



Hostile Behaviour among Undergraduates: The Roles of Family Support and Peer Relationship

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Abstract

*This study investigated hostile behaviour among undergraduates: The roles of family social support and peer relationship. Two hundred and sixty-six (266) undergraduates participated in the study. They include 220 females and 46 males, whose ages ranged from 17 to 25 years (mean age 20.51; standard deviation 1.44). A mixed sampling design involving purposive, simple random, and accidental sampling was used to select the faculties, departments, and students who participated in the study. Three instruments (Hostile dimension of aggressive behaviour scale, family social support dimension of the multidimensional scale of perceived social support scale and index of peer relations scale) were used to collect data for the study. The study adopted a correlational design and multiple linear regression statistics were used to analyze the data. The first result shows that family social support positively and significantly predicted hostile behaviour, $\beta = (34^{**}, t = 5.15, P < .01)$ while the second result revealed that peer relationship negatively and significantly predicted hostile behaviour, $\beta = (-.213^{**}, t = -3.586, P < .01)$. The discussion focused on importance and implication of these two predictors (family social support and peer relationship). Recommendations were based on the findings. It was recommended that input from positive improved family social support and peer relationships are important variables that can reduce hostile behaviours.*

Introduction

Hostile behaviour among undergraduates in Nigerian universities and other higher institutions of learning is on the increase on a daily basis but can be managed (Udoka et al., 2023; Obineri, 2025). It has been observed that many undergraduates of Nigerian universities most especially Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka at one particular time or the other involved in one form of hostile behaviours or the other while lecturers and other students may be the victims (Obineri, 2025). In the recent past, at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, a three (300) level female student brutally attacked a lecturer in the Faculty of Arts of the university (Obineri, 2025). There have also been reports of students exhibiting hostile behaviours to their fellow students and lecturers (Oshodi, 2025; Obineri, 2025) which affects undergraduates' mental health and academic achievement (Aroyewum, & Nwokedi, 2023). These hostile behaviours have attracted the attention of parents, guardians and management of higher institutions of learning in Nigeria.

Researchers have shown also that hostile behaviours such as incessant student's rape, campus cult clashes, armed robbery, fighting, bullying, and forceful cohabitation increased in frequency in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, most especially around Ifite Awka off campus student hostels (Opesemowo, & Taiwo, 2025; Kalu et al., 2021; Nwikpo & Offordueze, 2022; Eleweke, 2023). Some researchers agree that hostile behaviour is inborn in humans (Phelan, 2022).

However, these hostile behaviours such as armed robbery, incessant student's rape, forceful cohabitation, physical and verbal assaults are seen by students (victims), parents, university staff, and university management as a serious problem that needed to be managed (Nwikpo, et al., 2022; Nwikpo, & Ofodueze, 2022; Nwikpo, et al., 2024; Obineri, 2025). Despite the disciplinary measures taken in the past that lead to the expulsion and suspension of some students that engaged in hostile behaviours in the universities and its environs, (Obineri, 2025), many students still engage in the act of hostility like stealing, kidnapping, fighting, armed robbery, rape, and hostile sexual harassment (Nweke & Ukwueze, 2025; Elekwa, 2023; Elenweke, 2023).

Hostile behavior is a behavior with the intention to injure a person or group of persons (Bushman &

Anderson, 2001). Hostility has been defined as "a negative attitude towards others consisting of enmity, denigration, and ill will (Smith, et al., 2004). Hostility involves deliberate acts intended at hurting, harming, or destroying excluding accidental or well-intentioned actions (Bernstein et al., 2006; Brehm et al., 2005, Myers et al., 2005 as cited in Ezeugwunne et al., 2023). Hostile behavior manifests in various forms of behavior such as: verbal, coercion, intimidation, and destructive management styles that can have harmful psychological consequences on people). Specifically, among developing youths in Nigerian higher institution of learning, hostile behaviour affect them psychologically, and most especially their mental health, welfare, lessens productivity, students academic performance and generally undermines the fabric of society (Aroyewum & Nwokedi., 2023; Cénat, et al., 2019; Machisa, et al., 2018; Escoba, et al., 2023). The scope of hostile behaviour is endless and quite unbearable (Bukoye, et al., 2012). Evidence has shown the cases of students' hostile behaviours in the Nigerian higher institutions of learning in the past (Aroyewum, & Nwokedi., 2023; Mercy, 2019; Rotshak & Longdas, 2021).

The implications of these high rates of hostile behaviours in Nigerian Universities and other higher institutions of learning may include the following: undergraduates may drop out of schools, and more youths and students may be involved in hostile behaviors which are likely to affect the undergraduates' mental health, welfare and academic achievement. Moreover, hostile behaviour often has lifelong consequences for the victim's physical, mental health and social relations and can also slow students' relationships with other students. There may be many risk and protective factors that may be related to hostile behaviour and one study cannot cover all the risk and protective factors. Therefore, within the scope of the present study, two independent factors (family social support and peer relationship) which may be classified as external factors as suggested by empirical literature (Makarios, et al., 2012,) were considered as possible factors that relate to hostile behaviors.. Therefore, there is limited research that examined the role of family social support and Peer relationships on hostile behaviour using a statistical model that utilizes quantitative data to see the extent of their contributions as risk or preventive factors in hostile behavior among the

participants of this study. This present research addressed this gap by exploring Hostile behaviour among undergraduates: The role of family social support and peer relationship.

Family social support is the first variable of study in this research. Family social support is defined as the comfort given to one by family or the perceived function and quality of social relationships such as availability of aid or support received from family (Onyishi, et al., 2012 as cited in Mabia, et al., 2019). Therefore, these family social support resources can be emotional, informational, or companionship. Family social support is also seen as informal support and help from family members providing emotional or instrumental support for instance, in the case of suicidal adolescents, their parents are the main supporters (Kamarryati & Maa, 2020).

Aldersey, et al., (2016) pointed out that the family provides emotional, physical, material/ instrumental, and informational needs. They spend time to share their feelings and accompany the adolescents to contact health care providers when needed. Ezeugwunne, et al. (2023), conducted a study on social support and callous-unemotional traits on aggression among undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State Nigeria and the result revealed that social support and callous-unemotional traits contribute to the understanding of aggression was not significant. Ezeugwunne, et al. (2023), findings will help the undergraduates not to engage in aggressive behavior. This shows the effect of social support on aggression and hostility. In another study, Alradaydeh and Alorani, (2017), examined the relationship between aggression and perceived social support among university students in Jordan. The results showed that 51.3% of the university students had high levels of aggression, and they reported a moderate perception of perceived social support. In the same study, male students reported higher aggression than female students, while female students had a higher perception of perceived social support than male students. Alradaydeh and Alorani, (2017), results also showed that family social support had significant negative correlations with all domains of aggression.

The second variable of study in this research is peer relationship. Peer relationships are interpersonal relationships established during social interactions

among peers or individuals or college students with similar levels of psychological development. (Chai, et al, 2018; La Greca & Harrison, 2005; as cited by Wang & Wu, 2021). Peer relationship is the process of interaction or relationship of people who can be considered as peers in such a way that they can be influential to one another's behaviour. Peers have a great level of influence on one another because people always want to behave in certain ways that would earn them the required respect among their peers. Yu, et al., (2009) refer to that desire to be accepted among peers as peer acceptance. Peer acceptance represents the social status or popularity within a large group; they further stated that experiencing positive peer relationships and friendships contributes to positive self-image. Therefore, the social environment individuals find themselves influence their individual behaviours (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978).

Mabia, et al., (2023), conducted research on peer relations and gambling behaviours and the results revealed that peer relationships negatively and significantly predicted gambling behaviour among undergraduates. Moreover, Ndukaihe, et al., (2023), examined the role of gender and media violence in adolescents' peer relationship problems and aggressive behavior and findings from Hayes PROCESS Macro for moderated-mediation analyses indicated that peer relationship qualities predicted aggressive behaviour. Media violence exposure mediated the peer influence-aggressive behaviour relationship, such that the relationship was stronger for male participants with greater peer relationship problems. Ndukaihe, et al. (2023), result also showed that the relationship was weaker for female participants with lesser or no peer relationship problems. These findings were consistent with social cognitive learning theory, which proposes that people learn by observing others and how their environment, personal and environmental factors influence undergraduates to learn hostile behavior. In another study, Ýr-Leifsdóttir, (2022) investigated the relationship between parental and peer support with adolescent criminal behavior while considering substance use, financial status, gender, and age. Subjects were Icelandic high school students who took part in a survey called Youth in Iceland which was administered by the Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis in 2018. Using logistic regression, the results showed that parental and peer

support, substance use, gender, and age all had a significant association with adolescent criminal behavior, but financial status did not. The result also revealed that boys participated in criminal behavior than girls as well as younger individuals. The findings indicate that parental and peer support and age can have a protective effect against adolescent criminal behavior while substance use was associated with increased adolescent criminal behaviour.

Method

Participants

A total of 266 undergraduates from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka served as the participants in this study. All the participants were between 17 to 25 years. The mean age of the participants was 20.51 years with a standard deviation of 1.44. Three sampling techniques: purposive, simple random and accidental sampling were used to select the participants at different stages. In all 220 females (82.7%) and 46 males (17.3%) participated in the study.

Instruments

Participants completed three instruments which include: Hostile Behaviour Scale (HBS), the family Social Support scale (FSS) and the Peer Relations Scale (IPR).

The Hostile behavior Scale (HBS) is a subscale of the Aggression Questionnaire developed to measure the construct of hostility. This subscale of aggression was developed and validated by Buss and Perry, (1992) to measure the construct of hostility. It is designed to measure behaviours and characteristics that can easily predispose an individual to hostile behaviours. The eight items were directly scored. The scoring was done on five point scale ranging from 1= extremely uncharacteristic to 5 = extremely characteristic'. Sample items of the aggression scale include statements such as 'When people are especially nice to me, I wonder what they want'. 'I know that "friends" talk about me behind my back'. Items 3, 7, 10, 15, 17 20, 24 and 26 measure Hostile behaviours. The scale has a minimum score point of 8 and a maximum score point of 40. Buss and Perry, (1992), reported Cronbach alpha coefficients of .78, while the present researcher conducted a pilot test with 60 undergraduates of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam campus, Anambra State

Nigeria and a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .72 was obtained.

Family Social Support is four items subscale of the multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS) was developed by (Zemet et al., 1988). This four (4) items scale was used to measure family social support (FSS). FSS was scored on a 6-point Likert format ranging from 1 "very strongly disagree" to 6 "very strongly agree". Items 3, 4, 8 and 11 measure family social support. Sample items on the scale include, "my family really tries to help me" and "My family is willing to help me make decisions". Zemet, et al. (1988) reported that family support had strong and moderate construct validity. Zemet et al. (1988) also reported internal and test-retest reliability of family social support of MSPSS. Validity of the scale was also obtained by Onyishi et al. (2013) by reporting that factor loading of the items was relatively high. Onyishi et al. (2013) reported .78 internal consistencies of Family social support. Onyishi et al. (2013) reported a predictive validity of $p < .01$ by using MSPSS to predict life satisfaction of prison workers. Mabilia, et al., (2023) reported .89 Cronbach's alpha of family social support.

The index of peer relations (IPR) was developed and validated by Hudson et al (1986). The scale was designed to measure the degree, severity, or magnitude of a problem that a participant has in interpersonal relationships with peers. The scale consists of 25 items. IPR was scored on 5-point Likert format ranging from 1- strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree. Items 2 3 5 6 9 10 13 14 19 20 23 24 25 were directly scored while items 1 4 7 8 11 12 15 16 17 18 21 22 were reverse scored. Sample items on the scale include 'My peers act like they don't care about me' and 'I really feel left out of my peer group'. The addition of direct scores and reverse scores minus 25 is the total IPR score. Hudson et al (1986) reported a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .94 and the norms obtained by Anumba (1995) for Nigerian samples 29.31 for males and 26.83 for females. The norms obtained for American males and females by Hudson (1986) was .35 for 107 students. Anumba also obtained a validity coefficient of .62 for Nigerian samples which correlated IPR with Hare self-esteem (HSS) by Hare (1985). Mabilia, et al.,(2023) reported .78 Cronbach's alpha reliability of IPR.

Procedure

Ethical clearance and approval for the study were duly obtained from the Department of Psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (NAU). Three sampling techniques: purposive, simple random sampling and accidental sampling were used in selecting the participants. Purposive sampling was used in the first stage to select the institution (Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka). Simple random sampling was used in selecting the Faculties and Departments from the University, while an accidental (non-probability) sampling technique was used in selecting the participants in their various lecture halls. This is because hostile behaviors among undergraduates have been reported several times within Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, environs. The three sets of questionnaires (HBS, FSS and IPR) were administered to the participants after explaining the purpose of the study to them and obtaining informed consent. Further, assurances were also given regarding the utmost confidentiality of participants' responses, and they were specifically instructed not to indicate their names. This was done to increase the level of compliance in filling in the questionnaire. Participants were encouraged to be honest in their responses to the questionnaire. The questionnaires were self-administered and took approximately 60 minutes to complete. Only two hundred and sixty-six (266) well-filled questionnaires were used for the data analysis.

Design and Statistics

The researchers adopted a correlational design because the objective of the study is to establish family social support and peer relationships as predictors of hostile behaviour. Multiple linear regression analysis was used in testing the predictive effect of the variables in the study.

Result

Table 1: Summary table of Zero order correlation coefficient matrix of hostile behaviour, family social support, examination anxiety and peer relationship

S/N	Variable	1	2	3
1	Hostility	1		
2	FSS	.292**	1	
3	PR	-.130*	.232**	1

** P<.01, * P < .05

FSS= family social support, PR = peer relationship.

Results from Table 1 above showed that a positive and significant relationship was found between hostile behaviour and family social support, ($r = .292$, $P < .01$). This means that an increase in hostile behaviour will be associated with an increase in family social support. There is also a negative and significant relationship between hostile behaviour and peer relationship ($r = -.130$, $P < .05$). This means that an increase in negative peer relationship will be associated with an increase in hostile behavior and vice versa. These findings provide preliminary support for running multiple linear regression analysis which tested hypotheses 1, and 2.

Table 2: Summary of multiple linear regression analysis of hostile behaviour, family social support, examination anxiety and peer relationship

Variable	R ²	Df1(df2)	F	SE	β	T	Sig
Model	.129	3(262)	12.95**	5.15			
FSS					.342**	5.15	.001
PR					-	-3.586	.001
					.213**		

** P<.01, * P < .05

FSS= family social support, PR = peer relationship.

The result of multiple linear regression shows that Family social support has a significant β value of .342** and significantly predicted hostile behaviour while peer relationship negatively and significantly predicted aggressive behaviour, $\beta = -.213$ **

Discussion

The present study examined hostile behaviour among undergraduates: the roles of family social support and peer relationships. The zero-order correlation result revealed that family social support positively and significantly correlated with hostile behaviour. Table 2 results revealed that family social support positively and significantly predicted hostile behaviour. This shows that an increase in family social support contributes to an increase in hostile behaviour and vice versa.

Theoretically, this result agrees with social cognitive learning theory (Bandura, 1986) which explains how people learn by observing others and how their environment, personal factors and behaviour influence their behaviours. This implies that undergraduates who come from a family environment or have a family personality that encourages a particular behaviour, the undergraduate will learn the behaviour (hostile behaviour) and will start exhibiting the learned hostile behaviour. Empirically, Alradaydeh and Alorani, (2017), supported the present finding to some extent. Alradaydeh and Alorani, (2017), examine the relationship between aggression and perceived social support among university students and the results showed that family social support had significant negative correlations with all domains of aggression. This finding is not in agreement with Ezeugwunne et al. (2023). Ezeugwunne, et al. (2023), conducted a study on social support and callous-unemotional traits on aggression among undergraduates and the result revealed that social support and callous-unemotional traits contribute to the understanding of aggression was not significant. This shows that family social support and hostile behavior have a positive relationship.

The second finding of the study revealed that peer relationships negatively and significantly correlated with hostile behaviours. Table 2 results also revealed that peer relationships are negatively and significantly predicted hostile behaviour among undergraduates. This shows that as negative peer relationships increase hostile behaviours increase and as negative peer relationships decrease hostile behaviours decrease. Theoretically, this result is in agreement with social cognitive learning theory (Bandura, 1986) which explains how people learn by

observing others and how their environment, personal factors and behaviour influence their behaviours. This implies that undergraduates who relate to peers who do not encourage a particular behaviour (hostile behaviour), hostile behaviours will not be learned while undergraduates who relate with peers who encourage hostile behaviour will learn hostile behaviours among them. This means also that the environment one finds himself/herself and the personality of the person determine the person's behaviour. Empirically, the present findings is in agreement with Ndukaihe, et al. (2023), which revealed that peer relationship qualities predicted aggressive behaviour and that media violence exposure mediated the peer influence aggressive behaviour relationship, such that the relationship was stronger for male participants with greater peer relationship problems while there was a weaker relationship for female participants with lesser or no peer relationship problems. In another study, by Kpae, and Adokiye, (2019), the results revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between peer pressure and the various social criminal vices and that peer group pressure is what motivated youths into criminality in Rivers State.

Again, Mgboro, et al. (2019), also agree with this finding. The result revealed that peer group influence predicts aggressive behaviour among students.

Implications of the study

The findings of the present study have some practical implications. First, family social support and peer relationships are significant factors in hostile behaviour among undergraduates. A practical implication for this finding is that an increase in family social support brings about an increase in hostile behaviour and vice versa. Again, negative peer relationships increase hostile behaviours and positive peer relationship decreases hostile behaviours. A practical implication for this finding is that a negative peer relationship brings about an increase in hostile behaviour among undergraduates and vice versa.

Limitations of the study and suggestions for further Research

One of the limitations of the present study is that participants were selected from one public University in an urban area (Nnamdi Azikiwe). Also, this study utilized only self-report measures for hostile behaviour, family social support and peer relationships that may not match with behaviour. Moreover, the study is cross-sectional and correlational and therefore causality cannot be inferred. The population size is small and caution should be taken in the interpretation of the results. Therefore, further studies could select samples from other public and private universities and may consider other predictor factors such as parenting style, family functioning, and dropout intentions. Moreover, samples could also be selected from six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, so that the result can have more external validity.

Conclusion

The results have implications for policymakers who work with undergraduates' development, welfare and management. This implies that family social support and peer relationships are important factors related to hostile behaviour among undergraduates. Therefore, family social support and negative peer relationships should be considered as factors that are likely to increase or decrease hostile behaviour among undergraduates. Finally, results showed the contributions of the study variables; the roles of family social support and peer relationship on hostile behaviour. These research findings are hoped to encourage researchers to investigate other possible linked variables that will add positively or negatively to understanding hostile behaviour. This is because understanding variables that are linked to hostile behaviours will amplify the understanding of hostile behaviour and give an edge to those who are interested in curbing hostile behaviour-related problems.

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