



Assessment of child abuse knowledge and its associated socio-demographic factors among primary school pupils in Mbeya

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Abstract

The study aims to assess the level of abuse knowledge and its associated socio-demographic factors among primary school pupils in Mbeya city. A cross-sectional study design involving 428 primary school pupils aged 9-12 years conducted in Mbeya city from May to June 2023 to assess the level of knowledge on child abuse and its associated socio-demographic factors. Quantitative data were collected using a standardized questionnaire adapted from Knowledge, Management and Personal Meaning (KMPM) assessment tool on violence and related behaviours developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and analysed using the Statistical Product for Service Solution computer Software version 25 (SPSS). Inferences were drawn at 95% confidence interval with a significant level of 5%. The findings indicate that only 39% of respondents possess adequate knowledge of child abuse. Furthermore, among all demographic factors, knowledge of child abuse was significantly associated with education level of the parents ($X^2 = 5.6957$, $p = 0.0123$), the age of the child ($X^2 = 8.7198$, $p = 0.034$), occupational of parents ($X^2 = 1.358$, $p = 0.007$), the class of the study ($X^2 = 7.651$, $p = 0.042$), and the number of training ($X^2 = 6.7889$, $P = 0.005$). Additionally, school identified as the key source of knowledge among primary school pupils in Mbeya city. The study findings depicted that study respondents have inadequate knowledge on child abuse and calls for the implementation of comprehensive abuse prevention programs in school settings and ensure pupils active participation and fostering a culture of protection.

Keywords: Socio-demographic, primary school pupils, behaviours developed

Introduction

Background Information of the Study

According to the World Health Organization (2020), 1 out of 2 children aged 2-17 years globally experiences some form of violence each year while a third quarter of students aged 11-15 years worldwide have been bullied by their peers, and 120 girls are estimated to have suffered some form of forced sexual contact before the age of 20 years. Additionally, the report by the United Republic of Tanzania National Survey of 2009 on Violence Against Children in Tanzania revealed that Violence Against Children is a serious problem. Nearly 3 in 10 girls and approximately 1 in 7 boys in Tanzania have experienced violence prior to the age of 18 in school settings (Haki Elimu, 2020) [5].

The government of Tanzania have taken several efforts to protect children rights including the implementation of the National Plan of Action to end Violence Against Children and Women, incorporating child protection and rights into school curriculum, implementing awareness campaigns and workshops for both teachers and students (Daniela Ligiero, 2019) [8]. Despite the efforts to protect children's rights and welfare there are increasing cases of child abuse all over the country as reported in many media channels and the Ministry of Community Development. For example, there are 11,499 child abuse cases in the year 2021 (www.jamii.go.tz/news).

The study conducted by (Austin *et al.*, 2021) indicated there is a child abuse knowledge gap among children who are the main target for protection despite various global interventions. Tanzania like many other countries faces various challenges in health and education policy related to child protection education (URT, 2018) [28] including lack of

integrated comprehensive child protection education into the education system, insufficient training of teachers in protection and abuse prevention, limited resources, cultural sensitivity, poor monitoring and evaluation, poor child-friendly schools and inclusivity. All these challenges may hinder proper implementation of child protection education in schools (WHO, 2020)

Mbeya is among the emerging cities with increasing trade and other economic activities bordered with other countries including Malawi and Zambia. It is among the leading regions with high cases of violence and child abuse (Settergren *et al.*, 2018) [19]. Therefore, there is a need for child-participatory protection interventions to reach all students, improve knowledge of self-protection strategies and eliminate child abuse among schoolchildren (Leeb *et al.*, 2018).

Despite the government efforts to incorporate child rights education into the school curriculum and ensure the availability of health and social welfare services for the protection of child abuse victims such as the formation of school clubs, provision of guidance, and counselling teachers, there is the increasing cases of violence and child abuse. Therefore, assessing the level of abuse knowledge will help to reveal the existing gaps and entail for further interventions to capacitate children with protective mechanisms and reduce risks of being abuse.

Research Objectives

To assess the level of knowledge on child abuse and its associated socio-demographic factors among primary school pupils at Mbeya city council.

Empirical Review

Recent studies globally indicate a concerning gap in children's awareness and understanding of child abuse and its prevention. Arockiaraj *et al.* (2021) in Chennai, India, discovered that although 65% of children were aware of child abuse, a mere 10% were knowledgeable about its signs and symptoms, with a vast majority lacking awareness of prevention strategies. Similarly, Jeslin *et al.* (2022) in South India found most elementary school children possessing only moderate or inadequate knowledge about child sexual abuse prevention. Buhori J's (2017) study in Dar Es Salaam highlighted limited knowledge among pupils about reporting points for child sexual abuse, suggesting a need for educational programs in schools. Jagdish *et al.* (2021) also identified a predominant moderate level of knowledge about child sexual abuse among schoolchildren, with none exhibiting adequate knowledge. Quille-mamani *et al.* (2023) in Tacna-Peru reported a higher prevalence of abuse among older children, linking it to education level.

In Eastern Ethiopia, Abera *et al.* (2021) found that nearly half of the female students experienced sexual abuse, with higher risks in non-traditional family settings. Maranga *et al.* (2020) in Kisumu County noted a gendered predisposition in sexual abuse occurrences. Solehati *et al.* (2022) [20] in West Java, Indonesia, highlighted the importance of teachers and parents in imparting knowledge on child sexual abuse prevention. Lu *et al.* (2022)'s systematic review underscored the effectiveness of school-based education programs in enhancing knowledge and protective behaviors against child sexual abuse, and Thompson *et al.* (2021) showed the positive impact of the "play it safe!" program on increasing abuse prevention knowledge and skills among elementary school students. Collectively, these studies call for comprehensive, child-focused interventions in abuse education and prevention.

Methodology

Study Design

In this research, a cross-sectional study design was meticulously chosen to provide a snapshot of child abuse knowledge among primary school pupils in Mbeya City. This study design enables the simultaneous collection of data from a diverse group of participants at a single point in time, allowing for the comprehensive assessment of child abuse knowledge within specific context of Mbeya city whereby quantitative method was employed to gather

numerical data regarding child abuse knowledge levels among primary school pupils. Structured questionnaires were administered to allow statistical analysis of the collected data, facilitating the identification of patterns, trends and association within the dataset.

Data Collection Methods and Tools

Data Collection Method

Data were collected by using researcher-administered questionnaires to assess the level, association of demographic factors and sources of child abuse knowledge among primary school children. Nine (9) research assistants were employed and trained by the researcher for 1 day on the ways of collecting data, distributing the questionnaire, maintaining confidentiality, controlling conflict of interest, and other important things before the data collection. Data collection took place within the school buildings.

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected using standardized structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions adapted from the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The questionnaires comprised with 3 parts, namely the demographic section which included parents and pupil's demographic information include. The second part designed to assess student's level of knowledge on child abuse by using 18knowledge-testing items. The knowledge questions range from the scale of 0 – 1 whereby, 0 score = not knowledgeable; 1= knowledgeable about child abuse. The third section investigated if participants received any training or information on child abuse and the sources of child abuse knowledge and information.

Results

The relationship between demographic factors and child abuse knowledge among primary school pupils in Mbeya City. (N=428).

Knowledge on child abuse were dichotomized to create two groups namely, those with adequate knowledge on child abuse and those with inadequate knowledge on child abuse. Knowledge on child abuse were significant associated with education level of the parents ($X^2 = 5.6957$, $p = 0.0123$), Age of a child ($X^2 = 8.719$, $p = 0.034$), Occupational of parents ($X^2 = 1.358$, $p = 0.007$), and class of the study ($X^2= 7.651$, $p = 0.042$), Number of training ($X^2=6.7889$, $P=0.005$).

Table 1: Chi square results showing social demographic factors and their association with abuse knowledge

Variable	Response	Knowledge Level		Chi square	P-value
		Adequate knowledge	Inadequate Knowledge		
Age of child	9—10	88(41.51%)	124(58.49%)	8.7198	0.034
	11—12	81(37.50%)	135(62.50%)		
sex of child	Male	86(39.45%)	132(60.55%)	0.012	0.987
	Female	83(39.52%)	127(60.48%)		
Level of education of parents	No education	6(46.15%)	7(53.85%)	5.6957	0.0123
	Primary education	47(36.72%)	81(63.28%)		
	Secondary education	67(46.85%)	76(53.15%)		
	College/Universities	49(34.03%)	95(65.97%)		
Occupational of parents	Unemployed	24(41.38%)	34(58.62%)	1.358	0.007
	self-employment	112(40.88%)	162(59.12%)		
	Employed	33(34.38%)	63(65.63%)		
Class level	3 and 4	87(41.43%)	123(58.57%)	7.6511	0.042
	5 and 6	82(37.61%)	136(62.39%)		
Living with parents	No	11(33.33%)	22(66.67%)	0.5655	0.452

	Yes	158(40%)	237(60%)		
Number of children	<=3	84(39.81%)	127(60.19%)	0.0183	0.892
	>3	85(39.17%)	132(60.83%)		
Number of training	No- training	9(26.47%)	25(73.53%)	6.7889	0.005
	One-training	49(35.51%)	89(64.49%)		
	Two to four training	31(37.35%)	52(62.76%)		
	More than four training	80(46.24%)	93(53.76%)		

Binary logistic regression showing the association between socio-demographic factors and child abuse knowledge among primary school pupil sin Mbeya city. (N=428).

After controlling other factors, the predictors which were statistically significant (p<0.05) were shown as follows (Table 5).

Parents with colleges/university level of education were two times more knowledgeable on child abuse than those without formal education (AOR=1.88, p=0.001,95%CI:

0.1868; 1.8618). Children aged 11 to 12 years old were twice knowledgeable on child abuse compared to those aged 9-10 years (AOR=1.67, p=0.030, 95%CI: 0.037; 9.95).

Furthermore, class five and six children were twice knowledgeable on child abuse compared to children whose class level was three and four (AOR=2.37, p=0.0421, 95%CI: 0.0037; 2.17).

Children who received more than four trainings were three times more knowledgeable on child abuse compared to those who did not receive any training (AOR=2.56, p=0.035, 95%CI: 1.123; 5.434).

Table 2: Binary logistic regression to show the association between abuse knowledge and socio-demographic factors

Variable	Response	COR 95%CI	P-values	AOR 95% CI	P-values
Level of education of the parents	No education	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
	Primary education	0.6769(0.2147, 2.1339)	0.505	0.6413(0.2018, 2.037)	0.451
	Secondary education	1.028(0.3293, 3.2121)	0.961	0.988(0.3150, 3.1034)	0.985
	College/Universities	1.6017(0.1917, 1.887)	0.012	1.88(0.1868, 1.8618)	0.001
Age	9-10	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
	11-12	1.09(0.5735, 1.2461)	0.032	1.67(0.037, 9.95)	0.030
Occupation	Unemployed	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
	Self-employment	0.9794(0.557, 1.7412)	0.944	1.034(0.550, 1.9471)	0.915
	Employed	0.7420(0.3792, 1.4518)	0.072	0.8189(0.3971, 1.6881)	0.589
Class level	3 and 4	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
	5 and 6	1.85(0.5783, 1.2564)	0.042	2.37(0.037, 2.217)	0.041
Number of training	No- training	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
	One-training	1.5293(0.6616, 3.5350)	0.32	1.676(0.765, 3.989)	0.454
	Two to four training	1.6557(0.6853, 4.001)	0.262	1.71(0.701, 4.121)	0.34
	More than four training	2.3894(1.054, 5.4167)	0.037	2.56(1.123, 5.434)	0.035

Various sources of child abuse knowledge among primary school pupils in Mbeya city.

Out of 428 respondents 371 (86.6%) reported to receive trainings or workshops on child abuse from school, 12 (2.8%) received from churches or mosques, 17 (3.9%).

374 (87.4%) of respondents demonstrated to have peers discussion on child abuse. In addition most of children had

more than four training on knowledge about child abuse 173(40.4%), while 83(19.4%) received two to four training, 138(32.2%) had received one training while 34(7.9%) had no training or workshop.

Various sources of child abuse knowledge among primary school pupils in Mbeya City (N=428).

Table 3: Shows sources of knowledge and information on child abuse among primary school pupils in Mbeya city

Variable	Frequency	Percent
School sources		
No	57	13.3
Yes	371	86.7
Church/Mosque sources		
No	416	97.2
Yes	12	2.8
Home sources		
No	411	96.0
Yes	17	3.9
Peer groups sources		
No	54	12.6
Yes	374	87.4
Workshop/training sources		
No	34	7.9
Yes	394	92.0

Conclusion

This study concludes that the level of knowledge on child abuse among primary school pupils in Mbeya City was inadequate. Age, class of study, occupation and education level of respondents' head of household plays a significant role in influencing child abuse knowledge among primary school pupils in Mbeya City. Schools are the main source of child abuse knowledge among primary school pupils in Mbeya City Council. Churches or mosques, home and other sources are the minor sources of child abuse knowledge among primary school pupils.

The study calls for appropriate and comprehensive education programs on child abuse into school system to capacitate adequate knowledge and information to all children and enable them to be safe from all forms of abuse.

Recommendations

To effectively prevent child abuse, a multi-faceted approach involving schools, parents, community organizations, governments, law enforcement, and children themselves is necessary.

Schools should integrate comprehensive abuse prevention programs into their curricula, offering training for teachers and age-appropriate lessons for students on personal safety, boundaries, and how to report abuse. They should also create a safe and supportive environment.

Parents and caregivers need to have open discussions with children about personal safety and attend educational workshops. They should reinforce these lessons at home and support school initiatives.

Community organizations and NGOs should collaborate with schools, providing resources and organizing workshops and awareness campaigns for the wider community.

Lastly, primary school pupils should actively engage in abuse prevention education, understand their rights and boundaries, and share their knowledge with peers, contributing to a culture of awareness and protection.

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