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Child Abuse among Pre-School Children in Kenya: Implications on Learning Outcomes

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Abstract:

Though the rights of children are enshrined in Kenyan constitution 2010 and in the children's act 2001, it has been noted that the case of child abuse is on the increase. This scenario of child abuse becomes even more astounding when the abuse is being done by the very people who are supposed to protect them. Children who have suffered any form of abuse find it difficult to concentrate on their studies and this has impacted negatively on their academic performance. This study aimed at finding out the effects of child abuse on academic performance among pre-school children aged five to six years at Vyulya sub-zone in Machakos County, Kenya. It focused on the main forms of abuse, factors underlying child abuse and the effect of child on their academic performance. Data was collected using structured questionnaires, interview schedule and documentary analysis. The research found that the main forms of child abuse are physical abuse, neglect and emotional abuse. The factors underlying these abuse are poverty, ignorance, diseases and cultural values adopted by parents and other guardians. These abuses were found to affect the academic performance of children negatively. The researchers recommend that the ministry of education should come up with clear policies that safeguards the rights of all children.

Keywords: Child, child abuse, child right, academic performance

1. Introduction

Under the Children's Act 2001 and Kenyan constitution, 2010, the rights of every child are guaranteed. These rights include right to education, good health, love and care among others. When these children's right are implemented, children grow in a good environment thus enabling them to develop in all aspects of life which include emotional, physical, intellectual, social and spiritual development. It is therefore the responsibility of parents and other guardians to ensure that these rights are preserved so as to prepare the future generations for the task of nation building.

Despite the availability of documents and laws guiding the rights of children, studies have shown that children are still being abused hence making them to suffer a great deal in the hands of their care givers (Mbagaya, C., Oburu, P. & Bakermans, K. ,2013; UNICEF, 2012; Nicholas G.T. Aoife O. , 2018.). A study by the Kenya Medical Women Association (KMWA, 1999) attributed child abuse to lack of understanding and acceptance that children have rights of protection as individuals. Further studies reveal that child abuse has been the norm for ages due to different historical perspectives (Forsman, L. Brännström, B. Vinnerljung, A. Hjern. (2016. For instance, in Europe, children were treated like adults at a tender age of four years where they were expected to play adult games, participate in festivities and celebrations that were organized in the communities just like any other adults. This treatment was detrimental to their physical, cognitive and emotional development (Nicholas G.T. Aoife O., 2018). . In an effort to address this discrepancy, it took long and painful efforts in convincing the society that children needed quality care and protection.

Child abuse has been non-existence only in few counties like the People's Republic of China and Japan (Onyango, 1982). Where it existed it was minimal. This was attributed to stringent measures by the governments and also due to established traditions of child love and care by the parents. However, the case was different in Hong Kong where cases of child abuse was prevalent.

According to UNICEF (2004), Africa was found to have over 130 million children below the ages of six years. Out of this number, 20% of the children were found to be at risk of undergoing child abuse. This translates to twenty six million children being exposed to one form of abuse or the other. Child negligent was found to be prevalent where 10.6 million children were orphaned due to HIV/AIDS which had killed their parents in sub-Sahara Africa. War and conflict has also led to

destitution where 85% of the population in refugee camps are women and children. The situation in these refugee camps is not conducive for growth and development of these children as the physiological and psychological needs are not met. This negates the very essence of children's rights but the situation in the camp does not warrant this as everybody in the camp is concerned with their very survival.

Child abuse takes different forms depending on the locality and cultural background. For instance, the African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN, 2001), found out that young school children who had qualified to join pre-school were engaged in backbreaking work for long hours in agricultural zones, hence denying them chance to go to school. Other children were kept at home so as to help on domestic chores. Most of these children were subjected to physical and psychological torture to the extent that their education was highly hampered even when they eventually joined school.

Other forms of child abuse are done in the school environment. The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, (KICD, 2002), found out that some pre-school children were being denied leisure activities especially play games. This was attributed to inadequate play space and teachers ignorance on the importance of play among the learners. This research found out that some children were confined in small compounds and do not get the opportunity to socialize with their peers. In such a situation, the development of the child's language, social, emotional and cognitive skills are hampered, hence posing a great drawback to both physical and intellectual growth of the child.

In Kenya, child abuse has not been an exception. In 2007, there was post-election violence that led to displacement of many families from their settlements. During this period, children were molested and lacked basic needs like food and shelter. Moreover, parents were more concerned with security and thereby denied their children love and care as they found themselves in unfamiliar environment which was not conducive and friendly to their existence. This led to emotional abuse and those children who had access to education could not concentrate in their studies. Moreover, majority of children in these areas could not access the schools though education is a basic human right.

Several cases have been reported in the media of children being molested by either the caregivers, parents, teachers or other guardians who are supposed to be taking care of them (UNICEF, 2012).. This has been done through negligence where children go for a prolonged period without food, water or somebody talking to them. In other instances, they suffer physical torture as a result of beating or emotional abuse when they are verbally abused by use of harsh words or use of abusive language. This situation is prevalence at Machakos County, in Kenya.

Machakos County is semi-arid and sometimes lacks food and water. In most cases, fathers are away at work and therefore, children are left at the care of the mothers who serve as the role models. Due to financial constraints, mothers are forced by circumstances to also move away from home so as to substitute what their husbands are not able to provide. This leaves no one in charge of the children and this leads to negligence. Due to harsh economic situations, parents are not able to provide basic necessities like enough quality food. Some parents are harsh to children and even abuse them physically. To what extent has child abuse been the case in Machakos County? What is the implication of child abuse on their academic work?

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this was to investigate the effect of child abuse on the academic performance of pre-school children in Machakos County.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives for this study were:

- To investigate the main forms of child abuse practiced among pre-school children.
- To find out the factors underlying child abuse
- To examine the effects of child abuse on academic performance of the learners.

2. Methodology

Descriptive research design was used. This design was used because it helped the researchers to provide an accurate picture of the situation on the ground (Jackson, 2009). Data was collected using a questionnaire which sought the required information from teachers and parents of the abused children. In order to gather information on the effect of child abuse, interviews were carried out among the parents who were identified to be child abusers. This gave an in-depth analysis of the causes for child abuse. A group discussion was carried out among some of the abused children. In order to get the academic performance of children, documentary analysis was carried out.

3. Research Findings

3.1. Main Forms of Child Abuse

One objective was to find out some of the main forms of child abuse that are prevalence in the area under discussion. Table 1 below gives a summary of the findings.

Type of Abuse	Indicators	Always	Often	Rarely	Never	Mean Score	% Score
Physical abuse	Slapping	11	5	2	2		
	Canning	5	13	1	1		
	No food	3	8	4	3		
	Inflict pain	0	2	7	4		
Neglect	Locked in room	7	4	6	3		
	Not given food in good time	7	2	7	4		
	No time for parents to play with their children	9	5	3	3		
	Left to do some household chores on their own	11	3	1	5		
Emotional abuse	Use of harsh words	12	4	3	1		
	Use of abusive language	6	6	2	3		
	Not talking to children	3	4	10	3		
Total		63	53	45	27	3.64	90.96%

Table1: Types of Child Abuse

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indicated that 16% of children were physically abused by parents at home and teachers in relevant schools, 53.3% faced neglect especially at home by those entrusted to care for them, and 36.7% were emotionally abused by caregivers and parents at home, and some teachers in the learning institutions.

This therefore meant that abuse is widely spread, for the abusers are individuals who at many a times, are within the child's environment. From the findings, physical abuse was still imposed especially caning and pinching aimed at installation of pain in order to prevent the recurrence of an ill behavior. This type of abuse is rarely practiced in schools and takes the lowest percentage for most teachers are enlightened after the ban on corporal punishment. Neglect is the most common and had the highest percentage. Parents of the pre-scholars, especially the young parents, were not mindful of the child's basic needs. They prioritized their needs and rarely paid attention to the minor's needs. Most of the children were malnourished because they are not fed with the right and adequate food nutrients. This had endangered their cognitive ability which is quite essential for good academic performance. They had bad health as a result of frequent ailments, and experienced chronic school absenteeism. This is because a child whose basic needs are not adequately provided for especially food, love, security and medical care do not respond well in the teaching and learning process. At the end, low performance in academics was achieved.

Similarly, emotional abuse was also experienced among the pre-scholars at the family and learning institutions. Some parents often criticized children for no apparent reason. Others gave negative labels associating them with individuals of undesirable behavior and used derogatory language when addressing them. Physical abuse and neglect experienced by the child amount to the children's psychological torture, thus lowering the child's cognitive ability. Eventually, these forms of child abuse affect academic performance of pre-scholars without the perpetrator's intention.

3.2. Factors Underlying Child Abuse

The researchers intended to find out the factors that lead to child abuse that impact negatively on the academic performance among children in pre-schools in Machakos County. Figure 1 gives a summary of the findings.

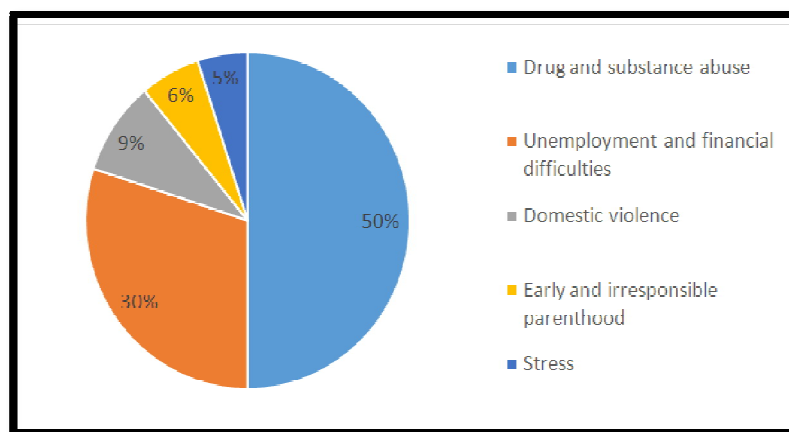


Figure 1: Factors Underlying Child Abuse

Figure 1 indicates that 50% of the children were abused at home by parents who were victims of drug and substance abuse, 30% of the child abused were caused by constraints in terms of finance and lack of employment among parents, 9% as a result of domestic violence in the family, 6% due to early and irresponsible parenthood, then 5% as a result of stress when it came to provision of requirements in parenting.

It therefore meant that drug and substance abuse, especially alcohol, khat (miraa) and bhang contributed most to the cause of child abuse among pre-scholars in the area under study. Majority of the male parents abused drugs, leading to the inability to provide for the basic needs required by the pre-scholars. They lacked time to associate with their children, hence left their educational needs unattended. Again, both of the parents were faced with financial problems because they are not employed and had inadequate resources to support their families. In most cases, they depended on wages paid on daily and weekly basis to provide for their children. In this case, the children suffer for they lack adequate support from their parents and their physiological and psychological needs are not well attended to.

Domestic violence in the homesteads was prevalence to some extent. It was witnessed by children where parents exchanged bitter words and engaged in physical fights. This is common in families where school dropouts marry before maturity time and engage into irresponsible parenthood. They are then unable to cope up with family life, demands and challenges. The result is that the child becomes the most vulnerable being in the family and the society, which ultimately affects its growth and development. This in turn impacts on the ability of the learner to concentrate in class and this leads to low academic performance.

3.3. Effect of Child Abuse on Learners Academic Performance

In order to find out the effect of child abuse on the academic performance of learners, the researchers analyzed data on each type of child abuse, whose findings are discussed in the preceding section.

3.3.1. Effects of Physical Abuse on Academic Performance

Figure 2 presents the findings on the effects of physical abuse on academic performance among the pre-school children in Machakos County.

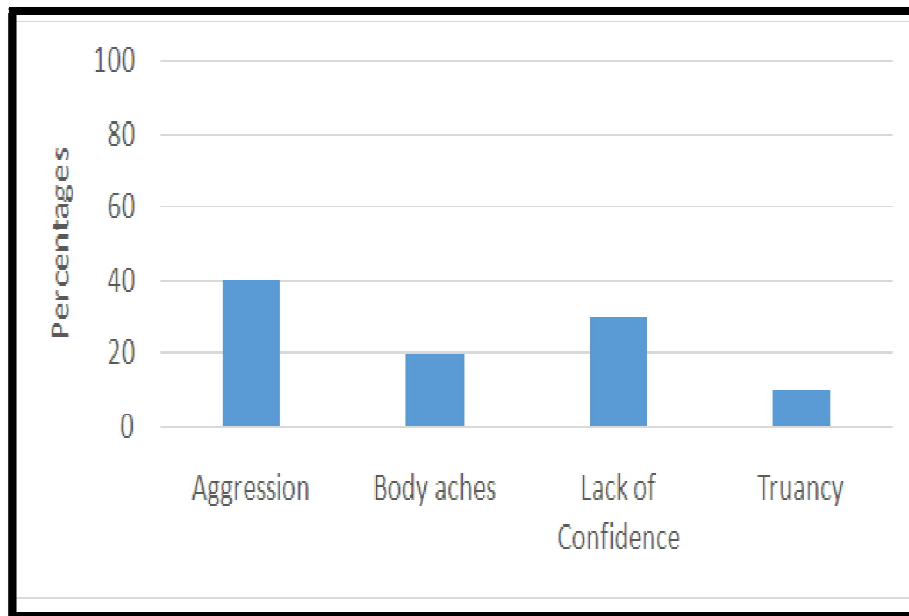


Figure 2: Effects of Physical Abuse

From figure 2, it can be seen that forty percent of the children who were physically abused developed aggressive behaviour, thirty percent lacked confidence hence had low self-esteem, twenty percent complained of body aches whereas ten percent had truancy behaviour which led to regular absenteeism from school.

This meant that physical abuse had different effects depending on the degree at which it was imposed to the preschoolers. The more the abuse, the greater the effect. Most of the physically abused children displayed aggression and had difficulties in conversing and relating well with their peers due to inappropriate social skills. These victims of physical abuse were bullies to others and tended to overreact to normal circumstances thus difficult to handle as a teacher. Indeed, physical abuse affected children's behavior. Acquisition of new concepts in the study became a challenge due to distracted attention. Similarly, parents who cane, pinch or shake their children violently interfered with the children's moods and mental development. They made them lack confidence and were not sure what to relay during a conversation. They were always nervous and could not assert themselves even during the learning process. On the body parts where pain was inflicted, the child tended to experience discomfort especially when seated and many a times called for the teacher's attention for emotional

consolation. Suffering led to the development of a vice known as truancy which made the victim of abuse develop a tendency of sneaking from school without the teacher's permission. Such a tortured child cannot perform well in academics and the results are low test scores in a school set up. Confirming this, one teacher said,

"I have noticed that most of the children who miss school come complaining of some pain here and there. When I asked one of them why he had difficulties sitting continuously, he confessed that the mother had beaten him in the buttocks and was still paining. Further probe revealed that he had been beaten several times at the slightest provocation".

One parent was very candid in response to why she gave her six year old daughter a lot of household chores which were not commensurate to her age. She said,

"I am the sore bread winner in the family. The father is a drunkard and does not provide for the family. When I come home from work, I am tired and I have no one to help me. So I ask her to help because we all need to eat. After all, it is a way of training her to be responsible. What's wrong with that?"

Another parent complained of failing discipline among the current generation and tried to justify the reason for canning. She said,

"If you don't discipline these children properly, they will not respect you. That's why I make use of the cane properly. Our religion has taught us that if we spare the cane, we spoil the child. We also got the same dose when growing up. Why do they expect to be treated differently?"

3.3.2. Effects of Neglect on Academic Performance

The following were the findings on the effects of neglect on academic performance among the pre-scholars in Machakos County.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Ill-health	12	30%
Malnutrition	13	32.5%
Chronic school absenteeism	10	25%
Hyperactivity	5	12.5%
Total	$\Sigma f = 40$	100%

Table 2: Effects of Neglect on Academic Performance

Table 2 above indicated that 30% of the neglected pre-school children had ill-health, 32.5% suffered from malnutrition, 25% had chronic or frequent school absenteeism and 5% were hyperactive in activities given to perform. It therefore meant that, pre-scholars who were neglected to a certain degree during the early years of development suffered from different ailments ranging from minor to severe. This was because the children lacked proper medical care for they imposed a burden to parents who were neglectful to them. Some pre-scholars' illnesses were less attended to. Other parents went to an extent of purchasing over-the-counter medicines without a doctor's prescription when their children fell sick to reduce expenses. This made the disease-causing germ to resist medication and prolonged the ailment period. By the time the child was taken for a better check-up, school lessons were lost and they found it difficult to make up for the lost time. Malnutrition was also an issue since a few of the young married parents were ignorant or semi-illiterate and did not understand the term 'balanced diet' (the rule of three).

They fed their children just to fill-in their stomach unaware of health hazards awaiting to befall them. This slows down the brain development in which a good diet is its 'booster'. As a neglected child lacks social, physiological and psychological support, a small number of the victims of abuse developed attention and behavioral problems. Indeed, the child could not settle or concentrate for quite some time and was always restless in class. Such behavior hindered good performance for the child could not follow instructions given by the teachers or parent's in-charge.

3.3.3. Effects of Emotional Abuse on Academic Performance

The following were the investigations on the effects of emotional abuse on academic performance among the pre-scholars at in Machakos County

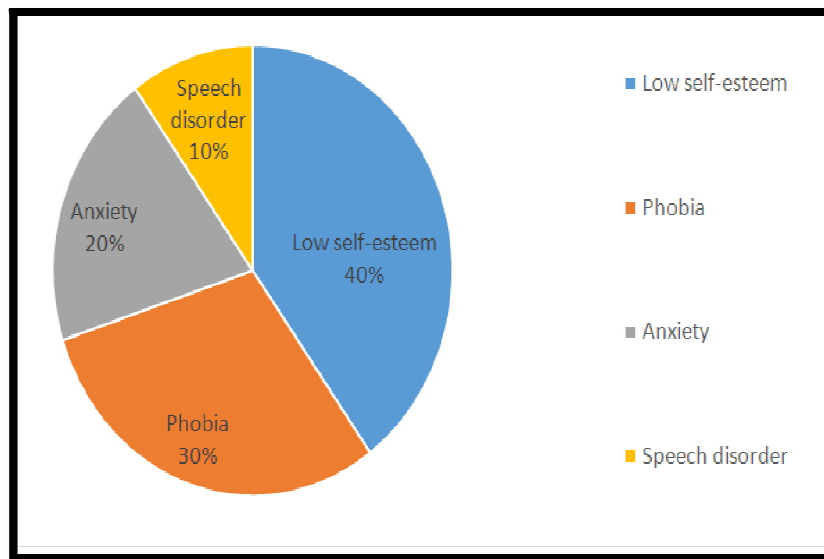


Figure 3: Effects of Emotional Abuse on Academic Performance

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Figure 3 indicated that 40% of the pre-scholars who were emotionally abused experienced low self-esteem, 30% of the victims of child abuse had phobia at different perspectives, 20% suffered from anxiety and 10% had problems in speech (speech disorder).

This therefore meant that the pre-scholars who were emotionally abused attributed themselves as inferior and their sense of self-worth was too low compared to the well-nurtured child at home and at pre-schools. These children at school did not socialize enough with their peers and preferred watching others play. The child was a loner and left a lot to be desired. Meanwhile, as the physiologically tortured child was with other friends, it was very difficult to express oneself or pose any question during the teaching and learning process. The child was engulfed with phobia for adults especially if they were their perpetrators and they were less motivated no matter efforts made. The child often had a sense of guilt and shame and tried as much as possible to perfect all what is expected to do.

Such nervousness led to some pre-scholars develop speech disorders such as stammering and stuttering. Those disorders of speech originate from one's brain during the course of development and a child ought to be given ample time to reorganize thoughts so as to pass the required information. As a result, the children found it difficult to concentrate in classwork that ended up missing some concepts for good academic performance. All in all, low scores were achieved for the abused pre-scholars had lacked conducive learning stimulation at the right age.

4 Conclusions

It is evident that child abuse is still rampant in today's society due to change of the family structure and the modern styles which every person is longing for adaption. Children are abused in the families they are brought up in, the societies and in the learning institutions in Machakos County. The parents and caregivers take the lead in abuse because neglect and emotional abuse is very common, leave alone the physical abuse. The parents prioritize their needs and pay too little attention to the children's basic needs. In schools, physical and emotional abuse are practiced but very minimal for the teachers are always alert on child rights. Such practices to a child is really detrimental to social, emotional and cognitive ability and end up to low academic performance in school.

Since there must be a cause of any human act, there were factors that underline child abuse and were multifunctional. Abuse among children were brought about by unfavorable life conditions which parents and caregivers experience. First, drug and substance abuse such as alcohol and miraa were commonly abused, endangering the lives of the children. Early and irresponsible parenthood which leads to domestic violence due to misunderstanding is a common occurrence. Unemployment and financial difficulties which later make the parents have stress for failing to cater for the child's and family's needs is extended to the child either directly or indirectly. At the end, it has resulted to low academic performance for their cognitive and emotional development are affected.

The effects of child abuse differ from one child to another depending on the form of abuse, duration of exposure and the degree at which the abuse was imposed. A neglected child had poor health, was malnourished, hyperactive and frequently absent from school. The physically-abused child had behavioral and psychological problems such as aggression, truancy and lacked confidence in case the child is required to pass a certain information. If for instance, physical abuse involved the use of cane or pinch, the victim complained of body ache. Finally, the emotionally abused children suffer from anxiety, low self-esteem, and phobia and may develop speech disorder which is a barrier to effective communication. Truly, such a disturbed brain could not concentrate during teaching and learning process thus lower academic performance of the child.

5. Recommendations

Parents and pre-school teachers who for long hours interact with the pre-scholars should be sensitized by the educational officers and the professionals of children's welfare on the main forms of child abuse that affect the pre-scholars' cognitive development. It can be effected by launching a campaign and inviting the latter, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education through seminars and workshops and facilitate on the rights of the child that ought to be implemented as stated in the Children's Act (2001). This would minimize abuse and enhance intellectual ability among children and eventually improve the academic performance in schools.

The community which is made up of parents at home and caregivers in the rehabilitation centers who deal with young children should be enlightened in the factors underlying child abuse hence guided and counselled often in Barazas and insets organized by the guidance and counselling department at school and at religious institutions. This would help remind them acquire life skills and be able to cope up with day-to-day challenges. In turn, abuse among children will be minimized if not curbed for the welfare of the child's schooling period and improved performance.

The caregivers at all categories and the pre-school teachers inclusive should be sensitized about the effects of child abuse as pertains the young child's education process. This can be put in place by organizing seminars and workshops whereby the concerned persons are invited by the health officers such as doctors and nurses, and education officers in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and education respectively in order to enhance the child's upbringing practices and be able to identify early the signs of abuse and act appropriately to safeguard the feelings of the abused child who deem a simulative environment for learning.

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