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Children living with violence: Identifying the effects on their behaviour and their views about their own self-image and school performance

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Abstract

This paper discusses the impact that children's exposure to violence against their mothers has on their behaviour and their views on their own self-image and school performance. The phrase 'children living with violence' implies that children are actively involved in this situation, since they can interpret what they see or hear, they can feel the pain experienced by their mothers, and they can get anxious about the consequences of violence or even start blaming themselves for causing it. What our research points out is that: a) violence against women victimises not only mothers but also their children, even if those children are not themselves the direct target of violence, and b) the signs/effects of a child's exposure to violence are as varied as children's personalities and may be externalised in different contexts where children socialise and become socialised, such as school. This paper has emerged out of the VICTIMS project which was designed and conducted in four countries and funded by the European Commission programme DAPHNE III. It concentrates specifically on the findings from Cyprus, where eighty children between nine and eleven years old, forty of whom were identified to have been exposed to violence and forty randomly selected, participated in the research. A questionnaire was administered and data was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The results indicated that children's views on their self-image and school performance, as well as their reaction towards violence, differed depending on whether or not they had themselves been exposed to violence. Results will be of interest to those directly or indirectly involved in the education and development of children.

Keywords: *children's exposure, violence against mother, effects, behavioural problems, self-image*

Introduction

The relationship between violence against women and children's exposure in the domestic sphere has been the focus of various research studies for over than thirty years. Despite the number of studies that have been conducted on this field, the definitions used and results provided often appear to be conflicting. More recently, Holden (2003) pointed out that children's exposure to violence against mother is tantamount to their psychological maltreatment and victimization. It is not also surprising the fact that, terms like 'invisible victims' (Osofsky, 1995) or 'unintended victims' (Øverlien, 2010) are also used to describe children who are exposed to violence against mother. Additionally, research reveals a wide range of effects on the child exposed to violence (see Fantuzzo

and Mohr, 1999; Osofsky, 1995; 1999), namely psychosocial outcomes, that is, behavioural, emotional and psychological problems (Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt and Kenny, 2003). However, the signs and effects of a child's exposure to violence are as varied as children's personalities and coping strategies, whereas factors such as age, gender, parental (maternal most of the times) support and type of violence can moderate children's reactions (Carlson, 2000; Clark, Koenen, Taft, Street, King and King, 2007; Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, Shapiro and Semel, 2003).

The effects of children's exposure to violence may be externalized in different contexts where children socialize and become socialized (Koutselini and Valanidou, 2011), such as school and even in different periods of their lives, that is, when children are grown up adults (Murrell, Christoff and Henning, 2007). But, the question that we should be primarily asking is not whether children externalize these effects or not, but, which are these effects shown in the tender age of primary school. To this end, we aim to examine the effects of children's exposure to violence against their mothers, with regard to their behaviour, their self-image, and their views about their school performance in particular. To attain this, we chose children to be the main informants of the research so as to get an insight to their experiences and understandings, meeting of course all ethical issues arising with a careful methodological plan.

What is worth mentioning is that within this study we pursued a context-based understanding of the children's exposure to violence against mother, since this problem, even if it occurs in the domestic sphere, becomes automatically a societal one (Berns, 2004; Øverlien, 2010). The present study is part of the European project VICTIMS (2009-2011), which was co-funded by the DAPHNE III programme (action grants 2007-2013) and coordinated by the University of Cyprus, and specifically by the UNESCO Chair in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

Theoretical background

As Øverlien (2010) points out, research in the field of children's exposure to domestic violence has initially started focusing primarily on women as victims and secondarily on men as perpetrators. According to Kitzmann et al. (2003), the term 'domestic violence' has been used to refer to a wide range of behaviours including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, shown by both adults and children in the context of family life (p. 340). Still, in most of the cases, domestic violence, or else violence in the family, refers to violence against women (Straus and Gelles, 1990), since over 80% of victims of domestic violence are female. Therefore, in the current article, we consciously disagree with the gender neutrality of the language and thus, we use the term of violence against women more specifically to refer to incidents of violence of any form towards the woman mother. We do reckon though that the specific term does not apply to all families where violence exists.

Violence against women victimizes not only the women but also their children, even if children are not themselves the target of violence (Osofsky, 1995; 1999). Women suffer violence and are the direct victims but their children become also victims, even indirectly, since they are exposed. Even if research in the field has increased for the last

ten years, especially from the area of psychology (see Holden, 2003; Osofsky, 1995; 1999), there are not any common definitions and terminology, exactly because research is conducted within many disciplines and philosophical theories (Øverlien, 2010). According to Cunningham and Baker (2004), the ‘nominal definition’ of a child exposed to violence may vary widely. For example, the term ‘exposed to violence’ is preferred than the term ‘witness of violence’ since the former include much more of the children’s experiences of violence against mother, and not just seeing, like watching, hearing, feeling and being involved (Fantuzzo and Mohr, 1999; Holden, 2003; Holden, Geffner, and Jouriles, 1998; Kitzmann et al., 2003). Holden (2003) even argues that exposure is far more complex construct than simply the dichotomy of whether the child observed or overheard the violence or not (p. 152).

Taking into account the discussions in the field, we believe that children exposed to violence against mother may experience violence in a number of ways including seeing, hearing, feeling or being aware of any form of violence that the one parent suffers by the other parent (Cunningham and Baker, 2004; Fantuzzo and Mohr, 1999; Holden, 2003; Holden et al., 1998; Kitzmann et al., 2003), but they are not themselves physically abused. Therefore, within the present study we adopt the term of children living with violence, implying that children are actively involved, since they can interpret what they see or hear, they can feel the pain experienced by their mothers and they can get anxious about the consequences of violence (Cunningham and Baker, 2004). Anyhow, children exposed to violence are considered victims first and foremost, instead of subjects in their own lives (Øverlien, 2010) whereas they are also described as ‘invisible victims’ (Osofsky, 1995) or ‘unintended victims’ (Øverlien, 2010).

From 1975, when the first article on children exposed to domestic violence was published in a scientific journal, to recently, various researchers have shown that children’s exposure to violence against mother has negative outcomes for children and brings on many psychological, emotional, behavioral, social and academic problems (Baker and Jaffe, 2007; Fantuzzo and Mohr, 1999; Osofsky, 1995; 1999). Reporting on all these psychosocial outcomes, including psychological (e.g., self-esteem), emotional (depression, anxiety), behavioural (aggression), social (e.g., social competence) and academic (e.g., achievement scores), is considered so important, that Kitzmann et al. (2003) determined it as one of the criteria used for the selection of studies included in their meta-analysis.

Children’s exposure to violence against their mothers is mostly linked with negative psychological and emotional consequences across all children’s age ranges (Fantuzzo and Fusco, 2007; Osofsky, 1999; Øverlien, 2010). Research also revealed that exposure to violence against mother increases the risk of behavioral problems (Kitzmann et al., 2003; Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith and Jaffe, 2003).

From the perspective of social learning models, emphasis is given in the increased levels of aggression and anger that children exposed to violence express (Kitzmann et al., 2003; Osofsky, 1999) or in the tendency of adopting violent behaviour (Fantuzzo and Fusco, 2007; Osofsky, 1999). Nevertheless, the behaviour of the children exposed to violence can be reversible; the child may adopt a tolerant behaviour towards violence and thus be exploitable by others (Koutselini and Valanidou, 2011). Kernic, Wolf, Holt,

McKnight, Huebner and Rivara (2003) revealed through their study that children exposed to violence tend to have more behavioural problems, including the way they react and externalize feelings. Ballif-Spanvill, Clayton, Hendrix and Hunsaker (2004) argued that children, who have been exposed to interparental violence, have more aggressive reactions in conflicts with peers and tend to get more easily into troubles being antisocial, undisciplined and rebellious, characteristics that mothers, victims of violence, can also realize (Koutselini and Valanidou, 2011). It is also stated that children exposed to violence may demonstrate cruelty to animals than to peers (Currie, 2006).

Children exposed to violence often experience either short- or long-term impact that affects also their adjustment at school either in terms of behaviour or performance. So, the negative effects can result in low performing at school (Osofsky, 1999) or a child may face increased emotional problems such as depression or anxiety (Fantuzzo and Mohr, 1999). Yet, children exposed to violence may have a poor social competence (Kernic et al., 2003) since exposure to violence can terrorize them and disrupt their socialization (Kitzmann et al., 2003).

If we take into consideration the social learning theory by Bandura and the zone of proximal development by Vygotsky, then we understand that primary-school age children learn how to behave in their future relationships from what they have experienced as children in their family. If children were exposed to violence, then the possibility of doing the same, taking either the role of victim or perpetrator, in the future increases. Thus, various researchers point out that children exposed to violence against mother are more likely to be abusive as adults (Murrell et al., 2007). In addition, they argue that children's exposure to violence desensitizes them to aggressiveness, the violent behaviour becomes part of the 'norm' and thus it is more likely to be adopted and well justified (Lichter and McClosky, 2004), based on the Cycle of Violence Theory. Nevertheless, there are theorists and researchers who critically question this theory, like Mullender and Morely (1994), based, of course, on various arguments regarding mainly the methodology applied in different research studies (e.g., biased samples).

Whatsoever, not all children exposed to violence against mother display behavioural and emotional problems (Øverlien, 2010), as these are described above. As educators, we do reckon that a given experience does not always lead directly to a given response or outcome since education interventions can counterbalance the negative outcomes. This, of course, depends, among other things, on children's age and stage of development (Osofsky, 1999). For example, Martinez-Torteya, Bogart, Von Eye, and Levendosky (2009) showed in their study that 54% of their sample that consisted of infants exposed to violence (2, 3 and 4 years old), were characterized as resilient and maintained positive adaptation. In addition, mother's response to the violence can differently affect the effects on the children when exposed and their responses (Holden, 2003). For example, it may differently affect the child when seeing his/her mother defending herself rather than being passive to violence (Holden, 2003). Furthermore, the interaction of the mother with the child and her supportive role in the child's life can mediate the possible effects resulting from the child's exposure to violence against mother (Clark et al., 2007; Levendosky et al., 2003; Øverlien, 2010).

The study

The present study is part of the biennial interdisciplinary European project VICTIMS (2009-2011) entitled '*An Indirect Harmful Effect of Violence: Victimizing the Child and Re-victimizing the Woman-mother Through Her Child's Exposure to Violence against herself*', which was designed and conducted in four countries (Cyprus, Italy, Romania, Slovakia) with co-funding obtained by the European programme DAPHNE III (action grants 2007-2013). The project VICTIMS, based on a holistic understanding, emphasizing the problem in the context of society, elaborated on the background of the effects of violence against women upon children, if exposed, and on how these may be externalized in different contexts, such as the school environment. In addition, the project aimed to sensitize all groups of people who are involved in the child's development and education by producing awareness-raising and research based material. The paper discusses particularly the findings in Cyprus, where 80 children nine to eleven years old, 40 children identified to have been exposed to violence and 40 children randomly selected attending primary schools all over Cyprus, participated in the research. Children exposed to violence against mother were taken as the main informants. So, the main purpose of the study was to uncover the effects of children's exposure to violence against their mothers, with regard to their behaviour, their self-image, and their views about their school performance.

Research Questions

The study intended to provide answers to the following:

1. Are there any differences between primary school-aged children who are exposed to violence against their mother and children who are not exposed with regard to their behaviour while being exposed to violence and/or while witnessing violence? Do they tend to adopt a violent or passive behaviour?
2. Are there any differences between primary school-aged children exposed to violence against their mother, and children not exposed, with regard to their views about their self-image and their school performance?
3. Are there any differences between boys and girls exposed to violence with regard to their behaviour and their views on self-image and school performance?

Methodology

The methodology applied in the study was based on the phase four of the VICTIMS project, according to which the main research study with the children participants took place in each partner-country. During this phase, the main research questionnaire, the scenarios' questionnaire, which was collaboratively constructed within the project according to the results of the project's previous phases in each partner-context, was administered. In particular, the previous phases in Cyprus concerned the analysis of data obtained from: a) 28 written testimonies from women and eight testimonies from children, victims of violence, and b) 17 semi-structured interviews with women-mothers, victims of violence. Data results obtained by all partner countries were exemplarily

codified as vignettes, small scenarios, in order to structure the main research questionnaire. These scenarios became filters through which children's views and impact of possible prior exposure to violence could be examined.

Participants

Eighty 4th, 5th and 6th grade primary school students (30 males and 50 females), ranging from nine to eleven years of age participated in this study. Forty of them were children identified to have been exposed to violence against mother in the domestic sphere. The other 40 children were randomly selected from the schools and classes where the identified children were attending to. Within each group of 40 children there were 25 girls and 15 boys. Students were studying in different primary schools all over Cyprus both in rural and urban areas.

Identification of children exposed to violence against mother

The identification of children exposed to violence against their mother was a demanding procedure and needed a careful plan of action. The identification took a lot of time and effort; the research team had to cooperate effectively with the relevant authorities in Cyprus, such as the Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Office of the Cyprus Police, sensitized school principals and teachers in order to get in a confidential way information about certain primary schools and classes where children with violence exposure experiences attend to. In addition, mothers, victims of violence, who participated in the initial phases of the VICTIMS project, that is, in the semi-structured interviews, were asked to give their permission for their children to participate in the research. Firstly, mothers were assured that participation in the research would not be a negative experience for the children.

Research materials

The main research material was the scenarios' questionnaire. The scenarios' questionnaire consisted of 14 scenarios becoming filters through which children's views and impact of possible prior exposure to violence could be examined. In particular, 40 items, 27 close-ended and 13 open-ended questions, were included in the questionnaire. Scenarios were categorized into all possible contexts (school, family, peers-self) and situations whereas the stories were probable, real and understandable. In addition, scenarios were categorized in groups according to the project's predetermined main aims. These groups were examining: a) child's reaction in an ordinary situation, b) child's reaction when exposed directly to violence, c) child's reaction while witnessing violence, d) child's view on mother as a role model, e) child's views on self-image and self-esteem, and f) child's views on school performance. Within the purposes of the article, analysis and results obtained by the 4th group of scenarios will not be discussed. Students were asked to read each scenario carefully and answer accordingly the relevant questions. Two examples of scenarios used in order to examine the child's reaction when

exposed directly to violence and the child's self-image respectively, as translated in English, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Samples from the scenarios' questionnaire

<p>Scenario 1 <i>It's break time. Anna sits alone in the school yard eating her snack. Some kids, her classmates, approach her without Anna noticing their presence. They are frightening her with a sudden noise and push her. Anna automatically stands up.</i></p> <p>1. How is Anna going to react? (Circle one of the choices below) <i>a) She will be so mad with them that she will scream and would like to kick them.</i> <i>b) She will behave like nothing happened, leaving from the school yard.</i> <i>c) She will laugh with their "joke".</i> <i>d) She will get angry and ask them "Why did you do that?"</i> <i>e) She will push them back.</i> <i>f) She will silently pack her things and go to her classroom.</i> <i>g) She will tell them that they scared her and that she would rather they would never do it again.</i></p> <p>2. What would you do if you were in Anna's place?</p> <p>3. Anna feels: a) angry b) upset c) happy d) stupid</p> <p>Scenario 2 <i>Some money, which was intended for a school trip, got lost in the classroom. George is wrongly accused for stealing the money, but he did not do it.</i></p> <p>1. What is George going to do? (Circle one of the choices below) <i>a) He will burst into tears and tell his friend that he won't come to school tomorrow.</i> <i>b) He will say he didn't do it; he will defend himself.</i> <i>c) He will accept stealing the money even though he didn't.</i> <i>d) He won't say anything; it's not even worth it.</i> <i>e) He will ask the teacher to investigate the whole matter; it's unfair to be accused for something he didn't do.</i></p> <p>2. What would you do if you were in George's place?</p>

Data collection procedures

The scenarios' questionnaire was developed initially in English; so it was then translated in Greek with the method of a subsequent backward-translation.

Firstly, a field study was carried out so as to check the questionnaire's readability; to see whether students understand the instructions and tasks being asked to do, and also the time needed to complete the questionnaire. In addition, the questionnaire was pilot tested for validation reasons, that is, to verify whether it could be used in the context of Cyprus. In the field study 41 nine to eleven-years old students participated. The scenarios' questionnaire, as elaborated according to the field study's results, was then administered to a group of 200 students attending 4th, 5th and 6th grade of primary school, randomly selected. In addition, the questionnaire was externally validated in Greece and Slovenia

with 805 nine to eleven-years old participants from both countries. Specifically, the results showed a good overall fit of the data from Slovenia and Greece to the Rasch model as the overall and individual fit statistics were close to their expected values.

The research was accordingly designed, so as to counter balance any effects and meet ethical issues arising, such as the stigmatization and re-traumatization of children identified to have been exposed to violence against their mothers. Thus, in each class, where there were identified students, all students of the class were being asked to participate and complete the questionnaires so that some of them, excluding the identified children, to be later on randomly selected to comprise the other group of 40 children. Students participated in an anonymous way using code-numbers while completing the questionnaire. Furthermore, teachers were not informed about the identified child/children in their classes in case they were not aware of the problem. In that way, the ethical and sensitive challenge of protecting personal data was addressed. Additionally, by discussing with the teachers and observing the children while completing the questionnaires, we tried to minimize the possibilities of having in the random group children with incidents of violence in their families.

Permission was granted from the relevant authorities in Cyprus to carry out the research in the selected schools. The headmasters of the primary schools selected for the study were informed about the study's purpose and had been asked for their cooperation. Moreover, student's parents were informed with a letter consent which they had to sign so as to declare their agreement about their children's participation in the research. Data collection took place over six weeks. During the data collection students were called upon to complete the scenarios' questionnaire within a period of 40-60 minutes.

Data analysis

To answer the research questions and examine the hypotheses of the study, qualitative and quantitative analyses were used. Content, thematic and discourse analyses were applied in the data obtained by the 13 open-ended questions of the scenarios' questionnaire whereas quantitative techniques were also used. In order to determine the presence and the statistical relevance of the differences between the two groups of children, Independent Sample T-Test and Analysis of Variance were used, taking into account exposure to violence against mother and gender as independent variables. Categorical effects in each group of scenarios served as dependent variables. Mean scores calculated were all smaller or equal to one.

Results

The internal consistency of scores measured by Cronbach's alpha was 0.69 for the scenarios' questionnaire, which is considered as a reasonable benchmark.

From the data qualitative analysis, the main discourses emerged from the answers of children exposed to violence in the open-ended questions were: a) discourse of aggressiveness-violence (e.g., 'I would start screaming and threaten to hit them', 'I

would tripped them to hit their head', 'I would be so angry that I would hit them to death'), b) discourse of passiveness-tolerance (e.g., 'I would burst into tears and run away', 'I would take my school bag and go home', 'I would probably say nothing'), c) discourse of low self-image (e.g., 'Probably, I would be among children who will play alone, my school mates wouldn't want me'), and d) discourse of school failure (e.g., 'I hate school; I don't want to come ever again', 'I know I am a loser'). Moreover, by processing students' answers, categories were inductively developed and adjusted with the predetermined categories of the close-ended questions; this allowed us to approach all data quantitatively too. The categories-variables emerged in each group of scenarios were: a) 'aggressiveness' (any form, i.e., verbally, physically), 'passiveness' and 'assertiveness' for groups one, two and three, b) 'low self-image' and 'high self-image' for group five, and c) 'excellent school performance', 'very good school performance', 'good school performance' and 'poor school performance-failure' for group six.

Our first quantitative analysis concerned the first group of scenarios examining the child's reaction in an ordinary situation. The hypothesis put forward was that the reactions adopted by the children vary according to the children's exposure to violence against mother. Using Independent samples T-test with exposure being the independent variable, significant differences between the two groups of children emerged regarding the adoption of aggressive behaviour ($t=-6.46$, $p=0.000$) and assertive behaviour ($t=-0.99$, $p=0.000$) in an ordinary situation. Children exposed to violence against their mothers expressed more aggression in their answers (Mean=0.29) than the children randomly selected (Mean=0.00). On the contrary, children not exposed to violence expressed more assertive ways of behaviour (Mean=0.83) in relation to the children exposed to violence (Mean=0.52). Concerning the possible adoption of passive behaviour, no significant differences were found between the two groups of children ($t=-0.99$, $p=0.322$). Using also ANOVA, having as independent variables both exposure and gender, significant differences between boys and girls exposed to violence were not found in terms of aggressiveness ($F=1.407$, $p=0.24$), passiveness ($F=0.335$, $p=0.56$), and assertiveness ($F=0.599$, $p=0.44$).

The second analysis performed concerned the second group of scenarios examining the child's reaction when exposed directly to violence with the hypothesis remaining the same, as in the first analysis. Using Independent samples T-test with exposure being the independent variable, significant differences between the two groups of children emerged regarding the adoption of aggressive behaviour ($t=-4.75$, $p=0.000$) and assertive behaviour ($t=4.37$, $p=0.000$). Children exposed to violence against their mothers provided more violent behaviours in their responses (Mean=0.33) than the children randomly selected (Mean=0.09). Concerning the possible adoption of passive behaviour when exposed directly to violence, no significant differences were found between the two groups of children ($t=0.77$, $p=0.444$). Using also ANOVA with independent variables both exposure and gender, significant differences between boys and girls exposed to violence were not found in terms of aggressiveness ($F=2.551$, $p=0.11$), passiveness ($F=0.083$, $p=0.77$), and assertiveness ($F=2.223$, $p=0.14$).

The third analysis performed concerned the third group of scenarios examining the child's reaction while witnessing violence with the hypothesis remaining the same, as in the first two analyses. Using again Independent samples T-test, significant differences

between the two groups of children were found regarding the adoption of aggressive behaviour ($t=-5.33$, $p=0.000$), the adoption of passive behaviour ($t=-2.08$, $p=0.041$) and the adoption of assertive behaviour ($t=5.13$, $p=0.000$). Children exposed to violence expressed themselves with more violent reactions (Mean=0.26) than the children randomly selected (Mean=0.02). Although, concerning the possible adoption of passive behaviour, means did not greatly differ between the two groups of children, still children exposed to violence were those who expressed more passiveness. Using also ANOVA, with independent variables both exposure and gender, significant differences between boys and girls exposed to violence were found only in terms of aggressiveness ($F=4.209$, $p=0.04$), and assertiveness ($F=4.780$, $p=0.03$). Still, the size effect for these differences was below the limit of 0.06 for a medium effect, that shows the existence of a high risk of committing a type I error, that is, detecting an effect that does not actually exist.

The fourth analysis concerned the fifth group of scenarios examining the child's views on self-image. The hypothesis put forward was that the students' self-image varies according to their exposure to violence against mother. Using Independent samples T-test with exposure as independent variable, significant differences between the two groups of children emerged regarding the low self-image ($t=-3.053$, $p=0.003$) and the high self-image ($t=3.053$, $p=0.003$). Children exposed to violence expressed lower levels of self-image in their responses (Mean=0.23) whereas children randomly selected showed higher levels of self-image (Mean=0.91). Using also ANOVA having as independent variables both exposure and gender, significant differences between boys and girls exposed to violence were not found in terms of low self-image ($F=2.225$, $p=0.14$), or high self-image ($F=0.442$, $p=0.50$).

The last analysis we made concerned the sixth group of scenarios examining the child's views on school-performance. The hypothesis put forward was that the children's school performance differs according to their exposure to violence against mother. Using Independent samples T-test with exposure being the independent variable, significant differences between the two groups of children were found only in the variable of low school performance and failure ($t=-3.644$, $p=0.000$). Children exposed to violence expressed more failure feelings in their answers (Mean=0.12) than the children randomly selected (Mean=0.01). Using also ANOVA, having as independent variables both exposure and gender, significant differences between boys and girls exposed to violence were found in the variable of good school performance ($F=12.503$, $p=0.001$) with the girls scoring higher (Mean=0.56) than the boys (Mean=0.39).

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the effects of children's exposure to violence against their mothers, with regard to their behaviour, their self-image, and their views about their school performance.

With regard to the behaviour domain, the results indicated that children exposed to violence tend to engage more easily in aggressive reactions than the children randomly selected in an ordinary situation, while they are being exposed to violence and while witnessing violence. Children exposed to violence seem to prefer violent solutions

instead of constructive ones, especially when they are themselves the target of violence, something that is also pointed out by other studies (Ballif-Spanvill et al., 2004). One plausible explanation of this result may be that children exposed to violence against mother learn to behave violently since they live with violence; thus violence becomes part of the 'norm' and is more easily adopted (Lichter and McClosky, 2004). From the qualitative analysis of the data, it was also shown that boys exposed to violence are those who express more aggression and tend to externalize in a more intense way their feelings of anger. Another interesting result was that children exposed to violence are those who, especially while witnessing violence, tend to adopt passive behaviours or show apathy (i.e., they prefer not to react and stay silent while being threatened or embarrassed).

As far as the self-image domain is concerned, the findings showed that children exposed to violence against mother tend to have lower levels of self-esteem and an inferior self-image compared with the children randomly selected. From their responses, it seems that they feel less accepted by peers and less popular among significant others, that is, their teachers, classmates and friends. This result indicates that children who are exposed to violence against mother are also psychologically and emotionally maltreated (Holden, 2003) whereas their self-esteem and self-confidence are diminished (i.e., they lack of confidence to participate in school activities or festivals).

Concerning children's views about school performance, the results of the present study revealed that children exposed to violence against mother tend to perceive themselves as not so good students, since they tend to believe that they have lower ability or competence within the realm of their scholastic performance. From their responses it seemed that they even tend to evaluate themselves as failures. Whereas gender effects were not strongly observed, still it seemed that girls exposed to violence are those who feel that they are not so good students compared with the boys who are also exposed to violence. This can be merely explained by the fact that school performance and academic success is something that minds mostly the girls and not the boys who may be more interested in performing well in sports or in outdoor activities in general (Adler, Kless and Adler, 1992; Renold, 2001).

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