

ABSTRACT

School violence is a precursor of youth violence and is claimed to be commoner than it appears. The burden, mechanism and associations of school violence have not been well studied in this region including Sri Lanka. The nature of violence may be context specific and it necessitates the adaptation of strategic intentions to be based on local evidence.

This study aimed to assess the prevalence, characteristics, and associated factors of violence among grade ten school children in Kesbewa educational division. A cross sectional sample of 246 school adolescents from grades 10 were asked to answer a self administered questionnaire. The questionnaire covered the presence of different violent acts during the past 6 months preceding the survey, characteristics of these acts and the potential risk factors.

The most common physical violent behaviours were stealing (51%), physical assault without using any object or instrument (33%) and physical assault by using an object or an instrument (24%). The commonest psychological violent behaviours were spreading secrets (41%), spreading rumours (40%) and tattletale (40%).

Most of the time students were victimized by a group of boys. When the perpetrator was a female it was mainly by a single female rather than a group of females. The perpetrators were from the same class or same grade and the incidents took place mainly during interval or free periods in the classroom. Majority of the victims did not complain regarding the incident to the authority, but they informed a friend. However, most of the students claimed that the violent incident had no major effect on them.

Assessments of the participatory roles of the violent behaviours showed that majority of the students were uninvolved in any type of violent behaviours. However there were 9% of pure aggressors in physical violence and 5% of pure aggressors in psychological violence. In physical violence there were 12% pure victims and 4% mixed aggressor victims while in psychological violence there were 9% pure victims and 5% mixed aggressor victims.

Different types of violence (Physical aggression, Psychological aggression, Physical victimization, and Psychological victimization) displayed different risk profiles. The risk profile of physical aggression included being a male, having attention deficit, impulsivity and hyperactivity, poor behavioral control, having anti social behavior, having peer problems, abusing substances, currently experiencing maternal deprivation, association with delinquent peers, and perceiving ones educational achievements as unsatisfactory.

Psychological aggression also included having attention deficit, impulsivity and hyperactivity, poor behavioral control, association with delinquent peers, having peer problems, and perceiving ones educational achievements as unsatisfactory in the risk profile. In addition having emotional problems, either mother or father exercising authoritative or permissive parenting styles, harsh and inconsistent disciplinary practices also increased the risk of psychological aggression.

The risk of being a physical victim was increased by being male, having attention deficit, impulsivity and hyperactivity, abusing substance, fathers using authoritarian or permissive parenting styles and parents using harsh disciplinary actions, fathers substance abuse, association with delinquent peers and living in socially disorganized neighborhood.

Similarly, having attention deficit, impulsivity and hyperactivity, fathers using authoritarian or permissive parenting styles, harsh or inconsistent disciplinary practices, association with delinquent peers, and living in socially disorganized neighborhoods increased the risk of being a psychological victim. In addition exposure to domestic violence, not being happy at home and perceiving ones educational achievements as unsatisfactory were also included in the risk profile of psychological victim.

Intervention programmes designed to prevent or promote behaviours that generally address the above risk profiles (mental health, parent and peer related) would highly benefit the school population. Further research targeting different ethnicities, religions and age groups would be beneficial to further understand the extent of the problem.