



Factors Hindering Primary School Pupils to Report Incidences of Physical and Sexual Violence in Tanzania

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Abstract: *The issue of pupils' reluctance to report incidences of physical and sexual violence poses a significant difficulty in Tanzania, resulting in adverse consequences such as bodily harm, psychological distress, behavioural problems, and academic progress for the victims. Despite these challenges, primary school pupils are reluctant to report incidences of physical and sexual violence. This study, therefore, explores factors that hinder primary school pupils to report incidences of physical and sexual violence, a case of 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 failed to report physical and sexual incidences due to fear of perpetrators, lack of awareness on reporting channels and support services, and societal and cultural norms. The study suggests that efforts should be made to ensure the safety and protection of victims who decide to report violence, including providing legal support and confidentiality. In addition, schools and community at large should create a safe environment that will encourage students to feel comfortable reporting incidences of physical and sexual violence.*

Keywords: *Reporting sexual violence, Physical violence, Primary school pupils, Tanzania*

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1. Introduction

This study sought to explore factors hindering primary school pupils to report incidences of physical and sexual violence in Tanzania. This study, therefore, defines sexual violence 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).

Studies have revealed that individuals who commit acts of child sexual abuse are more prone to have a pre-existing relationship with their victims, such as being family members, family friends, or acquaintances, rather than being strangers or individuals who are unfamiliar to the victims (Ullman, 2017). The research done by UNICEF (2018) suggests that the rates of violence are higher in developing countries, and the estimates of child violence are likely to be underreported as physical and sexual violence. In addition, the research shows that girls were less likely to report if they had experienced sexual violence.

Similarly, Niyonagize and Mukamazimpaka (2021) identified factors that lead children not to disclose physical and sexual violence: Firstly, children's failure to recognize violence as a problem or believe they need

services and normalization of violence; secondly, lack of vocabulary to describe the violence, fear of repercussions either for themselves or the perpetrator, shame, stigma, and self-blaming; and thirdly, lack of social support, the child's relationship with the perpetrator, and the child's environment.

The occurrence of violence against children is a widespread public health concern, evident on a global scale and particularly within the context of Tanzania. The phenomenon of violence against children encompasses various manifestations of harm inflicted upon individuals below the age of 18, irrespective of the identities of the perpetrators. These perpetrators can include parents, caregivers, peers, or unfamiliar individuals who perpetrate violence against the affected children (WHO, 2019). Individuals across different age groups and socio-cultural backgrounds contribute to the exposure of children to incidences of violence. This includes parents, caretakers, family members, peers, and intimate partners (WHO, 2019).

There exists various manifestation of violence perpetrated against children (Pereira, et al., 2020). These can be manifested through physical, emotional, or sexual in nature. This phenomenon is observed across nations and various contexts, encompassing the domestic environment. Local 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 (Hakielimu, 2020).

Primary school pupils are still vulnerable to ongoing abuse, which may be exacerbated by the adverse effects of their efforts to report the abuse. This can hinder their ability to expose 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). The challenges that children encounter when disclosing instances of sexual and physical violence can be linked to the consequences that arise from the act of revealing or discovering such violence. Moreover, Rashid and Rokade (2019) posited that children who have been subjected to maltreatment for extended durations face an elevated likelihood of enduring adverse long-term consequences.

This study however, among the other things, aims to investigate factors that hinder primary school pupils to report incidences of physical and sexual violence, a case of Moshi district, in Kilimanjaro region-Tanzania. 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 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, the results will shed light on effective strategies for supporting children who are victims of sexual and physical violence 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. The results of this study will also help to design intervention strategies to end sexual and physical violence against students in primary schools in Tanzania and improve their wellbeing.

2. Literature Review

Children's failure to report incidence of physical and sexual violence is a world-wide problem. Pereira et al. (2020) investigated the self-disclosure and help-seeking behaviours exhibited by children who have been subjected to instances of physical or sexual assault. The study employed a cross-country approach, utilizing nationally representative Violence Against Children Surveys in six distinct nations, namely Cambodia, Haiti, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, and Gabon. The results indicate that there is a low level of reporting of child violence incidents, namely those involving physical and sexual violence, throughout the nations that were studied.

Similarly, Lateef et al. (2019) conducted a study examining the challenges faced by children in Zimbabwe and Mozambique when disclosing incidents of sexual and physical assault. The findings revealed that children encountered significant difficulties in disclosing such forms of abuse.

Moreover, the study by Ezekiel et al. (2017) identified several factors that contribute to underreporting of violence, including a lack of recognition of the severity of the violence, fear of retaliation, and a perceived lack of credibility or support from others. Gender discrimination not only perpetuates violence against girls, but also plays a significant role in perpetuating the widespread disregard and societal acceptance of such violence as a norm. Perpetrators frequently evade accountability, while young females encounter discouragement in expressing their concerns and seeking access to necessary care, assistance, and protection. Although the mentioned difficulties are prevalent in the experiences of females, it is important to acknowledge that various forms of violence against males also tend to be underreported, mostly due to factors associated with social stigma and feelings of disgrace (UNICEF, 2018).

The results of a study conducted by Pereira and colleagues (2020) to investigate the self-disclosure and

help-seeking behaviours exhibited by children who have encountered instances of physical and/or sexual assault indicate a poor level of reporting for occurrences of child violence, particularly in instances of physical and sexual violence.

Boudreau et al. (2018)'s study in South Africa observed that a relatively small proportion of those children who were suffering violence, namely 24 out of the total, representing 20% of the sample, chose to make a formal or informal report or actively sought assistance. Additionally, the study revealed that females exhibited a higher propensity than males to seek support when confronted with instances of violence.

The study undertaken by Pereira, et al. (2020) examined the disclosure of violence among children in Cambodia, Haiti, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, and Tanzania. The findings of the study revealed that most children who undergo physical or sexual abuse tend to disclose their experiences in an informal manner to their immediate social circle, including family members, friends, and neighbours. Conversely, a relatively small proportion of these children choose to report such incidents to formal authorities such as the police, hospitals, or social workers. According to the survey findings, a significant majority of individuals who experienced violence refrained from reporting their victimization to an appropriate authority, so impeding the subsequent handling of the perpetrators and the protection of minors from instances of sexual assault.

In Tanzania, the prevalence of sexual and physical violence against children is alarmingly high (Hakielimu, 2020). From the reviewed literature, limited study has been undertaken to investigate the factors that hinder primary school students in Tanzania, particularly in Moshi District, not to reveal incidents of physical and sexual abuse. This study, therefore, aims to fill this gap by exploring factors that hinder primary school pupils to report incidences of physical and sexual violence in Moshi district- Kilimanjaro region.

3. Methodology

This is a case study design, 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 (Kothari, 2018).

Moreover, the researcher employed purposive sampling to select 12 key informants (6 teachers, and 6 parents)

from the total population for interview. Interviews with key informants were used for qualitative data collection to obtain in-depth information (Saunders et al., 2012). The researcher also utilized a random sample technique to pick a group of primary school children who participated in a questionnaire survey. This approach was employed to investigate the many elements that contribute to primary school pupils' reluctance to report incidents of sexual and physical assault. The questionnaire technique was 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.

Quantitative data were analysed 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 analyse qualitative data.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Factors that hinder pupils from reporting physical and sexual violence

This section presents and discusses the study's findings on the prevailing factors that hinder primary school pupils from reporting physical and sexual incidences.

4.1.1 Fear of perpetrators

This study sought to determine how frequently incidents of physical and sexual violence were reported in primary schools. One of the significant factors that hindered primary school students from reporting physical and sexual violence was fear as highlighted below:

"Fear is the factor that prevents pupils from disclosing physical and sexual violence they encounter. This is because the perpetrators threaten them by telling them that they won't be believed and will be punished if they reveal the abuse done to them". (Interview with a parent, May 2023).

The above finding agreed with Niyonagize and Mukamazimpaka's (2021) study who found that fear of repercussions either for themselves or the perpetrator, and the child's relationship with the perpetrator, made them not to report the incidences.

However, it was further noted that there were cases where incidents went unreported due to concerns about negative consequences once they report the incidences. Data from the questionnaires indicated that most of the

students were able to identify several causes that lead them to the fear of reporting abuse, including the status or superiority of the perpetrators, poverty, and lack of knowledge about empowering individuals to surmount their fears, and providing them with information about available support services. The questionnaire data from students indicated that a total of 35 (38%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they were afraid of the perpetrator, indicating that fear is a significant factor preventing victims from disclosing violence. Similarly, one of the respondents said:

“Even if we establish a system for children to disclose physical and sexual violence, it would be difficult for them to report because of fear since most of the perpetrators are their close relatives.” (Interview with a teacher, May 2023).

The observation made by the teacher underscores the imperative nature of continuous endeavours aimed at improving reporting protocols, hence fostering a sense of assurance and empowerment among students to report cases of abuse or violence. The findings concur with the study by the World Health Organization (2019) that states that a significant number of cases involving child sexual and physical abuse remain undisclosed and unreported.

Additionally, the research revealed that certain individuals engage in the alarming practice of instilling fear in students by the utilization of severe language, while deliberately concealing instances of physical and sexual violence. One of the teachers said that:

“The individuals responsible for these heinous acts typically use emotional manipulation to coerce the youngsters who have been victimized. As an example, individuals may communicate to the child by making threats such as I intend to cause harm to you, your mother, or your brother, with the purpose of compelling them to remain silent.” (Interview with a teacher, May 2023).

The findings suggest that children were afraid of the perpetrators, indicating that fear is a significant factor preventing victims from disclosing violence. According to the respondents, many of the court's final decisions discourage students from reporting offenses committed against them. It appears that law enforcement apparatuses fail to collect sufficient evidence to convict a significant number of offenders. This demoralizes the victims, especially when the offender is released on parole or completely free and back in the community. These findings highlight the importance of ongoing initiatives aimed at improving reporting, and response mechanisms pertaining to instances of physical and sexual violence among primary school students.

4.1.2 Lack of awareness on reporting channels/ support services

The study's findings have revealed that some pupils failed to report physical and sexual violence because they were not aware of the available support services or reporting channels to enable them to do so. One of the parents said:

The unavailability of supporting services makes pupils reluctant to disclose physical and sexual violence they encounter, due to the feeling that they have no place to address their problems’. (Interview with a parent, May 2023)

This finding agrees with the study conducted by WHO (2019) which revealed that a large proportion of pupils aged 07 to 12 years never disclosed or sought help following experiences of physical and/or sexual violence.

The results also revealed that reporting rates varied among schools and pupils. Some schools had well-established reporting mechanisms in place, enabling pupils to report incidents confidentially and without fear. These schools emphasized creating a safe and supportive environment, encouraging pupils to speak up when they witnessed or experienced physical or sexual violence. One of the teachers said that:

“The primary issue at hand is despite the existence of a system designed for children to report instances of physical and sexual abuse, still, there is notable concern around the lack of confidence in this system, which stems from the uncertainties surrounding the measures in place to safeguard these children, particularly in cases when the perpetrators are their immediate family members”. (Interview with a teacher, May 2023).

The comment made by the teacher emphasizes the importance of ongoing endeavours to enhance reporting procedures, hence creating an environment where pupils feel at ease and empowered to report instances of violence or abuse.

Furthermore, it has been noted that the wide societal endorsement of aggressive disciplinary measures towards pupils, along with a limited understanding of appropriate channels for reporting such incidents, restricted availability of support services, and a lack of social assistance, are all factors that contribute to children's reluctance to disclose instances of physical and sexual violence (Goodman-Brown, 2003).

4.1.3 Cultural practices and traditions

The influence of the community environment, encompassing its core principles, behaviours, rituals, standards, and cultural elements, can potentially impede a child's capacity to communicate instances of violence, either through direct or indirect means. One of the respondents said:

“Some customs and traditions prohibit to disclose of sexual and physical harassment activities done to them by one of the family members or relatives, when they try to disclose the information to the responsible institution the whole family will isolate you. Therefore, the whole issue is solved through negotiations within a particular family, hence, the child continues to be victimized” (Interview with a parent, 2023)

Similarly, the findings of this study indicate that a portion of the community members exhibited acceptance towards violence, expressing a lack of concern regarding its presence and perceiving it as an inherent aspect of their daily existence. Consequently, parents fail to provide their children with the opportunity to articulate the challenges they encounter in their daily experiences. When a student notifies a parent about an issue, no actions are implemented to help the individual facing the problem. One respondent said that:

“Certain cultural beliefs and traditions discourage the disclosure of instances of sexual and physical harassment perpetrated against children, particularly when the offenders are family. Upon disclosing the experiences, the victim encounters a state of isolation from all members of their family. These types of issues are typically best addressed within the context of the family, resulting in the ongoing victimization of the victim”, (Interview with a parent, May 2023).

Another respondent had this to say:

“You can find that most of the perpetrators are family relatives or members, so family members are not ready to report the cases which will put the close relatives in jail. So, they end up resolving it at a family level” (Interview with a teacher, May 2023).

From the above findings, it could therefore be suggested that community norms and traditions can influence pupils' reluctance to disclose physical and sexual violence. '

Moreover, the study found that some perpetrators were terrifying pupils by using harsh language not to disclose

physical and sexual violence. This study suggests that some of the community members accepted violence, saying that they don't find that violence is a problem, they take it as part of their lives. Therefore, parents do not give room to their children to express what they face in their lives. When a pupil reports the issue to a parent no measures are taken to support the victim.

4.2 Teachers' and parents' suggestions in helping victims of physical and sexual violence

Teachers and parents, on the other hand, emphasized the significance of establishing trust and providing professionals with adequate training in handling reports of violence. Reporting sexual abuse and physical violence is fought with difficulty; consequently, some of the students choose to remain silent until the situation deteriorated. Based on this finding, this study suggests the need for comprehensive support services, such as legal aid, counselling, and confidentiality protection, to mitigate the perceived difficulties associated with reporting.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study explored factors influencing primary school pupils' reluctance to report incidences of physical and sexual violence in the three primary schools in Moshi district- Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. The results have shown that there was a low level of reporting the incidences of physical and sexual violence. The study has revealed that pupils fail to report physical and sexual incidences due to fear of perpetrators who are also family members, lack of awareness on where to report, stigma, and others. The study has also revealed that some pupils reported the incidences informally due to societal norms and traditions. Since the instances of sexual abuse were reported, it highlights the need for comprehensive efforts to address and prevent sexual violence among primary school pupils in Moshi district, Kilimanjaro region.

5.2 Recommendations

This study proposes the following recommendations:

1. Effort should be made to ensure the safety and protection of victims who decide to report violence, including providing legal support and confidentiality. Thus, schools should establish trust with students, create a safe environment, whereby teachers should encourage students to feel comfortable reporting incidences of physical and sexual violence.
2. The community members should be educated and encouraged to report any instances of

- physical and sexual violence and provide support to victims.
3. There is a need to establish collaboration among parents, school authorities, and relevant professionals to address and prevent violence among students. By doing this, primary school pupils will feel empowered to discuss and report incidences of physical and sexual violence.
 4. There is a need to develop and implement comprehensive reporting and response systems for physical and sexual violence in primary schools.
 5. Specialized training/ education should be provided to professionals, including law enforcement personnel and child protection agencies on handling cases on physical and sexual violence on children.

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