

Severe Physical Aggression Scale: PHYSAGG

(or RAG-VAG-WAG: *Respondent's Aggression, Victimization, and Witnessing of Aggression*)

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The PHYSAGG measure contains items designed to assess an individual's experiences with *severe forms* of physically aggressive behavior – as a perpetrator, victim, and witness. These forms of behavior include choking, punching or beating, slapping or kicking, and threatening with or using a knife or gun.

The scale was initially constructed for use in the second wave of a longitudinal study examining the development of aggressive and antisocial behavior. At this time, respondents were young adults. The PHYSAGG measure has since been used in a number of different studies of aggressive behavior, and administered to older adults, adolescents, and children. Most prominently, the PHYSAGG has been utilized effectively in two major longitudinal studies of aggressive behavior, the Columbia County Longitudinal Study and the Cross-National Television Study.

The PHYSAGG essentially contains 12 items, four each to measure perpetration, victimization, and witnessing. However, alternate versions of the measure have used 3 to 5 n items. In most uses of the PHYSAGG, respondents have been asked to consider acts occurring only within the year prior to assessment. There have been two primary question formats utilized. In the first, the respondent is first asked to indicate whether he or she has ever committed, received, or witness a specific act (“yes” or “no”). Then, the respondent is asked to indicate the frequency (i.e., “how many times”) with which the specific act has occurred (on a 5-point response scale ranging from “once” to “four or more times”; or on a 10-point response scale ranging from 0 to “9 or more times”). In the second format, the respondent is instead asked to indicate “how often” the specific act has occurred along a response scale with “never,” “once,” “a few times,” and “a lot.” This format is the one usually used with children or adolescents. Scores can thus be computed by taking the mean of responses within each subscale.

The PHYSAGG has been shown to be a reliable and valid instrument for the assessment of aggressive behavior, victimization, and exposure in adults ranging in age from 18 to 50. Additionally, the perpetration, victimization, and witnessing subscales are highly intercorrelated (>.50), suggesting that individuals who engage in severe physical aggression are likely to be victims of and witnesses to similar behavior. More detailed reliability information is presented below. The PHYSAGG has been shown to correlate significantly in predicted directions with other measures of aggression (including criminal records as well as self-report data), victimization, and witnessing. Further, the perpetration subscale has often been included along with other self-reported and observer-reported measures of aggressive behavior to create composite scores for use in structural equation models. The PHYSAGG may also be used as an other-report scale, for example parents reporting on children, or spouses reporting on target respondents.

What follows is the most current version of the PHYSAGG, utilized in the fourth phase of the Columbia County Study. In this phase of the study, we administered the PHYSAGG to adults ages 19-50, and youth ages 8-18.

We would like to ask you how often IN THE LAST YEAR you have done certain things, had them done to you, or SEEN them done. Remember that no one will see your answers; so please answer honestly!

“Physical Acts at Others (perpetration)”

1. How often have you slapped or kicked someone?

0= never 1= once 2= a few times 3= a lot

2. How often have you punched or beaten someone?

0= never 1= once 2= a few times 3= a lot

3. How often have you choked someone?

0= never 1= once 2= a few times 3= a lot

4. How often have you threatened or actually cut another person with a knife, or threatened or shot at another person with a gun?

0= never 1= once 2= a few times 3= a lot

“Physical Acts to You (victimization)”

5. How often have you BEEN slapped or kicked by someone?

0= never 1= once 2= a few times 3= a lot

6. How often have you BEEN punched or beaten by someone?

0= never 1= once 2= a few times 3= a lot

7. How often have you BEEN choked by someone?

0= never 1= once 2= a few times 3= a lot

8. How often have you BEEN threatened with a gun or shot at, or threatened or actually cut by another person using a knife?

0= never 1= once 2= a few times 3= a lot

“Physical Acts Witnessed (witnessing)”

9. How often have you SEEN someone get slapped or kicked?

0= never 1= once 2= a few times 3= a lot

10. How often have you SEEN someone get punched or beaten?

0= never 1= once 2= a few times 3= a lot

11. How often have you SEEN someone get choked?

0= never 1= once 2= a few times 3= a lot

12. How often have you SEEN another person get threatened or actually cut with a knife, or threatened with a gun or shot at?

0= never 1= once 2= a few times 3= a lot

Items were also written for “other” reporters of a target individual’s behavior, e.g., “How often has this person SEEN someone get choked?”

Internal reliability indicators for data obtained with this version of the PHYSAGG are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1. Internal reliability for PHYSAGG data collected in the fourth wave of the Columbia County Longitudinal Study.*Data from original subjects, ages 48-50:*

Subscale	Total (n=481)	Male (n=238)	Female (n=243)
Victimization	.81	.76	.85
Perpetration	.63	.69	.47
Witnessing	.83	.83	.83

Second person spouse or friend reports of subject behavior (n=356):

Victimization: .83 Perpetration: .81 Witnessing: .85

Data from children of original subjects, ages 8-33:

Subscale	Age 8-18			Age 8-12			Age 13-18			Age 19-33		
	All n=204	Boys n=111	Girls n=93	All n=47	Boys n=24	Girls n=23	All n=157	Boys n=87	Girls n=70	All n=318	Boys n=144	Girls n=174
Victimization	.72	.73	.64	.71	.75	.62	.71	.72	.61	.79	.70	.83
Perpetration	.55	.57	.45	.58	.66	.31	.55	.54	.49	.61	.65	.58
Witnessing	.76	.76	.73	.80	.81	.79	.75	.74	.71	.81	.84	.75

As discussed above, the PHYSAGG measure has been used with a variety of samples, in alternate versions. Table 2 (below) summarizes the versions of the PHYSAGG that have been utilized. Additional reliability data are provided in subsequent tables.

Table 2. Additional samples and alternative version information for the PHYSAGG.

Study, Respondents, Year	Items used	Time period assessed	Rating scale
CTV parents 1970s CTV subjects 1980s/90s CTV second persons 90s	A. Choked, punched or beaten B. Slapped or kicked C. Threatened or actually cut with a knife or threatened or actually shot at with a gun	“in the last year”	# of acts in past year from 0 to “9 or more” scale scores are sum of item responses
CCLS subjects 1970	B. Slapped or kicked (P, V, W) D. Choked (V, W) E. Threatened or actually cut with a knife (V, W) F. Threatened or actually shot at with a gun (V, W) G. Punched or beaten (P, V, W) H. Spanked a child (P)	“ever”	0= No 1= once 2= twice 3= three times 4= four or more times scale scores are sum of items

CCLS subjects/spouses 1982	A. Choked, punched, or beaten B. Slapped or kicked C. Threatened or actually cut with a knife or threatened or actually shot at with a gun	“in the last 5 years”	0= No 1= once 2= twice 3= three times 4= four or more times scale scores are 100*mean of items
CCLS subjects/spouses/ children over 8 2000	B. Slapped or kicked C. Threatened or actually cut with a knife or threatened or actually shot at with a gun D. Choked G. Punched or beaten	“in the last year”	0= Never 1= Once 2= A few times 3= A lot scale scores are mean of items
Zelli et al. (1995, 1996)	A. Punched, beaten, or choked. B. Slapped or kicked. C. Threatened or actually cut with a knife or threatened or actually shot at with a gun.	“in the last year”	1= Never 2= once 3= two or three times 4= four to ten times 5= more than ten times scale scores are sum of items

Note. Items used on all scales except where indicated. V = victimization; P = perpetration; W = witnessing; CTV = Cross-National Television Study; CCLS = Columbia County Longitudinal Study.

Table 2 Internal reliability for PHYSAGG data collected in the fourth wave of the Cross-National Television Study, USA sample.*Data from original subjects, ages 20-25:*

Subscale	n for subscale	Total	Male	Female
VAG ever	395	.57	.61	.39
VAG # times	98	.60	.62	.13
RAG ever	395	.63	.74	.29
RAG # times	97	.76	.76	.67
WAG ever	395	.74	.73	.72
WAG # times	128	.89	.89	.89

Second person friend reports of subject behavior (n=353):

VAG ever: .59	RAG ever: .48	WAG ever: .63
VAG # times: .58	RAG # times: .53	WAG # times: .75

Note on Reliabilities

Traditional measures of internal consistency reliability may not be the best for these scales because the items probably violate the theoretical assumption that they should intercorrelated with each other. For example, one person may engage in a lot of physical aggression without weapons and never use weapons while another person may use weapons a lot but never engage in physical aggression without weapons.

For more information on the PHYSAGG, please refer to:

Dubow, E. F., Boxer, P., Huesmann, L. R., Shikaki, K., Landau, S., Gvirsman, S. D., & Ginges, J. (2010). Exposure to Conflict and Violence across Contexts: Relations to Adjustment among Palestinian Children. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, *39*, 103-116.

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Huesmann, L.R., Eron, L.D., Lefkowitz, M.M., & Walder, L.O. (1984). Stability of aggression over time and generations. *Developmental Psychology*, *20*, 1120-1134.

Huesmann, L.R., Moise-Titus, J., Podolski, C., & Eron, L.D. (2003). Longitudinal relations between children's exposure to television violence and their aggressive and violent behavior in young adulthood: 1977-1992. *Developmental Psychology*.

Lefkowitz, M.M., Eron, L.D., Walder, L.O., & Huesmann, L.R. (1977). *Growing up to be violent*. New York: Pergamon.

Zelli, A., Huesmann, L.R., & Cervone, D. (1995). Social inference and individual differences in aggression: Evidence for spontaneous judgments of hostility. *Aggressive Behavior*, *21*, 405-417.

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