

Exposure to Violence, Child Abuse, and Normative Belief about Aggression among Children

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The present research is aimed to measure the effect of gender, type of housing and type of family on the exposure to violence (EV), child abuse (CA), and normative belief about aggression (NBA) among children. It also examines the correlation of EV and CA with NBA. A sample of children from slums and buildings, from joint and nuclear families was studied. Age of children ranged from 8-12 years. A self-constructed close-ended interview questionnaire was used to assess EV among children. Child Abuse Scale by Malik and Shahwas used to assess the CA. Normative Belief about Aggression Scale by Huesmann was used to measure the NBA among children. There was a significant effect of gender on CA. Types of housing and family did not have any significant effect on EV, CA and NBA. The study reveals a significant, positive correlation among EV, CA, and NBA.

Keywords: Child Abuse (CA), Exposure to Violence (EV), Normative Belief about Aggression (NBA).

The most important question in the world is, "Why is the child crying?"

- Alice Walker

Violence is one of the major areas of concern in the society. It may be physical or emotional. Violence against children may appear in various forms. It is a universal phenomenon prevalent in every segment of the society, regardless of ethnicity, race, culture, class or country. Its manifestation may vary according to the economic, social and cultural context in which it occurs (Green, 1991; Tenney-Soeiro & Wilson, 2004). Children are exposed to violence through family environment, surroundings, and cultural beliefs. On the other hand, they are abused either by outsiders or their own family members. Such situations provoke children to develop the behavior which is not socially acceptable. The present research is aimed to study the effect of gender, type of housing and type of family to understand the exposure to violence (EV), child abuse (CA), and normative belief about aggression (NBA) among children.

Exposure to violence refers to the violent act/s and behaviour being witnessed and observed in family environment, surroundings and through television programs and internet. Normative belief about aggression is the belief

that the harmful or dangerous behaviour or act is normal. Abuse, in the present research, refers to the physical and/or emotional abuse, as well as physical and/or emotional negligence (by parents or guardians) that children are likely to face. Physical abuse includes hitting, striking, beating, kicking, biting, slapping, hair-pulling and similar acts of physical assault directed towards the child, which is inappropriate at his/her age. The signs of physical abuse include unexplained bruises, welts, broken bones, burn marks, lacerations, or even death (Deveci, Acik, & Ayar, 2006). Bourassa (2007) found that the co-occurrence of inter-parental violence and child's physical abuse has a significantly greater negative impact on behavior than does exposure to inter-parental violence only.

Emotional negligence is the most common form of abuse experienced by children (Newton & Vandeven, 2005). Up to 40 million children could be the victims of child abuse each year around the world (National Clearing house on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, 2005 a, b, c). India has about 440 million children; they constitute more than 40 percent of the

population. Many of them struggle through childhood of privation and risk, and fail to reach their full potential (Saini, 2013). Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) released a study report on child abuse in 2007. According to this report, children between the ages of 5 through 12 are at highest risk for abuse and exploitation. The study found that 69% of children reported to have been physically abused; out of these 54.68% were boys, 54.91% of boys and 47.09% of girls reported abuse in their family environment itself. 88.6% children were physically abused by their own parents. In relation to emotional abuse half of the children reported emotional abuse with 83% of that abuse conducted by parents. 70.57% of girls reported having been neglected by family members. Hence, studying EV, CA and NBA seem to be necessary on the ground of gender, type of family and type of housing.

Gender is one of the important factors to be studied in relation to violence. Women are particularly vulnerable to various forms of violence (Deveci et al., 2006). However, previous studies indicate mixed findings about gender in context of physical violence. Das et al., (2014) conducted a cross-sectional survey among boys aged 10-16 years from urban neighborhoods of Mumbai, India to examine the relationship among adolescent males' gender attitudes, attitudes conducting violence against women, exposure to family and community violence, and violence perpetration against peers and girls. More equitable gender attitudes were associated with significantly less likelihood of sexual violence perpetration. Promoting equitable gender attitudes may be an important modifiable factor in preventing violence against women and girls. It will be more effective, especially if it is done among the boys being exposed to violence. An examination of longitudinal relations by Miller, Wasserman, Neugebauer, Gorman-Smith, and Kamboukos (1999) revealed that exposure to violence was significantly related to subsequent changes in violent behavior among adolescent girls, but not among the boys. However, it is general observation that boys are at greater risk than girls for developing anti-social behavior. According to the study by Deveci et al., (2006), male children experience a higher victimization

adults as compared to children who observe lower levels of television violence (Dubow & Miller, 1996; Huesmann & Eron, 1984; Huesmann & Miller, 1994). Young children before entering the kindergarten are exposed to over 4,000 hours of television viewing (American Psychological Association, 2005). By the time they leave the elementary school, they have witnessed 8,000 murders and 1,00,000 acts of violence on just television alone (Levin, 1998). Nearly 1,000 children's television programs were analyzed in Britain and results revealed that 39% contained violence including 4,000 violent acts involving shootings and other forms of physical assault (Gunter and Harrison, 1997).

At the General Conference of UNESCO in Paris, a study including 23 countries around the world revealed that 93% of children have access to a television set and that television is the most influential source of information and entertainment, superseding books and radio (Groebel, 1997). Apart from access to television, there are other important aspects making difference in nuclear family and joint family to influence children's safety and development. The rate of CA and NBA may differ due to type of family. Being in joint family with grandparents and cousins and being away from such blood-relations may evolve certain influences to be considered. Hence, type of housing is considered as one of the influential factors in this research.

The present study intends to find out the relationship between EV and CA with NBA. EV within the family was found to be associated with negative behavioral outcomes for children (Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson & Zak, 1985; Wolfe & Korch, 1994; Wolfe, Zak, Wilson & Jaffe, 1986). For example, children exposed to high levels of violence and anger in their own families, are at increasing risk for behaving aggressively towards others (Cummings, Hennessy, Rabideau, & Cicchetti, 1994; Cummings & Zahn-Waxler, 1992; Widom, 1989). EV is believed to reduce inhibitions against antisocial behavior, which in turn increases children's propensity to commit violent acts (Bandura, 1986; Berkowitz, 1994; Dubow & Miller, 1996; Huesmann & Miller, 1994). Lorton and Saltzman (1993) found that youth exposed to high levels of community violence are

likely to report these violent events as normative or "nothing special."

In a large-scale, cross-sectional study of a general population sample of urban 6th, 8th, and 10th graders, exposure to community violence (witnessing a stabbing or shooting in the past year) was significantly associated with participation in aggressive and antisocial behaviors, even after controlling for demographic variables i.e., sex, grade, socioeconomic status and ethnicity (Schwab-Stone et al., 1995). Farrell and Bruce (1997) examined the influence of exposure to community violence on violent behavior across three-time points with a sample of 436 sixth-grade students in urban schools. The analyses of research indicated that exposure to violence was significantly related to violent behavior.

Regarding child abuse in some families, children face a great amount of violence and its daily exposure affects their mental state and self-image. Sometimes these children may imitate the violent behaviour that they are exposed to. It is observed that children exposed to erratic, coercive, and punitive parenting are at risk of developing anti-social personality traits and committing violent offences (Caspi et al., 2002; Moffitt, 1993; Patterson, Forgatch, Yoerger, & Stoolmiller, 1998; Widom, 1989).

Objectives

The objectives of the present research were: i) to study the exposure to violence, child abuse, and normative belief about aggression among children from different type of housing and family across gender, ii) to study the correlation between child exposure to violence and normative belief about aggression; iii) to study the correlation between child abuse and normative belief about aggression.

Hypotheses

- There will be a significant difference between boys and girls in terms of EV, CA and NBA.
- There will be a significant difference between children from buildings and slums in terms of EV, CA and NBA.

- There will be a significant difference between children from joint families and nuclear families in terms of EV, CA and NBA.
- There will be a positive correlation of normative belief about aggression with both exposure to violence and child abuse.

Method

Operational variables

Independent variables, each of which studied at two levels are: First, Gender: i) Male (M) and ii) Female (F); Second, Type of Housing: i) Binding (B) and ii) Slum (S); and Third, Type of Family: i) Joint family (J) and ii) Nuclear family (N).

Dependent variables studied as a function of the independent variables are: 1) Exposure to violence (EV); 2) Child Abuse (CA) and 3) Normative Belief about Aggression (NBA).

Sample

The stratified probability sampling method was utilized for the research. The sample consisted of 206 children ranging from 8 through 12 years (107 girls and 99 boys) from separate schools of boys and girls from Mumbai. Children from the selected schools were from both low and high economic background. Total 114 children were from slum areas, while 92 from buildings. A total of 99 children were from joint families, while 107 were from nuclear families. The sample of 206 children was further evaluated separately to study the effect of gender, housing and family.

Tools

Normative Belief about Aggression Scale (NBAS – Huesmann & Guerra, 1992) was used to measure the normative belief about aggression among children. NBAS is a 20-item scale designed to measure the perception of child, adolescent or young adult about how acceptable it is to behave aggressively both under varying conditions or provocation and when no conditions are specified. The items are appropriate for children from nursery school through adulthood with a change in the nouns from "boy" and "girl" to "young man" and "young woman" for college age subjects or to "man"

and "woman" for older adults. The items on the scale were derived through a process of pilot testing and revision. It was then administered on subjects from age 6 to 30 in a variety of countries and ethnic groups. The scale was adapted for Indian population making required changes with the permission of the authors. The reliability of the test ranges from 0.06 to 0.44.

Child Abuse Scale (Malik & Shah, 2007) was used to measure the child abuse. It comprises 34 items pertaining to four major categories: Physical Abuse, Physical Negligence, Emotional Abuse and Emotional Negligence. The reliability of the scale is 0.92. An interview questionnaire was developed to measure exposure to violence. It consisted of the questions regarding violence being exposed - in family, in neighborhood or through television programs.

Procedure

Data was collected from government aided English medium schools, in group as well as individually from Mumbai and suburbs. The permission was obtained from school authority. The purpose of the research and brief information were given to the parents. Participants were given proper instruction by the researcher after obtaining demographic information. They were allotted sufficient time to complete the scales. After data collection, parents were briefed about behavioural issues of children. The data was collected by a qualified and trained counseling psychologist.

Results and Discussion

The obtained data for EV, CA and NBA were analyzed with Three Way Anova and correlational analysis.

Table-1 indicates the mean and SD of genders, housing, and family on EV, CA and NBA. Gender has a significant effect on CA, $F(1,198) = 21.49, p < .01$. It indicates that there is a significant difference among both the genders in terms of child abuse. The male children were found to be more abused than female children in their family. This is supported by the findings by Deveci et al. (2006) who found that male children experience a higher victimization of physical violence than females. This may be because in developing countries like India, men

Table 1: Mean and SD of Gender, Housing and Family for EV, CA, NBA

	GENDER			HOUSING			FAMILY				
	EV	CA	NBA	EV	CA	NBA	EV	CA	NBA		
F Mean	3.1308	46.2991	34.9065	B Mean	3.0000	48.7500	34.8848	J Mean	3.0606	50.0000	34.9485
S.D.	1.00079	8.62118	7.40160	S.D.	1.06904	10.61786	7.92122	S.D.	1.18510	12.22577	8.41570
M Mean	3.0101	53.2525	35.8586	S Mean	3.1316	50.3596	35.9123	N Mean	3.0841	49.3084	35.7477
S.D.	1.30537	11.64119	8.98526	S.D.	1.22303	10.83025	8.40308	S.D.	1.13372	9.20050	8.00483

are considered stronger as compared to women. Hence, female children are more protected as compared to male children. In case of EV, no significant effect of gender was found, $F(1,198) = .53, p > .05$ and NBA, $F(1,198) = .51, p > .05$. In other words, in metro cities like Mumbai, males and females get the same EV and have no difference in terms of NBA.

As studied by Richters & Martinez (1993), 72% children had witnessed some type of community violence which seems to be true in Indian cities like Mumbai. However, the intensity of EV is lesser because the mean for EV is lesser than the other two factors. This indicates that there is some exposure to violence, but both gender get equal EV. The result indicates that in cities, due to almost equal freedom to both the genders, both get the same exposure and have the same NBA. However, the NBA seems to be much higher than the EV. These figures indicate the changing value system of present generation. Aggression has become a common and normal phenomenon. Hence, the hypothesis "There will be a significant difference between male children and female children in terms of exposure to violence, child abuse and normative belief about aggression" was partially accepted.

The type of housing did not have a significant effect on exposure to violence, child abuse, and normative belief about aggression. The result shows that there is no significant difference among children staying in a building or a slum in terms of EV, $F(1,198) = .73, p > .05$. CA, $F(1,198) = .82, p > .05$ and NBA, $F(1,198) = .31, p > .05$. Children staying in buildings as well as in slums have almost equal EV. They face abuse and have almost equal NBA. Hence, the present research finding is not supported by the findings of Campbell & Schwarz (1996) and Schubiner, Scott, & Tzelepis, (1993) that

rates of experiencing and witnessing community violence among children are high, particularly in lower socioeconomic urban communities. In cities like Mumbai, the situation is different than those in abroad. In Indian metro cities, whether in slum or buildings, it is the kind of environment one has which matters. The surrounding environment determines whether one will have EV, CA, and NBA. Hence, the hypothesis "There will be a significant difference between children staying in building and children staying in slum in terms of exposure to violence, child abuse and normative belief about aggression" is rejected. Usually people from slum area are assumed to face high EV with high NBA. However, this is not true in case of cities. No difference was found in terms of EV, CA and NBA due to type of housing. However, CA and NBA were found to be higher in both types of housing. This indicates that environment in metro cities seems to be inappropriate for children to develop and nurture good values.

Types of family also have no significant effect on any of the dependent variables: EV, $F(1,198) = .00, p > .05$; CA, $F(1,198) = .12, p > .05$ and NBA, $F(1,198) = .54, p > .05$. The mean table for types of family indicates that there is no significant difference between children from joint family and nuclear family in terms of EV, CA and NBA. Hence, the hypothesis "There will be a significant difference between children staying in joint family and children staying in nuclear family in terms of exposure to violence, child abuse and normative belief about aggression" was rejected.

The means of gender, types of housing, and types of family show that the EV among male and female children from buildings or slums, from joint or nuclear family, is almost the same. It is very low as compared to those for CA and NBA. Child abuse among male and female children from either buildings or slums and from either

joint or nuclear family is very high as compared to those for EV and NBA. The normative belief about aggression among male and female children from buildings and slums, and from joint and nuclear family is very high as compared to EV, but lower than CA. This again indicates that children are more prone to act violently as their NBA is higher than the average.

Table-2: Correlation Table (Correlation Significant at 2 - tailed)

	Normative Belief about Aggression (NBA)
Exposure to Violence (EV)	.163 (*)
Child Abuse (CA)	.199 (**)

Table-2 depicts the results for correlation. The correlation of both EV and CA is significant and positive with NBA, though weak in nature. The correlation between EV and NBA ($r = .163$, $p < 0.05$) indicates that as the EV increases, the NBA also increases. The findings are consistent with those by previous researchers (Caspi et al., 2002; Lorton & Saltzman, 1993; Moffitt, 1993; Patterson, Forgatch, Yoergger, & Stoolmiller, 1998; Widom, 1989).

Similarly, correlation between CA and NBA ($r = .199$, $p < 0.01$) indicates that the child who faces abusive treatment tends to be higher on NBA. Bourassa's (2007) findings also suggest that abuse has a greater negative impact on behavior which applies well in Indian context.

Conclusion

In metro cities like Mumbai, there is no difference between children whether from slums or buildings, joint or nuclear families in terms of getting exposure to violence, getting abused and developing normative belief about aggression. However, a gender difference does exist in terms of child abuse. The normative belief about aggression is positively correlated with both the exposure to violence and child abuse. As the present study has been conducted in Mumbai city, the findings cannot be generalized for rest of the country. The situation may differ in other cities of India.

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