
Factors Affecting Aggressiveness in Adolescents and Young Adults: A Systematic Review of the Literature 2020-2024

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Abstract: Aggression is a form of deviant behaviour that has a negative impact on individuals and their social environment. This study aims to systematically examine the factors that influence aggression behaviour by analysing 13 literature studies from 2020 to 2024. The results show that internal factors such as emotional intelligence, self-control, emotional maturity, impulsivity, and cognitive impairment have a significant relationship with the emergence of aggression. In addition, external factors such as family communication patterns, peer influence, school environment, digital media, culture and childhood traumatic experiences also influence aggressive behaviour. This study confirms that aggression is the result of multidimensional interactions between personal and contextual factors. An integrative and evidence-based approach is needed for effective interventions. The findings are expected to serve as a reference in designing aggression prevention and treatment programmes among adolescents and young adults.

Keywords: Aggression, emotional intelligence, self-control, internal factors, external factors, childhood trauma

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Introduction

Aggression is a form of deviant behaviour that is of concern in the fields of psychology and social science. Aggression is defined as an action intended to harm another person physically or psychologically (Baron & Richardson, 2004). The phenomenon of aggression often appears in various age groups, ranging from children to adults, with a variety of complex triggers. In everyday life, aggression can appear in the form of fights, verbal violence, bullying, and other destructive behaviours. The prevalence of aggression behaviour increases with social pressure, changes in communication patterns, and decreased self-control in individuals (Gómez-Leal et al., 2020). This behaviour not only harms the victim, but also adversely affects the perpetrator and society at large. Therefore, it is important to systematically examine the factors that cause aggression behaviour.

The factors that cause aggression cannot be explained through only one single approach. Various studies show that aggression is the result of interactions between internal factors such as personality and emotions, as well as external factors such as the social and cultural environment (Sekar, 2021; Sulistianingsih et al., 2023). One theoretical model used in understanding aggression is the General Aggression Model (GAM) which places aggression as the result of personal and situational inputs, internal conditions, and decision processes (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Through this approach, it is possible to understand how aggression develops from a complex interaction between impulsivity, emotional intelligence, and life experiences. Recent research suggests that low self-control and negative emotions can increase aggressive tendencies, especially in adolescents (Agbaria, 2020; Saputro, 2022). In the context of psychological development, individuals who are unable to manage their emotions well tend to be more easily triggered to commit aggression. This is an important basis for prevention and intervention of aggression behaviour.

In the adolescent age group, aggression becomes a very relevant issue because this period is characterised by intense emotional and social changes. Adolescents tend to experience emotional lability which can trigger aggressive behaviour, especially if not equipped with adequate emotion regulation skills (Cahyaningtyas et al., 2024). Emotional intelligence is an important predictor of aggression control, as shown by various studies (Wijaya et al., 2021; Rahmayanti et al., 2024). Adolescents with low emotional intelligence are more vulnerable to expressing anger through destructive means. In addition, interpersonal relationships with family and peers also influence this behaviour. A less supportive environment, harsh parenting, and lack of effective communication with parents can exacerbate aggression tendencies (Selly & Atrizka, 2021). Therefore, understanding these factors is crucial in designing prevention strategies.

In addition to individual and family factors, social environments such as schools and media also play a role in shaping aggression behaviour. A non-conducive school environment, such as bullying or a weak discipline system, has the potential to trigger aggressive behaviour in students (Cahyaningtyas et al., 2024). Exposure to violent media content, including in video games and social media, has also been associated with increased aggression in adolescents (Gómez-Leal et al., 2020). In the current digital era, the phenomenon of internet addiction has become one of the new issues that affect adolescents' self-control and positive emotions (Agbaria, 2020). Individuals who experience internet addiction tend to show low self-control and tend to be more irritable. In addition, social groups such as youth football supporter communities have also shown a link between fanaticism and aggression (Aziz et al., 2022). This suggests that aggressive behaviour is also contextual and can be influenced by the values of a particular social group.

On the other hand, traumatic experiences in childhood also contribute greatly to the formation of aggressive behaviour. Research shows that children who experience physical violence, abuse, or emotional neglect have a higher risk of developing aggression behaviour in adulthood (Nurhayati & Setyani, 2021). Childhood trauma impacts an individual's neurological and psychological development, which in turn impairs the ability to manage emotions and resolve conflicts in a healthy manner. This disruption then becomes the backdrop for the emergence of persistent patterns of aggressive behaviour. In this context, traumatic experiences are not only a direct trigger, but also amplify the effects of other risk factors such as impulsivity or a violence-permissive environment. Therefore, the historical aspects of the individual need to be considered in understanding aggression as a whole. Prevention efforts should include a recovery-orientated approach to past trauma.

In recent studies, it has also been found that not all high-risk individuals necessarily exhibit aggressiveness. The presence of protective factors such as empathy, social skills, and good social support can be a buffer against the emergence of aggression (Gómez-Leal et al., 2020). Empathy, as the ability to understand and feel the emotions of others, has been shown to suppress aggressive impulses in various situations. Emotional maturity also plays an important role in this process, where individuals with high maturity are better able to delay aggressive urges and consider consequences (Sulistianingsih et al., 2023). Cohesiveness in social groups such as families or school communities can also reduce levels of aggression. In other words, aggressiveness results not only from the presence of risk factors, but also from the absence of protective factors. A comprehensive intervention approach needs to consider the balance between these risk and protective factors.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that aggression is a multicausal phenomenon influenced by the interaction of various biological, psychological, social and historical factors. A partial approach to understanding aggression will result in a narrow understanding and less effective treatment. Therefore, it is important to adopt an integrative approach that considers both personal and environmental dynamics. This literature review aims to identify and synthesise empirical findings related to the causal factors of aggression. By compiling a systematic map of causal factors, this research is expected to provide a theoretical and practical foundation for aggression prevention efforts.

In addition, the results of this review can serve as a basis for designing more accurate evidence-based intervention programmes. The search was conducted through a systematic review method with strict inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the quality of the findings.

Method

This research is a systematic literature review study that aims to identify and analyse factors that influence aggression behaviour. The approach used was qualitative with a meta-synthesis method, where various previous research results were reviewed in depth and compared to find thematic patterns and consistent findings. The review was conducted by referring to the systematic guidelines of the PRISMA model (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) to make the study selection process transparent and structured (Page et al., 2021). The literature reviewed included relevant research results from 2020 to 2024, with a focus on adolescent and young adult populations and diverse social contexts such as schools, universities and work environments.

Article searches were conducted online through four main databases, namely Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Scopus, and SpringerLink. The keywords used in the search process included: 'aggressive behaviour', 'aggressiveness', 'factors of aggression', 'emotional regulation', and 'adolescent aggression'. The search process resulted in 80 articles which were then selected based on the title and abstract. After duplication elimination and initial screening, a number of articles were read in full-text review to assess the suitability of the content to the focus of the study. Evaluation of article eligibility was carried out with reference to predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

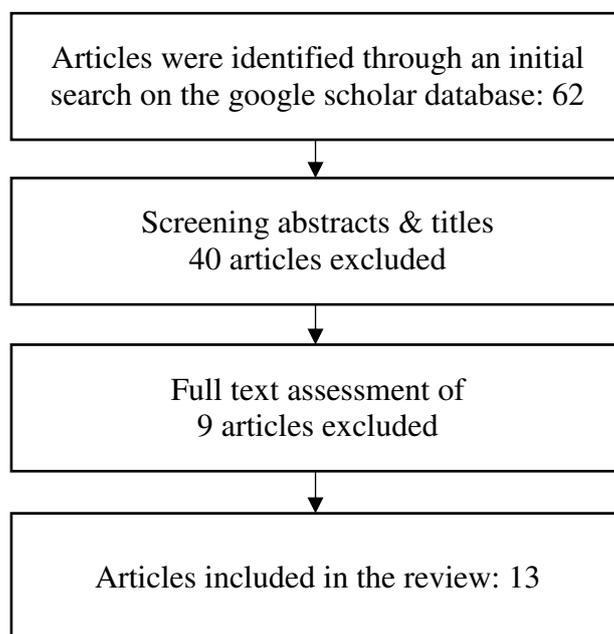
The inclusion criteria in this study included: (1) articles that examined the relationship or influence of factors on aggression behaviour, (2) research subjects were adolescents, university students, or young adults, (3) the type of research was qualitative, quantitative, or relevant literature studies, (4) available in Indonesian or English, (5) published between 2020-2024, and (6) available in full-text. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria include: (1) opinion or editorial articles that did not contain research data, (2) articles that were not relevant to the topic of aggression or its causal factors, (3) special populations with severe psychiatric disorders without contextual explanation, and (4) articles with restricted access (full-text inaccessible).

The following is a table of inclusion and exclusion criteria used in screening articles:

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inklusion	Exclusion
Research Topic	Studies that examine factors that cause or are related to aggression	Studies that only discuss aggression without linking to causal factors
Population	Teenagers, university students, young adults, members of organisations (e.g. police)	Specialised populations with severe mental disorders without contextual relevance
Type of Studi	Quantitative, qualitative, literature studies, meta-analyses	Opinion, editorial or non-scientific article
Language	Indonesian and English	Languages other than Indonesian or English
Year of Publication	Year 2020–2024	Study before 2020
Accessibility	Full-text available from scientific journals or academic platforms	Articles without access to full text
Variabel key	Examine at least one variable that influences aggression (emotions, self-control, trauma, etc.)	Studies that do not mention or examine causal factors of aggression

The article selection and screening process is further explained through the following PRISMA diagram. This diagram visually depicts the stages of article identification, selection and inclusion into the final analysis.



Gambar 1. PRISMA Diagram

Results and Discussion

Internal Factor

Internal factors are one of the main aspects that influence a person's tendency to engage in aggressive behaviour. One of the internal factors that is often researched is emotional intelligence, which is the ability of individuals to recognise, understand, and manage their own and others' emotions. Individuals with low emotional intelligence tend to be more irritable and less able to control impulses, so they have more potential to commit aggression (Saputro, 2022; Wijaya et al., 2021). Research by Rahmayanti et al. (2024) shows that emotional intelligence plays an important role in controlling the expression of negative emotions in individuals such as members of the police. This is in line with findings stating that emotion regulation ability is an important indicator to prevent verbal and physical violent behaviour (Gómez-Leal et al., 2020). Lack of emotional intelligence can narrow an individual's perspective in understanding social situations, making them more reactive to conflict. Therefore, improving emotional intelligence can be an effective preventive approach in suppressing aggression.

In addition to emotional intelligence, self-control is also an important aspect of the internal factors that contribute to aggressiveness. Self-control refers to an individual's ability to resist impulsive urges and delay gratification in favour of long-term outcomes. Individuals with weak self-control tend to have low tolerance for frustration, making it easier to engage in aggressive behaviour (Saputro, 2022; Agbaria, 2020). In a study on internet addiction and aggression, it was found that low self-control was a significant mediator between compulsive internet use and the emergence of aggression in adolescents (Agbaria, 2020). When a person is unable to control their emotional reactions, aggression is often the quickest and easiest form of release. Therefore, good self-control can lower the likelihood of aggression behaviour even in challenging situations. This reinforces the importance of self-control education and training from an early age.

Another internal factor is emotional maturity, which is the extent to which individuals are able to assess, interpret and respond adaptively to emotional situations. Research shows that individuals with high emotional maturity have lower levels of aggression, as they are able to resist negative impulses and use healthier problem-solving strategies (Sulistianingsih et al., 2023). In contrast, adolescents with undeveloped emotional maturity tend to respond to conflict with impulsive and destructive reactions. Emotional maturity is also related to empathy, patience, and good interpersonal skills. Thus, healthy emotional development allows one to consider the consequences of one's actions before reacting to anger-provoking situations. These studies confirm that emotional maturity is not only an innate ability, but also the result of learning and social experiences. Therefore, emotional education needs to be part of the child and adolescent development curriculum.

Cognitive and emotional disturbances are also among the internal factors that can increase aggressive tendencies. Some individuals exhibit cognitive distortions such as hostile attribution bias, which is the tendency to interpret the actions of others as a threat, even when they are not (Sekar, 2021). This makes individuals more ready to respond with aggression as a form of self-defence. Disruptions in emotional processing can also trigger overreactions to neutral or ambiguous stimuli. In many cases, emotional disorders such as depression or anxiety are also associated with aggressive behaviour as a form of compensation or escape mechanism (Cahyaningtyas et al., 2024). Research shows that students with aggressive behaviour often have unresolved experiences of emotional difficulties, both at home and at school. Therefore, evaluation of cognition and emotion is important in the initial assessment of individuals who exhibit symptoms of aggression.

Finally, impulsivity as a personality characteristic is also a strong predictor of aggressiveness. Impulsivity is the tendency to act spontaneously without considering the possible consequences. Individuals with high levels of impulsivity are more prone to aggressive actions, especially in challenging or frustrating situations (Gómez-Leal et al., 2020). Components of impulsivity such as negative urgency (the urge to act when negative emotions are high) have been shown to contribute to aggressive behaviour. Adolescents who are not used to managing impulses or who do not receive behavioural coaching are more likely to use aggression as a form of self-expression. Therefore, psychological interventions aimed at reducing impulsivity may be one effective approach in preventing aggression. Mindfulness training, problem-solving training and relaxation techniques have been shown to help reduce impulse-based aggressive behaviour. These implications reinforce the importance of personality-based preventive approaches in the management of aggression.

External Factor

External factors are environmental elements that significantly influence aggression behaviour, especially in adolescence and young adulthood. One of the main external factors is parenting and interpersonal communication in the family. Research by Selly and Atrizka (2021) shows that low parental communication with children is negatively correlated with adolescent aggressiveness. This means that the better the quality of communication between parents and children, the lower the level of aggressiveness tends to be. Conversely, the lack of emotional openness and validation from parents makes adolescents feel not understood, thus seeking release through aggressive behaviour. The family as a primary environment plays a major role in the formation of children's emotion regulation mechanisms. Therefore, the pattern of interaction within the family is an important foundation in the prevention of aggression behaviour.

In addition to the family, the school environment also has a significant contribution to aggressive behaviour. Schools that do not provide psychologically safe spaces tend to increase the likelihood of aggression, both as a form of reaction to stress and as a means of self-defence. In a study by Cahyaningtyas et al. (2024), it was found that students with aggressive behaviour often experience conflict at school, both with friends and teachers. Stressful school conditions, the absence of effective

anti-bullying policies, and the lack of social support from teachers and peers are the main triggers. School is supposed to be a place for learning social emotions and healthy conflict resolution. However, when this function is not optimised, aggression can become a form of frustration expression from students. Therefore, it is important for educational institutions to instil the value of empathy and conflict resolution early on.

Another external factor is peer influence, which plays a large role in shaping adolescent norms and behaviour. Adolescents who belong to friend groups that are permissive of violence or physical dominance will more easily adopt aggressive behaviour (Saputro, 2022). Pressure from peer groups often causes adolescents to commit aggressive acts in order to be accepted or considered brave. In some cases, aggression is used as a tool to demonstrate power or maintain social status in the group. This situation is exacerbated if adolescents do not have sufficient social skills to resist peer pressure. Therefore, the presence of a supportive and healthy social environment can be protective against aggressive behaviour. Peer group-based interventions have been shown to be effective in changing norms of violence to norms of co-operation.

Digital media and technology, especially violent content in the media and internet addiction, are also relevant external factors in the context of aggression. Repeated exposure to violent content in social media, films or video games may decrease sensitivity to real violence. Gómez-Leal et al. (2020) showed that this kind of exposure can change mindsets to be more permissive towards aggression. Agbaria (2020) also revealed that internet addiction is positively correlated with aggression and negatively with self-control and positive affect. Overuse of the internet makes individuals more vulnerable to experiencing negative emotions, especially when digital access is restricted. In such situations, aggressive behaviour may emerge as a response to frustration or social disconnection. Therefore, digital literacy and monitoring media use are important steps in preventing aggression. The role of parents and schools is vital in supervising and guiding the wise use of digital technology.

In a broader social context, group fanaticism, such as that within the youth supporter community, can also trigger aggression behaviour. The study by Aziz et al. (2022) showed that high fanaticism towards football clubs was positively correlated with aggressive behaviour, especially in the form of inter-group clashes. Adolescents in these groups often experience emotional distress and a very strong group identity, so that disagreements or club defeats can trigger physical conflict. Group norms that favour violence as a form of loyalty exacerbate the situation. In this case, aggression becomes a symbol of misguided solidarity. There is no significant relationship between education level or gender and aggression, so contextual factors of fanaticism are more prominent. Therefore, interventions should target the norms and culture within the adolescent sports fan community.

Culture and social values also shape the way individuals interpret and express aggression. Some cultures are more permissive of angry expressions or dominant behaviour, while others emphasise control and social harmony. In a study by Cahyaningtyas et al. (2024), it was found that culture and gender influenced the emotion regulation strategies used by aggressive adolescents. Male adolescents from masculine cultures tend to express anger externally, while females suppress it more internally. This suggests that aggression is not only determined by personality, but also by how the social environment values certain behaviours. A culture that normalises violence will create room for tolerance of aggressive acts, especially if they are used to defend self-esteem or authority. Therefore, a cultural value-based approach is indispensable in aggression prevention programmes. Cross-cultural education on non-violent conflict resolution is becoming increasingly relevant in multicultural societies.

Finally, traumatic experiences in childhood are external factors that have a latent but highly significant impact on aggression behaviour in adolescence and adulthood. Trauma such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, and witnessing domestic violence can disrupt the development of children's brain structures and emotional systems (Nurhayati & Setyani, 2021). As a result,

individuals have difficulty managing stress and are more likely to explode in stressful situations. Neuroscience studies show changes in brain areas such as the amygdala and prefrontal cortex in individuals with a history of severe trauma. In many cases, aggression becomes a form of self-defence or an outlet for unresolved emotional wounds. Unfortunately, these past experiences are often overlooked in the psychological assessment process. Therefore, a trauma-informed approach should be applied in all aggression interventions, especially for adolescents with dysfunctional family backgrounds.

Conclusion

Based on the review of 13 literature studies analysed, it can be concluded that aggression behaviour is a complex phenomenon influenced by the interaction between internal and external factors. Internal factors such as emotional intelligence, self-control, emotional maturity, impulsivity, and cognitive distortions are proven to have a significant relationship with aggression tendencies, especially in adolescents and young adults. Individuals with low emotional regulation ability and high impulsivity tend to be more reactive in the face of pressure, making it easier to express aggression destructively. On the other hand, external factors such as family communication patterns, peer influence, school environment, group fanaticism, digital media, social culture, and childhood traumatic experiences also play an important role in shaping or triggering aggressive behaviour. These findings suggest that aggression cannot be understood unilaterally as a purely personal response, but rather as the result of dynamic interactions between individuals and their environment. Therefore, aggression intervention and prevention efforts need to be designed comprehensively by taking into account bio-psycho-social aspects. The practical implication of this study is the importance of emotional education, social support, and trauma-informed approaches in preventing and treating aggressive behaviour.

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