

## **The Effects of Parental Violence on their Children's Withdrawal Behaviours towards School Peers and Teachers in Schools**

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### **Abstract**

*This study explored the effects of parental violence on children's withdrawal behaviour in the school environment in Dodoma, Tanzania. The study used a quantitative approach and a cross-sectional survey design to get 312 out of 652 children from five primary schools that filled in the questionnaires. The study used a chi-square test to determine the association between intimate partner abuse and withdrawal behaviour of pupils at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings showed a significant association between children from parental violence involved in withdrawal behaviour and children from non-marital violence. A test for association in significance further showed no significant relationship among boys and girls regarding withdrawal behaviour implying that both genders were affected. It is recommended that more endeavour should be done by diverse stakeholders to alleviate or reduce domestic violence in general.*

**Keywords:** Parental Violence, Gender-based Violence, Emotional Violence, Physical Violence, Withdrawal Behaviour

### **1.0 Introduction**

The stereotypical view of children witnessing parental violence, in terms of both physical and verbal abuse and fights between a mother and father, results in a child being traumatized (Holden, 2003; Richards, 2011). The research literature has demonstrated that when a child witnesses parental violence, can involve a much broader range of incidents, including the child intervening verbally or physically by asking parents to stop or

defending one of the parents; from being victimized verbally or physically when a child is accidentally hit by a thrown object or intentionally hit or blamed; to be coerced to participate by being used as a spy; to observe bruises or injuries, damaged property, intense emotions, or hear directly verbal or physical violence; to overhear through yelling, threats or breaking objects (Edleson, 1999; Guzman, 2009; Holden, 2003; Humphreys, 2008). In recent years, a range of terms have been added including 'being exposed', 'living with violence' and 'being affected by violence' have emerged to describe the experiences of children from violent homes (Holden, 2003; Powell & Murray, 2008; Richards, 2012).

Low self-esteem and feelings of withdrawal are common emotions experienced by children exposed to parent's violence (Clements, Oxtoby & Ogle, 2008; Richards, 2011). Children exposed to family violence feel that they are unable to stop it as they are torn between a desire to help the victim and the need to keep a family secret. Girls in particular are given the impression that females are supposed to keep quiet, to be weak and subservient, while males are supposed to be domineering (Edleson, 1999). Liberman (2000) suggested that social learning that is based on model learning can be applied by observing an actual activity and seeing what it achieves, which is referred to as associative learning. The author gave an example that children and young people who internalize their behaviours may do so because they have learnt from their parents' relationship that when the mother is quiet and withdrawn violence is less likely to occur.

It is apparent from the literature cited in this study that children experience feelings of loneliness, hopelessness, despair and anxiety owing to family violence, specifically violence between parents. Such a situation is likely to make children feel distracted and affect their socialization with their peers and thus experience isolation from them. Magwa (2013) reveals that

children who are exposed to parental violence have also conflicting feelings of anxiety, distrust and affection as they find it difficult to understand why two people do not love each other anymore. This suggests that violence between parents and children increases worry about their security and their parents' endless conflicts. Children's insecurity can go beyond the family boundary and affect their socialization with other people outside.

In Tanzania, one-third of women aged 15-49 are estimated to have experienced physical violence from their husbands or partners. A considerable proportion of Tanzanian men (38%) and women (54%) find wife beating is justifiable (Jacobsen, 2014). Violent treatment against women in general is also supported by Betron (2008) and Vyas (2012), who reported that both men and women acknowledge women being beaten by men when they are not ready for sexual intercourse with their husbands or partners.

## **1.2 Literature Review**

Researchers have observed the relations between children's exposure to violence, problems in the way children think about social relationships, and children's social adjustment in the school peer group. Children exposed to parental violence are less interpersonally sensitive and unable to identify other's emotional expressions (Medina, Margolin & Goedis, 2013). Children's physical and verbal aggressiveness, and anger resulting from parent's violence contribute to poor interaction with school peers as observed by Carlson (2000), who indicated that children from violent homes commonly exhibit anger, aggressiveness, and thus, difficulty in interacting with peers. James (1994) suggested that negative peer interaction is influenced by a child's aggressive behaviour.

Violence against women is a global problem that cuts across cultural, geographical, religious, social and economic boundaries (Jansen, 2011; Montoya & Lise, 2013; WHO, 2013, 2006; Yusuf, Arulogum, Oladapo & Olowookere, 2011). Women experience psychological, physical, economical and sexual violence in their marital or intimate relationships (WHO, 2013; Yusuf *et al.*, 2011). Physical assault is one of the abuses found in domestic violence. Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive behaviour such as emotional, physical, psychological or sexual committed by a current or former intimate partner intended to gain or sustain control in a relationship (Swanston, Bowyer & Vetere, 2014). Domestic violence is any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes psychological, physical or sexual pain to those in a relationship (Betron, 2008). Physical violence involves slapping, beating, burning, choking, pushing, pulling, biting, kicking or grabbing by the hair. It also includes physical neglect through denial of food or treatment (Jansen, 2011).

Studies continue to indicate that children exposed to family violence are at risk of experiencing depression (McIntosh, 2003; Milner, 2010; Osofsky, 2009; The Australian Domestic and Family Violence, 2011). Depression stems from children's insignificance, silence, feelings of powerlessness, and feelings of guilt for not protecting their mother. Children feel more depressed particularly when internal or external support is not available (McGee, 2000; Milner, 2010). However, the children's internalized depressive behaviours can be explained by social learning theory. The theory is based on the principle that behaviours observed by a young person will become learned and modelled as if the observed behaviour is a norm. For example, if the normal social behaviour of an abused mother in the home involves depression, anxiety or quietness, such behaviours are likely to be copied by the children

because of their attachment to significant adults (Siegal & Welsh, 2009). It implies that children exposed to parental violence are at risk of developing emotional problems such as quietness, anxiety and withdrawal behaviour throughout their life.

Medina et al. (2013) further observed that children who have been traumatized and suffered from internalized behaviours owing to exposure to parental violence are more likely to be withdrawn from their class because their state of mind becomes disconnected. Osofsky, Wewers, Hann and Fick (1993) posited that children who have difficulty with attention due to family conflicts may not be sensitive to important social instruction and expectations; thus, they find themselves struggling with school rules and peer relationships. Pynoos, Ritzmann, Steinberg, Goenjian and Pricecaru (1996) add that ‘social ostracism’ is further increased when children wish to move to another school to be away from their violent home. This disconnection from social life at school lead children who have been traumatized by their parent’s violence to become reluctant to socialize with other children.

One-third of Tanzanian women aged 15-49 are estimated to have experienced physical violence from their husbands or partners. A considerable proportion of Tanzanian men (38%) and women (54%) find wife beating is justifiable (Jacobsen, 2014). Violent treatment against women in general is also supported by Betron (2008) and Vyas (2012), who reported that both men and women acknowledge women being beaten by men when they are not ready for sexual intercourse with their husbands or partners. Williams, Larsen, and McCloskey (2004) research on violence against women in the Kilimanjaro region in Tanzania found that nearly one in three women had been physically assaulted by her husband or partner. The research indicated that physical violence and

partner abuse sometimes resulted in severe psychological and physical injuries to women. The National Bureau of Statistics (2011) conducted the first survey in the history of the Demographic and Health Survey in Tanzania mainland. The study survey indicated that among the types of physical violence experienced by women, slapping (36%) was the most commonly reported act followed by being punched (18%), pushed, shaken or having something thrown at them (16%).

The observation from the reviewed literature in this study has shown that only findings from abroad have indicated the effects of marital violence specifically violence against women on children's diverse school behaviours including interaction with other people (Medina et al, 2013; Richards, 2011; Carlson, 2000; Osofsky et al, 1993). The findings available in Tanzania have mostly concentrated on women's psychological, physical or social effects concerning domestic violence (Jacobsen, 2014; Vyas (2012; Betron, 2008). Therefore, the question is to what extent intimate partner violence affects children's well-being such as school behaviours in Tanzania? This shows that little is known about the adverse effects of parental violence on children's withdrawal behaviours towards school peers and teachers in school settings. Specifically, the study answered two questions:

- a) To what extent does marital violence specifically physical assaults against wives by husbands lead to children's withdrawal behaviour from school peers and teachers?
- b) To what extent does physical abuse against mothers result in children's withdrawal behaviour in the school context by gender?

## **2.0 Materials and Methods**

A cross-sectional survey design was employed in this study. The design enabled the researcher to associate the children's withdrawal behaviour (as the dependent variable) with exposed and non-exposed mothers to physical abuse (as the independent variable). The cross-sectional survey design further enabled the researcher to get information on respondents from a population within a short period (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). That is, children's withdrawal behavioural information was obtained within a short period. Furthermore, Cohen et al. (2011) comment that the cross-sectional survey provides generalizability within a given population and consolidates a degree of confidence which has an assurance in findings.

This study employed a quantitative approach to explore the extent to which physical abuse of mothers by husbands related to children's withdrawal behaviour in the school context. Therefore, the researcher used numerals to arrive at the responses from the respondents. Also, a sample of 312 children from five primary schools with a population of 652 children from classes four, five and six were selected through simple random sampling. The questionnaires were given to the selected 312 primary school pupils. The sample size was obtained by using a table that determines the sample size for random samples as suggested by Cohen et al. (2011), and an online sample size calculator (Survey Research System, 2012). Concerning the table by Cohen et al. (2011, p. 147), the population of 652 with a confidence level of 95% has the following confidence intervals (degree of accuracy) with probability of sample size, 5% (241), 4% (312), and 3% (404). In this case, the degree of accuracy of 4% is similar to a sample size of 312.

Analysis indicated a total of 110 children were from mothers exposed to physical maltreatment from husbands. While 202 showed their mothers did not experience physical abuse from their husbands. Therefore, children's withdrawal behaviour from mothers exposed to physical abuse was related to children whose mothers were not exposed to physical violence (Edleson, Katy & Narae, 2007; Finkelhor, Hamby, Omrod & Turner, 2005). The CEDV scale was adapted and modified to fit the context of Tanzania. Both close-ended and open-ended questionnaires were filled in by school pupils. The validity of the data was achieved by preparing appropriate and adequate questionnaire items for data collection. The reliability of the items used in the questionnaire was assessed by determining Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. The overall Cronbach's Alpha was 0.95, which enabled the researcher to use a questionnaire in the field of study under investigation.

The study used a chi-square test to examine the association between physical violence against mothers and children's withdrawal behaviour at a 0.05 level of significance. The researcher used a statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. to get descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. The internal consistency among the items was assessed by determining Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.7. The strength of the relationship between the variables was measured by Phi and Cramer's V coefficient. About strength for association between the variables, the small, medium and large limits were used. Thus,  $r = .10$  to  $.29$  or  $r = -.10$  to  $-.29$  (small strength),  $r = .30$  to  $.49$  or  $r = -.30$  to  $-.49$  (medium),  $r = .50$  to  $1.0$  or  $r = -.50$  to  $-.1.0$  (large).



### 3.0 Results and Discussion

Pupils' withdrawal behaviours from peers and teachers in the school setting were examined in relation to their exposed and non-exposed mothers to violence. Table 1 shows that only one item, that is, "*I stay away from my fellow pupils who tease or make fun of me*" out of six items indicated no significant relationship between children from physically and non-physically abused mothers regarding withdrawal behaviours from peers ( $X^2=8.396$ ,  $p=.078$ ). This implies that in this particular item, all school children from physically and non-physically abused mothers withdrew from peers who teased or made fun of them. Table 1 indicates the relationship between children's withdrawal behaviours from school peers and physical violence against mothers.

**Table 1: Children's Withdrawal Behaviours from School Peers**

Items	Likert scales	Children's Situation				Chi-square	Sig. (2tailed)	Phi & Cramer's V
		Children from mothers exposed to physical violence (N=110)		Children from mothers not exposed to physical violence (N=202)				
		N	%	N	%			
I stay away from my fellow pupils who tease or make fun of me	Very often	26	23.6	31	15.3			
	Often	20	18.2	41	20.3			
	Rare	26	23.6	32	15.8			
	Very rare	14	12.7	38	18.8			

	Never	24	21. 8	60	29.7	8.39 6	.078	.164
I stay away from my fellow pupils because they seem to hate me	Very often	24	21. 8	32	15.8			
	Often	18	16. 4	49	24.3			
	Rare	21	19. 1	34	16.8			
	Very rare	22	20	20	9.9			
I stay away from my fellow pupils since I feel as if they don't listen to me when I talk	Never	25	22. 7	67	33.2	11.7 19	.020	.194
	Very often	25	22. 7	15	7.4			
	Often	15	13. 6	35	17.3			
	Rare	24	21. 7	37	18.3			
I stay away from my fellow pupils since they seem to ignore me	Very rare	22	20	36	17.8			
	Never	24	21. 8	78	38.6	20.9 30	.001	.259
	Very often	23	20. 9	10	5			
	Often	19	17. 3	31	15.3			
I stay away from my fellow pupils since I feel as if they don't like to cooperate with me	Rare	18	16. 4	36	17.8			
	Very rare	23	20. 9	48	23.8			
	Never	27	24. 5	77	38.1	21.5 92	.000	.262
	Very often	26	23. 6	15	7.4			
I stay away from my fellow pupils since I feel as if they don't like to cooperate with me	Often	13	11. 8	44	21.8			
	Rare	14	12. 7	30	14.9			

	Very rare	20	18.2	37	18.3			
	Never	37	33.6	76	37.6	18.6	.001	.245
			6			53		
I stay away from my fellow pupils since I feel as if they don't value me	Very often	19	17.3	33	16.3			
	Often	13	11.8	29	14.4			
	Rare	17	15.5	10	5			
	Very rare	18	16.4	30	14.9			
	Never	43	39.1	10	49.5	11.2	.024	.190
			1	0		49		

Regarding Table 1, a chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association in the other items. The indication is that more children from physically abused mothers were involved in withdrawal behaviours than children from non-physically abused mothers. For instance, the item “*I stay away from my fellow pupils because they seem to hate me*” ( $X^2=11.719$ ,  $p=.020$ ) with a small strength of the relationship (Phi & Crammer’s  $V = .194$ ). Moreover, it shows that a test for the strength of association for both items was small. For example, the items “*I stay away from my fellow pupils because they seem to hate me*” (Phi & Crammer’s  $V = .194$ ) and “*I stay away from my fellow pupils because I feel as if they don't listen to me when I talk*” (Phi & Crammer’s  $V = .262$ ). This means that despite the strength for association being small, there was a relationship between children from mothers exposed to physical violence on withdrawal behaviours from school peers compared to children from mothers not exposed to physical violence.

When data were analysed, it was revealed that the results varied in terms of the item that measured children’s withdrawal behaviours from school

peers by gender. All in all, there was no statistically significant relationship between male and female children for the item “*I stay away from my fellow pupils who tease or make fun of me*” ( $X^2=9.055$ ,  $p=.060$ ). This indicates that both male and female children were staying away from peers who teased or made fun of them. The strength of relationship was small (Phi & Crammer’s  $V = .287$ ). While there was a statistically significant relationship for the item, “*I stay away from my fellow pupils because they seem to hate me*” ( $X^2=14.301$ ,  $p=.006$ ), it shows that female children were staying away from peers who teased and made fun of them than male children. The strength of relationship was medium (Phi & Crammer’s  $V = .361$ ). Also, there was no statistically significant relationship for the items “*I stay away from my fellow pupils because I feel as if they don’t listen to me when I talk*” ( $X^2=7.966$ ,  $p=.093$ ) with a small strength of relationship (Phi & Crammer’s  $V = .269$ ) and “*I stay away from my fellow pupils because I feel as if they don’t value me*” ( $X^2=7.383$ ,  $p=.117$ ) with small strength of relationship (Phi & Crammer’s  $V = .259$ ).

Moreover, there was a statistically significant relationship for the other two items. The item “*I stay away from my fellow pupils because they seem to ignore me*” ( $X^2=11.270$ ,  $p=.024$ ). It implies that female children were staying away from peers when they suspected that they were ignored by their fellow pupils than male children. The strength of relationship was medium (Phi & Crammer’s  $V = .320$ ). Another item was “*I stay away from my fellow pupils because I feel as if they don’t like to cooperate with me*” ( $X^2=16.288$ ,  $p=.003$ ). The strength of relationship was medium (Phi & Crammer’s  $V = .385$ ).

Analysis was further done for physical violence on mothers and children’s withdrawal behaviours from school teachers as reported in Table 3.2. A test for relationship in significant by employing a chi-square test revealed that there was no relationship between the variables regarding the item “*I avoid my teachers because they seem to hate me*” ( $X^2=6.153$ ,  $p=.188$ ) with a small strength of association (Phi & Crammer’s  $V = .140$ ). It can be interpreted that both school children from mothers exposed and non-exposed to physical violence were equally avoiding teachers who seemed to hate them. The strength of association was small.

**Table 2: Children’s Withdrawal Behaviours from School Teachers**

Items	Likert scales	Children’s Situation				Chi-square	Sig. (2tail ed)	Phi & Cramer’s V
		Children from mothers exposed to physical violence (N=110)		Children from mothers not exposed to physical violence (N=202)				
		N	%	N	%			
I avoid my teachers because they seem to hate me	Very often	15	13.6	15	7.4			
	Often	19	17.3	34	16.8			
	Rare	13	11.8	15	7.3			
	Very rare	12	10.9	32	15.8			

	Never	51	46.4	106	52.5	6.15	.18	.14
I avoid my teachers because they seem to ignore me	Very often	11	10	3	1.5			
	Often	13	11.8	19	9.4			
	Rare	15	13.6	17	8.4			
	Very rare	11	10	23	11.4			
	Never	60	54.5	140	69.3	16.35	0.003	.229
I avoid my teachers because I feel as if they don't value me	Very often	18	16.4	9	4.5			
	Often	9	8.2	42	20.8			
	Rare	19	17.3	23	11.4			
	Very rare	14	12.7	21	10.4			
	Never	50	45.5	107	53	21.576	.000	.263
I avoid my teachers because I feel as if they want to punish me	Very often	26	23.6	31	15.3			
	Often	8	7.3	52	25.7			
	Rare	16	14.5	28	13.9			
	Very rare	11	10	12	5.9			
	Never	49	44.5	79	39.1	17.441	.002	.236

Table 2 shows a statistically significant association in the other three items “*I avoid my teachers because they seem to ignore me*” ( $X^2=16.350$ ,  $p=.003$ ), “*I avoid my teachers because I feel as if they don't value me*”

( $X^2=21.576$ ,  $p=.000$ ), and “*I avoid my teachers because I feel as if they want to punish me*” ( $X^2=17.441$ ,  $p=.002$ ).

### **Children’s Withdrawal Behaviours by Gender**

The study also sought to analyse the data on children’s withdrawal behaviours from school teachers by gender. It was found that there was a statistically significant relationship for all four items that measured the children’s withdrawal behaviours from school teachers about their mothers being exposed to physical violence. It implies that female children showed more withdrawal behaviours from teachers than male children. For example, the items “*I avoid my teachers because they seem to hate me*” and “*I avoid my teachers because they seem to ignore me*” with ( $X^2=15.738$ ,  $p=.003$ ) and ( $X^2=22.532$ ,  $p=.000$ ) respectively. It indicates that female children avoided teachers who seemed to hate and ignore them more than male children. The strength of relationship between the variables was medium (Phi & Crammer’s  $V = .378$ ) and (Phi & Crammer’s  $V = .453$ ) respectively. Also, there was a statistically significant relationship for the items “*I avoid my teachers because I feel as if they don’t value me*” and “*I avoid my teachers because I feel as if they want to punish me*” ( $X^2=17.039$ ,  $p=.002$ ) and ( $X^2=26.076$ ,  $p=.000$ ) respectively. The strength of relationship was medium (Phi & Crammer’s  $V = .394$ ) and (Phi & Crammer’s  $V = .487$ ) respectively.

In this study, it was revealed that the association between the children’s withdrawal behaviour from their fellow school peers and teachers in the school setting and parental violence specifically physical assault against their mothers at home. The results further bring light to the phenomenon of children’s school problems such as withdrawal behaviours from school peers and teachers on inter-parental conflicts. The findings are also in line

with Richards (2011) and Clements et al. (2008), who posited that low self-esteem and feelings of withdrawal are common emotions experienced by children exposed to parent violence. Carlson (2000) also observed that physical, and verbal aggressiveness and anger resulting from parents' violence contribute to children's poor interaction with school peers. The author further added that children from violent homes commonly exhibit anger, aggressiveness, and thus, difficulty in interacting with peers.

Children from violent homes specifically violence between parents sometimes resort to isolating themselves from peers or teachers thinking that this is the only means of avoiding violence as they witness their mothers keeping quiet or running to another room to avoid maltreatment. This observation concurs with social learning theorists like Bandura (1977), who stressed that children's acquisition of many complex social behaviours is due to their exposure to competent models that display appropriate behaviour in solving problems and coping with their world. Bandura emphasized that individuals learn how to behave by observing and re-enacting the behaviour of role models such as parents and from social situations.

These results are further supported by Medina et al. (2013), who observed that children who have been traumatized and suffered from internalized behaviours are more likely to be withdrawn from their class because their state of mind becomes disconnected from the classroom environment. The findings are also supported by Liberman (2000), who suggested that social learning that is based on model learning can be applied by observing an actual activity and seeing what it achieves which is referred to as associative learning.



#### **4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study results have shown that there is an association between parental violence and pupils' withdrawal behaviours from school peers and teachers. The findings have shown that both female and male children experience withdrawal behaviour from school peers and teachers about marital violence practised at home. Violence between parents makes children including school-going children experience low self-esteem, worry and fear.

It is recommended that training through psycho-education within families, communities, governmental, and non-governmental institutions should be done to intervene or prevent domestic violence including violence against women in general. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training should also establish effective guidance and counselling services in primary schools with trained counsellors to support pupils with various problems such as those related to marital violence at home. It is also imperative to investigate and examine the factors that precipitate violence among spouses.

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