

Behavior Study of Children's Exposure to the Family Violence: Voices of Caregivers and Friends**doi: <https://doi.org/10.3126/skmj.v3i01.79297>****Deena Magar¹****Tika Bahadur Thakuri^{*2}****Abstract**

Children's Exposure to the family violence means child witnessing, hearing or being exposed to physical injuries, bruises or other indicators of violence. Family violence impact everyone who is exposed to it including the offenders, the victims and the children. This qualitative study expands common definitions of how children witness violence and its impacts on their behavioral changes through voices of 5 caregivers and 5 friends from the residential home located at Bhaktapur. In-depth interview and thematic analysis of narratives are used as data collection tools. Study focuses on incorporating case studies of children, systematic literature review and theories on the topic to explain the findings in more details and explore the research questions. The study has found that, children exposures to the family violence are impacted with fluctuating behaviors, adjustments and developments in life.

Keywords: Family, children, family violence, children witness, behavioral changes.

Introduction

Children need a home that is safe, secure, violence-free and with loving, protective parents above all else. Feeling of assurance and reliability make children comfortable to turn at their house as a haven of solace, support, and assistance when things outside of it go wrong. But many children don't feel safe and secure at home. Family violence at home affects hundreds

¹ Deena Magar has done her Master Degree in Social Work from Tribhuvan University and Guest Faculty Member of Department of Social Work, Tribhuvan University, Nepal. Email: magar.deena99@gmail.com

² * Mr. Thakuri is the corresponding author of this article and Lecturer at Central Department of Social Work, Tribhuvan University and Shahid Smarak College, Kirtipur, Kathmandu. Email: uchai@msw.edu.np; uchaiqsun@gmail.com

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of millions of children annually. Report of UNICEF, 2014 shows 12-14% of children worldwide are exposed to the family violence. In 2020 study of UNICEF has shown that one in four children are living with the mother who is the victim of intimate partner violence.

On the other hand, witnessing violence can have a significant and lasting impact on children's lives, as seen by the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), anxiety disorders, depression, behavioral issues and poor social and cognitive functioning (McCloskey & Litcher, 2003). Additionally, a number of studies shows that children who experience family violence are at an increased risk of experiencing violence as adults either as victims or as offenders (Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt & Kenny, 2003).

Child Maltreatment

In the context of a relationship involving responsibility, trust or power, child maltreatment includes all forms of physical and/or emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, careless treatment, and commercial or other forms of exploitation that actually or potentially endanger the child's health, survival, development, or dignity (Leung et al., 2008). According to Wolfe and Yuan (2001), there are four types of child maltreatment that are widely acknowledged: neglect, mental distress, sexual abuse, and physical abuse. According to Jack et al. (2006), family violence exposure has been identified as the fifth type of childhood maltreatment in Alberta.

Exposure to Family Violence:

Violence between parents, caregivers and other family members that takes place in the house is included in this category. This includes a youngster witnessing, hearing or being exposed to bodily injuries, bruises or other indicators of violence (Jack et al., 2006). However, Jack has helped to delimit the wider concept of exposure to family violence and specify study issue on the effect of witnessing the parental violence.

The above definition on exposure to family violence explains the violence that occurs in between family members, which directly or indirectly affect the children. In contrary to Jack (2006), definition of exposure of family violence, Joseph (2006) has defined family violence in a broad spectrum; everyone who is exposed to family violence is impacted, including the offenders, the victims, and the children who witness the violence. There is no denying that

family violence happens, that it is a global nuisance and that it impacts every individual regardless of race, gender and class (Joseph, Govender, Bhagwanjee, 2006).

Thus, the above definitions have stated that the exposure to family violence affect the children in different ways. It has clearly distinguished the family violence with respect to others. Similarly, it helped study to be more specific as it helped to define and outline the criteria in consideration of the family violence and its possible consequences. However, study discusses on how the children who are witnessed to the family violence get affected.

Witnessing Family Violence as a Child

It's simple to ignore the issues that arise for children who witness domestic violence. Even though it seems like children are doing well or that parents are doing their best to keep children out of violence circumstances. However, the effects of children witnessing the violent episodes have negative consequences (Pfouts, Schopler, & Henley Jr., 1982).

According to Mabanglo (2002) many children have never witnessed the actual act of violence, but they can describe traumatic events through hearing it. Similarly, Curran (2013) showed that children who had been exposed to family violence had far lower psychosocial outcomes than children who had not been exposed to any family violence. Here, both authors have explained the impact of witnessing family violence can vary for all individuals. Each person will experience family violence in a different way. Depending on the severity of the trauma, the effects of witnessing family violence on children can have a lasting effect on their development from the time of conception until adulthood.

Impact of Witnessing Family Violence on Child Development

Research indicates that the distress women suffers during her pregnancy can have an initial impact on the child's social and emotional development as well as their physical and physiological growth (Howell, Barnes, Miller, & Graham-Bermann, 2016). Similarly, research on children has attempted to document the effects, showing that negative behavioral and emotional outcomes are more common in children who felt a threat to their caregiver than in other forms of childhood stressors. They showed most prevalent symptoms such as hyper arousal, fearfulness and greater hostility toward peers.

Children frequently seek on their caretakers to provide their basic needs, like safety and self-regulation modeling. Studies reveal that a peril in one of those domains might influence the other's growth and development necessitates regular caregiving in a non-violent setting (Howell et al, 2016). Caregiver's relationship has been one of love, support, and nurturing but sadly, the impacts of family violence can break that tie and harm the relationship. This literature has helped study to identify what types of relationship coexist between care givers and children. Additionally, it has also helped to identify and understand about how and with whom the children build or worsen the relationship over different situation.

In addition study of chamberlain, 2001 has demonstrated that children exposed to family violence may experience a range of general behavioral, cognitive, and emotional consequences. These may include but are not limited to irritability, sleep issues, fear of being alone, aggression, anxiety, language development issues, poor concentration, antisocial behaviors, depression, eating difficulties, and withdrawal behavior. This review of Chamberlain helped in study to see whether the health problem on children occurs or not. Even if health problems are found, then it helped to assess whether identified health problems resemble with those found by Chamberlain.

Furthermore, children who encounter parental violence when they are preschool age frequently exhibit socially withdrawn characteristics, experience increased anxiety and become more afraid (Hornor, 2005). Unfortunately, witnessing family violence can impact children educational abilities. Similarly, in research of Peek-Aschamberlia, Maxwell, Stromquist, Whitten, Limbos & Merchant (2007) support the Horner Statement by proving that, in comparison to children whose parents did not report intimate relationship violence in the home, children whose parents reported partner violence fared 12.2 percentage worse on average.

Here, (Meltzer et al., 2009) convey contrast to the Horner and Peek perception stating that it differ in gender, how they reflect the behaviors. Further he explain, girls are more likely to exhibit internalized behaviors like worry and sadness, while boys who see familial violence are more likely to exhibit externalized behaviors like aggression or disobedience. For this study, support taken from three of scholar to collect information about behavior detained by

children exposure to family violence and assisted study to obtain data about externalizing and internalizing behaviors of the children from their early ages.

Theoretical Perspectives regarding Impact on Current and Future Relationships

Many parents find it difficult in parenting to maintain close relationships, which can be explained by the effects of family violence. The attachment styles and parenting of secure mothers in safe partnerships differ from those of non-secure mothers. i.e. higher the secure relationship better will be the attachment pattern and vice versa (Waldman-Levi et al., 2015). In this study it is highlighted that children with family violence exposure may increase lack of trust and make them isolated and rigid within themselves due to attachment problems in relationship.

Moreover, attachment theory argue that children should be protected by parents but the bond between parent-child get strained when parents are unable to defend themselves. In addition, study found that children who experience abusive or detached caregivers are likely to develop unfavorable reactions against them. Through this theory lens, we may better comprehend family violence and its effects on children's development because it helps us recognize the value of relationships, the importance of attachment, and the effects that insecure attachment can have on them.

Further, research of (Adams, 2007; Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2005; Payne & Triplett, 2009) show that boys who witness family violence may be more likely to commit acts of violence themselves whereas many female victims of family violence came from homes where they saw other women enduring violence against them. This study applied the social learning theory to explain, how boys learn to become abusers and girls learn about victimhood. Similarly, in 1961 using a doll named "Bobo," Albert Bandura conducted studies on children at the Stanford University Nursery School. The toddlers saw researchers acting aggressively toward the doll and when the children were left alone with it, they imitated the behavior and continued it toward other toys. Here, we can understand through lens of social learning theory how children model events and get influence from their environment. They play out socially in their world through their behavior from what they have learn witnessing family violence.

Additionally, study has shown the connection between the literatures in finding how children with family violence exposure had the tendency of making the target of violence. Further, Dutton (2000) argues that emotional attachment is traumatized by familial violence and that this affects the child's capacity for all aspects of life, especially in their interpersonal relationships. Similarly, (McKee & Payne, 2013) supported that, these attachment problems may contribute to envy and fear in their close relationships, which may intensify hostility and violence.

Thus, this study accomplished these theory and literature to strengthen and synthesize the information came out from the study so that other study also can prove that child exposure to violence invites many problems like behavioral changes, attachment problems and many other developmental problems. Being a child and witnessing violence won't be a rightfulness environment to child to learn the things and to maintain their future life and relationship in peacefulness is uncertainty.

The issue and Objectives

In 2003, during the family violence investigation in Canada, about 49% of the investigations were evidenced to be child (Jack, Munn, Cheng, & Macmillan, 2006). This statement has supported that the rate of exposure to family violence is more in children than that of other age group of people. In research of (Hughes, 2004), children with family violence have repeatedly found to marked different emotional and behavioral reactions to regain lost or secure relationships and are frequently reported to have disorganized attachments.

It is therefore considered as important issue to conduct the research on the behavioral study of children with family violence. In context of our country, unlike family violence and its exposure to children, there are number of publication in regard to the gender violence, sexual abuse and other social issues (O'Connor & Zeanah, 2003). However, the study look at behavior changes due to family violence. This study have more involved in the behavioral effects of exposure to family violence in their growth. Further, it has studies the behavior pattern towards their caregivers and friends over different situations to understand how and with whom children build or worsen the relationship.

Thus, this study can be significant in the behavioral analysis and explore the state of mind of children with family violence exposure. It highlights the importance of organizations working with children to design and develop various ways to deal with the changing behavior arising from family violence exposure. Similarly, psychiatric counselor also gets opportunities to look over these cases. Further, government or non- government organization can appeal for laws to upgrade to look over the family violence cases to protect the children.

Conceptual Framework

The main issue of research is the study of the behavior of children who have been exposed to the family violence. This qualitative research is based on narrative research approach which assist in developing in-depth understanding of participant's experiences. This study is based on both primary and secondary data, where primary data are collected from the in-depth interviews with key informants, case studies of children in residential home and observation analysis whereas secondary data are obtained from various journal articles, internet sources and books. Study consist selection of five caregivers and five friends who have spent more than 2 years with the children, who have witnessed and exposed to the family violence. This research study group is children who have witness family violence but they were not study participants. However, targeted participants were their caregiver and friends living in one of the residential home of Bhaktapur. Study data analysis and interpretation is done through transcribing all the recorded audio tape with thematic analysis. To strengthen and acknowledge the study findings various theories are adopted along with literature review. Study also follow ethical consideration to get consent of participants as well as to ensure safety of children identity.

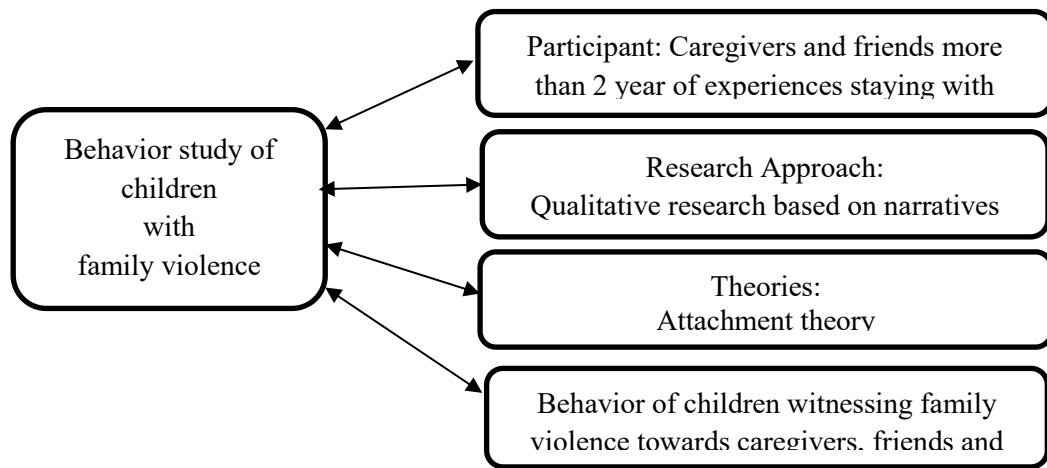


Figure 1: Summarizing Conceptual Framework

Behavior towards Caregivers

Aggressive reactions

It is found that all the targeted children have aggressive behavior towards their caregivers than children who didn't experience family violence. Children exposure to family violence more likely to have negative behavior and aggression without the valid reason to do so. Most of children have aggression behavior when the things don't go on their ways and denies rules and regulations to follow. All caregiver participants have experience of facing aggression behavior being encounter from those children such as shouting on caregivers, throwing utensils, slamming doors, not obeying rules and so on.

Withdrawal behaviors

In case of the children with exposure to the family violence, they have got higher rate and unexpected withdrawals. Out of four, two of the targeted children most often back out from the program, curricular activities, often organized by caregiver, escaping dinner & lunch along with caregiver, etc were the common withdrawal behavior found in study. It is also found that they withdrawal from attending the school making various health issues though medical report always comes normal. Caregiver also faces the behavior of unexpected

withdrawal from the children during the interaction, recreational program as well as from the daily activities routine.

Neglecting guidelines

Children with exposure to the family violence are found to be more neglecting towards the caregiver's instructions. Caregiver shares, despite their repetitive instruction and guidelines for health hygiene, diet, sleeping pattern, cooperation in groups still children don't obey them and create difficulties in stability of residential home. Children lost their personal accessories, clothes and even it's hard to take them for health check-up. Children who are expose to family violence tent to behave recklessly and have ignorance pattern of behavior towards their surroundings. Additionally, caregiver says, it might be their strategies to reduce their stress, depression, etc. arising from the exposure to family violence.

Lack of trust

Caregiver express, such violence exposed children mostly don't build the trust with caregiver and even parents. According to participants such lack of trust may be due to the effect of the witnessing the violence which often triggers them back and hence lacks the trust. Participant share their experiences that, children with family violence exposure is hard to understand and maintain the trust relation they wanted because if caregiver do not behave in a way children wanted then they mistrust and behave in a suspicious way.

Conflict in parent-child relationship

To the concern with the parent-child relationship, it is found that all the four targeted children barely communicate with their parents. It has also found that such communication gap have even fostered the aloofness and misunderstanding with their parents eventually leading towards conflict. Children want to escape from the family discussion from the caregiver as well as they show cold behavior towards caregiver if they discuss about the familial topics. Such action of the targeted children clearly implies the communication gap and hence leading to conflict not just with their parents even with the caregiver in the residential home.

Behavior towards Friends**Low self- esteem in group**

It is found that two out of four targeted children are seems to have low self-esteem. Participants articulates that maybe due to exposure to psychological and emotional abuse from family violence such children often exhibit their defeated self-esteem and fosters feeling of confusion, helplessness during the course of interaction. Curran (2013) also explained that, depending on the intensity of the trauma, witnessing family violence can have a lasting effect on a child's development that can begin as early as conception and last until adulthood.

Self-blame without own fault

Study found that, the violence witnessed children were evidenced to have self-blaming behavior. Those children have been found to blame themselves against any kind of unjust activities which is actually not committed by them. All the four targeted children show the behavior of suicidal thoughts, overly-pleasing behavior or extreme acting-out behavior. Taking blame on self and found to help amplify their existing exhaustion and pessimism eventually leading to the self-harm.

Trust with peers

Violence witnessed children generally found to build good magnitude of trust with their friends as compared with their parents and caregivers. They usually have a good communication, cooperative and helping attitude with friends than parents. However, such children do not build trust and make friends easily as much as normal children does.

Targets of violence in peer group

According to Albert (1977), social learning theory which also indicates that children with family violence learn from their environment and present themselves as predators or victims in front of their friends' circles. This study also found behavior pattern among children witnessing violence have high tendency of learning violence either as a victim or offender among their friends circles inside residential home as well as in the school.

Poor peer relationship

Study found that some violence witnessed children generally do not prefer to make many friends. It seems they usually prefer to be alone and introvert. They don't prefer to stay in groups and rarely share their feelings, problems with their friends. It is also evidence that due to lack of trust they doesn't makes friends often. Some of them does make friends and have good bonding however due to insecurity their relationship with friends doesn't last longer.

Impact on Behavioral Systems: Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors

Negative behaviors that are directed inward can be used to characterize internalizing tendencies. For example: anxiety, depression, fearfulness, social disengagement, and physical complaints. On the other hand, negative behaviors directed towards others are referred to as externalizing behaviors. Aggression, low self-esteem, bullying, vandalism, and issues with peer interactions are a few examples (Huang et al, 2015). According to Lawson (2001), it consistently shown that a child's behavioral functioning is significantly impacted by experiencing familial violence.

It discusses how the effects are “likely to produce long-term intergenerational cycles of abuse if not treated early (p. 508)”.

According to the information obtained from the participants, usually children who were raised in families where there was family violence were more likely to believe that using violence to resolve conflicts is acceptable. Almost all children were found to be impacted and which resulted in bringing different behavioral problem on them. The more exposure in early age took place the more traumatic situation bring the adjustment problem and bring fluctuation in behavior patterns. Such as either hyper or extreme passive responses. On the other hands, children who witness family violence may experience different effects and it varies from child to child. When it comes to school, some of them are able to thrive academically and see it as a place where they can control certain aspects of their day, while others struggle academically and find it hard to make friends.

Additionally, social learning and attachment theory supported study to analysis in more detail. Children behavior seems to be almost influenced by the frequent witnessing of the family violence where their parents are supposed to have the hyper aggression, neglects,

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silence, etc. with one another. As per the participant experience (caregiver, friends) some targeted children get troubled by previous events and also relate all the people and activities with what they have witnessed because of which it makes them difficult to make any kind of trust worthy relationship. Here, attachment theory provides a useful lens to understand comprehension of the significance of the attachment on the relationship and the long lasting impact that an insecure connection may have on it. For instance, impacts on the behavior of the children emotions and their perception towards the relationship and insecurity throughout their life.

Major Findings:

The sole finding of study comprise of the major behavioral identification seen within the targeted children. Study does not focus on the cause and consequences for the behavioral changes but it has shown it below in table, as it is related to research surface area and provide clarification of information about the scenario of the issue to the readers. Some of the major behavioral changes with respect to their cause are illustrated below in tabular form:

Targeted children (Pseudo Name)	Age	Causes	Behavioral Identified	Other ancillary problems
Sarita	16	Separation with parents	Prefer to be lonely, hyper aggression, lack of trusts, withdrawal	Insomnia, Depressive Behavior, parent child conflict
Romi	14	Death of mother, father got second married, misbehaved by step mother	Doesn't share anything (Introvert), lack of trusts, quick swing of mood	Insomnia, Nightmares, Showing no emotions
Sushma	15	Alcoholic father, death of mother and partial physical disability	Extreme panic & fear, back off nature, inability of cope issues	Low self-esteem, Poor communication skills, poor self-image

Sonu	16	Witness mother's death	Isolation, lack of trust, hyper aggression	Depression, Hallucination, suicidal thoughts, numbness
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Figure 2: Behavior study of children witnessing family violence

Conclusion

Family violence continues to be a problem among families. It has been increasing trend all over the world. Whether the country is developed or undeveloped, it is a worldwide issue that is unaffected by location, race, or social status. However, it is still a mostly taboo issue that few nations, neighborhoods, or families discuss in public but children are being equally suffering from the severe consequences of witnessing the family violence. It has created the long term behavioral and cognitive defect over the affected children. The research has concluded that the children who have witnessed the family violence exhibit more emotional and cognitive deformation than the physical effect. They occasionally tend to reflect their effect of violence in the form of their behavior. Hyper aggression, aloofness, depression, frequent swinging of mood, lack of confidence and self-esteem are the common behavioral and emotional features of those affected children. This study has found that, the children who witness the family violence often get troubled by the incident and get stuck into it. Similarly, such children also build the habit of relating any kind of activities or incidences with what they witnessed in the past. Such kind of habit has always tends to pull them back creating the obstacles for their right development.

It is therefore the intervention is must. This is just not the problem of affected children. It can be considered as an intangible social problem which one day can take a huge negative incarnation if we let go as it is. So, it should be addressed from all the aspect like family, schools, society and also the governmental and non-governmental organization. Even the number of research in this matter is very nominal. If we talk about our country, we can rarely find the news, articles, journals and even the research. This study have tried best to its knowledge and practice to explore about the behavioral problems of the children who

witness family violence. So, there are still many more things to be explored and conduct the research on the effect of the witnessing the family violence in order to minimize and eventually eliminate such chronic problem to safeguard children.

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