EMOTIONAL REGULATION CHARACTERISTICS AND VERBAL HOSTILITY IN EARLY SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

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Amidst a growing recognition of the profound impact that emotional competencies have on children's overall well-being and social integration, there is an escalating interest among scholars and practitioners in delineating methods to foster emotional resilience and mitigate verbal aggression among primary school students.

Theoretical Framework

According to Gross (2008), emotion regulation is the conscious or unconscious employment of cognitive strategies to modulate one's emotional experiences and expressions. This conceptualization highlights two primary strategies integral to the process of emotional regulation: *cognitive reappraisal* and *emotional suppression*.

Verbal hostility (VH) refers to a form of aggression expressed through language. It encompasses behaviors such as yelling, insulting, using sarcasm to belittle others, threatening, and engaging in malicious gossip or slander. (DeWall et al., 2011).

Materials and Methods

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between the characteristics of emotional regulation and manifestations of verbal hostility in early school-age children, with a focus on predictive factors and consequences for socio-emotional development.

The experimental cohort consisted of 107 students, aged between 8 and 10 years.

The gender distribution was balanced, with 52 girls and 55 boys, ensuring good representativeness and allowing for comparative analyses between genders.

Data Collection Tools

The following psychodiagnostic methods were employed: ***The Hostility Inventory*** by ***Arnold H. Buss*** and ***Ann Durkee*** was chosen to assess hostility manifestations of primary school students, particularly Verbal Hostility (VE). **The Emotional Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (ERQ-CA)** is an assessment tool that evaluates 2 primary emotional regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal (CR) and expressive suppression (ES).

Results

Distribution of responses on the Buss and Durkee Hostility Inventory, reveals a gender-based distribution in verbal aggressive behavior. The findings indicate that 5% of females and 7% of males exhibited VH, suggesting a slightly higher inclination towards VH among boys compared to girls in the sampled population. Conversely, the majority of participants, 95% of females and 93% of males, did not display VH, implying a predominant tendency towards less aggressive verbal expressions among the majority of early school-age children in this sample. These results highlight an overall

inclination towards non-aggressive communication behaviors, reflecting the effectiveness of emotional regulation and socialization mechanisms within the studied group. Based on the results on the ERQ-CA questionnaire we find that 23% of boys exhibit a preference for CR, whereas only 15% of girls adopt this strategy. This trend delineates a potential inclination among boys towards a more analytical approach in reinterpreting emotional contexts. Yet, a larger proportion of participants, 33% of girls and 38% of boys, utilize ES as their primary ER mechanism. Also, a significant proportion of subjects, 52% of girls and 38% of boys, combine these two ER strategies, CR and ES. This reflects a mixed approach, where children do not rely solely on a single regulation strategy but use both CR and ES, depending on the context and demands of the situation.

Data analysis

Statistical processing of the data was carried out with Pearson correlation analysis (r), which was used to determine the relationship between VH and emotional regulation strategies. The independent samples t-test was employed to investigate the hypothesis 1 (H1), which posited significant gender differences in the manifestation of VH, suggesting that boys would exhibit higher levels of VH compared to girls.

Results and discussion

The results show that for females a significant negative correlation (r=-0,44, p< 0,001) exists between VH and CR, indicating that higher use of CR is associated with lower levels of VH. By adopting CR, females may be mitigating VH by viewing circumstances in a less threatening light, thereby diminishing the intensity of negative emotions that could precipitate hostile reactions. However, no significant correlations were found between VH and ES, nor a combination of CR and ES. This may reflect the theoretical stance that ES does not address the root cause of the emotional response and could be psychologically burdensome over time. For males, a strong negative correlation (r =-0,633, p=0,001) is observed for CR, suggesting a pronounced effect of CR in mitigating VH. The correlations for ES and the combination of CR and ES among males are negative but less pronounced, with the relationship between CR and ES reaching statistical significance (r=-0,306, p=0,023). This could imply that while males attempt to conceal their emotions through ES, this strategy might not reduce the experience of these negative emotions, leading to increased VH when suppression efforts falter. The investigation into hypothesis 1 (H1), which anticipated gender-based differences in VH, revealing boys might exhibit more verbal aggression than girls, concludes that this is not the case. Descriptive analysis showed only a slight difference in the mean levels of VH between boys (M=4.78) and girls (M=4.17). Further analysis using an independent samples t-test, which included Levene's Test for equality of variances (p=0.143), found no significant variance in VH scores between genders. The t-test reported a p-value of 0.141 (t=-1.483, df=105 for equal variances) and 0.139 (t=-1.491 for unequal variances), indicating no statistically significant gender differences in VH levels. So, the study refutes H1, finding no significant gender differences in VH among early school-age children. This challenges prior assumptions about gender disparities in VH and suggests a similar propensity for VH among both genders within the sampled group. These findings highlight the need for further exploration into the factors influencing VH behaviors in children beyond gender.

CONCLUSION

This study delineates the influence of ER strategies, particularly CR, on mitigating VH among early school-age children, highlighting its significance in fostering positive interpersonal interactions. Contrary to expectations, no substantial gender differences were observed in VH, challenging conventional perceptions and underscoring the complexity of emotional and behavioral dynamics in this age group. These findings advocate for the integration of ER training in early education, emphasizing the development of adaptive strategies to enhance children's socio-emotional well-being and reduce VH.

References:

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Endorsed

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