

THE EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON THE BASIC SCHOOL CHILD

A CASE STUDY OF KASOA

ABSTRACT

The study sought to examine the effects of domestic violence on the Basic School child in Kasoa. Purposive sampling was used to select 120 respondents comprising 70 school children, 20 teachers and 30 parents drawn from four public and three private schools in kasoa. The main instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. Findings were coded and given qualitative interpretation with the support of simple numbers and percentages. Major findings indicated that the child academic work dwindles when he/she experiences violence. The school child becomes psychologically imbalance when he/she experiences violence. The child becomes aggressive when he/she experiences domestic violence. The child feels to avenge acts on him/her. Suggestions made to deal with the effects were; The teacher and the school counsellor as well as parents should provide a caring, compassionate, supportive environment for the school child and to rebuild trust which has probably been destroyed by the abuser. Teachers, school counsellors and parents should know their limitations and obligations in handling issue of abuse. They should legally report abuses to the law enforcers. The Ministry of Education and Sports should provide every school with unit counsellors or Para-counsellors to encourage children discuss their personal problems in confidence.

Introduction

Domestic violence is assuming national and international attention (Amnesty International 1995). It is a type of violence that is prevalent in many homes, and the World over. It is a form of violence that occurs in the form of defilement, assault, sexual harassment, and rape or battering, child abuse, for example denial of right, necessities and opportunities, threatening patterns of communication such as insults, harassment, neglectful lack of action.

Domestic violence has been outlined by Amnesty International as most violent attacks on an individual or group of people or women. It involves physical, sexual and psychological violence in the family including battering, sexual abuse of

female children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to any member of the household. Domestic violence may be exhibited by any member of the household.

All over the World, governments and non-governmental and international organisations are trying to collaborate to come out with appropriate ways to handle these burning issues.

In Ghana, a Ministry is established to focus on the interest of women and children. The philosophy behind its establishment was borne out of the idea that, women and children are vulnerable and are prone to domestic violence. Another important unit was also set up in the Police Service that is Women and Juvenile Unit to handle cases concerning women and juveniles in the society.

Women, all over the World agitated and fought for human dignity, more especially, the dignity of women. Significant among these moves was the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA, 1998). International Federation of Women lawyers (FIDA) is one of the organisations in Ghana which plays advocacy roles in combating all kinds of violence against children and women in society.

On the international front, Avoke, Hayford, Ihenacho, and Ocloo (1999) cited the United Nations declaration (1998) which enjoined member states to protect the rights of citizens, particularly the vulnerable groups such as women, children, the disabled and disadvantaged.

The repercussions of these violent acts and how spouses and their children suffer thereafter appears to be taken for granted. Ironically many people in Ghana generally tend to see domestic violence as part of everyday experiences. Cusack, Aniwa, Gadzekpo and Prah (1999) remarked of a queen mother who was reported to have commented as follows “I hear everyday that somebody has beaten the wife

but women do not come to report the men. I also keep quiet in my house” Such comments underpin the mini-subculture of abuse and violence that exist in many homes, and their subsequent effect on children growing up in those homes.

In many communities in Ghana, it is often the case that when defilement, assault, sexual harassment, rape, and battering are reported, little attention or regard is given to them thereby, reinforcing the perpetuation of violence in many homes. Thus, violence tends not to be reported.

Calderbanks (2002) writing from the United Kingdom similarly noted that violence and abuse at home may not be reported for a number of reasons which include;

- a. when allegations may be intimidating to parents
- b. when no action would be taken if a complaint is lodged
- c. when the victim will be falsely accused.

Statement of the Problem

Interaction with some teachers in schools in Kasoa reveals a growing trend towards violence and brutality towards pupils from their parents and homes. Often this violence plays out in other forms towards fellow pupils. In 2004, for instance a fourteen year old JSS student was arrested for raping another classmate. Further investigation revealed that the perpetrator of this crime had suffered domestic violence.

Kasoa is predominantly a sprawling market town with the majority of the residents living below the nation's poverty line. This has resulted in a trend where many families are pre-occupied with the pressures of daily living to the extent that some homes are witnessing indiscipline among pupils. In one of the Ghanaian Daily Papers in 2005, a fifteen year old JSS student was reported to have beaten his

father mercilessly to an unconscious stage for failing to pay his school fees. The propensity for pupils to be violent is also in part influenced by the domestic ecology.

From preliminary discussion with some teachers within selected schools within Kasoa, it was voted by these researchers that some pupils had the tendency of acting out violently, showing disrespect to teachers and often using abusive words. While many of the schools apparently had systems in place to respond to these behaviours, aspect of these behaviours of pupils seems to have been condoned in some cases by the same parents.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study were to;

- Find out the possible causes of domestic violence.
- Find out the effects of domestic violence on the school-going child or adolescent.
- Suggest way of eliminating or reducing the occurrence of domestic violence.

Research questions

The main research questions were:

- What are the possible causes of domestic violence in Kasoa?
- What are the effects of domestic violence on school pupils within area?
- What can be done to reduce domestic violence?

Significance of the Study

The problem of domestic violence is a national issue, and may not be limited to the area in which the study was carried out. The study among others will bring home to policy makers on the need to implement all kinds of laws relating to the rights of children especially those relating to violence emanating from the home.

Again the study will bring to the knowledge of those adults who take the law into their own hands and inflict violence acts on children to be careful of the repercussion of their actions on the life of the adolescent.

Finally, the study will create awareness among significant others, opinion leaders and educational authority on the effects of domestic violence on the child and its implications to the Ghanaian Society.

Literature Review

The literature review was discussed along the following lines

- a) Nature of domestic violence
- b) Causes of domestic violence

Effects of domestic violence (especially on the school child)

Nature of Domestic Violence

According to Cusack et al (1999), most forms of violence inflicted upon women and children in Ghana by persons known to them or in some cases by strangers are considered a “private matter” and given no name or value. In everyday life, we see our relationships in a variety of circumstances.

According to Cussack et al (1999), violence is a forceful way of getting something from someone. It is also living with someone and being forced to do things you do not understand and things that hurt. Violence refers to those actions that have a harmful physical (intentional infliction of pain on an individual) or mental effect (forced to do things that cause displeasure) on the individual. Physical violence can be perceived from five themes. They are;

- a) Cruel punishment
- b) Forced labour
- c) Beatings
- d) Assault with weapon and
- e) Death

Most at times, children and women are targeted for these acts. Cruel punishment come in the forms of starving children or food rationing, inserting pepper and ginger into anus of children, putting children's fingers into hot oil and the like.

Common among forced labour is the situation in which parents or guardians send their children to relatives and other people to be made a housemaid or houseboy for a little remuneration from their masters. These children are forced to work for long hours at work described as "hard" with little time off, all in exchange for food and shelter. Teachers use students to work for them unofficially without the students consent, and these requests are accompanied by unspoken threat that school work will suffer if not adhered to the request.

Beating can be described as physical assault with various degree of physical injury, descriptions of which is severity (stab wound) if weapons are used. Beating can range from isolated slapping using a hand to the regular use of fists, feet and weapons in attacks that targeted any part of the body.

Another form of violence may be psychological which is behaviour that is directed at an emotional level or has emotional impact such as inability to sleep or eat (restlessness). It includes threatening behaviour, verbal abuse and infantilisation of women.

Certain traditional practices are violent in nature. Female circumcision is one form of such traditional practices which many women underwent as teenagers or children, some even as infants (Amnesty International 1995). Other examples

include widowhood rites which sometimes has element of violence in its administration and a type of enslavement of female called “Trokosi”.

Nolan (1998) categorised a broad range of violent acts and abuse children are likely to fall victim to, and these include ;

- Emotional deprivation of love and physical contact
- Verbal abuse, that involves constantly being shouted at
- Exposure to violent aggressive scenes at home
- Physical neglect
- Deprivation of food warmth and shelter
- Lack of adult protection bullying, sexual assault and emotional neglect.

(b) Causes of Domestic Violence

According to (Cusack et al 1999) there are varieties of causes to domestic violence these are categorised into three broad areas;

1. Verbal altercation that can escalate into violent behaviour
2. Financial issues that can lead to disagreements and violence
3. Offensive conduct

From the perspective of (Cusack et al 1999) the causes of domestic abuse more especially violence against women and children are Infidelity, aspect of polygamy, socio-economic reasons, disobedience, family interference, marital disharmony, outside influences and vices.

School related reasons such as refusing to go to school, being late to school, refusing to perform personal chores of teachers, late payment of school fees, disobedience in school and other petty offences which include cheating in examination are other causes linked to domestic abuse (Cusack et al 1999). Afrifa

(1994) argues that inspite of the free education in Ghana over a quarter of acentury afte independence only 44% of children are enrolled in the Primary School, and he attributes the lack of full access to education as a violation of pupils rights. He further cites from a newspaper article, which states that, some families were openly selling their children because of poverty and hunger (Afrifa 1994 cited in Avoke, 2003)

Effects of Domestic Violence

Wolfe et al (1986) posit that children who are victims of domestic violence suffer traumatising events such as injury or death. Negative feelings such as withdrawal, depression abnormal fears, regression, learning problems or a decline in school performance, truancy, bullying, difficulty in building and maintaining relationships, impulsiveness, behavioural problems, denial and emotional problems are coupled with daily activities of children who suffer or witness domestic violence.

Depression has devastating effects on children eating disorders, psychosomatic illness, difficulties at school and instances in substance abuse.

According to Wolfe et al (1986) children who were victims or witness to physical domestic violence are more likely to become perpetrators of domestic violence as adults than those who were not victimised.

Methodology

This study was a mini survey, which examined the effects of domestic violence on the basic school child in Kasoa using qualitative and quantitative paradigms. Kasoa is a major fast growing commercial town in the Awutu / Effutu / Senya district of the Central Region of Ghana. The name “Kasoa” is an Hausa for market.

Population and Sampling Techniques

Simple random technique was used to select the pupils while purposive sampling was adopted to select teachers and parents for the study. This will enable the parents and teachers to confirm or otherwise what the pupils will say. The sample consisted of 70 school children, 30 parents and 20 teachers. The school children and teachers were drawn from three public and four private schools in Kasoa. The three public schools were District Assembly (D/A), Methodist and A.M.E Zion and the four private schools were Insaniya, West End, Pentecost and Star of the Sea Preparatory.

Instrumentation

The research instruments used for data collection were questionnaires. Three separate and almost the same in structure questionnaires were formulated to collect from each of the three groups comprising school children, teachers and parents. Books and other publications were also read to provide theoretical foundations for the study.

Data Collection

Two hours a day, 4 days in a week were used to observe and interview participants in their schools and homes while 4 weeks were used to collect data in each school and home. The questionnaires were used to collect data from the school children, teachers and parents. The questionnaires were administered during school break period while that of parents was done after classes at home.

Data was collected between April and June 2007 and analysed using descriptive statistics with simple numbers and percentages.

Results and Discussion

Personal Data of the Respondents

Table 1: Group respondents and other numbers

GROUP	NUMBER
School children	70
Teachers	20
Parents	30
Total	120

Seventy school children, twenty teachers and thirty parents participated in the study (table 1). Of the seventy school children used for the study, 62(88.6%) were between the ages 10-15 years and the remaining 8 (11.4%) were between 16-18 years. The implication is that the majority of the children were primary 4 up to JSS 3 pupils.

Out of the seventy school children, 42 (60%) were females as against 28 (40%) males.

Regarding the home background of the parents of the school children 18(60%) were single parents, 10(33.3) were both parents and 2(6.7%) were guardian. The implication here is that the majority of the school children live with their single parents. The results can mean that the majority lack parental care and can be subjected to domestic violence.

Research question 1

What are the possible causes of domestic violence in Kasoa?

Thirty-seven school children out of the seventy sampled reported being beaten mercilessly often before going to school for failing to complete their household chores. Twenty eight (40%) reported being denied of three square meals for lack of financial support at home. Children with their parents reported that their parents often quarrel (engage in verbal insults) which culminates sometimes in assault.

This confirms the findings of Cusack et al (1999) that variety of causes to domestic violence stems from verbal altercation, financial issues and offensive conduct.

When the parents of the children were interviewed, 53% of them reported that their wards are stubborn; they do not study at home and also do not do their domestic chores before leaving for school. Asked what they do to them as punishment, 12 out of the 30 parents said they deny them of morning meal and give them between ₦1000 to ₦3000. Ten (33.3%) of the parents reported canning their wards after returning from school as punishment for misbehaviour such as stealing and failing to do daily chores. In a study conducted by Morrel (1999) it was revealed that African parents and other member of extended family believed in corporal punishment as a means of maintaining discipline.

13(65%) out of the 30 teachers confirmed that most of the children complain of hunger in the morning as a result, are not able to concentrate on what they are being taught and therefore have to be attended to. This confirms the claims by the children and their parents.

Research Questions 2

What are the effects of domestic violence on the school child?

62(88.6%) of the school children claimed, they become dehumanised when denied food. 55(78.8%) said they are low spirited when hurled with insults. All the school children reported feeling sad when their parents quarrel at home. 68(97%) of the school children claimed they become uncomfortable when others are beaten mercilessly both at home and in the school. 60(85.7%) of the school children said they feel like running away from home and school due to fighting. Forty eight (68.6%) said they feel like retaliating violence. This could be interpreted as violence breeding violence. Fifty four (77.16%) of the children reported becoming aggressive after witnessing a fight. This finding connotes, violent action causes more violent behaviour. Forty female children out of the forty-two said they become traumatised when sexually harassed.

When teachers were asked to comment on problems posed by school children as a result of domestic violence, all the 30 teachers (100%) mentioned adverse effects like inattentiveness in class, truancy, low academic performance, timidness, disrespectfulness and exhibition of aggressive behaviour. The effects given by teachers confirm the claims by the school children that domestic violence has adverse effects on them.

From the evidence, scolding, quarrelling and the denial of food, which are forms of psychological violence impact considerably on the emotional well being of pupils and that is consisted with the findings of Cusack et al., (1999) who observed that violence may be psychological which is behaviour that is directed at an emotional level or has emotional impact.

Research Question 3

What can be done to reduce domestic violence?

Out of the total of 120(100%) respondents 105(87.5%) suggested the use of love, 98(81.7%) suggested the use of trust among in-mates, 108(90%) suggested tolerance for one another and 110(91.7%) suggested counselling sessions. All the respondents suggested education on the topic in order to bring to the public notice the adverse effects of Domestic Violence. Finally, 106 (88.3%) out of 120(100%) suggested that perpetrators be arrested and prosecuted according to the laws of the land.

Conclusions

The results of the study revealed the following

- The school child becomes psychologically traumatised when he/she experiences violence.
- The child's academic work dwindles when he/she experiences violence
- The child becomes aggressive when he/she experiences domestic violence.
- The child feels to avenge violence.

Suggestions

- The perpetrators of domestic violence must face the full rigours of the law.
- Both perpetrators and victims need counselling.
- Awareness creation on the effect of domestic violence is necessary.
- Love, trust, tolerance and faithfulness should run through family life

Recommendations

The recommendations on this study are mainly based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study for the consideration of the appropriate authorities.

1. The teacher and the school counsellor as well as parents should provide a caring, compassionate, supportive environment for the school child and to rebuild trust that has probably been destroyed by the abuser.
2. Teachers, school counsellors and parents should know their limitations and obligations in handling issues of abuse. They are required legally to report suspected and eye witnessed abuse and victimisation to the law enforcers. Counsellors more especially are required to handle abuse cases with care.
3. The Ministry of Education and Sports should provide every school with at least counsellors or para-counsellors to encourage children discuss their personal problems in confidence.
4. The National Commission on Civic Education should create awareness on the harmful effects of domestic violence especially on the child.
5. The NGOs who advocate for the women and children's rights should go to the grassroots where the actual problems lie and sensitise the family on the effects of domestic violence.

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