

Child Abuse and Its Effects on Teaching and Learning in Mutare, Zimbabwe.

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ABSTRACT:

The purpose of the study was to find out the effects of child abuse on teaching and learning in primary schools in Mutare district in Zimbabwe. The study adopted a survey design with focussed group discussions as the main data collection technique. Purposive sampling was used in selecting 180 children, 21 teachers, 12 SDC/SDA members and 3 heads as respondents. Qualitative analysis of the focus Group Discussion data was employed. Findings revealed that there was rampant physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect of children in schools and the community. This widespread abuse of children had negative effects on teaching and learning processes in schools. The study concluded that some of the abuse committed by parents was purported child training. Most cases of child abuse were not reported to senior authorities and law enforcement agents. The research recommended that child abuse issues be included in the primary school curriculum.

Keywords: *abuse, effects, learning, teaching, experiences, children Child abuse effects*

INTRODUCTION

Given the harsh economic conditions that gripped Zimbabwe since 2008, the issue of child abuse in homes and schools became topical among parents and educators as child labour and other forms of child abuse were on the increase (Unicef, 2010). Several non governmental organizations developed and implemented child abuse advocacy programmes that aimed at reducing child abuse in schools. It was therefore important to find out whether children had gained knowledge on child abuse and how to handle abusive individuals or groups of individuals. It was also important to find out how child abuse was affecting teaching and learning of children in schools Against this background the research team sought to explore some aspects of child abuse and how they impact negatively or otherwise on teaching and learning.

What is child abuse?

The prime natural obligation of human kind is to responsibly nurture their offspring into adulthood. Any intentional absence, withdrawal or withholding of care by a major (one who is 18+ years) is tantamount to child abuse. Child abuse occurs whenever an adult or other care provider intentionally threatens to or inflicts physical, emotional or sexual harm (Albertina, 1994). It is the maltreatment of children through acts of omission or commission by a parent or guardian that are judged by a mixture of community values and professional expertise to be inappropriate and damaging (Garbarino and Gillan,1980) in Berns (1993).

Cases of child abuse may be numerous as some forms of abuse, for example physical abuse are committed

without intent. Many researchers acknowledge that child abuse in its various forms is abounding in schools (Machakanja and Mandoga, 2002). In the same vein, Belton (2003) observed that one in every seven pupils in South Africa is bullied. Even teachers have a tendency of bullying some of their pupils especially those who fail to measure up to their expectations Leach et al (2002). Child rearing and control practices in the Zimbabwean society and schools tend to condone physical abuse (Unicef,1998) such that it is not uncommon to come across pupils who are injured (bruises, cuts, fractures) some quite severe others handicapped yet others occasionally maimed at the hands of school personnel (Dzumbira, 1999; Chibememe, 1999; Shumba,2000; Leach, Machakanja and Mandoga,2002).

Forms of child abuse

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse arises when one person's behaviour to another becomes unacceptable.

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Hence, child sexual abuse is inappropriate sexual behaviour between an adult and a child (Childline, 2001). Usually it takes a variety of forms. Leach et al (2000) note that sexual abuse can be directly or indirectly linked to other forms of abuse, for example a schoolgirl who grants sexual favours to a teacher while trying to avoid being beaten or verbally taunted. Also, male teachers may draw sexual gratification from beating girls Doyle (1994). In the same vein Belton (2003)observed that potentially abusive teachers become

harsh, verbally abusive and frequently beat girls they would have targeted for sexual favours.

Neglect and Emotional abuse

Neglect is another form of child abuse which manifests in the form of little attention or care to a minor child (Leach, Machakanja and Mandoga, 2002). Neglected children may become restless or psychologically and emotionally unstable. And emotional abuse can be borne out of all the other forms of abuse in sadistic tendency in a child. Sexual abuse may have traumatic effects on the child so would be neglecting the child. Children who are emotionally abused have been found to be vengeful, lowly esteemed and unassertive (Leach, Machakanja and Mandoga, 2002).

Effects of child abuse

The effects of child abuse can be devastating on the child's social and educational life and there is compelling evidence that abused children may never totally recover from the trauma (Leach, et al, 2000). The effects of child abuse generally manifest in one or more of the following: loss of attachment; fewer interpersonal relationships; reduced self esteem; a highly sexualised individual; depression or anxiety and avoidance behaviours. In addition, The Human Rights Watch (1999) revealed that any form of child abuse has indelible psychological imprints with the rise in riotous and rebellious incidents being traced back to some form of abuse. There is also a geometrical effect that is attached to child abuse as an abused child is likely to abuse more than one in his/her adulthood (Leach, et al, 2000). Hence there was need to investigate how child abuse was affecting teaching and learning in pupils.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey design with focused group discussion being the main technique for data collection. The purposive sampling technique was used, basing on reported cases of child abuse by the Ministry of Education Sport, Arts, and Culture- Zimbabwe, in selecting representatives from each of three school categories considered P1, P2, and P3. For the P1 category the school chosen represented the former group A primary schools located in urban low-density residential areas. Most of the children come from affluent families. The P2 category comprised former group B schools located in urban high-density suburbs. Most families live under overcrowded conditions and are of a working class background. The P3 category was for rural schools with children who come from rural schools with children who come from mostly

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peasant farmers. Data was collected from children, teachers, heads and community representatives who were SDA/SDC members. The procedures for data collection from each of the three schools were as indicated in appendix 1.

FINDINGS

These were categorized according to the following:

- the extent of knowledge and awareness of child abuse among primary school children, teachers and parents/guardians.
- the forms of child abuse perpetrated on primary school children.
- the effects of various forms of child abuse on primary school children.
- the level of advocacy on child abuse issues in primary school communities.

Discussions were in the context of how teaching and learning processes are affected by instances of child abuse.

Knowledge and awareness

Findings reflected that most school children, eighty percent and twenty of the twenty-four teachers understood child abuse in terms of physical and sexual abuse but emotional abuse, neglect and bullying were not readily viewed as such. Urban parents were aware of child abuse in terms of physical, sexual, neglect, verbal and bullying. Most urban children were aware of their rights to education, food and care of which denial to these constituted abuse. But rural children were not very much aware of their rights such that the parents and children easily accepted child beating as a form of correcting delinquent behaviour.

Although the teachers and parents were aware of the existence of laws that govern children's rights most could not specifically cite any. A close analysis of the responses seemed to indicate that parents and teachers would abuse or allow children to be abused in ignorance especially in

relation to bullying, neglect, verbal and even child bashing. Children often remarked that their parents/guardians encouraged teachers to beat them.

Some of the teachers reflected inadequate knowledge on child abuse and the related legal parameters.

Forms of child abuse perpetrated

The findings indicate that child neglect of various forms was rampant in both primary schools and their communities. In the communities child neglect was perpetrated by parents and

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guardians with the commonest victims of neglect being orphaned children living with either step-parents or relatives. Child neglect was seen through children getting inadequate food, clothing / uniforms, and non-provision of school materials like pens / exercise books and non-payment of school levies. The child is ignored and discriminated against in the home and in some instances a child is chased out of the house to sleep in the open. In schools child neglect took various forms also with some children being excluded from lessons for several days. Reasons given for exclusion from lessons as the children reported were failing to complete homework, not bringing writing materials, lack of participation in class, mischief, getting to school late and non-payment of fees and levies. Another form of child neglect in the schools was through teacher absenteeism. This was reportedly rife in the primary schools with teachers failing to attend to their classes regularly due to various reasons like illness, attending funerals, going for pay and to attend to personal commitments. In one interview teachers were said to be absent for as long as two days every week. Other forms of neglect in primary schools included non-marking of written exercises, teachers leaving classes to talk to other teachers within the school for long periods and teachers simply sitting and attending to private business in the classroom.

Findings also indicated that a lot of physical abuse as another form of abuse perpetrated was taking place in both primary schools and communities. In the schools there was rampant child beating and physical abuse purportedly in the name of punishment and child training. Child responses almost 90% equally comprised of both girls and boys showed that teachers were using objects like sticks, hosepipes, electric cords, ropes, rulers, wire, fan belts, sjamboks, chalkboard duster and even open hands to beat them. Physical pain was induced in children through manual work as they were asked to dig and water school gardens, work for long hours on school plots and carry bricks and sand for school construction in rural schools. At times children were reportedly physically abused through exposure to

extreme weather conditions (hot / windy/ chilly weather) while standing on one leg or running around the sports field. It also emerged that child beating was existent in the homes with guardians, step-parents and grandparents as the main perpetrators. Child labour was also reported to be taking place mainly in the rural areas where children said they were forced to work long hours on family fields, carry heavy loads to and from grinding mills and vending markets.

Yet another form of abuse manifested in children was being rebuked, scolded and ridiculed in both schools and homes. In some instances children reported of being isolated and denied participation in enjoyable school and home activities which constituted emotional abuse.

Teachers and children were rather cautious when it came to discussing sexual abuse issues. However, from the findings sixty percent of the children mostly girls indicated that there were some forms of sexual abuse taking place in both schools and communities. In schools, male teachers were fondling girl's breasts, patting and pinching girls' buttocks and at times even fell

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in love with school girls.

One female participant in a focused group discussion said, "My teacher (male) touches my breasts as he urges me to keep up the good work". The teachers though denied some of these allegations. In the community most forms of sexual abuse including sexual intercourse were said to be rife especially in the high density and peri-urban locations. Orphaned girls were reported as being the main victims. Sexual abuse was mainly perpetrated by relatives including guardians, neighbors, lodgers and in-laws with step – mothers and maids preying on young boys. One teacher remarked that grade 5, 6 and 7 girls openly discuss their previous day's sexual encounters over break time. A School development Association (SDA) member said that mothers often asked girls to go and look for money from the streets thereby fuelling abuse.

The last form of abuse experienced was bullying and the findings showed that there were different types of bullying from different school locations. Common among the school settings was bullying through beating, teasing, pinching ears and name – calling. Hat snatching was common in law – destiny urban settings while searching pockets and demanding money was common in high density urban and peri- urban settings. Snatching food / snack items was common in rural areas. Bullying

was common during break- time at school and on the way to and from home.

Effects of the various forms of abuse

The findings indicated that neglect in the home tends to spill over to the school and children without adequate school materials are likely to be on the sidelines in school. Being neglected in school has serious academic implications on the part of the child and economic implications for the education system as a whole. For instance, a child who is excluded from four consecutive lessons loses 2 hours of classroom learning. If the causes for exclusion are not checked then the child is likely to lose 10 hours x 13 weeks making 130 classroom learning hours. A primary school day is 5 hours long hence a child would have lost 26 learning days in a term. In a 60 day school term a child would have lost about half of classroom learning time. The child's right to education is therefore violated and such a child may carry this disadvantage into adulthood. This scenario is likely to obtain for orphaned children whose plight is not likely to change without some external intervention.

On the other hand , a teacher who is absent from duty on two days a week which is rife as noted earlier accumulates 26 days in a 13 week term leading to 78 days a year. Seventy eight days is more than a school term in Zimbabwe hence the teacher's class loses a full term per year in learning time. Given a teacher / pupil ratio of 1:40 it then means 40 children have each lost 78 days leading to 3120 learning days lost. The average term has 60 days and a year 3 terms. Therefore a class suffers a cumulative loss of 17, 3 years of learning time from one teacher over

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a year. Economically this constitutes gross wastage of national resources allocated to education in terms of salaries, per capita grants and voted funds. Parents would lose on their private incomes sacrificed towards children's education in terms of levy payment, uniforms and provision of other school materials. The internal efficiency of the school system is grossly threatened under such conditions as the cumulative effect of this absenteeism impacts negatively on quality education.

Inadequate supervision of children's work emanating from attending to private business while in class or leaving the classroom to chat with fellow teachers as alleged by most children leads to reduced learning opportunities for the children. It also inculcates a culture of laziness in pupils as they may tend to accept retiring on the job as an acceptable job practice.

Child neglect in homes in relation to shelter and food has negative effects on learning processes. A child, whose home environment is not friendly, experiences emotional and social discomforts as they may not have adequate time and facilities to do homework. They may attend school, without having had food, and lose concentration in class work and all this impacts adversely on academic performance.

On the effects of physical abuse the findings indicate that the children did not take it lightly as the purported form of behavior training. The majority, seventy – five percent expressed some negative feelings of anger, sadness and hatred. A few extracts from focused group discussion expressions were , “ I feel like beating the teacher , I wish I were a soldier and would shoot the teacher, I feel like making the teacher sit on needles (ndinonzwa kuda kuvasetera tsono).These sentiments reveal deep seated resentment and hatred that children have towards physical abuse. There is a clear message of imploding and this could perhaps explain some of the sporadic acts of vandalism schools in Zimbabwe have recorded of late.

The success of any classroom teaching and learning situation is dependent on the relationship between the teacher and the learner, which should be one of mutual love and trust. If children who experience child beating in their classrooms express such negative and extreme feelings surely there is no mutual love and respect between the teacher and the victims of the maltreatment.

It therefore stands to reason that the teaching and learning process becomes ineffective under such circumstances. In the worst- case scenario, poor teacher and pupil relationships, lead to pupil transfer and drop out. Indiscriminate child beating in classrooms and homes can lead to the development of a culture of violence since children tend to copy the behaviour of the adults around them. In one of the focussed group discussions children expressed how they felt when beaten, “I want to make someone suffer the way I did”, and another said “I feel like destroying everything in the school”. A culture of violence in a school heads to bullying and vandalism of

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school property which impacts negatively on the learning / teaching process. As the old adage aptly puts it, violence begets violence.

Manual punishment noted during time on task leads to compromised mastery of baseline competencies in any subject taught in school. Child labour in the homes

takes away children's time and energy for homework leading to classroom conflict with teachers and the subsequent consequences are minimal learning opportunities.

Child victims of emotional abuse lose self-esteem and lack self-confidence as evidenced by responses from the children. Findings reflect they felt unwanted and useless which may lead to extreme withdrawal and reduced participation in learning situations where they are expected to be actively involved to get the needed benefits. And in extreme cases children often drop out of school completely.

Sexual abuse whether taking place in schools or community has serious implications for education. Most respondents noted that school children risked contracting sexually transmitted infections and Aids which lead to absenteeism, possible drop out or death. Children with sexual relationships have difficulties concentrating on classroom activities thus leading to reduced participation and achievement. And on the other hand teachers having sexual relationships with their pupils are likely to practise favouritism, which may lead to disciplinary problems in the class and school. Sexual abuse in the home leads to strained interpersonal relationships, which

CONCLUSIONS

- From the findings it can be concluded that although teachers / parents / children have a general awareness of child abuse there seem to exist a misconception between behaviour training measures and physical abuse. While some acknowledged the need to protect children from physical maltreatment others felt that physical pain could be justified as a corrective tool.
- Emerging from the findings one can draw the conclusion that neglect and emotional abuse are not readily perceived as forms of child abuse per se.
- It is apparent from the study that the common forms of abuse being perpetrated are neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and bullying.
- A close analysis of the perpetrators leads to the conclusion that they are usually not strangers to their victims and comprise teachers, parents, guardians, relatives, neighbours, lodgers, in-laws and older pupils. The abuse might be committed for personal gratification or erroneously as intended behaviour training measures.

leads to reduced school performance. Turning to bullying, findings revealed that bullied children tended

to fear bullies hence would avoid them by all means. If in the same class the bullied child could even abscond lessons or avoid coming to school completely. In worse situations bullies commanded their victims to stop coming to school as an extract from a focussed group discussion indicated, "Bullies tell us not to come to school and you leave home and just hang around on the way until others come back." This shows that bullying can be a serious form of abuse which impacts negatively on some children's school experiences.

On the level of advocacy on child abuse issues the findings revealed that children mostly got information on child abuse from Zimbabwe Republic Police Public Relations Department, Non-Governmental Organisations like Simukai and television programmes eg Childline.

There was no planned teaching on child abuse in schools and many cases of child abuse went unreported. Findings seem to confirm that children were being abused in silence and suffering the negative effects ignorantly.

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- A close association between child abuse and reduced child commitment / involvement in the learning / teaching process was established as the details of children's feelings about abuse depicted. As evidenced in the findings each type of abuse somehow impacted negatively on the learning / teaching process.
- With no planned teaching and advocacy on child abuse issues it is no surprise that there is little reporting of abuse to relevant authorities in spite of the prevalence of the problem.
- From the foregoing the study revealed a sense of helplessness and surrender to the evil forces of abuse among school children and despite the amount of time they spent with their teachers without getting the faith to report the abuse the negative effects are set to continue to take their toll on learning and teaching.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings and conclusions stated above the following recommendations can be made:

- Schools and communities could meaningfully complement ZRP and NGO advocacy campaigns through structured school and cluster

based awareness activities targeted at teachers, parents and pupils.

- The Ministry of Education should assign suitable senior teachers with the responsibility of guiding and counselling both pupils and teachers accordingly on abuse.
- Community leadership (political ,religious or social) could be actively involved in advocacy programmes on child abuse.
- The study also recommends further action-oriented research with transformational emphasis on child abuse involving Primary schools and communities.

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Appendix 1: Selection of respondents

Respondents	Method
Grade 1 – 3 pupils 10 boys + 10 girls (separated)	Focus Group
Grade 4 – 5 pupils 10boys + 10 girls (separated)	Focus Group
Grade 6 – 7 pupils 10 boys + 10 girls (separated)	Focus Group
School head (1)	Face to face Interview
Grade 1 – 3 teacher (2female +1male)	Face to face Interview
Grade 4 – 5 teacher (1male+1female)	Face to face interview
Grade 6 – 7 teacher (1male+1female)	Face to face interview
SDC/SDA MEMBERS (4)	Focus Group

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