

Mothers' Experiences in Taking Care of Schooling Children in the Context of Domestic Violence in Songwe Region, Tanzania

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore the mothers' experiences in taking care of schooling children in the context of domestic violence in Songwe Region, Tanzania. The study opted for qualitative approach using the interpretive phenomenological design with a sample of 30 interviewed participants obtained through snowball sampling. The findings show that physical violence against mothers in terms of slapping and punching with fists from husbands made mothers provide inadequate needs and services to children. The results further show that social cultural beliefs and norms that assign men to control the family properties and make decision on family issues are the major underlying root cause of violence against women including wives. It is therefore recommended that deliberate measures should be taken by the government through its respective ministry and NGOs to protect women including mothers against partner violence so as to create harmonious home environments where fathers and mothers should work together in providing essential needs for children.

Keywords: Domestic violence; gender based violence; physical violence; intimate partner abuse; emotional violence.

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Introduction

Mothers in many African families are the major caregivers of young children. Mothers are not only taking care of children but also are involved in more family care responsibilities especially in rural areas. Any form of violence against mothers will therefore affect their children's care experiences. Coady (2011) and Lapierre (2010) are of the opinion that living with violence at home affects mother's ability to parent and meet children's needs. Kelleher, et al. (2008) in their study conducted in the USA about child welfare associated with physical violence by men against women involved mothers of children aged 1-14 years. In their study, they found that mothers who were physically assaulted by their husbands were reported to neglect child care responsibilities. The findings by Family Violence (2012) in Canada

reported that the neglect of children occurs when the child's basic needs are not being met. The report indicated that physical neglect of children involved inadequate provision of food, clothing, medical care, shelter, cleanliness and protection from harm. Thus, a mother in the violent situation may neglect her child by being unable to provide good quality childcare as English, Marshall and Stewart (2003) and Lapierre (2010) argued that family violence affects the quality of the caregiver with the child, including the caregiver's general health and well-being.

Domestic violence is any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in relationship (Betron, 2008). Physical violence involves beating, burning, slapping, choking,

pushing, pulling, biting, kicking or grabbing by the hair. Psychological or emotional violence involve harming a person's sense of self-esteem which may result to behavioral or cognitive risk. Psychological violence includes insults, threats, humiliation, excessive jealousy, constant yelling, isolating a woman from neighbors and deprivation of love and affection (Volpe, 2011). Sexual violence involves all forms of sexual assaults or harassments. It includes rape, unwanted sexual touching, forcing a woman to participate in any unwanted love and ridiculing a woman's sexuality (TAWJA, 2010; Kalra & Dinesh, 2013).

The researcher limited the scope of investigation to physical violence since it is the most visible type, although there is close interrelationship between different types of violence. Moreover, physical violence against mothers by husbands has observable adverse effects on children. Thus, the researcher explored mothers' experiences in Taking care of schooling children in the context of domestic violence in Songwe Region, Tanzania.

Literature Review

If mothers are depressed, stressed and preoccupied with the need to keep peace and appease the husbands or partners, they lack the emotional and physical support that children need (Sterne & Poole, 2010; Radford & Hester 2006). These authors observed that violence against mothers affects their parenting capacity to effectively control their children's behaviors and provide adequate physical and psychological needs of children. Research has also shown that the stress that women experience in a violent relationship may lead to increased physical and psychological pains to mothers and reduce effectiveness with child management (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2000; Jaffe, Wolf, & Wilson, 1990). Chang, Theodore, Marti and Runyan (2008) on abuse between parents and relationship with child maltreatment in United States, reported that partner abuse increased the likelihood of child neglect, particularly when the perpetrator of the violence was a man.

Violence against women including mothers affects their childcare ability in a number of ways and distorts the relationship that a mother has with her children. Mothers who are abused and undermined by the controlling husbands find it

difficult to discipline their children, for example, by imposing the acceptable behavior boundaries to children (Mullender, et al., 2002). Studies have shown that mother's stress, depression, distraction, physical and psychological pain as an outcome of violence undermines and reduce the mother's childcare and relationship, reduces their ability to be emotionally available and attentive to their children's needs (Hester, 2009; Radford & Hester, 2006). A mother in the violent home experiences difficulties in performing every day childcare tasks such as getting the children up and out, providing breakfast, preparing the learning equipment and helping them organize themselves for the day (Sterne & Poole, 2010).

Moran (2009) has in particular identified several types of child neglect as follows:

Physical neglect: This involves inappropriate provision of clothing, cleanliness and food. For instance, lack of nutritional diet whereby a child is provided with little or inadequate calories for normal growth in terms of physical, mental and psychological aspects.

Medical neglect: This includes denial or minimization of children's illness or health needs and failure to seek appropriate medical attention or administer medication and treatments.

Emotional neglect: This is whereby parents or care givers are not responsible to children's important emotional requirements, including failure to interact and provide affection, failure to develop a child's self-esteem and a sense of identity.

Educational Neglect: This has to do with a parent or caregiver's inability to present a stimulating learning environment such as support for their learning, showing an interest in the child's education at school, responding to any special needs and failure to comply with state requirements regarding school attendance.

Poor protection and guidance: This is where parents are unable to provide adequate level of guidance and supervision to ensure a child is physically safe and protected from any kind of harm. It may involve abandoning children to cope alone, failure to provide the limits about behaviors like alcohol use or under-age sex that may have adverse effects on children of different ages.

Despite the increasing concerns about the situation and wellbeing of children who are vulnerable to parent's violence and although mothers have been seen as central in the welfare of their children (Krane, 2003; Scourfield (2003), little attention has been paid to the issue of child caring within the environment of violent home. Radford and Hester (2001) reveal that:

"Despite almost thirty years of research into and activism against violence against women, little has been written about mothering in the context of abuse, whether from view point of women's experiences, of children's experiences, or on the basis of social policy and academic discourses" (p. 135).

Moreover, Humphreys, Lowe and Williams (2009) in their study on sleep disruption, domestic violence and its connection with mothers and children in the United Kingdom, found that mothers experienced sleep disruption as a consequence of domestic violence. It was noted that mothers struggled to balance their own needs for sleep and for their children's wakefulness such that some mothers used medication and drugs to reduce sleep problems. It was further found that the combination of medication and sleep disruption had the potential to limit parenting capacity especially the expression of love to children. A similar observation by Edleson, Mbilinyi and Shetty (2003) reported that some women from violent homes experienced long-term health and mental consequences such that they retreated to substance abuse that severely affected their parenting capacity to their children.

In review of the various causes of child neglect, Evans (2002) mentioned domestic violence or high levels of parent's conflicts as one of the major factors behind child neglect. Other causes mentioned included young mothers, larger families, isolated mothers, low income families and caregivers with low educational knowledge. The review also mentioned poorly organized families such as little positive interaction between parents/caregivers and their children, parental mental health problems such as maternal depression, mothers or caregiver's personal history of child maltreatment and parent's and caregiver's substance abuse.

Studies from Tanzania have dealt on the causes and effects of violence including physical assault

on women in general. The studies have tended to use the term "men" interchangeably as representing men and husbands and "women" as representing wives and mothers. A research report by WHO (2005) reported that 41 percent of women in Dar es Salaam and 87 percent in the Mbeya Urban district had experienced physical violence from men at some point in their relationship. In both areas, 29 percent of those women who experienced physical violence got body injuries.

Vyas's (2012) study on assessing the implications of women's economic status on intimate partner violence in Mbeya-Tanzania revealed that one of the manifestations of women's weak position in Tanzania is the pervasiveness of violence, including physical violence against women as a strategy often used by men to demonstrate their power and maintain control over women. Gonzalez-Brenes' (2003) study in Meatu Rural District in Tanzania showed that men are entitled to beat their wives for failing to fulfill the contract, for instance, failure of women to bear a number of children required by men, working on the farm and preparing food.

A study by Laisser (2011) on prevention of intimate partner violence in Temeke-Dar es Salaam showed that 90% of women experienced physical violence from their husbands. It was revealed that alcohol abuse and low levels of income among husbands contributed to physical violence against their wives. The study further indicated that some women exposed to violence got physical injuries, felt sadness and loss of confidence. A study by Obwana's (2012) on assessment of the impact of domestic violence on women's socio-economic development in Tarime District in Mara region showed that about 52% of women reported being slapped, kicked and pinched by their husbands. The contributing causes of violence against women by men were reported as being alcoholism, laziness and ownership of family properties by men in the households.

Moreover, Mmasi (2000) in her study on the factors contributing to gender-based violence among couples in Kibaha District in Tanzania observed that women, especially mothers, experienced gender violence like beating or insulting when they demanded to be involved in family decision making. However, the issues on

women's involvement in mothering have frequently been brought forward with regard to the situation of children staying and living with violent homes (Lapierre, 2008).

The findings from other countries show that physical violence by husbands against mothers affect children's care, support and supervision from mother. Studies from Tanzania reveal that women, including mothers are physically and psychologically affected by violence against them. However, how physical violence against mothers interferes and distorts the mothers' childcare remains unclear. This study therefore sought to investigate the mothers' challenges in taking care of children, particularly school going children in the violent home.

Methodology

The researcher conducted this study in Mlowo Ward, Mbozi District in Songwe Region. The study was qualitative by nature whereby the researcher opted for interpretive phenomenological design. Interpretive phenomenological design identifies events and experiences through how they are perceived by the individuals in a situation (Giorgi, 2009; Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie, 2013). The major aspect of interpretive phenomenological design is to explore in detail how participants make sense of their personal and social world. This is achieved by investigating individual's experiences, challenges, understanding, and perceptions. This study intended to explore in detail how mothers make sense of their challenges and experiences of childcare in the violent home context. Data was obtained through face-to-face interviews which were carried out with mothers and their husbands.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study was married women with children (mothers) and husbands. Snowball sampling was used to obtain mothers exposed to physical violence by their husbands. Mothers voluntarily mentioned other women (mothers) who were exposed to physical violence from their husbands. Husbands of physically abused mothers were also interviewed in order to capture their understanding and views on marital violence and its causes. Therefore, fifteen wives and their husbands were included in the study making the total of 30 participants. Creswell (2012) depicts that qualitative snowball sampling is a type of purposive sampling that

continues after a study begins and happens when the researcher asks participants to recommend other persons to be sampled.

Data Analysis

The researcher opted for inductive phenomenological analysis as it helped to analyze the challenges and experiences of mothers in the cultural context of physical violence against them by husbands. For instance, the research interview questions required the participants to explain why physical violence by husbands against mothers happened and the challenges they faced in taking care of children. The steps for inductive phenomenological analysis were followed as Smith and Osborn (2007) suggest five inductive content analysis steps namely, transcription (open coding), transformation (coding sheet), organization (grouping) translation (interpretation) and abstraction (writing up stage).

Trustworthiness of the Information

This study used semi-structured interview questions to ensure that the provided data covered the information of the themes with respect to the objectives and questions of the study. The researcher also often visited the study area so as to become familiarized with people in the community; this enabled the researcher to learn more about culture and ideas on domestic violence including physical assaults against women in general. The researcher further allowed the interviewees to choose a language of communication between Kiswahili and their local language. When it happened that some participants could not speak Kiswahili, the researcher sought help from a person whom the participant trusted in order to translate from vernacular to Kiswahili language. This method ensured that a participant grasped the subject in the interviews and built more confidence during conversations.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher introduced the aim of the study to participants and asked their consent to participate in giving the required information. The participants were told about their right to agree to participate in the study or not. Moreover, the researcher ensured confidentiality of information reported by the interviewees and their anonymity, that is, the researcher assured them that the given information will not be

shared with others. During the presentation of the results, the researcher discussed the identity of participants without disclosing the personal characteristics. Pseudonyms were further used instead of real names of participants.

Results and Discussions

This section presents results based on the research questions that guided the study.

Research Question 1: What types and causes of physical violence did mothers experience?

Data from interviews with 15 mothers indicated that physical violence from violent husbands occurred at different times in their marital relationships. The findings showed that all fifteen (100%) interviewed mothers reported that they

were beaten by their husbands. Owing to confidentiality reasons, the real names of location (villages) where physical violence occurred were assigned letters B and C. Table 1 summarizes the forms of physical violence against mothers and location.

Table 1 indicates that four mothers from village B and two mothers from village C revealed that they were slapped. Four mothers reported being punched with fists by husbands. Moreover, two mothers from village B and three mothers from village C explained that they were exposed to multiple forms of physical violence. It was also revealed that some mothers experienced multiple forms of physical violence in a single incidence of violence.

Table 1: Causes and Forms of Physical Violence against Mothers (N=15)

Forms	Village B	Village C	Percent
Slapping	4 Mothers	2 Mothers	40
Punching with fists	3 Mothers	1 Mothers	27
Multiple forms	2 Mothers	3 Mother	33
Total	9	6	100

The results showed that mothers in the families were not in a position to control, own, and makes decision on the family properties. The husbands argued that it was their responsibility to allocate how the family income including financial matters should be distributed. Husbands further urged that allowing wives to involve in any kind of business will lead to wives' poor household chore performance including childcare.

The overall findings indicated that eleven (73.3%) out of fifteen husbands admitted that the wives' claims on the fairness in family income sharing and involvement in small business like selling fruits were among the factors that led to violent arguments and beatings against them. The responses from husbands demonstrated that they beat their wives in order to make them stop from being inquisitive on family matters such as financial issues or doing small business.

The following were explanations from husbands: "A wife without a little bit of slapping will always be making noise claiming to have fair or equal share in the family property such as livestock and crop harvests. They forget that they are under their husbands (Interviewed husband, aged 48). Another participant gave the following report:

My wife is very troublesome on asking to know everything in the family even for the issues she doesn't deserve. For example, questioning about the use of money obtained through selling a cow. She sometimes wants to conduct her own business. That is why I sometime lose temper and slap her when she starts to insist on equal share of crops or financial issues (Interviewed husband, aged 35).

Research Question 2: What kind of experiences of child care did mothers encounter in connection to the physical violence they faced?

The study presents the kinds of experiences as follows:

Poor Preparation of Food

The most mentioned effect in childcare practices by mothers living with violent husbands at home was failure or preparing food very late. Nine (60%) out of fifteen mothers complained that at different times they failed or prepared food very late because they were unable to make the necessary preparation for cooking food. The preparation included fetching water, looking for fire woods or going to cereal milling machine. Mothers revealed that the situation was contributed by beatings from their husbands. They reported consuming a lot of time with

village leaders to resolve the conflicts. They also added that they sometimes suffered from body pains due to beatings from husbands. Mothers' explanations showed that children including the whole family got lunch or dinner very late. Mothers further explained that at times children missed lunch. The following mother's explanations demonstrate the situation,

Surely, just four months ago I failed to fetch firewood and water for almost two weeks because of elbow pain after beatings from my husband. Children and other family members suffered because we missed lunch or got it very late. Fortunately, my sister's daughter visited us and helped to perform some activities (Interviewed Mother, aged, 35).

It is clear from the above quotation that physical assault on mothers interferes with their domestic chores such as fetching water and firewood which are essential for food preparation. Thus, physical violence on mothers causes them to be inconsistent in providing meals to children and for the whole family.

The study also found that most husbands could not look for firewood, fetch water, and cook food or wash children's clothes because such tasks were traditionally ascribed to females. Mothers reported the following: "As usual, tasks such as cooking, fetching water or bathing children are for women not men" (Interviewed Mother, aged, 40). Another mother had this to say,

What I can say is that there are very few husbands who perform household chores such as sweeping, cooking or washing clothes for children. However, husbands who volunteer to perform such activities are laughed at and perceived as being controlled by wives through superstition (Interviewed Mother, aged, 51).

It is confirmed from the quotations that mothers' care for children including school children is very important since fathers at home hardly get involved in household chores and childcare roles.

Lack of Concentration on Children's Needs

The interviews with mothers indicated the beatings from their husbands diverted their attention from childcare practices including school children. Ten (66.6%) out of fifteen mothers acknowledged being preoccupied with too many thoughts about conflicts which reduced their ability to pay attention or

remember the children's needs. Mothers sadly explained that sometimes they forgot to wash children's clothes including school uniforms, to bathe their children, to wake school children up early in the morning which resulted to failure to attend school after waking up. A respondent reported, "I find myself unknowingly forgetting to attend children's needs such as washing their clothes including school uniforms. Sometimes I blame and ask myself, is it because of thinking a lot about this endless conflict and fights with my husband?" (Interviewed Mother, aged, 44). Another respondent said,

I sometimes forget to think about the children's needs such as bathing or washing their clothes because of the frequent conflicts at home. I also sometime forget to wake children up early in the morning. I think a lot at night about torture, especially beatings from my husband (Interviewed Mother interview, aged, 39).

The responses show how violence on mothers affects their concentration on children's needs including school children. It also implies that mothers are responsible to ensure that children attend school.

Moreover, three (20%) out of fifteen mothers reported that their children roamed about the village. Mothers pointed out that they were not effectively tracing their children's movements and socialization with other children. They argued that they spent a lot of time trying to solve their conflicts with village leaders, which contributed to paying less attention on children's supervision. One mother expressed it as follows,

My boy child started to abscond from school until I got the information from my neighbour. I noticed that he joined a bad-mannered group while roaming in the village. This happened when I was not following up my child's whereabouts. I concentrated on the problem with my husband (Interviewed Mother, aged, 29).

It indicates that mothers' poor supervision of children contributes to children's misconducts such as fighting with peers and other antisocial behaviors. One out of fifteen mothers revealed that her daughter came back home with teacher's permission and complained of headache. The mother elaborated that she failed to notice her child's sickness early in the morning. The mother replied as follows when

asked why she did not recognize the situation early, "...I was thinking about violence issues between me and my husband. I was also thinking about domestic chores. That is why I could not trace my child's health status until she came back from school with teachers' permission" (Mother interview, age, 37).

This means that a child went on suffering without medical checkup because her mother did not notice it earlier. It is obvious that husbands rarely get involved in following up children's health status. This further confirms that mothers are the chief child caregivers in the families taking care of physiological and psychological needs.

Abandoning Children with their Fathers

Responses from mothers indicated that when some women get tired of the physical violence, they ran away to their parents or other relatives for a while. The findings indicated that such situations caused more hardship and distress to children for remaining with fathers at home. Six (40%) out of fifteen mothers posited that school children sometimes attended school without getting breakfast and lunch. They emphasized that sometimes children get a single meal per day. For example, only dinner at night since no one prepared lunch for them. The following quotations confirm this assertion,

It is true that running away from your husband, especially when you have schooling children is difficult. But sometimes I have to run away for a while to avoid more beatings. I return when I think about my children's feelings of loneliness. After my return, children narrate to me the way they attended school without breakfast, and having a single meal per day (Interviewed Mother, aged 43).

The findings from the quotations indicate that when physical violence against mothers becomes hard and brutal, mothers decide to run away from their husbands for a short time.

The researcher further sought to establish how mothers were received by their parents or relatives after running away from their husbands. One mother said,

After two orthey advise me to go back to my husband. Sometimes my brother or uncle accompanies me in order to solve the problem, but after several months my husband repeats the same. I am thinking of divorcing him but the

problem is my schooling children whom I fear they will be mistreated from their step mother if he marries another wife (Interviewed Mother, aged 48).

With regard to above responses, it shows that mothers are warmly received by their parents or relatives after running away from their violent husbands. However, they are advised to return to the violent husbands due to cultural norms that prohibit staying with someone else's wife without her husband's permit. Moreover, mothers' feelings of pity for their children, particularly schooling children force them to go back to the violent husbands.

Discussion

The results indicate that social cultural beliefs and norms that allow men to control the family properties and make decision on family issues including women's interests are the major underlying root cause of physical violence against women including wives. Men are traditionally ascribed the role of making decisions on family matters such as the use and control of resources. For example, the study findings show that husbands agreed beating their wives after demanding to be included in the use of household income. It is therefore presumed that since mothers in Tanzanian society and in the world at large, are the major service providers for children care and supervision, any type of abuse such as physical violence against mothers would adversely affect children's lives in the families especially school going children. These findings concur with Bonomi, Anderson, Rivara and Thompson (2007) who observed that men use various behavioral means such as physical assaults to enforce some culturally defined norms against women whenever their authorities are challenged.

Mothers faced several challenges in caring and providing for children's needs, particularly school going children. Mothers were not able to provide an adequate amount of food for children when they suffered physical pains due to nursing injuries or psychological frustrations. They sometimes lost concentration on children's needs. Sometimes they abandoned their families and went to live with their parents or other relatives as a result of inflictions and torture from husbands. According to Shemmings and Shemmings (2011), domestic violence

undermines the child's care, support, security and stability through mothers' lack of closeness and the child's exposure to hostile home environment. Coady (2011) observed that the mothers' insecurity and fear from violent situations reduce their ability to attend to children's needs. These observations imply that mothers or child care givers should live in peace at home in order to provide adequate children's care and support.

Mothers being constantly available and responsive to their children provide children with basic needs and establish long lasting sense of security in children. However, mothers' closeness to their children decreases as they spend a lot of time and energy trying to find solutions to end violence at home and nursing their pains due to violence against them. It is clear that children from mothers exposed to domestic violence lack mother's close emotional support, warmth and love, thus weakening the bond between mothers and children. It is also obvious that physical violence on mothers affect their parenting roles and capacity to provide needs for school children.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion

The study concludes that the patriarchal system manifested through cultural beliefs and norms like the husbands' authority in decision making in household matters caused physical and mental infliction on women. As a result, mothers' concentration on children's basic needs and supervision was affected by the violent husbands. Mothers felt body pains, fear and insecurity which lead to inadequate provision of such needs to school children like food, water for bathing and washing school uniforms and other related services. School going children found themselves living with mothers who are inconsistent in providing such needs and services.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, it is recommended that the cultural beliefs that contribute to any type of violence on women should be alleviated through educating members of the respective communities about harmful societal cultural beliefs, norms and practices. Deliberate actions should be taken by the respective governmental ministry and NGOs to protect mothers against

partner violence in order to create a harmonious home environment so as fathers and mothers should work together in providing necessary needs for children.

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