School-based prevention of teacher and family violence: A pilot cluster-randomised controlled trial in Tanzania

Project data

Project type

☒ interdisciplinary pilot project ☐ cross-sector project ☐ global health postdoc fellowship

Research areas involved (check all that apply)

☐ Biomedical sciences ☒ Public health
☒ Social sciences and humanities ☐ Engineering and other sciences

Project duration

March 2024 – February 2025

Project team

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Case study

Introduction

More than 1.7 billion children worldwide experience violence in their upbringing. Prevalence rates are particularly high in Africa. Toxic stress associated with violence impacts the developing brain. This affects behavioural, social, and emotional functioning of children.

Project summary

Our project tested an intervention that simultaneously aims at reducing violence against children at home and at school. We tested (1) the feasibility and acceptability of the Intervention, (2) the initial effectiveness of reducing parental and teacher violence, and (3) whether the reduction of parental and teacher violence improved children's well-being, mental health, and their social and cognitive functioning. We conducted a mixed-methods two-arm school-based pilot cluster-randomized controlled trial (CRCT) in Tanzania.

Summary of quantitative results

In the baseline assessment, 97.0% of children reported experiencing any type of violence from teachers in the past week. 92.1% experienced emotional violence and 85.8% experienced physical violence. The use of any type of violence by fathers in the past week was reported by 66.5% of children. Emotional violence by fathers was reported by 54.3% of children in the past week, and physical violence by 37.1%. The use of any type of violence by mothers in the past week was reported by 90.3% of children. Emotional violence by mothers was experienced by 85.7% of students in the past week, and physical violence by 63.3%.

776 students participated in the baseline and follow-up assessments. The participating students were between 6 and 17 years old (M = 10.6; SD = 1.0) and 54.6% (N = 423) of them were female. Of the 776 participating students, 714 (92.0%) stated that both parents were alive and 58 (7.5%) stated that only one parent was alive. One person (0.1%) stated that they no longer had parents. 190 (24.5%) students lived with one parent and 476 (61.3%) with both parents. 70 (9.0%) stated that they lived with a relative. 38 (4.9%) students lived with another caregiver/guardian and one person (0.1%) lived in a childcare institution. 236 (30.4%) students stated that one parent took care of their needs the most and 442 (57.0%) stated that both parents took care of them. Furthermore, 58 (7.5%) of the participants named a relative and 39 (5.0%) named another caregiver/guardian/foster parent.

1331 parents participated in the baseline and follow-up assessments. The parents were between 18 and 84 years old (M = 40.4; SD = 10.3). 62.0% (N = 1331) were female participants. The sample of parents (N = 1331) consisted of 144 (10.8%) unmarried participants and 863 (64.8%) married participants. In addition, 79 (5.9%) were separated or divorced and 43 (3.2%) were widowed. With regard to education, the analysis showed that 72 (5.4%) parents did not attend

school, 746 (56.0%) attended primary school, and 259 (19.5%) attended secondary school. In addition, 30 (2.3%) parents reported having a diploma, 21 (1.6%) had a bachelor's degree, and 3 (0.2%) had a master's degree.

A total of 436 teachers participated in the baseline and follow-up assessments, with 85.1% (N = 436) being female. The age of the participating teachers ranged from 27 to 60 years (M = 43.6; SD = 7.6). Of the 436 teachers, 40 (9.2%) were single, 357 (81.9%) were married, 13 (3.0%) were separated or divorced, and 26 (6.0%) were widowed. Among the teachers, 154 (35.3%) had a certificate of teaching and 151 (34.6%) had a diploma of teaching. 113 (25.9%) had a bachelor's degree and 16 (3.7%) had a master's degree or higher.

Summary of process evaluation findings

To assess the implementation quality, fidelity, feasibility, and acceptability of the ICC-T (teacher-focused) and ICC-P (parent-focused) interventions, we collected both qualitative and quantitative data. This included attendance records, participants' evaluation forms, focus group discussions (FGDs), and in-depth interviews (IDIs), capturing perspectives from both participants and implementation staff.

Implementation quality and fidelity

Overall, the quality of implementation was high. Training sessions were delivered in close adherence to the curriculum, as confirmed by both facilitators and independent staff observers. Participants actively engaged in discussions and practical exercises, and 92% of sessions were completed without disruption from either internal or external factors. One facilitator summarized the sessions as going "*extremely well. Participants enjoyed a lot. They were able to give out vivid examples from their students. They exchange ability and experience as well as finding solutions to the challenges.*"

Participation and engagement

Participation and engagement were strong across both groups. Among teachers, 92% of those invited attended the training, with participants completing an average of 14.5 out of 15 sessions. Parent participation showed more variation across schools (ranging from 46% to 79%), with an average of 70% attending. However, conditional on participation, parents attended an average of 11.4 out of 12 sessions. Both groups reported high levels of motivation, comfort, and respect throughout the training.

Participant feedback

Participants emphasized the personal relevance of the training content, the competence and professionalism of the facilitators, and the use of diverse teaching methods. Role plays, in particular, were frequently mentioned as memorable and helpful. The polite tone and accessible language used by facilitators also contributed to a positive training atmosphere. As one parent stated: "*The training was entirely meant for me.*" Another parent appreciated the quality of the facilitators, saying: "*We are so thankful that these facilitators were exceptionally amazingly qualified and suitable to do this work.*"

Preliminary assessment of changes

Participants also reported shifts in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding corporal punishment. Several parents described a shift from harsh disciplinary practices to more constructive and respectful approaches. One parent shared: *"I have changed much as I used to use severe punishment to children, but I am now using good language to my children, stop beating them, stop insulting them and when they make a mistake, I will talk to them privately not in front the mass as I was doing before."*

Lessons Learned

Violence prevention is a critical issue for the global health community, as violence against children has been shown to cause massive negative effects on both individuals and society. Despite this, in many countries, violent practices in child-rearing remain socially accepted and widespread. Children are exposed to violence not only at school but also at home, highlighting the urgent need for interventions targeting both teachers and parents. Feedback from participants suggests that the combined violence prevention program implemented for teachers and parents in this study yields promising results.

Resources

1. Hecker, T., Mkinga, G., Ssenyonga, J., & Hermenau, K. (2017). Interaction Competencies with Children (ICC): An Approach for Preventing Violence, Abuse, and Neglect in Institutional Care in Sub-Saharan Africa. In A. V. Rus, S. R. Parris, & E. Stativa (Eds.), Child Maltreatment in Residential Care (pp. 357–378). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-57990-0_17

2. Kirika, A., & Hecker, T. (2022). Interaction Competencies with Children – Development and Theory of Change of a Preventative Intervention for Teachers in the Context of Socially Accepted Violence. Verhaltenstherapie, 32(Suppl. 1), 35–43. https://doi.org/10.1159/000525241

3. Hecker, T., Masath, F. B., Ssenyonga, J., Nkuba, M., & Hermenau, K. (2022). Teacher Violence. In T. Hecker, F. B. Masath, J. Ssenyonga, M. Nkuba, K. Hermenau, S. L. Moeschberger, & L. Miller-Graff (Eds.), Psychological Perspectives on Understanding and Addressing Violence Against Children (pp. 189–207). Oxford University Press, New York. https://doi.org/10.1093/med-psych/9780197649510.003.0011

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