

THE SWAY OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON MOTHERS AND ITS SILENT VICTIMS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Dr. TAHIRA PARVEEN

Department of Applied Psychology, Riphah International University Gulberg Green Campus, Islamabad.
Email: tahira.parveen@riphah.edu.pk

Dr. ZAQIA BANO

Department of Clinical Psychology, NUMS, PWD Campus, Pakistan. National University of Medical Sciences PWD Campus, Pakistan.
Email: zakia.bano@numspak.edu.pk

Dr. MUEEN ABID *

Department of Clinical Psychology, NUMS, PWD Campus, Pakistan. National University of Medical Sciences PWD Campus, Pakistan.
*Corresponding Author Email: Mueen.abid.uog@gmail.com

Abstract

Objective: To explore the impact of domestic violence on the development of anxiety among mothers and their adolescent children. **Material and Methods:** A cross-sectional research design and purposive sampling technique were used. The study was conducted from July 2021 to March 2022. Data was collected from the three Districts, District Gujrat, District Sargodha, and District Khushab, Central Punjab Pakistan. Data was collected from 1280 participants, mothers with experience of domestic violence n=320, mothers without experience of domestic violence n=320, adolescents who witness domestic violence on mothers n= 320, and adolescents who did not witness domestic violence on mothers n= 320, were included in the study. For the data collection, emotional distress scale for adult version and adolescent version were used. **Results:** Domestic violence has a significant predictive relationship with anxiety among mothers [$R^2=.420$; $F(1, 318) = 229.940, p<.01$] and mothers who experience domestic violence scored higher on anxiety as compare to those mothers who did not experience domestic violence. Witnessing domestic violence on mothers also has a significant predictive relationship with anxiety among adolescent children [$R^2=.113$; $F(1, 318) = 40.432, p<.01$], adolescents who witness domestic violence against mothers scored higher on the anxiety as compared to adolescents who did not witness domestic violence against mothers. **Conclusion:** It is concluded that domestic violence has strong influence on the development of anxiety among mothers and their adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescents, Mothers, Domestic VIOLENCE, Anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

In our society family is considered the most critical institution, and the internal dynamics of the family influence the child's development in both positive and negative ways.¹ It is considered that, in modern society only socially disadvantaged families show domestic violence. Nevertheless, it is proven that domestic violence exists in all sectors of society regardless of social, cultural, economic, religious, and legal aspects.¹ In domestic violence husbands deal with their wives in a discourteous way, insult them and use verbal and emotional aggression and do different types of violence on their wives.² Both partners can do violence to each other regardless of sex or gender. Although, husbands are

equally prone to violence as wives and commonly experience verbal violence, whereas the violence is comparatively high among wives.³ When wives or mothers constantly experience traumatic events and maltreatment in a romantic relationship, husbands ignored them and their basic needs which creates anxiousness. Further, they felt excessive fear of being victimized and they remain anxious about threats, control over money, actions, and emotions. Additionally, the long-term abusive relationship becomes worsens over time and has severe effects on the mother's health including physical and emotional damage.⁴ Domestic violence lead to hopelessness, emotional pain, and decrease in personal care, withdrawal, agitation, and anxious feeling. However, when such feelings become intense in nature and persistent, shake the abilities to perform daily activities and appear in the form of anxious behavior.⁵ Anxiety is the anticipation of future threats that share the symptoms of excessive fear like a reaction to perceived or real forthcoming threats. The level of anxiety can be increased when it shares cognitive symptoms such as excessive worry, panic states, fear without reason, behavioral symptoms like escape behaviors, and physiological symptoms like tachycardia, dry mouth, breathing difficulties and shaking hands.⁶ Moreover, Domestic violence affects not only the health of mothers, but also hurts all the members of the family, especially children and adolescents who witness domestic violence on their mothers at the home atmosphere.⁷ Although, children who witness domestic violence are not primary victims but they are silent victims of domestic violence.⁸ Moreover, The adolescence era is a critical developmental period, in this period of life the conflicts between parents had a great influence on adolescents' development. Likewise, distressed mothers are unable to take care properly their adolescents and mostly ignore them. In this developmental phase, the internal dynamics of the family have positive and negative effects on adolescents and domestic violence has the most deadly consequences for them.⁹ Similarly, when adolescents witness domestic violence, a fearful home environment, and intense situations, they felt distressed, insecure, terror, trembling, inadequate control over worrying thoughts, and inordinate focus on negative stimuli which cause disturbance and affect their lives.¹⁰ Moreover, aversive events and witnessing domestic violence exhibit the symptoms of fear and anxiety which include restlessness, rapid heartbeat, irritability, and difficulty in concentration.¹¹ Furthermore, anxiety interrupts cognition and memory of adolescents. The symptoms of anxiety aggravated among adolescent children who witness domestic violence as compared to those adolescents who do not witness domestic violence.¹²

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study was conducted in three districts of Central Punjab, Pakistan. The targeted population for the current study was mothers and their adolescent children between the age 12 to 19 years. Data was collected from 1280 participants, mothers with experience of domestic violence n=320, mothers without experience of domestic violence n=320, adolescents who witness domestic violence on mothers n= 320, and adolescents who did not witness domestic violence on mothers n= 320, were included in the study.

One adolescent child was selected from one family. After getting information about the domestic violence victims, partakers (mothers and adolescents) were approached in their respective areas including town, village, and city. After getting permission from concerned departments, only registered cases in Health and police department were taken in the study. For the data collection, emotional distress scale for adult version and adolescent version were used along with demographic forms.^{13,14}

The cross-sectional survey research design and purposive sampling technique were used for the recruitment of participants. The data was entered in the Social Sciences Statistical Package SPSS version (23) to calculate the frequency, reliability, regression, and mean of the data.

RESULTS

Table 1: Summary of Linear Regression Analysis of Domestic Violence as Predictor of Anxiety in Mothers Who Experience Domestic Violence and adolescents who witness domestic violence on their mothers (N=640)

Variables	R	R ²	ΔR ²	F	P
Anxiety among mothers	.648	.420	.418	229.940	.000
Anxiety among adolescents	.336	.113	.10	40.432	.000

Table-1 showed the predictive effect of domestic violence in anxiety among mothers and their adolescents. Linear regression analysis indicated domestic violence explained 42% variance in anxiety among mothers and 11.3% variance in anxiety among adolescents who witness domestic violence on their mothers.

Table 2: Comparison of Mean, Standard Deviation and t-values of Anxiety among Mothers with and without experience of domestic violence (N =640)

Variables	With experience of Domestic Violence (n=320)				without Experience of Domestic Violence (n=320)			
	M	SD	t(319)	P	M	SD	t(319)	P
Anxiety among mothers	36.61	11.65	56.73	.000	11.54	4.28	71.88	.000

Table-2 shows the mean, standard deviation and t-values for mothers who experience domestic violence and mothers without experience of domestic violence on anxiety.

Table 3: Comparison of Mean, Standard Deviation and t-values of Anxiety in Adolescents Who Witness Domestic Violence on their Mothers and Adolescents Who did not Witness Domestic Violence on their Mothers (N=640)

Variables	With experience of Domestic Violence (n=320)				without Experience of Domestic Violence (n=320)			
	M	SD	t(319)	P	M	SD	t(319)	P
Anxiety among Adolescents	33.05	11.65	50.72	.000	23.74	8.31	51.07	.000

Table-3 showed the mean, standard deviation and t-values for adolescents who witness domestic violence on their mothers and adolescents who did not witness domestic violence on their mothers, on anxiety.

DISCUSSION

Domestic violence is considered a traumatic act in a family, where one family member does violence to others in a domestic setting. Domestic violence equally harms the members of the family, mother, father, or children. The problematic attitude of husband and wife disturbs the home environment. Sometimes husband shows the harsh behavior toward his wife and children.⁷ Due to this violated behavior, mothers suffered from emotional distress and these distressing emotions disturb their physical, mental, and emotional functioning. They feel helpless, low self-esteem, weakness, sleep disturbance, and worry. Domestic violence is a major health threat among married women. The result of the current study reflects that domestic violence is a significant predictor of anxiety among mothers. The findings of statistical analysis confirmed the results. Domestic violence significantly predicts anxiety among mothers [$R^2=.420$; $F(1, 318) = 229.940$, $p < .01$]. The explained variance was 42%. Previous studies support the result of the current study that domestic violence has an effect on mental health and leads to anxiety.¹⁵ In exposure of domestic violence mothers experience fear and anxiety related to it, due to anxiety women experience muscle tension, avoidant behavior, and fear, during fear either they surrender or stay in a fight.¹⁶ Due to violence, they remain fearful about their safety and future. Symptoms of severity become worse when women feel that they trap in a worthless and loveless relationship, a relationship having no regard and respect, and they become more anxious.¹⁷ Previous studies also confirmed that when mothers undertake traumatic effects due to domestic violence they feel excessive worry and tensions about their home, children, marriage, and life. They assume that they are bound in an abusive relationship and they develop continuous worries and fear about marriage survival. Ultimately, they undergo low self-esteem, and low self-worth and eventually experience cognitive anxiety.¹⁸ Further, anxiety due to domestic violence not only affects cognition, but distorted thoughts, fear, and worries of mothers become the reason for the manifestation of physiological symptoms.¹⁹ Traumatic events such as violence induced extreme levels of fear that lead to physical symptoms like breathing problems, dry mouth, tachycardia, and shaking hands. Moreover, individuals showed escaping behaviors to avoid all the problems.⁶ The present study also indicated that mothers who experience domestic violence scored higher on anxiety ($M = 36.61$, $p < .01$) as compared to mothers without experience of domestic violence ($M = 11.54$, $p < .01$). Existing studies also supported the results of the present study that unhealthy and abusive marital relationships induced a higher level of anxiety among victimized mothers.^{16,17}

Thus, domestic violence is a terrible incident in domestic settings, whether it occurs on one member or more than one family member, it affects all members of the family because they also witness the violence. Most domestic violence perpetrators are husbands that do violence to their wives and their adolescent children witness this violence.²⁰ Moreover, adolescent children are vulnerable to domestic violence, even though they are not directly targeted, but witnessing violence on their close ones has also a great impact on adolescents' well-being.^{5,11,20} The findings of the study confirmed the results. Witnessing domestic violence significantly predicts Anxiety among Adolescents

[$R^2=.113$; $F(1, 318) = 40.432$, $p < .01$]. The explained variance was 11.3%. During the adolescence period witnessing violence, brutality, and an instance of cruel and harsh treatment of mothers by their fathers, induced emotional instability among adolescents. They feel restless, fear, and emotional disturbance because they have no control over situations and they are dependent on their parents, all these distressing factors further induced anxiety among adolescents. Earlier studies on domestic violence and anxiety confirm the findings of the present study that domestic violence triggers anxiety.^{5,21}

Whereby, adolescents feel unsafe and threatened when they experience domestic violence and conflicts between their parents, the conflicts between parents have a negative outcome that becomes harmful to adolescent children, parents, and family's well-being as well.²² Due to observing domestic violence and menacing appraisals children become hypervigilant or sensitized due to threats which lead to anxiety and fear that further leads to ambiguous or minor provocation.²² Moreover, viewing domestic violence is more devastating in terms of anxiety.⁵

Furthermore, research evidence also shows that for adolescents' mental health, good family relations in a family are highly beneficial. A healthy family functioning, safe family environment, and supportive parenting practices protect mental health from negative stress impacts and lower anxiety symptoms.²³ It was also observed that children who witness domestic violence score higher on anxiety as compared to those who do not witness domestic violence. Results indicated significant mean differences in anxiety, finding show that adolescents who witness domestic violence scored higher on anxiety ($M = 33.05$, $p < .01$) as compared to those adolescents who do not witness domestic violence ($M = 23.74$, $p < .01$). Previous studies on adolescents who witness domestic violence confirmed that children developed a higher level of anxiety when they undergo domestic violence as compared to those children who do not witness domestic violence.^{5,11} Although children do not directly indulge in domestic violence, they face the consequences of violence directly and they are disturbed mentally. Due to countersigning aggression, fights, verbal abuse, and a stressed home environment they feel distressed and undergo anxiety.^{21,24} On the other hand, when children live in a happy, safe, and peaceful home environment and do not feel any type of fear related to the parental relationship they have fewer issues of mental health they undergo with normal development and have fewer issues of anxiety as compared to those children who witness violence.^{5,11} The present study also supported the above notion that adolescents who witness domestic violence against mothers experience a higher level of disturbed psychological health as compared to those who did not witness domestic violence on mothers and lived in a healthy and sound home environment.²⁴

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