

PEER REVIEW HISTORY

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ARTICLE DETAILS

TITLE (PROVISIONAL)	Witnessing intimate partner violence and child maltreatment in Ugandan children: A cross-sectional survey
AUTHORS	Devries, Karen; Knight, Louise; Child, Jennifer; Kyegombe, Nambusi; Hossain, Mazeda; Lees, Shelley; Watts, Charlotte; Naker, Dipak

VERSION 1 - REVIEW

REVIEWER	Gunilla Krantz Dept of Public Health and Community Medicine The Sahlgrenska Academy University of Gothenburg Sweden
REVIEW RETURNED	05-Aug-2016

GENERAL COMMENTS	<p>There is no section on Ethics, some of the analyses done and also variables used should be elaborated on. Conclusions need to be more focused on child abuse and how to prevent it. My detailed comments are given in the attached manuscript file</p> <p>The reviewer also provided a marked copy with additional comments. Please contact the publisher for full details.</p>
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REVIEWER	Simukai Shamu Foundation for Professional Development and School of Public Health, University of the Witwatersrand South Africa
REVIEW RETURNED	29-Aug-2016

GENERAL COMMENTS	<p>General comments</p> <p>This is a well written paper from a well conducted research on child maltreatment and witnessing violence. The research covered a large population covering many districts. The study has interesting findings and is a forerunner to many studies that will look at child maltreatment in African and other low income settings. It highlighted the common but less accurately documented problem in the African context. A few specific issues need to be attended to as follows.</p> <p>Specific comments</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Abstract: Include percentages in the results section where you said "nearly all of these children had also experienced violence themselves.....besides parents" 2. Abstract: It would be good to show the percentages of boys alone and girls alone in your findings in your last sentence in the results. 3. In your introduction you cited the WHO 2002 report that did not find any studies on the overlap between witnessing IPV and other
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	<p>forms of maltreatment. Over the last 10 years, there has been studies in the low and middle income countries where related issues are explored although not so much has been done. It would be good to indicate the limited literature that is available.</p> <p>4. In the procedures, I am sure you wanted to say children provided assent and not consent as consent is for adults and in your case you received consent from the parents through the opt out approach.</p> <p>5. Please describe what P5 P4 means for the benefit of readers who do not know the Ugandan educational system.</p> <p>6. You described that 77% provided data and 19% were absent but did not account for the remaining 4%. Please account for this if it is not an error in the calculations.</p> <p>7. What age was the youngest participant and the oldest participant? This information is missing as we are only told that there were children below the age of 10 and others over 15 years and all these combined make a significant population of probably over 20% and yet the paper says the paper is about the children between 11 and 14 years.</p> <p>8. It would be easy for the reader to know from the beginning the way you are describing the statistics eg when you say 2 to 3 times that you are referring to both girls and boys though separately. Wouldn't it be good to indicate what boys' statistics and girls statistics was rather than mixing the two?</p> <p>9. In table 1 can you include the frequencies together with the percentages?</p> <p>10. Under limitations on page 16, the sentence: "...but both more or less....perpetrators" is incomplete and unclear</p> <p>11. In the limitations can you also state the limitation of the exclusion criteria that excluded boarding students and also that 4% had missing data on the main variable and were excluded from the analysis. Boarding students could have made a difference since most of the statistical calculations you did were about the physical violence at school which the boarding school students were also exposed to although they had limited time periods of exposure to other violence at home due to them being at school during school terms.</p>
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VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Reviewer: 1

Reviewer Name: Gunilla Krantz

Institution and Country: Dept of Public Health and Community Medicine, The Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Competing Interests: None declared

There is no section on Ethics, some of the analyses done and also variables used should be elaborated on. Conclusions need to be more focused on child abuse and how to prevent it. My detailed comments are given in the attached manuscript file.

Thank you for your comments. We have added a statement on ethics under Procedures, in the Methods which describes consent procedures and how referrals for child abuse were handled. We have added: "The study had full ethical approvals from the LSHTM (6183) and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (SS2520)."

Other comments from the manuscript are responded to below:

Abstract

I think one sentence could be added to underscore the importance of raising the issue of child maltreatment/violence that should be stopped. Preventive activities is needed and this is a policy matter and parents must be made aware of the seriousness of this matter for the

We have added a line to the abstract, so the last sentence now reads: "Large numbers of children also experience maltreatment in homes with no partner violence, highlighting the need for interventions to prevent child maltreatment more broadly."

Methods:

Maybe this sentence could be further explained, it is not clear what is intended here.

We have reworded this sentence: "We examined overlap between witnessing parental IPV and violence exposure from both parents and perpetrators other than parents by fitting logistic regression models adjusted for a priori identified potential demographic confounders (Tables 3-4). Next, we examined factors associated with experience of violence also, and witnessing plus experience of violence, by fitting another set of logistic regression models (Tables 5-6)."

Results:

Does this mean 68% of boys and 68% of girls? If so, interesting it is the same size...maybe clarify this

We have reworded this sentence to make clear that the percentages are the same for boys and girls: "About 68% of boys and 68% of girls have experienced violence but not witnessed IPV, and only 5.6% of boys and 4.6% of girls report never witnessing IPV or experiencing violence."

Discussion:

This is a long sentence and not quite clear, please reword it and explain more about using violence towards their peers as this is hardly mentioned earlier. mark also in the tables what this variable actually is measuring (peer violence)

Thank you for highlighting this confusion. We do not measure peer violence separately; instead we use the word 'peer' to refer to the comparison group of children in the regression analysis. We have reworded this to shorten sentences and to improve clarity: "The adverse effects of witnessing and experiencing violence are large. Boys and girls who have witnessed and experienced violence have nearly 4 and 5 times the odds of having high levels of mental health difficulties, and nearly 6 and 8 times the odds of using violence, versus their boys and girls who have not experienced or witnessed violence."

Here are suggestions/speculations for explanations to why violence happens to children, but there is no mentioning of educational level or socio-economic status in the families that may explain why they use violence (stress-related, poverty, tradition in up-bringing, low awareness etc.) maybe this should be pointed at as well.

Thank you for highlighting this. We agree, and have added a sentence to the discussion: "Of course, there are also macro-level factors, including socio-economic context, poverty, and related stress, and cultural and social norms that will shape risk of violence and maltreatment at the level of the family, and the community—individual experiences and behaviours must be seen in the broader socio-economic and cultural context."

Any suggestions for interventions?

The following lines of text, after this comment, do highlight different intervention strategies already: "Programs which seek to address norms and attitudes about violence against children may change levels of violence[31], and programs which build safe, stable, nurturing and supportive relationships may assist children who have been maltreated or who otherwise have difficulties in achieving better

outcomes[32].”

Table 1.

OK as wife's violence towards her husband is uncommon, but it happens in Uganda...to some extent. Maybe give a comment to this.

We have added a sentence to the limitations, to make clear what we asked: “We asked only about witnessing physical IPV from male partners to female caregivers, which may have underestimated prevalence.”

Table 2.

Is there reason to believe that these figures are grossly underestimated? In my experience, children are exposed to violence from parents as part of the up-bringing process and we have unfortunately very much higher figures from Rwanda on 'Being beaten by a parent during childhood' (approx 65%) not published yet.

We have added a sentence to the limitations on this—because of how we asked questions, we may have underestimated prevalence: “We also asked about violence from parents and other perpetrators in less detail relative to violence from school staff (as the main objective of our study was to document violence from school staff). This may also have underestimated prevalence.”

Table 6.

Those who work during school-days are at risk of experiencing violence from both parents and other perpetrators - does this signal that it is the poorest children from the poorest families that are abused? If so, poverty plays a role and it would have been interesting to know if you have any socio-demographic/socio-economic information on the pupils?

To be able to suggest how to prevent this violence, family situation would be helpful, such as educational level, housing standard etc of the families/parents. Any such info available?

Thanks for this thoughtful comment. The data from our various socio-economic variables (listed in Table 6) is mixed—household crowding is related to violence, but number of meals eaten is not. Working outside of school is relatively normal in this context, but there is also increased risk associated with this. Taken together, we agree that poverty and associated stress is likely to play a role. Unfortunately, we don't have any further data on this, (or data from families which is linked to this baseline survey—the baseline survey is only of children). This would certainly be interesting to explore. We have added a line to the discussion to highlight the important role of context: “Of course, there are also macro-level factors, including socio-economic context, poverty, and related stress, and cultural and social norms that will shape risk of violence and maltreatment at the level of the family, and the community—individual experiences and behaviours must be seen in the broader socio-economic and cultural context.”

Reviewer: 2

Reviewer Name: Simukai Shamu

Institution and Country: Foundation for Professional Development and School of Public Health, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Competing Interests: None declared

General comments

This is a well written paper from a well conducted research on child maltreatment and witnessing violence. The research covered a large population covering many districts. The study has interesting findings and is a forerunner to many studies that will look at child maltreatment in African and other low income settings. It highlighted the common but less accurately documented problem in the African context. A few specific issues need to be attended to as follows.

Specific comments

1. Abstract: Include percentages in the results section where you said “nearly all of these children had also experienced violence themselves.....besides parents”

We have added these: “ Only 0.6% of boys and 1.6% of girls had witnessed IPV and not experienced violence. ”

2. Abstract: It would be good to show the percentages of boys alone and girls alone in your findings in your last sentence in the results.

In the abstract, the last part of the results is the odds of increase in different health outcomes with exposure to witnessing IPV—these are already presented separately by sex, so we have left as is.

3. In your introduction you cited the WHO 2002 report that did not find any studies on the overlap between witnessing IPV and other forms of maltreatment. Over the last 10 years, there has been studies in the low and middle income countries where related issues are explored although not so much has been done. It would be good to indicate the limited literature that is available.

At the time of writing, we were not aware of any studies to look specifically at the overlap between witnessing IPV and other forms of violence against children from outside high income settings. We are happy to hear about any existing studies we should cite, and would welcome suggestions on this. However to our knowledge, this remains the case.

4. In the procedures, I am sure you wanted to say children provided assent and not consent as consent is for adults and in your case you received consent from the parents through the opt out approach.

In our study, children themselves provided consent, although we did allow parents to opt them out (this occurred in very few cases). We received full ethical approvals for this approach from both the LSHTM and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology.

5. Please describe what P5 P4 means for the benefit of readers who do not know the Ugandan educational system.

Thanks for pointing this out, we have amended this section as follows: The sampled schools contain 79.7% of Primary 5, 6, and 7 students in Luwero (equivalent to Grades 5,6,7 in the US education system; in Uganda, students in upper primary are about age 11-14 on average).

6. You described that 77% provided data and 19% were absent but did not account for the remaining 4%. Please account for this if it is not an error in the calculations.

Thank you for pointing this out. We have added the following sentence to clarify: “The remaining 4% were entered on class lists in error, had a parent opt them out, refused or the reason for participation was not recorded.”

7. What age was the youngest participant and the oldest participant? This information is missing as we are only told that there were children below the age of 10 and others over 15 years and all these combined make a significant population of probably over 20% and yet the paper says the paper is about the children between 11 and 14 years.

The youngest participant was nine years old, and the oldest was 19 years old. Given that age is not a central focus of our analysis, we would prefer to leave the description of this variable as is. The vast majority of the sample is between the 11-14 year age range.

8. It would be easy for the reader to know from the beginning the way you are describing the statistics eg when you say 2 to 3 times that you are referring to both girls and boys though separately. Wouldn't

it be good to indicate what boys' statistics and girls statistics was rather than mixing the two?
 We have added a sentence to the analysis section in methods to clarify how we are discussing results for boys and girls: "When discussing results, we refer to 'students' or 'boys and girls' where findings are similar, and then present separate percentages and highlight where there are differences for boys and girls." We prefer to keep the discussion this way, to save space where results are similar for boys and girls.

9. In table 1 can you include the frequencies together with the percentages?
 Yes, these have been added—we think you meant Table 2, where characteristics of participants are summarised, so we have added frequencies here.

10. Under limitations on page 16, the sentence: "...but both more or less....perpetrators" is incomplete and unclear
 Thank you for pointing this out, we have re-arranged this sentence to improve clarity: "In our measure of lifetime physical violence exposure, we included only severe physical violence from school staff, but both more and less severe forms of physical violence from other perpetrators."

11. In the limitations can you also state the limitation of the exclusion criteria that excluded boarding students and also that 4% had missing data on the main variable and were excluded from the analysis. Boarding students could have made a difference since most of the statistical calculations you did were about the physical violence at school which the boarding school students were also exposed to although they had limited time periods of exposure to other violence at home due to them being at school during school terms.
 We view the exclusion of boarding students as a strength of the analysis. Since our main objective was to explore experiences of witnessing violence in the home environment, and how these relate to other violence exposures including at school, including a group of students who spends substantially less time at home could have produced biased estimates. However, our results should not be interpreted as generalizable to boarding students, and we have added a sentence to clarify this: "We excluded boarding students, as they may spend substantially less time at home and thus be less exposed to witnessing IPV, hence our results should not be interpreted as generalizable to this group." Similarly, the levels of missing data on the main variables in this study are very low, and in our view, is a strength of this study.

VERSION 2 – REVIEW

REVIEWER	Simukai Shamu Foundation for Professional Development and University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
REVIEW RETURNED	24-Oct-2016
GENERAL COMMENTS	The paper has been revised well and questions have been well attended to. I do not have further comments.