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Can Being Victimized Verbally and Physically Predict Aggressive Verbal and Physical Behavior?: A Study on Omani Male and Female Middle School

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to examine if perceived family violence of victimized children is related to their perceived aggressive behavior. It has been acknowledged that children learn and behave what they observe and practice including violence. A stratified random sample (N =1160) of Omani school students was drawn from grades 6 to 9. The study used perceived family violence and perceived aggressive behavior measures to collect data. CFA was performed to test the proposed factor structure as well as the structural model. The invariance test lent support to the hypothesis that the structure of constructs is invariant across gender. However, the relations between constructs were not invariant. Children (boys and girls) who expressed high verbal violence on them reported they were more verbally and physically aggressive. Boys, but not girls, who reported high physical violence on them reported they were more verbally and physically aggressive. The relation between perceived family violence and perceived aggressive behavior seem to be dependent on gender and types of family violence as well as the kind of children's aggressive behavior.

Keywords: *Family violence, aggressive behavior, school children, Oman, structural equation modeling.*

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Introduction

Family is the cornerstone and the first brick in the building of personality. The child inherits some characteristics of the family and it socializes children to fulfill their social roles and conform to societal standards. Individual differences exist between families in how they socialize children due probably to the level of education, socioeconomic status and values that are prevalent in the family (Tayoub et al., 2010). Within these differences, the Arab families have specific approaches to rearing boys and other approaches to rearing girls (Abu-Hilal et al., 2016; Barakat, 1993; Hamady, 1960; Sharabi, 1975). Different rearing practices for boys and girls are based on the roles boys and girls will assume both in the family and in the society at large. Families differ in their toughness, harshness, and kindness in rearing their children (Barakat, 1993). Majority of Arab families go with the holy book of Quran and the teachings of Prophet Mohammad. One of the main premises of Islam is that Muslims are moderate "wajalnakum umatan wasata" (we made you in the middle) (Barakat, 1993). This is, when they behave, breach, talk, etc. they should not be extreme. When it comes to socialization and rearing children, parents should be reasonable and moderate. This kind of moderation will transmit to children. This may apply to majority of Arab families; there are individual differences among Arab families in the socialization of children. Some families may be extreme, strict or even harsh in their socialization and rearing of

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children, while some families are lenient. As children experience those different types of rearing practices they assimilate and consequently behave.

Perceived family violence (verbal and physical) is defined as the violent act of father and/or mother directed at the child who is the respondent in this study. Perceived aggressive behavior, on the other hand, is defined as the act of aggression induced by the child who is also the respondent in this study. Aggressive behavior of the child, verbal and physical, can't be understood if the conditions and precedents of this behavior are not known or understood. Family's treatment and relation with the child are among the conditions where well-being (adjustment) requires harmony, peace, and care. Extensive research has shown that if children have little confidence and trust in their families or they are treated harshly, they may develop unpleasant emotions such as anxiety, helplessness, and other forms of deviant behavior such as aggressive behavior (Al-Najjar, 2010; Chan & Yeung, 2009).

Berry (1995) defined family violence as the use of power illegally by an adult in the family against another member of the family. Family violence in this study is defined as an act of violence by the parents directed at children. It can be direct or indirect; it can be physical, verbal, or psychological. Parents' violence (shouting, slapping or beating) directed at children may at times come as a result of misbehavior by the children, and a method of discipline. Some parents, especially fathers, are harsh and violent in disciplining their children.

Family violence directed at children is not an emerging phenomenon; it is as old as humans (Taha, 2007). It is part of human life regardless of race, religion, and socio-economic status (Amirthalingam, 2003; Berry, 1995; World Health Organization [WHO], 2002). WHO (2002) considered family violence as one type of violence under interpersonal type. WHO classified the nature of violence into physical, sexual, psychological and deprivation/ neglect. The WHO report of 2002 highlights the challenges in defining and measuring violence. As a result of no consensus on definition, data collected from different countries suffer inconsistency and weak reliability (WHO, 2002).

Violence against Children in General

The rate of violence against children has witnessed an increase in the Arab World. In Iraq, for example, violence against children reached 15% in year 2004. Statistics coming out of Egypt, Yemen, and Kuwait reveal that violence against children has reached alarming rates. Such violence has happened in different ways such as kidnapping, sexual assault, torturing, and beating (Bahri & Qutaishat, 2011). Abdeljawwad and Tarawneh (2004) indicated that 1400 children in Jordan are reported as victims of family violence every year. In Oman, the total number of child-abuse cases handled by the child protection committees in the various governorates of Oman during the first half of year 2018 was 646 cases of abuse (387 males, and 259 females). About 39% of the cases were in the governorate of Muscat which has almost one third the population of Oman which consists of 4.636 million. Oman gives priority to child protection by which the Ministry of Social Development has created a department named 'the Department of Family Protection' (DFP). This department has a temporary care center called 'Dar Al Wifaq', which is dedicated to cases of children at risk of abuse and violence. As of the first half of 2018, there were 34 cases (16 males and 18 females) of abused children who were accommodated in 'Dar Al Wifaq'. In addition, the ministry created a hotline for child protection with the number 1100 that can be used around the clock to report cases of child abuse. In the first half of year 2018, the DFP received about 387 calls in this hotline telling about physical, psychological, sexual, and negligence abuses (Ministry of Social Development, 2018). Nevertheless, Omani school children generally reported low level of child abuse and favorable parenting style (Albalushi & Aldhafri, 2018).

It is not known for sure if the level of family violence is really low or because it is a family matter that can't be discussed outside the family. Family violence is hard to detect and measure and this is probably one reason why family violence is reported to be low. Different researchers have used different methods to measure domestic (family) violence. Also, researchers have differentiated violence in terms of whether it involves physical acts, psychological, or verbal acts of violence (see Straus et al., 1996). Family violence in this study is limited to parents' violence and not general violence such as street violence.

Children's Aggressive Behavior

The second important variable in this study is children's aggressive behavior. Aggressive behavior may include –but not limited to– “targeted verbal, physical, or gestural behavior that is intended to cause physical harm, psychological distress, intimidation, or to induce fear” (Greene, 2005, p. 237). Indirect forms of hostility like spreading nasty rumors and social exclusion may be also classified as aggressive behavior (Crick & Bigbee, 1998). Different theories have been used to explain and understand aggressive behavior. The genetic or instinctive explanation has been one of the theoretical frameworks used to explain aggressive behavior. The psychoanalysis theory is one of the theories that consider aggressive behavior as a natural behavior that intends to release the innate aggressive energy. Ruddle et al. (2017) explained that aggression may be impulsive which is an anger-driven, or as a result of poor self-control and aggressive needs or impulses. Ruddle et al. divided this kind of aggression into two types: generalized trait aggression and impulsive aggression. They reported research evidence that trait aggression is associated with some attributes

such as trait anger and anger ruminative tendencies that “have been associated with childhood exposure to DV (*domestic violence, added*) and DV perpetration.” (P. 161).

Some theorists have criticized the natural explanation of aggression and explained that aggressive behavior is more complex. Those theorists believe that the instinct theory falls short of fully explaining aggressive behavior. They have theorized that aggressive behavior is a learned behavior. Berkowitz (1973) has been one of the proponents of this explanation. Berkowitz argued that the main cause of aggression is frustration. Frustration, he argued, develops anger and anger may cause aggression.

Consistent with the argument that aggression is complex and can't be explained by the instinct theory, this study draws on the social cognitive theory of aggressive behavior. The social cognitive theory postulates that much of our behaviors are learned through imitation and modeling. Also, the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1973) suggests that a combination of environmental (social) and cognitive processes influence behavior. According to social cognitive theory, the process of learning is predicted by the observation of models and, more generally, by social experiences. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1973) focuses on the ways in which cognitive operations on social experiences are thought to influence behavior. These cognitive processes may explain why children learn aggressive behavior by observing the actions of others (e.g., parents). Furthermore, social cognitive theory explains that the frustrated child is keen to imitate the model of aggression especially if the act of violence of the model has brought pleasure to the actor. If the atmosphere in the family is violent, the child may transfer this kind of behavior to school or neighborhood in some kind of aggressive behavior or another.

Ruddle et al. (2017) used the general aggression model, which is in harmony with the social cognitive theory, to explain the relationship between child abuse and child's future aggressive behavior. They argued that dispositional characteristics and situational factors interact in producing aggressive behavior. They stated “when violence has been witnessed, cognitive scripts representing aggression are activated which increase the probability of future aggressive behavior” (p. 161). Consistent with the social cognitive theory, Ruddle et al. (2017) argued that “when an individual has been a childhood victim of DV ..., these scripts are strengthened and there is an increased likelihood that later in life these individuals would likely be aggressive in similar situations (p. 161). Although Ruddle et al. based their arguments on Western theories and research; these results can be tested as hypotheses in less researched environments such as the Arab World and, particularly, Oman. Empirical evidence needs to be provided to policy makers and the public at large in Oman that what families seed or instill they will get in return.

The differential socialization hypothesis explains the gender-role development. Environmental pressures and cognition work together in shaping gender-typed beliefs and behaviors. Beliefs and behaviors are usually learned and adopted through identification. Differential socialization hypothesis emphasizes that parents and other socializers treat girls and boys differently and convey gender to children in ways that foster sex differences in social behavior including aggressive behavior. Berk (2001) and Wood and Eagly (2012) indicated that boys are treated harshly to instill aggressiveness in case the country -or tribe- is involved in warfare. Parental control of boys is characterized by power, assertiveness, aggressiveness, and dominance. In contrast, parental control of girls is characterized by kindness, consideration of others, empathy, and interpersonal closeness. A meta-analysis study by Endendijk et al. (2016) revealed that studies published in the 1970s and 1980s reported more autonomy-supportive strategies with boys than with girls, but from 1990 onwards there was a shift in favor of girls. Accordingly, males were more likely to report higher rate of physical aggression and were voted to be more aggressive by their peers (Fives, et al., 2011). Results of research are consistent with the conceptualization that boys' conscience development is facilitated by parental discipline strategies involving warmth, the use of induction, and a de-emphasis on power-assertive techniques such as physical punishment (Kerr et al., 2004). Furthermore, inhibiting anger and aggression may indirectly limit girls' development of a flexible emotional repertoire of strategies that they can use to regulate and express various emotions, such as anger (Conway, 2005).

A common question asked is whether children who have been victims of family violence turn to be violent themselves. According to the social cognitive theory, children who have been victims of violence might learn to practice violence. Empirical research has found that exposure to violence is a significant predictor of aggressive behavior (Coyne et al., 20004). Litrownik et al. (2003), for example, conducted a longitudinal study to address this question and found that children who were victims of verbal and physical violence showed more aggressive behavior. The correlations became stronger as children grew up. This is, children at age 6 became more aggressive than they were at age 4. Certainly, children at age 6 are stronger and can exercise aggression more than age-4 children. Also, Singer, et al. (1999) found that exposure to violence was a predictor of children's violent behavior. Eriksen and Jensen (2006) found that the father (husband) violence and mother (wife) physical punishment of the sibling predicted sibling's aggressive behavior, but boys were much more aggressive than girls.

Family Violence and Aggressive Behavior in the Arab World

The Islamic way of life and code of conduct have contributed to the formation of the character of the Omani individual and family (Al-Barwani & Albeely, 2007). Family violence in Oman and most Arab countries is not declared and

mentioned in the media as it is in the West. Usually, such violence is among the secrets of the family. However, the Omani population is largely known of its peacefulness. As we will see later in this study, perceived violence and perceived aggressive behavior are way below the midpoint of the distributions of these variables. This, in a way, indicates that violence and aggression in Oman is low. Kessell's (2017) findings revealed that Western expatriates identified some of the state's promoted national identity elements, specifically those conceptions of Omani culture as one of tolerance, respect, and hospitality. They indicated that Omanis are genuinely warm, welcoming, tolerant, and friendly in their behavior and conduct in public space.

Research published In Arabic is limited. However, few studies have addressed the relation between family violence and aggressive behavior (e.g., Abdel Hadi, 2015; Hunaiti, et al., 2012; Marwah, 2012; Salim, 2014; Tayoub et al., 2010). Marwah (2012) found a significant correlation between physical violence and aggressive behavior among 118 children (age 9-12 years). Abdel Hadi (2015) found that perceived family violence was positively related to aggressive behavior among female college students in Saudi Arabia (see also, AlMotwa, 2008; Al-Swaiti, 2012; Jaareer & Lahrash, 2015; Tayoub et al., 2010.) Al-Farrayeh and Arabiat (2016) studied the relation between family violence and security feelings among 1248 Jordanian adolescents and found that the two variables were negatively correlated. In addition, they found that boys were more abused by family than girls. Tayoub et al. (2010) found that family violence was negatively related to parents' educational level and socioeconomic status. Similarly, Albalushi and Aldhafri (2018) found that children of low-income Omani families were more abused than high-income families.

In addition, aggressive students reported more family violence than non-aggressive students. Hunaiti et al. (2012) conducted a study on a sample of Omani college students in Jordan and found that physical violence was the least reported kind of violence. They found that physical, psychological and sexual violence significantly predicted aggressive behavior. Arabi-Katbi (2012) found that males were more abused than females. Arabi-Katbi found a significant correlation between family violence and feelings of loneliness among respondents.

Objectives

This cross-sectional study aims to explore the relationships among perceived verbal and physical kinds of family violence –mainly from parents- and perceived verbal and physical kinds of children's aggressive behavior. We believe that it is important that families as well as other educators and decision makers know the status of family violence and children's aggressive behavior in the pursuit of developing curricula and intervention programs.

As for the relationship between violence and aggressive behavior, we believe that perceived parents' physical abuse of the child would be more strongly related to children's physical aggressive behavior; and perceived parents' verbal abuse of the child would be more strongly related to child's verbal aggressive behavior. In addition, we assume that boys' responses would produce relationships that are somewhat different from those produced by girls' responses. This is in line with the differential socialization hypothesis that proposes that Arab boys and girls are differently socialized.

Method

Participants

The sample of this study consisted of 1160 students (617 boys, 543 girls). The students were selected from grades 6, 7, 8 and 9 in 12 schools (6 for boys and 6 for girls) in one of the eleven educational directorates of Oman. Schools were selected randomly, however, classes were assigned by the school administration according to the school's convenience. The range of age of the sample is between 12 and 16 years. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the sample by gender and grade level. Schools' permissions and students' consents were obtained. Students come from typical Omani families as the school directorates represent a typical Omani directorate. Students come from different socio-economic backgrounds. Great majority of the governorate population are Omani nationals. Consequently, the instrument was administered to participants in their classes. Time consumed was about 15 minutes.

Table 1: Sample Breakdown by Gender and Grade Level

		Grade				Total
		Sixth	Seventh	Eighth	Ninth	
Gender	Male	160	165	154	138	617
	Female	157	152	146	88	543
Total		317	317	300	226	1160

Measures

Two measures were developed: one measured perceived family violence directed to children, and one measured perceived aggressive behavior by children themselves. Each measure consisted of 14 items. After preliminary analysis, 2 items were dropped from each measure. Dropping the items was due to their weak contributions to the validity and

reliability of the measures and their subscales. The final number of items was 12 for the perceived family violence scale and 12 for the child's perceived aggressive behavior scale. Preliminary factor analysis produced two factors for perceived violence (verbal and physical) and two factors for perceived aggressive behavior (verbal and physical) with substantial loadings. These loadings indicate that the items measure the constructs validly. Alpha coefficients of reliability for verbal violence (6 items, e.g., "my parents scold me with nasty and dirty words"), physical violence (6 items: e.g., "I have been beaten badly by one of my parents"), verbal aggressive behavior (6 items: e.g., "I sometimes feel desire to insult others and call them names"), and physical aggressive behavior (6 items: e.g., "I have strong desire to harm others") were .76, .72, .71, and .74, respectively. All items were checked for normality and proved to be fairly normal. None of the skewedness statistics exceeded Kline (2005) suggested that skewedness statistic more than 3 indicate threat to normality.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed with AMOS 23 with maximum likelihood estimation. The assessment of models fit was based on multiple criteria. These criteria were the χ^2 likelihood statistic, the χ^2/df , the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). All fit indexes are included as part of the AMOS output. First, we tested the measurement model of each construct separately. Second, we tested a measurement model with constructs correlated. The objective of this model test was to assess the validity of items in measuring the constructs. The factor loadings were used as indicators of item validity. Then, we tested the invariance of models across gender. We knew a priori that boys and girls would produce different parameters especially the relations among the study constructs. Thus, we tested the null hypothesis that parameters are not invariant across gender.

Results

The Measurement Model

The fit statistics for the combined samples of males and females revealed that the measurement model fit the data reasonably well (e.g., CFI = .933, RMSEA = .035). After we established the fit of the measurement model, we tested for invariance across gender with seven nested models (Table 4). While CFI and TLI indicated a poor fit, both χ^2/df (<5.00) and RMSEA (<.06) indicated good fit. Model comparisons revealed that the non-constrained model had an acceptable fit. Also, when factor loadings were constrained to be equal across gender, the difference in TLI was less than .01. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis that factor loadings are not invariant across gender. However, when measurement intercepts were constrained to be equal across gender, the difference in TLI was much greater than .01. Similarly, when constraints of equality were placed on the structural covariance parameters, Δ TLI increased significantly. The poorest fit was for the model with measurement residuals assumed invariant across gender (Δ TLI = .150). Hence, the hypotheses of not invariant parameters of intercepts, covariances and residuals across gender are tenable.

Also, the correlations among the perceived violence (verbal and physical), and perceived aggression (verbal and physical) were not invariant. In other words, the magnitude of perceived violence (verbal and physical), perceived aggression (verbal and physical), may vary according to gender. Similarly, the size of correlations among constructs may also vary according to gender. Table 3 (upper part) shows the items' loadings on the respective factors for females and males. The loadings range from .39 to .74 ($p < 0.01$) with a median loading of .59 (mean = .57). The mean loading for girls is .58 and for males .54 indicating a small difference due to gender. The lower part of Table 3 shows the correlations among the latent factors for females and for males. Four of the six correlations among the constructs are greater for females than for males; whilst only two of the correlations are greater for males than for female. The mean correlations for females is .62 and the mean for males is .55 indicating that females are little more consistent than males.

Table 2: Fit Statistics for the Four Constructs Separately

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90
Verbal Violence	22.064*	8	2.758	.990	.980	.039	.020	.059
Physical Violence	39.488**	8	4.936	.973	.949	.058	.041	.077
Verbal Aggression	14.989	9	1.665	.995	.991	.024	.000	.045
Physical Aggression	16.013*	9	1.779	.984	.973	.039	.000	.070

Note: CFI: Comparative fit index; TLI: Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA: Root mean square error of approximation.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Results of the Path Model for Males and Females

As the fit statistics indicated, males and females produced different parameters for the relations among constructs of perceived family violence and constructs of perceived aggressive behavior. The fit of the invariance model was poor. Only the unconstraint model was acceptable. Also, the loadings were invariant with somewhat acceptable fit. As such, we ran the model for males and females separately.

Relations of Violence and Aggression for Females

Figure 1 shows the regression coefficients of predicting perceived aggressive behavior from perceived family violence for females. The links of the perceived verbal violence with the perceived verbal aggressive behavior ($\beta = 0.59, p < 0.01$) and with the perceived physical aggressive behavior ($\beta = 0.50, p < 0.01$) were not markedly different. This is, perceived verbal violence predicted perceived verbal aggressive behavior a little more strongly than the former predicted the perceived physical aggressive behavior. As for the links of perceived physical violence with perceived verbal aggressive behavior and with perceived physical aggressive behavior, the results produced inconsistent predictions. The path from perceived physical violence to perceived verbal aggressive behavior was negative ($\beta = -0.13, ns$). However, the path that linked perceived family physical violence to perceived physical aggression was positive ($\beta = 0.26, ns$). The correlations between perceived verbal violence and perceived physical violence ($r = 0.72, p < 0.01$), and between perceived verbal aggression and perceived physical aggression ($r = 0.64, p < 0.01$) were all positive indicating that if one increases the other also increases. The percent of variance explained in the perceived verbal aggression was 26%; and the percent of variance explained in the perceived physical aggression was 50%. Both explained variances are significant ($p < 0.01$).

Table 3: Loadings on the Four Factors, and Correlations among Factors for Females and Males.

Items	I		II		III		IV	
	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B
1	.66	.49	.39	.44	.51	.52	.48	.54
2	.62	.63	.49	.32	.58	.54	.49	.52
3	.67	.58	.61	.58	.58	.68	.62	.57
4	.62	.56	.60	.56	.60	.54	.59	.59
5	.59	.47	.53	.49	.52	.56	.60	.47
6	.55	.58	.74	.62	.63	.56	.55	.47
Factors	I		II		III		IV	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
I. Verbal Violence	---	---						
II. Physical Violence	.77	.59	---	---				
III. Verbal Aggression	.54	.47	.36	.47	---	---		
IV. Physical Aggression	.65	.44	.61	.44	.80	.87	---	---
α	.78	.73	.72	.67	.73	.69	.74	.73

Note. F: Females, M: Males

All loadings and correlation coefficients are significant, $p < 0.01$

Relations between Violence and Aggressive Behavior for Males

Figure 2 shows the results for males. For males, the link of the perceived verbal violence with perceived verbal aggressive behavior ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.01$) and with perceived physical aggressive behavior ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.01$) were somewhat similar. This is, perceived verbal violence predicted perceived verbal aggressive behavior and perceived physical aggressive behavior positively and significantly. Also, perceived physical violence significantly predicted perceived verbal aggressive behavior ($\beta = 0.30, p < 0.01$) and perceived physical aggressive behavior ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.01$). This is, males who reported more physical family violence directed at them, reported more verbal aggression that they themselves exercised. The correlations between perceived verbal violence and perceived physical violence ($r = 0.58, p < 0.01$), and between perceived verbal aggression and perceived physical aggression ($r = 0.82, p < 0.01$) were all positive. The percent of variance explained in the perceived verbal aggression for males was 28% ($p < 0.01$); and the percent of variance explained in the perceived physical aggression was 25% ($p < 0.01$) also.

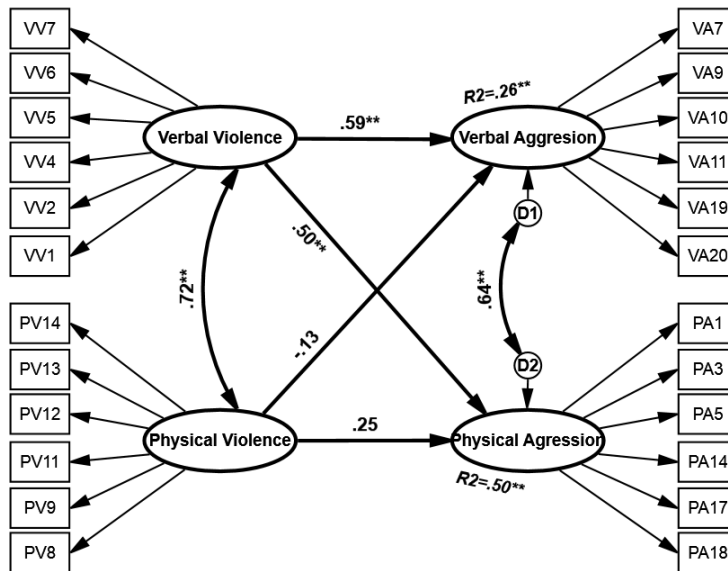


Figure 1. Path model for predicting verbal and physical aggression from verbal and physical violence for females
 Note: VV: Verbal violence; PV: Physical violence; VA: Verbal aggression; PA: Physical aggression. Numbers represent numbers in dataset.
 Loadings are reported in Table 3, ** p < 0.01

From Figure 1 and Figure 2 we can draw the following comparisons:

- a) Predicting perceived aggressive behavior (verbal and physical) by perceived family violence (verbal and physical) was more consistent among males (range between .27 and .30) than among females (range between .13 and .59). That is, males produced path coefficients that were closely similar.
- b) Perceived verbal family violence was a stronger predictor of both perceived verbal aggressive behavior and perceived physical aggressive behavior for females than for males.
- c) Perceived physical family violence was a stronger predictor of both perceived verbal and physical aggressive behaviors for males than for females. In contrast, perceived verbal family violence was a stronger predictor of both perceived verbal and perceived physical aggressive behaviors for females than for males.

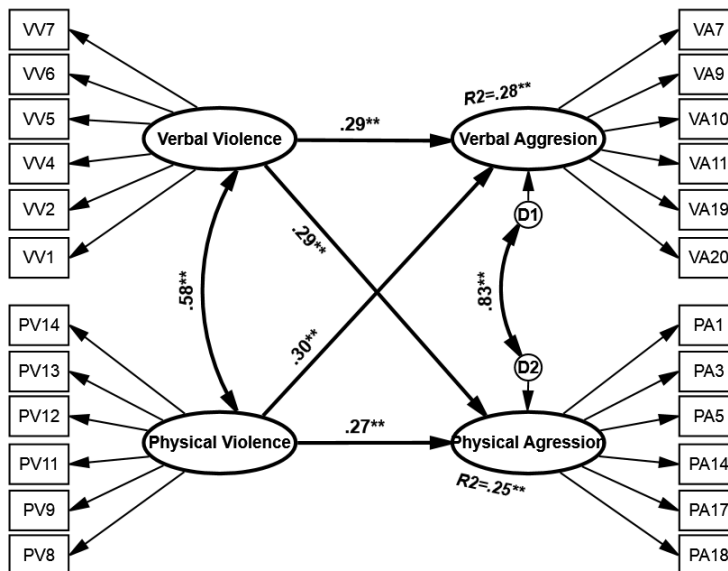


Figure 2. Path Model for Predicting Verbal and Physical Aggression from Verbal and Physical Violence for Males.
 Note: VV: Verbal violence; PV: Physical violence; VA: Verbal aggression; PA: Physical aggression. Numbers represent numbers in dataset.
 Loadings are reported in Table 3, ** p < 0.01

- d) The variance explained in each of the perceived verbal aggressive behavior and perceived physical aggressive behavior was larger for females than for males.

Discussion

Correlated Factors across Gender

The results of this analysis provide support to most previous studies in that violence is positively related to aggressive behavior regardless of the nature of violence and aggressive behavior (see Litrownik et al., 2003). This is true for both males and females. The results of the structural model (Table 3) produced results that are consistent with our predictions and with previous research (AlMotwa, 2008; Bandura, 1992; Hunaiti, et al., 2012; Jaareer & Lahrash, 2015; Litrownik et al., 2003; Marwah, 2012; Salim, 2014; Tayoub et al., 2010). Perceived family violence correlated positively with perceived aggressive behavior. Omani school children who perceived that they had been subjected to family violence reported that they acted more aggressively. These results provide support to the social cognitive theory in that children learn violence from the family and translate it to a behavior of their own. In other words, they perceive themselves as becoming more violent and aggressive.

Table 4: Fit Statistics for the Invariance Models across Gender

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	Δ TLI
Unconstrained	1067.194**	490	2.178	.908	.896	.032	.029	.035	---
Measurement weights	1100.679**	510	2.158	.905	.898	.032	.029	.034	-.002
Measurement intercepts	1578.122**	534	2.955	.827	.833	.041	.039	.043	.069
Structural weights	1602.284**	538	2.978	.825	.829	.041	.039	.044	.071
Structural co-variances	1637.063**	541	3.026	.821	.824	.042	.040	.044	.075
Structural residuals	1643.554**	544	3.021	.821	.824	.042	.039	.044	.075
Measurement residuals	2203.900**	569	3.873	.746	.738	.050	.048	.052	.150
Independence model	6793.067	552	12.306	.000	.000	.099	.097	.101	

Note: CFI: Comparative fit index; TLI: Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA: Root mean square error of approximation. Δ CFI = .003 and .081 for the measurement weights and intercepts, respectively, ** $p < 0.01$

Predicting Perceived Aggressive Behavior from Perceived Family Violence

The more interesting results came from the structural equation model with perceived family violence predicting perceived aggressive behavior. Considering the cultural characteristics of the Omani society, in particular, and the Arab-Muslim society, in general, we knew *a priori* that the relationship between violence inflicted on children and aggressive behavior of children would not be the same for males and females (Barakat, 1993). This contention is based on two justifications: one, comes from the Quran (*Male is not the same as female*), which reflects the different natures of males and females. Two, comes from the status and role of the male and female in the family and society. The results of the present study provide support to social cognitive theory, general aggression model, and previous research (e.g., Eriksen & Jensen, 2006), in addition to some postulates about the nature of each gender (Al-Farrayeh & Arabiat, 2016; Al-Swaiti, 2012). The results of this study are consistent with Litrownik et al. (2003) who found that children who were victims of verbal and physical violence showed more aggressive behavior (see also, Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Singer et al., 1999). The difference between our results and those of previous research is that the prediction is not consistent across gender and type of violence and aggression. If violence is verbal and the victim is male or female, the aggression, whether verbal or physical, is a consequence. If violence is physical and the victim is male –but not female–, the aggression, whether verbal or physical, is a consequence. These results support those of Eriksen and Jensen (2006), that males reported more aggression than females.

The findings of this study may give credence to the argument of the differential socialization hypothesis (Wood & Eagly, 2012). Males in the Arab society are socialized differently than females. The Arab family raises females to value modesty and shyness, but raises males to be tough and responsible (Abu-Hilal et al., 2016). Males are more physically able whilst females are more verbally able (Abu-Hilal, 2005). Females who perceived themselves as being victims of physical family violence did not report more verbal or physical aggressive behavior. This would probably support the intimidation hypothesis in that when females are victims of physical violence, they may place control on their strength. In addition, females who perceived themselves as victims of physical family violence did not translate this violence into physical aggressive behavior. The limitation of physical strength and intimidation, as well as socialization of females may explain such weak relation between perceived physical family violence and perceived physical aggressive behavior among females. Probably, when females get physically punished or are abused they get intimidated and refrain from acting physically. Possibly also, females may develop some kind of phobic syndrome as a result of physical violence or punishment. As Conway (2005) indicated, inhibiting anger and aggression may indirectly limit females development of a flexible emotional repertoire of strategies that they can use to regulate and express various emotions such as anger. Moreover, females who perceived they were subjected to physical violence, internalized family rules and teachings that females are weak and kind, and probably adhered to these rules. They may put constraints on their verbal and physical reactions.

Females were more vehement verbally. Females who saw themselves victims of verbal family violence turned to be more verbally aggressive. They seemed to have capitalized on their strength. This result may be consistent with the nature and abilities of females. Females are better verbally than physically. Therefore, it is not surprising that they translated verbal violence into verbal type of aggression. In contrast, males are encouraged to retaliate if they get into fight with other kids, but females are not (Barakat, 1993). In many parts of the Arab countries, females are called names similar to males when they become physical. The fear of a stereotype that may lessen their feministic nature may render less physical type of behavior. As indicated earlier, females are treated more kindly than males (Al-Farrayeh & Arabiat, 2016; Al-Swaiti, 2012). Hence, females learn more from the verbal violence than from the physical violence. They may be victims of verbal violence but rarely they may be victims of physical family violence.

Scrutiny of the item means revealed that males reported physical family violence much more than females. This is in support of Al-Farrayeh and Arabiat (2016) who found males were more harshly treated than females. In all of the six items that measured perceived family physical violence, males reported higher means ($p < .05$). The means of the six items that measured family verbal violence for males and females were similar with one item which females had a higher mean.

As for perceived aggressive behavior, males had greater means for four of the six items that measured perceived physical aggressive behavior. In contrast, females had greater means for two of the items that measured perceived verbal aggression; and males had greater means for two of the items. Our results imply that if punishment -verbal or physical- is used to discipline females, the method can be successful and effective as punishment did not result in aggressive behavior. In contrast, punishment as a method of discipline may not be effective with males as perceived verbal and physical punishment was associated with more verbal and physical aggressive behavior. Males and females in Omani society may not be treated equally when it comes to discipline. Consequently, the outcome in aggressive behavior is not the same for both genders.

In summary, whereas males translated both verbal and physical family violence into verbal and physical aggressive behaviors (see Eriksen & Jensen, 2006; Litrownik et al., 2003), females only developed verbal and physical aggressive behavior in conjunction with verbal family violence. Being subjected to physical violence, females did not translate such experiences into aggressive behavior of their own. This is probably because they perceived themselves being less subjected to family violence, be it verbal or physical. These results provide support to the views of the social cognitive theory that aggressive behavior is learned. Females learn what they see and experience, and males learn what they see and experience (see Al-Farrayeh & Arabiat, 2016; Al-Swaiti, 2012; Arabi-Katbi, 2012). A final note is that although the model of predicting the behavior of aggression from violence inflicted on children was adequate for males, it may not be as good model for females in Oman. A conversation with an Arab philosopher comes to mind and has significant implications. That philosopher had only two daughters. He said that he preferred rearing them for the street and not for home. "The boy by nature can defend himself, but if I instruct my females to be kind, modest and act as females, they would be incapable of facing any street surprises." Although we recognize the differential nature of males and females, we do believe that the Arab philosopher did not err when it comes to females rearing. Probably, families need to consider that society has changed and that female nowadays entered many fields that males are in. Females go to school as males do. They walk in the streets as males do. To imprison females in specific roles that hinder their abilities to act verbally and physically doesn't do any service to them.

Conclusion

As a complex phenomenon, aggressive behavior can't be readily and easily explained by family violence on children alone. The type of rearing and socialization add to the complexity of the aggressive behavior in that the differential socialization of males and females produced different explanations to the relationships between family violence and aggressive behavior.

Recommendations

Practically, teachers as well as counselors may develop initiatives and programs through which they can initiate group discussions with males and females. They may develop programs that help students express and talk about their conditions and treatments by their families. This kind of discussion may help children mitigate aggressive behavior. However, programs or initiatives need not be the same for females and males. Counselors who develop intervention programs based on verbal expression of anger, may provide females with more effective coping strategies and assist them in processing parents' disciplinary behaviors to react assertively in conflict situations (Powell & Ladd, 2010). Based on our results, families should know that good part of the children's aggressive behavior is learned from the family and the family should be involved in developing the programs.

Limitations

This study, however, is not without limitations. The study relied completely on self-report of family violence and aggressive behavior, which has known limitations. Also, the study is cross-sectional and doesn't imply causality. Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution. One can't rule out other factors that may be responsible for

aggressive behavior, be it actual or perceived. Also, since the instruments were responded to by the same source – students-, it is possible that a potential method bias exist in the students' responses. Saying all of that, the method bias can't severely affect the results of the study since males and females provided different responses. If method bias is serious source of common variance, males and females should have similar responses and similar associations between the predictor and criterion variables. Future research may consider obtaining data from different sources such as parents, peers and teachers. Also, other variables such as personality types, and other demographic variables (e.g., order of birth and the family size (number of males and females in the family) may be considered. The unlimited availability of social media and internet are sources for learning aggressive behavior and need to be considered in future research. In addition, self-defense mechanisms (e.g., compensation) may be explored to more fully understand aggressive behavior.

Conflict of Interest:

Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Mohammed S. Hammoud: Conceptualization, design. Maher M. Abu-Hilal: Conceptualization, analysis, writing editing/reviewing, supervision. Suad M. Al-Lawati: editing/reviewing. Muna M. Al-Bahrani: editing/reviewing. Yousuf S. Al-Rujaibi: data collection.

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