

Abstract

Violence among schooling adolescents has been identified as a global phenomenon which demonstrates a considerable cultural diversity and a relatively new research area for Sri Lanka and other South Asian countries. The few studies which have been conducted among small samples in selected areas in Sri Lanka signal that prevalence of violence among schooling adolescents is alarmingly high and needs to be addressed.

The objectives of this research were to determine prevalence, circumstances and consequences of peer violence and correlates of violence among schooling adolescents aged 13 to 15 years in Gampaha district. It was also aimed at assessing psycho-social environment of schools related to preventing violence among students and describing the conceptualization of violence and its prevention among teachers, parents and students.

The study comprised two components. First component was a cross-sectional study and the second, a qualitative study. The descriptive cross sectional study design was used to determine the prevalence of interpersonal violence, to describe types of interpersonal violence, its circumstances and consequences among 13-15 year old adolescent peers. A comparative cross sectional study design was used to identify correlates of violence. The study also assessed physical and psycho-social environment of schools for features that promote or prevent interpersonal violence. The qualitative inquiry was carried out to obtain an insight into the views of teachers, parents and students regarding underlying reasons for contributory and protective factors and their suggestions on mechanism of preventing interpersonal violence among schooling adolescent peers.

The cross sectional survey was carried out among a 1770 sample of schooling adolescents aged 13-15 years recruited using multi-stage cluster sampling with probability proportionate to the size of the 13-15 year old school children in government schools in district of Gampaha. A total of 88 clusters were included in study, and cluster size was twenty. Response rate for the study was 96%.

Prevalence of interpersonal violence was assessed in several ways. The prevalence of being an overall victim for any violent activity at least once within preceding six month was 85.1% (95% CI= 83.4-86.8%). This was significantly higher ($p<0.001$) than the prevalence of being an overall perpetrator (66.5%, 95% CI=64.3-68.7%). The prevalence of being an overall victim among males was 89.7% (95% CI=87.7-91.7%). It was significantly higher ($p<0.001$) than the corresponding prevalence among females (80.1%; 95% CI=77.4-82.8%). Similarly, prevalence of being a perpetrator was significantly higher ($p<0.001$) among male adolescents 75.3% (95% CI=72.5-78.1%) compared to females (56.9%, 95% CI=53.5-60.3 %).

Violence was also assessed by the nature of violent activities which was categorised as physical and relational. Prevalence of being a victim of physical violence (77.6 %, 95% CI=75.6-79.6%) was significantly higher ($p<0.001$) than being a perpetrator of physical violence (60.4%, 95% CI=58.1-62.7%). Prevalence of being a victim of physical violence among male adolescents (86.4%, 95% CI=84.1-88.7%) was significantly higher ($p<0.001$) than that of females (68.0%, 95% CI=64.8-71.2%). Prevalence of being a perpetrator of physical violence, was significantly higher ($p<0.001$) among male adolescents (71.9%, 95% CI=68.9-74.9%) compared to females (47.9%, 95% CI=44.5-51.3%).

With regard to relational violence, prevalence of being a victim was 70.4 % (95% CI=68.2-72.6%) and this prevalence was significantly higher ($p<0.001$) than of being a perpetrator of relational violence (50.9%, 48.5-53.3%). Prevalence of being a perpetrator of relational violence was significantly higher ($p<0.001$) among male adolescents (60.7%, 95% CI=57.5-63.9%) compared to females (40.3%, 95% CI=36.9-43.7%). However, with regard to being a victim to relational violence, there was no significant difference ($p=0.055$) between males (72.4%, 95% CI=69.5-75.3%) and females (68.1%, 95% CI=64.9-71.3%).

As an approach of examining the relationship of the perpetrator and victim, participants were assigned four participatory roles, pure perpetrator, pure victim, mixed perpetrator-victim and uninvolved. More than fifty percent of study sample (57.6%, 95% CI=55.3-59.9) was found to be mixed perpetrator-victim of physical violence in the present study. A significantly higher ($p<0.001$) percentage of male adolescents (69.2%, 95% CI= 66.2-72.2) were observed in the mixed perpetrator-victim group for physical violence compared to females (45.1%, 95% CI=41.7-48.5%). With regard to relational violence, 47.8% (95% CI=45.4-50.2%) adolescents were assigned to mixed perpetrator-victims of relational violence. Percentage of male adolescents in mixed perpetrator-victim group was higher than females (male=56.7%, 95% CI=53.4-60%, female=38.1%, 95% CI 34.8-41.4) ($p<0.001$).

As there were a large number of violent activities in the violence inventory used, it was decided to study them in a more meaningful way. Exploratory factor analysis was carried out to achieve this objective. The analysis classified violence under three factors or categories. On perusal of the different items that came under different three domains showed that the items were related to the degree of severity. With regard to victimization, prevalence of mild violence, severe physical violence and severe relational violence was 84.9% (95% CI=83.2-86.6), 28.6% (95% CI=26.4-30.7) and 24.2% (95% CI=22.1-26.2%) respectively. Prevalence of being victims to mild violence and severe physical was significantly higher ($p<0.001$) among males compared to females. However, prevalence of 'severe relational violence victimization did not showed a significant sex difference.

Similarly, prevalence of being a perpetrator of mild violence, severe physical violence and severe relational violence was 65.7% (95% CI=63.4-67.9%), 14.9% (95% CI=13.2-16.6%) and 26.3% (95% CI=24.2-28.4%), respectively. Male and female difference of all three categories of violence was found to be significant with more males being perpetrated. Furthermore, prevalence of 'severe physical violence victimization' (28.6%, 95% CI=26.5-30.8%) was higher compared to 'severe physical violence perpetration' (14.9%, 95% CI=13.2-16.6%). The 'severe relational violence victimization' (24.2%, 95% CI=22.2-26.2%) was lower compared to that of 'severe relational violence perpetration' (26.3%, 95% CI=24.2-28.4%).

The most common time that adolescents have been victimized to physical violence (79.1%) and relational violence (81.6%) was during time slots with no school work which are designated as 'free periods'. This was also the most common time of perpetration of physical violence (79.7%) and relational violence (85.7%). Other timings reported were during school interval, after school hours and during lessons. A large majority of victims of physical violence (83.0 %) and relational violence (89.4 %) identified the class room as the most common place of experiencing violence school. Similarly a large majority of perpetrators of physical violence (83.6 %) and relational violence (87.3%) also reported 'the class room' as most common time for them to commit violence.

A large majority of both victims and perpetrators of physical violence (victim=84.5 %, perpetrators=80.5%) and relational violence (victim=88.2 %, perpetrators=80.8%) identified their perpetrator or victim as a peer of same age or grade.

The consequences of physical violence, a larger majority (64.4%) of victims of physical violence were reported as an injury. Most common types of injuries as reported by victims were abrasion or superficial removal of skin (74.8%) and bruises (37.6%). More severe forms of injuries such as cut injuries (7.8%), laceration or deeper removal of skin (5.9%), injury to eye (2.1%), burns (1.4%) and fractures or breaking bones (1.3%) were reported less commonly. The upper limbs (69.1%) were the most commonly injured part of the body while lower limbs (35.6%), and head and face (18.8%) were next commonly injured parts of the body as reported in the present study.

Only 47.9% of victims of physical violence and 45.4% of victims of relational violence reported the incident to the school authority

Multivariate logistic regression analysis revealed correlates of interpersonal concurred with the different levels described in the accepted conceptual frameworks for interpersonal violence. Age of 13 completed years, being a male, presence of symptoms of mental health problems, ever been engaged in love affair, poor school attendance, witnessing physical fights among neighbours and occurrence of crimes in the area of residence were significant correlates of both

physical and relational violence. Correlates which were significant only for physical violence were, age of 14 completed years, mother in foreign employment, poor socialization of adolescents by parents or guardians during a usual school day, alcohol intake by parents or guardians, having aggressive friends, watching three or more movies per week during school term and preference for action movies. Low self-esteem, poor school performances, perceived low level of family support, corporal punishments by parents and using internet for more than two hour during school day were found to be significant correlates of relational violence only.

Ministry of education has not drawn up policy for prevention of violence among schooling adolescents. Schools had paid minimal attention for prevention of violence in schools through modifying the physical and psycho social environments of the schools. Parental involvement in policy formulation was minimal. Though there was evidence of acceptance of services of primary health care team, their services have not been utilized for violence prevention programmes.

It is concluded that violence among 13-15 year schooling adolescent is a complex phenomenon with many types, categories and with different roles. Violence should be addressed urgently both at national policy level and should also be included in syllabus of teacher training programmes. School based preventive programmes need to be carried out with the contribution of primary health care staff. Awareness should be created among community and general public on correlates of interpersonal violence among schooling adolescents.

Key words: adolescents, Interpersonal violence, peer violence, school violence, correlateds of violence