

# SOCIAL SKILLS AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR OF ADOLESCENTS

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## ABSTRACT

*In order for a man as a social being to achieve appropriate social development, it is necessary to know and understand the norms, rules and values of the community in which the individual lives. School life takes place in the interaction between students and teachers. Different forms of aggressive behavior are observed in the school environment. Today, as a protective factor against aggressive behavior, special importance is attached to social skills, however, one of the questions is how effective are the programs based on social skills in preventing maladaptive behaviors among young people? Therefore, the main problem of this research was to examine the relationship between social skills and aggressive behavior of young people, while the aim of the work was to investigate the predictive values of social skills for aggressiveness, and to determine differences in relation to gender and school success. The research was conducted on a convenience sample of 823 adolescents from the area of Tuzla Canton, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The results of the research indicated that it is important to develop social skills in order to make aggressive behavior prevention programs more effective.*

**Keywords:** social skills, aggressiveness, youth, school success

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## INTRODUCTION

Secondary education represents a stage in the life of young people that is often the most difficult obstacle for young people with socially unacceptable behavior. Frequent misunderstandings arise since it is impossible to gain insight into all forms of social interaction and behavior of young people, especially those that are considered unacceptable. The development of social skills, self-confidence and self-esteem is a more important factor for a child's long-term success than his cognitive abilities [1]. The very word - social skills, indicates that the children need to be given a lot of opportunities to observe a behavior, understand its purpose and consequences, demonstrate, analyze and practice.

Social skills are defined as social behaviors that are known to be good indicators of social competence, they are learned by imitation, through the method of learning through effects, and are later strengthened through interaction with other members with whom peers come into contact at school, i.e., wider the social environment in which we live [2]. At the same time, they are adopted by growing up, through the interaction with other groups such as peers, school, work. In this way, they are determined and changed [3].

Grešam [4] emphasizes that no other category of behavior is as important for the adapted functioning of children and youth with behavioral disorders as social skills. Social skills can be assessed based on certain clusters: cooperation, empathy, responsibility, assertiveness, self-control. Usually, the list of social skills consists of: assertive skills, skills related to feelings, skills that are important for planning, etc.

Among children at school, criminogenic infection is increasingly pronounced, i.e., antisocial behavior that spreads like a "virus" and is the source and focus of all forms of socially maladjusted behavior of children and young people [5]. Loeber and Hay [6] state that in preschool and primary school age, boys are prone to physical aggression, girls are more inclined to indirect forms of aggression. However, not all studies have shown gender differences in aggressiveness. Parke and Salby [7] report on equal aggressiveness of men and women, but under certain conditions. According to the mentioned research, girls are equal to men in aggressive behavior when there is weak supervision of others over their behavior, when the diffusion of responsibility for individual aggressive reactions is allowed, when it comes to the anonymity of the aggressor or when someone else is explicitly held responsible for their aggressiveness. Physical forms of aggressive behavior are more common among young men, while verbal forms are more characteristic of girls. Teachers' assessments showed that male subjects were more inattentive, restless, prone to aggressiveness and antisocial behavior than female subjects [8]. Numerous works speak in favor of the fact that young men are more prone to predominantly active forms of behavior such as delinquent and aggressive behavior, conduct disorder, but also the consumption of psychoactive substances, especially alcohol and marijuana [9].

The school places great emphasis on student success. Research on risk factors often cite poor school performance. It has been shown that school stress and failure at school can stimulate feelings of incompetence and helplessness, and thus some forms of self-destructive behavior [10]. The above indicates that negative academic achievements cause an increase in internalized symptoms. For this reason, it is necessary to reduce the focus solely on academic success and develop new policies and programs that simultaneously improve student health, socio-emotional status, and academic results. According to Bouillet and Uzelac [11], in every school you can find between 5 and 7% of students with unacceptable behavior, where we are talking about students who show at least one of three groups of unacceptable behavior: breach of duty (mainly violation of house rules), failure to comply commitment to school and the use of violent forms of behavior. It is also believed that about two-thirds of students who exhibit a high level of risky behavior commit criminal acts.

According to Hinshaw [12], it is stated that the links between school failure and difficulties in adjusting behavior have long been noticed. Numerous studies have confirmed the reciprocal relationship between poor academic achievement and behavioral disorders. Poor school performance is significant for predicting peer violence, where poor school performance is associated with more violence [13]. Macanović [14]. Also, in his research that he conducted with juvenile delinquents, he indicates that they have a negative attitude towards school and achieve modest results in education, and most of them voluntarily stop schooling.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research goal*

The main problem of this research was to examine the relationship between social skills and aggressive behavior of young people. The aim of this paper was to investigate whether social skills are significant correlates of aggressive behavior, to determine their predictive values for aggressiveness, as well as to determine whether there are significant differences in the mentioned variables with regard to school performance and gender.

### *Research hypotheses*

1. It is expected that there is a connection between social skills and aggressive behavior in high school students, as well as that social skills are significant predictors of aggressiveness.
2. It is assumed that girls rate themselves significantly better on the scale of social skills and that they show less aggressiveness compared to boys.
3. It is expected that there is a difference in social skills and aggressive behavior with regard to school performance.

### *Research methods, techniques and research instruments*

Considering the nature of the work, the following research methods were used: theoretical analysis and synthesis method, survey research method. The techniques used in the research are: content analysis and assessment (self-assessment). The research used a sociodemographic questionnaire adapted for this research, a questionnaire for assessing aggressive behavior and a questionnaire for social skills. The research was conducted on a convenience sample, where the research population consisted of young people attending secondary schools in the area of Tuzla Canton, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The research included N=823 respondents (403 male and 420 female, which in percentages represents the ratio 48.96% : 51.04%). The age of the students ranged from 16 to 19 years. The research was conducted in 2021.

## RESULTS

The first hypothesis was related to the examination of the relationship between social skills and aggressiveness. The results show that there is a significant negative relationship between aggressiveness and social skills ( $r = -.176$ ;  $p = .000$ ), also a negative significant relationship of aggressiveness was found with dimensions of social skills: assertiveness ( $r = -.144$ ;  $p = .000$ ), cooperativeness ( $r = -.202$ ;  $p = .000$ ), self-control ( $r = -.154$ ;  $p = .000$ ) and empathy ( $r = -.138$ ;  $p = .000$ ). The above results are presented in the table 1.

*Table 1. Correlation of aggressiveness with social skills*

		Social skills	Assertiveness	Cooperativeness	Self-control	Empathy
Aggressiveness	Pearson Correlation	-.176**	-.144**	-.202**	-.154**	-.138**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	823	823	823	823	823

The predictive value of social skills for aggressiveness was further examined. It is evident from the table that the multiple correlation coefficient between all predictor variables and criteria is ( $R = -.203$ ;  $F = 8.761$ ,  $p = .000$ ).

**Table 2.** Multiple regression analysis with beta loadings and individual significance levels contribution to the criterion variable aggressiveness

Predictors	$\beta$	t	P	
Assertiveness	-.011	-.205	.837	
Cooperativeness	-.216	-3.416	.001	
Self control	-.004	-.073	.942	
Empathy	.033	.602	.547	
	R = -.203 .041	R Square= F = 8.761	p=.000	

The next hypothesis related to the examination of differences in social skills and aggressiveness in relation to gender. The presented data show that there is a statistically significant difference in social skills in relation to gender (Mm=57.42; SD=13.33; Mž=59.94, SD=11.102, t(821)=-2.937, p=.003), where girls estimate that they have a higher level of social skills. A significant difference was also found on the dimensions of cooperativeness (t (821) = -3.827, p=.000), self-control (t (821) = -2.705, p=.007), empathy (t (821) = -6.019, p=.000), no significant difference was found on the assertiveness dimension. Also, no significant statistical difference was found when it comes to aggressiveness in relation to gender (Mm=180.80, SD=67.74; Mž=175.71, SD=71.60; t (821) = 1.043, p=.296) (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Gender differences in social skills and aggressiveness

	Gender	N	M	SD	SEM	t	p
Social skills	Male	403	57.42	13.337	.664	-2.937	.003
	Female	420	59.94	11.102	.541		
Assertiveness	Male	403	14,57	3,52629	.175	1,688	.092
	Female	420	14,16	3,4394	.167		
Cooperativeness	Male	403	14,59	3,77625	.188	-3,827	.000
	Female	420	15,53	3,23362	.157		
Self control	Male	403	14,49	3,8016	.189	-2,705	.007
	Female	420	15,16	3,28021	.160		
Empathy	Male	403	15,12	3,54341	.176	-6,019	.000
	Female	420	16,53	3,14703	.153		
Aggressiveness	Male	403	180,80	67,741	3,374	1,046	.296
	Female	420	175,71	71,604	3,493		

The third hypothesis was related to the examination of the difference in aggressiveness and social skills in relation to school success. The obtained results did not show significant differences either in aggressive behavior (F (817) = 1.687, p= .168), or in social skills with regard to school success (F (817) = 1.656, P= .175). Significant differences were individually found in social skills in relation to school success and in: cooperation (F (817) = 1.687, p= .168) and self-control (F (817) = 3.355, p= .018)

**Table 4.** Differences in aggression and social skills with regard to school performance

		N	M	SD	SEM	F	P
Aggressiveness	Insufficient and sufficient	107	184.52	63.879	6.175	1.687	.168
	A good one	218	169.56	72.023	4.878		
	Very good	342	179.63	67.907	3.672		
	Excellent	156	182.81	73.75	5.904		
	In total	823	178.20	69.74	2.431		
Social skills	Insufficient and sufficient	107	57.79	14.00	1.354	1.656	.175
	A good one	218	59.10	12.03	.815		
	Very good	342	57.97	12.42	.671		
	Excellent	156	60.39	11.03	.883		
	In total	823	58.70	12.30	.428		
Assertiveness	Insufficient and sufficient	107	14,64	3,81	0,368		
	A good one	218	14529	3,59	.243		
	Very good	342	14,3403	3,38	0,183	0,244	0.865
	Excellent	156	14,242	3,33	0,266		
	In total	823	57,3769	8,73	0,3046		
Cooperativeness	Insufficient and sufficient	107	14,8336	3,85	0,3724		
	A good one	218	15,0209	3,49	0,236		
	Very good	342	14,8429	3,54	0,191		
	Excellent	156	15,8024	3,28	0,262	2,889	0,035
	In total	823	15,0707	3,53	0,123		
Self control	Insufficient and sufficient	107	14,4597	4,03	0,390		
	A good one	218	14,9159	3,43	0,232		
	Very good	342	14,5663	3,56	0,192		
	Excellent	156	15,5741	3,28	0,262		
	In total	823	14,8361	3,55	0,124	3,355	0,018
Empathy	Insufficient and sufficient	107	15,5122	3,54	0,342		
	A good one	218	15,9028	3,31	0,224		
	Very good	342	15,7246	3,55	0,192	1,236	0,295
	Excellent	156	16,2514	3,15	0,252		
	In total	823	15,8441	3,41797	0,119		

## DISCUSSION

Based on the obtained results, it is noticeable that there is a significant negative correlation between social skills and aggressive behavior. When it comes to the prediction of aggressive behavior based on social skills, they are a significant predictor of the criterion variable. The results showed that there are some similarities and some differences with other research. This indicates the need for a serious approach in developing programs that are based on social skills. In addition to everything, it is necessary to pay attention to what constitutes social skills and what skills are needed for a particular school, students and environment, and who should be included and activated. Namely, the results show that the variance of aggressiveness is explained by 4.1% and that the only significant predictors are cooperativeness. From the perspective of developing programs for prevention and reduction of aggressiveness, the most interesting negative predictors are cooperativeness, which should be given attention in preventive programs. The justification of the results could go in the direction of trying to compensate for the lack of cooperation with aggressive tendencies and attracting attention in a socially unacceptable way. The results showed no significant difference between girls and boys in aggressiveness. In recent years, there are more and more studies that indicate that girls are not less aggressive than boys, but that they show their aggressiveness in a less open and more socially acceptable way [15]. Different reactions of parents influence the different expression and manifestation of aggressiveness in boys and girls. However, when we try to summarize the results of expressing aggressive behavior of children and adolescents in relation to gender, the results indicate that there are significantly more boys than girls. Our results agree with the first interpretation and show no difference between male and female gender, except only on the scale of physically manifest aggressiveness, which is expected.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the presented results, it is possible to draw several conclusions. A statistically significant negative correlation between social skills and aggressive behavior was established, cooperativeness as a dimension of social skills is a significant predictor of aggressive behavior. The regression model of social skills explains 4.1% of the variance in aggressiveness. Significant differences were found in cooperativeness, self-control and empathy in relation to gender, while no significant difference in aggressiveness was found in relation to gender. No significant differences were found in aggressiveness regarding school performance. Significant differences were also found on the dimensions of cooperativeness and self-control in relation to school success. When it comes to the assessment of social skills, we should not forget that people strive for a positive assessment, even if it is not realistic in certain circumstances. All the above implications suggest that more attention should be paid to checking the development of social skills and encouraging them in order to prevent aggressive behavior.

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