

## THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN AGGRESSIVENESS, PEER PRESSURE AND PARENTAL ATTITUDES AMONG TURKISH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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The relationships between aggressive behaviors, peer pressure, parental attitudes, and gender among 202 students from different public high schools were investigated in this study. Three scales were employed. Following the calculation of the correlation coefficients among the scores, a significant and positive relationship between the aggressiveness scores and the peer pressure, authoritarian and protective parental attitudes scores, and a significant and negative relationship between the aggressiveness scores and the democratic parental attitudes scores were found. Regression analysis was employed to see if the variables of peer pressure and parental attitudes predict the aggressiveness scores, and indicated that democratic parental attitudes, peer pressure and protective parental attitudes are the predictors of aggressiveness. Furthermore, the difference between the female and male students' aggressiveness score means was tested by using *t* test, and it was established that male students were more aggressive than were female students.

*Keywords:* aggressiveness, peer pressure, parental attitudes, adolescent, gender.

Aggressiveness has been defined as the behavior generally performed to obtain superiority, to set up dominance or to gain control over others with the intention

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of inflicting verbal or physical harm on others (Atkinson, Atkinson, & Hilgard, 1995). It has been found that the increasing physical power and energy during adolescence leads to aggressiveness (Kulaksızoğlu, 1999). However, when the relevant research findings are examined, it appears that aggressiveness has no single cause but rather a number of variables affecting it. Among these variables are parental attitudes (Duncan, 1999; Orpinas, Murray, & Kelder, 1999), in-family violence (McGaha & Leoni, 1995; Straus & Kantor, 1994; Uz, 1989), presence of criminals in the family and child abuse (McEvoy & Welker, 2000), peer relationships (Barnow, Lucht, & Freyberger, 2001), socioeconomic status (İlter-Kiper, 1984), and age and gender (Arıca, 1995; Orpinas et al., 1999). The other conditions that increase the risk of aggressive and bullying behaviors are: lack of social skills, hyperactivity, attention deficit, risk taking tendency, rigid beliefs and attitudes, and learning disabilities (Leone, Mayer, Malgren, & Misel, 2000).

Duncan (1999) investigated the relationship between parental attitudes and aggressiveness, and found that aggressive children and adolescents have parents who are generally less affectionate, excessively tolerant and physically and emotionally aggressive in their relationships with their children. While Hatunoğlu (1994) found that adolescents who have authoritarian parents are more aggressive than those who have democratic and indifferent parents, Yavuzer (1996), in a research study on criminal children, found that a great majority of these children reported parental pressure and violence. Feshbac (1970) investigated the relationship between frustration, disappointment, and parental attitudes, and stated that rejective parental behaviors provoke frustration and aggressiveness (cited by Doğan, 2001). The family environment of a child and the parental attitudes towards the child have their effects on, and determine the psychosocial development, personality traits and behaviors of, the child (Baumrind, 1980; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1990).

In recent research studies, it appears that an important reason for observed aggressive behaviors in childhood and adolescence is peer pressure (Ryan, 2000; Santor, Messervey, & Kusumakar, 2000; Steinberg, 1999). During adolescence, one retires to a distance from parents and spends much more time with peers (Cook & Dayley, 2001; Helsen, Volleberg, & Meeus, 2000). The psychological needs of an adolescent in a group of peers to be accepted and appreciated as a part of that group are accompanied by peer pressure. Most of the time, adolescents are affected by peer groups and unknowingly begin to behave just like them (Santor et al., 2000). Risk-taking within the group, resisting traditional society and parental authority, and efforts to get his or her identity approved, enable an adolescent to be an accepted member and part of a peer group. While these groups sometimes help adolescents with positive activities, they sometimes encourage them to smoke cigarettes (Alexander, Piazza, Mekos, & Valente, 2001), use drugs

(Bauman & Ennet, 1996) neglect study and adopt behaviors including violence (Gürşimşek, 2005), fighting, and bullying (Huttunen, Salmivalli, & Lagerpetz, 1996) and other criminal behaviors.

Aggressive behaviors show significant differences in terms of gender also. In many studies (Arıcağ, 1995; Rivers & Smith 1994; Salmivalli, Karhunen, & Lagerpetz, 1996) it has been found that male adolescents are more aggressive than female ones. However, some recent studies in Western countries report that girls are more aggressive than in the past and commit more crimes (Artz, 1998; Lamb, 2002). However, studies to investigate female adolescent aggressiveness specifically have not yet begun in Turkey. Hence, gender is taken as a variable in the present study.

Such aggressive behaviors as bullying, fighting, wounding with knives or guns, and killing, which have been more scarce in schools in Turkey compared to schools in Western societies, are becoming more and more frequent these days, especially in high schools, with aggressiveness that results in either injuries or deaths. There have been almost no studies in Turkey investigating the psychological reasons behind such behaviors getting more and more serious. Considering this lack, this study was undertaken to investigate the aggressive behaviors of adolescents in terms of the variables of parental attitudes, peer pressure and gender. Though there have been some studies in Turkey about aggressiveness and parental attitudes, none have dealt with peer pressure, parental attitudes and aggressiveness together. We believe that the findings of the study will contribute to the related literature and to understanding more about the reasons for students' aggressive behaviors and determining the precautions to be taken in schools and families.

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between 15 to 17-year-old adolescents' aggressive behaviors and peer pressure, parental attitudes and gender variables. Answers for the following questions were sought:

- 1 Is there a significant difference between the means of the scores female and male students obtained from the aggressiveness scale?
- 2 Is there a significant relationship between the aggressiveness scores, the democratic, authoritarian, and protective parental attitudes and the peer pressure scores?
- 3 How strongly can the variables of peer pressure and democratic, protective, and authoritarian parental attitudes predict aggressive behavior?

## **METHOD**

### **PARTICIPANTS**

The group consisted of 202 voluntary students drawn from the ninth and tenth

grade classrooms of various state high schools in Bursa, Turkey. It included 104 female and 98 male students, ranging in age from 15 to 17. The mean age of the participants was 16.61 years.

### INSTRUMENTS

In this study, three scales were used: the Aggressiveness Scale, Parental Attitudes Scale and Peer Pressure Scale. The information regarding the validity and reliability of these scales is provided below.

**Peer Pressure Scale** Developed by Kiran (2002), the Peer Pressure Scale (PPS) is a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of 34 items. It aims to measure the peer pressure that adolescents experience. It has two subscales. The Cronbach alpha coefficients were .90 for the whole scale, .89 for the Direct Peer Pressure subscale, and .82 for the Indirect Peer Pressure subscale. The test-retest reliability coefficients were found to be .82 for the whole scale, .74 for the Direct Peer Pressure subscale, and .79 for the Indirect Peer Pressure subscale. For the construct validity of the Peer Pressure Scale, factor analysis was used and the total variance for the two factors obtained was found to be 40.52%. The scale yields only one score. The higher the score obtained from the scale the higher the peer pressure, and the lower the score the lower the peer pressure. The scale includes such items as "I do what my friends want me to do lest they think I'm coward," "Even when I don't want to, I get involved when one of my friends starts a fight".

**Aggressiveness Scale** Developed by Tuzgöl (1998), the Aggressiveness Scale aims to measure adolescents' overt, secret, physical, verbal and indirect behaviors related to aggressiveness. It is a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of 45 items. In it, there are questions to be re-asked, of which 21 have an aggressive content, 15 lack it, and 9 others are asked just to attain the validity score. The scale provides only one total score. For the reliability of the scale, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated at .71, and the test-retest determination coefficient was found to be .85. For the validation study of the scale, the Aggressiveness Scale was given to 45 students identified as aggressive by at least three teachers and these scores were compared to the ones obtained by a group of people not identified as aggressive;  $t$ -value was found to be 3.25 ( $p < .01$ ). Thus, the scale was considered to measure aggressive behaviors. The higher the scores obtained from the Aggressiveness Scale the higher the aggressiveness level, and the lower the scores obtained the lower the aggressiveness level. "I get angry when others do not agree to accept my superiority over them," "When someone does any harm to me, I think that I should take revenge" are some of the items present in the scale.

**Parental Attitudes Scale** Developed by Kuzgun (1972), and the psychometric studies of which were repeated by Eldeleklioğlu (1996), the Parental Attitudes

Scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale aiming to measure parents' attitudes towards children. The scale is made up of three subscales specified after factor analysis and from these subscales, three different scores are obtained. These subscales are democratic parental attitudes, protective parental attitudes and authoritarian parental attitudes. For the reliability of the scale, Cronbach alpha coefficients were calculated and found to be .89, .82, and .78 for the democratic parental attitudes, the protective parental attitudes, and the authoritarian parental attitudes subscales respectively. Moreover, the test-retest stability coefficients were found to be .92, .75, and .79 for the democratic parental attitudes, the protective parental attitudes, and the authoritarian parental attitudes subscales respectively. For the validity study, it was calculated how independent each subscale was from the others and the correlation coefficients were found to be -.64 between the democratic subscale scores and the authoritarian subscale scores, and .36 between the authoritarian subscale scores and the protective subscale scores. Some of the items in the scale are as follows: "when we are together, our relationship is very friendly", "he would behave coldly and antipathetically whenever I desired to be physically and emotionally close to him/her", "he/she always wants to know where I am and what I am doing".

### **PROCEDURE**

To the data obtained following the administration of the scales, the following techniques were applied: *t* test for the independent groups to find the relationship between aggressiveness and gender, the Pearson correlation coefficients to analyze the relationships between aggressiveness, parental attitudes, and peer pressure, and regression analysis to test whether or not parental attitudes and peer pressure predict aggressiveness.

## **RESULTS**

The findings obtained after the data had been analyzed in accordance with the aim of the study are provided in tables together with explanations below.

### **AGGRESSIVENESS, PARENTAL ATTITUDES, AND PEER PRESSURE SCORES**

The mean score on the Aggressiveness Scale was 62.45 ( $SD = 10.12$ ), and the mean of the Peer Pressure Scale is 52.08 ( $SD = 15.54$ ). The mean of the scores from the democratic parental attitudes subscale ( $M = 106.50$ ;  $SD = 22.59$ ) is much higher than the mean of the scores from the protective parental attitudes subscale ( $M = 81.42$ ;  $SD = 17.64$ ), and the mean of the scores from the authoritarian parental attitudes subscale ( $M = 46.86$ ;  $SD = 13.82$ ). The fact that the variance of the democratic parental attitudes scores is large shows that parents are at different levels in terms of behaving democratically.

**DO SCORES FROM THE AGGRESSIVENESS SCALE DIFFER ACCORDING TO GENDER**

The difference between the means of the male and female scores on the Aggressiveness Scale was tested by using *t* test; the results are shown in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATION AND *T* VALUE OF THE SCORES FOR FEMALE AND MALE STUDENTS ON THE AGGRESSIVENESS SCALE

	Gender	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Aggressiveness	Female	104	60.62	9.73	0.008*
	Male	98	64.40	10.21	

\**p* < .01

When Table 1 is examined, it appears that the mean score the male students obtained (*M* = 64.40) is higher than that of the female students (*M* = 60.62) and the difference between the two means is significant at .01 level. The variance of the male students' aggressiveness scores and the female students' aggressiveness scores are very close to each other. According to this finding, it can be stated that the ninth and the tenth grade male students are more aggressive than the female students. This finding is an expected one and supports the studies by Tuzgöl (1998) and Arıcaık (1995).

**RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN AGGRESSIVENESS, PARENTAL ATTITUDES AND PEER PRESSURE**

As is seen in Table 2, when the Pearson correlation coefficients between 'peer pressure' and 'parental attitudes' and 'aggressiveness' were examined, it was found that there was a negative relationship between aggressiveness and democratic parental attitudes (*r* = -.362), a positive relationship between aggressiveness and protective parental attitudes (*r* = .252), between aggressiveness and authoritarian parental attitudes (*r* = .287), and aggressiveness and peer pressure (*r* = .381) at 0.01 level significant relationships. According to the correlations found, it could be stated that the more democratic attitudes parents have, the less frequent adolescents' aggressive behaviors are and the frequency of the aggressive behaviors of the adolescents with protective and authoritarian parents is likely to be higher. That there is a positive relationship between aggressiveness and peer pressure also shows that peer pressure increases aggressiveness.

**TABLE 2**  
**CORRELATIONS BETWEEN AGGRESSIVENESS, PARENTAL ATTITUDES AND PEER PRESSURE**

	Democratic Parent	Protective Parent	Authoritarian Parent	Peer Pressure
Aggressiveness	-.36.2**	.25.2**	.28.7**	.38.1**

\*\*  $p < .01$

Table 3 shows the results of the multiple regression analysis done to test the extent to which parental attitudes and peer pressure predict aggressive behaviors.

**TABLE 3**  
**MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS REGARDING THE PREDICTION OF AGGRESSIVENESS**

Dependent variable	$R^2$	$F$	Independent variables	$t$
Aggressiveness	0.224	18.25**	Peer Pressure	3.609**
			Dem. Parent A.	-3.820**
			Protective Parent A.	2.01**

\*\*  $p < .001$

As seen in Table 3, the three regressed variables 'peer pressure,' 'democratic parental attitudes,' and 'protective parental attitudes' together yield a significant relationship with aggressiveness (dependent variable) (Multiple  $R = 0.473$ ,  $R^2 = 0.224$ ,  $F = 18.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Peer pressure and protective parental attitudes variables predict aggressiveness behavior in a positive direction significantly, but democratic parental attitudes predict aggressive behavior in a negative direction significantly. Democratic parental attitudes, protective parental attitudes and peer pressure together explain approximately 25% of the total variance in aggressive behavior. Since authoritarian parental attitudes were found to be statistically insignificant after stepwise regression was calculated, it was not included in the multiple regression model. According to the standardized regression coefficient (B), the relative order of importance of predictive variables on aggressiveness is democratic parental attitudes, peer pressure and protective parental attitudes. When the  $t$  test results regarding the significance of the regression coefficients are examined, it is seen that peer pressure, democratic parental attitudes and protective parental attitudes variables, all three, are significant predictors on aggressiveness behavior ( $p < .001$ ).

## DISCUSSION

According to the results of the study, the scores the male students obtained from the aggressiveness scale were found to be significantly higher than those of the female students ( $p < .01$ ). The fact that male adolescents are more aggressive than female ones has been known for years and there are many research findings supporting this. In the research studies by Tuzgöl (1998) with high school students and by Arıcak (1995) with university students, the aggressiveness levels of male students were found to be significantly higher than those of female students. Rivers and Smith (1994) state that male students, when compared to female students, bully more and exhibit behaviors including more violence (kicking, pushing, etc.), and Salmivalli, Karhunen, and Lagerspetz (1996) make clear that aggressive behaviors are more favorable among male adolescent peer groups. Girls tend to express their negative feelings in ways like insulting, gossiping, and making rude remarks rather than using violence. However, some studies conducted in recent years in the West found that girls have become more aggressive than before, and they have started to commit crimes more often than before (Gabor, 1999). The fact that males are more aggressive than females can be explained by gender roles. In all cultures, but more clearly in Turkey and in other eastern societies, violent behavior by girls is not favored and, while they are expected to behave in a more controlled manner, boys are expected to be stronger, and to sometimes behave aggressively to protect their own rights. Moreover, when male students think that they are obstructed or treated unjustly, they, unlike female students, may prefer to behave aggressively rather than to express this verbally or emotionally.

According to other research findings, there are statistically significant correlation coefficients between the scores from the Aggressiveness Scale and the scores from the Peer Pressure Scale ( $r = .380$ ), and the democratic ( $r = -.362$ ), the protective ( $r = .252$ ) and the authoritarian ( $r = .287$ ) parental attitudes subscales ( $p < .01$ ). As seen, the democratic parental attitudes scores are negatively but significantly correlated with the aggressiveness scores. This finding supports many research study findings in the literature (Duncan, 1999; Hatunoğlu, 1994). Children raised in a democratic family environment have more acceptance, experience less obstruction, and are allowed to behave somewhat autonomously. Furthermore, because their self-confidence is higher and anxiety level is lower, their personal and social adjustments are higher and this leads to less aggressive behaviors. According to the other findings of the present study, there is a significant relationship in the positive direction between the aggressiveness scores, and the scores from the subscales protective parental attitudes, and authoritarian parental attitudes.

The positive relationship between the authoritarian parental attitudes and aggressiveness is an expected one and supports the findings by Duncan (1999), by Hatunoğlu (1994), by Leschied, Cummings, Van Brunschot, Cunningham, and Saunders (2000), and by Barnow et al. (2001). In the authoritarian family structure, the adolescent's behaviors are firmly controlled, his or her individuality and personality are less respected, and his or her autonomous behaviors are obstructed and limited. Thus, the adolescent loses his or her self-confidence, has difficulty adjusting personally and socially and so exhibits inappropriate aggressive behaviors. In a comparative study by Kağıtçıbaşı (1991) with Turkish and American adolescents, the Turkish family structure was generally controlling. The democratic family structure and the protective family structure differ from each other in the dimension of controlling. While democratic parents attach importance to internal locus of control, protective parents restrict the child's and the adolescent's behaviors and show their love conditionally. Therefore, like the authoritarian family environment, the protective family environment is controlling and restrictive. The obstructive and limiting environments, as mentioned above, increase adolescents' aggressive behaviors.

Another finding from the study is the positive relationship between the aggressiveness scores and the peer pressure scores. No research studies have been found that investigated the relationship between aggressiveness and peer pressure. However, there are many research studies made in other countries indicating this relationship indirectly. The desire in adolescents to belong to a peer group is a strong one (Ryan, 2000). For this reason, adolescents sometimes cannot resist negative peer pressure, and they can exhibit behaviors such as drug addiction (Bauman & Ennet, 1996), damaging school or others' property and deception (Graham & Juvonen, 2002).

From the results of the regression analysis we made to see if the peer pressure, democratic, protective, and authoritarian parental attitudes variables predict aggressiveness, it appears that peer pressure and protective parental attitudes predict aggressiveness behavior in a positive direction significantly while democratic parental attitudes predict aggressiveness behavior in a negative direction significantly. Democratic parental attitudes, peer pressure, and protective parental attitudes, in the order given, predict aggressiveness behavior. As mentioned above, while there are many research studies on parental attitudes and aggressiveness, and peer pressure and aggressiveness, no studies dealing with both variables together and investigating the predictability of the relationship were found. For this reason, more extensive research studies, conducted with larger groups, are required to support these results. Moreover, in the present study, an effort was made to explain the aggressiveness behavior in terms of the variables of peer pressure, parental attitudes, and gender. However, there might be some factors affecting aggressive behaviors other than these

variables. As for the other limitations to the study, the present study was carried out with a small sample group without considering the socioeconomic levels of the students and in only public high schools. It is suggested that further studies should be made using more variables, and a larger heterogeneous sample group. Another limitation is that the parental attitudes scale used in the study measures only how students perceive their parents' attitudes.

All these findings suggest that families should be informed through family counseling that a democratic family environment decreases aggressive behaviors, but protective and authoritarian parental attitudes increase aggressiveness, and school-parent collaboration should be assured. Besides this, establishing a democratic classroom environment in schools, rather than an authoritarian one, enables adolescents to be able to express themselves better. Moreover, in order to get rid of the negative effects of peer pressure, adolescents should learn to say 'No!' and be determined to stick by their decision. In this phase of life, the determined personality structure becomes more important. Group or individual counseling can be ways of having adolescents acquire the competency to stand up against the compulsive effects of peer groups, and to constitute their own values, teaching them conflict-resolving skills and other social skills.

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