



Faculty of  
Psychology and  
Educational Sciences  
"Ovidius" University  
of Constanta, Romania



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## **Comparative study on the level of aggression, depression and social skills among school-age children**

**Daniela Cornelia Sterie**

<sup>1</sup>Ovidius University of Constanta  
steriecornelia@gmail.com

**Abstract.** In this research you will find the gender differences that exist between children of young school age in terms of the level of aggression, depression and social skills, but also their importance in everyday life. The tests were applied to a group of 60 subjects, the distribution being of 30 girls and 30 boys. Participants belong to the age range of 6 to 11 years. Considering the presented, the objectives of the paper are: to find out the differences between the two types of gender in terms of the level of aggression, depression and social skills. Following the statistical calculations, all the objectives were achieved, all three hypotheses being valid. Relative to the level of aggression, boys had significantly higher scores than girls, and in terms of levels of depression and social skills the scores indicated were higher among girls.

**Keywords.** schoolchildren, differences, depression, aggressiveness, social skills

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Aggression**

We all know that the term aggressiveness implies a series of behaviors oriented with the aim of hurting or insulting another human being (Iluț, 2013). Ruxanda Folostin's theory (2018) presents aggression as the tendency to harm others, physically or emotionally, or the tendency to destroy their possessions. Some authors define aggression in a simpler way, insisting above all on the intention of the one who initiates an aggressive action. Thus, in Kimble's conception (1990, *apud* Mitrofan, 1996, p.1) *aggression is any act done with the intention of injuring another person, either in a physical sense or in a psychological sense*. Also, Bandura (1973) considers that aggression serves only one purpose, namely, to cause injuries, be they physical, mental or emotional.

At the same time, it should be noted that in most situations, children proceed to such aggressive manifestations due to the family environment to which they belong. Children who are assaulted by their parents or who witness acts of violence between their parents can also become aggressive. As Cosmovici (1996) states, there are also cases when parents do not tolerate domestic violence, but encourage bold, arrogant and even violent behavior towards other children.



Also, according to Bandura (1986), aggressive behavior is learned in several ways, including:

- by observing and imitating certain patterns of conduct of other people (especially adults);
- through direct learning, that is, by rewarding or punishing certain behaviors.

There are numerous studies on the factors behind violence and aggression (Pain, 1997; Debarbieux, 1996; Dubet, 2002; Bègue, 2004). Below, we will briefly present the risk factors that lead to the appearance of aggression in the small school: (Apostu, 2018, p.113-114)

<b>Individual factors</b>	<b>Socio-familial factors</b>	<b>School factors</b>
- violent behavior can be influenced by biological, psychological or social characteristics; - impulsiveness, lack of control, affirmation of the Self, desire for power and prestige lead to the appearance of aggression.	- violent behavior can be determined by: the socio-affective climate in which the child lives, the existing/valued family model (type, the size of the family), the material conditions of the family, the relationship models promoted and the value system to which they are report the family.	- can affect violent behaviour, relating to the current environment at the school unit level (either too competitive or too tolerant), but also to the dissonance that the imposed standards create at the school level variables.

## 1.2 Depression

Depression is that nervous or psychotic disorder, that collapse of the mood based on sadness, inactivity, feelings of rejection and despair (Neamțu, 2016). According to Larousse (1993), depression is a pathological condition characterized by a grieving state of mind, associated with a reduction in psychomotor activity. He also believes that many depressions occur as a result of an unpleasant event or any other experience that requires the subject to adapt to a new situation. After Jeican (1995), depression is one of the most common disorders that can be encountered at any age, with an incidence of about 10% for healthy people and 87% for those suffering from various somatic or mental illnesses.

It is worth mentioning that the manifestation is different from human to human. According to Neamțu (2016), this can be fleeting or permanent, mild or severe. Of course, as Birch (1999) states, there are cases in which depression is so deep that it can cause suicide, and unfortunately these cases are increasingly encountered even at an early age.

Referring to the stage of small schooling, we can say that depression has a strong influence in terms of affective and social development of children. Depressed children are more withdrawn, exhibit less imitative behavior and can cause negative reactions from others (Joiner, Coyne & Blalock, 1999). As children slip into depression, they begin to avoid people and important experiences in their lives, with school and its social connections being the main pawns at this stage (Seligman, 2021).



According to Huberty (2012), in school, depressed children are seen as lazy, uninterested and unmotivated to participate in social and academic activities. Indeed, Goleman (2018) shows us that when depressed children have been compared to those without depression, it has been found that the former are less able to adapt in society, have fewer friends and are not preferred by others to play. Also, they do not have poor results at school, depression having negative effects on memory and the power of concentration, so that schoolchildren hardly manage to pay attention to classes or remember what is taught.

At the same time, the family context has proven to be very influential in developing and maintaining depressive symptoms and disorders. Huberty (2012) shows us that most of the research has focused on family dynamics and the association of depression in parents with depression in children. The variables found to be associated with the child and adolescents, have resulted that depression includes the family atmosphere, relationships between family members, and family stressors. Also, according to Beardslee, Versage & Gladstone (1998), children with depressed parents are three times more likely to have a depressive episode than children with non-depressive parents.

Concluding, we can say that depression is a negative state that significantly affects relationships with others, the way of relating to life and the environment.

### **1.3 Social skills**

Social skills are an important pawn in the life of any individual, and in the absence of these, development and integration into society can be a difficult thing to climb in the community of people. According to Angelo's conception (2015), social skills are a critical part of functioning in society. Having good manners, communicating well and paying attention to the feelings of others are all important components of good basic social skills.

A theory of social skills is offered by McGuire and Priestley (1981, *apud* Dickson, Hargie & Saunders, 1994) who consider social skills to be those types of behavior that are basic to effective face-to-face communication between individuals. Also, Lecroy and Beker (1983) consider that a person with social skills is able to perceive what situations require the use of these skills and use them appropriately so that the results are positive. Schlundt and McFall (1985) defined social skills as components specifically necessary for an individual to be able to accomplish the goals of a task.

Regarding the stage of small schooling, we can say that this represents the stage at which the child can develop a wide area of social skills. According to Piaget (1980) socialization is a process in which everything that is not innate must be assimilated through learning. As the child's world extends beyond the family home, their most significant relationships arise with the school, neighborhood, and community (Bowers, 2011, p.31-32). This is when the child reports more interest in having friends and social interactions.

At the same time, the quoted author shows us that the development of the sociability of the small school school is obviously manifested in the school activity through the relations with the other children and develops through play. At this age level the game acquires new valences, and joaca is more than just fun. It's to promote creativity at this stage, encourage problem solving and improve social relationships. Children like subject games, games related to the division of tasks by roles, activities that develop especially their ability to socialize.

In the same order of ideas, the little schooling is after Angelo (2014) a good time to teach



children to appreciate each other's strengths, differences, and it is also the time in a child's life when they learn how to be a friend, how to cooperate and how to share certain experiences.

## **2. Research**

### **2.1 Objectives and assumptions**

This research was conducted to discover the level of aggression, depression and social skills among young school-age children and the impact they have on everyday life. The goal is to find out the gender differences in the level of the two concepts mentioned above, among girls and boys during their small schooling.

Assumption 1: It is presumed that there are significant differences between girls and boys of young school age in terms of aggressiveness.

Assumption 2: It is assumed that there are significant differences between girls and boys of young school age in terms of depression.

Assumption 3: It is assumed that there are significant differences between girls and boys of low school age in terms of social skills.

### **2.2 Lot of participants**

The tests were applied to a group of 60 subjects between the ages of 6 and 11, 30 girls and 30 boys. Also, a number of 25 participants came from rural areas and the rest 35 from urban areas.

### **2.3 Description of working tools**

To carry out this research we used the BASC-2 manual that is part of the Behaviour Assessment System for Children (Reynolds, Kamphaus, 1992).

This Behavioral Assessment System for children is used in the evaluation of behavior and self-perception, for children and young people who are between the ages of 2 and 25. Basc-2 was also built to facilitate the diagnosis and classification of a variety of emotional and behavioral problems that can be encountered in children. At the same time, the system contains two assessment scales: one for teachers (Assessment Scale for Teachers, Teacher Rating Scale, TRS) and another for parents (Assessment Scale for Parents, Parent Rating Scale, PRS) (Reynolds and Kamphaus 1992, p.15-16), the latter being used in this study.

The assessment scales used by BASC-2 cover a vast area of adaptive behaviors and problem-behaviors manifested by children in a family or social context, among which: depression, hyperactivity, somatization, aggressiveness, social skills etc.



## 2.4 Data analysis and processing

**Assumption 1: It is presumed that there are significant differences between girls and boys of young school age in terms of aggressiveness.**

Table 1. The normality test tells us if the distribution is normal. In the case of the female gender, the result does not comply with a normal distribution, the value is 010, which causes us to use a nonparametric method.

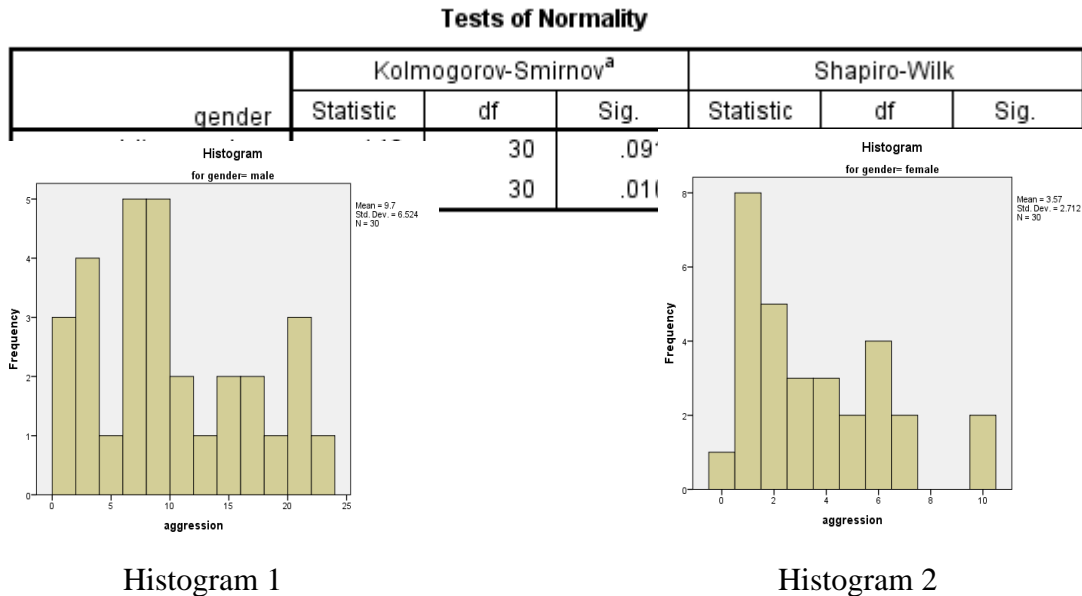


Table 2. The Mann Whitney test table shows the difference between the scores of boys (average = 39.52) and girls (average = 21.48) on the size of aggression.

**Ranks**

gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
aggressivity male	30	39.52	1185.50
female	30	21.48	644.50
Total	60		

Table 3. Following the statistical calculations, the hypothesis is confirmed, there is a statistically significant difference between girls and boys, at a materiality threshold of p=000.



**Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>**

	aggression
Mann-Whitney U	179.500
Wilcoxon W	644.500
Z	-4.021
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

We can say that a possible significant influence in terms of high aggressiveness in boys, especially related to the current situation, is played by games on the computer, tablet or any other device. In most cases, the games that attract boys are those of fighting and violence, unlike girls, who choose calm games and games that often involve socialization.

Another influence that can lead to more aggressive behavior among boys is represented by those cartoons with a violent character. Referring to the drawings that are broadcast nowadays, we can say that most of them present boys in roles involving aggressive behaviors, and this can amplify the aggressive attitude of boys. We say this because children take what they see either on TV or from games and manifest them in everyday life.

As for the literature, Espelage and Swearer (2004) show us that most studies and research have shown that boys show a higher aggressiveness than girls. For decades, boys have been considered the more aggressive kind.

For example, Whiting and Whiting's scholar (1975, *apud* Goldstein, 2001) on six very different cultures around the world found that, in general, girls are calmer and boys more aggressive. Also, in a recent meta-analysis of children aged 3 to 14 in 12 countries, the results showed that boys showed more direct aggression than girls (Tulviste, Best & Gibbons, 2019, p.82).

However, other research (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Lagerspetz, 2000; Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, 2004; Tapper, Boulton, 2004; Condon, Vives & Verrando, 2006) have indicated that differences in aggressiveness in girls and boys could be attributed to the different ways in which aggression is expressed. From this point of view, boys tend to use direct aggression while girls usually use indirect aggression, understood as a form of aggression in which the perpetrator harms the victim by destroying his/her relationships or the role he/she has in the group faster than using a direct attack.

It is evident that cultural and social variables including gender stereotypes, early schooling that encourages aggressiveness in young boys, and domestic abuse all combine to increase the likelihood of physical aggression in some males (Dayton, Malone, 2017, *apud* Tulviste *et al.*, 2019).

Girls and boys are also treated very differently by their families, peers, societal institutions and the media, which has a profound impact on their behaviour. Girls, for example, are encouraged to be passive and gentle, while boys are encouraged to be honest and aggressive. For this reason, girls may be less likely to engage in direct acts of aggression, instead they rely more on verbal and other indirect forms of aggression that are considered by society to be more socially acceptable (Crisp, Turner, 2017).



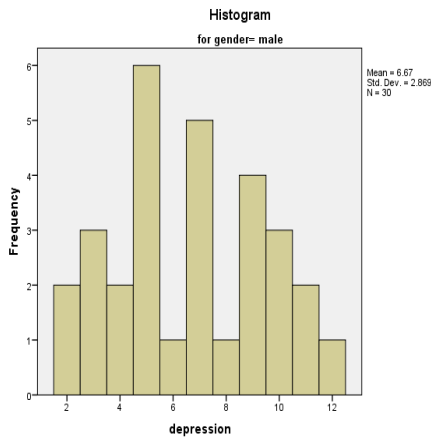
**Assumption 2: It is assumed that there are significant differences between girls and boys of young school age in terms of depression.**

Table 4. The normality test indicates to us that we have a normal distribution because both sig values exceed the value of 005, which causes us to use the parametric method.

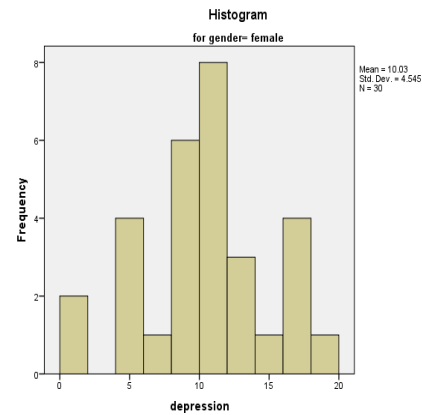
**Tests of Normality**

gender		Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
depression	male	.153	30	.072	.954	30	.213
	female	.143	30	.118	.956	30	.239

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction



Histogram 3



Histogram 4

Table 5. The group statistical table shows the difference between the scores of boys (average = 6.67) and girls (average = 10.03) for the size of depression.

**Group Statistics**

gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
depression	male	30	6.67	2.869	.524
	female	30	10.03	4.545	.830

Table 6. Following the statistical calculations, the hypothesis is confirmed, there is a significant difference between girls and boys, at a materiality threshold of  $p=001$ .





Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
depression	Equal variances assumed	2.458	.122	-3.431	58	.001	-3.367	.981	-5.331	-1.403
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.431	48.944	.001	-3.367	.981	-5.339	-1.395

As we well know, and as it has been proven over the years, girls are much more sensitive and emotive than boys. Starting from this statement, we can say that this sensitivity most often leads to the appearance of depressions among girls, since they embrace certain unpleasant situations with a lot of emotional involvement. Thus, after completing more heated discussions either within the family, at school or between friends, it is most possible that the girls will fall into a slight depression being sensitized by the situation.

Referring to the literature, Berndt (2014) shows us that most studies have concluded that females have a higher ratio of depression than men. That's right, boys externalize their problems instead of what girls rather internalize them. Thus, they suffer from depressions or disorders much more often than boys.

After Stahl (2021), for boys cognitive vulnerability may be a risk factor, but it is not enough to intensify depressive symptoms. Of the boys with more markedly negative attribute styles, only those who have a high level of stress have shown depressive symptoms. In contrast, for girls, cognitive vulnerability can be a sufficient cause of depressive symptoms. Even girls with optimistic attribute styles were vulnerable to depressive symptoms under conditions of high stress.

Also, the cited author shows us that depressives are often people who inhibit their aggressiveness, and this is especially true in girls. As we have already stated, about a third of women protect themselves through excessively adaptable behavior, which is why depression has long been considered a predominantly female disease.

At the same time, Cioroianu (2013) considers that girls are much more exposed to depression, on a purely physiological basis. Every year, 19 million people suffer from a major depression. Of these two thirds are female individuals, since they are prone to mental amplification of negative life experiences.

The World Health Organization (2008) presented the prevalence of depression as 50% higher in females than in males. Also, in 2016, the global annual prevalence was 5.5% and 3.2%, respectively, representing an incidence 1.7 times higher in girls. At the same time, in 2017, the prevalence of cases of major depression was 1,878.26 per 100,000 inhabitants, with a prevalence of 2,261.61 cases registered among women and 1,474.7 cases per 100,000 inhabitants among men.

In 2019 the average was 1.5% with an incidence of 1% among men and 2% among women according to Mediafax (2019). Thus, we can observe that with the passage of years women have retained their position and presented higher levels of depression than men.



**Assumption 3: It is assumed that there are significant differences between girls and boys of low school age in terms of social skills.**

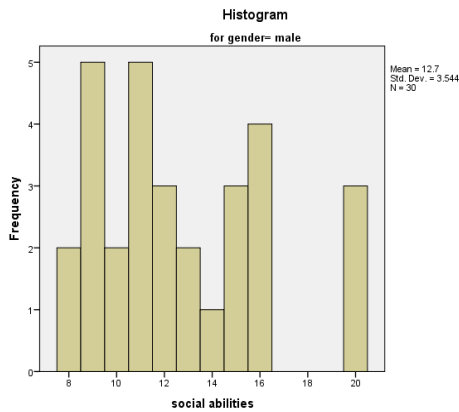
Table 7. The normality test indicates to us that we have a normal distribution because both sig values exceed the value of 005, which causes us to use the parametric method.

**Tests of Normality**

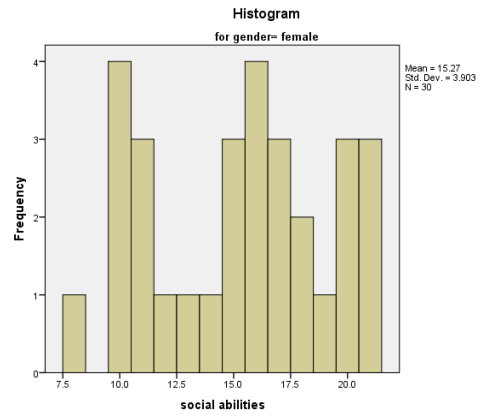
gender		Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
social abilities	male	.151	30	.079	.914	30	.019
	female	.129	30	.200*	.939	30	.084

\*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction



Histogram 5



Histogram 6

Table 8. The group statistical table shows the difference between the scores of boys (average = 12.70) and girls (average = 15.27) for the size of social skills.

**Group Statistics**

gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
social abilities	male	30	12.70	3.544	.647
	female	30	15.27	3.903	.713



Table 9. Following statistical calculations, the hypothesis is confirmed, there is a significant difference between girls and boys, at a materiality threshold of  $p=0.10$ .

		Independent Samples Test									
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper	
social abilities	Equal variances assumed	.388	.536	-2.666	58	.010	-2.567	.963	-4.494	-.640	
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.666	57.468	.010	-2.567	.963	-4.494	-.639	

Referring to the literature, numerous studies (Gresham, Elliot., 1990; Lloyd, Smith., 1986; Benenson, 1996; Roberts, Strayer., 1996; Nemeth, 1999; Taylor, Liang, Tracy, Williams & Seigle, 2002; Huaqing, Kaiser., 2003, Keane, Calkins., 2004, Margets, 2005) showed that women are more socially developed than male people. For instance, a longitudinal research by DiPrete and Jennings (2012) evaluated several social and behavioural traits in kids from kindergarten through fourth grade. In the first evaluation, social skills tests yielded greater results for girls than for boys (attention measures, emotional control, training and maintaining friendship etc.). Boys and girls developed different social and behavioural abilities during time, and by the fourth grade, the gender difference had grown significantly.

Also, Rubin and collaborators (2015, *apud* Mathisen, Sansos & Karevolt, 2018) argue that girls can be more emotionally invested in their friendships, which in turn can help stimulate intimacy and feelings of closeness. Supporting this, some social studies (Rose, Rudolph., 2006) shows that girls, compared to boys, report higher levels of social skills.

Boys tend to play in larger, less organized groups, while girls tend to interact in smaller and more intimate groups (Eder, Hallinan, 1978). Consequently, the skills of entering the group may be of greater importance for boys. Instead, having the skills to make a new friend and sustain a diadic interaction can be more valuable to the social functioning of girls (Nangle, Hansan, Erdley & Norton, 2010). At the same time, Ladd (1983) shows us that a social conversation seems to be a greater component of social interaction for girls than for boys.

Also, Nourani (1998) tells us that girls are usually gentler, more receptive, more empathetic and more prosocial than boys from the earliest age. Therefore, deficits in conversational skills can be more problematic for boys than for girls.

### Conclusions

Referring to the first variable in which we analyzed the aggressive behavior, the results showed that the gender differences in this variable are significant. One factor that can lead to a higher manifestation of aggression by boys is given by the different ways in which aggression is expressed. Girls are more sensitive than boys and often use indirect aggressiveness while boys are tougher and often resort to aggressive behaviors.

Regarding the second variable aimed at depression, the results in the research indicated that girls are more prone to depressive episodes than boys. Girls presents depressive symptoms more often than boys due to emotional instability and interiorization, which embrace certain unpleasant situations with a lot of emotional involvement.

Analyzing the third variable that indicates social skills we found that gender differences



are also present in this case. Girls have much more developed social skills than boys, they sell at school age and not only, activities and games that often involve interaction and role-play, thus developing their social skills.

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