

Parental attitudes and aggression in the Emo subculture

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Summary

Introduction. A better functioning of adolescents involves proper relationships with parents, whereas negative relationships lead to aggressive behaviour. Young members of Emo subculture, characterised by deep emotional sensitivity, are particularly vulnerable to parental influence.

Aim. The aim was to specify a relationship between parental attitudes and aggression among adolescents from the Emo subculture in comparison with a control group.

Material. 3,800 lower secondary school students took part in the introductory research. A target group constituted 41 people from the Emo subculture as well as a control group involving 48 people.

Method. A screening survey, the Parental Attitudes Scale, the Aggression Questionnaire and the author's questionnaire including questions concerning the functioning in the Emo subculture were used in the study.

Results. The results obtained in the research study suggest that there is a relationship between the indicated improper parental attitudes and aggressive behaviour among adolescents from the Emo subculture in comparison with the control group.

Conclusions. In the Emo subculture, teenagers' aggressive behaviour is related to improper parental attitudes. It has been stated that mother's attitudes, irrespective of subculture, are much more strongly associated with the aggression among adolescents than father's attitudes. Moreover, aggressive behaviour in the Emo subculture occurs when father displays an excessively demanding attitude. A reduction of the level of almost all kinds of aggression manifested among teenagers from the Emo subculture is associated with mothers' attitude of acceptance. Mothers' autonomous attitude leads to an increase in the aggression in this group, whereas an inconsistent attitude of mothers fosters an increase in aggression among all teenagers.

Keywords: adolescent behaviour, aggression, family relations

Introduction

The functioning of adolescents is closely associated with the perception of reality and environment around them. At the end of the 1990s, teenage rebellion in Poland was based on the opposition to consumer lifestyle and political-economic situation. Along with political changes and new possibilities Polish sociologists have noticed that currently teenage rebellion is of intra – and interpsychological rather than socio-cultural character. The world of adults has been considerably losing its interest in youth, which was discerned by teenagers and aroused the reaction of sheer irritation [1]. Contemporary groups, that are youth subcultures among others, are formed to draw adults' attention to the problems of young people [2]. Aggressive behaviour manifested in the Emo subculture is a form of response to reality, which is dominated by the feeling of loneliness and chaos. It may also be the consequence of disturbed intra-familial relations, disrupting the proper emotional and social development of a teenager. The authors decided to conduct broad psychological research on these relations, which will be the pioneer, and exploratory study on that topic.

Family is a characteristic system with its own organisation, structure and tasks [3]. A key to proper development of teenagers' personality depends on the sense of togetherness at home, respect, clearly defined norms and rules as well as on the adjustment of upbringing methods to the current needs of young people [4].

Parents create special strategies in order to meet their children's needs. These strategies are parental attitudes, owing to which the type and quality of parents-children relationships can be specified [5]. The most comprehensive definition of parental attitudes is presented in Polish literature by J.Rembowski, who describes them as “overall form of parental attitudes (father's and mother's separately) towards children, upbringing issues, etc. formed during the process of upbringing” [6, p.197]. Attitudes should both change along with the development of a child and be relatively stable. According to study conducted by M. Plopy, teenagers during early adolescence perceive educative efforts of their parents quite objectively [5]. Relationships with their parents perceived by teenagers are therefore reflected in the reality, and the quality of these relationships determines the degree of adequacy of a mental development of teenagers. A number of research publications indicate that the more positive parental attitudes are, the better socio-emotional functioning among young people is observed [7, 8]. Considerable and negative developmental consequences arise from parental attitudes based on excessive control, ruthless strictness, conservatism, and failure to meet the needs of children [9].

In early adolescence there frequently arises a conflict between parents and their children concerning the scope of the possible autonomy. With the lack of agreement with parents, teenagers seek and experience autonomy among peers too early, frequently with negative consequences [10]. When a peer environment supports or displays deviant and aggressive behaviour, the risk of negative influence on teenagers' behaviour increases. From the psychological point of view aggression is a kind of behaviour aiming at harming the other person and exerting the influence on the social environment [11]. During the adolescence period the development of aggression among girls and boys is similar, and susceptibility to familial influences is the same irrespective of gender [12].

Aggression is the result of personality, situational and social variables' influence [13]. Social reasons of aggression incidence may include: financial difficulties in a family, bringing up in a family with strict rules, lack of sense of security, and bad relations with parents above all [14]. A form of aggressive behaviour that is directed to the inside is self-harm, which is the kind of disturbance of an individual self-preservation. Adolescents with a disturbed socio-emotional sphere often self-injure, which in many cases serve a social function, e.g. this kind of behaviour is used to manipulate the environment and contributes to achieving the specific position in a group [15]. Apart from biological roots, disturbances of familial relationships constitute a significant causes of self-harm and suicide attempts [16]. Adolescents, on the grounds of their sensitivity and low emotional resistance, are particularly exposed to this kind of self-destructive behaviours. British statistics reveal that approximately 7–9% of young people self-injure. Some research indicates that it is one of the highest percentages of self-injuring teenagers in Europe [17]. There is no equivalent Polish population data, as some of self-injury incidents are not reported. It is assumed that the frequency of self-harm is as high as 4% of the general population and 21% of the clinical population; this is confirmed by a study on the number of self-harm in the youth wards [18].

The possibility of aggression incidence (including self-aggression) among teenagers increases along with their participation in negative (antisocial) groups as well as a tendency to watch violence in media and on the Internet. One of the youth subcultures strongly associated with the Internet is Emo. The term 'Emo' defines 'emotional hardcore'. Emo movement comes from the United States and was established in the mid 80s. It describes the style of DIY (Do It Yourself) bands, playing a bit different music from hardcore punk. Modern Emo is a generation of the Internet and pop-punk revolution. It gathers young people between 12 and 20, who listen to emotional punk rock [19]. Ideologically, it is the opposition to the so-called rat race, involving the feeling of loneliness as well as to 'unnaturalness' of contemporary people, who hide behind a strongly attached 'mask'. Membership in the Emo subculture ensures its members the possibility to freely express the real emotions [20].

The Emo subculture has been visible for several years now in Poland and it gathers mainly adolescents, and there are four times more girls than boys. The Emo group uses the Internet to exchange the impressions after attempted suicides or self-injury. It advocates suicidal behaviour and, therefore, gains many supporters. In 2006 an increased number of self-injuring girls in English secondary schools was reported, and it was related to the substantial increase in the new members of the Emo subculture. The analysis of Czech Internet materials reveals that the adolescents from the Emo subculture self-injure more frequently in comparison with teenagers from outside this group [21].

Aim

The aim of the research was to specify the relationship between parental attitudes and the aggression of teenagers from the Emo subculture. The following research questions have been formulated:

- Is there a relationship between parental attitudes and aggression manifested in a group of young people from the Emo subculture and the control group?
- What is the specific nature of the relationship between parental attitudes and aggression manifested in the Emo subculture?

Material and methods

The research has been carried out in lower secondary schools in two stages. In the first stage, survey selection research whose aim was to select teenagers belonging to the Emo subculture was carried out. The second stage, actual research, was related to the assessment of Emo adolescents' functioning. After selection studies, which involved 3,800 students, it turned out that only some of them declare their membership in the Emo subculture. It was probably related to highly closed nature of this group.

Teenagers at the age of 13–16 were selected to the study based on the average age of adolescents from the Emo groups, which had been established in the previous studies. The group studied in the research included 41 people (32 girls and 9 boys) being the members of the Emo subculture, and the control group consisted of 48 people (30 girls and 18 boys) who did not belong to any subculture. Both groups were of similar in terms of age, gender, place of residence, financial situation, as well as had comparable school grades and their parents received similar education.

The screening research involved an authorial survey with questions concerning the membership and functioning in a subculture or a youth group. The actual study has been carried out using Polish questionnaires: the Parental Attitude Scale by M. Plopa [22], the Adolescent Aggression Questionnaire – emotional reactivity [23] as well as the self-prepared questionnaire. The Parental Attitude Scale distinguishes five types of parental attitudes (accepting-denial, excessively demanding, autonomous, inconsistent, and excessively protective) in the perception of young people aged 13–19. The typology of attitudes presented by M. Plopa refers to the typology of A. Roe and W.C. Becker. The Adolescent Aggression Questionnaire was used to diagnose the level of aggression of youth aged 13–16, depending on the ways they manifest their aggression (direct aggression, indirect aggression, irritability, oppositional behaviour, verbal aggression). The self-prepared questionnaire contained questions on the demographic data of the young people and supplementary data related to the functioning of teenagers in the subculture.

Results

The statistical analysis revealed that there are differences between types of parental attitudes and the level of aggression manifested by teenagers. The relationship between fathers' and mothers' attitudes and the manifestation of aggression in groups was assessed using regression analysis.

The results of statistical analyses of the relationship between the father's attitudes and the adolescents' aggression indicate statistically significant differences in beta factors in the control group and the group of teenagers from the Emo subculture (Table 1).

Table 1. Regression analysis of the relationship between father's attitudes and aggression in the groups involved in the study

Forms of aggression	father's attitude	Control group			Emo group		
		b	beta	p	b	beta	p
direct aggression	autonomous	0.34	0.58	0.05	-0.01	-0.01	0.97
oppositional behaviour	demanding	-0.07	-0.10	0.79	0.50	0.51	0.04

Table 1 includes only those results that showed significant differences in the values of beta coefficients in the control group and the group of young people from the Emo subculture.

The data suggests the existence of a relationship between father's attitudes and direct aggression among adolescents. In the group of teenagers from the Emo subculture as much as 49% of differences in the scope of direct aggression is explained by the father's attitudes, and 21% in the control group. However, the level of direct aggression manifested by teenagers who do not belong to the subculture increases along with the rise of autonomous attitude of their fathers ($\beta = 0.58$), which is not observed in the Emo group.

In the scope of direct and verbal aggression as well as irritability no statistically significant correlations have been reported.

In the Emo group as much as 63% of differences in the scope of oppositional behaviour is explained by father's attitudes and in the control group it is 24%. A father's demanding attitude is highly related to oppositional behaviour in the Emo group ($\beta = 0.51$), whereas it is of little importance ($\beta = -0.10$) in the control group.

The nature of relationships between particular mother's attitudes and the aggression manifested by teenagers was also examined (Table 2).

Table 2. Regression analysis stipulating the relationship of particular mother's attitudes and forms of aggression manifested by teenagers

Forms of aggression	mother's attitude	Control group			Emo group		
		b	beta	p	b	beta	p
direct aggression	accepting	0.29	0.53	0.00	-0.32	-0.44	0.26
	autonomous	0.13	0.19	0.38	0.71	0.94	0.01
indirect aggression	accepting	0.19	0.38	0.00	-0.45	-0.57	0.14
	autonomous	0.03	0.05	0.84	0.70	0.87	0.02
	inconsistent	0.46	0.53	0.01	0.37	0.42	0.21
oppositional behaviour	accepting	0.28	0.48	0.00	-0.47	-0.55	0.12
	autonomous	-0.09	-0.12	0.52	0.61	0.70	0.04
	inconsistent	0.74	0.74	0.00	0.26	0.28	0.36
verbal aggression	accepting	0.25	0.45	0.00	-0.56	-0.69	0.07
	autonomous	0.03	0.04	0.84	0.74	0.88	0.02
	inconsistent	0.66	0.69	0.00	0.17	0.19	0.57

Table 2 includes only those results that showed significant differences in the values of beta coefficients in the control group and a group of young people from the Emo subculture.

The results obtained from regression analysis indicate that in the control group 56% of differences in the scope of direct aggression can be explained by mother's attitudes, whereas it is 49% in the Emo group. A mother's accepting attitude is related to the higher level of direct aggression among teenagers from the control group and with the lower level of the said aggression among adolescents from the Emo subculture. A mothers' autonomous attitude towards teenagers from the Emo subculture is related to the increase in the manifestation of direct aggression by those adolescents ($\beta = 0.94$).

Mothers' attitude is closely related to indirect aggression manifested by teenagers. In the control group 55% of differences in the scope of indirect aggression is explained by mother's attitudes, whereas 49% in the group of adolescents from the Emo subculture. A mother's accepting attitude is related to indirect aggression differently in the control group ($\beta = 0.38$) and in the Emo group ($\beta = -0.57$). A mother's strongly accepting attitude is related to a decrease in the level of indirect aggression in the case of teenagers from the Emo group, and its increase in the control group. A very strong and positive relationship exists solely between the discussed type of aggression and a mother's autonomous attitude in the Emo group ($\beta = 0.87$), whereas it is not so visible in the control group ($\beta = 0.05$). Giving autonomy to teenagers from the Emo subculture by their mothers is highly related to a decrease in the level of indirect aggression. An inconsistent attitude affects both the control group and the Emo group. Its role in defining indirect aggression in the control group is quite significant ($\beta = 0.53$), whereas in the Emo subculture it is moderate ($\beta = 0.42$). It appears that the inconsistent mothers' attitude fosters the increase in the level of the above-mentioned type of aggression among teenagers, irrespective of the group they belong to.

Mother's attitudes are of significant importance with relation to oppositional behaviour of the teenagers involved in the research. As much as 67% of differences in the scope of oppositional behaviour in the control group is explained by mother's attitudes, and as much as 57% of differences can also be explained in the same way in the Emo group. A mother's accepting attitude influences both groups differently. This influence is quite strong and negatively directed in the Emo group ($\beta = -0.55$), whereas it is moderately positive in the control group ($\beta = 0.48$). The more accepting is the attitude of Emo teenagers' mothers, the less oppositional behaviour is manifested by their children. The reverse relationship exists in the case of the control group. A mother's autonomous attitude is strongly and positively related to oppositional behaviour in the Emo group ($\beta = 0.70$), whereas negatively and marginally in the control group ($\beta = -0.12$). It appears that giving teenagers from the Emo subculture a lot of freedom by their mothers is related to the higher level of their oppositional behaviour. A mother's inconsistent attitude has a strong influence in the control group ($\beta = 0.74$), whereas its impact is almost three times as weak in the Emo group ($\beta = 0.28$). Therefore, mothers' inconsistency would conduce to the increase in adolescents' oppositional behaviour in both groups.

Moreover, the results indicate that the relationship between mother's attitudes and verbal aggression among adolescents is quite strong. In the Emo group 51% of differences in the scope of verbal aggression is explained by mother's attitudes, and in the control group it is 63%. A mother's accepting attitude has a different influence on both groups – it is negative and strong in the Emo group ($\beta = -0.69$), whereas positive but moderate in the control group ($\beta = 0.45$). A mother's accepting attitude is related to the decreased level of verbal aggression among adolescents from the Emo group, and to the increased one in the control group. There is a strong relationship between verbal aggression and a mother's autonomous attitude among teenagers from the Emo group ($\beta = 0.88$), which has not been noted in the control group ($\beta = 0.04$). A mother's attitude of considerable autonomy may induce an increase in verbal aggression of her child in the group of teenagers identifying themselves with the Emo subculture. An inconsistent attitude positively affects the above-mentioned type of aggression in both groups involved in the study. It strongly influences the control group ($\beta = 0.69$), whereas its impact on the Emo group is substantially more marginal ($\beta = 0.19$). A mother's inconsistent attitude is connected with the increased manifestation of verbal aggression mainly among the teenagers from the control group.

Discussion

This research is the pioneer psychological study in the world presenting relationships between parental attitudes and aggression among adolescents in the Emo subculture.

It has been concluded that adolescents from the Emo subculture were more inclined to aggressive behaviours if their fathers manifested an excessively demanding attitude. In their study T. Pychyl et al. found that the negative developmental consequences result from the parental attitudes based on excessive parental control, absolute rigidity and conservatism [9].

Mother's attitudes were of more significant importance in the explanation of adolescents' aggression and they influence teenagers from the Emo subculture to a greater extent. Considerable autonomy given to adolescents from the Emo subculture by their mothers as well as their inconsistency fostered an increase in the level of aggression. An interesting relationship has been observed – a mother's accepting attitude was related to a decrease in the level of all types of aggression manifested by teenagers from the Emo subculture; however, it fostered an increase in this level among adolescents, who did not identify themselves with any subculture. Therefore, it may be concluded that adolescents from the Emo subculture need substantially more acceptance from their mothers for a proper functioning in the period of adolescence than teenagers from outside the subculture. Autonomous attitude of mothers of adolescents outside the Emo subculture provides free choices and actions and the ability to establish contacts with other peers. In adolescents belonging to the Emo subculture may, however, lead to a sense of loss, increase the level of experienced anxiety and consequently activate maladaptive defence mechanisms in the form of aggression or self-harm.

The research carried out by O. Schwartz et al., concerning the relationships between parents' behaviour and the development of depressive and anxiety symptoms among Australian teenagers, revealed that a higher level of parents' aggression caused depressive and anxiety symptoms, whereas positive behaviour alleviated the intensity of depressive symptoms. The authors also emphasise the role of family in prevention or intervention in case of development of depression or anxiety among teenagers [24], which also correlates positively with the results of our research concerning the role of family.

From the previous studies of the author of this paper it appears that adolescents from the Emo subculture are characterised by higher neuroticism and depressiveness. Such an array of personality traits may shift the direction of teenage rebellion. In fear of consequences anxious and weak individuals direct their rebellion inside, which may cause temporary repression of emotions and may lead to behaviour disturbances such as aggression, self-injury or identification with negative (antisocial) youth groups [25]. The above theoretical assumptions may constitute a good explanation for the phenomenon of self-aggression among adolescents from the Emo subculture.

The research study, carried out by R. Pierro et al., involving 267 students of Italian secondary schools, revealed that students who self-injured were more impulsive and aggressive than those who did not self-injure and reported worse quality of relationships with mothers as well as more incidents of sexual and physical abuse. It was noticed that students who self-injure often have worse relationship with both parents and do not tend to identify themselves with fathers [26].

To conclude, parental attitudes and, in particular, mother's incorrect attitudes have a significant impact on the development of aggressive behaviour, including self-aggressive one, among teenagers from the Emo subculture [27].

Another similar research studies may focus on broader analysis of the problem of depressive and suicidal behaviour in the Emo group. The current research studies have their practical implications; they can be used in prevention and therapies of emotional disturbances, as well as in therapies of aggressive and suicidal behaviour. They can also serve an informative function for tutors, professionals treating adolescents and for parents [28].

Conclusions

1. In the Emo subculture, teenagers' aggressive behaviour is related to improper parental attitudes.
2. Mother's attitudes, irrespective of membership of young people in a subculture, are much more strongly related to teenagers' aggression than father's attitudes.
3. In the Emo subculture aggressive behaviours are associated with excessively demanding attitude of the father.
4. A decrease in the level of almost all forms of aggression manifested by teenagers from the Emo subculture is related to an accepting mother's attitude. An autonomous mother's attitude is related to an increase in the level of aggression in this group, whereas an inconsistent mother's attitude fosters an increase in the level of aggression among all teenagers.

5. The inconsistent attitude of mothers is associated with higher levels of aggression in all adolescents.

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