

Abstract

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), socioeconomic status is an individual or group's social standing within a community based on "education, income and occupation" (2012). Previous research has found that children and adolescents from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds tend to engage in heightened levels of aggressive behaviors (Molnar et al., 2008). However, most research in this area has focused on physical forms of aggression (e.g., hitting kicking, punching), and we know little about how SES may relate to relational forms of aggression (e.g., gossip, social exclusion). In addition, as studies suggest that when females are aggressive, they tend to engage in relational forms of aggression (Card et al., 2008), it is also important to examine whether the association between SES and different forms of aggression differs by gender. To address these questions, we analyzed data from a cross-sectional sample of 167 students (81 male) in the fourth through sixth grades, collected as part of the Peer Relationships and Academic Achievement (PRAAP) study. Peer nomination procedures were used to assess physical and relational aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Family income, as reported by the students' parents, was used as a proxy for socioeconomic status (SES). Regression analyses were conducted separately by gender to examine the association between SES and each form of aggression, controlling for the other form of aggression. Findings indicated that, among males only, low SES was associated with heightened physically aggressive behavior ($\beta = -.262, p < .05$). Additionally, among males only, SES was positively associated with relational aggression ($\beta = .259, p < .05$). SES was not significantly associated with either form of aggression among females. Findings suggest that SES may be uniquely associated with different forms of aggression among males. Future studies should take into account differences in forms of aggression – relational versus physical – in studies of aggression among students from varied SES backgrounds.

Keywords: socioeconomic status (SES), aggression, gender