

Guerra, Nancy G. & Huesmann, L. Rowell. 1997: Children's normative beliefs about aggression and aggressive behavior. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. (72,2). 408-419.

Literature Review: Crick and Dodge (1994) used a schema concept that was applied to a range of social information, including information about self, others, social roles, and events. Focused on latent mental structures, which is consistent with recent research in social psychology that has emphasized the importance of cognitive schemata, or abstracted general knowledge, in the regulation of behaviors. Huesmann (1982) introduced a kind of cognitive schema called scripts into the analysis of aggressive behavior. The constancy of scripts accounts to a great extent for the stability of aggression across time and situations.

Purpose:

- Tested whether normative beliefs about aggression increases in stability with age.
- Examine affect of normative beliefs about aggression in both genders and across ethnic groups.

Methods:

- Study 1, Sample: 1,550 first (784) & fourth (766) graders from low socioeconomic, high crime neighborhoods. Approximately 38.3% African American, Hispanic 36.6%, and White 18.1%.
- Study 2, Sample: 1,015 inner city kids in second (317), third (323), and fifth (375) graders. 503 girls and 512 boys.
- Study 1 and 2, Variables: Set of 88 questions suitable for elementary school children about aggression. Questions based on four main categories: severity of provocation, severity of response, gender of provoker, and gender of responsibility.
- Study 1 and 2, Procedure: Testing administered individually for children in first grade and for other grades administered in regular classroom setting. Questions read aloud, one assistant present in giving tests. Spanish translators present when needed for test taking.

Results/Conclusions:

- Children's normative beliefs about aggression correlated significantly with their actual aggressive behavior.
- The correlations between beliefs and behavior aggregated across grades were higher than the correlations within grades.
- 1st graders develop normative beliefs on the basis of: their own behavior and how it is reinforced; from observing the behavior of others; and through direct tuition they receive from peers, parents, and others.
- Beliefs about aggressive behavior influenced by own early social behaviors, which become moderately stable in elementary grades and influence on social behavior after that increases.