behavioural challenges.

While this study can be attributed to the experiences of preschool staff, it has its limitations, which need to be analysed to achieve better and expected results. The sample size would need to be substantial to ensure the validity of the findings and their generalizability; therefore, the study is limited to a particular perspective. The constraints suggest, thereon, that more extensive and varied samples be used, with perceptions collected that could justify the theories set forth here. Additionally, although qualitative approaches yield depth, they may not fully capture the prevalence and frequency of aggressive behaviours in early childhood settings. Future studies employing mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative narratives and quantitative data would provide a more comprehensive representation of aggressive behaviour and its management. In summary, this study highlights the pivotal roles that teachers, parents, and community stakeholders play in understanding and addressing aggressive behaviour in early childhood settings. The collaborative strategies outlined by participants also present ways to improve and open further research avenues into effective practices that foster positive behaviour.

Conclusions

The subsequent conclusions are systematically structured in alignment with the research questions explored in the study. They illuminate preschool educators' perspectives on the underlying causes of aggressive behaviour, evaluate the efficacy of existing intervention strategies, and delineate the challenges encountered during the implementation of these strategies:

Preschool teachers overwhelmingly report two root sources of early childhood aggressions: violent television and computer use and family life. Most stated that kids with tumultuous family lives, and even kids who see violent behaviour at home, become violent at school. Teachers supplemented that excessive use of technology, including violent computer and television use, continues to drive violent behaviour in kids. Teachers emphasised that immaturity and the early developmental stage, including children's egocentrism and difficulty in expressing feelings, contribute significantly to aggression during the early childhood stage.

The effectiveness of current intervention approaches varies regarding the experiences of preschool teachers. Most have found that having a strong set of rules, in collaboration with kids at school, and imposing proper consequences for wrong behaviour helps a lot in curbing aggression in school. Additionally, maintaining a supportive environment through regular contact with parents is effective. However, even with many approaches showing considerable potential, teachers expressed a lack of individualised and personalised approaches to curbing aggression in children, particularly in specific situations, such as within a particular room or with specific children.

Preschool educators face numerous challenges in implementing intervention strategies. One such challenge is developing a sound working relationship with students in an attempt to understand the causation of aggression, and in most cases, such causation can vary for each individual. Expressing one's view on a range of approaches and their effectiveness requires further negotiation and discussion. Individual variation in traits and background between instructors generates a variety of interpretations regarding obstacles, making it challenging to develop effective and coherent approaches. Besides, maintaining constant contact and coordination with parents generates a new variety of obstacles, with variable coordination between parents having an impact on the overall effectiveness of behavioural interventions.

The current study highlights significant observations from preschool instructors regarding the complex factors involved in early childhood aggression. By understanding multi-faceted causation, the effectiveness evaluation of interventions, and the obstacles to their implementation, this study re-emphasizes the overall approaches and increased coordination between instructors and parents. The current work provides significant information regarding early childhood instruction, with a renewed emphasis on continuous teacher development and a direction towards developing caring educational environments. Future studies can extend these observations with larger samples and additional refinement in intervention approaches, providing a balanced direction towards controlling aggression in early childhood environments in schools.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research may pave the way for deeper exploration of the topic, given the limited existing findings on aggressive behaviour in preschool-aged children. Furthermore, future studies could focus on specific comparisons among educators according to gender. An increased sample size encompassing educators of children aged three to four years in daycare settings and those teaching four to six-year-olds in kindergartens could yield valuable insights. Comparative analyses of aggressive behaviours across these age groups, as well as different approaches to managing aggressive behaviour by educators, will enrich the academic discourse on this critical issue. Another potential research avenue could involve tracking a specific cohort of children exhibiting aggressive behaviour from preschool age through their kindergarten graduation, with the systematic observation of behavioural trajectories and contextual factors influencing their behaviour throughout this developmental period.

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