

Impact of School Violence on Health and Psychology of Adolescent Girls with Hearing Impairment

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Abstract

Violence occurred in the schools is perpetrated by teachers, peers, non-teaching members of the schools and senior school fellows. Persons with hearing impairment lacks in hearing due to problems in auditory pathway. It has increased the risk of school violence due to effects of limited hearing and inability to communicate. This qualitative research study was carried out with the objectives of exploring the influence of school ferocity on the health and psychology of the adolescent hearing impaired girls. The sample of present research comprised of hearing impaired girls getting education in the schools of Punjab from grade 8 to 10. A total number of 17 adolescent girls with hearing problems were taken from 7 schools of three populous cities of Punjab. All of the girls who were selected as participants had been experienced any type of school violence in school timings and having record of any physical or mental illness and who were willing to be the part of this research. Based on literature review, an interview protocol was formulated as tool of the study. It is used after validation through piloting to conduct the in-depth interviews from the victimized girls to get insight into their health and psychological problems. On the basis of interviews, it was found that headache, stretching of muscles, pain in different body parts, stomach problems, disturbance in menstrual cycle emerged as major health problems. Anxiety, depression, isolation and insomnia were major psychological problems reported by the victimized girls. The empowerment of adolescent girls with hearing impairment is recommended to uplift their life by raising their power of speech against school violence.

Keywords: *Psychology, health, school violence, adolescent girls with hearing impairment*

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Introduction

Violence against school going girls with disabilities is a serious problem affecting the health and wellbeing of youth all over the world (Masho, Zirkle, Wheeler, Sullivan, & Farrell, 2019). It has become public health, human rights and social problem due to its overwhelming effects and consequences (Devries et al., 2018). Girls with hearing impairment are at double risk of violence due to their impairment causing speech and communication problems. The frequent types of school based violence includes physical (mostly corporal punishment), psychological and sexual violence including bullying. Corporal punishment is a form of physical punishment in which students are forced to correct their misconduct or academic performance. It also causes some degree of pain or discomfort.

Psychological violence includes verbal and emotional abuse including separating, denying, disregarding, insulting, calling with bad names, mockery, mortification, and psychological punishment (Ferrara, Franceschini, Villani, & Corsello, 2019). Humiliating, disparaging, threatening, scaring or ridiculing students are common types of psychological punishment. Sexual violence includes sexual harassment, unwanted touching, sexual coercion and rape. Violence in schools produces insecurity, anxiety and fear which damage the overall school environment and impedes students' right to learn in a safe and sound environment. Violence in school premises hampers schools to fulfil their role as places conducive for learning and socialization pertaining to an unsafe environment. School bullying is mostly committed by peers and non-teaching staff. It generates more severe consequences if perpetrated by the teachers. The main features of school violence are physical, verbal, or psychological attacks or which are intended to bring anxiety, grief, or harm to the victim. An unequal system of influence (psychological or physical) with a more powerful child (or children) subjugating less powerful ones are common types of peer mediated violence (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). In Pakistani society, there is an agreement to work against any kind of violence on girls due to its pervasive impacts on the life of victims (Breunlin, Cimmarusti, Hetherington, & Kinsman, 2006). In particular, impact of violence on physical and psychological health of victimized girls with hearing impairment is evident in global researches too

Impact of the study

The research has addressed a prevalent phenomenon related to school aged girls with hearing impairment. No doubt, it is an unaddressed issue due to prevailing social and cultural setup in particular when the victim is a girl. The findings of this research will be helpful in bringing a change in the school life of affected girls. It will also have an impact on the health related aspects of their life by elaborating in-depth health and psychological problems of victimized girls with hearing impairment in post trauma period of later life. Finally, the parents of the girls with hearing impairment will be in

better position to work for protective and healthy life of their daughters with hearing impairment.

Objectives

The research was carried out to achieve the following objectives:

1. Understanding the nature of violence occurring in the schools of girls with hearing impairment (GWHI) in Punjab.
2. Getting insight into the effect of violence on the health and psychology of the GWHI.

Research Questions

The study intended to answer the following research questions.

Q.1: Are GWHI facing violence during school timings in the schools of Punjab?

Q.2: Does the school violence has an impact on health and psychological wellbeing of victimized with hearing impairment?

Q.3: Do the schools of GWHI have a system to control school based violence?

Methodology

We have adopted following methodology to conduct this study.

Procedure of the study

Qualitative research design was used to carry out this research (Creswell & Báez, 2020). Interpretive approach was used to gather meanings from the interviews of the respondents. Population and sample of the study

The population group for this research was comprised GWHI studying in the schools of Lahore, Faisalabad and Sialkot cities of Punjab in Grades 8 to Grade 10 and their respective head teachers.

The sample was selected from seven schools by applying purposive sampling technique. An informed consent was taken from all those girls who had experience any type of violence during school timings in last two years and who were willing to be part of the study and share their violence related experiences. Finally, 20 GWHI studying in class 8 to 10 selected as sample and express their lived experiences. A number of seven head teachers were also taken from these schools.

Instrumentation

Two different types of tools were constructed; a semi-structured interview schedule comprising 10 questions for the interview from school principals and an interview protocol was developed to collect data from the victimized girls with hearing impairment. Content validity of both tools were assessed by taking experts' opinion. Repeated readings and piloting was conducted to develop valid instruments.

Table. No.1: Semi-structured questionnaire for the interview of head teachers.

1. Can you please tell about the nature any type of incidents of violence in your school?

2. Are your teachers trained to deal hearing impaired girls in crisis?
3. Do you think experiencing violence impact the health and personality of victimized girls?
4. Do you visit the school in break times and communicate with the girls?
5. Do your school have any facility of psychological counselling for the victimized girls?
6. Is there any system of quick punishment for the culprits?
7. Have you ever provide girls training on personal safety to empower them?
8. Is there any system to check the movements of non-teaching and other staff in break times and other free times?
9. Do you provide victimized girls financial assistance to manage their post traumatic period?
10. Please inform us about if your school have any formal system to deal such incidents?

Data Collection Procedure

This research was carried out into two steps. In first step, we conducted 50 to 90 minutes in-depth interviews of the girls with hearing impairment. Besides having command on sign language, the services of an expert female sign language interpreter were also taken for the clarity of communication of victimized girls with hearing impairment. The female sign language interpreter was requested to take special care of confidentiality and anonymity which she agreed on. Prior to interviews, affinity was developed between the researchers and interviewee. In second phase of the data collection, principals of all those schools were interviewed through semi-structures interview schedule.

Data Analysis

The collected data were transcribed and analyzed by thematic analysis using interpretive approach. The in-depth interviews of the girls with hearing impairment were proof read and edited by the researchers. To identify the patterns and links from the interviews of the victimized girls, we have conducted repeated readings (Neuendorf & Kumar, 2015). The research studies on qualitative research have proven the content analysis as most suitable method to interpret the meanings and identify the patterns from the respondents' interviews (Müller, Schmiedel, Gorbacheva & Vom Brocke, 2016). Furthermore, all interviews were repeatedly read to ensure truthfulness of the respondents, views and experiences and identifying the latent meanings from their talk. (Creswell & Báez, 2020). Through the repeated reading by us, the interviews were completely coded, and a various codes related to the questions of the study emerged. On the basis of codes, five broader themes were generated; two themes based upon girls voices regarding psychological impacts of school violence and three themes were based on expressions of girls with hearing impairment about health problems experienced by them as consequence of school violence. The interviews taken from school principals were

interpreted and two broader themes appeared from the in-depth analysis of their interviews.

Results of the study

The themes generated on the basis of interviews taken from girls with hearing impairment have been presented in detail in this section along with chunks from their original voices.

Post-traumatic pains

Victimized girls with hearing impairment complained pains in different parts of body for a long time duration due to corporal punishment from the teachers or by hurting physically from the peers. Physical violence has been found a major reason of being sore.

Girl 1 of class 9 expressed this reality in sign language. Her views have been transcribed in the following words:

“My male school fellows often tried to enter the girls section during break times and tried to touch, push, kick and hit me, mostly in the absence of the teacher. It really hurts me and I remains painful for long period of time. In case of complaint, my class teacher usually asked to ignore such actions and take it casually.”

Second girl victim of school violence expressed her feelings as:

“Whenever my teachers exhibited anger/aggression or scolded me, it really gave me tension and I felt headache, stomachache, and muscles stretch. I remained lethargic for many days. It was really insulting to bear the anger of anybody in presence of class fellows.”

Third girl stated that:

“I couldn’t study due to this incident. I felt all the time nervous and anxious, sometimes I wanted to hit my head with wall due to pain.”

Almost all of the girls with hearing impairment complained post traumatic pain in different parts of the body.

Menstrual problems

Girls with hearing impairment studying in grade 9 and 10 expressed this problem after experiencing school violence. Pain in lower part of body and legs during menstrual cycle, irregular periods, and over bleeding were common problems narrated by the respondents.

Fourth girl of grade 10 expressed her feelings as:

The stress effect badly my health, being victim of abuse, all this disturbed my menstrual cycle. It disturbed my dates which used to make it a painful process. I remained lethargic and used to feel weakness during this period.”

It appears from the interviews of respondents that common health problems occurred after experiencing trauma of school violence.

Psychosomatic Problems

Psychosomatic problems refer to actual physical symptoms that result from or are influenced by the mind and emotions rather than a specific organic cause in the body (such as an injury or infection). These problems initiate from or are intensified by emotional stress or depression and manifest in the body as physical pain and other symptoms. Depression also affects the immune system and causes severe health issues. Second girl of grade 10 expressed her condition after experiencing sexual harassment in following words:

“I used to feel nausea and stomach pain mostly during school hours. My physical education teacher often harassed me during game period and I used to feel ill all the time. My doctors usually could not diagnose my problem and nobody could understand me.”

All girls expressed psychosomatic problems as major consequence of physical and sexual harassment. Complaints of stomach disturbance, irregular bowel routine and constipations were common condition expressed by the girls with hearing impairment.

Anxiety and Depression

Anxiety and depression are psychological problems which usually occur due to post traumatic stress (Fink, 2016).The respondents of this study expressed these two psychological problems as most frequent post traumatic psychological condition.

Girl 4 of grade 8 narrated it as:

“The physical abuse, slapping, and kicking give me mental stress, anxiety and depression...my school fellows used to make fun of me. I can understand their body language while they are mocking me on my body shape. It gave me anxiety and stress so much that I could not concentrate on my studies. It affected my studies badly.”

Another girl of Grade 9 expressed as:

“I remained in stress due to the hate and neglect of my teachers. It affected my health too as I was suffering from constipation. My school attendance also got affected due to emotional stress.”

Isolation

All the health conditions narrated in above mentioned themes lead towards the isolation or segregation of the GWHI. Girls who had experienced sexual harassment and violence in the school settings mostly appeared to be isolated from their peers.

Girl 11 of grade 10 narrated that:

“I used to feel so ashamed and insecure after the attempt of harassment made by my class fellow, I started staying in my classroom even during recess time. I did not like to play with my class and school fellows.”

Another girl from grade 8, a victim of school violence expressed that:

“All this painful situation led me towards loneliness and isolation. I did not feel comfortable with my school fellows. Sometimes, I thought to leave the school. It was safer to live alone instead of getting hurt from the others.”

Insomnia

Majority of the girls with hearing impairment (80%) complained of insomnia (a sleep disorder) after undergoing violence within school premises. A girl of grade 10, aged 20 years, narrated her feelings as:

“Since one of my class fellow chasing me after school timings and between break timings, it harass me which frightened me whole day and at night I cannot sleep properly. My sleep has totally disturbed due to that person. Sometimes, I see nightmares too, after which I cannot sleep.”

Other respondents also shared similar feelings about their sleep. A relationship between sleep disorders and school absenteeism also appeared from the talk of respondents.

Findings on the basis of semi structured interviews of the head teachers.

Two broader themes have emerged from the interviews conducted with the head teachers including formal system and empowerment.

Firm system of punishment

According to all head teachers all forms are existing in the schools, perhaps the phenomena can be controlled if there in a strict system of law and order leading towards the check and balance in all social institutions including the schools. We can control it through fast and firm system of punishment to the perpetrators by the school authority. One of the head teacher said as

Incidences of violence in the school premises is a shameful fact of our value oriented society.

I feel so bad for such incidence, I believe one of the central reason is that we have many weaknesses in our law and order system which effects all public institutions .There is a need to design a strict mechanism and instant system of punishment to control such phenomena.

Awareness and Empowerment.

The other theme appeared from the interviews of head teacher is empowerment. All head teachers have narrated that through awareness and empowerment of young ladies particulars teen agers, the phenomena of school based violence can be minimized.

One of the head teacher expressed her views in following words:

Girls with disabilities are at greater risk for the cases of school based violence. This phenomena not only needs a strict system of punishment rather it also requires empowerment of girls with disabilities including girls with hearing impairment. The lack in communication increase the chances of psychological and health problems many times greater than in hearing girls. To stop all this we will have to give awareness to our girls and empower them through trust and education.

She further added that

This needs to be done with the young ladies and with the girls who are in pubertal time period.

Discussion and Conclusion of the Study

The in-depth interviews of girls with hearing impairment has sensitized us on the most ,sensitive but unspeakable issue related to their school life which ultimately affects their psychological and physical health (UNESCO, 2020). The girls are experiencing verbal, physical (corporal punishment) and sexual harassment within school premises. These findings are in conformity with those of Leach and Humphreys (2007). The perpetrators are teachers, peers and non-teaching staff as mentioned by them in their interviews. All the victimized girls have expressed impact of violence on their health including reproductive health (Rose, Julia, Chen, Katherine, Roof, Sharon, Rachel, Kathryn & Yount, 2020). All the health problems which are mentioned by the respondents have impact on the future life of the victimized girls (Mncedisi & Maphalala, 2014).

Another impact of school violence as expressed by the victimized girl is psychological health. The school going girls have expressed school violence as major determinant of psychological problem. In addition to this, anxiety and stress have long lasting impact on their social life too. Collectively, all these conditions have an impact on the future lives of the victimized school girls with hearing impairment. These findings are in line with many international studies (Pontillo,, Tata, Averna, Demaria , Gargiullo, Guerrero, Pucciarini, Santonastaso, & Vicari, 2019).

The themes appeared from the head teachers interviews expressed the need to empower the young ladies through education, trust and awareness in addition to have a strict system of penalty for the culprits. The perpetrators should pay the price of such acts. .

While summing up this research, we want to share our thought as qualitative researchers regarding the existence of school based violence in general schools and also in the schools of GWHI, why we are still unable to control the phenomena and to dugout its roots completely?

Recommendations of the study

Keeping in view the in-depth interviews of the victimized girls and talk with head teachers we have certain recommendations to work out on the school based violence.

Firstly there is need to develop a system in the schools of hearing impaired girls to rehabilitate the victimized girls through medical and psychological counselling for their healthy future life. Furthermore, there is a need to empower the adolescent girls with hearing impairment so that they can take care of their personal security and safety.

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