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Institutionalization and Aggressiveness - Gender Differences

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Abstract: This paper tackles the findings of a research aimed at detecting aggressiveness and at identifying differences between types and levels of aggressiveness in institutionalized children in Romania. The paper relied on the results collected after examining a group of 200 institutionalized children living in social service centers or in foster families. We used the Buss-Perry (1992) aggressiveness questionnaire, which measures four dimensions of aggressiveness, namely physical aggressiveness, verbal aggressiveness, anger and hostility. The results reveal the presence of all forms of aggressiveness in the whole group of subjects, with higher scores in female subjects compared to male subjects. This enabled us to conclude, among others, that there are some shortcomings of the protection system as concerns its beneficiaries and their evolution, aspects that determine them to develop different forms of aggressiveness.

Keywords: *Institutionalized Children, Aggressiveness, Protection System, Gender Differences.*

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1. Introduction

This paper shows the partial results of a research carried out in the social assistance and child protection system in Romania, where we noticed the presence of the aggressiveness phenomenon in the beneficiary children. The preliminary results were initially published in Romanian (Fedor, 2020) and they were followed by further developments that we will present below.

The purpose of our research is to highlight the presence of different forms of aggression in institutionalized children. The proposed objectives consist in measuring its amplitude at the level of the entire investigated sample, as well as differentiating aggressiveness according to the types of manifestation and the gender of the subjects.

2. Literature Review

Without referring strictly to the situation in our country where we find a lack of studies on this topic, literature reveals that, in general, living in foster care facilities causes backwardness in the physical and cognitive development of institutionalized children (Naumova *et al.*, 2016). For those who experienced institutionalization in an early age, stable placement in family care is essential as a remedial measure to ensure the best outcomes for their development (Johnson *et al.*, 2018). Some authors are not shy to use the term ill-treatment when discussing the institutionalization system (Sousa & Cruz, 2018). Ill-treatment influences the way in which children use their emotional and social resources to deal with socio-moral conflicts. The findings of various studies conducted on this topic indicated a significant relationship between the history of ill-treatment, the attachment model developed by children and their behavior (Katsurada et al., 2017). There is an increasing body of evidence that attachment may even be compromised in institutionalized children (Lionetti et al., 2015). Adverse childhood experiences, especially maltreatment, are regarded as significant risk factors for the development of antisocial behavior in adolescence. Possible correlates are still to be investigated after considering the experience of institutionalization (Protic et al., 2020). More than that, institutionalized children showing high levels of externalizing problems may be a reflection of disturbed psychosocial development. However, internalizing problems may not be readily recognized (Ginige et al., 2020). Generally, young people who have a history of child protection system involvement have significantly greater and more complex

needs than those who have no child protection experience (Malvaso et al., 2019).

As we have seen, these aspects may constitute risk factors for social maladaptation or even delinquency in the future adult. Hence the need to conduct research on the protection system, in general, and the segment of the population consisting of institutionalized children, in particular, in order to substantiate public policies that aim to reduce the negative effects reported.

3. Research Methods

The research was conducted at the Directorate-General for Social Assistance and Child Protection of Iaşi County (Romania), on a group of 200 institutionalized children, equally represented in terms of gender variable, aged between 12 and 18 years, living in social service centers or in foster care. Our access was allowed by the management of the host institution following the approval of our research project. Participation was voluntary and the subjects gave their informed consent to participate in the research, having the option to withdraw at any time. The respondents were informed of the objectives of the research and of the role of the questionnaire and they were also assured of the non-disclosure of their identity. Completing the questionnaires was done in a study room familiar to the subjects, in the presence of a specialized caregiver. They were cooperative, yet their level of understanding of the tasks they had to perform, their poor self-analysis skills, as well as the time factor were an impediment for some of them.

Aggressiveness was measured by the aggressiveness questionnaire developed by Arnold H. Buss and Mark Perry, which consists of 29 items designed to measure four dimensions of aggressiveness, namely physical aggressiveness, verbal aggressiveness, anger/rage and, last but not least, hostility. The applied tool uses a 5-step Likert scale (1 - very unsuitable for me; 2 - somewhat unsuitable for me; 3 - slightly suitable; 4 - somewhat suitable for me and 5 - very suitable for me). The four subscales of aggressiveness are measured by the 29 items of the questionnaire as follows: physical aggressiveness (PA: 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 24, 26, 28); verbal aggressiveness (VA: 2, 6, 10, 14, 18); anger/rage (A: 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 22, 29) and hostility (H: 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 23, 25, 27).

Total *aggressiveness* scores range from 29 to 145. The level of aggressiveness may be divided into three categories, namely: low aggressiveness (with scores between 29 and 68), medium aggressiveness (with scores between 69 and 107) and high aggressiveness (with scores between 107 and 145). The total sum of *physical aggressiveness* may range between 9 and 45.

Thus, the levels of physical aggressiveness may be considered low (with scores between 9 and 21), medium (with scores between 21 and 33) and high (with scores between 33 and 45), respectively. With scores ranging between 5 and 25, *verbal aggressiveness* may be low (with scores between 5 and 11), medium (with scores between 11 and 18) and high (with scores between 18 and 25), respectively. With scores ranging between 7 and 35, *anger/rage* may be low (with scores between 7 and 16), medium (with scores between 16 and 25) and high (with scores between 25 and 35), respectively. Finally, *hostility*, the score of which may range between 8 and 40, is low (with scores between 8 and 18), medium (with scores between 18 and 29) or high (with scores between 29 and 40).

4. Results and Discussions

a) Results for the entire population

Regarding the average score for the studied population, its value is 84.01. Thus, it can be argued that the level of aggressiveness of the individuals interviewed in this study is medium. Table 1 shows the mean value for each item in the first column, then the second column is the sum of the answers for each item, the third column is the range of values (minimum value: 1 and maximum value: 5) which describes the responses given by the respondents (1 - total disagreement/very unspecific to me, 2 - disagreement/somewhat unspecific to me, 3 - neither disagreement, nor agreement/neither specific, nor unspecific to me, 4 - agreement/somewhat (sometimes) specific to me, 5 - total agreement/very specific to me), whereas the last column shows the values of the standard deviation for each item.

Table 1
Average scores for the entire population

Items	Mean	Sum	Range [min, max]	Standard deviation
Some friends tell me that I am impulsive	2.82	480	[1.5]	1.54
If I have to resort to violence to defend my rights, I will.	2.42	412	[1.5]	1.52
When the others are kind to me, I wonder what they want to obtain from me	3.50	598	[1.5]	1.37
I tell my friends exactly what I think	3.76	647	[1.5]	1.37
Sometimes I get so angry that I start breaking things	2.02	344	[1.5]	1.52
I cannot come up with arguments when the others do not agree with me	3.18	540	[1.5]	1.48
I wonder why I am sometimes so fierce /aggressive	2.77	462	[1.5]	1.49

Items	Mean	Sum	Range [min, max]	Standard deviation
Sometimes I cannot control my desire to hit another person	2.15	366	[1.5]	1.52
I am a calm person	3.99	687	[1.5]	1.24
I get suspicious when strangers behave very friendly	3.50	592	[1.5]	1.48
I hurt many people I know	2.59	446	[1.5]	1.60
I get wound up quickly, but I calm down just as fast	3.68	630	[1.5]	1.39
When challenged I end up hitting people	2.33	400	[1.5]	1.45
When the people around me upset me, I tell them what I really think of them	3.42	588	[1.5]	1.52
I get jealous sometimes	3.21	549	[1.5]	1.64
Sometimes I would hit a person for no reason	1.64	282	[1.5]	1.20
Sometimes I feel that life is unfair to me	3.34	575	[1.5]	1.54
I cannot control myself	2.03	349	[1.5]	1.45
When I am frustrated, I show it	2.63	453	[1.5]	1.40
I sometimes feel that people make fun of me when I am not present	2.92	502	[1.5]	1.55
I often find myself in opposition / contradiction with the others	2.69	449	[1.5]	1.48
If someone hits me, I hit back	2.93	504	[1.5]	1.67
Sometimes I feel like a „powder barrel" ready to explode	2.67	456	[1.5]	1.58
The others always seem to get the best	2.91	498	[1.5]	1.57
There are people who have put me under so much pressure that we ended up fist fighting	2.29	394	[1.5]	1.51
I know that my friends talk behind my back	3.32	571	[1.5]	1.54
Friends tell me that I am a somewhat logical person	3.51	603	[1.5]	1.32
I often get angry for no particular reason	2.47	424	[1.5]	1.53
I get into conflicting situations faster than the others	3.77	649	[1.5]	1.54
TOTAL AVERAGE SCORE			**84.01**	

Data source: personal processing.

b) **Average scores by types of aggressiveness - total population**

The average score for the whole population was 14.42. This value indicates the respondents' medium level of verbal aggressiveness. Thus, overall, the interviewed individuals do not exhibit aggressive verbal behavior, either to a large extent or to a lesser degree.

Table 2 also shows that the highest mean value was recorded for item number 10 (*I get suspicious when strangers behave very friendly*) while the lowest mean value is for item number 18 (*I cannot control myself*).

Table 2
Average score for verbal aggressiveness - total population

No.	VERBAL AGGRESSIVENESS	AVERAGE SCORE			
		14.42			
	Items	**Mean**	**Sum**	**Range [min, max]**	**Standard deviation**
2	If I have to resort to violence to defend my rights, I will	2.42	412	[1.5]	1.52
6	I cannot come up with arguments when the others do not agree with me	3.18	540	[1.5]	1.48
10	I get suspicious when strangers behave very friendly	3.50	592	[1.5]	1.48
14	When the people around me upset me, I tell them what I really think of them	3.42	588	[1.5]	1.52
18	I cannot control myself	2.03	349	[1.5]	1.45
	TOTAL	**2.91**	**2481**	**[1.5]**	**7.44**

Data source: personal processing

According to the results obtained from the questionnaire process, it can be noticed that in terms of the average score obtained for the type of physical aggressiveness in the whole studied population (Table no. 3) it ranges from 22 to 33. In other words, the average score of the whole population (25.74) regarding the type of physical aggressiveness reveals that the level of physical aggressiveness is medium. As concerns the standard deviation values, we noted a high value, i.e., 1.57, for item 24 (*The others always seem to get the best*) and a low value for item number 9 (*I am a calm person*).

Table 3
Average score for the type of physical aggressiveness - total population

No.	PHYSICAL AGGRESSIVENESS	AVERAGE SCORE			
		25.74			
	Items	**Mean**	**Sum**	**Range [min, max]**	**Standard deviation**
1	Some friends tell me that I am impulsive	2.82	480	[1.5]	1.54
5	Sometimes I get so angry that I start breaking things	2.02	344	[1.5]	1.52
9	I am a calm person	3.99	687	[1.5]	1.24
13	When challenged I end up hitting people	2.33	400	[1.5]	1.45
17	Sometimes I feel that life is unfair to me	3.34	575	[1.5]	1.54

No.	PHYSICAL AGGRESSIVENESS			AVERAGE SCORE	
					25.74
	Items	**Mean**	**Sum**	**Range [min, max]**	**Standard deviation**
21	I often find myself in opposition / contradiction with the others	2.69	449	[1.5]	1.48
24	The others always seem to get the best	2.91	498	[1.5]	1.57
26	I know that my friends talk behind my back	3.32	571	[1.5]	1.54
28	I often get angry for no particular reason	2.47	424	[1.5]	1.53
	TOTAL	**2.88**	**4428**	**[1.5]**	**13.41**

Data source: personal processing

Regarding the average score for anger, table number 4 shows that it is 21.28. The values indicating an average level of anger range from 17 to 25. Therefore, the value recorded for the whole studied population indicates that the level of anger that the respondents demonstrate is medium.

Table 4
Average score for anger - total population

No.	ANGER			AVERAGE SCORE	
					21.28
	Items	**Mean**	**Sum**	**Range [min, max]**	**Standard deviation**
3	When the others are kind to me, I wonder what they want to obtain from me	3.50	598	[1.5]	1.37
7	When the others are kind to me, I wonder what they want to obtain from me	2.77	462	[1.5]	1.49
11	I hurt many people I know	2.59	446	[1.5]	1.60
15	I get jealous sometimes	3.21	549	[1.5]	1.64
19	When I am frustrated, I show it	2.63	453	[1.5]	1.40
22	If someone hits me, I hit back	2.93	504	[1.5]	1.67
29	I get into conflicting situations faster than the others	3.77	649	[1.5]	1.54
	TOTAL	**3.06**	**3661**	**[1.5]**	**10.72**

Data source: personal processing

Table 5 provides information on the score of people questioned about hostility. Taking into account the levels of hostility (low: 8-18, medium: 19-29, high: 30-40), we found an average score of 22.56 among the interviewed persons. Therefore, the level of hostility of the individuals participating in the study is average.

The lowest average value was noted for item number 16 (*Sometimes I would hit a person for no reason*) and the highest average value was recorded for item number 4 (*I tell my friends exactly what I think*).

Table 5

Average score for hostility - total population

No.	HOSTILITY			AVERAGE SCORE	
					22.56
	Items	**Mean**	**Sum**	**Range [min, max]**	**Standard deviation**
4	I tell my friends exactly what I think	3.76	647	[1.5]	1.37
8	Sometimes I cannot control my desire to hit another person	2.15	366	[1.5]	1.52
12	I get wound up quickly, but I calm down just as fast	3.68	630	[1.5]	1.39
16	Sometimes I would hit a person for no particular reason	1.64	282	[1.5]	1.20
20	I sometimes feel that people make fun of me when I am not present	2.92	502	[1.5]	1.55
23	Sometimes I feel like a „powder barrel" ready to explode	2.67	456	[1.5]	1.58
25	There are people who have put me under so much pressure that we ended up fist fighting	2.29	394	[1.5]	1.51
27	Friends tell me that I am a somewhat logical person	3.51	603	[1.5]	1.32
	TOTAL	**2.83**	**3880**	**[1.5]**	**11.44**

Data source: personal processing

c) **Average scores by type of aggressiveness - female gender (girls)**

Regarding the average score for female respondents, this is 14.62 and shows that the level of verbal aggressiveness recorded by women is medium. According to table 6, the average value recorded for item number 2 (*If I have to resort to violence to defend my rights, I will*) deviates from the total average value by 1.54.

Table 6 *Average score for verbal female aggressiveness*

No.	VERBAL AGGRESSIVENESS	Mean	Sum	Range [min, max]	Standard deviation
				AVERAGE SCORE	
				14.62	
2	If I have to resort to violence to defend my rights, I will.	2.58	273	[1.5]	1.54
6	I cannot come up with arguments when the others do not agree with me.	3.22	341	[1.5]	1.52
10	I get suspicious when strangers behave very friendly.	3.69	387	[1.5]	1.40
14	When the people around me upset me, I tell them what I really think of them.	3.35	362	[1.5]	1.53
18	I cannot control myself.	2	216	[1.5]	1.41
	TOTAL	**2.968**	**1579**	**[1.5]**	**7.40**

Data source: personal processing

The average score that results after database processing, based on the data obtained from the questionnaires from persons belonging to the female gender is 26.26. Since it ranges between 22 and 33, we may safely say that the level of physical aggressiveness of female respondents is medium.

Table 7
Average score for physical aggressiveness - female

No.	PHYSICAL AGGRESSIVENESS	Mean	Sum	Range [min, max]	Standard deviation
				AVERAGE SCORE	
				26.26	
1	Some friends tell me that I am impulsive	2.89	306	[1.5]	1.51
5	Sometimes I get so angry that I start breaking things	2.05	217	[1.5]	1.52
9	I am a calm person	3.89	420	[1.5]	1.26
13	When challenged I end up hitting people	2.28	246	[1.5]	1.45
17	Sometimes I feel that life is unfair to me	3.57	386	[1.5]	1.46
21	I often find myself in opposition / contradiction with the others	2.79	290	[1.5]	1.52
24	The others always seem to get the best	2.93	316	[1.5]	1.55
26	I know that my friends talk behind my back	3.49	377	[1.5]	1.47
28	I often get angry for no particular reason	2.57	278	[1.5]	1.54
	TOTAL	**2.94**	**2836**	**[1.5]**	**13.28**

Data source: personal processing

The type of aggressiveness represented by anger in female respondents has an average score of 22.21 (table no. 8). This score indicates a medium level of anger. The lowest average value was recorded for item number 19 (*When I am frustrated, I show it*), and the highest one is in item number 29 (*I get into conflicting situations faster than the others*). At the same time, we can see a value of 1.69 of the standard deviation registered by item number 22 (*If someone hits me, I hit back*). In other words, the average value for this item deviates from the total average by 1.69.

Table 8
Average score for anger – female

No.	ANGER				AVERAGE SCORE
					22.21
	Items	**Mean**	**Sum**	**Interval [min, max]**	**Standard deviation**
3	When the others are kind to me, I wonder what they want to obtain from me	3.53	378	[1.5]	1.36
7	When the others are kind to me, I wonder what they want to obtain from me (why I am left with a "bitter taste")	3.1	329	[1.5]	1.50
11	I hurt many people I know	2.95	319	[1.5]	1.60
15	I get jealous sometimes	3.31	354	[1.5]	1.59
19	When I am frustrated, I show it	2.6	281	[1.5]	1.39
22	If someone hits me, I hit back	3.08	333	[1.5]	1.69
29	I get into conflicting situations faster than the others	3.75	405	[1.5]	1.52
	TOTAL	**3.19**	**2399**	**[1.5]**	**10.65**

Data source: personal processing

Table 9 shows the level of aggressiveness represented by the hostility of questioned females. Therefore, a medium score of 23.20 for the type of aggression represented by hostility indicates an average level of hostility. The highest standard deviation value reflects a greater deviation from the total mean of the average value for one item. Thus, we found the mean for item 8 (*Sometimes I cannot control my desire to hit another person*) to deviate from the total mean by 1.67.

Table 9 *Average score for hostility - female*

No.	HOSTILITY			AVERAGE SCORE	
					23.20
	Items	**Mean**	**Sum**	**Range [min, max]**	**Standard deviation**
4	I tell my friends exactly what I think	3.79	409	[1.5]	1.31
8	Sometimes I cannot control my desire to hit another person	2.21	236	[1.5]	1.67
12	I get wound up quickly, but I calm down just as fast	3.79	405	[1.5]	1.24
16	Sometimes I would hit a person for no particular reason	1.81	196	[1.5]	1.32
20	I sometimes feel that people make fun of me when I am not present	3.11	336	[1.5]	1.51
23	Sometimes I feel like a "powder barrel" ready to explode	2.82	302	[1.5]	1.58
25	There are people who have put me under so much pressure that we ended up fist fighting	2.26	244	[1.5]	1.48
27	Friends tell me that I am a somewhat logical person	3.5	378	[1.5]	1.30
	TOTAL	**2.91**	**2506**	**[1.5]**	**11.42**

Data source: personal processing

d) **Average scores by type of aggressiveness - male gender (boys)**

We found that male respondents had a medium level of verbal aggressiveness (14.09).

Table no. 10 Average score for verbal aggressiveness - male

No.	VERBAL AGGRESSIVENESS			AVERAGE SCORE	
					14.09
	Items	**Mean**	**Sum**	**Range [min, max]**	**Standard deviation**
2	Some friends tell me that I am impulsive	2.17	139	[1.5]	1.45
6	I cannot come up with arguments when the others do not agree with me.	3.11	199	[1.5]	1.42
10	I get suspicious when strangers behave very friendly.	3.2	205	[1.5]	1.58
14	When the people around me upset me, I tell them what I really think of them.	3.53	226	[1.5]	1.50
18	I cannot control myself.	2.08	133	[1.5]	1.52
	TOTAL	**2.82**	**902**	**[1.5]**	**7.46**

Data source: personal processing

The questionnaires and the statistical processing of the collected data showed us that the level of physical aggressiveness of the male individuals was medium. The highest mean for each of the items that make up the type of physical aggressiveness was recorded for item number 9 *(I am a calm person*), while the lowest one was for item number 5 (*Sometimes I get so angry that I start breaking things*).

Table 11

Average score for physical aggressiveness - male

Nr.	PHYSICAL AGGRESSIVENESS	AVERAGE SCORE			
					24.88
	Items	**Mean**	**Sum**	**Range [min, max]**	**Standard deviation**
1	Some friends tell me that I am impulsive	2.72	174	[1.5]	1.60
5	Sometimes I get so angry that I start breaking things	1.98	127	[1.5]	1.53
9	I am a calm person	4.17	267	[1.5]	1.20
13	When challenged I end up hitting people	2.41	154	[1.5]	1.44
17	Sometimes I feel that life is unfair to me	2.95	189	[1.5]	1.60
21	I often find myself in opposition / contradiction with the others	2.52	159	[1.5]	1.40
24	The others always seem to get the best	2.89	182	[1.5]	1.63
26	I know that my friends talk behind my back	3.03	194	[1.5]	1.61
28	I often get angry without any specific reason	2.28	146	[1.5]	1.51
	TOTAL	**2.77**	**1592**	**[1.5]**	**13.52**

Data source: personal processing

Considering that the level of aggressiveness represented by anger is determined on the basis of the following ranges (7-16: low, 17-25: medium, 26-35: high), we can safely say that, according to the results obtained by questioning the subjects, the level of aggressiveness represented by anger among male individuals is medium.

Table 12 also shows that the average value recorded for item number 22 (*If someone hits me, I hit back*) deviates from the total mean by 1.62.

Table 12 *Average score for anger - male*

No.	ANGER				AVERAGE SCORE
					19.72
	Items	**Mean**	**Sum**	**Range [min, max]**	**Standard deviation**
3	When the others are kind to me, I wonder what they want to obtain from me	3.44	220	[1.5]	1.38
7	When the others are kind to me, I wonder what they want to obtain from me (why I am left with a "bitter taste")	2.18	133	[1.5]	1.30
11	I hurt many people I know	1.98	127	[1.5]	1.43
15	I get jealous sometimes	3.05	195	[1.5]	1.72
19	When I am frustrated I show it	2.69	172	[1.5]	1.44
22	If someone hits me, I hit back.	2.67	171	[1.5]	1.62
29	I get into conflicts faster than others	3.81	244	[1.5]	1.60
	TOTAL	**2.83**	**1262**	**[1.5]**	**10.49**

Data source: personal processing

Table 13 shows that the level of hostility of male respondents is medium (21.61).

Table 13 *Average score for hostility - male*

No.	HOSTILITY				AVERAGE SCORE
					21.61
	Items	**Mean**	**Sum**	**Range [min, max]**	**Standard deviation**
4	I tell my friends exactly what I think	3.72	238	[1.5]	1.47
8	Sometimes I cannot control my desire to hit another person	2.17	139	[1.5]	1.49
12	I get wound up quickly, but I calm down just as fast	3.52	225	[1.5]	1.60
16	Sometimes I would hit a person for no particular reason	1.34	86	[1.5]	0.91
20	I sometimes feel that people make fun of me when I am not present	2.59	166	[1.5]	1.57
23	Sometimes I feel like a "powder barrel" ready to explode	2.41	154	[1.5]	1.56
25	There are people who have put me under so much pressure that we ended up fist fighting	2.34	150	[1.5]	1.58
27	Friends tell me that I am a somewhat logical person	3.52	225	[1.5]	1.36
	TOTAL	**2.70**	**1383**	**[1.5]**	**11.54**

Data source: personal processing

Comparing the values recorded by the respondents belonging to both the male and female groups in terms of the four types of aggressiveness, we found that both men and women have an average level of aggressiveness, regardless of the type of aggressiveness we refer to.

Conversely, we noticed that the average female scores are slightly higher than the average male scores. This aspect sends us to further additional research.

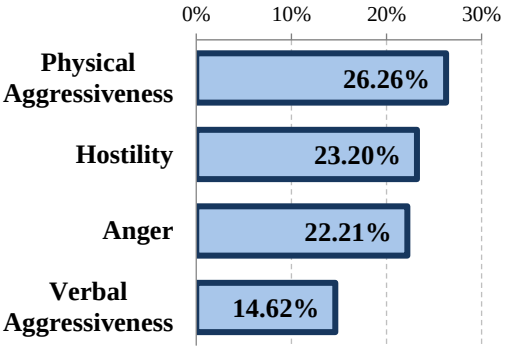


Figure 1
Average score for the 4 types of aggressiveness - Female (Girls)

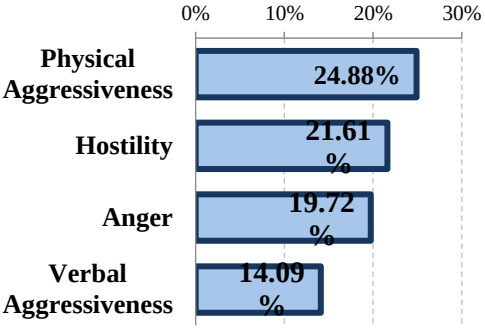


Figure 2
Average score for the 4 types of aggressiveness - Male (Boys)

Data source: personal processing

5. Conclusions

Comparing the answers of all respondents, respectively, in terms of the level of 4 types of aggressiveness that characterizes them, we found that both male and female participants exhibited a medium aggressiveness level, regardless of the type of aggressiveness. However, the average score values recorded was higher in girls than in males, a finding that may prompt us for further consideration. The aspects mentioned above may be risk factors for triggering social maladaptation or even delinquency in the future adult.

It seems that the child protection system in Romania fails to provide appropriate conditions for a healthy mental development to its beneficiaries. Further multidisciplinary (bio-psycho-sociological) research in this system is required in order to limit the unwanted effects of the institutionalization of children, among which their aggressiveness.

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