



# PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIORAL IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

\*\*Chitra.R. Research Scholar, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Manonmaniam Sundranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu

\* Dr.Beulah Shekhar, Emeritus Professor, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Karunya Institute of Technical Sciences, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu

## ABSTRACT

Violence is a persistent force in the lives of children. Exposure to violence during childhood is increasingly common and is recognized risk factors for the development of stress, anxiety and aggression among children. The types of violence that have been associated with adverse psychological and behavioural impact include domestic violence, school violence, media and community violence. Children's psycho physiological functioning is significantly affected by exposure to violent environment. This study was aimed to assess the psychological and behavioural impact of violence on children. Quantitative research approach and descriptive research design was used for this study. The present study was conducted among 60 school going children who were selected based on convenient sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire consisted of part A, demographic characteristics, part B, scale to assess the Anxiety and depression and part C scale to assess the stress. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings of the study revealed that majority of the school going children had moderate level of Anxiety and depression, and 61.7% of school going children had moderate level of stress. It is suggested that the interventions should be carried out to reduce violence in the home, school and the community. It can be effective in the prevention of anxiety, stress and depression among school going children.

**Keywords: Anxiety, Community violence, Depression, Domestic violence, School violence and Stress**

## INTRODUCTION

The healthy future of a society depends on the health of children, who are the guardians of that future (WHO, 2005). Children's development is expected to unfold within a safe and nurturing environment. Violence has negative impacts on child's development. It can impact children's, physical, psychological, behavioural, cognitive and social development. Violence against children threatens not only children's survival and health but also their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Exposure to violence during childhood is increasingly common and is recognized risk factors for the development of stress, anxiety, aggression and depression among children. The types of violence that have been associated with adverse psychological and behavioural impact include family violence, school violence, media and community violence. Children's psycho physiological functioning is significantly affected by exposure to violent environment. Children exposure to violence develops emotional and behavioral disorder at early stage. It disturbs the process of normal psychological development of children. This study was aimed to assess the impact of violence on psychological development of children in terms of anxiety, stress and depression among school going children exposure to violence.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines the phenomenon of violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, a group or a community, which results or is likely to result in injury, death, psychological harm, or developmental loss or damage" (Krug, 2002).

## BACHGROUND OF THE STUDY

Violence refers to "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a child, by an individual or group, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity." (WHO, 2002). Anxiety & Depression in childhood is not simply a mood regulation disorder; it also involves alterations in the physiology and in the cognitive and social functions of children, and requires comprehension of developmental integration processes at multiple levels of biological, psychological and social complexity in individuals (McCauley E, 2001).

Individual, family and environmental factors have been recognized as psychosocial factors for childhood depression and anxiety. Family factors associated with childhood depression include marital conflict, parental depression, rejection and low interaction with the child and environmental factors include daily difficulties, stressful or traumatic life events and lack of social support. Children exposed to these risk factors can be more vulnerable to psychological problems like stress, anxiety and depression. Burns et al. (2010) explain that while approximately half of these vulnerable children are diagnosed with mental health problems, 75% of them do not receive treatment.

Children may find it more stressful when they exposure to violence between their parents ,school and in the community. The impact of witnessing violence has a negative effect, since children may perceive the world as unsafe, adults as untrustworthy, and events as unpredictable or uncontrollable.

## **NEED FOR THE STUDY**

Exposure to violence and violence victimization are common among school going children. It can occur in any settings like home, school or in the community. Exposure to violence can increase the risk for poor mental health. Violence takes many forms including physical, sexual, emotional, media, community, school, economic, and mental forms. This may occur once, or it may occur repeatedly often in an increasing manner. It creates physical, emotional, and psychological scars on the victims thereby causing distressing consequences on the individuals involved and the society at large.

The literature shows that children who are victims or witnesses to violence are at risk for experiencing both behavioural and emotional problems and somewhat at risk for impaired social functioning. The care provided to children by the family, by other social groups and institutions greatly influences their chances of survival and dramatically improves their quality of life. In addition, caring functions as a reference value, which helps children to construct their own identity and form the first ideas about themselves, about others and the world (Deslandes, Assis & Santos, 2005). This motivates the investigator to conduct the study to assess the psychological and behavioural impact of violence on children.

### **Objectives of the study**

The primary objective of this study is to assess the psychological and behavioural impact of violence on children. The secondary objective is to associate the psychological and behavioural impact of violence with selected demographic variables of children

## **METHODOLOGY**

Quantitative research approach and descriptive research design was used for this study. The present study was conducted among 60 school going children who were selected based on convenient sampling technique. Permission was obtained from the head of Institution to conduct the study. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data from the samples. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire consisted of four parts. The tool was administered in regional language(Tamil )and English.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE TOOL**

The data was collected using self administered questionnaire method. The tool was prepared based on the information gathered from the review of literature. Demographic data of school children were collected using semi- structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was translated in to regional Tamil language. The tool consisted of four sections like,

**Section-I: Demographic information:** This section focus on demographic information like age, gender, class of studying, religion, type of family, number of siblings, family structure, family monthly income, parent child relationship etc.

**Section –II: Exposure to violence:** This section consisted of 20 items and is designed to gather information about exposure to violence in the past years. It consisted of three domains of violence exposure: family (10items), school(5items) and community(5 items). It is a dichotomous response questionnaire. A total of 20 items were used to assess the violence exposures.

**Section –III: Level of stress:** Stress was assessed using modified Gordon stress inventory which consisted of 15 statements. It is a rating scale and each item is rated as follows, never (0), almost never (1), sometimes (2), fairly often (3), very often (4). The maximum score is 60. The total score was counted and the percentage was calculated.

**Section – IV: Level of Anxiety:** Level of anxiety was assessed using 4 point likert scale which consisted of 15 items. Each item is rated as never (0), sometimes (1), often (2), always (3). The maximum score is 45. The total score was counted and the percentage was calculated.

**Section – V: Level of Depression:** Level of depression was assessed using 4 point likert scale which consisted of 10 items. Each item is rated as never (0), sometimes (1), often (2), always (3). The maximum score is 30. The total score was counted and the percentage was calculated

**Section – V: Level of Aggression:** Level of aggression was assessed using aggression inventory which consisted of 30 items. The total score was counted and the percentage was calculated

## DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The present study was conducted in selected district of Tamilnadu. The respondents of the study were 60 school children. Samples were selected based on convenient sampling technique. After obtaining permission from the head of the institution, the samples were identified. These children were explained about the purpose of study and permission was obtained. Their parents were informed about the participation of their children in this study and permission was obtained from them. The questionnaire was administered to the children. The tool was administered in regional language (Tamil )and English. Informed consent was obtained from the participants. It took around 15 – 20minutes for each sample to complete the data collection.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Data were entered with accuracy and precision into computer for computation. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in this study.

## RESULTS

### *Background Information*

Majority of the children (70 %) belonged to 13 year of age while the rest, 25% and 5%, belonged to 14 years and 15 years respectively. Regarding gender, 58.3% of them were male and 41.75 of them were female. Majority (75%) of children were Hindus and 66.7% of them were belonged to nuclear/single families. Regarding number of siblings, 50% of children had one sibling and 13.3% of children had more than two siblings.

Majority (86.7%) of the children were living with both parents. Regarding parent child relationship, 48.3% of children had average relationship and 25% of them had poor relationship. Only 25% of the children good sibling relationship and 46.7% of the children had average relationship.

### **Information pertaining to exposure to violence**

All the samples (100%) had exposure to violence in the family, school and community. Regarding family violence, about 80 % of the children exposed to family violence like insulting, shouting, threatening, denying of love, slapping, kicking etc. Regarding the school violence 60 % of the children had witnessed school violence like seeing someone attacked, slapped, punched etc. Regarding community violence, around 45% of them had exposure to violence like punched and chased by gangs.

### **Level of Stress, Aggression, Anxiety & Depression**

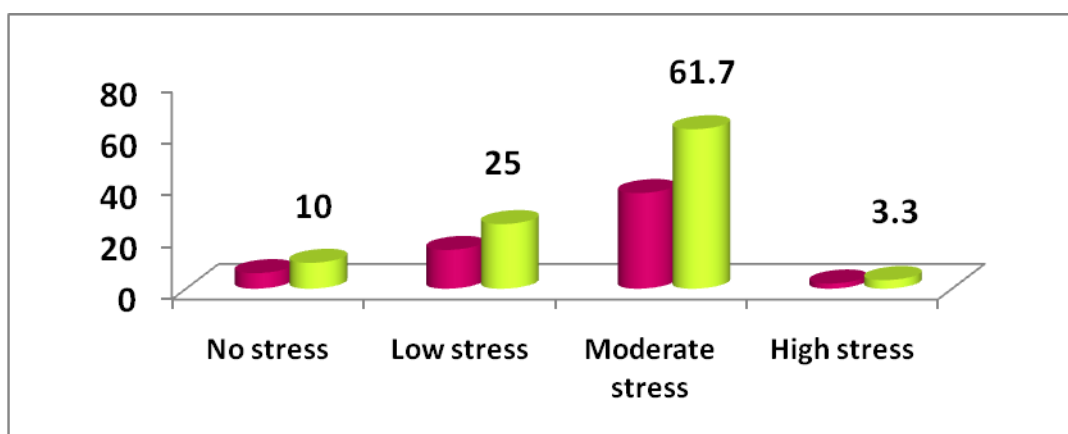
On assessment of stress, majority (61.7%) of the children had moderate level of stress and 53.3% of them had moderate level of anxiety. Regarding depression, majority (60%) of the children had moderate level of depression. More than fifty percentages of the children had moderate level of aggression.

There was a statistically significant association between level of stress, depression and exposure to violence at 1% level of significance. There was no significant association between level of stress, anxiety, depression and demographic variables of children.

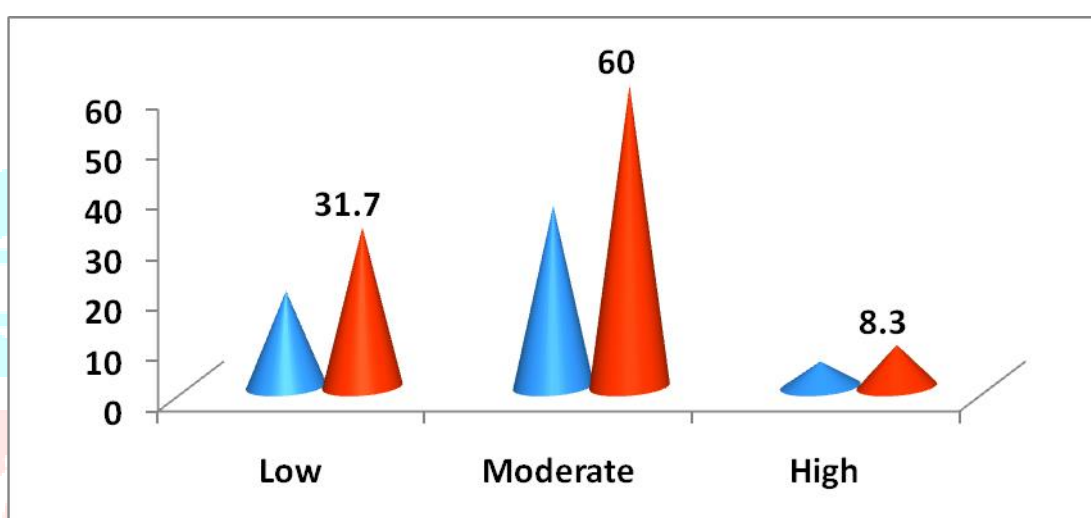
## IMPLICATIONS IN PRACTICE

Criminologists are playing a vital role in protecting the children against violence. The implications are,

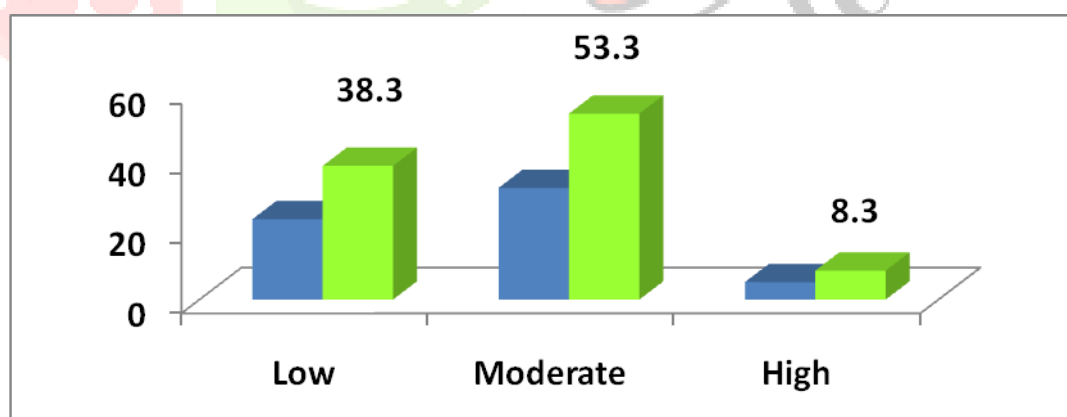
- Anticipatory guidance to parents and care givers about impact of violence on development of children
- Counsel parents about developmentally appropriate means of disciplining the children
- Counsel parents about nonviolent ways to resolve conflict
- Educate parents about the negative impact of arguments on children
- Direct parents to limit their children's media usage
- Screen for exposure to violence
- Strengthen school mental health service
- Behavioral therapy should be initiated as early as possible to reduce the impact



**Fig.1: Frequency & Percentage distribution of level of stress**



**Fig.2: Frequency & Percentage distribution of level of depression**



**Fig.3: Frequency & Percentage distribution of level of anxiety**

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the study clearly stated the association between violence exposure and psychological and behavioural impact. All the samples in this study were exposed to violence in the family, school and the community. The study findings revealed that majority of the children had moderate level of stress, anxiety and depression. More than fifty percentages of the children had moderate level of aggression. Violence against children is preventable. It is suggested that the interventions like counselling of parents regarding

negative impact, screening the children for violence exposure in the school, strengthening school mental health service, behavioural therapy etc should be carried out to reduce violence in the family, school and the community.

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