

Influence of Collective Emotion on Aggressiveness among Street Children in Semarang: A Literature Review

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Abstract. Street children in Semarang often engage in aggressive behaviors, influenced by their environment and strong group dynamics, leading to hostility towards outsiders. This research explores the factors contributing to aggression among these children and seeks interventions to reduce their involvement in criminal activities, focusing on collective emotions and group dynamics. A literature review analyzed key social factors, particularly social influence, collective identity, and group cohesiveness. The findings indicate that social influence and collective identity significantly drive aggression. The shift from individual to group identity correlates with increased aggression and criminal behavior, exacerbated by shared experiences within cohesive groups. The study highlights the critical role of collective emotions and group dynamics in the aggressiveness of street children in Semarang. Targeted interventions are essential for mitigating these influences and fostering a safer environment. Future research should develop strategies to manage these dynamics effectively.

Keywords: Aggressiveness; Street Children; Collective Emotion; Group Cohesiveness

1 Introduction

2.1 Aggression on Street Children

Street children often find themselves trapped in a cycle of inappropriate behavior, frequently attributing their actions to the harsh realities of poverty^[5], with aggression being one of the most prevalent outcomes. According to 2021 data from the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs, there are approximately 9,113 street children across the country^[17]. In Semarang, the introduction of Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2014 aims to assist street children, homeless individuals, and beggars. However, despite these legal frameworks, the vulnerability of these children remains high. Their families abandon many, leaving them to fend for themselves without supervision, exposing them to unsafe environments^[10]. These circumstances force them into forming communities, where they develop shared identities as street children, which frequently lead to engagement in aggressive activities.

Aggression is defined as a conduct that intentionally harms others. It has been part of human nature since ancient accounts of human atrocities ranging from those committed by Genghis Khan and his army, who conquered large parts of Asia, the Middle East, and even portions of Europe in the 13th century, to the killing of approximately 6 million Jews by German Nazis during World War II^[7]. Given the passage of time since these significant acts of intergroup violence occurred, we may be able to view them from an emotional distance. However, most people find it much more challenging to confront violent occurrences in their personal lives^[7]. Aggression in a group can intensify aggressive replies by distributing responsibility that is made by one person in the group as the strategists are remote from the front liners, and the others carry them out^[13].

Previous research has already shown that aggression has always been adhered to by street children due to adaption tools of unfavorable settings and group-categorization signifies group. In this context, street children have aggression inclinations by sharing the members' negative perceptions of the group^{[3][4]}. They experience collective emotions frequently founded on dynamic mutual entrainment of movements and behaviors created by group practices with temporal, practical, or symbolic structures^[8]. It has already been a long time since conformity demands and deindividuation became more prevalent as group identity grew. As a result, their identity as a group of street children with aggressive tendencies must be investigated.

2 Method

2.1 Search Strategy and Data Sources

A comprehensive literature search was performed in June 2024. The search used Boolean phrases, including “aggression,” “street child*,” “collective emotion*,” “group cohesiveness,” and “Semarang,” across multiple databases such as ResearchGate, Scopus, Sage, and Google Scholar. Initially, 100 abstracts and titles were identified. After a preliminary review, 80 studies were selected based on relevance. In the second stage, full-text reviews narrowed the selection to 16 studies that focused specifically on aggression among street children.

2.2 Screening

The screening began with a review of all titles and abstracts related to street children and aggression. Studies meeting the inclusion criteria were further evaluated. The exclusion criteria omitted studies related to technology influences, social media, and substance dependence, as they did not align with the study's focus on behavioral aggression.

2.3 Data Extraction

From each selected study, data were extracted, including the author's name, year of publication, journal title, country of origin, study focus, theoretical frameworks, definitions of aggression, methodological approaches, sample details, measures of reliability and validity, and critical findings. This information provided the foundation for analyzing the relevant research on street children and their aggression tendencies.

In this traditional literature review, while data were extracted from selected studies, including information on authors, publication years, key themes, and methodological approaches, the review does not present these details in a structured data matrix or table. Instead, the extracted data are discussed narratively within the paragraphs, critically synthesizing the themes and insights. This approach aligns with the nature of traditional reviews, which offer flexibility in discussing the literature without the formal presentation required in systematic reviews, such as detailed matrices or coding frameworks.

2.4 State of Art (SotA) Review

The State of the Art (SotA) review offers a time-based perspective on the evolution of the study of aggression among street children. It focuses on significant theoretical developments and

highlights the main factors that have informed our current understanding. The review also identifies gaps in the existing literature and offers suggestions for future research, particularly in understanding the role of collective emotions and group dynamics^[12]

2.5 Analysis

The extracted data were synthesized using the methods of a traditional literature review rather than a systematic approach. Unlike systematic reviews, which follow a predefined protocol with exhaustive searches and specific inclusion criteria, a traditional literature review offers a more narrative and critical synthesis of selected studies. This method allows for a broader interpretation of the literature, giving more room for discussing theoretical frameworks and insights. According to Snyder (2019), traditional literature reviews effectively provide a comprehensive overview of a field of study while offering flexibility in exploring themes and insights from a broader perspective^[23]. This approach was chosen to better align with the exploratory nature of this study, which seeks to understand aggression in street children from multiple theoretical lenses.

3 Result

3.1 Search Result

The initial screening process, which applied inclusion and exclusion criteria, yielded 14 manuscripts in which full text could be reviewed. Among the 14 articles that have been analyzed, there were articles with quantitative study designs and one article employing a mixed-method study design. The rest of the qualitative articles were correlation studies and articles on family harmony models.

3.2 State of Art Review

Synthesis of Result In the analysis process, there are proofs of aggression, especially in group settings, that increase aggression tendencies. But not especially for street children. Some have already stated that peer influence plays a crucial role in shaping aggressive behavior within a group dynamic. Adolescents may feel pressured to conform to the group's norms, which can either reinforce or discourage aggressive actions. The dynamics of power and hierarchy within the group can also impact how aggression is expressed and tolerated among members^[9]. Besides that, the territory of street children forms their identity as a community that solves their

problems. Also, the research that was conducted to determine the collective identities of street children and youth in Indonesia found that the self-categorization theory applied to street children includes rules, values, hierarchy, and even exclusivity^[1].

Youth with antisocial tendencies, lack of close family bonds, and expectations of academic success may find social identity in a gang^[13], as street children are one of them. After several times, street children learn by interacting with their community's expectations, and this influences them to prove their existence by expressing themselves with collective anger because of society's behavior^[1]. Supporting this, research comparing human aggressiveness perpetrated by groups and individuals showed that intergroup interactions were much more aggressive than interindividual interactions^[2].

One of the severe forms of aggression is violence. Violent groups can help to counter individuals' aversion to causing interpersonal harm by providing group-level justifications and incentives for violence and by strategically removing obstacles to violence^[6]. People pay more attention to ingroup members' orientations because they not only provide more reliable information about practical aspects of what is going on but also represent the group's normative attitude^[8]. This could be related to the poorer self-esteem of street children compared to those who don't^[11]. Another factor is poor communication and relations with parents, which can lead children to behave aggressively ^[14].

3 Discussion

Focusing on the background and group dynamic between street children gave much proof to support the aggression of street children. As mentioned in the beginning, street children often justify their aggressive behaviors by citing poverty as a factor^[5]. In Indonesia, there are 9,113 street children, with many abandoned by their parents and left vulnerable^[10]. Although Semarang has regulations to assist these children, they frequently engage in aggression as part of their community dynamics. There are forms of street children aggression, violent behavior with siblings that came from their conflicts and frustrations, shouting, and misbehavior with abusive language^[7]. These behaviors can impact not only the family but also others.

Aggression, defined as intentionally harming others, has historical roots in human behavior. Group aggression can amplify violent responses by diffusing responsibility among members^[13]. Research indicates that street children adopt aggressive behaviors as adaptive responses to their

environment, influenced by negative group perceptions and shared collective emotions^{[3][4]}. Their identity as a group fosters conformity and deindividuation, necessitating further investigation into their aggressive tendencies.

Aggression among street children can be understood as a complex interplay of emotional regulation, group dynamics, and environmental stressors. According to recent studies, emotional regulation is crucial in moderating aggressive behavior. Children with poor emotional control, particularly in environments of high stress, like life on the streets, are more likely to engage in impulsive, aggressive behaviors. This is compounded by low inhibitory control, where the inability to suppress aggressive impulses leads to more frequent and intense outbursts. In such environments, aggression can be viewed as a survival mechanism, often triggered by provocation or a perceived threat and heightened by the group dynamic of street children who operate in closely-knit communities^[18]. This difficulty is compounded by the chaotic and often hostile surroundings they are exposed to, which heightens emotional distress and fuels aggression as a defensive or survival response.

In addition to these individual factors, group dynamics play a significant role in shaping aggressive behavior. Street children often form groups for survival; within these groups, aggression can become a way of asserting dominance, gaining resources, or maintaining status. Studies on aggression in group settings show that individuals in groups feel less responsible for their actions, leading to a diffusion of responsibility that increases the likelihood of violence^[19]. This is further supported by social identity theory, which suggests that group members adopt the norms of the group, which, in the case of street children, often include aggressive behavior as a means of navigating their harsh realities^[20].

Moreover, exposure to violence—whether experienced firsthand or observed—further normalizes aggression among street children. Research highlights that children exposed to violence are more likely to adopt aggressive behaviors themselves, as they internalize violence as a normal and expected part of life^[21]. This exposure creates a vicious cycle where aggression is continually reinforced both at the individual and group levels, making it difficult to break without targeted interventions.

To address this issue, interventions must focus on improving emotional regulation through therapy and educational programs that teach children how to manage their emotions healthier. At the same time, it is critical to alter the environmental conditions that perpetuate aggression,

such as poverty, lack of stable housing, and limited access to education. Programs that provide safe spaces for children to interact, mentorship, and opportunities for positive social engagement can significantly reduce the likelihood of aggression by disrupting the social dynamics that encourage violent behavior^[21].

For the Semarang context, Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2014, aimed at addressing street children issues in Semarang, has shown limited effectiveness due to weak inter-agency coordination, which hampers proper management of children's welfare. The policy fails to prevent children from returning to the streets and lacks focus on root causes like poverty, family breakdown, and limited education access^[22]. A more comprehensive strategy is recommended, including prevention, rehabilitation, and reintegration. Stronger leadership and improved social services are crucial for effective interventions and breaking the cycle of vulnerability faced by street children. Street Children being engaged in violent action increases the individual's affiliation with the group, which increases their readiness to commit future acts of violence on behalf of the group. Another conclusion is that the cycle of violence can begin with coercive, rather than voluntary, participation in collective violence^[6]. Intragroup emotional convergence cannot be fully described by cognitive or interoceptive processes working independently in the minds of individual group members^[8]. Also, members' self-identity allows them to give themselves over to the group, often feeling a pleasurable oneness with the others due to the higher frequency of self-contagion ^[13]. Thus, the environment of street children themselves makes them do aggressive behaviour.

Preventive measures can be implemented to mitigate these behaviors by establishing secure surroundings, addressing underlying concerns, teaching alternatives to aggressiveness, and fostering positive social relationships. The focus should be on ensuring that children have supportive individuals in their lives, including family members, teachers, counselors, and community mentors, who can serve as protective influences against the impacts of violence. They also work to make the environment safer for families living in extreme poverty. It should help improve social competence and skills and replace social isolation with social relationships. Mentorship initiatives, buddy programs, and other treatments promoting supportive peer interactions in the school setting are successful programs. The study highlights that treatments must address the broader issues of poverty and homelessness, which intensify family violence and its effects on children. Permanent housing options are critical to reducing the isolation and hardships experienced by homeless families^[3].

Furthermore, because this study was based on a literature review, more research is needed, especially focusing on Social Learning Theory in the future, to understand the precise reasons for experimental trials and determine which intervention is most appropriate.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, street children in Semarang face significant challenges due to their exposure to harsh, often dangerous environments that foster aggressive behaviors. The lack of adequate social support systems forces them into communities where group dynamics contribute to conformity and violence. These children often form identities around aggression, influenced by peer pressure and the need for survival. Preventive measures must address the environmental factors in Semarang, providing safe spaces, education, and emotional support. Collaborative efforts between local governments and social organizations are essential to disrupt the cycle of violence and promote healthier development.

To prevent further escalation, interventions targeting both individual behavior and group dynamics should be prioritized. These can focus on emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and positive role modeling, helping children form identities outside of aggressive peer influence. In Semarang, existing policies need to be reinforced with community-based programs that offer consistent support and rehabilitation services.

Furthermore, addressing the root causes of aggression, such as poverty, family breakdown, and social exclusion, is key. Tailored intervention programs must equip children with the tools to resist negative peer pressure, offering alternatives that encourage healthy social interactions and development.

Finally, long-term solutions for street children in Semarang require coordinated efforts from multiple stakeholders. Government agencies, NGOs, and local communities must collaborate to ensure children are provided with comprehensive care, including education, rehabilitation, and family support.

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6 Conflict of Interest

The authors disclosed no potential conflicts of interest for the research, writing, and/or publication of this paper.

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