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THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN DEBRE MARKOS TOWN, ETHIOPIA

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Abstract

The focus of this paper was to assess the causes and consequences of family violence against children in Debre Markos town. The paper employed qualitative research approach. It employed case study research design. It used both secondary and primary sources of data. The data were gathered from secondary sources such books, journal articles, and report papers through document analysis. In addition, it employed unstructured interview to collect primary data from key informants. The key informants were selected through purposive sampling. There was an intensive family violence in Debre Markos town. There were various causes of family violence in Debre Town. The major causes of family violence in Debre Markos town were the weak enforcement of policies, backward traditions, poor socio-economic status, and dysfunctional family relationship. Family violence had many negative effects on children. Children faced cognitive and biological, social and economic, psychological, and physical problems due to family violence in Debre Markos town.

Keywords

Family, Children, Family Violence, Causes, Consequences, Debre Markos Town

1. Introduction

The UN Convention on Rights of Children points out that those biological parents, the members of the extended family, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child are considered as family. According to UN Convention Article 18, “parents have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern” (UN, 1989, p.5). In another side, the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity or African Union articulated that children are every human being below the age of 18 years (UN, 1989; UNICEF, 2006). Family violence is common in every socio-economic and cultural area. It negatively affects parent-child relationship. They tend to act dependent, moody, hostile and showing lower levels of social skills and self-control (Save the Children, 2011). Violence against children is not limited to one country or one region, but it is a worldwide problem (Lampinen & Kathy, 2010).

The family violence arises due to several factors. Children may be abused physically or psychologically. The characters of the family members also determine the relationship between children and parents. If either of the parents has got mental disorder, it may disturb the family as a whole or children in particular. Dysfunctional family relationships and poor parents may influence children to experience violence at home. Violence may be a combination of personal, familial, social, economic and cultural factors. Moreover, some children are exposed to several types of violence (Versian, 2011). The United Nations Secretary-General’s study on violence against children pointed out that children expressed their frustration at the modeling of violence by their parents. Children may learn violence from their parents. Family violence may be a factor for the intergenerational transmission problems (cited in Covell, 2006).

Physical aggression on the part of parents is known to be positively associated with how children regulate their emotions and adjust to social situations outside the home (Martin & Clements, 2002). If parents react to a child with anger and inconsistency, the child may experience behavior problems. On the other hand, parents who display warmth and consistency are more likely to have children who have fewer problems. Socio-economic status may also have an impact on patterns of aggression in children and adolescents. Aggressive behavior is associated with family socio-economic status. The impact of poverty on the family tends to increase parental hostility and child–parent conflict (Paternite, Loney, & Langhorne, cited in

Lampinen & Kathy, 2010). There is family violence against children in Debre Markos town. There are various factors for the presence of family violence. Children have been facing different problems due to family violence (Debre Markos town Women, Youth, and Children Affairs Office, 2014 & 2015). Hence, by considering the existing gap, the paper contributed in filling the literature gap. This paper tried to assess the causes and consequences of family violence against children in Debre Markos town.

2. The Characteristics of Family Violence in Debre Markos Town

Family is a group of two or more persons who have biological relations, or legal relations such as marriage and adoption. Family is typically used to describe the primary caregiver for a child. The parental role may be held by biological parents, guardians, stepparents, grandparents, foster parents, or other primary caregivers. Families are pursued through blood ties, marriage and intimate relationships such as parent, child, grandparent, grandchild, and adopted children (Finch and Mason, 1999). The nuclear family structure, i.e. family consists a husband and wife and their children, is essential for children and thereby provides the basis for the continuation of generation. The family provides shelter, nourishment, and protection for children (Berns, 2007).

Most child participants in the study pointed out that family violence is common in the town. However, the violence is not considered as violence by the parents rather they consider it as accustomed issue. According to Tariku Zeru, who is gender and children affairs expert at Debre Markos town Women, Children and Youths' Affairs Office, there are various kinds of family violence against children in Debre Markos town. Physical violence, neglect, child labor exploitation, and psychological violence are commons. The Debre Markos Town Women, and Children, Youths' Affairs Office sometimes conduct assessment on the sort of family violence and its impacts on children. Corporal punishment is high in Debre Markos town. It involves kicking, throwing, scratching, biting, pulling hair, and burning.

Most child participants pointed out those children in Debre Markos experience hitting, kicking, shaking, beating, bites, burns, strangulation, poisoning and suffocation by members of their family. However, the action is considered normal by some families, children and community. For instance, Abebe Habtamu is a grade four student in Ede-Tibeb primary school. He is ten years old. His biological mother died when he was six. He said that his parents particularly his step mother beats and insults him in different occasions. This exposed him to

physical and psychological problem. Once upon a time his leg was broken because of the physical punishment by his father. Meron Awoke is also a grade five student in Ede-Tibeb primary school. She is 12 years old. Her parents are poor. She is working in others home. The cost of her education is covered by her employers but she has no another incentive. She usually absent from class because there is work load at home. She said that she might be beaten by her employers if she fails to do what is ordered by her them. Her teacher, Bezawit Feleke said that Meron was clever student when she was grade two and three but now, her performance is decreasing. She usually absent from class and she does not follow classes attentively.

Bezawit Feleke and Zewdie Alemneh, who are teachers in Ede-Tibeb primary school, pointed out that there is no only physical violence but neglect and psychological violence prevails in the town. The children's physical and emotional needs may not be fulfilled due to poverty and social crisis. This causes psychological problem on children. Yilma Desalegn, who is monitoring Evaluation, Reporting and Learning Officer at Tesfa Social and Development Association, articulated that there are some children who are victims of family violence in Debre Markos town. Physical and psychological are the main types of violence in Debre Markos town as far as the Tesfa Social and Development Association's investigation. In addition, Tariku articulated that the intensity of family violence is high. Children are negatively affected by family violence in the town.

3. The Causes of Family Violence against Children in Debre Markos Town

Violence is likely to result from a combination of personal, familial, social, economic and cultural factors. Moreover, some children are exposed to several types of violence from multiple sources over many years (Bragg, 2003). There are different causes of family violence against children in Debre Markos town. The relationship between children and parents is affected by different factors. The factors might be low socio-economic status, lack of awareness, substance abuse, disability, age and so on (Debre Markos town Women, Children and Youths' Affairs Office, 2014 & 2015).

3.1. Dysfunctional Family Relationship

Dysfunctional family relationships and poor parent-child interactions lead children to experience violence at home. Strong parent and children relationships protects from internal and external shocks (Debre Markos town Women, Children and Youths' Affairs Office, 2014 &

2015). The existence of stress in the family could be hindrance for establishing good environment for the safe mental and physical development of children. Parents who are socially isolated may also contribute for the social isolation of children. Children learn most of the issues from family. Thus, children who grow up in the family with complex problems may face serious challenges in their future life (World Health Organization, 2002).

The nature of the family is a cause for the prevalence of family violence against children in Debre Markos town. The presence of mental disorders, substance abuse and divorce in family may be the cause for violence against children. Some parents are alcohol addicted. This causes neglect against children (Debre Markos town Women, Children and Youths' Affairs Office, 2014 & 2015). Bekele Kebede is a grade five student. He is twelve years old. His father Kebede is drunk. He does not bother about his family. He usually beats and insults his child and wife. This causes physical and psychological problems on Bekele. According to Save the Children, parents may not control their aggressive behavior. This leads for violence against children. Particularly, poor families do not have self-esteem and capacity to accommodate incidents related with children. The presence of stress is not always determined by the economic development of the countries. Like developing countries, parents in developed countries may face stress (Save the Children, 2011).

3.2. Poor Socio-Economic Status

Socio-economic status is another cause for the prevalent of family violence against children. Less educational status of family, less income level, absence of family planning, poverty, unemployment, social isolation and others may contribute for the presence of family of violence (Berk, 2003). Socio-economic status is one of the causes of family violence against children in Debre Markos town. Tariku and Migbaru Getasew (Lawyer or judge in Debre Markos town court) stated that socio-economic status has big impact on the parent-child relationships. Usually, children gain more treatment in educated and wealthy families than others in Debre Markos town. Different cases related with family violence come from less educated parents and the parents who have less source of income. In other words, poverty, unemployment, and low education cause family violence against children. In addition, Kifle Belay who is the program manager of the Organization for Social Services and Aids stated that parents or families who have less source of income usually use their children as means of income. In the poor families, children are forced to engage in income generating activities such as shoe shining, selling gums

and tissue, begging, daily labor, and others. Usually, the problem is serious in less educated families. Moreover, Wondeweson Tegegn is a father for Solomon. Solomon is a grade six student in Ede-Tibeb primary school and he is also shoe shine boy. He is twelve years old. Wondeweson is a daily laborer. He has no good source of income to lead his family. He said that children must help their parents. He forced his child Solomon to be shoe shine boy to increase the income of parents. Consequently, Solomon usually absent from school. According to Wondeweson, this is not violence against his child. His child (Solomon) is doing what is expected from him.

Mikias Abere, who is a student at Ede Tibeb Primary school, articulated that he is from poor family. He is a grade four student. He is ten years old. He is forced to do beyond his capacity to increase the income of the family. He collects fire wood from forest and sells it at the market and finally gives money for his parents. Similarly, Solomon Wondeweson, is a grade six student at Ede Tibebe School. He is twelve years old. He said that his parents are poor. They have no permanent job and their own house rather they are living in rented home. So, he must help his family to increase the income of the family. He has no enough time to study. This shows that poverty is a serious problem, which becomes cause for the existence of family violence against children at Debre Markos town.

3.3. Backward Traditions

In some communities, children with disabilities may be victim of cultural prejudice. This may lead for the presence of family violence against children. Children with disabilities may be considered as manifestation of bad luck, and sin. Disability may be also a cause for family violence against children (Save the Children, 2011). Moreover, in different communities, females are usually more vulnerable for family violence than males. Daughters are more likely to be severely neglected in societies where as in some societies sons are more likely to experience severe violence than daughters (ibid). As Tariku, Migbaru, Kifle, backward cultures are another factor for the presence of family violence against children in Debre Markos town. For instance, corporal punishment is usually considered as normal children disciplining practice. Most parents believe that they are the main and sole responsible bodies for their children. Thus, they can take different measures to discipline their children even that are dangerous for children. Biyazen Tefera who is the father of Almaze said that corporal punishment is the best mechanism to

discipline children. Children must do all things depending on the commands of their families because they are not able to easily identify what is good or bad.

According to Kifle, some parents are not interested in the intervention of government and non-government organizations in the family affairs even the situation of serious problems against children. Most parents perceive that taking any kind of measure against their children as their right. As Tariku, there is labor exploitation against children in the town. It is one of the violence committed against children. Most parents consider it as normal thing. When the parents are asked, they say that it is their right to use their children's labor force. Ennew and Pierre Plateau, (2005), articulated that violence against children may be culturally acceptable in different societies. Moreover, children may have low social status in the society due to the traditional cultures of the society. No attention may be given to the needs and ideas of the society (cited in Willow, 2010).

3.4. Weak Enforcement of Policies

The weak enforcement of policies can be also another cause for presence of family violence. Fuad Mussa and Yosef Balew, who are lecturers in sociology and psychology departments respectively, said that Ethiopia has adopted different conventions to protect children from violence. However, the absence of effective implementation of policies is the major problem. There are also gaps in the policies to address various issues associated with families and children. According to Tariku and Migbaru, the implementation of policies and protection of children need the involvement of different bodies. There is cooperation among police, court, Women, Children and Youth Affairs office, schools, NGOs, and so on to protect children. However, the cooperation is still weak and not well integrated though the presence of some improvements. In addition, there is also gap in the enforcement of laws and policies relating to access to family planning services, alcohol availability, disciplining mechanisms, access to birth, death and marriage registration. This problem has significant impact on vulnerability of children for violence. The absence of strong policies regarding different aspects of family-children relationship may leave children and families without economic and social security.

Weak legal and policy framework is another factor for the presence of family violence. The presence of strong laws and proper implementation of the laws are essential for protecting children from different violence. Many countries lack legal protection against harmful traditional practices and child marriage, and in some countries laws against child sexual abuse apply only to

men's sexual violence against girls or may not address sexual violence against children by family members (Fitzgerald, 2011). There should be strong laws and policies regarding the access to family planning services, alcohol availability, access to mental health and substance abuse treatment, and access to birth, death and marriage registration. The absence of them may have direct and indirect impact on the parent-child relationships. Policies regarding education, child care, parental leave, health care, unemployment and social security that leave children and families without economic and social safety nets exacerbate family stress and social isolation. It can contribute to higher rates of family violence against children (World Health Organization, 2002).

Authoritarianism behavior is also another cause for existence of family violence. In the community which provides low status for children, family violence against children is common. Corporal punishment against children may be considered as normal thing. Some parents may think that their ideas are absolutely right. A child who cannot be abided by their ideas will be subject to corporal punishment. Children are always expected to act in accordance with their parents. This should not be confused with authoritative parenting, which balances warmth and support with setting and enforcing clear limits on behavior, and blends setting high standards with being responsive to the child's needs and developing capacities (Berk, 2003).

4. The Consequences of Family Violence on Children in Debre Markos Town

Family violence does have various negative impacts on children. Children face different problems such as biological, neurological, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, psychological and so on problems. According to Tariku and Kifle, "family violence against children has physical, psychological, and emotional impacts. The violence that children experience in the context of home and family leads to lifelong consequences for their health and development." The impacts are observed in different children. The experts in Tesfa Social and Development Association, and Organization for Social Services and Aids articulated that children are affected by family violence intensively. There are physical and psychological impacts which restrain the development of children.

4.1. Physical Consequences

The consequences of violence to children are fatal and non-fatal injury. Parents may deliberately inflict pain on a child, whether for punishment or for some other reasons.

Physically punished children distance themselves from parents compared to children who are not physically punished (Save the Children, 2011). According to Tariku, Migbaru, experts in the NGOs, and child participants, physical violence against children particularly corporal punishment has serious impact on children. The most negative consequences of violence to children are fatal and non-fatal injury on their body. AL maze is a grade seven student. She is fifteen years old. She is victim of family violence. She is usually punished when she fails to do what is given by her parents. Because of the punishment her arm was broken and she did not gain an appropriate treatment.

Children are victimized by parents in place where they ought to feel safe. Loss of confidence and belief in the human beings closest to the child can instill feelings of fear, suspicion, uncertainty, and emotional isolation. He or she may never again feel safe or secure in the company of the parent or family member who perpetrated the violence. A non-attentive parent may withhold attention from a child who, in turn, escalates her attention-seeking behavior. The parent may then become annoyed by this behavior and react harshly toward the child. This response inadvertently reinforces the child's negative behavior to create an interlocking pattern of behavior between parent and child that can intensify and eventually result in abusive behavior by the parent aimed at stopping the child's attention-seeking behavior (Save the Children, 2011).

4.2. Psychological Consequences

Psychological consequences include feelings of rejection and abandonment, impaired attachment, trauma, fear, anxiety, insecurity and shattered self-esteem. Due to the family violence, children may cause emotional problems. Emotional problems which might be observed are nightmares, clinginess to parents, and fear of natural exploring beyond their immediate environment, the numbing of emotions, distractibility, intrusive thoughts, and feelings of not belonging. Kifle, Yilma, and Tariku pointed out that there are also various psychological impacts such as cognitive impairment and failure to thrive, feelings of rejection and abandonment, impaired attachment, trauma, fear, anxiety, insecurity and shattered self-esteem. Physically punished children may distance themselves from parents compared to children who are not physically punished.

Almaze said that because of the punishments and less treatment from her family, she is usually depressed, and worry about on what is happening in the family. Senayit is also a grade six student. She is twelve years old. She said that her parents are aggressive. They try to solve

every problem forcefully. There is often disagreement between her father and mother and between her parents and her. This undermines the interests of her. She has no self confidence and self-esteem. Children may face physiological reactions leading to inappropriate displays of emotion, difficulties with emotional control, and impulse control problems. They usually have less self-esteem compared to their peers and problems with making and keeping friends (Lampinen & Kathy, 2010).

4.3. Cognitive and Biological Consequences

Slower rate of information processing and decision making are the manifestations of cognitive problems. The prevalent of cognitive problem may not help children to process, organize and memorize information. Because of this impact, children may face overestimations of danger, over interpretations of ambiguous cues as aggression, a sense of preoccupied worry, and intrusive thoughts about the safety of oneself or of loved ones (Briere cited in Lampinen & Kathy, 2010). In Debre Markos town there is an intensive family violence against children. As a result, children faced cognitive problems. As Tariku and Yilma, many children are exposed for chronic memory problems and stress. This also restrains the mental and physical development of children.

According to Perry (2001), moderate stress can actually be helpful for children because it may allow for the development of healthy and successful responses to stress. However, an intense and chronic stress may result vulnerability to future stress; and deficits in the ability to tolerate stress. If a child is exposed to fear and violence for long period, his/her neurobiology will adapt to the chronic violence. The brain and body are activated less efficiently to interpret and respond to the environment.

4.4. Social and Economic Consequences

Socio-economic status is not only the cause for the family violence against children but it has also been considered as consequence of family violence. As Kifle, Yilma, Tariku, and Migbaru, when children are physically and psychologically hurt by the ill-treatment of family, the parents may directly cost for medical care and legal and social welfare services. It also costs the family and children which may include possible lasting injury or disability, psychological costs or other impacts on a victim's quality of life; the disruption or discontinuation of education; and productivity losses in the future life of the child.

As Yilma and Kifle, Tesfa Social and Development Association, and Organization for Social Services and Aids usually focus on children. They usually do an assessment on the parent-child relationship and on vulnerable children. There are a lot of children who are affected by the family violence. Usually, these NGOs intervene on the children and parents based on the findings of the assessments. Belay articulated that children are obliged to accomplish tasks incompatible with their age and negatively affect their normal development. Their families may force their children to serve the family as a whole in terms of their physical labor. Children may take responsibility in the family which cannot cope with (Belay, 2006).

Generally, these imply that family violence has psychological, social, economic and physical impacts on children. Aster Mintesnot, Miskir Sebisibe and Bereket Bedilu are street children. Aster and Miskir are fourteen years old whereas Bereket is thirteen years old. They said that they come in street because of family violence. They had no good relationship with their families. For instance, Aster had biological father and step mother. However, after the death of her biological father in October 2014, she came in street because she had no good relation with her step mother. According to them, they faced physical, psychological, and socio-economic impacts because of family violence.

5. Conclusion

Family is considered as a safe place for children. Similarly, family may be dangerous place for children. There is family violence which is committed against children. Children cannot defend themselves from violence because they are dependent on their family. Their needs and wants can be fulfilled only by the parents because they have no their source of income. As a result, children faced different problems. There is family violence against children in Debre Markos town. Children are exposed for different problems which are committed by their families. The causes of family in Debre Markos town are multiple.

The weak enforcement of policies backward traditions, poor socio-economic status, and dysfunctional family relationship are the major causes of family violence in Debre Markos town. Due to poverty and backward traditions, some parents consider their children as any property that can be used to increase the income of the family. They do also ignore the interests of children; and they do not meet needs of their children. Consequently, children faced many problems as a result of family violence in Debre Markos town. Cognitive, biological, social,

economic, psychological, and physical consequences are the major consequences which are inflicted on children. This restrains the development of children.

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Appendix

Table Number 1
Child Participants

No.	NAME OF CHILD PARTICIPANTS	INSTITUTION	POSITION	TIME AND PLACE OF INTERVIEW
1.	AbebeHabtamu	Ede TibebPimary School	Student	26 May 2015, Ede Tibeb Primary School
2.	AlmazeBiyazen	Ede Tibeb Primary School	Student	26 May 2015, Ede Tibeb Primary School
3.	Bekele Kebede	Ede Tibeb Primary School	Student	26 May 2015, Ede Tibeb Primary School
4.	Meron Awoke	Ede Tibeb Primary School	Student	26 May 2015, Ede Tibeb Primary School
5.	MikiasAbere	Ede Tibeb	Student	01 June 2015, Ede Tibeb

		Primary School		Primary School
6.	Senayit Belay	Ede Tibeb Primary School	Student	01 June 2015, Ede Tibeb Primary School
7.	Solomon Wondweson	Ede TibebPrimery School	Student	01 June 2015, Ede Tibeb Primary School
8.	Aster Mintesnot		Street Child	9 September 2015, Nigus Tekle Haimanot Square
9.	BereketBedilu		Street Child	9 September 2015, Nigus Tekle Haimanot Square
10.	MiskirSebsibe		Street Child	9 September 2015, Nigus Tekle Haimanot Square

Table Number 2

Key Informants

No.	NAME OF KEY INFORMANTS	INSTITUTION	POSITION	TIME AND PLACE OF INTERVIEW
1.	Tariku Zeru	Debre Markos town Women, Children and Youths' Affairs Office	Children and Gender Affairs Expert	02 April 2015, Debre Markos town Women, Children and Youths' Affairs Office
2.	Migbaru Getasew	Debre Markos town Court	Judge	03 April 2015, Debre Markos

				town court
3.	Yosef Balew	Debre Markos University	Lecturer	5 October 2015, Debre Markos University
4.	Fuad Mussa	Debre Markos University	Lecturer	28 September 2015, Debre Markos University
5.	Yilma Desalegn	Tesfa Social and Development Association	Monitoring Evaluation, Reporting and Learning Officer	17 July 2015, Tesfa Social and Development Association Office
6.	Kifle Belay	Organization for Social Services and Aids, Debre Markos branch	Program manager	26 June 2015, Organization for Social Services and Aids, Debre Markos branch Office
7.	Taye Yihun	Heath Development and Anti-Malaria Association	Project Officer	Health Development and Anti-Malaria Office
8.	Zewdie Alemneh	Ede Tibeb Primary School	Teacher	23 May 2015, Ede Tibeb Primary School
9.	Bezawit Feleke	Ede Tibeb Primary	Teacher	23 May 2015, Ede

		School		Tibeb Primary School
10.	Wondeweson Tegegn		Parent	30 June 2015, at home
11.	Biyazen Tefera		Parent	25 June 2015, at home

❖ The name of child participants and key informants is changed for the sake of privacy and confidentiality.