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## Chitra R

Research Scholar, Department  
of Criminology and Criminal  
Justice, Manonmaniam  
Sundaranar University,  
Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India

## Dr. Beulah Shekhar

Emeritus Professor,  
Department of Criminology  
and Criminal Justice, Karunya  
Institute of Technical Sciences,  
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu,  
India

## Corresponding Author:

### Chitra R

Research Scholar, Department  
of Criminology and Criminal  
Justice, Manonmaniam  
Sundaranar University,  
Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India

## Prevalence and the impact of violence on children

Chitra R and Dr. Beulah Shekhar

### Abstract

Violence against children is extensive and must be addressed to improve children's health and well-being. Children are at risk of any form of violence like physical, psychological, sexual etc and is recognized risk factors for the development of stress, anxiety and depression among children. The types of violence that have been associated with adverse psychological impact include domestic violence, school violence and community violence. Children's psycho physiological and behavioural functioning is significantly affected by exposure to violent environment. This study was aimed to assess the prevalence and impact of violence on children in terms of level of anxiety and stress among children exposure to violence. Quantitative research approach and descriptive research design was selected for this study. The present study was conducted among 100 school going children who were selected based on snowball sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire consisted of part I, demographic characteristics and part II consisted of structured questions to assess the prevalence of violence exposure. Part III consisted of scale to assess the Stress and part IV consisted of scale to assess the Anxiety. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings of the study revealed that majority of the school going children had moderate level of Anxiety and 61.7% of school going children had moderate level of stress. It is suggested that the interventions should be carried out to reduce violence in the family, school and the community. It can be effective in the prevention of anxiety and stress among school going children.

**Keywords:** Anxiety, community violence, domestic violence, school violence and stress

### Introduction

The healthy future of a society depends on health of children, who are the guardians of that future (WHO, 2005). Childhood is regarded as a period of special protection and rights in our culture. Children's development is expected to unfold within a safe and nurturing environment. Violence remains a widespread and has negative impact on child's development. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines the phenomenon of violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, a group or a community, which results or is likely to result in injury, death, psychological harm, or developmental loss or damage" (Krug, 2002) <sup>[12]</sup>.

Violence against children can be in any forms such as physical, sexual and emotional. Violence can take place in any places like homes and families, schools, communities etc. The perpetrators are often those closest to the children like their parents, guardians, teachers, and police and security forces. It can impact children's, physical, psychological, cognitive and social development. Exposure to violence during childhood is recognized risk factors for the development of stress, anxiety and aggression among children. Violence against children threatens not only children's survival and health but also their emotional and psychological wellbeing. Psychological wellbeing of children is understandably necessary for a healthy development

### Background of the study

Childhood is an important stage of life, requiring significant emotional investments and social support. The care provided to children by the family, by other supportive groups and institutions greatly influences their chances of survival and significantly improves their quality of life. In addition, caring functions as a reference value, which helps children to construct their own identity and form the first ideas about themselves, about others and the world (Deslandes, Assis & Santos, 2005).

Exposure to violence and violence victimization are common among school going children. It can occur in any settings where children spend time like home, school or in the community. Exposure to violence can increase the risk for poor mental health.

There are a variety of contributing factors to the onset of violence on children. Studies have found that they are physical, social, environmental, and psychological factors. As prevalence of violence on children grows rapidly in our society and it disturbs the process of normal functioning of psychological development of children. This study was aimed to assess the prevalence and the impact of violence on children in terms of anxiety and stress among school going children.

### Statement of the problem

A study to assess the prevalence and the impact of violence on children among school going children in selected schools in Chennai.

### Objectives of the study

- To assess the prevalence of violence exposure in school children
- To assess the level of stress among children exposure to violence
- To assess the level of anxiety among children exposure to violence
- To associate the stress and anxiety with selected demographic variables of children

### Methods

This is a descriptive study conducted among school children studying in selected schools in Chennai. Quantitative research approach was chosen for the study.. The samples were selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The present study was conducted among 100 school going children who were selected based on snowball sampling technique. Samples were explained about the purpose of study. Their parents were informed about the participation of their children in the study and informed consent was obtained from them. Self administered questionnaire was used to collect the data from the samples.

### Materials

The study tools were prepared based on the information gathered from the review of literature. Demographic data of school children were collected using semi- structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was translated in to regional Tamil language. The tool consisted of four parts like,

**Part-I: Demographic information:** It focused on demographic information like age, gender, class of studying, religion, type of family, number of siblings, family structure, family monthly income, parent child relationship etc.

**Part-II: Exposure to violence:** This part consisted of 20 items and was designed to gather information about exposure to violence among children. It consisted of three domains of violence exposure: Family (10items), School (5items) and Community (5 items). A total of 20 items were used to assess the violence exposures.

**Part-III: Level of stress:** Stress was assessed using modified Gordon stress inventory which consisted of 15 statements. It is a rating scale and each item was rated as follows, never (0), almost never (1), sometimes (2), fairly often (3), very often (4). The maximum score is 60. The

total score was counted and the percentage was calculated.

**Part – IV: Level of Anxiety:** Level of anxiety was assessed using four point likert scale which consisted of 15 items. Each item was rated as never (0), sometimes (1), often (2), always (3). The maximum score is 45. The total score was counted and the percentage was calculated.

## Results

### Background Information

Majority of the children (70%) belonged to 13 year of age while the rest, 25% and 5%, belonged to 14 years and 15 years respectively. Regarding gender, 58.3% of them were male and 41.75 of them were female. Majority (75%) of children was Hindus and 66.7% of them were belonged to nuclear/single families. Regarding number of siblings, 50% of children had one sibling and 13.3% of children had more than two siblings.

Majority (86.7%) of the children were living with both parents. Regarding parent child relationship, 48.3% of children had average relationship and 25% of them had poor relationship. Only 25% of the children good sibling relationship and 46.7% of the children had average relationship.

### Information pertaining to exposure to violence

All the samples (100%) had exposure to violence either in the family, school and community. Regarding family violence, about 80% of the children exposed to family violence like insulting, shouting, threatening, denying of love, slapping, kicking etc. Regarding the school violence 60% of the children had witnessed school violence like seeing someone attacked, slapped, punched etc. Regarding community violence, around 45% of them had exposure to violence like punched and chased by gangs.

### Level of Stress and Anxiety

On assessment of stress, majority (61.7%) of the children had moderate level of stress and only 25% percentage of children had low stress. Regarding anxiety, 53.3% of them had moderate level of anxiety and 38.3% percentage of children had low anxiety.

There was a statistically significant association between level of stress, anxiety and exposure to violence at 1% level of significance. There was no significant association between level of stress, anxiety and demographic variables of children.

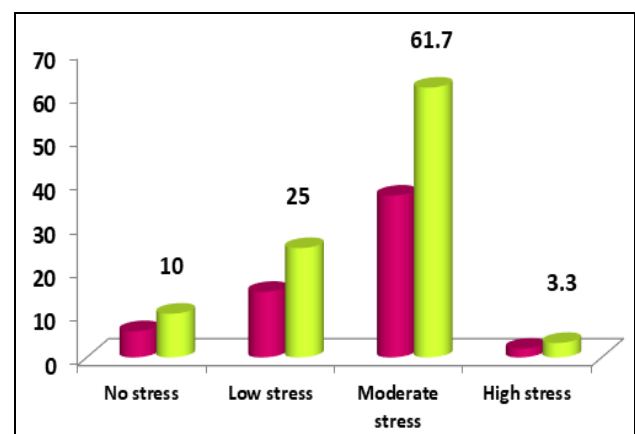


Fig 1: Frequency & Percentage distribution of level of stress

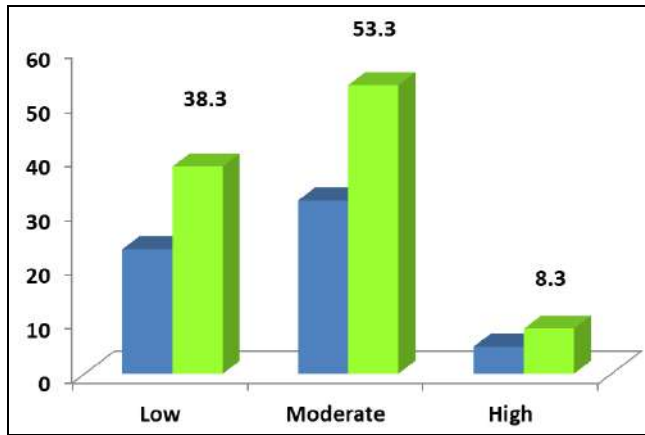


Fig 2: Frequency & Percentage distribution of level of anxiety

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess the prevalence and the impact of violence on children. The results obtained in this study are quite significant and demonstrates 100 percentages of children exposed from different forms of violence like physical, sexual and emotional violence in the family, school and community. Violence can be any form of abuse with intention to hurt 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 of children. Psychological violence includes verbal and emotional abuse: isolating, rejecting, ignoring, insults, spreading rumours, making up lies, name calling, ridicule, humiliation and threats, and psychological punishment. This results was on par with a previous study on prevalence of violence in children (Riberio, I.M. 2015) With the results, we can infer that the various forms of violence was high in the environment of school going children.

Indeed, the results also indicate that majority of the children exposed violence had moderate level of stress and anxiety. This finding clearly indicates that, exposure to violence has negative impacts on children. Affected children have difficulty in forming emotional attachments with others, and may react violently when held, cuddled, or comforted. It is established an increased risk of anxiety, depression, hyperactivity, and reduces frustration tolerance among children exposed to violence (Moran, K. 2017). The similar finding is supported by Ferrara, P. *et al.* (2019) in their study on impact of violence on children.

### Recommendation

Child health nurse and Criminologists are playing a vital role in protecting the children against violence. Awareness programme need to be conducted for school teachers, parents and children to reduce the violence and its impacts. The recommendations are,

- Anticipatory guidance to parents and school teachers about the impact of violence on development of children
- Positive parenting strategies to improve the quality of child rearing practices.
- Counseling the parents about developmentally appropriate means of disciplining the children
- Educate parents about the impacts of exposure to violence on children.

- Direct parents to limit and monitor their children's media usage
- Screening tool to identify children exposure to violence at early and to reduce the long term impacts.
- Measures to strengthen School Mental Health Service in order to enhance mental health of children.
- Behavioral and psychotherapy for children with psychological impacts

### Conclusion

Violence is a significant cause for the psychological and behavioural problems among children. The findings of the study clearly stated the association between violence exposure and the impact on stress and anxiety. All the samples in this study were exposed to violence in the family, school and the community. The study findings revealed that majority of the children had moderate level of stress and anxiety. Every child has the right to live free from violence. It is suggested that the interventions like positive parenting, counseling of parents regarding negative impact, screening the children for violence exposure in the school, strengthening school mental health service etc should be carried out to reduce violence in the family, school and the community. It can be effective in the prevention of anxiety, stress and depression among school children.

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