IMPACTS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT IN GOBACHOP COMMUNITY, PAYNESVILLE, MONTSERRADO COUNTY, LIBERIA

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Abstract

Gender-based violence is grounded in unequal power relations, cultural norms, and discriminatory practices that privilege one gender over another. This study investigated the impact of gender-based violence (GBV) on children's development in Gobachop Community, Paynesville, Montserrado County, Liberia. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was employed. The population of the study comprised of 60 children in Paynesville, Montserrado County, Liberia. There was no sampling because the population was manageable for the study. A Five-point rating scale questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on the Impact of Gender-Based Violence (QIGBV)" was used for data collection. An overall Cronbach alpha co-efficient of 0.74 was used to establish the reliability of the study. The instrument was validated by three experts, one form measurement and evaluation unit in the Department of Educational Foundations, one from the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, and one from the Rudolph Kwanue University, Republic of Liberia. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while t-test was used to test null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

The finding of the study among others showed that the impacts of gender-based violence on the physical and social development of children leads to injuries, children perceiving and reacting to things negatively, and most often young men sometimes involving into criminal offences against the abusive parent (mostly fathers), in order to protect their mother and siblings, as well as regularly become victims of an act of revenge by the abuser against the mother in Gobachop Community. Recommendations include establishment of support Systems, community awareness programs, capacity building for caregivers, policy implementation and enforcement, access to

education, mental health services, economic empowerment, collaboration and partnerships among government agencies, NGOs, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure a coordinated response to GBV and its impact on children development.

Keywords: *Gender-based Violence, Impact, Physical Impact, Social Impact, Development*

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to any harmful act perpetrated against a person based on their gender. It encompasses a wide range of behaviours, including physical, sexual, and psychological violence, as well as economic coercion and control. According to Thornton (2014), gender-based violence is an incident involving family members, including the wife, husband, children, and other family members and takes the form of physical and/or verbal violence. For example, physical violence in the form of slapping, hitting and torturing, while verbal violence takes the form of insults and threats. Additionally, Luca Rollè, Shulamit Ramon, and Piera Brustia, (2019) study revealed that gender-based violence can occur due to economic problems, infidelity, incompatibility, and others. It is rooted in gender inequality and the unequal distribution of power between men and women, and it is perpetrated in various settings, including the home, the workplace, school and the community.

Gender-based violence also takes many forms, including domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, forced and early marriage, 'honour' crimes, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and human trafficking. However, according to the studies of Miller and McCaw, (2019) and Sian Oram, Kylee Trevillion, Gene Feder, and Louis M. Howard (2017), the most prevailing form of violence is Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), which is a pattern of physical, or sexual, or

psychological, or emotional abuse directed toward a partner or former partner. It can also occur in non-intimate relationships, and it can affect people of any gender identity or expression. GBV is a violation of human rights and has severe physical and social consequences for survivors. Mittal (2020), defines physical violence as injury by an offender in the form of flogging, kicking, biting, or other means that cause injury such as fracture, bleeding, bruising, and complete exposure to toxins. Violence can be any form of physical aggression with intention to hurt (corporal punishment and physical bullying) by adults and other children. Corporal punishment is any punishment in which physical force is used and that is intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort; it is often used to punish poor academic performance or to correct misbehaviour.

Physical impact of gender-based as the result of beating, burning, kicking, punching, biting, maiming, scratching, pushing, shoving, throwing, grabbing, biting, chocking, shaking, poking, hair-pulling, slapping, hitting, killing or use of weapon (gun, knife or other object), and use of restraints or one's body, size or strength against another person, can lead to injuries such as bruises, etc. Often, children and young people who are present during an act of spousal abuse will also be injured, sometimes by accident and sometimes because they try to intervene. Also, according to the Korean Ministry of Education (2015), violence can have a physical impact and it can cause psychological distress, permanent physical disability and long-term physical or mental ill-health. Physical impacts may also include, mild or serious wounds, bruises, fractures, and deaths by homicide or suicide. In addition to physical deterioration, according to Mahapatro (2018), it can lead to loss of personality and lack of consciousness, as well as lead to accidents in extreme cases. Ultimately, these things can harm children and impact their physical development.

Social impact of gender-based violence refers to the far-reaching effects of violence on individuals, communities, and society as a whole. These impacts can include increased fear, anxiety, and trauma, as well as changes in behavior, social relationships, and community dynamics. According to the World Health Organization [WHO] (2021), violence can have significant social impacts, including, increased healthcare costs and burden on healthcare systems, loss of productivity and economic growth, breakdown of social cohesion and community trust, and increased crime and antisocial behavior.

Social impact of gender-based violence on children on the other hand, may lead them to isolating themselves from others, involving into risky behaviors such as stealing, robbery, gambling, early sexual activities, etc. Children who experienced any type of violence at school or home may develop reactive attachment disorder that is classified by The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5th Edition (DSM-5) as a trauma- and stressor-related condition of early childhood caused by social neglect and maltreatment. According to the DSM-5, affected children have difficulty forming emotional attachments to others, show a decreased ability to experience positive emotion, cannot seek or accept physical or emotional closeness, and may react violently when held, cuddled, or comforted. Children may respond to inter-linkages with aggression, fear, defiance, or rage; they develop a negative self-schema, and experience somatic symptoms of distress.

In the study of Moran, McDonald, Jackson, Turnbull and Minnis (2017), psychomotor restlessness is common, as is hyperactivity and stereotypic movements, such as hand flapping or rocking. It is confirmed an increased risk of anxiety, depression, hyperactivity, and reduces frustration tolerance.

GBV is not only a violation of human rights but also has significant physical-economic and social costs, including lost productivity, increased healthcare costs, and reduced educational attainment. Efforts to address GBV involve a combination of prevention, protection, and prosecution. This includes promoting gender equality, providing access to justice and legal services, and implementing policies and programs to prevent and respond to GBV. Additionally, raising awareness and challenging harmful gender norms and stereotypes is crucial in preventing and ending GBV. In light of this, the present study examined the impact of gender-based violence (GBV) on children development in Gobachop Community, Paynesville, Montserrado County, Liberia.

Statement of the Problem

Gender-based (GBV) remains a persistent social challenge in many parts of Liberia, and the Gobachop Community in Paynesville is no exception. Despite national and international efforts cure GBV, children in this community continue to grow up in environment where physical, sexual, and psychological violence against individuals in widespread. These forms of violence do not only harm the direct victims but also extend significant negative impacts on children who witness or experience them.

Children in Gobachop Community are increasingly exposed to domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, intimate partner violence, and harmful traditional practices. Such exposure places them on risk of emotional trauma, behavioral patterns, poor academic performance, low self-esteem, depression, and interrupted social development. Many children who witness GBV, develop fear, anxiety, and aggressive tendencies, while those who experience abuse directly often suffer long-term cognitive, emotional, and physical consequences.

Although several NGOs, community groups, and government agencies had introduced GBV intervention programs in Montserrado, there limited empirical evidence especially addressing how GBV affects the developmental outcomes of children in Gobachop Community. The extent of which GBV impacts children's physical wellbeing, social adjustment, academic achievement, and overall development is not clearly documented. This is the problem; this study seeks to solve.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to ascertain the impact of gender-based violence on the development of children in Gobachop Community, Paynesville, Montserrado County, Liberia. Specifically, the study examined:

1. the impacts of gender-based violence on the physical development of children in Gobachop Community.
2. the impacts of gender-based violence on the social development of children in Gobachop Community.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the impacts of Gender-based violence on the physical development of children in Gobachop Community?
2. What are the impacts of gender-based violence on the social development of children in Gobachop Community?

Methods

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Nworgu (2015) refers to descriptive survey research design as the one in which a group of people or items are studied by

collecting data and analyzing it from only a few people considered representative of the entire group. The population for the study consisted of 60 male and female children used as the sample size. There was no sampling because the population was manageable for the study. Questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. The instrument was developed on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) with assigned values of 4,3,2, and 1, respectively. The instrument was validated by three experts, one from measurement and evaluation unit in the Department of Educational Foundations, one from the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, and one from the Rudolph Kwanue University, Republic of Liberia. A criterion means of 2.50 served as the benchmark for agreement level for any item while any mean score below the benchmark was not disagreed. All the 60 copies of the questionnaire were administered and fully collected after completion.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the impacts of Gender-based violence on the physical development of children in Gobachop Slum Community?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on the impacts of Gender-based violence on the physical development of children in Gobachop Community.

s/n	The impact of GBV on the physical development of children:	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	makes them to be victim of physical abuse leading to bruises, injuries, etc.	3.83	0.42	Agreed
2	makes them to have serious headaches.	2.84	0.57	Agreed
3	Delay children's growth or development.	3.01	0.95	Agreed
4	gives discomfort to them.	2.81	0.88	Agreed
5	makes them to have serious stomach pain.	2.50	1.03	Agreed
	Grand Mean	**2.99**		**Agree**

Table 1 reveals the mean and standard on the impacts of gender-based violence on the physical development of children in Gobachop Community. The respondents rated agreed to all items 1-5 with mean scores of 3.83, 2.84, 3.01, 2.81 and 2.50. The grand mean of 2.99 revealed that respondents rated agree to the impacts of gender-based violence on the physical development of children in Gobachop Community. The standard deviation reveals heterogeneity in the respondents rating 0.42 – 1.03.

Research Question 2: What are the impacts of gender-based violence on the social development of children in Gobachop Community?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on the impacts of Gender-based violence on the social development of children in Gobachop Community.

s/n	The impact of GBV on the social development of children:	Mean	SD	Remarks
6	makes them to isolate themselves from others.	3.52	0.70	Agreed
7	increases the risk of street life for them.	2.78	0.80	Agreed
8	puts a boy into early sexual activities.	3.06	0.91	Agreed
9	makes them to get involved in risky behaviours such as stealing, robbery, gambling, among others.	2.89	0.86	Agreed
10	makes the boys to always see themselves as superior of girls in all aspects and that the girls must accept being the subordinates.	2.75	0.91	Agreed
	Grand Mean	**3.00**		**Agreed**

In Table 2, the mean and standard on the impacts of gender-based violence on the social development of children in Gobachop Community. The respondents rated agreed to all items 7-10 with mean scores of 3.52, 2.78, 3.06, 2.89 and 2.75. The grand mean of 3.00 revealed that respondents rated agree to the impacts of gender-based violence on the social development of children in Gobachop Community. The standard deviation reveals heterogeneity in the respondents rating 0.70 – 0.91.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in research question one revealed that there are huge negative impacts of Gender-based violence on the physical development of children in Gobachop Community. These findings supported the findings of World Health Organization [WHO] (2021) who suggests that GBV is associated with a higher risk of non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes, and chronic stress from GBV can weaken the immune system, making children more vulnerable to illnesses, leading to severe physical injuries, disability, or even mortality in children. Similarly, the United Nations Children Fund [UNICEF] (2020) posits that children exposed to GBV are more likely to experience malnutrition and related health issues. Additionally, Shonkoff et al. (2012) found that exposure to violence can harm brain development, affecting cognitive and physical growth, impact children's growth and development, including delayed puberty and stunted growth. Gobachop Community is a congested slum community in Liberia, mixed with diverse people, including disadvantaged youths referred to as “zogos”, etc. For instance, almost a family of mum, dad, sister, brother and even relative together live in a single room. GBV in this environment is most likely normal. Sadly, children who are present or witness GBV of different kinds on a daily basis in this environment, experience the negative impact of GBV on their physical development. Consequently, the negative impact of gender-based violence on the physical development of children observed in this study likely reflects the lack of awareness on GBV and limited contextual relevance of resource provisions programmes in the study area.

The findings in research question two revealed that there are huge negative impacts of Gender-based violence on the social development of children in Gobachop Community. These findings supported the findings of Osofsky (2019) who posits that children exposed to GBV often experience emotional insecurity, which can manifest in poor social skills and difficulty forming

healthy relationships. It also leads to difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy peer relationships, difficulties with conflict resolution and negotiation skills in children (Osofsky, 2023). Similarly, Margolin and Vickerman (2017) found that GBV can impair children's ability to regulate their emotions, leading to mood swings and behavioral problems. Additionally, United Nation Population Fund [UNFPA] (2021) suggests that exposure to GBV in childhood can have long-term social consequences, including difficulties with relationships and social interactions in adulthood. John W. Fantuzzo, Whitney A. LeBoeuf, and Dennis P Culhane (2021) on the other hand, found that exposure to GBV can lead to difficulties in communication, cooperation, and empathy in children as well as understanding others' perspectives. Children exposed to GBV are more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior and have difficulties with emotional regulation (Margolin as Gordis, 2010). Moreover, Fantuzzo et al., 2021) also revealed that GBV can lead to social withdrawal and isolation in children and may have reduced empathy and difficulty. GBV negatively impact the social development of children thereby leaving them with no alternative, but to behave an inhumane manner. Consequently, the negative impact of gender-based violence on the physical development of children observed in this study likely reflects the lack of awareness on GBV and limited contextual relevance of resource provisions programmes in the study area.

Conclusion

Gender-Based Violence is a hostile incident in the family that affects every family member, including children. Children who are in the process of development are prone to disturbances due to stressors and developmental disorders. Gender-based violence impacts children’s physical and social developments. The experience of trauma due to gender-based violence needs to be a shared concern among people such as parents, teachers, and health workers, including nurses, to provide interventions to prevent a more severe impact.

Recommendations

1. Given the negative impact of gender-based violence on the physical development of children in Gobachop Community, healthcare providers should be trained in Gobachop

Community to identify and respond to GBV cases, providing psychosocial support and referrals. Community-based counseling services for children affected by GBV, involving trained local counselors should be provided.

2. Since Gender-based violence the negatively impact the social development of children in Gobachop Community, Paynesville, community-based interventions should be implemented, prioritizing GBV prevention and support services for affected children. Trauma-informed care and awareness programs should be integrated into local schools and healthcare systems as well as community-wide sensitization programs on GBV impacts should be implemented, emphasizing children's rights and protection.

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