THE COGNITIVE ORIENTATION OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL CHILDREN

ALIZA CARMEL, SHULAMITH KREITLER

Abstract

The purpose was to construct and test a tool for assessing the motivation for aggression in elementary school children. The cognitive orientation questionnaire of aggression in children (CO-AC) was developed in the framework of the cognitive orientation theory (Kreitler, 2004) which describes how cognitive contents and processes shape motivations and behaviors. The CO-AC is a forced-choice self-report tool. In study 1 it was tested in a sample of 186 children of both genders in the 4th to 7th grade. Aggressiveness was assessed by teachers’ ratings and peers sociometric nominations. In study 2 a short version of the CO-AC was tested in a sample of 44 children of both genders in the 4th to 7th grade in the Scouts’ youth movement. The measures of aggression were the guides’ ratings, direct observations of physical aggression incidents and sociometric nominations. The CO-AC has satisfactory reliability and validity. It differentiated significantly between aggressive and non-aggressive children in terms of mean scores and discriminant analysis. The studies showed that motivation for aggression is a matrix of varied beliefs referring to five major factors of self focus, toughness, action orientation, immediacy and cautious distrust of others.

Cuvinte-cheie: motivaţie, agresivitate, elevi, orientare cognitivă.

Key words: motivation, aggression, school children, cognitive orientation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have witnessed an increase in the aggression of younger individuals (Newton, 2010). Aggressive behavior in the framework of the schools has risen to such peaks that it has begun to affect seriously the welfare of children in schools and the management of schools (Mulvey & Cauffman, 2001). The rise in children’s aggressive behavior has been considered as particularly worrisome because it generates a great number of problems in the family life, schooling and social relations of the children (Esau, 2003), and may also affect their adjustment and development later in life (Kokko, Pulkkinen & Fuustinen, 2000). The seriousness of the problem is further enhanced by the limited effectiveness of most focused interventions (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001) and by the restricted possibility of handling children’s aggression by means of penalty procedures commonly applied in regard to aggressive behavior in older adults.

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The etiology of aggression in children remains unclear. Identified causes include social factors, such as exposure to aggressive models; environmental factors, such as crowding and heat; situational factors, such as availability of aggressive tools and provocation; individual determinants, such as physiological state or arousal and genetics; and personality tendencies, such as need for social approval and external locus of control (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Esau, 2003).

Our studies were done in the framework of the cognitive orientation (CO) theory. This is a cognitive theory of motivation which assumes that cognitive contents and processes guide behavior (Kreitler & Kreitler, 1976, 1982). This approach was selected because of the growing evidence that cognitive attitudes affect aggression (e.g., Berkowitz, 1997; Connor, 2004) and the special advantages of the CO theory for the prediction and change of behaviors. The CO theory has been applied successfully in predicting and changing a great variety of behaviors in adults and children, e.g., impulsiveness, planning, curiosity and exploration, achievement, reactions to success and failure, and rigidity (e.g., Kreitler & Kreitler, 1976, 1987, 1994; Zakay, Bar-El & Kreitler, 1984).

The basic assumption is that any act in the human system is a function of a motivational disposition, which provides the directionality, and the actual implementation of the act, that provides the procedural operational enactment (Kreitler, 2004). The motivational disposition is a vector representing four types of beliefs that refer to themes relevant to the behavior in question. The belief types are: (a) Beliefs about self, which express information about oneself, one’s actions, feelings, abilities, e.g., ‘I must get what I want without delay’; (b) Beliefs about rules and norms, which express ethical, esthetic, social and other rules and standards, e.g., ‘One should never trust others’; (c) Beliefs about goals, which express actions or states desired or undesired by the individual, e.g., ‘I want to be respected by others”; and (d) General beliefs, which express information about others and the environment, e.g., ‘Most kids try to get the better of you’. The beliefs do not refer directly to the behavior in question (in our case, aggression) but to deeper meanings or themes of the behavior which are identified by a standard interviewing procedure of pretest subjects. The beliefs referring to the themes are assessed in a multiple-choice closed format questionnaire. The scores provide information about the motivational disposition.

2. STUDY 1

2.1. OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to construct a questionnaire of aggressiveness in elementary school children that would shed light on the multiplicity of constituents that make up the motivation for aggression and would enable their integration. An instrument of this kind would make it possible to assess the motivation for aggression, to identify children at risk for aggression, to design intervention
programs geared to deal adequately with the specific motivational constituents of aggressiveness, to evaluate programs aimed at the reduction of aggression, and analyze the reasons why they have succeeded or failed and wherein they have failed.

Our hypothesis was that aggressive children would score higher than non-aggressive ones on the variables of the CO-AC.

2.2. METHOD

2.2.1. Participants

The number of participants was 186 (102 boys, 84 girls), in the age range of 9; 1 to 12; 5 (M = 11; 2, SD=0.9), from the 4th to the 7th grades. They were all from medium low SES families as determined by a modified Hollingshead index (Hollingshead & Redlich, 1958).

2.2.2. Instruments

(a) The CO-AC. It included 135 items in the four parts: one dealing with beliefs about self (n = 37), one with rules and norms (n = 31), one with beliefs about goals (n = 32), and one with general beliefs (n = 35). All four parts were administered together in random order, each part with separate instructions. The items were presented as statements with four response alternatives: Not true, Mostly not true, Quite true, Very true, scored as 1 to 4, respectively. About half of the items were in reversed direction.

The items referred to 20 themes, none of which mentioned aggression. The themes represented underlying meanings of aggression. They were identified in interviews with pretest subjects (16, four from each of the grades including two aggressive and two non-aggressive) conducted in accordance with the standard procedure generated by the CO theory (Kreitler & Kreitler, 1982). It consisted in requesting the participants to communicate the meaning of aggressive behavior and then of the terms they had used in the communication. Themes that occurred at the end-points of the interview in at least three interviewees were selected as themes for the CO-AC (see list in Table 1). Each theme was represented by 1–3 statements in each of the belief types. The scores were the sum of responses in the four belief types and the 20 themes.

(b) Sociometric scale. This scale was a modified version of several measures of aggression based on peer reports which mostly refer to lists of specific aggressive behaviors (e.g., Deluty, 1979). It included 5 items: to name in random order those “in your class” who are “the 5 best students”, the “5 who are best in sports”, the “5 who are your best friends”, the “5 who are the most unruly children”, and the “5 who are the most quiet and well-behaved children”. Only the last two items were relevant for the study. The rest were used for concealing the purpose of the study. The score 3 was assigned to a child who was named as
among the 5 most unruly ones by at least 25% of his/her class and by none as among the best behaved ones; the score of 1 to a child who was named as among the 5 most unruly ones by no more than 2 children and by none as among the best behaved ones; the rest got score 2.

(c) The Rating Scale of Aggressiveness. It requested the teacher to rate the frequency with which each child used physical force toward peers or was involved in fights. There were three response alternatives: often, seldom and almost never, scored as 3, 2 and 1, respectively.

The CO-AC was designed to assess the motivation for aggressiveness; the sociometric scale and the teachers’ ratings were designed to provide criterion measures.

2.2.3. Procedure

The questionnaires to the children were administered in random order in two separate group sessions, 7–10 days apart, of which one was devoted to the CO-AC, and the other to the sociometric scale. All children who were present at school on the days on which the study was run participated in the sessions. The administration took place in the classrooms, for the whole class together, in school hours, in the presence of the same experimenter. The study was introduced to the children as a basis for a new program for social hours, designed to improve interpersonal relations in the children’s group. They were asked to write their names on the questionnaires for purposes of coordinating information, but in accordance with the informed consent signed by their parents, it was explained to them that their identity and their responses would be kept completely confidential. The children did not know about the teachers’ ratings.

The teachers got the sheets of the rating scales with the names of the students alphabetically ordered. The teachers did not know the hypotheses of the study and the questionnaires administered to the children or their results. Debriefing was conducted after termination of the study.

2.3. RESULTS

2.3.1. Measures of Aggression

The interrelations between the two measures of aggression showed that the teachers’ ratings and the sociometric scales were significantly related ($\chi^2 = 262.02$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$; $r = .862$, $p < .001$, range across grades $r = .84$ to $r = .93$, $p < .001$).

Correspondence between teachers’ and peers’ scores was complete in regard to 182 of the 186 children (i.e., 97.85%): 108 got the score of 1 by both, 3 the score of 2 and 71 the score of 3. Four children got different scores by teachers and peers (one-step apart), and were classified in line with teachers ratings after discussions
which showed that the ratings were not likely to be biased (see also Archer & Coyne, 2005 on using teachers’ ratings for validation). Since only 3 children got medium scores, all those who got 3 were considered as aggressive (71 or 38.2%) and the rest as non-aggressive (115 or 61.8%). The distribution of genders showed a bias in favor of boys (of all aggressive children, 67.6% were boys; of all boys 44.4% were aggressive but of all girls only 27.3%), which corresponds to a great number of reports in the literature (Card et al., 2008). Therefore, the material will be analyzed both for the whole sample together as well as for each of the genders.

2.3.2. The CO-AC

The means, SDs and α reliability coefficients for general beliefs, self beliefs, norms, goals, and the total were 2.63 (.38) α = .81, 2.83 (.32) α = .78, 2.56 (.28), α = .63, 3.06 (.36) α = .83, 2.76 (.34), α = 82, respectively. Reliability is satisfactory, especially in view of the fact that the questionnaire is based on 20 different themes.

All belief types are significantly (p < .001) correlated in the range of r = .48 to r = .63. A factor analysis on the themes of the CO-AC yielded five distinct factors accounting for 89.6% of the variance (for numbers of listed themes see Table 1): Factor 1: Self focus (saturations: themes 6, 10–12,14,20; major themes Attaining one’s goal by whatever it takes, Not considering others); Factor 2: Toughness (saturations: themes 1–2,17–18); main themes Communicating courage, Dominating others); Factor 3: Immediacy (saturations: themes 3–5; main themes Immediate gratification, Acting without planning); Factor 4: Action orientation (saturations: themes 13, 16, 19; main themes Actions instead of words, Escape from boredom); and Factor 5: Cautious distrust (saturations: 7–9, 15, 18; main theme Distrusting others). The eigenvalues and variance of the five factors are 7.42 (37.5%), 6.18 (21.8%), 5.25 (14.6%), 4.92 (8.50%), 2.09 (7.20%), respectively.

Comparisons of the means of boys and girls within the group of aggressive children on the variables of CO-AC (belief types and themes) showed that of the 25 comparisons only two yielded significant results in themes, which in line with Bonferroni criteria may be attributed to chance.

The relation between the CO-AC and the dependent measure of aggressive behavior. Table 1 shows that the aggressive children scored significantly higher than the non-aggressive children on all four belief types as well as on 19 of the 20 themes comprising the CO-AC. The comparisons of belief types and 16 of the 20 themes are significant also in view of the Bonferroni test (for 25 comparisons p < .01 for interpreting as p < .05). The remaining 4 need to be interpreted with caution.

Notably, the aggressive children score significantly higher also on the CO index score. Their score is > 3.00 while the non-aggressive ones score < .300. Since according to the CO theory, the expected behavior is manifested if the CO score is at least 3, the findings contribute to establishing the validity of the CO-AC.
Table 1
Mean Comparisons of Scores of Aggressive and Non-Aggressive Children on the Variables Belief Type and Themes of the CO Questionnaire of Aggression in Children (CO-AC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CO Variables</th>
<th>Aggressive</th>
<th>Non-Aggressive</th>
<th>t-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scores of belief types</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about Self</td>
<td>3.01 .32</td>
<td>2.71 .33</td>
<td>6.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about Norms</td>
<td>2.63 .33</td>
<td>2.52 .27</td>
<td>2.44***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Beliefs</td>
<td>2.81 .43</td>
<td>2.52 .37</td>
<td>4.68***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about Goals</td>
<td>3.20 .36</td>
<td>2.97 .41</td>
<td>4.03***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO Scorea</td>
<td>3.25 .22</td>
<td>2.26 .27</td>
<td>27.50***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores of themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Courage</td>
<td>2.98 .35</td>
<td>2.75 .31</td>
<td>4.60***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Strength</td>
<td>2.84 .36</td>
<td>2.67 .39</td>
<td>2.99**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Immediate gratification</td>
<td>2.63 .34</td>
<td>2.45 .38</td>
<td>3.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Immediate response</td>
<td>2.77 .41</td>
<td>2.53 .37</td>
<td>4.00***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. No planning</td>
<td>3.11 .42</td>
<td>2.87 .36</td>
<td>4.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Attaining goal</td>
<td>3.20 .18</td>
<td>2.68 .35</td>
<td>13.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Respect</td>
<td>3.18 .28</td>
<td>2.90 .41</td>
<td>5.60***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Distrust</td>
<td>3.27 .36</td>
<td>3.00 .39</td>
<td>4.82***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Belonging</td>
<td>2.96 .37</td>
<td>2.43 .40</td>
<td>10.82***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Disregarding others’ feelings</td>
<td>2.77 .38</td>
<td>2.48 .42</td>
<td>4.91***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Not considering others</td>
<td>2.96 .35</td>
<td>2.61 .34</td>
<td>6.73**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Narcissism</td>
<td>3.15 .39</td>
<td>2.87 .41</td>
<td>4.75***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Actions not words</td>
<td>2.84 .38</td>
<td>2.71 .32</td>
<td>9.41*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. No justice</td>
<td>2.90 .37</td>
<td>2.76 .35</td>
<td>2.41*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Independence</td>
<td>3.12 .41</td>
<td>2.97 .37</td>
<td>2.54*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Tension</td>
<td>2.83 .40</td>
<td>2.75 .38</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Concealing emotions</td>
<td>3.24 .44</td>
<td>2.90 .39</td>
<td>5.96***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Dominating others</td>
<td>3.24 .45</td>
<td>2.92 .40</td>
<td>5.00***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Anti boredom</td>
<td>2.82 .37</td>
<td>2.31 .41</td>
<td>8.95***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Rejecting curbs on freedom</td>
<td>2.89 .36</td>
<td>2.55 .38</td>
<td>6.18***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The CO Score is an index ranging from 0 to 4, indicating the number of belief types in which one scores above the group’s mean.

** p < .05. *** p < .01. **** p < .001.

Stepwise discriminant analyses with the four belief types or the five theme-based factor scores as predictors of membership in the aggressive or non-aggressive groups were performed. The belief types enabled correct predictions of 83.33% of the children (i.e., 33.3% better than the 50% chance level, Critical Ratio = 6.82, p < .001). The eigenvalue, canonical correlation and Wilk’s lambda were .38, .59 and .74 (p < .05), respectively. All four belief types had a significant contribution (the coefficients for general, self, norm, and goal beliefs were .98, .96, .65, and .51, respectively). The results with the theme factors as predictors were similar: correct prediction of group membership of 79.03% of the children (i.e., 29.03% better than the 50% chance level, Critical Ratio = 5.85, p < .001). The eigenvalue, canonical correlation and Wilk’s lambda were .35, .56 and .78 (p < .05), respectively. All five factors had a significant contribution (the coefficients were .65, .35, .58, .37, and .41.
for factors 1 to 5, respectively). A replication of the discriminant analyses for boys and girls separately yielded results comparable to those obtained for the sample as a whole.

2.4. DISCUSSION

This study focused on constructing a CO questionnaire of aggressiveness in children. The CO-AC was shown to have adequate reliability and validity. The validity was confirmed by the significant relations between the scores of the CO-AC and the measures of aggressive behavior – the ratings of aggressiveness by teachers and peers, which were highly correlated (see also Pakaslahti & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 2000). Hence, it may be concluded that the CO-AC is adequate for assessing motivation for aggressiveness in children in the examined sample, i.e., from the 4th to the 7th grade.

3. STUDY 2

3.1. OBJECTIVES

Study 2 had three goals. First, to reinforce the conclusions of Study 1 by replicating it on a sample and in a different context from those of Study 1. The sample in Study 1 consisted of children in a lower middle-class neighborhood of a small town, in which they may have been exposed to some violence, and the questionnaires were administered in the setting of the schools and in the presence of teachers, which could have contributed to increasing aggressiveness. The sample in Study 2 included children of upper middle class in a big city, in a less restrictive setting, namely that of the Scouts’ youth movement organization.

The second goal was to validate the CO-AC against actually observed aggressive behaviors. The third goal was to test a shortened version of the CO-AC, which would enable a wider and more economical use of the questionnaire.

The hypotheses were the same as those in Study 1, namely, aggressive children will have higher score on the variables of the CO-AC than non-aggressive children.

3.2. METHOD

3.2.1. Participants

There were 44 participants, 25 girls and 19 boys (56.8% vs. 43.2%, Critical Ratio 1.38, ns), from the 4th to the 7th grade, all members of the Scouts’ organization in a central city. All children of the relevant grades participated.

3.2.2. Instruments

Four instruments were used:

(a) The short version of the CO-AC. It included 63 items (45.6% of the original), representing 18 of the 20 original themes (the excluded themes were No. 6:
Tension, and No. 20: Rejecting curbs on one’s freedom). The items were selected from the full version as those with the highest contributions to the coefficients of reliability within each type of belief, and so that each theme was represented by at least one item in each of the four belief types.

(b) The Sociometric scale. It included the same five items as in Study 1. But in view of the limited number of children in the reference group, the participants were requested to name three (instead of five) of their friends who were “most unruly”, “most quiet and well-behaved” etc. It was scored as in Study 1.

(c) Rating scale for the children’s guides. The scouts’ guides who knew the children were administered the same rating scales as the teachers in Study 1. Same scoring procedures were applied.

(d) Observations of aggressive incidents. The observations were to be recorded by the Age Group Supervisors (each of whom was responsible for supervising one of the age groups) twice a week, for two consecutive weeks, for 3 hours each time. Each incident of overt aggressiveness in which each of the participants was involved was to be recorded (e.g., beating, pushing). One score was the number of aggressive incidents in which the participant was involved in the course of formal group sessions, and the other score was the number of such incidents outside formal sessions but still in the framework of the Scouts.

3.2.3. Procedure

The CO-AC and the Sociometric scale were administered to the children in random order in one session, in the afternoon hours, in the framework of the routine formal sessions of the Scouts, in the presence of the experimenter. The guides filled the rating scales and the supervisors their observation sheets independently without knowing about each others’ tasks. The children did not know about the guides’ and supervisors’ tasks and the latter did not know about the children’s questionnaires.

3.3. RESULTS

3.3.1. Measures of Aggression

The two scores of observed aggression – in and outside sessions – were correlated significantly (r = .38, p < .01). Further, the ratings of aggression by the guide and the observations of aggression by the supervisor were correlated positively and significantly, in regard to aggression both in (r = .91, p < .001) and outside sessions (r = .39, p < .01). These results confirm the validity of adults’ (teachers’ or guides’) ratings as a measure of aggressiveness in children.

The ratings of peers were not used because they were not correlated with the guides’ ratings or with the observations of aggression in sessions but only with those outside the sessions (r = .81, p < .001). Accordingly, the selected measure of aggressiveness was the guides’ ratings. Fifteen (34.1%) children were classified as aggressive and 29 (60.9%) as non-aggressive.
3.3.2. The CO-AC Short Version

The reliability coefficients of the four belief types were high (.78 to .91). The four belief types were significantly interrelated (r = .85–.89). Gender differences in three themes did not pass the Bonferroni criteria.

The relation between the CO-AC and the dependent measure of aggressive behavior. The aggressive children scored significantly higher than non-aggressive children on all four types of beliefs, on the index CO score, and on 17 of the 18 themes represented in the CO-AC short version. The means and SDs for beliefs about self, norms, general beliefs, goals and the CO score in the aggressive and non-aggressive children were: 2.66 (.32) and 1.97 (.34), 2.43 (.33) and 2.12 (.33), 2.56 (.36) and 1.78 (.41), 3.01 (.54) and 1.54 (.56), respectively.

Stepwise discriminant analyses with the four belief types or the five theme-based factor scores as predictors of membership in the aggressive or non-aggressive groups were performed. The belief types enabled correct predictions of 90.9% of the children (i.e., 40.9% better than the 50% chance level, Critical Ratio = 2.82, p < .01). The eigenvalue, canonical correlation and Wilk’s lambda were .35, .62 and .69 (p < .05), respectively. All four belief types had a significant contribution (the coefficients for general, self, goals and norm beliefs were .97, .92, .60, and .56, respectively). The results with the theme factors as predictors were similar: correct prediction of group membership of 81.82% of the children (i.e., 31.82% better than the 50% chance level, Critical Ratio = 2.11, p < .05). The eigenvalue, canonical correlation and Wilk’s lambda were .32, .58 and .64 (p < .05), respectively. All five factors self focus, immediacy, toughness, cautious distrust and action orientation had a significant contribution (the coefficients were .55, .36, .59, .32, and .38 for factors 1 to 5, respectively).

Comparable results were obtained for boys and girls in both types of analyses.

3.4. DISCUSSION

The major conclusions are that the shorter version of the CO-AC has satisfactory reliability and good validity, which was proved in regard to ratings of guides in a setting outside the school and in regard to physical manifestations of aggressiveness.

4. GENERAL DISCUSSION

The major contribution of the two studies is the construction and testing of a new tool for assessing the motivational disposition toward aggression in elementary school children. The tool is grounded in a cognitive theory of motivation that provided the means for identifying the relevant contents (namely, themes) and adequate form (namely, four belief types) for assessing the motivation for aggressiveness. The resulting questionnaire was presented in a long and short version and passed successfully the tests for reliability and validity in two different
samples. The short version compared well with the longer one in terms of its reliability, factorial structure and discriminative validity. The validity was confirmed by the significant relations between the scores of the CO-AC and the measures of aggressive behavior, in a total of 230 children from the 4th to the 7th grade, of both genders, and of different SES levels. Notably, the predicted aggressiveness was assessed in different forms, including ratings of aggressiveness by teachers or guides, sociometric measures, and direct observations of aggressive behavior. Hence, it may be concluded that the CO-AC is adequate for assessing motivation for aggressiveness in elementary school children (4th to 7th grades).

Applying the CO theory to the study of aggression has shed light on a set of 18–20 themes that make up the motivation for aggressiveness. Factor analysis revealed the following five major clusters of these themes: focusing on oneself and one’s goals, immediacy in responding, action orientation, cautious distrust of others, and toughness in the sense of communicating strength and non-emotionality. Notably, the set of themes as a whole concern a broad range of domains including emotions, cognition, interpersonal relations, style of responding and goal attainment. Some of these themes have been observed by others in different contexts, e.g., sensation seeking (i.e., the themes of tension and anti-boredom) (Zuckerman, 1979).

This result lends support to the motivational approach of the CO theory. It confirms the assumption that when the relevant kinds of contents (namely, themes) are assessed in an adequate form (namely, four belief types), cognitive contents enable a straightforward prediction of the behavior of aggression without the mediation of other situational or circumstantial variables. The relation with behavior is not perfect because the behavior is a function of both the motivational disposition and the behavioral program. In this study only the former was assessed.

The special advantage of applying the CO theory to the study of motivation for aggression is that one gets a comprehensive set of motivationally-relevant themes which can be examined simultaneously. The set allows for flexibility so that different themes play a more and less prominent role in regard to different types of aggression, in different types of individuals, and perhaps even in different contexts. Moreover, the studies showed that the CO-AC is flexible and broad enough to accommodate the motivations for aggressiveness of the two genders. Despite the higher proportion of aggressive boys than girls, they did not differ in the underlying motivation for aggressiveness. This finding confirms the conception that the genders do not differ in the determinants of aggressiveness but rather in the threshold, extent of control or cues for aggressiveness (e.g., Baron, 1977, p. 219–221). The noted breadth of themes enables also integrating within the framework of one theoretical approach a great many findings about factors affecting aggression, e.g., social, personal and developmental. Last but not least, the CO-AC appears to be an adequate tool for planning and assessing interventions designed to control aggressiveness.

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Scopul acestui studiu a fost construcția și testarea unui instrument pentru evaluarea motivației agresivității în gimnaziu. Chestionarul orientării cognitive a agresivității copiilor (CO-AC) este construit în conformitate cu conceptele teoriei cognitive (Kreitler, 2004) și surprinde modalitățile în care cunoașterea (procesoarele și conținuturile cognitive) determină motivație și comportamente.

CO-AC este un chestionar de autoevaluare cu răspunsuri predefinite. Într-un prim studiu a fost testat pe un eșantion de 186 de băieți și fete, elevi în clasele gimnaziale (a IV-a – a VII-a). Agresivitatea elevilor a fost evaluată de către profesori și prin metoda sociometrică aplicată în colectivele de elevi.

În al doilea studiu, o versiune prescurtată a CO-AC a fost testată pe un eșantion de 44 de băieți și fete, elevi în clasele gimnaziale (a IV-a – a VII-a), membri ai unei organizații de cercetători (Scout). Agresivitatea a fost evaluată pe o scală Lickert asociată unei matrice sociometriche – având ca bază observația comportamentelor agresive și a incidentelor care sunt caracterizate prin agresivitate în grup. Chestionarul CO-AC a obținut indici de validitate și fidelitate satisfăcători.

Evaluarea cu ajutorul CO-AC permite stabilirea diferențelor între comportamentele agresive și non-agresive.

Studiile asupra agresivității au demonstrat faptul că la originea acesteia se găsește o matrice de crenți diferite care fac referință la cinci factori majori: orientarea personală, încăpățânarea, impulsivitatea, orientarea acțiunii, absența încredrei.