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ABSTRACT

Can Empathy Help in Conflict Resolution? Examining the Effect of Empathy on Aggression, Prosocial Behaviour and Conflict Resolution among Adolescents in Trinidad

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This study examined the effect of empathy on aggression, prosocial behaviour and conflict resolution among adolescents in 5 Secondary Schools across Trinidad. A total of 108 (N=108) students ranging in age from 11 to 16 years were surveyed using a self-report demographic questionnaire, the Direct and Indirect Aggression Scale (DIAS), Index of Empathy for Children and Adolescents (IECA), Prosocial Tendency Measure-Revised (PTM-R) and Conflict Resolution Behaviour Questionnaire (CRBQ). An in-depth understanding of these behaviours was garnered from the perspective of 15 teachers through semi-structured interviews. Data analyses utilizing a T-Test, Pearson's Analysis of Variance tests and thematic analysis revealed gender differences and developmental trends. Quantitative results found that girls significantly exhibited more empathetic and prosocial behaviours than boys, as well as attack conflict resolution behaviours. Findings from the qualitative data revealed that attack conflict resolution behaviours and constructive third-party interventions were the most popular strategies utilized by adolescents. The qualitative results also indicated that girls and boys were equally aggressive. The statistical analyses found that empathy had a significant effect on reducing aggression, increasing prosocial behaviour, and also, a positive correlation to compromise conflict resolution behaviour. These findings were discussed within the framework of Bandura's social cognitive theory. Recommendations for future research and policy related to conflict resolution and empathy development were proposed.

Keywords: Onell Nakita Gomez; Empathy; Conflict Resolution; Aggression; Prosocial Behaviour; Social Cognitive Theory; Trinidad and Tobago; Caribbean Area.