Primary School Pupils' Awareness of Physical and Sexual Violence in Tanzania

Jane Kimaro and Upendo Biswalo
St John's University of Tanzania, Department of Education, Tanzania
Email: Kimaro.jane83@gmail.com

Abstract: Children who have experienced physical and sexual violence are at risk for a variety of physical, mental, behavioural, and social issues that can lead to drug abuse and academic failure. However, how children perceive physical and sexual violence is unknown. This study, therefore, explores primary school pupils' awareness of physical and sexual violence in the three selected schools in Moshi district, in Kilimanjaro region, Tanzania. This study employed a mixed approach whereby interviews and questionnaires were used as data collection tools. Random sampling technique was utilized to select 92 students from three primary schools as the study's sample unit, while a purposeful sampling technique was employed to select 12 key informants (6 teachers and 6 parents) from the total population. The findings have revealed that pupils had limited knowledge of the physical and sexual violence they faced. However, some participating schools employed various approaches to enable students to become aware about physical and sexual violence. The approaches included interactive seminars and age-appropriate educational materials. The study's findings can help to design intervention strategies to end sexual and physical violence against students in primary schools in Tanzania and to improve their wellbeing.

Keywords: Awareness of sexual violence, physical violence, pupils, academic achievement, Tanzania

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1. Introduction

This study explored primary school pupils' awareness of physical and sexual violence in the three selected schools in Moshi district, in Kilimanjaro region, Tanzania. For this study, sexual violence is defined as all forms of sexual victimization of a girl or boy under the age of 18, including sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. This includes compelled, pressured, coerced, unwanted, or unlawful sexual activity or attempts to engage in such activity with a girl or boy under the age of 18 (WHO, 2019). Moreover, in this study, physical violence is defined as any physical punishment or psychological aggression by a caregiver or authority, including any physical act intended to cause pain or distress (WHO, 2019).

Physical and sexual violence against children is a widespread public health concern, evident on a global scale. It happens in all countries and any setting – in a child's home, community, school and online. This phenomenon is observed across nations and various contexts, encompassing the domestic environment, local community, educational institutions, and the digital realm. According to a study conducted by HakiElimu (2020), violent disciplinary practices are prevalent and socially sanctioned in many regions across the globe. For a significant number of young individuals, acts of violence are perpetrated by individuals in positions of trust, such as their parents or caregivers, teachers, peers, and neighbours.

UNICEF's (2019) report explored data from 20 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) using Demographic and Health Survey data and shows that a large proportion

of pupils aged 07 to 12 years never disclosed or sought help following experiences of physical and/or sexual violence (ranging from approximately 32–69%). The WHO study found that 0.3 to 12% of female respondents reported being forced to have sex that they did not want to since the age of 12 years. Peru, Samoa, and the United Republic of Tanzania reported the highest levels, ranging from 10 to 12% (Palermo, Bleck, and Peterman, 2018).

The act of compelling a child to engage in sexual behaviours, regardless of the child's level of awareness, is classified as child sexual violence in the context of Tanzania (HakiElimu, 2020). This encompasses various forms of inappropriate behaviour, such as engaging in physical contact, exposing children to explicit sexual content, observing sexual acts, promoting children to engage in sexually inappropriate behaviour, and engaging in unwarranted physical contact.

Despite the notable prevalence of sexual abuse cases reported in Tanzania, very little research evidence has been documented regarding primary school students' awareness on physical and sexual violence in Moshi district, Kilimanjaro region. Examining the contextual factors that impact the reluctance of pupils to report incidents of physical and sexual abuse is an intervention aimed at addressing violence against children, hence enhancing the overall welfare of children. The results of this study are expected to offer significant contributions to the understanding of this phenomenon among teachers, students, the community, and other pertinent stakeholders in the education sector within Moshi district and Tanzania as a whole. Specifically, it will shed light on effective strategies for supporting children who are victims of sexual and physical violences but failing to disclose them due to lack of awareness, as well as providing guidance on how to report such incidents to the appropriate support services.

2. Literature Review

Finkelhor, (2019) asserts that, child sexual abuse is a prevalent issue affecting both boys and girls worldwide, encompassing individuals from many racial, ethnic, and family backgrounds. According to the findings of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), around 20% of individuals within the adult population aged 18 to 74, amounting to 8.5 million individuals, reported having encountered at least one instance of child abuse, encompassing emotional, physical, sexual, or exposure to domestic violence or abuse, prior to reaching the age of 16.

The study conducted by Meinck, et al. (2017) in Kenya revealed a noteworthy influence on those who have experienced violence, particularly those who have been subjected to sexual abuse. The phenomenon resulted in the psychological conditioning of both individuals who have experienced violent crimes as well as those who have committed such acts. These behaviors, as it was found, contribute to the socialization of children to view various forms of child abuse as normal and sustain their occurrence. According to both national and international regulations, such behaviours could be classified as acts of aggression against individuals who are under the legal age of adulthood. Still, it has been observed that the perpetrators and the victims in this scenario perceive these activities as non-deviant or non-violent due to their psychological conditioning, inclination to collaborate, and adherence to culturally prescribed roles and behavioural patterns (Bradshaw, 2021).

Finkelhol (2019) asserts that empirical evidence has unequivocally demonstrated the grave implications of child violence on the overall well-being and societal welfare of the nation. One could posit that adults, such as neighbours and teachers, bear the responsibility of protecting children from many manifestations of violence, including sexual abuse. Furthermore, it is imperative for family members to take necessary measures to safeguard children from any manifestations of violence (Thulin, Kjellgren, & Nilsson, 2020).

Furthermore, empirical research indicates that females exhibit a higher susceptibility to instances of sexual violence in comparison to boys, as supported by the findings of HakiElimu (2020). The vulnerable status of young females in Tanzania renders them more susceptible to instances of sexual violence. It can be observed that girls tend to experience a higher prevalence of sexual violence in comparison to boys, while this discrepancy is contingent upon the specific.

Primary school pupils are still vulnerable to ongoing abuse, which may be exacerbated by the adverse effects of their efforts to report the abuse (Ezekiel et al., 2017). This can hinder their ability to expose the violence in the future. The disclosure of sexual and physical abuse by children has a crucial role in launching interventions aimed at ending violence against children, addressing its immediate consequences, and reducing the probability of negative long-term results (Pereira et al., 2020).

Further, in a study that involved primary school children in Uganda, (Wandera et al., 2017), found that perpetrators of violence against schoolchildren include their school peers, school staff, and family members. This study aims to examine awareness of physical and sexual violence among primary school pupils in Moshi district, in the Kilimanjaro region-Tanzania. This study is significant in bringing awareness not only to students, but also to schools, homes, and community at large where they live, in order to promote their wellbeing.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted in the three selected primary schools in Northern Marangu and Mamba wards. The research design utilized in this study was a case study, whereby a mixed method approach was applied to gather both quantitative and qualitative data (Kothari, 2018). Both cross-sectional survey and descriptive research designs were used in the investigation. Descriptive survey research aims to identify factors or roles linked to specific events, outcomes, or outcome circumstances (Kothari, 2018). The design allows the collection of qualitative and quantitative data concurrently at equal weight and the analysis of each set of data separately. The cross-sectional survey design is an appropriate method for gathering extensive data from numerous variables in studies that employ a mixed approach, by incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data (Kothari, 2018).

A random sampling technique was utilized to select 92 students from the selected three primary schools as the study's sample unit, who participated in a questionnaire survey. This approach was employed to investigate the many elements that contribute to primary school pupils' awareness of sexual and physical violence. Questionnaires were beneficial to pupils, especially for those who feared to express themselves about physical and sexual violence acts which they might have experienced. To avoid class interruptions, pupils were required to complete the questionnaire after class hours.

Moreover, the researcher used a purposeful sampling technique to select 12 key informants (6 teachers, and 6 parents) from the total population. In this study, the key informants were interviewed to get in-depth information and personal experience about physical and sexual violence within the community (Saunders et al., 2012).

In this study, quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS v26) and MS Excel. The results were subsequently shown in the form of tables, figures, and graphs to provide a concise overview. Moreover, thematic analysis tools were used to analyze qualitative data.

4. Results and Discussion

The study aimed to explore primary school pupils' awareness on physical and sexual violence, a case of Moshi district, in Kilimanjaro region. following sections present and discuss the study's findings. The findings are discussed according to emerged themes:

4.1 Students' awareness on physical and sexual violence

The findings revealed that a significant proportion of the pupils demonstrated some level of awareness regarding physical and sexual violence. One of the respondents said:

> "*Students are aware of physical and sexual violence and abuse because they are taught crimes committed against children by their teachers at school in the civics and moral subjects. Pupils are taught in schools on the negative effect of violence on their life and we are insisting on them to be transparent on the matter if it happens to them,"* (Interview with a teacher, May 2023).

The study's finding above suggests that pupils exhibited an understanding of physical and sexual violence, although the depth of their knowledge varied due to their level of understanding, home environment, and how the issue of violence is taken by the community they live in. The awareness of physical and sexual violence was primarily derived from various sources such as school programs, discussions with parents or guardians, and media exposure. One of the parents said:

> "*Some of us teach our children the issue of violence and its effects to mankind; so, we insist they report and inform those who were involved in any kind of violence,,, it is something restricted, other parents are busy with economic activities they lack time to talk to their children, and absolutely, drunkards sometimes are the one who exercise sexual violence to their children"* (Interview with a parent, May 2023).

The parent's comment implies that this issue of physical and sexual violence exists in society but is kept hidden. This study implies that to raise awareness that violence is wrong for children and that strong action should be taken against individuals who engage in it, more education on this topic is required because children encounter a variety of issues, such as harassment, rape, sexual assault, and abuse. Additionally, all those interviewed believed that there was a problem with children's failure to reveal violence. This study, among other things, insists on the establishing appropriate mechanisms and support systems whereby students will be free to report physical and sexual violence they might encounter.

Moreover, some pupils reported having discussions with their parents or guardians at home on the importance of

personal boundaries and how to identify and report incidences of violence or abuse. One teacher said:

> "We make pupils aware of physical and sexual violence by teaching them on the matter and making a critical follow-up to ensure that a pupil is practicing what is taught. As teachers, we need to describe in detail on risks that a pupil faces from physical and sexual violence and all means of resisting these kinds of violence" (Interview with a teacher, May 2023).

The teacher's comment suggests that students had some awareness about physical and sexual violence although some were not able to recognize some forms of violence.

4.2 Physical punishment in schools as a form of physical violence to children

Among the 92 participants, 69% of the pupils claimed to experience physical punishment in schools. The harshest physical punishments described included being hit with sticks, slaps and physical work. Moreover, one of the pupils described being kicked by an angry teacher. However, only 13 (31%) of the pupils identified serious injury from physical violence and some left scars on their bodies.
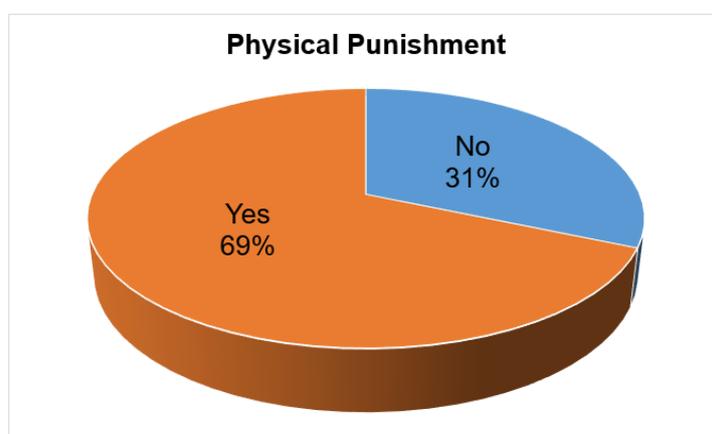

Figure 1: Physical punishment in schools

Furthermore, some of the students from the selected schools were questioned separately, and they were able to identify teachers who treated them harshly. Mfaume (2017) had the same argument for teachers who breach their ethics and heavily abuse the children.

4.3 Physical punishment at home as a form of physical violence

When pupils were asked about the harshest physical punishment experienced at home, 56 (60%) of the participants reported instances of physical punishment. The specific incidents included being hit multiple times by sticks. This is almost for all of them, while 45 (50%) identified being slapped and pinched, while less than 6(9%) identified being hit by electrical wires and sticks to the stage they could barely move. Most of them come from single-parent families and stepparent families. This could imply that children who live with single parents and stepparents may encounter more physical violence compared to those who live with their both biological parents as Pereira et al. (2020)'s study suggests.

Similarly, in the interview, one of the parents said:

> ''We have been hearing of such practices when there is an incidence in our community, and it was painful to see individuals being punished for a practice, which if we could have known, was related offense, we could have prevented it before it happened. In the circumstances, one would be expelled from studies''. (Interview with a parent, May 2023)

Theimer and Hansen (2018) claim that instances of child sexual abuse are less likely to be reported to the relevant authorities in cases when the perpetrator is a family member or the primary financial provider. The participants held the belief that a significant majority of perpetrators are individuals who are closely related to or affiliated with the victim, hence intensifying the difficulty associated with disclosing such incidents. The study revealed that the individuals responsible for the abuse, who are often unfamiliar to both the kid and the family, present a contrasting perspective to the recent research conducted by HakiElimu (2020). However,

these findings align with the study conducted by UNICEF (2018) and WHO (2019) as explained in this research paper. It is widely acknowledged that sexual abuse has an impact on individuals of all genders, including boys and girls. The prevailing perspectives in scholarly literature assert that instances of abuse are not contingent upon an individual's wealth or social standing, age, or gender.

4.4 Physical punishment experienced apart from home and school

Approximately 27 (30%) of the pupils reported experiencing physical punishment and sexual violence outside the home and school environment. The incidents mentioned encompassed fighting against themselves and being beaten by strangers and neighbours. Some of the kids mentioned others being sexually abused by neighbours and others with their relatives who are living in the same compound. Four (4) pupils mentioned the girls being raped and some victims were impregnated, leading them to drop out of school due to heavy punishments. These victims feared to report in a way that they could be helped. One parent said:

> *"We always emphasize children study hard in order to prepare for their future, so that they don't dependent on us ... the problem of being sexually abused leads some of them to get pregnancy, or disease like HIV, and other sexually transmitted diseases ... it becomes a burden to us to take care of them due to poor economic status of the family".* (Interview with a parent, May 2023).

4.5 Witnessing injuries from physical violence

When pupils were asked whether they witnessed injuries inflicted on their friends because of physical violence, 69 (75%) of all pupils claimed to have witnessed a child having injuries from punishment. The severity of the observed injuries varied, the majority described minor injuries, few indicated moderate injuries, and very few reported severe injuries that leave scars on the skin. Some other kids were traumatized by the physical scars that come from wounds from stabs and heavy work and burns. These findings were like those by the study by Thulin, Kjellgren and Nilsson (2020) whose study's recommendation urged family members to take necessary measures to safeguard children from any manifestations of violence.

4.6 Instances of sexual violence

When primary pupils were asked if they had heard of anyone being sexually abused, many pupils, 43 (47%) of the participants reported being aware of such cases while 16 (20%) were able to identify the names of the victims and perpetrators, meanwhile, 33 (35%) of the pupils were not aware of an instance of sexual violence in the study area. The study's findings shed light on the prevalence of physical punishment in schools, at home, and outside environments (Townsend, 2016).

The reporting of documented incidences of physical discipline, resulting injuries, and those responsible underscores the imperative for a secure and supportive educational setting that respects the rights of children. According to a report by UNESCO (2014), a significant proportion of children globally, residing in countries where corporal punishment is not legally prohibited, have encountered instances of physical abuse within educational institutions. Based on studies, it has been observed that corporal punishment is prevalent as a form of physical violence within educational institutions (Fawole, et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2014). Additionally, instances of sexual violence targeting students, mainly males, and involving teachers have also been reported (UNESCO, 2014). Nevertheless, there exist several limitations regarding the use of physical punishment in Tanzania, while several educators have been misusing this lawful prerogative to rectify the conduct of unruly children.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study explored primary school pupils' awareness of physical and sexual violence in the three primary schools in Moshi district, in the Kilimanjaro region, Tanzania. The results have shown a significant proportion of the pupils demonstrated some level of awareness regarding these issues, with sources such as school programs, discussions with parents or guardians, contributing to their understanding. Some pupils reported witnessing injuries resulting from punishment or physical violence, emphasizing the detrimental impact such incidents have on children's well-being. Additionally, instances of sexual abuse were reported, highlighting the need for comprehensive efforts to address and prevent sexual violence among primary school pupils. Finally, this study provides significant benefits in terms of raising awareness among educators regarding the need to carefully monitor and address unusual changes in student's behaviour.

5.2 Recommendations

This study proposes the following recommendations:

1. Schools should create a safe and inclusive classroom environment, whereby teachers should encourage students to feel comfortable reporting incidents and foster a culture of open communication.
2. There is a need to incorporate age-appropriate discussions on physical and sexual violence into the curriculum to educate students about such issues.
3. The government should make sure that policies and programs that address and prevent physical and sexual violence among primary school pupils are in place and students are aware of.
4. There is a need of establishing a collaboration among parents, school authorities, and relevant professionals is essential to address and prevent violence among students to foster a safe environment where individuals feel empowered to discuss and report incidents of abuse.
5. The government need to allocate sufficient resources to provide accessible and affordable support services for victims and their families.
6. There is a need to educate the community on the importance of married couples to resolve their issues and stay in marriage to minimize the incidences of physical and sexual abuse to their children.

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