

The Relationship between Aggression and Perceived Social Support among University Students in Jordan

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between aggressions and perceived of social support among university students in Jordan. A sample of 919 students from the University of Jordan answered self-reported questionnaires including the Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) and Perceived Social Support Scale (PSSS). The results showed that 51.3% of the university students had high levels of aggression, and they reported moderate perception of perceived social support. The level of aggression among male students was higher than female students, while female students had higher perception of perceived social support compared with male students. The results also showed negative correlation between aggression and perceived social support ($r = -.22$, $p < 0.001$). The perceived social support from family had significant negative correlations with all domains of aggression. These findings indicated to enhance the perceived social support among university students through engaging them in peer support groups or extracurricular activities. Further studies are needed to explore additional ways that strengthen the social support received from family and friends.

Keywords: Aggression, Jordan, Perceived social support, University students.

1. Introduction

University students have various psychological, social, academic, and economic challenges (Jenkins et al., 2013; Kitzrow, 2003). Some students make appropriate adjustments for these challenges, while others do not and are at risk for developing maladjustment complications such as poor academic achievement, impaired social functioning, and developing aggression attitudes toward their colleagues, instructors and environment (Hamdan-Mansour, 2010). In recent years, aggression behaviors among university students were significantly increased, and universities witnessed the most frequent events of violence (Al Louzi, & Farhan, 2009). Aggression at universities became a serious problem and an important area of research and investigations among researchers (Wessler & Moss, 2001).

Aggression was defined as intentional behavior to harm another person (Baron & Richardson, 1994), it includes multidimensional construct that develops within a complex interaction of biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors (Vitoratou, Ntzoufras, Smyrnis, & Scefanis, 2009). Buss and Perry (1992) stated that aggression includes four factors: physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility. Physical aggression or violence is defined by the Centers for Disease Control (1999) as threatened or actual use of physical force against another person which cause physical injury or death. Verbal aggression was defined as attacks on self-concept by another person (Infante & Wigley, 1986) which includes insults behaviors such as character attacks, competence attacks, teasing, ridicule, profanity, and threats. Anger implies physiological activation and represents the emotional component, and act as a psychological bridge connecting between cognitive components and violence (Buss and Perry, 1992).

While hostility refers to attitudes that involve dislike and negative evaluation of others (Buss, 1961). Literature review showed different causes for various domains of aggression among university students. These causes were classified to three categories according to Alshoraty (2015); the first category was causes related to students (weak commitment to educational or psychological counseling, and frustration caused by low grades).

The second category was causes related to universities (lack of concentration on problem solving and critical thinking skills, and not including forgiveness, tolerance, values, and culture of the inadequacy of dialogue). The third category was causes related to society (tribal fanaticism, tribal support for students who resort to violence and wrong socialization). However, wrong socialization or inadequate social support considered one of the main important factors that lead to students aggression (Al louzi, & Farhan, 2009; Edwards, 2001). The perceived social support was defined according to Wang (2014) as the help or care provided by other people which the person can notice or feel, and it includes emotional concern, reassurance, direction, and giving information or motivation. Moreover, the perceived social support have positive influences on physical, mental, and psychological well-being (Hamdan-Mansour & Dawani, 2008; Cohen, Gottlieb & Underwood, 2000). In addition, the perceived social support provided by families, friends or significant others to university students considered a significant predictor for the ability to adjust to university life (Rahat & Ilhan, 2016), and have positive and significant effects on both students loyalty and satisfaction (Putral & Fauzi, 2015).

In Jordan, Few studies addressed social support among university students. Zaitawi, (1999) reported that university students (male and female) had higher perception of perceived social support from family than from friends. Unfortunately, there are no studies had been conducted about the relationships between perceived social support and aggression among university students? Therefore, the current study is the first study described the levels of aggression and perceived social support among the university students in Jordan, and explained the correlations between different domains of aggression (physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility) and perceived social support provided from families, friends or significant others. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between aggression and perceived social support among university students in Jordan. While the specific research questions were:

1. What are the levels of aggression and perceived social support among university students in Jordan?
2. Is there differences between male and female university students regarding to the levels of aggression and perceived social support?
3. What are the relationships between the different domains of aggression and perceived social support provided from families, friends or significant others among university students in Jordan?

2. Methods

2.1 Design and sample

Descriptive-correlation study was conducted at the University of Jordan; which is the largest public university in Jordan, located in Amman, and includes more than thirty thousand students in all faculties (University of Jordan facts and figures, 2012). The students were invited for participation during the academic class in various universities' faculties. The research assistant explained to students the study purposes, required time to fill the questionnaires, and directions about how to obtain and return the questionnaire packages. The students who expressed interest in participation were get a package of three self-reported questionnaires with a cover page showed study aims, significance, data collection instructions, contact information for the researcher, and a statement informing the participants that their privacy would be protected and they have the rights to withdraw at any time without any penalty. A total of one thousand packages were distributed to students. Nine hundred and thirty-two students completed and returned their questionnaires, with a response rate of 93%. After data screening, 919 questionnaires were eligible for analysis. The other questionnaires were rejected because of 50% or more of missing values. Prior to data collection, the ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board (IRB) in the Faculty of education and Deanship of Academic Research at the University of Jordan. To protect the individuals' identity, subject's identification numbers were assigned for each participant at the beginning of the study. All patients' information was kept in locked cabinets at the researcher office.

2.2 Measures

Self-reported questionnaires were used to collect data from the participants, it included two parts: part one the author-developed demographic profile.

Part two consisted Arabic version of valid and reliable scales to measure aggression and perceived social support. Aggression was measured using the Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) (Buss & Perry, 1992). It is one of the most used instruments to assess aggression. It includes 29 items grouped into 4 domains, physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility, each item has five points likert scale ranging from “extremely uncharacteristic” to “extremely characteristic”. The total scores of the aggression questionnaire ranges from 29 to 145. This questionnaire was translated into Arabic by professional English language editors, and back translated into English language by another independent editor. The two English forms, the original and the translated versions, were compared. Then pilot testing was conducted to evaluate the readability, comprehension, and cultural appropriateness using a sample of 15 university students. In this study, the scale had demonstrated good internal consistency value of .85.

The perceived social support was measured using the Multidimensional Perceived Social Support Scale (MPSSS). It was developed by Zimet et al. (1988) to measure the perceived social support from three sources (families, friends, and a significant others). It includes 12 items, four items to measure each source of social support. Each item has seven points likert scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). The total score for MPSSS ranges from 12 to 84; (12 – 48) low acuity, (49 – 68) moderate acuity, (69 – 84) high acuity of perceived social support. The MPSSS was reviewed by Eker, Arkar, & Yaldız (2001), the scale showed high internal consistency value of 0.89. In the current study, the Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was 0.87. The demographic variables for the participants were obtained from an investigator-developed profile which included age, gender, educational level, and specialty.

2.3 Data analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software (Statistical Package for Social Science, Version 20). Then, the data were screened for missing or impossible values using central tendency and frequency measures. According to the level of measurement, percentages statistics were used to describe the demographic variables. Descriptive statistics (mean, median and standard deviation) were used to describe and summarize the main study variables (aggression and perceived social support). Reliability analysis was used to calculate internal consistency for the measures. Independent sample t-test was used to evaluate aggression and spiritual well-being in relation to demographic variables. Lastly, the Pearson (r) correlation coefficient test was used to assess the correlation between aggression and perceived social support.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic data

The sample consisted of 919 students from the University of Jordan. As showed in table 1. Thirty three and half percent (n = 308) of the students were males and 66.5% (n =611) were females. Almost 36.7% (n = 337) of the students were in thier first academic year, while 13.3% (n = 122) were in their second academic year, 27.2% (n=250) were in their third academic year and 22.8% (n =210) were in their fourth academic year or more. Forty one percent (n =378) of the students enrolled in humanistic faculties, while 29.6% (n= 272) and 29.3% (n = 269) were enrolled in scientific and medical faculties, respectively.

Table 1: Description of sample characteristics (N= 919)

variable	N (%)	M(SD)
Age		20.5 years (SD=2.14)
Gender		
Male	308 (33.5%)	
Female	611 (66.5%)	
Educational level		
First year	337 (36.7%)	
Second year	122 (13.3%)	
Third year	250 (27.2%)	
Fourth year or more	210 (22.8%)	
Specialty		
humanistic faculties	378 (41%)	
Scientific faculties.	272 (29.6%)	
Medical faculties.	269 (29.3%)	

3.2 Aggression

Of the total samples and using the median as cut point for low and high aggression, 471 (51.3%) students reported high aggression, while 448 (48.7%) students reported low aggression. The mean scores for aggression was 79 (SD =15.1). Studying the subscales for aggression questionnaire showed that the mean scores for the physical aggression subscale was 21.1(SD=6.6) out of 45, the mean scores for the verbal aggression subscale was 15.0 out of 25 (SD= 2.9), the mean scores for the anger subscale was 20.9 out of 35 (SD= 4.87), while the mean scores for the hostility subscale was 21.9 out of 38 (SD= 5.27). The results showed significant differences in the mean scores of aggression in relation to gender, male students reported higher levels of aggression (mean= 83.14, SD= 15.23) than female students (mean= 76.9, SD= 14.65) $t(917) = 6.02, p=0.000$. Moreover, there are no significant differences in the mean scores of aggression regarding to students' specialty or their educational level.

3.3 Perceived social support

The results showed that the mean scores for MPSSS was 62.2 out of 84 (SD=12.9), which indicated to moderate acuity of perceived social support. The mean scores for the perceived social support provided from families was 21.3 out of 28 (SD= 5.1), the mean scores for the perceived social support provided from friends was 19.8 (SD= 5.0), while the mean scores for the perceived social support provided from significant others was 21.0 (SD=5.4). The results showed that female students had higher level of perceived social support (mean= 63.2, SD= 12.7) than male students (mean= 60.3, SD= 13), $t(917) = -3.18, p=0.002$. Moreover, there are no significant differences in the mean scores of perceived social support regarding to students' specialty or their educational level.

3.4 Relationships between aggression and perceived social support

The Pearson (r) correlation coefficient test showed that aggression was negatively correlated with perceived social support ($r = -.22, p < 0.001$). However, high levels of aggression were associated with low levels of perceived social support among university students. In addition, the correlation analysis showed that high levels perceived social support provided from families was associated with low levels of physical aggression, verbal aggression, hostility, and anger. While, the perceived social support provided from friends or significant others were not correlated with verbal aggression among university students. Table 2 presents the associations between subscales of perceived social support (family, friends, significant others), and subscales of aggression (physical aggression, verbal aggression, hostility, and anger).

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Coefficient Values between Subscales of Perceived Social Support, and Subscales of Aggression

	Perceived social support from family	Perceived social support from friends	Perceived social support from significant others
Physical aggression	-.19**	-.10**	-.16**
Verbal aggression	-.078*	-.006	-.051
Anger	-.17**	-.08*	-.058
Hostility	-.28**	-.20**	-.17**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4. Discussion

This study identified the levels of aggression and perceived social support among the university students in Jordan, and described the relationships between the specific domains of aggression (physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, hostility) and perceived social support provided from families, friends, and significant others among students in various faculties and academic years. Aggression was assessed using a combination of questions, which addressed physical aggression, verbal aggression, hostility, and anger. The results showed that 51.3% of students had high aggression, while 48.7% of the students had low aggression. Although few studies were investigated the levels of aggression among university students, the results of the current study was higher than other studies conducted in different places such as Iran (Komasi, Saeidi, Soroush, &Zakiei, 2016), and Nigeria (Abasiubonga, Abiolab, &Udofiac, 2010). In Jordan, the specific dimensions of aggression among university students were investigated in previous studies. Hamdan-mansour (2009) revealed that 56% of students at the Jordanian universities reported high hostility while 44% reported low hostility.

Moreover, The Higher Youth Council (2010) indicated that 73% of university students witnessed violence inside the universities and 30% were directly involved in the university students' violence. The high levels of aggression and its dimensions (physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility) among university students could be related to different causes such as poor investing of free time and weak commitment to Islamic values such as tolerance and forgiveness (Alshoraty, 2015; Al louzi& Farhan, 2009), while the main source of aggression among university students was tribal and family fanaticism (Rawajfa, 2007). The high levels of aggression among male students might be explained by the components of brain behavioral systems such as novelty seeking, impulsivity, and tender (Komasi, Saeidi, Soroush, &Zakiei, 2016). Furthermore, males in Jordanian culture have more freedom of mobility, more flexibility, and fewer restrictions on their activities which may increase receiving negative feedback from others. The criticism from others may cause more negative effect, and they may express more anger in their behaviors as a result of damaging in interpersonal tactics.

The results showed that university students reported moderate perceptions of perceived social support. These results corresponded with previous international studies, Jenkins et al., (2013) reported that university students had moderate perceived social support provided from families, friends, and significant others. Also, social support was positively correlated with psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Nationally, moderate levels of perceived social support were found among university students in Jordan (Zaitawi 1999). Specifically, the perceived social support provided from families was higher than the perceived social support provided from friends or significant others, the highest levels of perceived social support from families might be expected in Jordanian culture because students live within families, which act as essential support system to students, and provide them with closeness, advices, love and guidance (Hamdan-mansour& Dewani, 2008).

This study also found that female university students reported higher perceived social support than male students. The higher scores of perceived social support among female students might be related to Jordanian culture that encourages the protective nature of families towards female students. In addition, socialization system allows female students the privilege of seeking help and perceived more social support from friends than did male students. On the other hands, low levels of perceived social support among male students might be explained by cultural expectations for sober, autonomous and independence among male students. Also, asking for help among male students might be considered as weakness and cowardice. Therefore, male students might defense and deny the need for social support. The results indicted to significant negative correlation between perceived social support from families, friends and significant others in relation to physical aggression and hostility, these results was corresponded with previous national study that reported a positive correlation between hostility and wrong socialization or inadequate social support among university students (Alshoraty, 2015). This correlation may refer to the lake of student's openness, conscientiousness, and extroversion which may lead to express their emotions by improper way, and they may use aggressive behaviors as an adaptive way to correspond their feelings and emotions (Hamdan-mansour, 2009). However, students without adequate perceived social support may did not have enough openness to accept new ideas and required skills to solve their potential problems, and they may have less behavioral stability in controlling their behaviors. Therefore, students with less control on their behavior are more likely to show high aggressive behaviors (Komasi, Saeidi, Soroush, &Zakiei, 2016).

5. Implications

The current study suggests to enhancing the perceptions of perceived social support among university students by identifying alternate sources of social support such as engaging students in peer support groups, and providing them with the necessary support to overcome the daily challenges in their universities. Moreover, There is a prompt need to implement legislations by university's administrators to prevent occurrence of aggression such as create additional extra-curricular activities, offering an obligatory course concentrating on unity, tolerance, forgiveness, dialogue, morals, and peace, using posters encouraging coexistence, avoiding fanatic education and socialization, conduct more meetings between students and academic members, and promote the role of psychological counselors and educational officer to provide continuous assessment and interventions for students who reported high levels of aggression.

6. Limitations

Numerous study limitations should be noted. First, some variables were not measured in this study might explain our findings such as poor academic achievement, living in unsafe neighborhoods, or economic poverty.

More specific information would allow researchers to determine the causes of aggression and its relationships with perceived social support. Second, the sample that included in the current study was limited to students at the university located in the capital city of Jordan; therefore the results might not be generalized to students in rural and suburban areas. Lastly, studies among students in different geographical areas using both qualitative and quantitative designs may increase understanding for the relationship between aggression and perceived social support, and addressing further causes of aggression in order to found healthy campus in Jordan.

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