



Conditionings of being perpetrator or victim in adolescence ¹

Condicionamientos de ser agresor o víctima en la adolescencia

Marzanna Farnicka

University of Zielona Góra (Poland)

m.farnicka@wns.uz.zgora.pl

ORCID:0000-0002-4274-1646

Abstract

The aim of the article is to investigate the thesis of a direct and indirect link between sex, gender, and aggressive and victim behavior from the perspective of bio-, social and psychological development. The meta-analysis of the previous study identifies risk factors and protective factors for becoming an aggressor or a victim and the role of sex and gender in that process. The work consists of two parts. The first part of the chapter is the review of the latest research in the field of aggression and adolescence focused on conditions of violence among youth. And the second part is the presentation of the latest research of the author. In the study, model were considered: bio, psycho and social factors such as sex, temperament; attachment; aggressiveness; family, teacher, and classmate support; resilience; and the previous victim or aggressor experiences.

Key words: Adolescence; development of aggression; gender; perpetrator; sex; victim.

Resumen

El objetivo del artículo es investigar la tesis de una relación directa e indirecta entre el sexo, el género y el comportamiento agresivo y de víctima desde la perspectiva del desarrollo bio, social y psicológico. El meta análisis del estudio anterior identifica los factores de riesgo y los factores de protección para convertirse en agresor o víctima y el papel del sexo y el género en ese proceso. El trabajo consta de dos partes. La primera parte del capítulo es la revisión de las últimas investigaciones en el campo de la agresión y la adolescencia centradas en las condiciones de la violencia entre los jóvenes. Y la segunda parte es la presentación de las últimas investigaciones del autor. En el estudio se tuvieron en cuenta los siguientes modelos: factores bio, psico y sociales como el sexo, el temperamento, el apego, la agresividad, el apoyo de la familia, los profesores y los compañeros de clase, la resiliencia y las experiencias previas de víctima o agresor.

Palabras clave: Adolescencia; desarrollo de la agresión; género; agresor; sexo; víctima.

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1 Introduction

Longitudinal studies have shown the fluctuation of aggression and victimization in childhood and adolescence. Generally, aggression and victimization increase in early adolescence and gradually decrease towards the end of that life period (Werner, 1989).

It needs to be noted that the entry of young people into the adolescent stage, coupled with certain internal conditions specific to the individual (including temperament, emotionality, structure of aspirations and goals, aggressiveness, and the mechanism of bond formation), has a significant impact on the change or consolidation of specific strategies of functioning in the school environment, and on relations with parents or peers (Sroufe, 1989).

Many children, when entering adolescence, already experience problems that affect their social functioning, such as early traumas, cognitive distortions, insecure attachment bonds, or risky temperament (Slotter & Finkel, 2009; Zeanah & Sonuga-Barke, 2016; Werner, 1989). Other children, though, only develop problems with social interaction when they become teenagers.

The aforementioned factors are joined with many others: family distortions (divorce, maltreatment), peer-related problems (rejection, gangs, being different), poor school performance or individual problems (emotional control, self-image, problems with undertaking developmental tasks; Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008; Demaray & Malecki, 2000; Meldrum, Young, & Weerman, 2012).

Sometimes the change in the nature of the relations with parents or peer groups is directly connected with the strengthening of aggressive behaviour or victimization experience (Hadiwijaya, Klimstra, Vermunt, Branje, & Meeus, 2017; Olweus, 1979).

This behaviour may have various forms, from verbal and psychological aggression to

physical violence and indirect violence (Card et al., 2008).

Models describing the emergence of disorders in the functioning of adolescents in the school environment frequently focus on problems characteristic for this life period, such as externalization- and internalization related problems with emotional and behavioural functioning (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Eggum, 2010).

According to Thomas Achenbach (1993) externalization and internalization problems are connected with specific strategies of coping with difficult experiences, emotions and thoughts as well as other developmental conditions.

The externalization of disorders is connected with lack in self-emotional control processes, and internalization with overgrowth of control. These strategies are often the cause of undertaking difficult and unacceptable risky behaviour.

In adolescence, the problems of externalization or internalization appear (among others) in the form of the lowered mood, self-esteem, loneliness, anxiety, depressive disorders, and manifest themselves in attention-deficit, hyperactivity, oppositional defiant disorders or aggressive or victim's behaviour (Nigg, Nikolas, 2008; Lahey, 2008).

From the developmental and evolutionary point of view, aggressive behaviour may be a manifestation of adaptation-related difficulties with the fulfilment of school obligations (problems in managing school stress) and with the pursuit of developmental tasks.

In this case aggressive behaviour may serve as a way of releasing emotional tension emerging as a result of adolescents' inability to meet the expectations of adults. This tension involves anger, anxiety, uncertainty, sadness, or shame (Eisenberg et al., 2010; Jacobson, 2016; Nigg, 2017).

In the social cognitive field focused on understanding the aggressive and the victim-like behaviour, the existing models underscore the role and significance of scripts for the social codes of behaviour applicable to girls and boys, as well as other social patterns entrenched in social knowledge and their interactions with norms, personal traits and activated attributions (Reformulated Social Information Processing Model, Crick & Dodge, 1994; 1996; Gender-Linked Model of Aggression Subtypes, Ostrov & Godleski, 2010).

According to Ostrov and Godleski's model, there is a correlation between the choice of the aggressive or the victim-like behaviour and the social as well as personal gender pattern (2010). From the perspective of developmental psychopathology, one of the primary criteria for the assessment of mental health comprises, on the one hand, an evaluation of the functioning of a particular individual in relation to developmental standards for their age and, on the other hand, an assessment to what extent the functioning of that individual interferes with their daily life and the condition of the society as a whole.

Consequently, individuals can exhibit both negative and positive adaptation, which is conditioned by the interaction of specific developmental (biological, bio-psycho-social, environmental, interactional, relational) and situational factors.

Adaptation relies on a set of criteria including the absence of serious mental problems and/or problem behaviour, possession of psychosocial competencies and successful fulfilment of age-appropriate developmental tasks.

Positive adaptation (i.e. good adjustment) is treated as an outcome of a dynamic interactive process through which an individual –despite past or present adverse life circumstances– acquires an array of skills to use their internal and external resources.

The process is triggered by regulation mechanisms including resilience, self-efficacy or mentalization processes (Masten & Obradović 2006, Schwarzer 1998). In other words, it is a result of mutual interactions between the individual's biological and psychological traits, their experience, developmental challenges and contextual considerations (comprising both risk factors and protective factors).

The problems of adolescence such as depressed mood, loneliness, anxiety, depressive disorders, attention deficits, hyperactivity, oppositional-rebellious or provocative or aggressive behaviours have their source in externalizing or internalizing mechanisms and may also be their manifestations (Nikolas & Nigg, 2013; Lahey, 2008).

Numerous studies on mental health problems during adolescence emphasise that externalization and internalization of problems are often connected with the onset of personality disorder in young people (Kobak & Madsen, 2008).

It has been assumed that the inappropriate process of adaptation is triggered by the launch and consolidation of inadequate and ineffective strategies of both emotional and cognitive control. In the case of externalization mechanisms, its lack or scarcity is observed. On the other hand, in the case of internalization mechanisms, its excess is observed and it may manifest itself in excessively experienced sadness, fear, anger or social withdrawal (Achenbach, 1993).

One of the ways to tackle and solve the problems discussed above is offered by the contextual approach. It is worth reminding here that in the contextual approach developmental environment and developmental context are two different things. Developmental environment comprises all the material and non-material elements that an individual potentially has access to and by which he or she is potentially influenced.

The moment when those objects, events or situations enter the psychological reality of the individual, they become the context of his or her individual development (Brzezińska, 2000; Farnicka, 2011; Kowalik, 2015).).

Berry (2013) presented the model of analysis of three basic characteristics of individual functioning in a social world. Those are: attitudes of cognitive processes, social competences and goal-directed social activity. Another (older) proposal is the method of systemic description of complex psychological phenomena in the penta-basis approach. W.

A. Ganzen proposed that the functioning of a given psychological object (process) should be described in relation to the following four dimensions: time, space, energy and information (1984).

With the use of that method one can describe interactions of each dimension with the object (process) and the emerging relations structure based on five elements. Approaching the process from the developmental perspective, those elements interact in time with the object and therefore researchers are able to observe and analyse the character of those interactions.

Each object has its intrinsic characteristics, which determines its mode of existence in each of the dimensions.

The time dimension may describe the current status of the object and its developmental tendencies. One should remember that time is a multidimensional phenomenon. Various time dimensions are recognized for an individual human being or for a given culture: time may have a biological, historical, or social aspect or serve to differentiate between orientations towards the past, the future, or the present moment.

However, time is not only understood as the dimension that describes one aspect of the developmental context (Trempała, 2000). Time is a universal unit/measure that we devote to performing something. It is within a given unit of time that one can observe variety

vs constancy and regularity vs. randomness of occurrence of certain phenomena.

The way of understanding and the attitude towards the phenomena observed within specific time may be characterized with the use of such dimensions as: flexibility, quick pace of performing tasks, undertaking risks, welcoming change versus conservatism, preservation of law and order, traditions, caution, repeatability.

The space dimension reflects the situation of the 'object' in relation to other objects. This dimension not only points out to physical aspects of space, such as material conditions, locations (of events or tasks) and their specific nature, but also to psychological aspects of space, such as closeness vs. distance to others, openness to new experience or closing one's space, control or lack of control over space, loneliness or the presence of others.

The energy dimension indicates the nature of mutual relations between the 'object' and the environment and other dimensions. Various aspects of that dimension describe energy connected with: involvement vs. apathy (succumbing to the course of events or even inertia), activity vs. passivity, effort or resignation.

The way of communicating with other objects is also characteristic for the energy dimension. One can observe that openness and permeability of boundaries may be describe space, but it may also relate to the energy dimension – if that openness or closing, permeability or its lack occurs as a result of actions (energy use) of an individual.

The informative aspect depicts and reflects cognitive orientations and the manner of analysing the environment. That relation line reveals the manner of functioning in reality in the following dimensions: separating – consolidating, looking for similarities – looking for differences, analysis – synthesis, specification – generalization. Those strategies characterize both the ways of organizing and processing information coming from the outside world and from inside a

given psychological system and the undertaken and analysed activities.

The presented dimensions have already been used for the analysis of various psychological phenomena, such as creativity, needs, personality, mental health, or some complex issues such as the educational system (Rongińska, 2013).

In developmental psychopathology the assessment of the trajectory of development is possible in the perspective "between" the negative and positive adaptation of the individual. The flexibility of behaviour and the fluid bonds between the individual structures of the emerging personality in adolescence are emphasized. Numerous interactions of a number of bio-psycho-social and contextual factors as well as the equifinality and equipotentiality of the observed processes are taken into account (Cicchetti, 2008).

The correct course of development requires systematic successful changes, which are recognized in the form of positive adaptation. In this sense, positive adaptation is the result of the interaction between the (biological and psychological) characteristics of the individual, his/her experience and history of previous adaptations, the course of development, recognized challenges in the current phase of life and the interaction of specific factors that can act as risk and protection factors.

Criteria of the adaptation understood in this way include lack of serious psychological problems and / or problem behaviour, psychosocial competence and age-related developmental tasks that are successfully fulfilled (Cierpiatkowska & Sęk, 2016).

Iwona Grzegorzewska (2011) presented positive adaptation in many aspects and dimensions, defining it in descriptive categories: clinical category (low level of psychopathology), developmental category (high level of implementation of developmental tasks) and subjective category (high sense of life satisfaction).

After Georg Vailliait (2012), has been assumed that the process of adaptation in adolescence illustrates balancing the ability of young people to meet social expectations with the possibilities of satisfying personal needs related to shaping their own identity.

As the base theory for the developmental problems, the concept of developmental tasks by Robert Havighurst (1981) was adopted. This concept deserves attention due to the fact that it considers the transformation of the adolescent's functioning in various areas of psychological and social activity and it allows to follow the specificity and course of development in the period of adolescence. Havighurst assumed that the internal processes of the individual are manifested in the form of strategies for the implementation of developmental tasks. As a consequence of this assumption, it can be pointed out that observable changes in human functioning reflect changes in internal developmental processes.

For this reason they can be treated as determinants of both the development and the process of developmental adaptation. The importance of the pace, order and punctuality of the events that are essential for development was emphasised by Janusz Trempała (2002), in his temporal model of mental development.

2. What do we know? what is the model of conditions for being a perpetrator or a victim in adolescence?

The study assumes that there are specific individual and social conditions that facilitate taking on the role of the aggressor or the victim (Krahé, 2013; Ostrov, Kamper, Hart, Godleski, & Blakely-McClure, 2014). In this paper, being an aggressor and being a victim are treated as parallel forms of social behaviour in interpersonal relationships and they may be explained by the same processes (Österman et al., 1994; Pratt, 2006).

Assuming the aggressor and/or the victim behaviour was treated as an output of the interaction of individual and sociocultural factors and as readiness for aggression or victimization revealed in interpersonal contacts. The specific and unspecific protective and risk factors are shown in table 1.

The classical framework, basic bio-psycho-social risk factors of aggressive behaviour during the period of adolescence include temperamental traits (e.g. impulsivity – Neuhaus & Beauchaine, 2013), insecure attachment patterns (Zucker et al., 2003), disordered affect regulation and weakened impulse control (Clarkin, Posner, 2005; Coan & Allen 2007; Fajkowska-Stanik & Marszał-Wiśniewska, 2004), adverse environmental conditions (war, disease in the family, poverty, social isolation of the family – Williams, Konger, Blozis, 2007), dysfunction of the family or the individual (Borecka – Biernat 2000, 2003, 2013; Dishon, French & Patterson 1995, Kucharewicz 2015) as well as prior experiences such as being affected by violence (Aliniki, Egeland, 2013; Perry, 2008), problems at school (Valjaranta and Nurmi, 2014) or negative effects of peer pressure (Demaray, Malecki, Elliot, 2000; Österman et al., 1994; Thornberry & Krohn, 1994), hostility understood as a personality trait and/or abnormally increased anger manifested at the behavioural level (McGirr, et al., 2007, 2008).

The meta-analysis of Studies investigating factors which determine taking the role of perpetrator of peer violence (Smith, 2011) demonstrates that the role is more commonly assumed by adolescents with a higher-than-average level of anxiety and sadness, and a lower level of self-esteem. It is also characterized by an elevated level of anger and temperamental activity, and the cognitive tendency to attribute other people's behaviour as hostile.

One should also mention gender, which is often treated as a factor conditioning a certain type of aggressive behaviour among adolescents. Numerous studies show that in

terms of the discussed issue gender should be treated as an ambiguous summary variable, because in our culture different paths of the socialization of girls and boys can be noticed (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, Kaukiainen, 1992; Duncan, 2006; Konopka & Frączek 2013 & Olweus, 1979).

The role of gender (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen 1992; Krahé 2013) in development and social functioning has been mentioned many times in the context of aggression and victimization (Barbosa, 2021; Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

As for the role of age, age is treated as a variable that expresses the cumulative effect of a number of other changes, such as: biological maturation of the body, making new social roles, related experiences, and social expectations. Age has an ordering function here. It is used to compare the developmental experience of an individual and groups (early adolescence, middle adolescence, late adolescence).

There are two research models in the literature dealing with the emergence of social adjustment disorders among children. One of them is the six-stage SIP model (Crick & Dodge, 1994, 1996).

The other one, proposed by Ostrov and Godleski (2010), is based on the former but focuses on aggression as a manifestation of non-adaptive behaviour. Both proposed models underscore the role and significance of scripts for the social codes of behaviour applicable to girls and boys, social patterns entrenched in social knowledge, and their interactions with norms, personal traits and activated attributions. In accordance with the model proposed by Ostrov and Godleski, there is a correlation related to the choice of behaviour conditioned by the social and personal gender pattern. Their studies show that girls more commonly engage in gender-consistent aggressive behaviour. Accordingly, girls usually opt for relational rather than physical aggression (Ostrov, 2014; Card et al., 2008; Murray-Close et al., 2016; Putallaz et al., 2007).

TABLE 1. Some specific and unspecific developmental risk and protective factors of the victim and the aggressor.

source	Risk factors specific for being a victim	Risk factors specific for being an aggressor	Non-specific protective factors
individual	High level of anxiety and sadness (McGirr et al., 2007)	Hostility, temperamental anger	resilience (Connor, Davidson, 2001)
	Gender (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992, Krahe, 2013; Ostrov)	Gender (Bussey, Bandurs, 1999; Mendoza, Ramirez, 1986, Ramirez, Fujihara, van Goozen, 2001)	
	Lower intellectual abilities level, Problems with emotional control and self-control problems (Clarkin, Posner, 2005, Crick, Murray-Close, Woods, 2005, Fajkowska-Stanik, Marszał-Wiśniewska, 2004, Finkel, 2014)	High level of physical attractiveness (Bee, 2006) High level of self-esteem (Ybrant, 2006) High level of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1976)	
	non appropriate recognition of situation (Finkel, 2014)	Normative path of development (developmental tasks, Bloomquist, 2006)	

Individual experience	Low level of school achievements (Viljaranta et al., 2014) Breaking educational path or dropping out of school (Arnett, 1992, Krahé, 2013)	High level of school achievements (Luthar, 2006)	
	undisclosed experience of being a victim or perpetrator left without help (Zeanah & Sonuga-Barke, 2016)	being accepted (Ziemski, 1977)	
relationships	isolation	Support when one is an aggressor	
	Low socio-metric position among peers (Dixon, 2011)	High or low position in the group (Dixon, 2011, Smith, 2011)	High position in the group (Dixon, 2011)
	Problematic relationships problematic attachment (Zucker et al., 2003)	Social support (Demaray, 2006)	
	Family bad economic situation, instability of family functioning (Eisenberg et al., 2005, Greszta, 2006) and parenting	Parental Engagement, warm relationships (Farnicka 2017)	Warm family climate,

	style (Dominiak - Kochanek, Konopka et all. 2018)		
Envir onme nt	Acceptatio n of violence in relationshi ps (Dishon, Patterson, 1994; Ramirez, Alvarado, Sanlisteba nm 2016; Rohlf, Krahé, Busching 2016)	Non- violent values in relationshi ps (Ramirez, 1997)	
	Exposure to violence (Perry, 2008)		
	Being from a “different” group of lower social status (Spears, Taddeo, 2014)		
	Legal norms and religion (Ramirez et all. 2007)		

Note: Own elaboration

3. An hypothetical mechanism for producing aggressive behaviour

The interaction of specific circumstances created by the sociocultural context and the individual's subjective conditions leads to the emergence of the individual's own resources which are capable of influencing directly the individual's inner state and the activated regulation mechanisms as well as methods of situation assessment.

The study model also marks the current emotional states indicating the specific nature of current experiences (strength, content, direction). Also, it needs to be stressed that

episodes of the individual's functioning repeat over time and culminate in the formation and consolidation of specific ways of coping, experiencing emotions and handling particular situations.

Furthermore, recurrent episodes of similar functioning may change not only flexible structures but also those recognized as stable (e.g. attachment or social and cultural expectations on gender roles and ways of conforming to them).

It is also important to note that attempts to determine the level of adaptation typically refer to a certain consolidated manner of an individual's mental functioning which has arisen from the reinforcement of an adaptive pattern specific to that individual at a given time and in a given situation.

To develop the research model the Reformulated Social Information Processing Model (Crick & Dodge, 1994; 1996) was used. Ostrov et al. (2014) indicate that individuals with an increased level of anger and temperamental activity, and with cognitive readiness to perceive other people's behaviour as hostile, tend to assume the role of an aggressor in adolescence.

In other words: the old experience and old context are structured and restructured by the orientative cognitive, emotional processes (Mischel, 2004; Piaget, 1972; Pascual - Leone, 1980), temporal perspective (Trempeła, 2000) and they represent and activate emotional processes and motivation (Labouvie- Vief 2003).

From the point of dynamical social psychology (proposed by Nowak, Vallacher, Tesser, Borkowski 2000) at the time of many changes and when there is a lot of new information, the self is rather an emergent property that emerges as an experiential phenomenon from the interaction of psychological perceptions and experience where a set of decision rules generates complex behaviour.

This is a model based on the activity of individuals. Therefore, in the proposed model of self-structure, incoming information of a

random structure increases the organization among elements (provided information is not too intense to overpower the system). The society-of-self model is useful for revealing properties of the self-system that are common to complex systems composed of many interconnected elements.

Thus, one can gain insight into the emergence of stable self-understanding from the dynamic interplay of initially disordered elements and external influences.

Moreover, the individual with a low pressure for integration may benefit from social feedback and other sources of self-relevant information, as long as such information does not convey highly conflicting evaluations. This information can facilitate the person's self-integration.

This suggests that people may turn to others to facilitate their own internal process of achieving coherence in their self-concept.

4 Discussion

Even the developmental psychopathology is not new, by applying this paradigm the specific issues associated with the complex system of in which biological, psychological and social factors are in constant interaction may be understood and predicted.

There are a lot of evidence that developmental tasks and the specific interaction between factors which influences on undertaking them should be taken under consideration.

Good observation and well-known categorisation system in teams involved in diagnosis or treatment process may be a way of improve integrative approaching mental health care among adolescents.

Thus, it should be summarised that developmental psychopathology pays special attention to comparing maladaptive forms of behaviour to a developmental norm, which is defined in two ways: either in terms of developmental tasks which a child in a specific stage of life should manage or realize, or in terms of universality (frequency) or rarity of

certain behaviour or manner of emotional experience at a specific age (quantitative norm) (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1996; Kazdin & Kagan, 1994).

Developmental changes could be observed as positive and negative outputs of development (health or disorders). They could be described both in categorical and dimensional models.

The process of development is recognized in the dimensional model but the effect of this process is seen in the categorical model (diagnostic categories represent discrete syndromes, Beauchaine 2003; Drabick 2009).

This assumes that normative developmental tasks could be treated as predictors of the next step of development. DSM uses a categorical model for conceptualizing diagnoses, but many symptoms cause clinically significant impairment at subthreshold levels reinforcing the importance of evaluating psychological symptoms using both categorical and dimensional approaches.

A dimensional approach could facilitate identification of children who are at risk for more severe or pernicious courses prior to the full presentation of symptoms.

The meta-analysis by Dixon and Smith (2011) and research conducted by Bogg and Finn (2010) leads to the conclusion that adolescents with higher than average level of anxiety and sadness, and a lower level of self-esteem, tend to become aggressors more frequently. In addition, Ybrant's study (2008)

indicated that problems included in internalisation disorders, such as elevated levels of anxiety and sadness, were predictors and/or indicators of aggressive and criminal behaviour.

In their studies Eisenberg, Smith, Sadovsky and Spinrad (2004), Finkel (2007), and Finkel, Campbell and Brunell (2006) indicate the importance of anxiety as a risk factor in aggressive behaviour. It is worth adding that in many cases children and adolescents learn

to control their emotions in accordance with the socialization pattern for girls and boys.

That trajectory was stressed from more broad perspective by M. Diehl, N. Coyle, and G Labouvie-Vief, G. (1996) and named as strategies of coping and defense across the life span hidden in social knowledge and connected with age and sex differences.

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