

Prevalence of Exposure to Violence among Primary School Children and their Related Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Background: School violence constitutes a serious problem particularly among primary schoolchildren. About one half of the boys and one-fourth of the girls in Egypt are exposed to such violence at this age. **Objectives:** to study the prevalence of, knowledge about and factors relevant to violence among primary schoolchildren in Manzala district, Dakahlia Governorate. **Methods:** A cross-sectional analytical design was used on 500 schoolchildren from 5 randomly selected primary schools in the setting. Data were collected through an interview questionnaire covering socio-demographic characteristics, history of exposure to violence and scholastic achievement as well as pupil knowledge about violence. Fieldwork was done in the period of November 2009 - January 2010. **Results:** most of schoolchildren have been exposed to violence (70.4%) mainly the physical one (72.4%), committed it (89.4%), had a satisfactory total knowledge level(60.8%) and significantly($p<0.001$) recorded higher absenteeism(78.6%). In multivariate analysis, age, gender, birth order, father education, mother working status, and preference of video games were negative predictors while crowding index, mother education, family income, exposure to violence, and preference of violent movies were positive ones of knowledge score($p<0.001$). **Conclusion:** The prevalence and frequency of exposure to violence was high and had a negative impact on school attendance. Knowledge was influenced by many personal and family characteristics. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education should develop national violence prevention programs along with training teachers in avoiding violence. The role of parents and school health nurse should be more emphasized.

Keywords: Violence, primary schoolchildren, knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Primary schoolchildren represent an important and highly vulnerable group to injuries of the population.⁽¹⁾ This age category represents about 37% of the total population in Egypt.⁽²⁾ Children at this age are more active because their muscle coordination improves and their strength doubles. They engage in large muscle activities such as walking, running, skating, swimming, riding bicycles, and team-

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sports.⁽³⁾ Violence is an aggressive behaviour that may be physically, sexually or emotionally abusive. This aggressive behaviour is conducted by an individual or a group against another or others. Physically abusive behaviour is where a child, an adolescent, or a group directly or indirectly threatens, injures, or kills another or others. The aggressive behaviour can involve pushing, shoving and shaking, punching, kicking, squeezing, burning, or any other form of physical assault on a person or a property. Emotionally abusive behaviour is where there are verbal attacks, threats, taunts, slogging, mocking, yelling, exclusion, and malicious rumours. Sexually abusive behaviour is where there is sexual assault or rape.⁽⁴⁾ Bullying described many different types of behaviour ranging from teasing or ignoring to serious assaults and abuse.⁽⁵⁾ Most studies indicated that no single factor or unique situation causes an individual to engage in violent behaviour.⁽⁶⁾

Many children around the world experience violence as a regular part of their school experience. School violence may be defined as any deliberate act that harms or threatens to harm a pupil, teacher, or other school officials and which interferes with the purpose of school.⁽⁷⁾ It constitutes a serious problem particularly among primary schoolchildren. About one half of the boys and one-fourth of the girls are exposed to different types of violence at this age.⁽⁸⁾

Instead of facilitating the healthy development of children, schools are too often the source of violence and abuse that undermine children's opportunities to learn.⁽⁹⁾ The results of school violence can be devastating. Children may become depressed and anxious. They may use alcohol or other drugs or engage in risky sexual behaviors as a way of dealing with stress. Many children skip classes, others change schools or drop out altogether, and some commit suicide.⁽¹⁰⁾

The different types of violence can be prevented by addressing the underlying

causes and risk factors specific to each type, and by increasing children's knowledge and awareness of it. School nurses should play important roles towards violence. They are effective child advocates who can lobby for appropriate interventions and control to address violence against children including local and national efforts to establish safe schools and communities. By combining efforts with other professionals who share similar beliefs and goals, better prevention and management of this problem can take place.⁽¹¹⁾

RATIONALE and AIM OF THE STUDY:

In order to be able to address the problem of violence in primary schools, it is important to know its magnitude to be able to develop plans and strategies to assist in the process of ensuring the safest possible learning environment. The aim of this study was to measure the prevalence of violence among primary schoolchildren in Manzala district, Dakahlia Governorate, to assess

their knowledge about it, and to determine the related factors.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

Study design and setting: A cross-sectional analytical design was used in this study, which was conducted in morning primary schools in Manzala district at Dakahlia Governorate.

Study sample: All schoolchildren attending grade six in any primary morning school in Manzala district during the study period were eligible for inclusion in the study sample. The required sample size to estimate a prevalence of any type of violence of 25% or higher, with 2% absolute precision at 95% confidence level as determined by Epi-info 6.04 software package was 450. This was increased to 500 to compensate for a dropout rate of about 10%. Five mixed primary schools were randomly selected out of a total of ten schools. In each school, two or three classrooms were selected to fulfill the required sample size.

Data collection tool: A 3-part pre-designed interview questionnaire was used. Part 1 entailed schoolchildren's socio-demographic characteristics such as age, sex, birth order, residence, as well as parents' education, job, etc. Part 2 was concerned with the detailed history of exposure to violence in addition to its effect on scholastic achievement from teachers. Part 3 included 15 questions that covered schoolchildren's knowledge about violence regarding definition, types, methods, and signs. A correct answer was scored one and the zero for incorrect ones, so the total score ranged from 0 to 15. The total was converted into percent score after summation. Knowledge was considered satisfactory if the score was 50% or higher and unsatisfactory if less than 50%.

The tool was developed by surveying related literature and reviewed for face and content validity by a panel of five experts in community health and psychiatric nursing. A pilot study was conducted on 10% of the study sample for testing clarity and

feasibility, and for estimating the time required for filling in the sheets. Based on the result of the pilot study, the necessary modifications and clarifications of some questions were done. Subjects sharing in the pilot study were not included in the main study sample.

Administrative design and ethical considerations: An official permission was obtained from the Ministry of Education and from the Regional Directorate of Education in Manzala district. These permissions were handed to school directors to facilitate data collection, and the aim and procedures of the study were explained to them. Every participant was provided with an explanatory form which detailing the purpose of the study, confidentiality of information, and some instructions. These forms were intended to seek the consent of the parents of the schoolchildren. All ethical issues were considered during all phases of the study. At interview, each subject was informed about the purpose of the study, and that participation

was voluntary with the right to withdraw at any time without giving any reasons. In addition, confidentiality was secured through coding all data collection forms.

Fieldwork: The researchers met with the schoolchildren in the selected classes along with their teachers and explained the study to them. Then, each schoolchild was interviewed individually using the tools. The interviews took about 40 minutes for each schoolchild. Data collection lasted for three months during the period from November 2009 to January 2010.

Statistical analysis: Data entry and statistical analysis were done using SPSS 14.0 statistical software package. Categorical variables were compared using Chi-square test. Whenever the expected values in one or more of the cells in a 2x2 tables were less than 5, Fisher exact test was used instead. In larger than 2x2 cross-tables, no test could be applied whenever the expected value in 10% or more of the cells was less than 5. Multiple

linear regression analysis was done to identify the independent predictors of the knowledge score after testing for normality, linearity, and co-linearity. Statistical significance was considered at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

More than half of the schoolchildren in the study sample were boys (64.4%), 12 years age or older constituted 52%, second or third birth order were 52.8%, 57% with a crowding index two or higher, and those living in rural areas formed 59% as shown in Table 1. Concerning parents' characteristics, only 11.6% of them were illiterate, while more than one-fourth were university graduates. More than half of fathers were manual workers 65%, while 60% of mothers were housewives. As regards family socio-economic characteristics, table 1 showed that more than two-thirds (65.4%) had insufficient income, and 52.2% were of low socio-economic status. The majority of the schoolchildren reported having insufficient daily allowance (88.8%)

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of the studied schoolchildren

Items	Frequency (n=500)	Percent
Age (years):		
11-	240	48.0
12+	260	52.0
Sex:		
Boys	322	64.4
Girls	178	35.6
Birth order:		
First	112	22.4
Second-third	264	52.8
Fourth or more	124	24.8
Crowding index:		
<2	215	43.0
2+	285	57.0
Father education:		
Illiterate	58	11.6
Basic	144	28.8
Secondary	169	33.8
University	129	25.8
Father job:		
Employee	175	35.0
Manual worker	325	65.0
Mother education:		
Illiterate	58	11.6
Basic	226	45.2
Secondary	68	13.6
University	148	29.6
Mother job:		
Housewife	300	60.0
Working	200	40.0
Residence:		
Rural	295	59.0
Urban	205	41.0
Income:		
Sufficient	173	34.6
Insufficient	327	65.4
Socio-economic status:		
Low	261	52.2
Middle	181	36.2
High	58	11.6
Daily allowance:		
Sufficient	56	11.2
Insufficient	444	88.8

As regards scholastic achievement, the highest percentage of schoolchildren (41.6%) had very good grades and 29% had good grades. Less than half of them (44.8%) reported absence of their school.

Table 2: Schoolchildren violent behavior, scholastic achievement and absenteeism

Items	Frequency (n=500)	Percent
Violent movies/games:		
Watching violent movies	432	86.4
Playing violent games	374	74.8
Scholastic achievement:		
Excellent	62	12.4
Very good	208	41.6
Good	145	29.0
Fair	85	17.0
School absenteeism:		
No	276	55.2
Yes	224	44.8

According to Table 3, more than two-thirds of the schoolchildren (70.4%) reported previous exposure to violence, and 89.4% of them committed violence. The exposure to violence was daily in more than half of them (57.1%) and was mostly physical (72.4%). School children's reactions to violence were mostly counter-violence in the form of insulting or beating; (33.5% and 49.1%, respectively). The most frequent types of punishment for those committing violence were seclusion at home (74.0%) and deprivation from playing (64.9%).

Table 3: Study sample history of exposure to and commitment of violence

Exposure to and commitment of violence	Frequency(n=500)	Percent
Have been exposed to violence	352	70.4
Frequency of exposure:		
Frequent (daily)	201	57.1
Sometimes (monthly)	135	38.4
Rare (yearly)	16	4.5
Type:		
Physical	255	72.4
Psychological	19	5.4
Sexual	78	22.2
Child reaction to exposure:		
Nothing	42	11.9
Insulting	118	33.5
Beating	173	49.1
Withdrawal and crying	19	5.4
Have committed violence:	447	89.4
Punishment of children committing violence:		
Deprivation from playing	290	64.9
Deprivation from money	143	32.0
Seclusion at home	331	74.0

Table 4 showed that 60% of schoolchildren had satisfactory knowledge level about violence. The highest were related to violence at school (91.2%) and the tools used for violence exposure (92%).

On the other hand, only 51.8% of them had satisfactory knowledge level about injuries caused by violence. Overall, 60.8% of the study sample had total satisfactory knowledge level.

Table 4: Studied schoolchildren knowledge about violence

Knowledge about violence	Frequency (n=500)	Percent
Knowledge level:		
Satisfactory	304	60.8
Unsatisfactory	196	39.2
Knowledge items :		
Definition	320	64.0
Types	314	62.8
Violence at home	443	88.6
Violence at school	456	91.2
Tools used	460	92.0
Injuries caused by violence	259	51.8
Symptoms and signs	339	67.8
Psychological violence	362	72.4
Place of possible exposure	398	79.6
Effects on child education	317	63.4

In table 5, the satisfactory knowledge was insufficient daily allowance, whose fathers are significantly frequent among younger, female basically educated & employees ($p < 0.001$) and and firstborn children ($p < 0.001$), with urban mothers are secondarily educated and residence, sufficient family income and working ($p < 0.001$).

Table 5: Relationship between schoolchildren's knowledge about violence and their socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-demographic characteristics	Knowledge level				X ² Test	p-value
	Satisfactory		Unsatisfactory			
	no (304)	%(60.8)	no (196)	%(39.2)		
Age (years):						
11	171	71.3	69	28.8	21.15	<0.001*
12	133	51.2	127	48.8		
Gender:						
Boys	175	54.3	147	45.7	15.80	<0.001*
Girls	129	72.5	49	27.5		
Birth order:						
First	112	100.0	0	0.0	97.68	<0.001*
Second-third	121	45.8	143	54.2		
Fourth or more	71	57.3	53	42.7		
Father education:						
Illiterate	31	53.4	27	46.6	17.47	0.001*
Basic	106	73.6	38	26.4		
Secondary	87	51.5	82	48.5		
University	80	62.0	49	38.0		
Father job:						
Employee	126	72.0	49	28.0	14.17	<0.001*
Manual worker	178	54.8	147	45.2		
Mother education:						
Illiterate	31	53.4	27	46.6	65.78	<0.001*
Basic	106	46.9	120	53.1		
Secondary	68	100.0	0	0.0		
University	99	66.9	49	33.1		
Mother job:						
Housewife	153	51.0	147	49.0	30.22	<0.001*
Working	151	75.5	49	24.5		
Crowding index:						
<2	128	59.5	87	40.5	0.25	0.61
2+	176	61.8	109	38.2		
Residence:						
Rural	148	50.2	147	49.8	34.12	<0.001*
Urban	156	76.1	49	23.9		
Income:						
Sufficient	124	71.7	49	28.3	13.13	<0.001*
Insufficient	180	55.0	147	45.0		
Daily allowance:						
Sufficient	18	32.1	38	67.9	21.73	<0.001*
Insufficient	286	64.4	158	35.6		

(*) Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 6 revealed that the satisfactory knowledge was significantly higher in schoolchildren who are neither exposed

to nor commit violence ($p < 0.001$), don't like violence movies ($p < 0.001$) or games ($p = 0.03$) and have school absenteeism

($p=0.001$) but lower among those with excellent grade ($p<0.001$).

Table 6: Relationship between schoolchildren's knowledge level about violence and their scholastic achievement and absenteeism

Items	Knowledge		X ² Test	p-value		
	Satisfactory no	%			Unsatisfactory no	%
Exposed to violence						
No	122	82.4	26	17.6	41.28	<0.001*
Yes	182	51.7	170	48.3		
Committed violence:					38.22	<0.001*
No	53	100.0	0	0.0		
Yes	251	56.2	196	43.8		
Like violence movies:					50.74	<0.001*
No	68	100.0	0	0.0		
Yes	236	54.6	196	45.4		
Like violent games:					4.81	0.03*
No	87	69.0	39	31.0		
Yes	217	58.0	157	42.0		
School absenteeism:					10.76	0.001*
No	150	54.3	126	45.7		
Yes	154	68.8	70	31.3		
Scholastic achievement:					34.14	<0.001*
Excellent	20	32.3	42	67.7		
Very good	133	63.9	75	36.1		
Good	84	57.9	61	42.1		
Fair	67	78.8	18	21.2		

(*) *Statistically significant at $p<0.05$*

Table 7 indicated a statistically significant relation between schoolchildren's history of exposure to violence and their school absenteeism ($p<0.001$). It was clear that the relation between schoolchildren's history of exposure to violence and their school absenteeism was higher among those reported exposure to violence. Meanwhile, exposure to violence had no statistically significant relation to scholastic achievement.

Table 7: Relation between schoolchildren's exposure to violence and their scholastic achievement and absenteeism

Items	Exposure to violence				X ² Test	p-value
	No		Yes			
	no (148)	% (29.6)	no (352)	% 70.4		
School absenteeism:						
No	100	36.2	176	63.8	13	<0.001*
Yes	48	21.4	176	78.6		
Scholastic achievement:					4.95	0.175
Excellent	20	32.3	42	67.7		
Very good	55	26.4	153	73.6		
Good	40	27.6	105	72.4		
Fair	33	38.8	52	61.2		

(*) *Statistically significant at p<0.05*

In multivariate analysis (Table 8), many statistically significant independent predictors of the score of schoolchildren's knowledge were identified. As the table illustrated age, gender, birth order, father education, mother working status, and preference of video games were negative predictors. On the other hand, the crowding index, mother education, family income, exposure to violence, and preference of violent movies were positive predictors.

Table 8: Best fitting multiple linear regression model for schoolchildren's score of knowledge about violence

Items	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-test	p-value
	B	Std. Error			
Constant	199.659	24.039		8.306	<0.001
Age	-7.263	1.265	-.271	5.739	<0.001
Gender (reference: male)	-9.832	2.087	-.352	-4.712	<0.001
Birth order	-13.797	1.153	-.708	11.969	<0.001
Crowding index	15.164	1.362	.561	11.135	<0.001
Father education (reference: illiterate)	-24.098	1.260	-1.748	19.131	<0.001
Mother education (reference: illiterate)	26.452	1.737	2.038	15.227	<0.001
Mother job status (reference: housewife)	-14.002	2.853	-.513	4.908	<0.001
Family income (reference: insufficient)	18.370	3.660	.653	5.019	<0.001
Exposure to violence (reference: no)	4.299	1.019	.147	4.219	<0.001
Like violent movies (reference: no)	10.068	2.346	.258	4.291	<0.001
Like video games (reference: no)	-7.635	1.579	-.248	4.834	<0.001

r-square=0.55

Model ANOVA: F=54.65, p<0.001

Variables entered and excluded by model: residence, socio-economic status

DISCUSSION

Violence is a major public health problem worldwide. In addition to death and disability, violence contributes to a variety of other health consequences. However, it is not an intractable social problem or an inevitable part to the human condition since it is preventable.⁽¹²⁾

The present study revealed a high prevalence of exposure to violence at schools. Part of this high prevalence could

be due to the fact that it depended on schoolchildren' reporting, which could be exaggerated. However, a similar high rate was found in public elementary schools in the United States. Their rate of 71% was very close to the present study rate of 70.4%.⁽¹³⁾

The frequency of exposure to violence in the present study was also high, where more than half of schoolchildren reported

being exposed to violence daily. This finding was in congruence with the reviewed one by **Ammar** on domestic violence who stated that more than half of Egyptian children reported exposure to violence daily.⁽¹⁴⁾

A higher percentage of the school children in the present study had also reported committing violence. This, in addition to the reported high rates of counter-violence as a reaction to exposure to violence, reflected a high level of aggressive behavior among these children. This is consistent with Mercy et al. ⁽¹⁵⁾, who mentioned that children responded violently when feeling strong emotions such as anger, stress, and frustration due to beating. However, our rates were higher than those found in a study done by Youssef et al ⁽¹⁶⁾ in Alexandria where violent behaviours were recorded among 51% of boys and 20.9% of girls compared to 89.4% in the present study. The difference in rates could be attributed

to differences in the study settings. The high prevalence of violence and aggressive behaviours seemed to have a negative impact on school attendance. The present study findings revealed that absenteeism was significantly higher among those exposed to violence. This might be explained by fear from going to school due to this risk, or even due to the consequences of such violence. This study finding was in agreement with **the results** of a survey conducted in the United States. It revealed that exposure to violence was significantly linked to high schoolchild's absenteeism and reluctance to go to school.⁽¹³⁾

Meanwhile, the present study could not reveal a significant relation between exposure to violence and scholastic achievement. This might be explained by the high prevalence of exposure to violence, in addition to the tendency of over-reporting. In contrast with this finding **Kellerman and Mercy** demonstrated a

negative impact of violence on schoolchildren's academic achievement.⁽¹⁷⁾

Concerning schoolchildren's knowledge about violence, the present study demonstrated that most of them had satisfactory knowledge in most related areas. This could be explained by the high prevalence of exposure to violence through which they acquired more knowledge and experience. In fact, exposure to violence turned to be a significant positive independent predictor of the knowledge score in multivariate analysis. However, this study finding was incongruent with Fanslow who mentioned that a higher proportion of primary school children had poor knowledge about violence. This might be due to that their study included only girls.⁽¹⁸⁾

Moreover, female gender was a negative predictor of the score of knowledge, which might be due to the lower exposure to violence among girls compared to boys. Boys experienced high levels of all types of violence especially

physical one because they were overactive, played in the street and watched action and violence movies more than girls.⁽¹⁹⁾ In addition, boys have used to be more exposed to violence and corporal punishment for having and using the power and encouraged by parents to beat anyone insulting or beating them.⁽²⁰⁻²²⁾

The present study showed that the schoolchildren residing in rural areas had significantly lower knowledge. This might be due to a more likelihood of exposure to violence in urban areas as shown by Celisa the Third⁽²³⁾ and Samantha *et al.*⁽²⁴⁾. However, in multivariate analysis, residence was not an independent predictor. So the relation could be confounded by other factors such as parents' education and job, as well as the socio-economic factors. In fact the crowding index, mother education, family income and the preference of violent movies were found to be positive predictors of the knowledge score. These variables

were certainly different in rural compared to urban settings. The effects of family and these economic factors had been previously shown in several.^(7,10, 12, 25-29)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, although most primary schoolchildren had satisfactory knowledge level about violence, the prevalence and frequency of exposure to violence were high among them. Their knowledge was influenced by many personal and family characteristics. Exposure to violence had a negative impact on school attendance. Therefore, it is recommended that the Ministry of education should develop a national violence prevention programs that include some conflict resolution models in primary schools curricula, along with training teachers in avoiding violence through close supervision on students especially during the break hours. As for parents, they should manage to decrease the time spent in playing violent video games and replacing it by sport activities.

The role of the school health nurse should be more emphasized.

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