

**COUNSELLING AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG FAMILIES, A PANACEA TO
BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN NASARAWA STATE,
NIGERIA**

Ayuba, I. H.
Nasarawa State University Keffi
Faculty of Education
Department of Educational Foundations
Guidance and Counselling Unit
iyaharunaayuba@nsuk.edu.ng or iyaharunaayuba@yahoo.com
+2348065703395

Oke, T. D.
Nasarawa State University Keffi
Faculty of Education
Department of Educational Foundations
Guidance and Counselling Unit.

&

Jacks, S. C.
Department of Guidance and Counselling,
University of Calabar.
PMB 1115, Calabar, Nigeria

Abstract

Domestic violence is increasingly becoming a rampant problem among Nigerian families, with children always at the receiving end. The paper focuses on the impact of domestic violence on the behavioural development of primary school pupils. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. It had a population comprising primary four and five pupils purposively selected from Nasarawa State University Demonstration Nursery and Primary School. Data was collected using purposive random technique. Statistics used for data analysis includes frequency, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Findings of the study revealed that 50.9% of respondents have witnessed domestic violence between their parents, and while 20.0% of them are witnesses of physical violence, 10.9% witnessed emotional and 7.3% witnessed economic violence. The study similarly revealed that some respondents exhibit similar violent behaviours that they witness. It was hence concluded that domestic violence between parents has negative impact on pupils' physical, psychological, emotional and social development. Researchers therefore recommended the need for counsellors Educate and counsel parents/families to guard their children's upbringing against exposure to domestic violence

Keywords: Counselling, domestic violence, behavioural problems, school pupils

Introduction

The family is an important environment for every child. Parents ought to be proactive in ensuring that the home is a comfortable place for children to experience love, care, affection and protection. Comfortable and peaceful homes help children to grow and develop the right attitude towards life. This is however not the case with many families globally considering the increasing rate of domestic violence. The CLEEN Foundation National Crime Victimization Survey (2013) reported that one in every three respondents admitted to being a victim of domestic violence. The same survey also found a nationwide increase in

COUNSELLING AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG FAMILIES

domestic violence from 21% in 2011 to 30% in 2013. Domestic violence is a function of personality traits and mental characteristics of the perpetrators, external factors in the perpetrator's environment such as family structure, stress and social learning (Oluremi, 2015). Domestic violence is one problem hampering the peace and comfort of families thereby, affecting children in different ways. The need for consistent care giving in a non-violent environment is therefore crucial for the development of children (Howell, Barnes, Miller & Graham-Bermann 2016).

The National Coalition against Domestic Violence (NCADV, 2015) defines Domestic violence as a wilful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behaviours that have become part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. Domestic violence appears to have no boundaries as it has penetrated homes of educated and uneducated, rich and poor, young and old couples, and religious and non-religious individuals. Parents and significant others are most times not mindful that negative actions displayed in the presence of children live them traumatized and impacting negatively on their behaviours. Witnessing domestic violence may not necessarily mean that the child is in visible range of the violence (Meltzer, Doos, Vostanis, Ford, & Goodman, 2009). It could just be that the child overhears quarrelsome conversations and also understands that all is not well in the family. Scheeringa and Zeanah (1995) reported that children who even sense a perceived threat directed at their caregivers are more likely to have negative behavioural and emotional outcomes than other types of childhood stressors. This suggests that witnessing domestic violence has developmental impacts on children, and can start as early as conception and carry on through adulthood depending on the severity of the trauma (Curran, 2013) the child is exposed to, over time. Children hardly voice out their displeasure and hurts about their parents' conduct towards each other. They therefore experience flashbacks on episodes of domestic violence they had witnessed, and likely to develop certain unhealthy attitudes towards others as they grow. Note that domestic violence ripples through families, impacting not only the victim, but the children as well (Pingley, 2017). This is why counselling is considered timely in prevention and treatment of domestic violence.

Children are good at emulating whatever behaviour parents put up in their presence. Children are exposed to domestic violence are more likely to exhibit aggressive, antisocial fearful and inhibited behaviours, showing lower social competences (Edleson, 1997). Many children developed temper tantrums and fight with siblings and schoolmates because they are witnesses of violence (Dutton, 2000). According to Sullivan, Egan, and Gooch (2004), 275 million children in the world and more than 10 million children in the United States alone are witnesses of domestic violence. In African countries, the statistics is possibly higher. The impact of domestic violence on children as witnesses takes diverse dimensions ranging from educational, social, emotional, behavioural, and the likes. Domestic violence affects all who are exposed: perpetrators, victims, and the children who witness the violence (Pingley, 2017). This article only focuses on the impact of domestic violence on the behaviour of pupils.

Children who witness domestic violence experience delays in cognitive and emotional development, extreme withdrawals, aggressiveness, anxiety disorders, as well as internalizing and externalizing behavioural problems (Antle, Barbee, Yankeelov, & Bledsoe, 2010). Children who are exposed to acts of Violence turnout experiencing; lower social competence, reduce academic achievement, controlling behaviours in relationships, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms, externalizing behaviour problems like aggression and conduct disorder (Chanmugam & Teasley, 2014). Children who experience trauma due to exposure to domestic violence have shown higher cognitive, psychological, and emotional impairments (Huang, Vikse, Lu, & Yi, 2015). Other problems include; irritability, sleep problems, fear of being alone, immaturity, language development, poor concentration, aggressiveness, antisocial behaviours, anxiety, depression, violent behaviours, low frustration tolerance, problems eating, and being passive or withdrawn (Holt, 2015). In short, domestic violence has far reaching impacts on children, with numerous psychological effects especially for the children who witness it (Pingley, 2017).

While the effects of witnessing domestic violence in boys can be seen through externalized behaviours such as aggressiveness or disobedience, girls tend to show more internalized behaviours such as anxiety and depression (Meltzer et al., 2009). And while some children may excel in school and feel safe, others may be distracted or tired (Chanmugam & Teasley, 2014). Witnessing domestic violence is a life threatening experience that leaves creates a sense of vulnerability, hopelessness, psychological disorders and emotional threats among children, resulting in negative academic capabilities (Kanchiputu and Mwale, 2016). Domestic violence places great burden on children across all developmental stages and needs to be checked

Domestic violence could present as physical violence, economic violence, expressive/emotional violence, and accidental violence among others. Physical violence involves beating, pushing, coercing, kicking, knocking, punching, choking, confinement and assaults using objects, tools and weapon. Physical abuse is one of the commonest forms of abuse (Oluremi, 2015). This violence harms and pains children physically and emotionally. Emotional Violence involves insults, shouts, repeated criticism, frequent blames, threatening, denial of love and affection, and neglect. Emotional violence may not have physical traces but harms children's feelings and thinking. It is mind centred and causes unforeseen dangers such as anxiety, depression, trauma, stress and can lead to suicide; a rising reality in Nigeria of recent. Economic violence occurs when the financial support is withheld or withdrawn, important matters like payment of school fees is ignored, and denial of food for the family is experienced. It also includes stealing from or defrauding a loved one, withholding money for essential things like food and medical treatment, manipulating or exploiting family member for financial gain, preventing a loved one from working or controlling his/he choice of occupation (Oluremi, 2015). Many children are victims of violence dying in silence.

Statement of the Problem

Domestic violence increasingly constitutes serious problems in families. Most times it occurs between parents, it also occurs among significant others in the family. Wide spread attention is focused on the direct victims who are usually women and children. Unfortunately, if a child is an indirect victim of domestic violence, no one seems to bother about how such violence traumatizes the child psychologically, nor how his/her behaviours can be negatively influenced. An instance existed of a primary school pupil who witnessed domestic violence between her parents almost on daily bases. The pupil struggled in doing school activities compared to her class mates and friends, and also was reserved. One of the pupil's parents reported that their child had difficulty sleeping at night because her mind was loaded with episodes of violent behaviours between them. Most children are unable to voice out their concerns about the violence that occur in their families, thereby internalizing them and eventually reflecting them in their behaviours. That is probably the reason why some primary school pupils show violent and bullying behaviours. Violence behaviours exhibited before children can possibly live indelible memories of unhealthy family relationship in their minds hence, affecting them psychologically and influencing their behaviours, creating problems in families and the society at large. Based on this, the article focused on counselling against domestic violence among families, as a channel to addressing behavioural problems of Primary School Pupils in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this paper are to:

- i. Find out whether pupils are raised under violent conditions at home
- ii. Identify the forms of domestic violence that pupils have witnessed at home
- iii. Find out violent behaviours that manifest among pupils in school

Research Questions

The following research questions are stated to guide in achieving the objectives of the study:

- i. Are pupils raised under violent conditions at home
- ii. What are the forms of domestic violence that pupils have witnessed at home?
- iii. What violent behaviours do pupils manifest at school?

Methodology

This paper adopted a descriptive survey research design. It describes the impacts of witnessing domestic violence by primary school pupils of Nasarawa State University Keffi (NSUK) demonstration Nursery and Primary staff school. The population of the study included 55 primary 4 and 5 pupils of the school. A questionnaire designed by the researchers was used for data collection. The questionnaire had four sections; 'A' for demographic data, 'B' investigated the existence violence in pupils' families, 'C' investigated the forms of domestic violence witnessed by pupils, and 'D' focused on pupils' behaviours in school. Statistics used include frequencies and percentages, mean and standard deviation.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of the Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age:		
Below 10years	9	16.4%
Above 10years	46	83.6%
Gender:		
Boys	29	52.7%
Girls	26	47.3%
Class:		
Primary 4	36	65.5%
Primary 5	19	34.5%

Survey, 2019

Table 1 reveal that 83.6% of the respondents are pupils between ages 10 and above. While 52% of them are boys, 47.3% of them are girls. 65.5% of the respondents are primary four pupils, and 34.5% are primary five pupils. Most of these respondents sat for the 2019 common entrance examination and are at the verge of enrolling into different secondary schools across the country. What this means is that any negative behaviours learnt as a result of being a witness of domestic violence can be carried along into secondary schools hence, making the school environment unbearable for other children to learn. On the other hand also, such unhealthy behaviours can be unlearned by the pupils through regular guidance and counselling organised by professional counsellors.

Research Question 1: Are pupils raised under violent conditions at home?

Table 2 shows frequency counts, mean and standards deviation conducted

Table 2: Mean Responses of Pupils as Witnesses of Domestic Violence

Item Statements	Responses in Freq., Mean & S.D	
	Yes	No
Do your parents fight at home sometimes?	17(1.47/.51)	38(1.47/.50)
Do you hear your parents insulting themselves?	4(1.75/.50)	51(1.45/.50)
Do your parents quarrel with each other?	17(1.47/.51)	38(1.47/.51)
Can you say your parents have never fought?	28(1.57/.50)	27(1.37/.49)
Do your parents throw objects at each other?	6(1.67/.52)	49(1.45/.50)

Survey, 2019

Table 2 shows that out of 55 pupils who responded to the questionnaire, 17 have confirmed that their parents fight, same number said their parents are quarrelsome, 4 confirmed that their parents are insulting, and while 27 of them cannot affirm that their parents have never fought, 6 have witnessed their parents throwing objects at each other. This means that some pupils are living under unhealthy family environment capable of making their upbringing problematic. This study supports Jaffe, Wolfe, and Wilson (1990) who noted that children who witnessed their mother being subjected to abuses suffer emotional problems similar to those experienced by physically abused children. It is also in sync with Kanchiputu and Mwale (2016) who emphasized that domestic violence is a life threatening experience that leaves children vulnerable, hopeless, psychologically and emotionally threatened to the extent of affecting their academic capabilities. Similarly, Ifeanyichukwu, Christopher & Kizito (2017) justified that the trauma that children experience while watching their mother humiliated, demeaned or younger siblings abused feel socially insecure and uncomfortable about their future as they cannot predict what will happen next and tend to be overly over protective of themselves and younger ones.

Research Question 2: What forms of domestic violence have Pupils Witnessed at Home?

Result of the analysis is presented in Table 3

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis of Forms of Domestic Violence Witnessed by Pupils

Variables	Responses in Freq. and percentages		
	Yes	No	Total
Physical violence	11(20.0%)	44(80.0%)	55(100.%)
Emotional violence	6(10.9%)	49(89.1%)	55(100%)
Economic Violence	4(7.3%)	51(92.7%)	55(100%)

Survey, 2019

Table 3 shows that 20.0% of the respondents witnessed physical violence between their parents, 10.9% have witnessed emotional violence, while 7.3% are witnesses of economic violence. This means that pupils exposed to these violence at home are bound to show different behavioural challenges in school. The findings are in sync with Oluremi (2015) who opined that physical violence

is one of the commonest forms of violence among families. Similarly, Kanchiputu and Mwale (2016) found that students and adults reported that children are sometimes exposed to physical violence at home, emotional violence being the common form of violence reported against children, followed by economic/abuse.

Research Question 3: What violent behaviours do pupils manifest at school?

Table 4 shows result of the analysis.

Table 4: Descriptive Analysis of Violent Behaviours Manifested by Pupils

Item Statement	Responses (in Freq., Mean & S.D)	
	Yes	No
Are there pupils who fight in your class?	54 (1.46/.51)	1(2.00/.00)
Are there quarrelsome pupils in your class?	42(1.40/.49)	13(1.69/.48)
Have you ever been insulted by your classmate?	49 (1.47/.50)	6(1.50/.55)
Do you fight your class mates sometimes?	39(1.51/.51)	16(1.38/.50)
Do you insult your classmates sometimes?	34(1.50/.51)	21(1.43/.51)

Survey, 2019

Table 4 revealed that physical fights, quarrels, and insults abound among primary for and five pupils in the school. This is possibly the effect of the exposure they have as pupils from their respective families. The finding supports earlier findings by Scheeringa and Zeanah (1995) that children who sense/perceive threats directed at their caregivers are more likely to have negative behavioural and emotional outcomes than other types of childhood stressors. This confirms Abbasi, Akram, and Manzoor (2015) who noted that Physical violence affects children negatively and makes boys to show rude behaviour to their sisters. It further agrees with their study which revealed that 59% of the respondents said that their sons showed rude behaviour while 85% of the respondents said that their daughters were shy, due to their attachment with parents. As a result of the attachment children have with their parents, physical violence between parents affects children emotionally, physically, badly hurts their self-confidence, and causes delinquent behaviour among children as 71% of the respondents in the same study said their children show such behaviour.

Implications for Counselling

Many children who witness violence turn out to be violent themselves and experience psychological stress thereby informing the following counselling implications;

- i. General counselling on domestic violence should time to time be administered by school counsellors to pupils in order to discourage violent behaviours
- ii. Attempts of violence among pupils should be reported for necessary counselling intervention
- iii. Pupils who demonstrate non-violent behaviours should be re-enforced to continue
- iv. Encourage pupils to avail themselves for counselling if they have violent parents

Conclusion

This article concludes that domestic violence is real in Nigeria but its perpetrators are unaware of the extent to which their actions affect children in the long-run, long after the violence has ended. It revealed that violent behaviours demonstrated by school pupils can sometimes be attributed to witnessing domestic violence hence, children need not be exposed to unhealthy behaviours and conducts.

Recommendations

Based on findings obtained, authors recommend that it is paramount for counsellors to:

- i. Educate and counsel parents/families to guard their children's upbringing against exposure to domestic violence
- ii. Educate families on the existence of different forms of domestic violence, their manifestation, and how they affect children
- iii. Counsel primary school pupils against imitating unacceptable behaviours, and encouraging them to seek counsel from professional counsellors, providing them information on where to access counselling

References

- Abbasi, S. S., Akram, M. B., & Manzoor, B. (2015). Impact of wife battering on the family. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Science*, 6(4), 344-353
- Agbo, C. & Choji, R. (2014). Domestic violence against women; Any end in sight?. from leadership/news/382501
- Antle, B., Barbee, A., Yankeelov, P., & Bledsoe, L. (2010). A qualitative evaluation of the effects of mandatory reporting of domestic violence on victims and their children. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 13:56-73. DOI: 10-1080/10522150903468065
- Chanmugam, A. & Teasley, M. (2014). What should school social workers know about children exposed to adult intimate partner violence. *National Association of Social Workers*. DOI: 10.1093/cs/cdu023.
- Curran, L. (2013). *101 trauma-informed intervention*. PESI Publishing and Media. Edited by: Marietta Whittlesey & Bookmasters.
- Dutton, D. (2000). Witnessing parental violence as a traumatic experience shaping the abusive personality. *Journal of aggression*, 3: 59-67.
- Edleson, J. (1999). Children's witnessing of adult domestic violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 14(8), 839-870
- Howell, K., Barnes, S., Miller, L., & Graham-Bermann, S. (2016). Development variations in the impact of intimate partner violence exposure during childhood. *Journal of Injury and Violence research*. 8:1, 43-57. DOI: 10.5249/jivr.v8i1.663.
- Kanchiputu, P. G. & Mwale, M. (2016). Effects of domestic violence on children's education: the case study of mpemba, in blantyre district [malawi]. *Journal of Psychological Abnormality*, 5(2), doi: 10.4172/2471-9900.1000152
- Meltzer, H., Doos, L., Vostanis, P., Ford, T., & Goodman, R. (2009). The mental health of children who witness domestic violence. *Child and Family Social Work*, 14: 491-501.
- NCADV(2015). Domestic violence national statistics. Retrieved: 15th July, 2019 from www.ncadv.org
- Oluremi, F. D. (2015). Domestic violence against women in Nigeria. *European Journal of Psychological Research*, 2(1), 24-33. ISSN 2057-4794
- Pingley, T. (2017). The Impact of Witnessing Domestic Violence on Children: A Systematic Review. Retrieved from Sophia, the St. Catherine University repository website: https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers/776