Original Article

The Relationship Between Young Children's Influence and violence against children in Selected Bugiri Primary Schools in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between children's influence and violence against children in selected Bugiri schools based on the fact that Bugiri district had reported high rates of violence against children. The study was guided by the following three research objectives: To establish the level of children's influence in the chosen schools, determining the level of violence against children at the chosen schools, and lastly to determine the relationship between the two factors (children's influence and violence against children) at the chosen schools. The study used a sequential explanatory mixed method design and was carried out at two government-aided primary schools in the Bugiri district of Uganda. Two hundred thirty-six (236) young children in primary three comprised the sample, out of the 365 children in the accessible population. The data were analysed using regression analysis and Pearson's correlation coefficient index. The results indicated a statistically significant, correlation between children influence and violence against children in schools (self-esteem, role model attachment and decision-making capacity). The study recommends that children should be used to influence violence decisions and planning at school. Programs at school meant to lessen violence have to include children in choosing violence reduction strategies and implementing violence-reduction activities in schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional research on violence against children has typically positioned children as vulnerable and in need of protection from and by adults (Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2020). This positioning has led to prevention efforts to focus on mitigating risk factors (Thornberry et al. 2014) and not so much mitigating protection factors (Austin et al., 2020). This positioning of children as vulnerable has also restricted young children's ability to actively participate in and influence violence reduction efforts. It is believed that young children have been excluded from violence prevention fields aimed at reducing violence based on taken for granted assumptions of that they lack abilities and capacity to handle such circumstances (Vanner & Almanssori, 2021).

There is therefore a dearth of academic evidence attesting to relationship between the young children influence and violence against children in schools. Moreover, the limited scholarly literature on the relationship between young children participation and violence against children in schools, is constrained and fragmented to include the older children and adults. It is based on this background that this current study being informed by critical theory sought to establish the relationships between young children influence and violence against children in schools. The study was guided by the following three research objectives: To establish the level of children's influence in the chosen schools, determining the level of violence against children at the chosen schools, and lastly to determine the relationship between the two factors (children's influence and violence against children) at the chosen schools

In this study, the phrase "young children influence" refers to the participation of young children in violence against children program planning, implementation and review (Kennan et al., 2017) in school. It implies that children have some influence over decisions made and activities taken, rather than implying awareness or being present (Mager & Nowak, 2012). WHO (2018), defines violence against children as any form of abuse—physical, sexual, or emotional—as well as

neglect, maltreatment, exploitation, injury, and abuse directed toward a child under the age of eighteen. This includes harm committed by parents, other caregivers, peers, romantic partners, or strangers. Following this line of thought, this study defines violence against children as young children exhibiting behaviour that is causing or likely to cause harm to them or their peers such as low self-esteem, low role model attachment and low decision-making capacity.

Previous evidence from the first mapping of projects (SRSG, 2021) that involved children in violence reduction revealed that children were contributing their ideas and solutions, becoming positive change agents, and their involvement helped them become more self-assured, empowered, and knowledgeable about what violence was. Additionally, the same children collaborated with the community and law enforcement to address the issue of violence against them. However, much as this project involved children in violence reduction, the young children in the early years were not the focus of the mapping exercise. The need to explore more about young children participation in violence against children becomes paramount. It is based on this background that the current study's emphasis concentrated on young children influence in violence against children. Kennan et al. (2017) contends that young children's participation in service planning review were limited in Ireland child and family agency. They were few designated structures to bring children and young people together to participate in service planning and review hence need for more investigation in to this area.

METHODOLOGY

The results presented in this paper were part of a larger research project that employed a mixed method sequential explanatory design (Bowen et al., 2017). A survey of two hundred thirty-six (236) primary three students was conducted among the accessible population of three hundred and sixty-five 365 students from two primary schools in the Bugiri district. The students were

chosen using simple random sampling to participate in the study. The information obtained through the use of questionnaires was analysed using regression analysis techniques and Pearson's correlation index. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Uganda Christian University Review board and National council for science and Technology.

The analysis and findings presented here are from the quantitative data and are presented starting with the biographical information of the respondents then results on children influence, results on violence against children and finally results on testing of the study hypothesis.

Biographical Information

The number of the respondents, 133(58%) were girls, while 96(42%) were boys. This means more girls took part in the study than boys.

Children's Influence

The children's influences were assessed using 10 items set on a point scale of 1= NO, no = 2, yes = 3 and YES = 4. Descriptive statistics used to present results include frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation. For the interpretation of mean scores, the following intervals were used to explain the findings; 1.00 – 1.75= NO, 1.76-2.50 = no, 2.51-3.25= yes, and 3.26 - 4.00= YES. Results are displayed in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on children's influence

Item	Mean	SD
Most of the time in the classroom teachers listen to what I say	2.01	1.136
Most of the time in the classroom teachers do what I say	1.82	1.018
Most of the time in the class room teachers tell me how my suggestion/answer was used	1.88	1.055
Most of the time in the class room children listen to what I say	2.04	1.083
Most of the time in the class room children do not do what I do	2.20	1.053
At school children take my suggestions seriously	1.98	1.078
I am free to dress what i want at school	1.75	0.940
Most of the time at school I lead and other children follow	1.83	1.017
Most of the time at school my suggestion is accepted by the headmaster	1.82	1.039
Most of the time at school teachers do not follow what I suggest for learning	2.30	1.159
Average mean	1.96	1.058

Source: *Primary Data*

Composite mean and standard deviation ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 1.058$) indicates that on all items used to assess the level of children's influence, there was low influence by the children on teachers, fellow children and adults. These revelations point to the fact that the level of influence of children in schools is still low, a phenomenon that could negatively impact on the efforts to reduce violence against children.

Violence Against Children In School

Violence against children in school was assessed using 10 items set on a point scale of 1= NO, no = 2, yes = 3 and YES = 4. For the interpretation of mean scores, the following intervals were used to explain the findings; 1.00 – 1.75= NO, 1.76-2.50 = no, 2.51-3.25= yes, and 3.26 - 4.00= YES It was

measured based on the proportion of children in the sample with self-esteem indicators, role model attachment indicators and decision-making capacity indicators. Violence against children meant a high proportion of children with low self-esteem, a high proportion of children with low role model attachment and a high proportion of children with low decision-making capacity.

Self-Esteem

Children's self-esteem was studied using 10 qualitative items and results are provided in *Table 2* below. The average self-esteem score is 2.61 and the standard deviation is 0.997 which indicates moderate variability in self-esteem scores around the mean. According to the average self-esteem score, the participants in the study

generally have a moderate amount of self-esteem. The range in self-esteem scores, where some respondents scored higher or lower than average, reflects the diversity of self-esteem levels within the sample. The variation in self-esteem scores points to the possibility that some children have lower self-esteem, which may have an effect on how well they respond to or handle violence

Table 2: Means and standards deviations on children's self-esteem

Statement	Mean	SD
I am a special or important person in my class	2.53	1.032
I sometimes feel so bad about myself that I wish I were somebody else	2.56	1.010
I am not very sure if I will pass exams	2.69	0.971
I am not very sure if I can make friends at school	2.76	0.964
I feel I cannot do things as good as other people	2.66	0.986
I can become number one in my class	2.48	1.016
I like the way I dress	2.72	0.943
I really don't like myself very much.	2.54	1.011
No one pays much attention to me at school	2.56	0.996
I wish I were a different kind of person because would have more friends.	2.61	1.036
Average mean	2.61	0.997

Source: Primary Data

Role Model Attachment

Children's role model attachment was studied using 10 qualitative items and results are provided in *Table 3*. The average role model attachment score is 2.53 and the standard deviation is 1.014 which indicates moderate variability in role model attachment scores around the mean. The range in role model attachments, where some respondents scored higher or lower than average, reflects the diversity of role attachment levels within the sample. The variation in role attachment scores points to the possibility that some children have lower role model attachment, which may have an effect on how well they respond to or handle violence.

Table 3: Means and standards deviations on role model attachment

Statement	Mean	SD
If you needed advice on something other than school work, you would go to one of your teachers.	2.69	0.979
I have a teacher who is my friend	2.74	0.968
Would you like to be like your teachers	2.83	0.930
My teachers treat me like how my friends treat me	2.32	0.968
We like the teacher who does not use force to discipline us	2.43	1.301
I have a teacher who advises me on other things out of class	2.36	1.002
You have many children Your school who use good words you want to copy	2.31	1.006
You have many children you admire who share their eats with others	2.45	0.992
You want to be like children at your school because they care about you.	2.55	0.992
You admire the school nurse/matron because she is nice to children	2.60	0.997
Average mean	2.53	1.014

Source: Primary Data

Decision Making Capacity

Children's decision-making capacity was measured using 10 qualitative items and results are provided in *Table 4*. A mean score of 2.62 indicates that, on average, respondents' decision-making capacity are somewhat neutral or leaning towards the lower end of the scale. However, there appears to be a significant amount of variety in the scores around the mean, as indicated by the 1.152 standard deviation. This indicates that there is variation or heterogeneity among the sample or population in terms of their beliefs, attitudes, or experiences connected to decision making. It also

signifies that responses to the measure have varied over a large range.

Table 4: Means and standards deviations on children's decision-making capacity

Statement	Mean	SD
I often decide to fight physically for what I want if I am not given	2.38	1.170
If I feel bad, I decide to hit other people.	2.63	1.127
When I am annoyed, I have to shout at people	2.70	1.147
I often decide to lie to someone if it will keep you out of trouble with them	2.59	1.146
If I am hungry, I decide to steal from someone who has many	2.36	1.153
I often decide to dodge school if I don't feel like	2.61	1.225
I often decide to hit those people who nick name me	2.72	1.108
I often decide to respond negatively when I am treated negatively	2.79	1.159
In my school if someone calls children bad names, they also call them back	2.84	1.128
I often choose to fight those who do not agree with me	2.60	1.157
Average mean	2.62	1.152

Source: Primary Data

In order to visualize the relationship between children's influence and violence against children a scatter plot was used as indicated below. Each point on the plot represented children with the x-coordinate indicating the proportion of children influencing and the y-coordinate indicating the proportion with

Testing the Study Hypothesis

H_3: "There is a statistically significant relationship between children's influences and violence against children".

The Pearson's correlation coefficient index was utilized to test this hypothesis, and later on, basic linear regression analysis was employed to determine the direction and strength of the relationship as displayed in *Table 5* below.

Table 5: Correlation between children's influences and violence against children

			Violence against children.	Childrens' Influences
Spearman's rho	Violence against children.	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.404**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	229	229
	Childrens' Influences	Correlation Coefficient	.404**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	229	229

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Spearman's correlations between children's influences and violence against children shows that children's influences were moderately and positively correlated with violence against children (r = +0.404, p = .000, n= 229). This implies that increase in children's influences would lead to increased violence against children. In a nutshell, when the level of children's influence increases, there is a likelihood of violence against children at an increasing rate.

Additionally, since the p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05, then stated hypothesis was accepted concluding that there is a statistically significant relationship between children's influences and violence against children.

A linear regression analysis was conducted to examine how well children's influences predicted violence against children. Regressions results are displayed in *Table 6*.

Table 6: Regression Analysis between children's influences and violence against children

Model Summary				
Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	.447[a]	.200	.196	.46720

a. Predictors: (Constant), Children's influences

ANOVA[a]						
Model		**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	Regression	12.353	1	12.353	56.592	.000[b]
	Residual	49.549	227	.218		
	Total	61.902	228			

a. Dependent Variable: Violence against children
b. Predictors: (Constant), Children's influences

Coefficients[a]						
Model		**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**t**	**Sig.**
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1	(Constant)	1.935	.090		21.541	.000
	Children's influences	.323	.043	.447	7.523	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Violence against children against children

The Adjusted R Square value, or coefficient of determination, is 0.196, according to Table 6's results above. This suggests that the influence of children account for 19.6% of the overall variation in violence against children in school. These findings also show that a unit increase in the positive influence of children accounts for 0.323 units of the violence against children. A statistically significant contribution was discovered (t = 7.523, p-value = 0.000) leading to a rejection of the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative hypothesis.

This implies that increase in children's influences would lead to increased portion of children with role model attachments hence improving violence reduction efforts. In a nutshell, when the level of children's influence increases, there is a likelihood of violence against children at an increasing rate. There is a significant relationship between children's influence and violence against children in school.

DISCUSSION

The study found that there was a strong relationship between children's influence and violence against children in school. These findings are directly supported by Kennan et al. (2019), who revealed that when children are allowed to influence decisions about their safety and protection from violence it was associated to them (children) making good decisions such as creation of safe guards to ensure their safety and protection from violence. This finding was also in direct agreement with De Róiste et al. (2012) who also revealed that children's influence was related to children having positive perceptions about themselves and the school. For example, their participation in schools rulemaking was positively associated with positive self-image and happiness at school. Similarly, Mintzer and Cushing (2017) conducted individual interviews and focus groups with fifty-five hospitalized children about their influence in health care decisions. Their findings also showed children's influence was associated with them feeling happier, more assured and valued. Allowing them to influence also gave them the opportunity to ask questions and make right decisions. children who participated felt their wishes were being heard and were happier with their stay in hospital. In Santiago, Chile, student participation has been related to beneficial student outcomes like civic growth, an active public life, and prosocial behaviours (González et.al 2021. Better academic achievement and lower levels of antisocial behaviour were associated with students who had some control over setting coexistence rules in their schools. These associations were then associated with better levels of student life satisfaction. These

findings offer a strong justification for the need to encourage student influence and genuine participation in the school community, making them particularly pertinent to the design and evaluation of interventions and educational programs.

CONCLUSION

The study sought to establish the relationship between children's influence and violence against children in schools. After analyzing data on 236 young children in selected Bugiri primary schools, results indicated that children's influence significantly related to violence against children in schools (self-esteem, role model attachment and decision-making capacity. The study thus concluded that children's influence was statistically positively related with violence against children in schools.

Recommendations

The government should distribute and promote child participation legislative frameworks, policies, and all operational standards for awareness creation in primary schools through the Ministry of Education and Sports and other line Ministries. This would facilitate the understanding of the various school stakeholders' roles and duties regarding child participation.

Additionally Owners of schools should embrace the significance of ongoing evaluations and assessments of young children's self-esteem, attachment to role models, and decision-making ability because it has been demonstrated that young children who possess these factors are better able to resist, challenge, and handle violent situations.

The head teachers of the selected Bugiri schools should form a committee to plan and carry out Violence against children training that addresses the challenges of young children talking about their experiences, the challenges of young children influencing decisions, rules, regulations and activities for violence against children.

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