

Prevalence of Domestic Violence among School Children

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the prevalence of domestic violence among school children. Using survey research design, data were collected from 664 school children in Ekiti State Nigeria. Multidimensional Domestic Violence Scale (MDVS) was used to collect data. Results from the study reveal a high prevalence of domestic violence with physical violence as the most recurrent. The study also found that even though school children's age did not considerably influence the degree to which they were exposed to domestic violence, the level of study was a significant element in verbal and social violence. Also, it was found out that gender meaningfully contributed to the level at which children were exposed to physical and social domestic violence. It was concluded that regardless the gender, age, and level of study there is a high prevalence of domestic violence among school children in Ekiti State. With the adverse effect of domestic violence on children, in the long run, sensitizations, preventions, and interventions programmes should be embraced to educate the children, parents, and other adults.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Verbal Violence, Social Violence, Physical Violence

Introduction

The array of domestic violence been experienced by children across culture and Nigeria in particular can make one tag it a social menace or social epidemic. An in-depth look towards various kinds of reports relating to domestic violence against children on social media, newspaper and other media makes it worrisome and calls for urgent intervention among relevant stakeholders. A child is a person under the age of eighteen years. A child can be referred to as **every human being below the age of 18 years** (The African Child Policy Forum, 2013). Childhood stage is viewed as a period of special protection and rights. Children at this stage in the elementary school can be referred to as school children. School children are children that are expected to be in the elementary schools be it preschools or primary schools. These children are vulnerable, their vulnerability have exposed them to hazards such as child abuse, domestic violence, bully, health etc. in the school, at home and in the environment. Children's development is expected to be seen within a protected and nurturing home environment. Where the home and environment are infected by violence, the entire task of growing up are possibly to be adversely affected.

Violence is defined as intentional use of force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, a group or a community, which result in injury, death, psychological harm, or developmental loss or damage (Lourenço et al., 2013). Violence is an act of hostility that is commonly found in interpersonal dealings or interaction. Kahol (2003) posited that violence is a coercive mechanism to enforce one's will

over another in order to prove or feel a sense of power. Violence is an act of aggression, usually in interpersonal interaction or relations. Violence is seen as an active endeavor by one who is powerful to regain a sense of control over at least one element of his environment when they feel out of control generally (Roy, 2015). Domestic violence is described as abusive behaviour used by one intimate person to control and dominate the other intimate person (Narmada et al., 2016). It can also be referred to as threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation) by current or former intimate partner or family member (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety & Department of Justice, 2013; Devaney, 2015).

Domestic violence occurs in all ethnic, social, religious and educational groups (Thornton, 2014) It is generally understood to apply to any assault committed by a person who either shares a living arrangement with or is involved in an intimate relationship with the victim of the assault (Gordon, 2002). Domestic violence is common in male dominated cultures such as patrilineal and patriarchy cultures, as it is justified in customs and traditions, and condoned by law. Most children who are victim of domestic violence suffer in silence because such cases go unreported (Newell et al., 2008). Kanchiputu & Mwale, (2016) highlighted that there are various reasons for lack of reporting, for instance, young children lack capacity to report, many of them are afraid of reprisals by perpetrators or interventions by authorities that worsen the overall situation and parents, the primary protectors of children, are in many cases also the perpetrators of violence and may remain silent if the violence is perpetrated by other family members or powerful members of the community or society.

Domestic violence by the parents and other adults against the children has been identified to include physical, sexual, psychological, economic, emotional and verbal (Roy, 2015; UNICEF, 2006). Roy, (2015) and UNICEF, (2006) associated physical violence against children includes pushing, shaking, slapping, arm twisting, hair pulling, punching, kicking, ear twisting, dragging, knock on the head, beating, trying to choke or burn them on purpose, and threat or attack with a weapon. Sexual violence includes having sex forcefully with female children in the household, pornography, or enforcing them to perform other sexual acts, coerced sex through threats or intimidation or through physical force, forcing unwanted sexual acts, forcing sex in front of others and forcing sex with others. Psychological abuse involves isolation from others, excessive jealousy, control of his or her activities, verbal aggression, intimidation through destruction of property, harassment and stalking, threats of violence and constant belittling and humiliation. Also, economic abuse includes failure to meet their basic needs, controlling access to money and other resources. Emotional violence by the parents and other adults against the children includes anger, intimidation, controlling, neglect, humiliation, threats, isolation and verbal abuse. On the other hand, verbal abuse might involve threats, name-calling, blaming, ridicule, disrespect, and criticism. Victims of domestic violence may be trapped in violent situations through isolation, power and control, insufficient financial resources, fear, and shame (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005; Roy, 2015).

There is an ongoing awareness of the fact that children are exposed and experiences domestic violence every day. This can be referred to as 'eyewitnesses' of violence. To be an eyewitness of violence may not really describe ways in which children become involved in cases of domestic violence. Lourenço et al. (2013) noted that a child might be affected by more than one type of violence, most especially in a chronic and severe situation where these circumstances are related.

The prevalence of studies on this topic have not been established, most researchers rely on estimates. Radford et al. (2011) estimated that a large number of children are exposed to domestic violence in Great Britain. Similarly, Dauvergne & Johnson (2015) also estimated that children in half a million households in Canada are exposed to domestic violence. As a result of this estimated values in these countries, to determine exact statistics of children exposed to domestic violence in the study area will be quite challenging which will invariably affect the gross impacts it has on children except studies such as this is conducted. Several developed countries have conducted research on the effect of domestic violence on school children (Pingley, 2017; Rossman, 2011; Stanley, 2011), while few studies had been carried out in developing countries which could be as a result of inadequate data due to the fact that domestic violence is considered as family affair which one should not meddled with in the African settings (Aihie, 2010). In Nigeria, there is currently no reliable data on the prevalence of domestic violence on school children, hence this study intends to be one of the pioneering attempts to investigate the prevalence of domestic violence among school children in Ekiti State Nigeria with the view to identify the levels of domestic violence, and effect of the demographic variables of gender, class of study, location and age of the report levels and types of domestic violence.

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design. The population of the study comprised of public primary school pupils in Ekiti State. A multistage sampling technique was used in selecting 664 participants (male= 341, female= 323) for the study. From each of the three senatorial districts in the state, two Local Government Area (LGA) were selected to make a total number of six LGA. The selected LGA were stratified to urban and rural area. A school was randomly selected from the selected area, and a total number of 12 primary schools were used for the study.

A research instrument, the Multidimensional Domestic Violence Scale (MDVS) was developed and was used to collect data for the study. The scale is a 32-item self-report instrument consisting of items intended to find out the extent to school children were violated by parents and other adults. The items cover four aspects of domestic violence, namely physical violence (e.g. 'being beaten often at home'); verbal violence (such as 'swore at me' or 'called me names'); social violence (e.g. 'made other people not to talk to me'); and sexual violence (such as 'touch my body, slap my buttocks or watch pornography'). Participants were required to specify how frequent (0 = 'Not at all', 1 = 'Once', 2 = 'More than once') they experienced the 32 domestic violence experiences. The MDVS was found to possess internal reliability coefficient with Cronbach Alpha value of 0.79. The scale has total scores range of 0 to 32, a range of 0 to 8 on each of the subscales. Scores between 0 to 16 specify a low level of domestic violence, 17 to 21 specify moderate level of domestic violence while 22 to 32 indicate a high level of domestic violence.

Results

To ascertain the prevalence of domestic violence among participants, data collected from the Multidimensional Domestic Violence Scale were subjected to descriptive analysis. The data in Table 1 reveal the overall level of domestic violence experienced by the participants.

Table 1. Reported levels of domestic violence

Levels of Domestic Violence	Frequency		
	N	Per cent	Cumulative per cent
Low	82	12.4	12.4
Moderate	218	32.8	45.2
High	364	54.8	100.0
Total	664	100.0	100.0

The data in Table 1 shows, 82 participants representing 12.4 percent reported a low level of domestic violence while 218 participants representing 32.8 percent were moderately involved in domestic violence. Also, 364 participants representing 54.8 percent experienced a high level of domestic violence. In order to determine the type of domestic violence experienced, participants' scores were subjected to descriptive statistics on each of the four sub-scales of the research instrument. The mean and standard deviation values of the types of domestic violence are as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of component variables of Domestic Violence

Types of Domestic Violence	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Physical Violence	664	4.01	3.38
Verbal Violence	664	3.39	3.36
Social Violence	664	1.60	1.98
Sexual Violence	664	0.39	0.78
	664	9.39	2.38

Table 2 reveal that physical violence was the most frequent type of domestic violence the participants experienced. This was followed by verbal violence and social violence. The least experienced by the school children was sexual violence.

A further attempt was made to determine the influence of the demographic variables of gender, age, level of study on reported types of domestic violence. Table 3 shows a t-test comparison of the domestic violence scores of male and female participants on types of domestic violence while Table 4 shows the difference in the scores of pupils in upper and lower primary schools.

Table 3. Difference in domestic violence scores of male and female participants

Types of domestic violence	Gender	N	\bar{x}	SD	df	t	P
Physical violence	Male	341	4.14	3.337	662	1.01	<0.05
	Female	323	3.87	3.416			
Verbal violence	Male	341	3.37	3.561	662	-0.49	>0.05
	Female	323	3.41	3.148			
Social violence	Male	341	1.61	1.992	662	0.18	<0.05
	Female	323	1.58	1.977			
Sexual violence	Male	341	0.41	0.837	662	0.54	>0.05
	Female	323	0.37	0.717			

* Significant level $p = < 0.05$

From table 3, t-test statistical analysis of the types of domestic violence reported by participants showed a significant difference between male and female scores on physical ($t = 1.01$, $p < 0.05$) and social violence ($t = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$) reporting with male participants reporting higher level than female. Also, the table revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female scores on verbal and sexual violence.

Table 4. Difference in domestic violence scores of lower and upper primary classes

Types of domestic violence	Class	N	\bar{x}	SD	Df	t	p
Physical violence	Lower primary	80	3.68	2.93	662	-0.93	> 0.05
	Upper primary	577	4.05	3.44			
Verbal violence	Lower primary	80	2.89	2.65	662	-1.41	< 0.05
	Upper primary	577	3.45	3.45			
Social violence	Lower primary	80	1.64	1.47	662	0.26	< 0.05
	Upper primary	577	1.58	2.03			
Sexual violence	Lower primary	80	0.34	0.71	662	0.57	> 0.05
	Upper primary	577	0.39	0.78			

* Significant level $p = < 0.05$

As shown in Table 4, a comparison of the domestic violence scores of participants in lower and upper primary classes. A t-test statistical analysis of domestic violence in lower and upper primary pupils on verbal ($t = -1.41$, $p < 0.05$) and social ($t = 0.26$, $p < 0.05$) violence reveal a significant difference at 0.05 probability level. This suggests that the levels of physical and sexual violence reported by pupils in lower and upper primary classes were not significantly different.

The study also examined the effect of age on the reported types of domestic violence faced by pupils of different age groups using the one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical procedures. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Influence of age on participants' level of domestic violence

Types of Domestic Violence	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Physical Violence	Between Groups	23.23	2	11.62	1.02	> 0.05
	Within Groups	7532.71	661	11.39		
	Total	7555.95	663			
Verbal Violence	Between Groups	17.56	2	8.78	0.78	> 0.05
	Within Groups	7485.74	661	11.33		
	Total	7503.30	663			

Social Violence	Between Groups	3.73	2	1.87	0.47	>0.05
	Within Groups	2604.10	661	3.94		
	Total	2607.83	663			
Sexual Violence	Between Groups	1.87	2	0.93	1.53	>0.05
	Within Groups	402.32	661	0.61		
	Total	404.19	663			

* Significant level $p = < 0.05$

As presented in Table 5, a t-test statistical analysis of the influence of age on all types of domestic violence did not reveal any significant difference at 0.05 probability level. This suggests that physical, verbal, social, and sexual violence reported by pupils at different ages were not significantly different.

Discussion

The findings of this study have shown that primary school pupils in Nigeria experienced high levels of domestic violence. The collected data on the prevalence of domestic violence among primary school pupils revealed that 54.8% of the participants recorded a high level of domestic violence, 32.8% showed a moderate level while 12.4% reported a low level of domestic violence. The study has also shown that physical violence was the most prominent type of domestic violence. This was followed by verbal violence social violence. The high percentage of pupils who recorded a high level of domestic violence concerning physical violence is quite worrying as it indicates a severe setback that may have broad effects on children socio-emotional development and by extension may bring about negatively impact on the cognitive, psychological, psychosocial wellbeing of the children that will later affect the society at large.

The findings of this study point attention to the seriousness of domestic violence as a social problem that require immediate attention and interventions. It is logical to assume that exposing children to domestic violence will cause a high level of traumatic stress, social aggression, anxiety, withdrawal, anxiety, depression, delinquency, low self-esteem, emotional hurt, psychological hurt, which is consistent with the study of Adeyele, (2021), Greene et al., (2018), Kanchiputu & Mwale, (2016), Osofsky (1999), and Roy, (2015). The occurrence of these has an adverse effect beyond the victims of domestic violence, it may affect their family, community, society, and the entire nation. Also, it looks reasonable to deduce that the high rate of domestic violence reported by the participants is perhaps an early indication of anti-social behavior which will ultimately end in criminal acts and violence in the Nigerian society (Adeyele et al., 2017). This line of thought is strengthened by the submissions of some researchers such as Øverlien (2010), (Hutch-Bocks, 2008) and Roy (2015)) that the experiences from past violence contribute immensely to social maladjustment, child's behavioural and psychological problems. In the same vein, Narmada et al. (2016) posited that exposing children to violence affects their healthy development and may adversely affect them in adulthood.

Also, the results of the findings have shown that participants gender significantly contributed to the level to which school-age children were exposed to physical and social domestic violence. Precisely, male participants were subjected to a higher level of physical and social violence than their female colleagues.

This finding is supported by the work of Finkelhor et al. (2009)) which indicated that males were more likely to be victims of physical violence than females. However, there was no gender difference in exposure to sexual and verbal violence. This can be buttressed with Asagba et al., (2021) and Fagan & Wright, (2011). Although, this finding contradicts previous studies where there were diverse opinions on gender differences and exposure to domestic violence (Benebo et al., 2018).

Furthermore, a major finding of the study shows that even though the age of the learners did not have a significant influence on reported levels of domestic violence among school children, their level of study meaningfully contributed to the degree to which they were victims of domestic violence. Particularly, participants in upper primary classes witnessed an overall higher level of verbal and social violence than their lower primary class colleagues. There is no consistent data on the class level of school-age children concerning exposure to domestic violence. However, this possibly might be associated with the socio-cultural belief that older children should be able to take care of themselves and also be responsible for their younger ones.

Conclusion

Conclusively, the study established that there is a high prevalence of domestic violence experienced by school-age children regardless of their age, class, gender, and location. The damaging consequences of domestic violence should bring about pragmatic ways to confront the rate at which children are exposed to domestic violence. Given this, programmes such as sensitizations, preventions, and inventions should be put in place to educate the children, parents, and other adults on the adverse effect of this occurrence on the children and the society at large. Further studies will benefit from investigating the effect of domestic violence on school-age children.

Ethical Approval:

As per international standard or university standard ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the authors.

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