

ABSTRACT

Introduction - Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a serious social problem through out the world. It cuts across all social boundaries. In Sri Lanka too IPV is a social problem for which there is growing public awareness. Most of the Sri Lankan studies are on the prevalence of IPV and on affected women. The studies conducted in other countries show that children who are exposed to IPV experience serious effects with regard to their health, safety, behaviour, emotional and social development and educational performance. Children who are the indirect victims of IPV have never studied in Sri Lanka.

Objectives - The present study aimed to determine the influence of IPV on behaviour, psychological status and school performance of children.

Methods - Cross sectional analytical study design was used to achieve the objectives. The exposure (IPV) was assessed in mothers and the outcome was assessed in children.

Sample consisted of 828 Sinhalese speaking school children of 14-17 years of age and their mothers who were residing in the Chilaw MOH area of the Puttlam district. Children were selected using simple random sampling technique.

Behaviour and psychological status was assessed using the self version of SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) and average marks for the term tests and school attendance were extracted from school registers (outcome variables).

Mothers were screened for IPV using Modified AAQ developed and validated in Sri Lanka. It was a self administered questionnaire which screened for ever and current physical abuse and current sexual abuse (exposure variable). Apart from the above, factors related to exposure and outcome were also assessed using the questionnaire (QFEO)

Data were analyzed using SPSS 10 software package. Univariate as well as multivariate analysis were performed

Results - The prevalence of abnormal behaviour and psychological status among the children was 21.0%. The commonest domain was hyperactivity and the least frequent domain was conduct problems. The school attendance was more than 80% in 66.3% of children and nearly 80% of children have obtained average marks of more than 40%.

The percentage of ever IPV was 31.2% while that of current IPV was 21.0%. The percentage of current sexual abuse was 4.3%.

The prevalence of abnormal behaviour and psychological status among the children exposed to IPV was 36.2% while that of non exposed children was 16.9%. The proportion of children who obtained <40% of average term marks among the children exposed to IPV was 48.6% while that of non exposed children was 12.2%. The proportion of children who had <80% of school attendance among the children exposed to IPV was 66.1% while that of non exposed children was 24.6%.

A significant association was observed between current IPV and abnormal behaviour and psychological status of children (OR=2.8; 95% CI: 1.9-4.2), obtaining <40% average term marks (OR=6.8; 95% CI: 4.6-9.9) and a school attendance of <80% (OR=5.9; 95% CI: 4.1-8.5). In the multivariate analysis OR for IPV and abnormal behaviour and psychological status was 2.1(95%CI: 1.3-3.2), for average marks OR was 2.8 (95%CI: 1.8-4.4) and for school attendance OR was 3.8(95%CI :2.5-5.9)

Abnormal behaviour and psychology of children were also identified as risk factors for average term marks of <40% (OR=2.6; 95%CI: 1.8 -3.8) and school attendance of < 80% (OR=1.8; 95% CI: 1.3 - 2.6).

For abnormal behaviour and psychological status, current IPV, regular consumption of alcohol by the father, past and family history of psychological illness, punishment by the father for misbehaviours and smoking by the father were risk factors in the univariate analysis. Only family history of psychiatric illness ,a monthly income of less than Rs. 5000/= and current IPV and regular consumption of alcohol by the father remained significant after controlling for confounding using multivariate analysis.

For obtaining < 40% of average term marks, current IPV, regular consumption of alcohol by the father, punishment by the father for misbehaviours, maternal educational level, paternal educational level, social class, monthly income, standard living index were risk factors in the univariate analysis. Only current IPV, social class and study time remained significant after controlling for confounding using multivariate analysis.

For a school attendance of <80%, current IPV, regular consumption of alcohol by the father, punishment by the father for misbehaviours, maternal educational level, paternal educational level, social class, monthly income, standard living index and alcohol consumption by the father were risk factors in the univariate analysis. Only paternal educational level, social class, paternal punishment to misbehaviour and current IPV remained significant after controlling for confounding using multivariate analysis.

Conclusions – Current IPV was a risk factor for abnormal behaviour and psychological status of children and for poor school performance in terms of obtaining < 40 % of average term marks and a school attendance of <80%.

Recommendations - the influence of IPV on behaviour, psychological status and school performance can be used for advocacy of parents to stop IPV.