

INVESTIGATING COPING MECHANISMS AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS WITNESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN IRINGA MUNICIPALITY

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Abstract: This study ought to investigate coping mechanisms among primary pupils witnessing domestic violence in Iringa Municipality. The study was guided by three specific objectives: first, to identify the types of domestic violence witnessed by pupils; second, to establish the effects of witnessing domestic violence among pupils and third, and explore coping mechanisms employed by pupils who witness domestic violence. The study was conducted in Iringa municipal in two wards, a qualitative research approach was used and a phenomenological research design was used; a purposive judgemental sampling technique was used to sample 51 participants to provide the data needed. Primary data was collected by using interviews and focus group discussions and secondary data was collected by using documentary review. The findings revealed that physical and sexual abuse are the forms of violence witnessed by the majority of the pupils; also pupils who witness domestic violence apply unhealthy ways of coping such as running away from home and intervening in the violence. Lastly, findings indicate that children that witnessed domestic violence are affected psychologically and socially and are likely to develop problems such as trauma, withdrawal, hopelessness and anxiety. The study recommends that parents and caregivers should be educated on the effects of children witnessing domestic violence. In addition, the government should employ and post counsellors in institutions to deal with children all over the country.

Keywords: investigate coping mechanisms, domestic violence.

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the problem, statement of the problem, objectives and research questions, scope of the study, the significance of the study and definition of terms.

Background of the Problem

Coping mechanisms are the strategies people often use in the face of stress and/or trauma to help manage painful or difficult emotions, coping mechanisms can help people adjust to stressful events while helping them maintain their emotional well-being (Carr & Pudrovska 2007). Studies show that a high percentage of children had emotional reactions after witnessing abuse against their mothers. For instance, Allen et al (2007) study in the United States of America (USA) whose findings revealed that mothers reported that 81% were fearful, 14% were angry, and 05% were confused, similarly 80% of Children reported fearful, 10% were angry, and 10% were confused. According to mothers' reports, the most common responses included children becoming overprotective of their mothers (71%), leaving the room (61%), or ignoring what was happening (50%). Almost half of the children (44%) became aggressive against the assailant.

Similarly, according to children's reports, 67% left the room, 60% ignored what was happening, and 49% tried to stop what was happening. Both mothers and children's reports indicate that relatively few children sought help from someone other than a sibling (14% and 22%, respectively) Allen et al (2003).

A study conducted in the United States suggested group interventions for children exposed to domestic violence as bibliotherapy, through the use of stories, has shown to be an effective tool in helping children expose to family violence and in teaching children nonviolent means of conflict resolution (Butterworth and Fulmer 1991), through play therapy, school mental health professionals can enter the world of elementary school students by using children's play and toys as a common language, based on Piagetian tenets of development, play is the most developmentally appropriate means of communication for young children. (Heather Thomson, Trice-Black 2012).

Witnessing domestic violence may include seeing or hearing violent interpersonal events, direct involvement such as trying to prevent a violent encounter or to call for outside help, or experiencing the visible or emotional consequences of such encounters Finkehor et al (2015). In contrast a United Kingdom study suggests that about 29.5% of children less than 18 have been exposed to domestic violence during their lifetime and approximately 5.7% of children and young people will experience domestic violence in a year. (Radford, Corral, Bradley, & Fisher, 2013). Tsavoussis, Stawicki, Stoicea, and Papadimos (2014) stated that in 2010, 1 in 15 children were exposed to cases of intimate partner violence, with a worrying 1 in 3 children also experiencing acts of violence.

A study in the Western Cape province of South Africa found that almost all adolescents had witnessed community violence and 75.8% had either direct or indirect exposure to school violence (Kaminer, Duplessis, Hardy & Benjamin 2013).

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) defines domestic violence as "the wilful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behaviour as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, Abuse sexual violence, psychological violence, and emotional abuse (Laura L. Finley 2020) aligning with this definition to the study a Tanzanian nationally representative survey of violence against children also found that nearly 75 percent of girls and boys had experienced physical violence (either by an adult or intimate partner) by age 18, and that nearly 3 in 10 girls had experienced sexual violence before reaching adulthood (UNICEF 2011) and a study conducted on the state of violence against school children in Tanzania mainland came up with the findings stating that nearly 60.9% of school-going children involved in this study reported to have experienced psychological violence, about 87.9% of all interviewed school children stated that they have experienced physical violence, 21.1% of students from public schools and 15.2% from private schools said they had experienced negligent treatment and the study also found that 17.0% of school children from public schools and 14.3% per cent from private schools experienced at least one incident of sexual violence (Haki Elimu 2020).

A study conducted on the violence against women in Tanzania revealed that the majority, 2784 (30.2%) had experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner only, while a further 464 (5.0%) women experienced physical or sexual violence by both a partner and a non-partner. Six hundred twenty women (8.0%) reported they had experienced physical or sexual violence by a non-partner only (Vary 2019), linking this information with my study, children are part of the community and when these violent acts occur they may be present and witness them.

The African report on violence against children of 2014 states different ways of helping children exposed to domestic violence in different countries, Specialised child-friendly units have been set up within police stations in Mozambique to identify child trafficking victims, and Togo provides training to child victims to assist their rehabilitation and reintegration, In Liberia, the NGO More Than Me works with community leaders to identify girls in sex trafficking and those at highest risk of exploitation. The organization pays school tuition and provides school lunch to maintain girls' attendance in school, The government in Botswana has created partnerships with children, families and communities to strengthen the protection of children from sexual exploitation, In DRC the government is working with NGO partners to rescue and rehabilitate girls involved in prostitution and Sudan has established a specialist child protection unit that provides legal aid and medical services for child victims of violence and exploitation, and special services are offered in hospitals across the country.

Iringa region is one of the regions that have the highest concentration of cases relating to GBV, this is according to the study conducted by the ministry of health and social welfare and national bureau of statistics in 2012.

Witnessing domestic violence may have a lot of effects on the emotional development of young children, according to the Child Safety Project 2004), young children are not immune to the effects of violence. Studies indicate that a large number of children experience domestic violence (UNICEF 2011; Haki elimu 2020) and the Society is increasingly becoming aware of the negative impact of child abuse on children's Behavioural, emotional, and social functioning and these children adapt to different coping mechanisms that are not widely known. Although, the existing evidence on the coping mechanisms are mainly from high income countries (Allen et al 2003) and little evidence is from low-income countries like Tanzania most studies only look on the effects of children witnessing domestic violence and ways of intervention not coping mechanisms, like a study conducted in South Africa which looks on childhood exposure to the community and domestic violence: prevalence, risk factors and post-traumatic outcomes in a south African student sample (Collins 2014). That is why my study investigated the coping mechanisms among primary school pupils witnessing domestic violence in Iringa municipality.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

General Objective

The general objective of this study was to investigate the coping mechanisms among primary school pupils witnessing domestic violence.

Introduction

In this study methodology led towards obtaining basic data through phenomenological research design, and rapid assessed methodological techniques using qualitative data collection methods. This chapter will introduce the study area, research design, study population, sample size and sample strategies, data collection techniques, data presentation and data analysis.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Iringa municipal in the Iringa region and since Iringa region is one of the regions that have the highest concentration of cases relating to GBV with a 42.3% in Tanzania, this is according to the study conducted by the ministry of health and social welfare and national bureau statistics (2012). Two wards were selected randomly since the researcher cannot cover the whole municipality due to financial strains and the type of research approach undertaken only requires a small number of respondents. The area of the study will be in the Kihesa ward and Gangilonga Ward in Tumaini primary school and Gangilonga primary school.

Research Approach

This is a plan and procedure that consists of broad assumptions to a detailed method of data collection, analysis and interpretation. This study applied a qualitative research approach, which is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribed to a social or human problem (Creswell 2018). A qualitative approach was used because it sits perfectly to offer a unique opportunity to gain in-depth information from respondents, respondents were able to freely disclose their experiences, thoughts and feelings without constraint, also the study required deep explanations and views from the respondents' experiences.

Research Design

Research design is the set of methods and procedures used in collecting and analysing measures of the variables specified in the problem research. It is a framework that has been created to find answers to research questions (Creswell 2014).

Since the main objective of the study is to investigate the coping mechanism among primary pupils witnessing domestic violence in Iringa municipal, a phenomenological research design was applied, this is a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants (Creswell 2018). This type of design was used simply because the researcher attempted to understand people's perceptions, perspectives and understanding of the study at hand. Also, this type of design helps a researcher to make generalizations according to the respondents' perspectives by looking at different perspectives on the same situation.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The sample size for this study was 51 participants since this is a qualitative study and the sample size in qualitative studies is normally small and determining an adequate sample size in qualitative research is a matter of the researcher's judgement on the information to be collected because qualitative researches do not involve making statistical generalizations (Creswell 2018).

Table 1: Sample Information and Its Distribution

Participants	Sample size
Primary students	30
Teachers	6
Caregivers/ parents	12
Social workers	2
Gender desk police supervisor	1
Total	51

The study applied a judgmental or purposive sampling technique which is based on the judgment of the researcher as to who provides the best information to succeed for the objectives of the study. Because adopting purposive sampling for the study helped the researcher to extract lots of information from research participants, especially when there are just a few of them. The researcher needed to focus on those people with the same opinion to have the required information and who were willing of sharing it. This sampling technique was used to select the participants that the researcher saw fits best in providing information for the study.

The researcher selected primary pupils from grade three to grade six, this simply is children from the age of 8 to 12 because, by age 8, kids begin to move into more abstract thinking and cognitively are more able to explain themselves, the researcher excluded grade seven since during the time of data collection they were preparing for their national examination. 15 pupils were selected from each school to make a total of 30 primary pupils from both schools.

The researcher selected six (6) teachers, 3 from each school that were the headmaster or mistress, the discipline master or mistress and the school counsellor, because these are the ones who have more information about the children and they are the first ones to get information when incidents occur to pupils.

The researcher also selected 12 parents whose children have been part of study 6 from each school, to gather and clarify information given by children. Also, the researcher selected two (2) social workers and one (1) police officer from the police gender desk to provide a document review on the rate and types of violence primary pupils witness.

Types and Sources of Data

The researcher collected two types of data, that is primary data and secondary data.

Primary data is the information collected first-hand, it is collected for a specific research problem at hand, using procedures that fit the research problem the best (Boije 2014). The researcher collected Primary data because it is reliable, unique means not published anywhere else before, authentic and based on the objectives of the study. The sources of the primary data in the study were the primary pupils, parents/caregivers, teachers and social workers.

Secondary data is the information gathered from other people's findings and documents (Kothari 2004). In this study, the secondary was collected from the social welfare office and police gender desk on their written review on domestic violence.

Data Collection

The data collection method is the process of preparing and collecting the data (Weller 1988). The purpose of data collection was to obtain the information, keep records and make a decision about important issues and pass information to others. Primary and secondary data were collected to provide basic information regarding the specific study.

Interviews

An interview is a face-to-face conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee, where the interviewer seeks replies from the interviewee for choosing a potential human resource (Kothari 2004). The researcher applied the semi-structured interview since these are the questions that do not strictly follow a formalised list of questions and mostly are open-ended, it is easy to get data from children. The researcher used interviews because it allows clarification and gives room for a detailed discussion of information given by the respondents. To come up with appropriate research results, the researcher conducted a ten minutes interview with each pupil to get their opinions.

Focus Group Discussion

Is it a model for obtaining detailed, qualitative information? The method aims to obtain data from a purposely selected group of individuals rather than from a statistically representative sample of a broader population (Stewart, 1998). Focus group discussion was used because it asks participants for open-ended responses conveying thoughts or feelings. Focus group discussion was used to get data from parents/caregivers and teachers by allowing them to give opinions on the study at hand, by grouping them as parents/caregivers with their group of six from each school and teachers a group of three from each group.

Documentary Review

Is a systematic collection, documentation, analysis and interpretation, and organization of data in research. This data collection method will be used to collect data from the documents of Iringa municipal social welfare and Iringa police gender desk to get information on the trend and types of domestic violence acts from January to May 2022 to predict the number of children that have witnessed domestic violence in their households.

Data Analysis and Presentation

This refers to the process of evaluating data using analytical and logical reasoning to examine each component of the data provided (Teddlie 2008).

In this study, the researcher used content analysis which is a systematic research method for analysing and making inferences from texts and other forms of qualitative data from interviews, focus groups and documents. Key trends and themes were identified and systematic coding of the data was done.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative studies issues of trustworthiness are normally questioned since their concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way in naturalistic work (Shenton, 2004) instead researchers pay more attention to issues like credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability.

Credibility was ensured since it involves a range of different research methods and will measure what it intends. Also, although the qualitative research approach deals with a small population, the findings of the study may apply and be generalized to other situations and populations since it involved different kinds of respondents.

Dependability was ensured in the process of presenting the data, that it was reported clearly and in more detail to pave way for other researchers to conduct more research on the same field and gain the same result.

Conformability was assured due since the respondents will be people with more experience on the subject matter, also responses entirely depended on the informants' ideas and evaluation of the findings will be done by considering the solid evidence.

Lastly, to ensure the transferability of the findings, the researcher provided a detailed description of the setting in which the study was conducted.

Ethical Consideration

To address ethical considerations in my study the following was done.

The researcher was given a letter of approval from the University of Iringa to conduct the study that introduced the researcher to the area of field studies such as police gender desk, school and social welfare for them to provide the

information needed, a letter of approval from the municipal council to parents to allow their children to participate in this study. The researcher also made sure that voluntary participation of respondents in the study and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point they wished to do so. Also, the privacy and anonymity of respondents were observed, the researcher acknowledged the work of other authors used in any part of the study with the use of the APA referencing system and any type of communication concerning the study was done with honesty and transparency.

Coping Mechanisms Employed by Pupils Who Witness Domestic Violence

The third objective is to explore the coping mechanisms employed by pupils witnessing domestic violence in Iringa municipal. To answer this objective, data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions; the respondents included pupils, teachers and parents. The findings revealed some coping mechanisms applied by pupils after witnessing domestic violence in their homes or at school. Which mainly were running away from the violent environment, asking for help and interfering in the violence.

Running Away From the Violent Environment

The findings indicate that most children after witnessing domestic violence tend to run away and ask for help from other people such as neighbours or escape from the environment permanently. During the interview one of the pupils responded that:

"When I witnessed my neighbour being raped I ran to go and ask for help from my parents. (Pupil05, School X, July 2022).

To align with that a focus group discussion was conducted and one of the teachers said that:

"Most children have different coping mechanisms after witnessing domestic violence although many of them run away to go and ask for help, a few tend to interfere and become victims of violence too". (Teacher05, school Z, July 2022).

Also during a discussion with the parents, one of the parents stated that:

" every time I and my husband get into an argument and start fighting my children will hide in their rooms and lock themselves up, they don't want to see what is happening". (Parent 05, ward Y, July 2022).

Interfering in the violence

The findings indicate that most children interfere with the violence involving their loved ones, in an act of helping them. During the interview with the pupils, one of the pupils replied that:

"One day I witnessed my father beating my mother, and she was in a lot of pain, I had to interfere to rescue my mom, though I was also beaten in the process of helping my mother". (Pupil 06, School Z, July 2022).

To align with that during the focus group discussion one of the parents stated that:

"One time my son saw his friend being mistreated and abused by a neighbour, he interfered in the act and started abusing back the neighbour, as a result, he was beaten in the process" (Parent 06, ward x, July 2022).

Referring to the findings, it is evident that most pupils lack skills on how to cope with witnessing domestic violence and the majority end up using unhealthy ways of coping after witnessing domestic since they don't know what to do.

3. DISCUSSION

Coping Mechanisms among Primary Pupils

Coping mechanisms are the strategies people often use in the face of stress and/or trauma to help manage painful or difficult emotions. Coping mechanisms can help people adjust to stressful events while helping them maintains their emotional well-being (Carr & pudrovska 2007).

Here the researcher aimed to investigate what pupils normally do after witnessing a violent act at any place and the majority of the respondents stated that running away, hiding and asking for help were the main coping mechanisms they applied. The researcher found out that during parental fights children are told to hide in their rooms also sometimes due to fear they hide themselves so according to the findings, children not only see the violent acts but also hear them while hiding.

When violence is happening at home the findings show that most children go out and ask for help from their neighbours or relatives that are nearby and ask those people to intervene in the act to save the victim to avoid stressful situations.

Also, from the findings some children run away from the violent acts, this implies that when violence becomes a habit at home, children become very stressed and get tired of witnessing those activities now and then, so some of them prefer living in the streets by running away to prevent the pain they feel every day thus witnessing domestic violence may result to increase of many street children.

The findings show that children also intervene in the violent acts as a coping mechanism, this is a very dangerous mode of coping and it happens especially when the mother is being abused and the children want to help they tend to intervene, as a result the children also become victims of violence not only witnessing .and this mode of coping with witnessing domestic violence may even to lead to the death of this children since the perpetrators become very angry and may hit them anyhow.

Findings are supported by different scholars such as Peled & Davis(1995), which state that: this is particularly challenging within a domestic violence context; active coping strategies could be dangerous (e.g., getting help or phoning 911) and passive coping strategies (e.g., hiding) could be safer for some children in some situations. Even some seemingly safe active strategies, like leaving the room or getting help, can be dangerous when these actions might involve the child being closer to the violence or when the action could further inflame the assailant. Thus, when building on children's natural responses to witnessing violence, it is important not only to emphasize a particular coping strategy (e.g., getting help, leaving the room), but when that strategy is safe and when it could be potentially harmful.

The findings are also supported by the coping theory by Lazarus and Folk man(1984), which states that successful coping mechanisms depend on the emotional functions related to the problem that is; self-control, confrontation, social support, emotional distancing, escape and avoidance, radical acceptance, positive reappraisal and strategic problem-solving.

In addition, O'Brien, Margolin, John, and Krueger (1991) found that children who witnessed abuse against their mothers were more likely to intervene in the interparental conflict and to use distraction to cope with interparental conflict.

A study conducted by Rosenberg (1987); stated that even when parents might have thought their children were asleep through the arguments and beatings, found that the children reported hearing the violence and remained in their bedrooms because they were afraid to leave.

Lastly, to support the findings, some scholars stated that; No all children, of course, respond in the same way to witnessing abuse against their mothers, and some children appear to be more adversely affected than others (Graham-Bermann, 1998; Hughes, Graham-Bermann, & Gruber, 2001; Jaffe et al., 1990).

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

Based on the findings it is concluded that pupils witness physical and sexual violence the most both at home and in school, pupils Witnessing domestic violence do not know the healthy ways of coping and continue using negative coping mechanisms such as running away from home and interfering in the violence act among families in Iringa Municipality. And it is clear that exposure to violence places a great burden on children across all developmental stages, as well as psychological and socially where they may have problems such as depression, stress, anxiety, fear, anger, trauma, loneliness poor establishment of relationships, hopelessness, withdrawal from others and imposing violence to others.

Recommendations

The researcher suggests the following actions or measures be taken by the government, ministry of community development, gender, elders and children, schools, parents and other stakeholders dealing with children based on the objectives and the findings.

Based on the findings it is evident that physical abuse and sexual abuse are highly witnessed by children, the government under social welfare should educate the community on the effects of gender-based violence and how it affects the children that witness them.

Also, the government should create policies and laws to help these children in Iringa municipality who have witnessed domestic violence, also treat them as victims of violence and offer measures to help them overcome the outcome effects such as giving them counselling services, educating parents on how to prevent their children from witnessing violence.

Social welfare should organize workshops with parents and caregivers addressing the effects of children witnessing domestic violence as a very sensitive thing and how to prevent victimizing them.

Parents and caregivers should be aware of the importance of talking to their children in a friendly way so that their children can disclose more information that may be troubling them to reduce the psychological and social effects of witnessing domestic violence.

Counsellors are to be posted in different primary schools to help children overcome the trauma of witnessing domestic violence and to be educated on the safe coping mechanisms after witnessing domestic violence.

Recommendations for Further Studies

Given the findings, the researcher recommends that further studies should be done and investigate the coping mechanisms among primary school pupils witnessing domestic violence in a different area and at a large scale with a large sample including various data collection tools. Also, another study should specifically examine the measures taken to help primary school pupils witnessing domestic violence, lastly, further studies should be conducted on other specific factors on primary school pupils' psychological wellbeing and its impact.

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