

The factor structure of the Normative Beliefs about Aggression Scale as used with a sample of adolescents in low socio-economic areas of South Africa

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Abstract

The issue of adolescent aggression and violence has received significant attention in the literature. Normative beliefs about the acceptability of aggressive behaviour have been identified as central in influencing aggression. The Normative Beliefs about Aggression Scale was developed to identify cognitive beliefs about the acceptability of aggressive behaviour. The scale has been extensively used in research on child and adolescent aggression and has consistently demonstrated that normative beliefs account for variances in adolescent aggressive behaviour, predict aggression, and mediate the relationship between risk factors and aggression among this population group. Despite extensive use of this scale in other contexts, information is lacking on its psychometric properties. A full analysis of the factor structure of the Normative Beliefs about Aggression Scale has not yet been conducted. This study presents the first test of the factor structure of the full instrument and confirms that the Normative Beliefs about Aggression Scale is a reliable instrument when used in the South African context. The results point to the multidimensional nature of beliefs about aggression and provide an important foundation for future research into correlates of aggressive behaviour in different cultural contexts.

The issue of adolescent aggression and violence has received significant attention in the literature. In South Africa, various studies on youth risk behaviour have demonstrated the prevalence of bullying (Boyes, Bowes, Cluver, Ward, & Badcock, 2014; Liang, Flisher & Lombard, 2007), intimate partner violence (Russell et al., 2014), sexual assault (Jewkes, Flood, & Lang, 2015), and homicide (Swart, Seedat, & Nel, 2015) among this population group. The propensity to engage in aggressive behaviour has been demonstrated to be the outcome of the interaction of individual (e.g., locus of control, self-esteem: Wallace, Barry, Zeigler-Hill, & Green, 2012), family (e.g., parental supervision, family cohesion: Bacchini, Miranda, & Affuso, 2011; Hamama & Arazi, 2012), and community-level factors (e.g., exposure to community violence: McMahan, Felix, Halpert, & Petropoulos, 2009).

In South Africa, adolescents in low-income Black communities have been identified as being at risk of both violence perpetration and victimization (Kaminer, du Plessis, Hardy, & Benjamin, 2013). These communities were created as part of the apartheid-era Group Areas

normative beliefs about aggression and aggressive behavior. Paper presented at Aggression Workshop, Berlin, Germany. Downloaded from: http://www.aggressionsworkshop.de/2003/doc/abs_4.pdf

Werner, N. E., & Nixon, C. L. (2005). Normative beliefs and relational aggression: An investigation of the cognitive bases of adolescent aggressive behaviour. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 34, 229–243.

Zelli, A., Dodge, K. A., Lochman, J. E., & Laird, J. (1999). The distinction between beliefs legitimising aggression and deviant processing of social cues: Testing measurement validity and the hypothesis that biased processing mediates the effects of beliefs on aggression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77, 150–166.

Appendix 1

Sample items from the Normative Beliefs about Aggression Scale (NOBAGS)¹

General Beliefs subscale

1. In general, it is wrong to hit other people.
2. If you're angry, it is OK to say mean things to other people.
3. In general, it is OK to yell at others and say bad things.
4. It is usually OK to push or shove other people around if you're mad.

Retaliation Beliefs subscale

1. Suppose a boy says something bad to another boy, John (Weak provocation) Do you think it's OK for John to scream at him?
2. Suppose a boy hits another boy, John (Strong provocation) Do you think it's wrong for John to hit him back?
3. Suppose a boy hits a girl

Do you think it's OK for the girl to hit him back? (Retaliation against males)

4. Suppose a girl hits a boy
Do you think it's wrong for the boy to hit her back? (Retaliation against females)