

## Assertive Training Dynamics: Examining its Efficacy in Mitigating Aggression Among University Students

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*The purpose of the study was to investigate the efficacy of assertive training on aggression among university students. A Quasi experimental design was used for present study. The participants (N=48) with age range of 18-25 years (M=.60 SD=.49) were drawn through Convenience Sampling Technique from Islamia college Peshawar. The primary outcome of the study was aggression which was measured through The Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ). A total of seven sessions of assertive training were employed to assess the efficacy of treatment program. Data was analyzed through Descriptive statistics, correlational analysis, and paired sample t-test. Results on paired sample t-test revealed that the Verbal aggression and Anger on aggression scale significantly reduced after administration of assertive training ( $p<0.01$ ) and ( $p<0.03$ ) respectively. While physical aggression, hostility on aggression scale did not significantly reduce after assertive training ( $p>0.05$ ). Hence, it is concluded that assertive training has high efficacy to treat verbal aggression and anger and provided effectiveness in physical aggression and hostility.*

## 1. Introduction

Aggression is a behaviour with an evolutionarily conserved function and is an important factor in establishing social hierarchies and protecting valued resources in a variety of species, including humans. Aggression is part of social behavior and is normal in humans, however some types of aggression can endanger life, cause psychiatric illnesses, and represent a significant economic cost to society (World Health Organization [WHO], 2002). Aggression is also a multifaceted phenomenon that can be divided into proactive aggression and reactive aggression, where proactive aggression is purposeful and goal-directed, similar to compulsive behaviors, and reactive aggression is impulsive and hostile and resembles impulsive behaviors (Golden & Shaham, 2017). In addition, aggression is defined as deviant, anti-social, or problematic behavior, reflecting its multidimensional nature (Domracheva & Andreeva, 2019; Odebo, 2019; Amstad & Müller, 2020).

Aggression in the educational environment can occur both physically and verbally, including instances where people strike to others and where people speak aggressively; it can also be indirect, for example, by gossiping. Aggression risk factors from the social domain are attention and hyperactivity issues, poverty, family history of violence, childhood abuse, unequal punishment and rewarding, and association with delinquent peers (Farrington et al., 1998; Reif et al., 2007; Liu, 2004; Beaver et al., 2009).

The use of assertive training as an intervention to reduce and/or prevent aggression is an important avenue for consideration. Assertiveness is a very important social skill, and is essential for good interpersonal communication because it helps a person to share his or her thoughts and feelings in an honest and appropriate way. It allows people to stand up for their rights, and yet uphold the rights of others (Koparan et al., 2009). Positive characteristics that are linked to assertiveness include being 'considerate of others', empathetic, and able to deal with what society expects (Ghodrati et al., 2016). Assertive behaviour includes respecting one's and other's rights, expressing opinions with courage and using appropriate body language, which leads to an increase in self-esteem and communication (Jakubowski & Lange, 1978; Forneris et al., 2007).

Assertive training is done verbally and through nonverbal means and it is intended to reduce anxiety, correct skill deficits and change the thoughts of people (Williams et al., 2023). The goal of the program is to help participants feel empowered to express their needs, build self-esteem, and learn effective interpersonal communication skills (Speed et al., 2018; Bryant, 2018; Shaw, 2020). It is important to note, however, that there is a distinction between assertiveness and aggression: assertiveness is expressing one's needs without imposing on others, while aggression is imposing one's needs at the expense of others (McNamara, 2022). While the assertiveness training technique can be applied to address aggression in the university learning context, there may be some issues to consider, including: identifying and addressing underlying factors that may cause aggression and distinguishing assertiveness from aggression in the context of daily life (Noble & Mcgrath, 2005; Ebrahim et al., 2021). Effective assertiveness training programs can help in positive behavioral changes that will help students handle their aggression-assertion dilemma (Avşar & Alkaya, 2017; Elias & Weissberg, 2000).

Although the aggressive behaviors of university students are prevalent in Pakistan, very few studies have focused on this topic (Khurshid et al., 2020). It is interesting to note that male aggression is greater than female aggression, and that biological and environmental factors have an impact on this (Harris, 1996).

Therefore, the present study is undertaken for the first time to investigate the difference in mean aggression scores before and after using assertive training in the population of university students. The formulated hypothesis was that there will be a difference in aggression score after assertive training which will be statistically significant. Through this research, a comprehensive understanding of the impact of assertive training on aggression levels among university students is sought.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Sample**

The present research used a quasi-experimental research design to investigate effect of assertive training on aggression among the students of University (N=48) of which male and female students were equally distributed in age group (18-25 years). Convenience Sampling technique was used to choose the participants from various semesters (2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, and 10th) and different departments of Islamia College Peshawar, KP, Pakistan.

### **2.2 Inclusion Criteria**

- Those Participant who was within the age range of 18 -25 years were included in the study.
- Student exclusively from Islamia College Peshawar were included in the study.

### **2.3 Exclusion Criteria**

- The criteria involved the exclusion of individuals diagnosed with any psychological disorder.
- The participants who are taking psychological treatment, and those exhibiting self-harming behavior were excluded from the study.

## **2.4 Instruments**

### **2.4.1 Demographic Sheet**

The Demographic sheet consisted of age of the participants, gender, Socioeconomic Status, educational level. Moreover, the few questions through which participant were included and excluded in the study.

### **2.5 Buss-Peery Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ)**

The most important scale used was the Buss Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) (Buss and Perry, 1992) which measures four types of aggression: physical aggression, verbal aggression, hostility, and anger on a 29-item with five-point Likert scale ranging from extremely uncharacteristic to extremely characteristic. The Cronbach alpha of the scale is ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

## 2.6 Procedure

Before the data were collected, formal administrative approval had been received from the academic department heads. This study was carried out in an ethical manner with the guarantee of anonymity and voluntary participation of the participants. Available students of the selected departments were recruited using purposive sampling technique. A demographic information sheet and the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) were administered first to all participants to establish some baseline (pre-test) aggression scores. Students were screened and those that scored high for aggression were invited to participate in an intervention phase. These candidates provided comprehensive informed consent which included the nature, timeframe, and procedure of the study. The therapeutic intervention was conducted with students who gave informed consent, both verbally and in writing. The intervention was a structured, four weeks (Seven Sessions) assertiveness training program, which was administered in a series of consecutive sessions to promote skill acquisition and behavioral engagement.

- **First and Second sessions:** Focused on foundational assertiveness concepts. Participants completed assertiveness background sheets and cognitive belief sheets to identify personal behavioral barriers.
- **Third and fourth sessions (Skill Development):** Experiential learning was facilitated through structured role-playing exercises designed to simulate real-world interpersonal scenarios.
- **Fifth and Sixth sessions (Consolidation):** Advanced cognitive-behavioral techniques, including the "**three-legged stool**" model of communication, were introduced.
- **Seventh sessions (Evaluation):** Assertiveness review sheets were administered in the final stages to evaluate progress, reinforce adaptive behaviors, and ensure the internalization of assertive communication skills.

## 3. Results

Table No 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristic of the Participants (n=48)

Sample characteristics	N	Percentage %
<b>Age</b>		
18-21	19	39.6
22-25	29	60.4
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	24	50.0
Female	24	50.0
<b>SES</b>		
Lower	3	6.3
Middle	27	56.3
Upper	18	37.5

**Table No 2: Psychometric Properties of Aggression Scale (N=48)**

Variables.	M	SD	Range	$\alpha$
BPAQ	89.78	14.707	29-145	.83

Note: BPAQ= Buss and Perry Aggression questionnaire

Table 2 shows that Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficient of The Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire .83 indicating a high-level internal consistency.

**Table No 3: Descriptive Statistics of Aggression Scale (N= 48)**

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
PA	25.45	6.72	1			
VA	16.46	3.94	.41**	1		
A	22.73	5.24	.66**	.46**	1	
HOST	24.20	5.16	.26	.29	.24	1

Note: \*\* $p < .01$ , PA= Physical Aggression, VA= Verbal Aggression, A=Anger, HOST=Hostility

A Pearson Correlation coefficient was computed to assess the linear relationship between aggression and its subscales there was positive and significant association among PA, VA, A and HOST ( $P < 0.01$ ).

**Table No 4: Mean Comparison of Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention on Aggression among University Students (N=48)**

Variables	Pre-Test		Post-Test		t (48)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
PA	25.57	6.40	23.77	7.41	1.83 >	.07	0.25
VA	16.54	3.95	15.02	3.70	2.53 <	.01	0.39
A	22.62	5.26	20.85	4.80	2.16 <	.03	0.35
HOST	24.47	4.87	23.36	5.86	1.70 >	.09	0.20

Note: \*\* $p < .01$ , PA= Physical Aggression, VA= Verbal Aggression, A=Anger, HOST=Hostility

The dependent sample t-tests indicated that some sub-scales of aggression score showed significant differences in university students after the assertive training intervention. For the sub-scale of verbal aggression, the scores significantly decreased after the intervention ( $M=15.02$ ,  $SD=3.70$ ) compared to before ( $M=16.54$ ,  $SD=3.95$ ),  $t(48) = .015$ ,  $p < .001$ . The mean difference was .60, with a 95% confidence interval (CI) ranging from -.31143 to 2.73205. A Cohen's d of 0.39 was found which suggests a large effect on verbal aggression scores and thus rejected the null hypothesis.

Likewise, for the sub-scale of anger, a statistically significant decrease was seen after the intervention ( $M=20.85$ ,  $SD=4.80$ ) as compared to before ( $M=22.62$ ,  $SD=5.26$ ),  $t(48) = .037$ ,  $p < .001$ . The mean difference was .820, with a 95% CI ranging from -.11637 to 3.43363. The

Cohen's *d* was 0.35, which indicates large impact on anger scores and the null hypothesis was rejected.

For physical aggression and hostility, however, the intervention did not result in statistically significant changes for the sub-scales. After the intervention, scores for physical aggression were ( $M=23.77$ ,  $SD=7.41$ ), and for hostility were ( $M=23.36$ ,  $SD=5.86$ ), compared to before intervention scores of ( $M=25.57$ ,  $SD=6.40$ ) and ( $M=24.47$ ,  $SD=4.87$ ), respectively. The mean differences were .982 and .654, with 95% CIs ranging from  $-.18764$  to  $3.78764$  and  $-.20625$  to  $2.43353$ , respectively. For physical aggression and hostility, Cohen's *d* values were 0.25 and 0.20 respectively, suggesting that the intervention did not have a significant impact on these sub-scales. Therefore, physical aggression and hostility were accepted as null hypothesis.

#### 4. Discussion

The present study explored the complex association between assertiveness training and aggression levels in college students. The main goal was to examine the effect of an assertiveness training program on the students' anger and aggressive behaviors in general. The findings provide insight into an intriguing scenario; a dynamic change in emotional and behavioural responses of the students.

A significant finding was that there was a statistically significant difference in the anger level of the students before and after the assertiveness training program. The foregoing change implies that students gained from the training and found tools that will help them deal with and manage their anger in various situations. The result of this study was the same as Hamza et al. (2019) that studied the effect of assertiveness training using a cognitive-behavioral skill-based training program on reducing anger intensity.

The study also revealed interesting findings regarding the students' self-confidences and assertiveness pre and post intervention. Many students were not confident before training and the program on assertiveness had helped to enhance their confidence. This positive change was said to be a direct result of students' applying assertive behaviours in various situations, which led to confidence and empowerment to express themselves better. The results confirm the role of assertiveness training in improving self-expression, self-esteem and decision making, which was supported by the findings of Hosseini et al. (2015).

The results of this study were also confirmed by Ebrahim et al. (2022) and Parray et al. (2022) who emphasized that assertiveness skills were highly related to the reduction of general aggression. The most important change was from aggressive to assertive behaviors, demonstrating the benefits of assertiveness training. The effect on verbal aggression scores was statistically significant with a pre- and post-test difference between the two, suggesting that assertiveness training was effective in changing communication patterns.

In addition to the individual changes in behavior, the study recognized the societal implications of assertiveness training in the prevention of bullying. The present change in peer bullying behavior, as emphasized by Keliat et al. (2015) and Schroeder et al. (2012), is a phenomenon of assertiveness training on interpersonal relations in students. Overall, the impact on communication skills was highlighted, which is another essential benefit of assertiveness

training as discussed by Bozkurt & Kavas (2015) for the development of more healthy relationships.

The study also highlighted the intricate nature of assertiveness's effects, finding that it had no significant effect on physical aggression and hostility. Cultural factors such as the normalisation of hostility within certain cultures and the seriousness of these forms of aggression, were suggested as possible reasons. This subtle approach highlighted the need to consider various cultural and contextual variables in determining the differential effects of assertiveness training on different types of aggression.

## 5. Conclusion

This study generated a comprehensive view of the multi-faceted effect of assertiveness training on the students of the University, including emotional control, self-confidence, communication, and bullying prevention. The results highlight the importance of a complex and culturally appropriate approach to assertiveness training, as it can be used to promote positive behavior change, but also considers the context that can affect different forms of aggression.

### 5.1 Limitation of Study

- The number of students in the study is limited, so the findings might not be applicable to the entire university student body.
- The non-probability sampling limited the inclusion of universities which is situated in Peshawar

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