



Can Gender And Self-Regulation Determine Anti-Social Behaviour Among Undergraduates?

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Abstract

Anti-social behaviours (such as fighting, drug abuse, disregard for community safety, cultism, rudeness, vandalism, disorderly behaviour etc.) are acts that create problems for the community. It therefore important to know which gender might be more involved in the acts and if controlling one's behaviour, emotions, and thoughts could predict anti-social behaviour. Therefore, the present study examined how gender and self-regulation decide anti-social behaviours among undergraduates. The participants comprised 620 students (280 males; 340 females) whose mean age was 20.89 years (SD=3.33) with age range of 16 to 33 years. Brief Anti-social Behaviour Scale and Self-Regulation Questionnaire were the psychological scales used in this study. Findings from the study revealed that gender significantly predicted anti-social behavior such that male undergraduates had higher level of anti-social behaviour compared to their female counterparts. Also, it was shown that self-regulation significantly predicted anti-social behavior among the participants. In order to curb anti-social behaviour among the undergraduates, the study recommended that University managements should allow psychological seminars and workshops that will enhance the self-regulation of (male) undergraduates. It is also recommended that parents and guardians should report any behaviour that is against the norm of the society in their wards to Psychologists and finally, undergraduates should be encouraged to spend their time on meaningful extra-curricular activities such as sports and community services.

Keyword: Anti-social behaviour, gender, self-regulation, undergraduates.

Introduction

The actions which are considered to disrupt the rights of others by committing crime, such as stealing, physical attack and non-criminal behaviors such as lying are

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known as antisocial behaviours (Dickson, Emerson, & Hatton, 2005). Antisocial behavior which is also known as dissocial behaviour is described as a kind of behaviour that impairs the peace of others in a society. It is important to understand that the behaviour develops through social interaction within the family and community and then adversely affects a child's personality traits, cognitive ability and their involvement with negative peers, dramatically affecting children's cooperative problem-solving skills (Ojo, 2015).

It has been observed that anti-social behaviours constitute lack of adherence to the social norms and standards of a particular society by her members and may not allow the occupants of such society to co-exist peacefully. Anti-social behaviours such as inappropriate sexual activities, smoking, stealing, bullying, examination malpractice, lying, assaulting others, abortion, cultism, loitering, lateness, rudeness etc. are mostly displayed by young adults who engage in risky behaviours that may sometimes constitute a violation of legal codes (Kayne, 2012 & Ojo, 2015)

Clare (2006) further explained that anti-social behaviours are destructive actions characterized by covert and overt hostility and intentional aggression towards others and are not tolerable across various societies in the world. For instance, United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2007) reported that 75% of public schools in the United States of America encountered at least one violent or criminal action in which many lost their lives and scores were injured during 2007-2008 academic periods. Moreover, in a crime analysis survey, it was revealed that eight out of ten people reported that anti-social behaviour had increased in England and Wales within the past years (Allen, Edmonds, Patterson & Smith 2006). In Nigeria,.....(sample of)..... All the above reported cases disrupted the peace and harmony in the locations where they occurred.

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It was stated according to Kimberly and Jacob (2002) that anti-social behaviour could inflict physical or psychological harm on people and/or their properties. It is also important to know that engaging in anti-social behaviours does not only affect the receiver of such behaviour but also poses great risk to the perpetrator's mental and physical health (Farrington, Gaffney & Ttofi, 2017). In other words, the high risks of interpersonal and intra-personal implications of anti-social behaviours are readily apparent (Clare, 2006). It is important to be aware that factor which include parental history of anti-social behaviours, parental alcohol and drug abuse, chaotic and unstable home life, absence of good parenting skills, use of coercive and corporal punishment, family disruption due to divorce, death or other separation, parental psychiatric disorders especially maternal depression, heavy exposure to media violence through television, movies, internet, video games and cartoons and economic distress due to poverty and unemployment can elicit anti-social behaviour in a student (Clare, 2006). In addition, anti-social behaviour according to Gale Encyclopedia of Children's Health (2018) can be displayed by any category of people in a place and can be influenced by an individual's temperament and irritability, cognitive ability, the level of involvement with deviant peers, exposure to violence, and deficit of cooperative problem-solving skills. Among students, Ojo (2015) found that the common causes of anti-social behaviour as revealed by one of his studies were media influence, lack of counselors in schools, ineffective and inefficient school administration, peer pressure or influence, broken home, lack of good parental care, and poor socioeconomic background. He further provided a list of the most common anti-social behaviours that might be exhibited by students (undergraduates). The list includes but not limited to examination malpractice, lateness, abortion, stealing, unsuitable sexual activities, cultism and rudeness.

Undergraduates with antisocial behavior also demonstrate impulsivity, poor interpersonal skills, ineffective cognitive-problem solving skills, academic deficiencies that negatively impact teacher-and-peer-related adjustment,

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involvement in criminal activities when the students become adults. Furthermore, being involved in antisocial behavior causes high rate of school dropouts and therefore, the dropouts become terror to innocent citizens, retards the development of the society, mud the integrity of the schools such individuals attend and make them offend humanity (Onyeme, Ibe-Nwaorisara, & Mbamalu, 2020).

According to Williams, Aderanti and Womiloju (2015), the understanding of the biological and social explanations of anti-social behaviours is not new to researchers in the area of Psychology, Neuroscience, Sociology and Criminology. Though some of the anti-social behaviours are normal at certain ages of child development and when carried on during adolescence, it can serve as one of the strongest predictors of adjustment problems, including criminal behaviour during adulthood stage of development. As a matter of fact, anti-social behaviour is a severe distress across different communities and start manifesting in early stage of adolescence (Wright, John, Livingstone, Shepherd & Duku, 2007). This means that individuals who displayed more severe anti-social behaviours in childhood usually have greater difficulties in later years than their peers at work/career, abuse substances, have difficulties in interpersonal relationships such as marriage or parenting during young adulthood (Monahan, Steinberg, Cauffman & Mulvey, 2009). In addition, Zakzaky (2001) investigated those behind violence in some Nigerian cities and he found out that most of those who carried out violent crimes associated with lootings and killings are groups of jobless youths, who have no means of livelihood. Ezereonwu (2001) and Aderanti (2006) added that such youths are unemployed, poor, use their youthful vigor negatively and acquire respect and recognition illegally, thereby, becoming high security risks to the peace and stability of the nation. There are some psychological factors that may be responsible for anti-social behaviour among students. The factors may include substance use, personality traits, self-esteem, perceived parenting styles, gender and self-regulation.

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Several authors (Barrera, Biglan, Ary & Li 2001; Storvoll & Wichstrom, 2002) have considered the risk factors of anti-social in both male and female students and some evidence for the specific impact of gender on the relationship between behaviour problems and delinquency among youngsters. According to Geolge (2012), the findings obtained from different studies on possible influence of gender on anti-social problems are not consistent. Gender typically constitutes a differential factor when the indicators and the source of troubles are examined among youths (Claes, Lacourse, Ercolani, Pierro, Leone & Presaghi, 2005). Arguments about the differences in the gender pathways to anti-social behaviours among youngsters have been raised (Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2001). Studies have begun to address gender differences in the causes of anti-social behaviours, thus indicating that the study of such differences can give a better understanding of the root cause of aggression and anti-social behaviour (Moffitt, et al, 2001). A number of authors considered that, globally, risk factors of behavioural problems are identical in girls and boys (Barrera et al., 2001; Storvoll & Wichstrom, 2002) while some argued that physically, males are more aggressive than females (Frey et al., 2003; Staniloiu & Markowitsch, 2012). Furthermore, Buss (2005) confirmed that males commit the vast majority of murders.

Bettencourt and Miller (1996) added in their illustration that men were more aggressive than women in neutral conditions, and specific types of provocation highlighting gender differences in aggressive (anti-social) behaviour. However, women physical attacks and insults elicited far more aggression than when a verbal attack was made on their self-esteem, males reacted equally aggressive to attacks on their self-esteem as much as their physical being, which were both more than the aggression in response to an insult (Ramirez, 2003). The findings of Ellis, Kevin, Beavera and Wright, (2009) confirmed that in the United States of America, statistics has indicated that males commit more overall and violent crime than women. Accordingly, it was also revealed through a study that men were more aggressive

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than women when physical aggression was available to them, but were equally aggressive as each other when verbal aggression was involved (Fahlgren, Cheung, Ciesinski, McCloskey & Coccaro, 2022). Eagly and Wood (2012) illustrated that females were significantly less physically aggressive and thereby involve in less anti-social behaviour compared to men.

Antisocial behaviour among undergraduates can also be predicted by another psychological variable called self-regulation. Simply, self-regulation involves controlling one's behaviour, emotions and thoughts in the pursuit of long-term goals (Cuncic, 2022). According to American Psychological Association (2020), self-regulation is the ability to adjust one's behavior through the use of self-monitoring (such as keeping a record of behavior), self-evaluation (assessing the information obtained during self-monitoring), and self-reinforcement (rewarding oneself for suitable behaviour). Learning how to self-regulate may serve as an important skill that children learn both for emotional maturity and social connections in life. Self-regulation is an important psychological phenomenon that allows an individual to act in accordance with his deeply held values or social conscience (Rothman, Baldwin, Hertel & Fuglestad, 2011). Students who are adept at self-regulating tend to possess the following abilities: acting in accordance with their values, calming themselves when upset, cheering themselves when feeling down, maintaining open communication, persisting through difficult times, putting forth their best effort, remaining flexible and adapting to situations, seeing the good in others, staying clear about their intentions, taking control of situations when necessary and viewing challenges as opportunities (Hampson, Edmonds, Barckley, Goldberg, Dubanoski & Hillier, 2016).

Due to the fact that self-regulation involves taking a pause between a feeling and an action, it is vital in determining an individual's action (Friese, Messner & Schaffner, 2012). Unfortunately, lack of self-regulation often time causes problems (including

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anti-social behavioural deficits) in life and makes one to face reprimands, lack self-confidence and self-esteem and have trouble handling stress and frustration. This is because any youth who cannot take time to think things through and make a reasonable plan would surely be involved in behaviours that are not in line with the societal rules and regulations.

Cuncic (2022) mentioned that there are some common problems about self-regulation. The problems with self-regulation could start early; as an infant being neglected. A child who does not feel safe and secure, or who is unsure whether his or her needs will be met, may have trouble soothing and self-regulating. Later, a young person or an adult may struggle with self-regulation, either because this ability was not developed during childhood, or because of a lack of strategies for managing difficult feelings. When left unchecked, over time this could lead to more serious issues such as mental health disorders and risky behaviors such as anti-social behaviour. There is need to learn some important strategies or skills so as to maintain proper self-regulation but many individuals were never taught about the strategies. This is because most often, parents, teachers, and other adults expect that children will "grow out of" the childhood and tantrum phase. While this is true for the most part, all children and adults may benefit from learning concrete strategies for self-regulation.

According to psychological models and theories such as self-regulation theory (SRT) propounded by Bandura (1988), self-regulation simply outlines the processes and components involved when we decide what to think, feel, say and do. According to him, self-regulation is a continuous active process in which we monitor our own behaviour, the influences on our behaviour, and the consequences of our behaviour; judge our behaviour in relation to our own personal standards and react to our own behaviour (i.e., what we think and how we feel about our behaviour). According to modern SRT experts, Baumeister and Vohs (2007), there are four components



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involved in self-regulation. They are: (a) Standards of desirable behavior (b) [Motivation](#) to meet standards (c) Monitoring of situations and thoughts that precede breaking standards (d) [Willpower](#) allowing one's internal strength to control urges. These four components interact to determine an individual's self-regulatory activity

at any given moment.

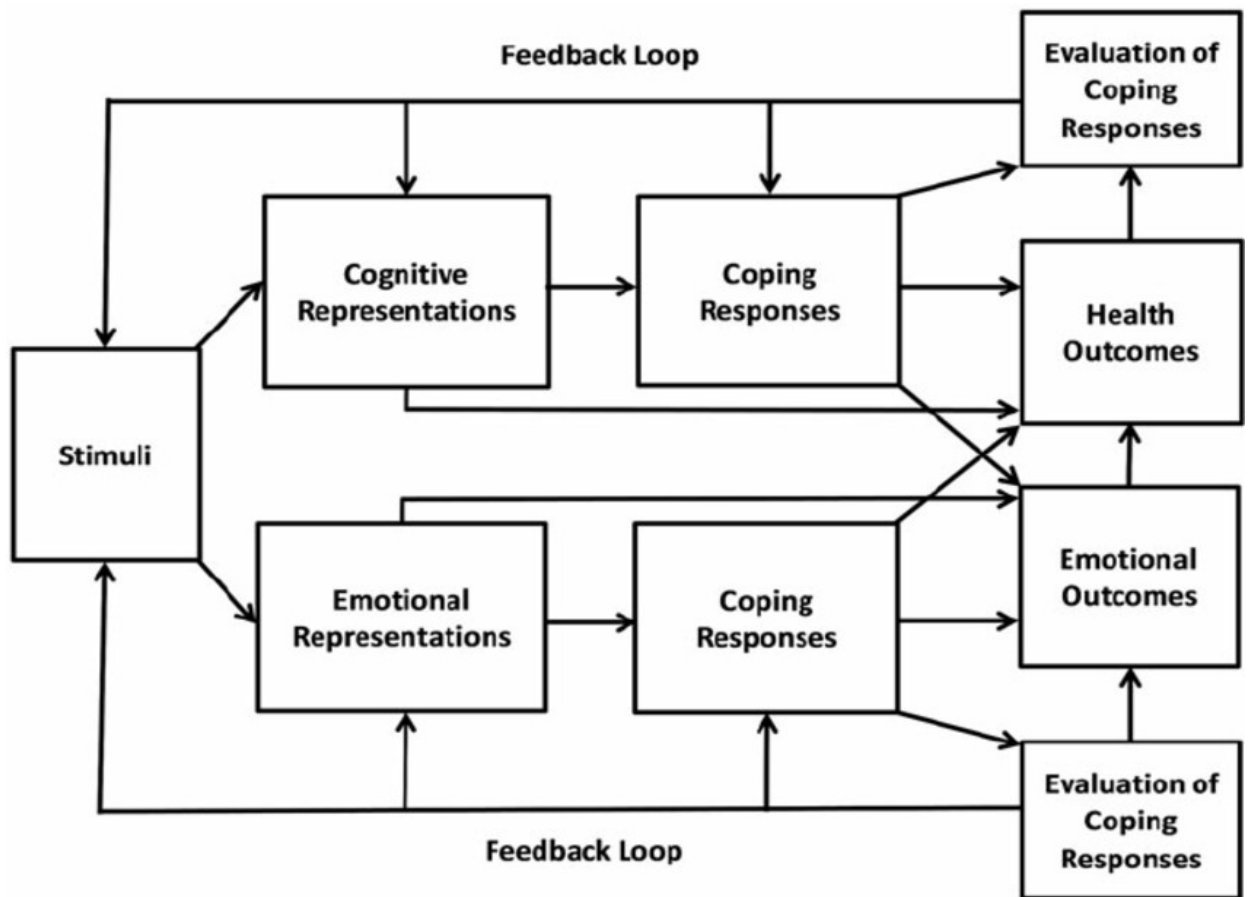


Figure 1: Leventhal's (1980) Self-Regulatory Model

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It can be useful to consider the self-regulatory model to better understand self-regulation.

While the model is specific to health-and-illness-related (rather than emotional) self-regulation, it is still a good representation of the complex processes at work during self-regulation of any kind.

Below is the description of how the model works:

Stimuli are presented (something happens that provokes a reaction, whether it is a thought, something another person said, receiving significant news, etc.).

The individual makes sense of the stimuli, both cognitively (understanding it) and emotionally (feeling it).

The sense-making leads the individual to choose [coping](#) responses (what the person does to influence her feelings about the stimuli or the actions she takes to address the stimuli).

The sense-making and coping responses determine the outcomes (the individual's overall response and how she chooses to behave).

The individual evaluates her coping responses in light of these outcomes and determines whether to continue using the same coping responses or to alter her formula.

It was suggested that difficulties regulating emotions may contribute to anti-social experiences (Turton, Berry & Danguah, 2021). Burt, Simons and Simons (2006) observed that regulating one's behaviour in life may become relatively stable at early adulthood; it should not be seen as a stable and immutable propensity in adolescence. For instance, Turton et al., (2021) found a correlation between emotion dysregulation and anti-social behaviour among some individuals. Turner and

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Piquero (2002) opined that individuals with more self-regulatory behaviour are not likely to perpetrate anti-social activities. Campbell (2002) reported that people with lower level of self-regulation are higher on anti-social behaviour. Also, Nichols, Graber, Brooks-Gunn and Botvin (2006) and Mason & Windle (2002) suggested that factors such as lack of self-directive in conjunction with family problems play roles in increased participation in anti-social behaviour by undergraduates. Other studies (Moffitt et al., 2001), however, indicated that inability to control oneself plays a greater role for men's anti-social behaviour than for women's anti-social behaviour.

Few studies have been conducted and documented on anti-social behaviour among African countries such as Nigeria. Even the few documented studies examined either gender (Isife, 2016; Ojo, 2015) or self-regulation (Williams et al., 2015, Nwankwo, Nwoke, & Chukwuocha, 2010) on anti-social behaviour. Based on this evidence, this present study, therefore, showed interest in investigating how both gender (being a male or female) and self-regulation (tactically controlling one's behaviour) will determine antisocial behaviour among undergraduates in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Mohammed, Tavershima, and Saanyol, (2018) assessed gender differences on anti-social (aggressive) behaviour among undergraduates in Nigeria. It was reported by the study that the males had higher level anti-social behaviour compared to females. Also, Morgado, (2017) compared the gender differences on anti-social behaviour in a sample of 489 Portuguese's males and females adolescents; it was discovered that boys as more prone to anti-social behaviour. Using survey research method, Isife (2016) examined gender and anti-social behaviour in 197 Tertiary Institution undergraduates in Enugu Metropolis. The findings showed that 49.74% female students were involved in illicit sex while (80.2%) males engage in all other anti-social behaviours. Also, Mobarake, (2015) examined age and gender differences on anti-social Behaviour among 395 adolescents' school Students in Tehran city in Iran.

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The results indicated that the adolescent boys were more likely to show anti-social behaviour than girls. It was confirmed in a study conducted by Castro, Carbonell and Anestis, (2012) that masculine gender role was positively related to anti-social behaviour, while feminine gender role was negatively related to anti-social behaviour.

In a research carried out by Ong and Thompson (2018) on the impact of coping and emotion regulation on suicidal behavior in a sample of 120 students (51 males, 69 females), it was revealed that increased coping strategies decreased the participants antisocial behavior. The socio-personal factors as determinants of anti-social behaviours among 231 adolescents in Ikenne, Ogun State were been examined by Williams, Aderanti, and Womiloju, (2015). The results showed that the combination of self-control and social skills can help reduce the anti-social behaviours displayed by adolescents. Furthermore, Rajappa, Gallagher and Miranda (2011) studied the link between emotion regulation and suicide (an antisocial behaviour) by measuring different emotion regulation strategies (e.g., awareness, clarity, non-acceptance, impulse, goals, and strategies) among young adults with varying experiences of suicidal behavior. The outcome ascertained that self-regulation could help a person to escape negative behaviours. In addition, about 1,012 Dutch adolescents participated in a study conducted by de Kemp, Vermulst, Finkenauer, Scholte, Overbeek, Rommes and Engels (2009) and they found out that anti-social behaviour was greatly curbed by those adolescents who could self-regulate better than others.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested in the study:

1. Gender will significantly predict anti-social behavior such that male undergraduates will have higher anti-social behaviour compared to female undergraduates.

2. Self-regulation will significantly predict anti-social behavior such that lower level of self-regulation would lead to increase anti-social behavior among undergraduates.

Methods

Research Design and Setting

A cross sectional survey research design was adopted in this study. The dependent variable was anti-social behaviour. The independent variables were gender and self-regulation. This research was conducted among undergraduates in a University located in Ondo State, Nigeria. The choice of the University as a research location is because it has a large number of students (the target population of the present research).

Participants

A total number of 620 students participated in this research. They were 280 males and 340 females. Their age ranged from 16 years to 33 years. The mean age of the participants was 20.89 (SD=3.33). Based on their family type; 404 were from monogamous family, 216 were from polygamy family. In terms of their academic level, 196 were in 100 level, 198 were in 200 level, 101 were in 300 level, 86 were in 400 level, 39 were in 500 level.

Instruments

The needed information from the participants was obtained through the use of standardized psychological instruments (questionnaires). Each copy of the questionnaires comprised four (4) sections: sections A, B, C and D.

The socio-demographic information of the participants such as age, gender, academic level, religion and family type was collected in section A.

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In this present study, anti-social behaviour was measured using Brief Anti-Social Behaviour Scale developed by Mezquita, Bravo, Pilatti, Ortet and Ibanez (2021). It is a 13-item scale. The scale adequately assesses anti-social behaviour in young adults from different countries/cultures. Sample items of the scale include 'I have broken windows and glass doors' and 'I have forged signatures, medical prescriptions or other documents' Mezquita et al., (2021) obtained a Cronbach Alpha of .89. A reliability coefficient of .87 was gotten in the present study. The instrument was contained in section B of the questionnaire.

The participants' level of self-regulation was assessed using Self-Regulation Questionnaire developed by Gaumer-Erickson, Soukup, Noonan and McGurn (2015). The scale contained twenty-two (22) items. Gaumer-Erickson et al., (2015) identified four components that are essential for self-regulation in the questionnaire. For self-regulation to be achievable by students, the scale requires that they plan what they want to accomplish, monitor progress, control change when things do not go as planned, and then reflect on what worked. Sample items include 'I keep making the same mistakes over and over again' and 'I have trouble remembering all the things I need to accomplish'. According to Gaumer-Erickson et al., (2015), the plan subscale consisted of 5 items ($\alpha = .61$), the monitor subscale consisted of 6 items ($\alpha = .70$), the control subscale consisted of 6 items ($\alpha = .72$), and the reflect subscale consisted of 5 items ($\alpha = .69$). The overall self-regulation questionnaire (22 items) was found to be highly reliable with a Cronbach Alpha of .89. The study at hand obtained an overall Cronbach Alpha of .91

Procedure

The procedure for data collection was done solely by the researcher. This study was designed for undergraduates. The purpose of the study was explained by the researcher to the participants as they were also given assurance of confidentiality and anonymity of their identities and responses. They were also informed that

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participating in the research would not expose them to any form of physical or psychological hazard and that they could withdrawal their participation at any point of the research. The questionnaires were distributed after establishing a good relationship with the respondents. Participants were advised to respond sincerely to all items in the questionnaire, though there was no time limit. It took the researcher nine (9) weeks to administer and retrieve the copies of the questionnaires that were distributed. Out of the six hundred and fifty (650) copies of questionnaires that were distributed, a total of six hundred and thirty-five (635) were retrieved and only six hundred and twenty (620) copies were found usable for data analysis.

Data Analyses and Results

Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted on the properly-completed copies of the questionnaires. This was done to test the formulated hypotheses.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 1: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the Prediction of Anti-Social Behavior by Gender and Self-Regulation

Variables	B	T	R	R ²	Df	F
			.40	.16	2, 617	36.46**
Gender	-.36	-7.65**				
Self-regulation	-.21	-4.35**				

** p < 0.01

The result in Table 1 revealed that gender significantly predicted anti-social behaviour ($\beta = -.36$, $t = -7.65$, $p < .01$). Also, it was noted that self-regulation

significantly predicted anti-social behavior ($\beta = -.21, t = -4.35, P < .01$), in such a way that lower level of self-regulation led to increased anti-social behavior among the undergraduates.

In order to know which of the gender (male and female) significantly predicted anti-social behaviour, a t-test of independent sample was conducted. It is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Independent T-Test Showing the Prediction of Gender on Anti-social Behaviour

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	P
Anti-social Behaviour	Male	280	21.11	7.063	618	7.18	> .05
	Female	340	16.70	4.937			

The result in Table 2 revealed that both gender (male and female) significantly predicted anti-social behavior ($t = 7.18, p < .05$). This means that anti-social behavior can be influenced by gender. It was further shown on the table that male had a mean score of 21.11 while female had 16.70 as mean score. This revealed that male undergraduates exhibit a higher level of antisocial behaviour compared to their female counterparts.

Discussion

The present study investigated the prediction of gender and self-regulation on anti-social behaviour among undergraduates of a Nigerian University. The first hypothesis which stated that gender will significantly predict anti-social behaviour

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such that male undergraduates will have higher anti-social behaviour compared to female undergraduates was confirmed and therefore, accepted. The result supported a study conducted by Castro et al., (2012) where he examined the influence of gender role on the prediction of anti-social behaviour and found out that masculine gender role was related to anti-social behaviour. Also, the study was in line with a study conducted by Mobarake, (2015). He examined age and gender differences in anti-social behaviour among students and the findings revealed that there was a significant correlation between gender and anti-social behaviour of the respondents (males possessed more anti-social behaviour than females). The present study further supported a study carried out by Bolu-Steve and Esere (2017) where he found boys to be more prone to deviancy than girls. The research of Muhammad, et al. (2018) in which it was revealed that male students practiced more anti-social behaviour than female students also received support from the present study.

The second hypothesis which stated that self-regulation will significantly predict anti-social behaviour such that lower level of self-regulation would lead to increase anti-social behavior among undergraduates was also confirmed and therefore accepted. This result was in corroborated with a study conducted by de Kemp et al., (2009) where they revealed that lack of self-control resulted in aggression and delinquency among students. Rajappa, et al. (2011) found out that failure to adopt emotion regulation strategies and non-acceptance of emotional responses significantly predicted anti-social behaviour; this is also backed by the present study. The result of this study further corroborated the result of a research done by Williams et al., (2015) where they examined and found that there was a significant joint and relative contribution of some socio-personal factors to anti-social behaviour among youths. The ability to self-regulate is important towards alleviating antisocial behaviours among the people in the society and most especially among the adolescents.

Conclusion

The study at hand investigated the prediction of gender and self-regulation on anti-social behaviour among undergraduates in a Nigerian University. Findings from the study revealed that male students possessed higher anti-social behaviour compared to their female counterparts. Also, it was revealed that self-regulation significantly predicted anti-social behavior in such a way that lower level of self-regulation leads to increase level of anti-social behavior.

Recommendations and Limitation of the Study

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were provided:

University managements should allow psychological seminars and workshops that will enhance the self-regulation of all undergraduates. This will greatly curb anti-social behaviour among the students.

Psychological clinics should be built in all Nigerian Universities so that psychological techniques can be used to train students (especially the male students) on how to practice self-regulation thereby reducing their antisocial behaviours.

Parents and guardian should be encouraged to report any behaviour that is against the norm of the society in their wards; signs and symptoms of poor or low self-regulation should be reported Psychologists.

Government should provide and implement favourable policies guiding the affairs of all societies against anti-social behaviours (for example the activities of mass media) while offenders must be punished accordingly.

Undergraduates should be advised to spend their time on meaningful extra-curricular activities such as sports rather than engaging in disruptive behaviour.

This study has been able to add to the psychological literatures on anti-social behaviour but it still has a couple of limitations. It examined gender and self-

regulation on anti-social behaviour among only undergraduates in Ondo State, Nigeria and therefore, ignored other categories of people. Also, the data collection process was done with only the use of questionnaires, which may not be sufficient to provide detailed information. It is therefore, advised that, other category of people should be examined or a comparison study that would involve other categories of people be conducted in future studies. Also, the use of other methods of gathering data such as interview should be incorporated by future researchers.

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