

Practices and Effects of Child Abuse on Learner's Academic Performance in Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the practices and effects of child abuse on learners' academic performance in selected primary schools in Budaya Sub-county. The study concluded that parents ranked highest in promoting child abuse. They subject their children to both physical and psychological abuse, which consequently affects their performance at home and school. In addition, the study revealed that physically and emotionally, the abused child becomes aggressive towards fellow pupils and elders and suffers stunted physical and mental development. According to the findings, the study calls for social welfare agencies (public and private organizations) to redouble efforts in educating, counseling, and rehabilitating victims of child abuse. These efforts could encourage many victims of child abuse to continue their education or engage in other meaningful activities. Furthermore, the knowledge of both teachers and other school personnel, along with representatives from health care services, social services, and law enforcement, regarding child abuse is severely limited. Therefore, the government should educate all stakeholders about ways to reduce child abuse. Finally, the government should make and enforce strong laws to isolate the abuser from the victim, impose harsh sentences, and provide treatment services to the sexually offended victims.

Keywords: Academic performance, Child abuse, Culture, Primary school, Students

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse is prevalent in almost every culture around the world and has been a problem for as long as recorded history. People used to abuse their children with razor straps, and no one thought anything of it [1]. It is only recently that citizens became aware of what a problem abuse could be. The United Nations Universal Human Rights Charter encompasses all individual human rights. The United Nations Children's Rights Section provides for children's rights, including the right to live, access to education, and to be subjected to natural justice, among others [2]. In the world over, it has been noted that children in various countries are subjected to a lot of child abuse, despite the constitutional provision for child protection and other legal provisions by the various human rights bodies. Every 20 minutes, abuses occur in the United States of America, sometimes leading to a child's death [3]. In India, the condition is worse. Families prefer to have a boy than a girl. This social preference has made the girl child subjected to various abuses in the form of child neglect, torture, and denial of higher education, food, shelter, medical care, and clothing [4]. The African Union and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) identified various forms of child abuse, including children serving as military officers in various rebel groups; family child labour; children employed in production plants; physical torture; physical burning; denial of food; education; medical care; closing; shelter; among others [5]. In Uganda, the situation remains unchanged. The reports from Nkora [6] et al. indicated that children are subjected to corporal punishments in schools, denied access to good health services, carry out small businesses for family income, scare away birds from gardens, work in sugar cane plantations, factories, and other entities, something that violates children's rights. There has been a growing concern about child abuse in Uganda. Though the 1995 Ugandan constitution provides for individual rights, including children's rights, child abuse is still rampant. In Busoga and Bugiri District in particular, it was noted that about over 60% of the rural children in Budaya sub-county are subjected to various forms of child abuse [7]. Still, 2015 reports from Budaya police post and health centre III indicated that about 120 cases of child abuse were reported in 2014. This indicates a higher rate of child abuse in the sub-county. Due to the higher rate of child

abuse in the sub-county, many children have dropped out of school, and some are infected with HIV/AIDS. Sadly, the local community has done little to reduce the causes and effects. The local community has different knowledge, attitudes, and practices towards child abuse. This study investigated the practices and effects of child abuse on learners academic performance in selected primary schools in Budaya Sub-county.

KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD ABUSE

According to Visnawathan et al. [8], when child maltreatment is suspected, the teacher-child examination has the three following objectives: (1) medical-to assess the physical injury to the child and develop an appropriate treatment plan; (2) psychological-to afford the child a sense of safety; and (3) legal-to provide physical documentation that may be used as evidence. Artz et al. [9] stated that nearly 3.6 million children were subjected to child physical abuse making (16%) of the total reported cases in the country. Widom et al.[10] revealed that in 2006 abuse fatalities were at 1530 (2.04 per 100,000), but this is thought to be an underestimate due to under-recognition, lack of standard terminology, and flaws in investigation procedures in the various schools in America. A research by Ding et al. [11] suggests that reporting behaviour may be influenced by teachers' attitudes, detection skills, knowledge and training, social influences, teachers' personal characteristics and features of the abuse. Attitudes that may promote reporting include beliefs that disclosure is part of the teacher's professional responsibility and that it will prevent future harm. Attitudes that act as barriers include concerns that reporting will damage teacher-child or teacher-family relationships, fear of making an inaccurate report, fear that reporting may escalate the abuse and beliefs that inadequacies in the child protection system may harm the family. The Child of Rights Convention In this part the researchers maintain some article about child rights, to improve knowledge of teacher about child rights to reduce child abuse. Article 19 pertains to the protection of children from all forms of violence. "Children have the right to protection from physical or mental harm and mistreatment. Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents, or anyone else who looks after them. In terms of discipline, the Convention does not specify what forms of punishment teachers and parents should use. However, any form of discipline involving violence is unacceptable [12]. There are ways to discipline children that are effective in helping children learn about family and social expectations for their behavior - ones that are non-violent, are appropriate to the child's level of development and take the best interests of the child into consideration. In most countries, laws already define what sorts of punishments are considered excessive or abusive. It is up to each government to review these laws in light of the convention [13]. Kenny [14] in his research has mentioned in his research that three fourth or 75% of child abusers are not reported by teachers. He cited that teachers claimed that the sufficient training was not taken by college educations to them in the field of child abuse, and also these teachers felt that their pre- and post-service training did not adequately prepare them for abuse reporting. The most reasons Journal of Educational, Health and Community Psychology 2014. Webster et al. [15] mentioned reasons for parents not reporting child abuse were fear of making an inexact report, feeling as though child protecting services do not help parents, and no clear physical signs of abuse. He also mentioned that in comparison with the profession and physicians, the teachers got the minimum knowledge in child abuse. Another finding confirms the lack of teachers' knowledge about the signs of child abuse in school age reduces chances of reporting various child abuses [16]. This finding strongly supported that the signs or indicators of child abuse should be taught to the professionals and teaches them how to report it to authorities for action. These studies and a lot of studies about child abuse show that it is necessity to enhance and improve training teachers on child abuse reporting. The training of child abuse for teachers should create their responsibility along with their duty in order to report. In order to train the teachers it is essential to make the experiment and hypothetical environments to cover the fear of teacher regarding the false report and to improve the skills of reporting [17].

Practices of Child Abuse

According to Chiffin et al. [18], sexual abuse occurs when a child or adolescent is involved in sexual activities that he or she does not understand or for which he or she is unable to give informed consent. It may include a teacher using a child for sexual gratification, and it may occur on a contact or non-contact basis. A variety of sexual behaviours between a child and an adult or between children are considered sexual abuse. They may involve bodily and non-bodily contact, such as genital exposure, verbal pressure for sex, and sexual exploitation. Senn et al. [19] compiled a thorough list of behaviours that are considered sexual abuse. It is important to note that there is disparity in the research surrounding the definition of child sexual abuse. Most researchers agree that having sexual intercourse with a child is sexual abuse; however, there is ambiguity surrounding behaviors such as sleeping with a child or bathing a child. Dye [20] defined emotional abuse as the emotional mistreatment or rejection of a child. Emotional abuse may include sustained, repetitive, inappropriate emotional responses and reactions to the child's emotions and behavior. For instance, an inappropriate response could be a parent becoming angry with the child after the child accidentally breaks something, yelling at the child excessively, or calling the child names. In addition, other emotionally abusive behaviours include belittling or terrorising the child, isolating them from others, and rejection or missocialization. Mehta et al. [21] added that emotional maltreatment may

include hostile parenting, such as inconsistency, poor stability, low nurturing, coercion, negative interactions, and rejection of the child. The absence of a tangible, physical quality in emotional abuse makes the research and discussion challenging. There are varying definitions among clinicians, advocacy groups, and lawmakers. It is particularly difficult to prove actual, measureable damage to the child due to the emotional nature of the abuse [22]. Karakurt and Silver [23] outlined the difficulty in defining emotional abuse and also took into consideration cultural factors. Internationally, verbal punishment is used 70–85% of the time (e.g., yelling). Then, the question arises: is this emotional abuse, or does it form part of a family or group culture? After examining research and other definitions of emotional abuse, their findings and definitions support Trickett et al.'s [24] definition of emotional abuse, outlining parental behaviours such as humiliating, degrading, berating, threatening, abandoning, or coercing the child, and using excessive discipline. Although there are multiple opinions and definitions surrounding emotional abuse, there is consensus on the devastating effects caused by these behaviours towards children. Baker et al. [25] suggested physical torture as a common form of abuse practiced by teachers. He defined physical abuse as a situation in which someone causes deliberate physical harm or injury to a child or fails to prevent the child from physical injury. Physical abuse is defined as injuries and adult behaviors that are not sexual in nature. Physical abuse may include injury from punishment that is not appropriate for the child's age or condition and can be a single or recurrent act by the teacher. Kim [26] stated that the majority of actions considered physical abuse by teachers include causing injury to learners, burning a child with cigarettes, and carrying heavy objects. Seifert et al. [27] explained that burning a child with a cigarette would always be considered abusive because it inflicts body burns and can scare him or her away from school. Gonzalez [28] suggested that child neglect is another form of child abuse. He defined child abuse as the failure to protect a child from any type of danger or care. Neglect may include insufficient attention to the child, stimulation, emotional availability, food, clothing, shelter, hygiene, nutrition, supervision, medical care, or education that could result in harm to the child. Neglect may include failure to provide mental health treatments or prescribed medications, exposure to dangerous environments, or the teacher's placing the child under the supervision of an inadequate caregiver [29]. Dubowitz [30] proposed different groups of neglect subtypes, which include physical, mental, cognitive, supervision, educational, emotional, and medical neglect. Despite the unique subtypes within each set, they share commonalities such as the unmet physical, emotional, mental, cognitive, medical, educational, and psychological needs of the child. According to McSherry [31], the definition of neglect should center on the child's needs and their capacity to function both physically and psychologically. Parenting style influences the prevalence of child abuse. Hostile and inconsistent parenting is the strongest predictor of child abuse symptomatology.

EFFECTS OF CHILD ABUSE

Physical Effects of Child Abuse

Abused children may find it difficult to form and maintain relationships, alter their sense of self, develop fear and distrust of adults, compromise their coping skills, display aggression in play, and feel the need to establish control in a variety of settings, not to mention performing poorly in school [32]. Lind et al. [33] outlined additional physical effects of child abuse, which included somatization, sexual difficulties, increased physical arousal, sleep disturbances, and psychosomatic symptoms. She also furnished details about PTSD, such as a specific physical effect of sexual abuse may be enuresis, which describes bath-rooming problems associated with the abuse.

Psychosocial and Behavioral Effects of Child Abuse

In addition to physical health problems, children who have experienced abuse may display a variety of psychosocial problems. Pfalz et al. [34] discovered that these children have impaired interpersonal relationships with peers and adults, as well as intense feelings of rejection. In a review of their related literature, Spruit et al. [35] found that psychosocial problems included disorganized or insecure attachments, chronic and long-term anxiety that affects a child's overall functioning, social deficits, depression, and poor family functioning. Children who have experienced maltreatment have low self-esteem, a lack of confidence, a fear of expressing themselves in class, and emotional problems, all of which lead to poor academic performance. Emotional problems as a result of maltreatment may include mood disorders, anger, frustration, pervasive distrust of others, restricted affect, irritability, anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal [36]. They further described that child abuse may cause a child to experience flashbacks, certain stimuli associated with the maltreatment, and cognitive suppression. Children who have experienced maltreatment may display a general unhappiness during lessons at school and in class.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Target Population

This research study used a sectional design. Data collection across the selected sample justified the use of a cross-sectional design. The targeted populations for this study were teachers and primary six pupils in the selected primary schools in Budaya sub-county, Bugiri district. We selected a total of 35 respondents from the four sampled schools, including 12 teachers and 23 primary school pupils. This sample was large enough to represent the total

population of the study. The selection of primary six pupils occurred due to their frequent exposure to teacher abuse and their superior ability to respond to questionnaires compared to those in lower classes.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

In the process of selecting the sample size, the researcher used a purposive sampling procedure. The primary six pupils and teachers from each selected school received a total of 12 and 6 papers with even and odd numbers, respectively, and those who selected the addition numbers were considered for the study.

Table 1: Table of Sample Size Distribution

School	Teachers sample study population	Primary six sample population
School A	3	5
School B	3	6
School C	3	6
School D	2	6
Total	12	23

Source: Field data 2017

RESULTS

Table 2: Respondents' responses on the common forms of child abuse in Budaya sub county

Responses	frequencies(n=35)	Percentage (%)
Physical abuse	15	43
Sexual abuse	11	31
Emotional abuse	9	26

Source: research data 2017

According to the responses on the table 2 above, the majority of the respondents 15/35 (43%) said physical abuse is the common type of child abuse in Budaya sub-council, 31% of the respondents said it is sexual, while the minority 9/35 (26%) said emotional abuse.

Table 3: Respondents' responses on factors that contribute to child abuse in Budaya sub-county

Responses	Frequencies (n=35)	Percentage (%)
Peer group influence	12	34
Poor socialization	2	6
Weakness in child rights protection laws	4	11.5
Poor cultural Values	4	11.5
Alcoholism	13	37

Source: field data 2017

According to table 3 above, the majority of the respondents 13/35 (37%) said alcoholism is the factor that contributes to child abuse in Budaya sub-county, while the least, 2/35 (6%) said it is poor socialization of the children.

Table 4: Respondents' responses on the psychological effects of child abuse

Variable	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Verbal aggression towards fellow students and adults	n=35	
High	13	37
Very high	17	49
Low	4	11
Very low	1	3
Rejection of parents and teachers	n=35	
High	12	
Very high	6	17
Low	12	34
Very low	5	14
Pupils unhappiness both at home and school	n=30	
High	10	
Very high	14	47
Low	6	20
Very low	00	00

Source field data 2017

According to Table 4 above, showing responses on the psychological effects of child abuse, the majority (17/35) (49%) said very high, while the least 1/35 (3%) said very low. This indicated that the abused pupils develop verbal aggression towards other people as a result of stressful situations that frequently occur to them due to the abuse subjected to them. Furthermore, the majority of respondents (12/35) (34%) indicated that the rate of abused pupils rejecting their parents and teachers was high, while the minority (5/35) (14%) indicated that the rate was very low. The minority expressed a low level of rejection because they often experience abuse from their parents and teachers after making common mistakes, and they understand that it is their responsibility to prevent them from repeating these mistakes. Furthermore, regarding the issue of abused pupils experiencing unhappiness both at home and at school, the majority of respondents, 14/30 (47%), expressed a high level of dissatisfaction, while only 6/30 (20%) expressed a low level.

DISCUSSION

The study results on the social demographic data about sex reveal that the majority of the respondents (57% were male), while the minorities (43% were female). This indicated that there were more male respondents than females in the study. This could be due to the fact that the sampled schools had more male teachers and learners. Furthermore, based on the respondents' age, the majority (66%) were in the age bracket of 13 to 19 years of age, while the other 6% were 31 years of age and older. This was due to the fact that the study involved more students than teachers and parents. In terms of marital status, the majority (69%) were single, while 31% were married. This was because the study involved more pupils than teachers and parents, more of whom could be married. In addition, on the level of academic attainment, the majority of the respondents (66%) were at the primary school level, while the least (34%) had attended tertiary institutions. This indicated that the study involved more students than teachers. The few teachers could have attended tertiary institutions. Furthermore, in responses to areas of residence, most respondents (54%) said they lived in rural areas, while the least (46%) lived in urban areas. This suggests that the study took place in a rural setting. Nonetheless, 77% of the respondents belonged to the Basoga tribe, with the remaining 23% belonging to other tribes. This suggests that the study took place in the Busoga region, where the majority of participants are Basoga. The study investigated whether respondents had knowledge about child abuse. They were to comment on either yes or no, depending on their perception of the variable. The majority, 94%, said yes, while the minority, 6%, said no. The results showed that the majority of the respondents had knowledge about child abuse. In support, Marcus [37] said that most countries have already defined laws and what sorts of punishments are considered abusive to children, and it is up to each government to review these laws in light of the Convention. In addition, on the item requiring respondents to suggest the forms of child abuse

experienced in their area, the majority (43%) suggested physical abuse, while the least (26%) suggested emotional abuse. The results indicated that they all had knowledge about child abuse, and physical abuse is common in the area of study. In support, Gonzalez et al. [28] proposed different groups of child neglect subtypes by parents, which include physical, mental health, cognitive, supervision, educational, emotional, and medical neglect. Despite the unique subtypes within each set, they all share commonalities such as the unmet physical, emotional, mental, cognitive, medical, educational, and psychological needs of the child. In support, Garrido [38] suggested that child mistreatment may lead to higher rates of conduct problems, physical and verbal aggression towards peers and adults, and noncompliance. Shafi et al. [39] also added that behavioural problems such as aggressive play, oppositional behaviour, delinquency, criminality, self-injurious behaviour, suicidal behaviour, substance abuse, and fighting with peers are a result of child abuse.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigates the practices and impacts of child abuse on the academic achievement of pupils in Budaya sub-county, Bugiri District. The study concluded that parents ranked highest in promoting child abuse. They subject their children to both physical and psychological abuse, which consequently affects their performance at home and school. In addition, the study revealed that physically and emotionally, the abused child becomes aggressive towards fellow pupils and elders and suffers stunted physical and mental development. According to the findings, the study calls for social welfare agencies (public and private organizations) to redouble efforts in educating, counseling, and rehabilitating victims of child abuse. These efforts could encourage many victims of child abuse to continue their education or engage in other meaningful activities. Furthermore, the knowledge of both teachers and other school personnel, along with representatives from health care services, social services, and law enforcement, regarding child abuse is severely limited. Therefore, the government should educate all stakeholders about ways to reduce child abuse. Finally, the government should make and enforce strong laws to isolate the abuser from the victim, impose harsh sentences, and provide treatment services to the sexually offended victims.

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