

Behavioural Effects of Parental Violence on Learners' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Tigania East Sub-County of Meru County in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Parental violence is a pattern of abusive behaviour by one or both parents in a family setting. When families experience parental violence, the parents and children suffer. The effects of parental violence are many but this paper is restricted to behavioural effects. Parental violence is recognized as one of the most entrenched and pervasive forms of violence in Kenya today though its influence on school going children has yet to receive the same degree of attention. Children who are victims of parental violence may develop emotional, cognitive, social and behavioural problems as a result of parental violence. The short-term and long-term emotional and physical aftermath of parental violence may affect pupil's behavioural patterns in school and affect academic performance. The purpose of this paper is to bring out the behavioral effects of parental violence on learners academic performance in secondary schools in Tigania East Sub-County. There are no clear investigations done on the effects of parental violence on learners' academic performance in Tigania East Sub-County. This study adopted a descriptive survey design. Target population consisted of the principals, teachers and learners from the 44 secondary schools in Tigania East Sub- County. Specifically, the study targeted 44 principals, 44 deputy principals, 9825 learners and 400 teachers. Stratified random sampling techniques were used to select the sample size comprising of 9 Principals, 9 Deputy Principals, 22 teachers, 9 counseling teachers, 100 learners and 14 peer counselors. The total sample size was 163.. Questionnaires and interview guide were used to collect data from the respondents. The results indicated that behavioural effects of parental violence like personality problems affect learner's academic performance negatively.. The study established that the emotional effects of parental violence affected learner's academic performance. Respondents who witnessed parental violence had emotional effects like feeling guilty, fearful, insecure, emotional confusion towards parents, withdrawal, anxiety and post traumatic stress disorder; cognitive effects were like diminished concentration, poor attention during lessons and failure to complete academic tasks. The researcher recommended that parents should avoid parental violence and solve their issues without letting their children know or witness violent behaviour because behaviour of children is affected by parental violence, which in turn affects their academic performance.

1. Introduction

Parental violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviours including physical, sexual and psychological, as well as, economic coercion that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners. (Imtione, Aluede & Oboite, 2009) The extent and magnitude of parental violence cannot be precisely measured because there are many cases whereby victims fail to report. Thus, making this vice an inter-personal and family secret. Children witnessing family violence have caregivers who are both frightening and frightened. This makes children develop insecure attachment and become disorganized. This insecure attachment and disorganization is because these children are not given an opportunity to develop organization strategies. The insecure attachment is from the fact that the people who need to be helping them feel safe, are the ones who make them frightened.

When the child's anxiety is raised by abuse or threat of abuse, the child needs to cling to the attachment figure, even if that person also frightens them (Thomson-Salo & Paul, 2007). Although incidences estimates vary greatly, some researches indicate that between 2.3 and 10 million children are exposed to parental violence each year in the United States (Rossman, Hughes, & Rosenberg, 2000). Because of the high incidence rates, researchers recently have began to examine the effects of such exposure on children. In a study of 41 British families, 85% of the children were physically present in the household while their mothers were being abused in some way and 71% saw their mother being physically assaulted (McGee, 2000). Children exposed to parental violence may be impacted in a variety of ways. Exposure may increase negative externalizing behaviour (Kernic *et al*, 2003); increase risk of aggressive behaviour (Mc-Gee, 2000), cause anxiety and depression.

Children affected by neglect, tend to be more isolated at school compared to other groups of children and have difficulty making friends (Hildyard and Wolf, 2002). Neglected children may also display aggressive and disruptive behaviour; however, externalizing behaviour problems are more closely associated with physical and sexual abuse or witnessing parental violence (Hildyard and Wolf, 2002; Holt, AR, Kitzmann, KM, Gaylord, NK, & Kenny, ED, 2003).

According to United Nations Development Fund for women (UNIFEM) parental violence in Kenya has revealed high figures as indicated in a study carried out in eight provinces of Kenya (Prem & Esso, 2003). Among the findings of that study was that 41% of women have been sexually abused, 61% of women have been physically abused one time or several times as adults. Thus, the possible implication is that the children who witness violence between their parents are more able to express their fears and anxieties regarding their parent's behaviour. Raphaela (2005) affirms such children as constantly fighting with peers, rebelling against adult instructions and authority and being unwilling to do school work.

Parental violence is very high in Tigania East Sub-County of Meru County. According to a survey carried out by Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2008) showed that around 82% of children in the region experiences psychological or physical punishment in the home. In the same survey, 68% of women stated that they believed it justified for a husband to beat his wife, for example, if she goes out without telling him, refuses to have sex or burns the food.

Besides the scenes of violence being traumatic, children exposed to violence may suffer short term, as well as, long-term emotional imbalances, which not only affect their behaviour and performance in schools, but may also adversely affect their social and interpersonal relationships. Children who witness violence between their parents often develop many of the same behavioural and psychological problems as children who are themselves abused (Tony, 2002). Children who live in households with parental violence are said to be at higher risk for maladjustment than children who do not live with such violence. Exposure to parental violence can have serious negative effects on children. Such effects may include behavioural problems such as aggression, phobias, insomnia, low-self esteem, and depression, low level of social competence, poor academic performance and low level of problem solving skills (Margolin Wolfe, 2000).

It is also important to understand the indirect effects of exposure to parental violence. Even if not directly present when the violence occurs, children may be impacted in an indirect way. Fathers who are batterers are often authoritarian, negligent and verbally abusive in their child-rearing and also expose their child to the risk of physical or emotional injury (Bancroft, 2004). Behavioural effects of parental violence include: aggressiveness, disruptive behaviour, antisocial behaviour, difficulty in regulating anger, frustrations, negative feelings, deficits in understanding and lack of empathy. Personality and behavioural problems among children exposed to violence in the home can take the forms of psychosomatic illness, depression, suicidal tendencies and bedwetting (Fantuzzo & Wanda, 2003). Behavioral changes also include excessive irritability, sleeping problems, emotional distress fear of being alone, immature behaviour and problems with toilet training and language development. Exposure to parental violence threatens development, (Osofsky, 2003). Significant correlations have been observed between aggression and physical violence indicating that as violence increases so does aggression in children. Research on aggressive responses found that when children witnessed marital conflict with negative tactics (like physical aggression threat withdrawal), the children were more likely to engage in immediate aggressive behaviour (Cummings, Goekemorey & Papp, 2004). These behavioural effects have been found to affect academic performance. As they grow children who are exposed to violence may continue to show signs of problems. Primary school age children may have more trouble with schoolwork and show poor concentration and focus. They tend not to do well in school.

Children who are exposed to parental violence have been reported to have more disciplinary problems at school than their non-exposed peers and are more likely to be suspended from school. This affects their academic performance. Exposing children to violence is a serious society problem, but little is known about the behavioural effects of parental violence on learners' academic performance in secondary schools in Tigania East Sub-County.

2. Study Area

The study was conducted in Tigania East Sub-County of Meru County in Kenya. The Sub-County consists of nine county wards namely Ankamia, Antuanduru, Buuri, Karama, Kiguchwa, Mucimukuru, Mikinduri East, Mikinduri West and Thangatha. It has a population of 158,338 people. The district has 44 secondary schools and 400 teachers. Activities of the people include farming, business with main crops grown being Miraa, (Khat), coffee, tea, bananas, macadamia nuts, beans, maize and peas. This area was chosen as the researcher's professional interest in the area. The researcher has worked for 20 years in secondary schools of the area and has witnessed incidences of parental violence. Academic results from Tigania East Sub-County indicate that learner's academic performance in most secondary schools is not good.

3. Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design that was to explain the nature and extent of relationship between the various independent variables identified. Survey research attempts to obtain a complete and accurate description of a situation. The approach is considered valuable in assessing and collecting data for this particular study because it is suitable for an in depth study of the target population.. There are several advantages associated with a descriptive survey design including the fact that the researcher is in a position to collect adequate volume of data. This design therefore was appropriate for this study because it gathers the self reported data from the sampled members in order to determine the current status of the population. (Kombo and Tromp, 2006).

4. Target Population

Target population consisted of the principal's teachers and learners from the 44 secondary schools in Tigania East Sub-County. The study targeted 44 principals, 44 deputy principals, 9825 learners and 400 teachers.

5. Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

Stratified sampling procedure was used in this study,. Stratified sampling was used because it ensured inclusion in the sample of subgroups which otherwise would have been omitted entirely by other sampling methods because of their small number in the population (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). A sample of nine principals and nine deputy principals, was chosen from nine public schools which included mixed day secondary schools, mixed boarding secondary schools, boys boarding secondary schools and girls boarding secondary schools of Tigania East Sub-County. There were 9 guidance and counseling teachers who responded to the study. A sample of 22 teachers of secondary schools of the Sub-County participated in the study. The study also included 100 learners as respondents who included peer counselors and ordinary learners. So there was a total sample was 163 respondents participated in the study. Once the strata were established, the names of teachers and learners were put in a container and the required number was picked randomly.

Table 1
Sample Size in Relation to Target Population

Category	Population	Sample size
Principals	44	9
Deputy principals	44	9
Teachers	108	22
Guidance and Counselors	44	9
Learners	2150	100
Peer Counselor	72	14
Total	2462	163

6. Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaires were used to collect data from the learners. These were structured or closed-ended and unstructured or open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaires had two parts: Part A and Part B. Part A comprised of personal details and part B comprised of open and closed ended Likert scale questions. Items on the questionnaire were structured in order to capture data relevant to the variables under investigation. The questionnaire for deputy principals, teachers, learners, peer counsellors and guidance and counsellors contained two sections. The first section was used to capture demographic or personal information and the consequent sections captured data for other variables. The researcher also constructed interview guide that was used for the principals.

7. Piloting of the Research Instruments

A pilot study was done to assess the quality of the instruments. Procedures used in pilot testing were identical to those that were used during the actual study. One school in the neighbouring Tigania West Sub-County was used for the purpose of pretesting because they share the same environment and experiences and has population of 400 learners. The pilot study offers the opportunity to assess the appropriateness of the data collection methods in order to make amendments if necessary. In this research, the validity and reliability of the research instruments were specifically assessed.

8. Data Collection Procedure

The researcher visited respective schools to establish rapport with the respondents in preparation for data collection. This also was helpful in determining a suitable time to deliver the questionnaires to them. Questionnaires were handed out to the deputy principals, teachers, head of guidance and counseling departments,

learners and peer counselors. The respondents were given 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The respondents were asked to put the completed questionnaires in a sealed box placed in front of the classroom. Interviews were later held with the principals of the respective schools and they filled in the interview guide.

9. Data Analysis Techniques

Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The analysis of the data required a number of closely related operations such as the establishment of categories, the application of these categories to raw data through coding, tabulation and drawing statistical inferences. Large amounts data collected from the field was condensed into manageable groups and tables for further analysis. Editing was done to improve quality of data for coding and tabulation was done to classify the data and put it in form of tables. After tabulation, data was computed into percentage or frequencies and distribution tables. Inferential statistics was correlation coefficient and descriptive statistics such as the means were used in the data analysis. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), computer software was used to assist in data analysis. Results were displayed using tables. Qualitative data from interviews was also analyzed and information presented in the narrative form.

10. Personal Characteristics of the Respondents

Respondents to the study included 9 principals, 9 deputy principals, 22 ordinary teachers, 9 counseling teachers, 100 students and 14 peer counselors. 33% of the principals were aged between 18 to 25 years, 22.2% were aged between 26 to 30 years, 22.2% were aged between 33 and 44 years while 22.2% were between 45 and fifty years. 22.2% of the deputy principals were aged between 18 and 25 years, 33.3% were aged between 26 and 35 years, 22.2% were aged between 36 and 44 years while 22.2% were aged between 45 and 50 years. 13.6% of the ordinary teachers were aged between 18 and 25 years, 22.7% were aged between 26 and 35 years, 27.3% of the teachers were aged between 36 and 44 years while 36.4% were aged between 46 and 50 years. 21.4% of the counseling teachers were aged between 18 and 25 years, 21.4% were aged between 26 and 35 years, 28.6% were aged between 36 and 44 years while 28.6 were aged between 45 and 50 years. A disparity in percentages was caused by irregularities in the filling of questionnaires.

There were 20% learners below 13 years while peer counsellors were 21.4% in the same age bracket. There were 25% learners and 28.6% peer counselors aged between 14 and 15 years. Learners aged 16-18 years 30% while peer counselors were 28.6%. Learners who were above 18 years were 25% and peer counselors were 21.4%. It's clear that all age brackets were well represented and hence the data collected was not biased.

11. Type of the School from which Data was collected

Data was collected from county and district schools that were either mixed day secondary schools, boys boarding secondary schools, girls boarding secondary schools and mixed boarding secondary schools. Principals, deputy principals, teachers, counseling teachers, learners and peer counselors were selected from these schools.

The learners interviewed were from form three and form four. There were 50 form 3 learners and 50 form four learners who responded to the questionnaires. In addition, 7 peer counselors from form three and 7 peer counselors from form four were respondents to the study.

12. Behavioural Effects of Parental Violence on Learners Academic Performance.

This section deals with the behavioural effects of parental violence on learners as per the learners' responses that are indicated on Tables 4.8 and 4.9

Table 2
Behavioural Effect of Parental Violence

	Frequency	Percent
Aggressive	30	30.0
Meanness	10	10.0
Unable to make friends	20	20.0
Fighting often	20	20.0
Disruptive behavior	20	20.0
Total	100	100.0

The researcher sought to establish the behavioural effects of parental violence and how it impacts the learners' academic performance. The findings are summarized in Table 2. The study found out that 30 (30%) developed

aggressive behavior; 10 (10%) were mean, 20 (20%) were unable to make friends, 20 (20%) were often fighting, while 20 (20%) had a disruptive behaviour. These findings concur with those other respondents like the teachers peer counselor, deputy principals and the principals.

Table 3
Behavioural Effects of Parental Violence on Learners Academic Performance

	Frequency	Percent
Reading abilities	45	45.0
Disciplinary problems	30	30.0
Absenteeism	25	25.0
Total	100	100.0

The researcher also sought to establish whether there is any behavioural effect of parental violence had effects on learners' academic performance. The researcher established that the learners had problems in reading abilities 45(45%), while 30 (30%) had disciplinary problems, and the rest 25(25%) had a problem of absenteeism as shown on Table 3

These findings concur with research findings in the literature review. Exposure to parental violence threatens development (Osofskys, 2003). Research on aggressive responses found that when students witnessed marital conflict with negative tactics like physical aggression threat withdrawal), the students were more likely to engage in immediate aggressive behavioural (Cummings, Goekemorey & Papp, 2004).

Emotional effects of parental violence on children included: depression, anxiety behaviour and peer problems, post-traumatic stress disorder, diminished concentration, demotivation difficult to attend school lessons due to lack of concentration to complete academic tasks and isolation. This is in agreement with Kitzman's *et al.* (2003) meta-analysis of the effects of witnessing domestic violence on children. Kitzman *et-al* (2003) exposure was significantly correlated with negative effects. All the above emotional effects of parental violence undermine children's school adjustment and academic achievement. In trying to cope with these problems. Some children isolate themselves and withdraw from environment.

Students from backgrounds with parental violence had developed some violent behaviour such as verbal aggression, use of threats, physical aggression while others always pushed one another. These behaviours in turn affected the students' academic performance negatively. This is in agreement with other researches that indicates that children who witness of domestic violence score lower on measures of social competency than control groups (Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson & Zak 2002). Other researches have suggested specific social problems that children who witness domestic violence may encounter. In a study of children who had witnessed domestic violence, Hester, Pearson & Harwin (2000), found that children exhibited problems of social isolation, difficulties in trusting others and poor social skills. In a review of the research literature, social competence problems associated with children's exposure to domestic violence included deficits in school academic performance, deficits in interests and activities, and deficits in relationships with others.

This study agrees with other studies since behavioural effects are like aggressiveness, disruptive behaviour, antisocial behaviour, difficulty in regulating anger, frustrations, negative feelings, deficits in understanding, and lack of empathy. Personality and behavioral problems among children exposed to violence in the home can take the forms of psychosomatic illness, depression, suicidal, tendencies and bed-wetting (Fantuzzo & Wanda, 2003).

14. Conclusions

A child who has been exposed to parental violence may be more inclined to have behavioral problems at school. These children learn that violence is a way to dealing with anger and conflict; therefore, they may exhibit behavioral problems at school when interacting with peers and adults. The school is a very "social" environment thus; these behavioural problems may be more noticeable in school than at home because the child is interrelating with a variety of different people.

Exposure to parental violence, for most children, interferes with their ability to function properly in school and thus, leads to a decline in their academic performance. The parental violence creates a great deal of stress that may cause the child to have difficulties concentrating both inside and outside the classroom. As a result, the child may begin receiving poor grades because of his or her inability to focus on schoolwork.

Finally, parental violence affects learners emotionally as evidenced in the study. It appears as though inconsistencies in parental practices make a child more likely to perform poorly in school. Mothers or victims of parental violence may become so preoccupied with the critical issues of safety and survival that they are unable to fully access the needs of their children. Children need consistency in their lives; they need to know that there is someone always available to help them when needed. If a parent is failing to provide their child with the extra emotional support they need, then most likely the child is going to be adversely affected in terms of academic performance.

15. Recommendations

This study recommends:

1. Counseling of parents on behavioural effects of parental violence should be enhanced by Tigania East Secondary School principals and teachers so as to help counter the negative effects on children academic performance. This can be done during parents meetings.
2. Parents should be encouraged to keep children out of their disagreements that lead to parental violence which affects learners behavioural hence academic performance negatively
3. Teachers need to identify victims of parental violence in their schools and refer them for counseling.

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