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Mother Facing Domestic Violence Weighted Down the Hearts of Her Children: A Phenomenological Study

Hajra Shoukat
&
Sahira Zaman
Gender Studies
Fatima Jinnah Women University Rawalpindi

Abstract

The study aims to shed light on the stance or perception of individuals who have witnessed domestic violence upon their mothers over their lifetime but were able to do nothing to save their mothers from violence. This research attempts to capture obstacles that they think would be able to save their mothers from this ordeal. A qualitative research design is utilized in this research. The data were analyzed using the interpretive phenomenology method. The research recruited young adults who volunteered for the study. Two broad themes emerged from data analysis about respondents' childhood experiences and their views on the causes of domestic violence in their families. The factors also discussed prevented them from taking action to save their mother. This study tries to establish connections between the causes and consequences of helping their mothers in domestic violence-ridden environments and also moving forward to a happy family.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Gender, Phenomenology, Hindrances, Mother-Child Relationship.

Introduction

The fundamental violation of any human right is violence against women and girls is practiced in every country across the globe (True, 2021). It permeates all spheres of life and influences those of all age groups. Women across the globe deal with different forms of violence on a day-to-day basis domestic violence includes murder of one's spouse and acid burns, disfigurements, beatings, and threats; honor killings; and torture and poor treatment in detention (Hadi, 2017). Domestic violence is defined as a series of coercive actions by a partner to establish dominance in the relationship (Vangelisti, 2022). These behaviours can be physical, verbal, sexual, emotional, psychological, or financial (British Medical Association, 2007). Domestic violence is defined as Threatening, restricting, or oppressing any individual (independent of their age, ethnicity, belief system, gender, or sexuality) by an ex- or present intimate partner or family member using violence or abuse (including psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, financial, or emotional). Furthermore, domestic violence can also be referred to as domestic abuse or intimate partner

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violence (Cudd, 2006). In the outer ring, physical and sexual abuse is a blatant and strong illustration of violent supremacy used to sanction the utilization of other subtle forms of abuse (Pence & Paymar, 1993). The most frequently committed forms of domestic violence are psychological and emotional abuse and they are the most difficult to assess and prove. Due to manipulation of controlling strategies, the victim might begin blaming him or herself for the perpetrator's behaviour (Northern Ireland Policing Board, 2011).

The exact number of children exposed to cyberbullying is only dimly perceived in most cases, but numerous researchers report high statistics (Holt, Buckley & Whelan, 2008). The impact of domestic abuse on a child's behaviour as per the study is therefore multifaceted and varies within long-term and short-term behavioural, social, emotional, and physical dimensions (English, Edleson & Herrick, 2005). Families and caregivers believe children in abusive families have more difficulties ranging from behavioural to emotional compared with those who are not in an abusive home (Sternberg, Lamb, Guterman, & Abbott, 2006). Fathers and mothers are held to distinct standards, and it is uncommon for child welfare issues to be "articulated as a harmful father / protective mother." Douglas & Walsh (2010).

Over time, this reality has become the only thing that matters to him, as he loses track of human interactions and his sense of identity. According to the studies, children who have been exposed to domestic violence at an early age are at an increased risk of later commissioning antisocial acts (Edleson, 1999), substance abuse, violent crimes, and adult criminality (based on Edelsberg, 1999, Osofsky, 1999). Children exposed to violence at home later learn values and beliefs which indicate to them that violence just is fine in society (Thornton, 2014; Lloyd, 2018). The increasing age will lead to turning more violent as in puberty they may even quarrel with their peers where the probability of violence in the future is high (Pingley, 2017; Weithorn et al., 1999). Intimately involved with it, women and their offspring can face different consequences of domestic violence. Parents and children often completely disregard or never talk about the abuse after the abuse stops, which can ultimately be detrimental to the mental health individually for both parents and children and to their relationship (Anderson & Van Ee, 2018).

Review of the Literature

As stated by Lapierre (2010), mothers in the study had a sense of responsibility toward their children to take care of and improve their lives. The creed of the women was "We have to provide for and protect our children". The mothers were already in deep sorrow for allowing their children to be in danger, and insulting them as bad mothers and not having protected their children made the situation worse. Hence, they internalized the blame (Lapierre 2010). Moreover, researchers have recently expanded the space of their research by using a qualitative perspective to see how children are affected by domestic violence. It is stated by Mullender, Hague, Imam,

Kelly, Malos & Regan (2002), that "For children, it means handling, understanding, and making sense of, the multiplicity of complex and interrelated issues in domestic violence." This undoubtedly offers an insight that has proven useful in the area of concern. Furthermore, children report frequently feeling perplexed, fearful, and worrisome about their security according to research by (Holt, Buckley & Whelan, 2008). Many pre-teens argued that they had to become mature and insightful adults, sometimes sooner than they were ready for, and that had both positive and negative perceived effects (Goldblatt, 2003).

Qualitative research's nature, like providing group statistics, is insufficient to illustrate diversity in life performance. The foundation of this research was the belief that different people have subjective views and understanding of the same experience or incident. Due to this, one also can obtain multiple and varied viewpoints on the "event" through the accounts of different persons. Furthermore, people indeed learn their perspectives from other people through social interaction, and any person's particular understanding is finally affected by the interpreter's beliefs, thinking, and emotions. The main facts proved after reviewing scientific publications on the incidence and consequences of domestic violence on children as well as some guidelines to professionals involving how to meet the needs of children regarding security and help are observed in the article below.

Holt, Buckley & Whelan (2008), reviews the effects of exposure to domestic violence on children: emotional neglect, slowly building up to instances of domestic violence, which may lead to difficulties in the upbringing of a child, and other adversities (Yount, DiGirolamo & Ramakrishnan, 2011). The outcome demonstrates that abuse against children is highly probable if exposure occurs. Problems appear in the manifestation of children's emotions and behaviour. Fortunately, these risks might be intensity reduced with protective factors, which are well expressed by supportive interactions between women and their moms. However, children do not always follow the rules, even when they are exposed to safety measures, which are a part of the protection system around them, they get excited and very social with each other in their surrounding environment (Mayes, Roberts, Boles & Brown, 2006). Interventions ought to be immediate, precise, and targeted to assist children's development of resilience that will help them get over challenges (Holt, Buckley & Whelan, 2008). Youth protection is of significant importance not only now but also in the future which is why governments around the world have started focusing on its preservation (Bannon & Carter, 2003).

However, not much is known on what practices of support for this age group can be effective (Guy, Feinstein & Griffiths, 2014). A literature review by Anderson & Van Ee (2018), from which 17 interventions were finalized showed that the interventions contained very few early interventions which are directly addressed to girls and children. This research also made us see that it may be advisable to work with both

the mothers and the children in separate sessions as well as the joint sessions so much so that the beneficial changes within the family will be sustainable. Individually and together, a couple's therapy can probably bring about the most benefits in the area of relationships and further general well-being (Anderson & Van Ee, 2018:3). Researchers described 26 different interventions by Austin et al. (2019), among which nine of them were targeted at mother-child relationships. This article focused on the perceptions of the women and children who were the victims and part of domestic violence interventions that were community-based in the North West of England (UK).

Theoretical Framework

Here are different theories that are relevant and insightful in the context of domestic violence impacts on children's hearts.

Attachment Theory

John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth's attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979; Holmes, 2014) includes the emotional bonds built between children and their primary caretakers (Bowlby et al., 1992). This approach can help to understand how acts of domestic violence destroy or affect the positive attachment bonds, which are the basis of a child's mental health and the establishment of their future healthy relationship. The emotional responses, coping mechanisms, and long-term effects of domestic violence on children's hearts may be scrutinized by the lens of attachment theory (Choate & Tortorelli, 2022; Ford, 2015).

Gender Socialization Theory

This theory understands the influence of gender cultural socialization upon people concerning gender identities and behaviours. As per socialization theory (Maccoby, 2000), children copy and build on the norms and values of their societies in such areas as gender roles and beliefs about emotions expressed and ways of managing them (Michael, 2014). This leads to the hypothesis that researching how gender socialization impacts children's experience and behaviour will contribute to the comprehension of children's reactions to home violence (Montserrat et al., 2022; Coursesidekick, n.d.).

Power and Control Theory

Among all other theories, the power and control theory (Glasser, 1985) provide an understanding of the mechanisms of regulating power and force within abusive relationships, frequently accompanied by feminist ideas (Cassidy, 1995). On the other hand, using this concept in research needs to focus on issues caused by a power imbalance and methods of control within domestic violence (Hagan et al., 1987). It helps in a way that

makes it the revealer of how power behaves with children and manages their nature (Yount et al., 2011). Also, it helps in a way that is how children follow those patriarchal norms into gender-based violence (Hagan, Simpson & Gillis, 1987).

Structural Violence Theory

Structural violence (Ho, 2007) is characterized by the way the components of social institutions and structures themselves create the recurrent oppression, and violence in the society (Lee, 2016). Hence, this theory is applicable to investigate the issue of domestic abuse that is linked to the patrilinear structure and culture of the society (Alexander, 2018). It can be used as a tool to reveal the details of how social institutions and gender discrepancies work together to establish such social evil and also how children get into such situations and how they react to it (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999). When you study domestic violence from the feminist perspective, you are focused on its gendered facets, and you can challenge the existing gender roles and the existing power imbalances in society, and provide popularized insights on how child abuse can impact the broader vicious circle of oppression (Vorobej, 2008; Sinha, 2017).

Rationale

This research will have a direct impact on the kids who watch their mothers suffer from domestic abuse. In an attempt to get their father to alter his perspective, they ask the researcher to write about their life experiences in a style that he will be able to read (this is not a part of this study). In addition, this study will assist the kids in facing their shortcomings and taking action to create a happy family.

Main Objectives of the Study

1. To highlight the causes behind domestic violence from children’s perspectives

2. To help children confront the hindrances on the way toward a happy family

Significance of the Study

This study will help the children to know their inner-self, their weaknesses, and how to overcome these issues. This research opens up the ways for further research that which measures should be taken to reduce or eradicate domestic violence. This study will also be significant in the following ways:

Addressing the Lived Experiences

Family violence has significant negative effects on children's social, emotional, and psychological health (Yount et al., 2011). You can delve into the real-life experiences

of kids who have observed or suffered domestic violence by doing a phenomenology study. With this method, you may fully comprehend the long-term repercussions by capturing the subjective meaning and analysis of their experiences.

Filling a Research Gap

Domestic violence has been a topic of interest for researchers, gender specialists, and human rights activists for a long time in the local and international context. However, bringing the perspectives of young adults who have suffered or witnessed domestic violence during their childhood through an in-depth phenomenological point of view would bring new perspectives to the situation. Focusing on the subjective experiences of the study participants would help to understand the emotional and psychological trauma of the participants, which they suffered during the experience, and also its long-term impacts on their personality development and mental health in the present situation.

The research would also help to bring voice to individuals who have suffered domestic violence as children. Childhood is a stage where an individual depends upon adults/caregivers. Children find it difficult to understand their feelings, let alone voice their reactions to the situation. The pent-up emotions and anxieties of this stage of life carry throughout life if not treated through a cathartic process. This phenomenological research also allows them to voice their thoughts, feelings, opinions, repressed emotions, and suggestions to deal with such situations amicably and help them to validate their feelings and emotions.

The findings of this research can also bring strategies to utilize for awareness spreading and advocacy for mitigating the impacts of domestic violence on the personality and psychological health of the individuals who have suffered from or witnessed it in their childhood. Interventions, resource allocation, and community family support can be identified based on participants' responses to promote well-being.

Research Methodology

Children experience domestic violence in many settings. More studies are still needed to understand the particular mental and emotional processes of children who experience domestic violence. The data was analyzed by performing interpretative phenomenological analysis as a part of a qualitative research method. The participants were selected by purposive sampling, ensuring that diversity was present in age, gender, and social backgrounds. Informed consent was obtained. Data collection was based on open-ended interviews, allowing participants to speak about the domestic violence they may have observed or experienced directly, including their feelings and emotions. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed word-for-word for analysis purposes. Qualitative analysis was done to extract latent themes and preserve the meaning of the interviewees' narratives. Ethical issues, including confidentiality and participant welfare, were addressed precisely. The study helped to more broadly

understand the consequences of domestic violence on children's hearts and point out the directions of help and support to meet their needs.

Sources of Data

Semi-structured interviews, observations, and conversations were data sources. The primary source of data for this phenomenological study was a series of in-depth interviews conducted with individuals who have gone through domestic violence as children. The in-depth interview technique provides many colors and details to the data. It helped the participants to express their experiences of witnessing domestic violence at home and also of being survivors of domestic violence.

Participants

A small sample of around 11 young adults who have witnessed domestic violence upon their mother during their childhood most of the time were included in the sample. Nevertheless, the number of participants is small, but it is sufficient for in-depth phenomenological interviews and to shed light on their individuality and the variety of their life experiences. Respondents were individuals who have undergone and also witnessed domestic violence within their homes and were represented by different gender, age, and cultural backgrounds. The goal is to collect detailed and substantial stories from each participant, enabling an extensive investigation of the research topic within a qualitative, phenomenological study design framework.

Data Collection Techniques

The hermeneutic phenomenology (Suddick, 2020) followed, focusing on the study's requirements. The information was collected using a conversational method, and audio recordings were used with the participants' permission. Data were collected till the saturation in themes was achieved.

Study Locale

Data was collected from a rural community located in Tehsil Gujar Khan, Rawalpindi District, Province of Punjab, Pakistan.

Analysis of the Data

Data was processed to provide both the textural and the structural description individually, which would be realizable. The qualitative data themes and patterns were identified using a thorough scientific and systematic analysis approach of the data obtained from the probing interviews. Data were carefully transcribed for analysis to maintain the validity of the findings. Using thematic analysis, essential ideas, concepts, and feelings emerge in the

participants' narratives. The process consisted of diligent reading and re-reading the transcription to generate codes and categories. These codes and categories were arranged into general themes, encapsulating the main aspects of the participants' lives in the story. The study focused on describing the unique content of the children and how they feel towards home violence through expressing their individual experiences. The outcomes were interpreted and explained against existing data and research, along with the theories of domestic violence and its effects on the development of children into young adults. Through analysis, the overall objective is to provide a detailed and helpful perspective on how domestic violence affects the minds of young individuals and to yield suggestions to influence policies to improve the existing support services.

Results

Analysis & Findings

Table 1: This table shows different axial codes and themes of open codes

Open codes	Axial Codes	Themes	Verbatim
Distress	Emotional turmoil	Adverse effects of domestic violence	*"Every time I hear a loud noise, it feels like being dragged back to those horrible moments and I can't remove these memories. They torture me even in my nightmares."*
Fear			
Anxiety			
Trust			
Relationships			
Emotional distress	Psychological impact		*"Sometimes it feels like I should shout extremely loud, but inside down I know I have to keep it to myself because nobody cares and knows what I'm going through."*
Constant vigilance			
Emotional suppression			
Isolation			
Social withdrawal			*"It's been a long time since I felt safe and secure. Even at home, I have to be continuously alert, thinking that something bad will happen again at any moment.*
Guilt	Coping and adaptation		
Attachment issues			
Conflicting emotions			
Power imbalance			
Resilience			
Trauma	Traumatic impact and coping	Unveiling hidden scars	*"Every time I used to go out, I'm scared that people will judge me because I don't want them to know what our family is like and what is going on inside our home."*
Loyalty			
Help seeking			
Poor development			
Disruption			
Insecurity	Impaired well-being and functioning		*"It is tough to concentrate on my studies when all I have are concerns in my head. I feel that I can't focus, I can't seem to get back on track again."*
Low self-esteem			
Introvert			
Poor bonding			
Poor performance			

Discussion / Analysis

This study focuses on the lifelong impacts of witnessing domestic violence on the hearts of the children who have suffered it. The data analysis covers the effect of domestic violence on the child's psyche, parents, and society. Many themes have been noticed due to the thematic analysis of the collected interview data, opening the curtain on the psychological turbulence these children experienced.

The impact of emotional stress through an unbearable type of trauma became apparent in the subject of traumatic impact and coping (Allen, 2008). The participants spoke of their assorted fears, worries, and insecurities, associating quite a few of them with the tormenting scenes of witnessing domestic violence. Concerning their own and their siblings' safety from abuse, they mentioned that they had to bottle all of their emotions inside of themselves and had to develop some methods of coping with it. The emotional lives of those living in conditions of hypervigilance were affected by the violence in this situation (Lazarus, 1998). The decline in children's general well-being was apparent due to impaired well-being and functioning (Pollard & Lee, 2003).

Along with intense feelings of insecurity, low self-worth, and social loneliness, we have discovered from the people. Some of them could not form their interpersonal skills and make friends because what happened to them made it hard for them to cultivate trust and healthy connections. Participants generally felt that their learning ability was affected by different time zones, leading to concentration problems, which were detrimental to their performance. This reveals mental health disturbances and impairment in the performance of daily activities among children, as well as long-term emotional damage (Marin et al., 2011). People may present resilience when they struggle to cope with them, but it is evident that they have suffered in general well-being.

The children usually lack support and intervention; the analysis highlights the urgent need for social networks and intervention. It is crucial to make mental health services readily available and provide safe spots for young people to talk about what is troubling them regarding the atrocities they witnessed as children. The current research study only adds to the ever-growing field of knowledge concerning the delayed consequences of domestic violence on poor souls by unraveling the elaborate details of those impacts. Additionally, it points out that intense interventions are effective treatments. On the other hand, one has to note that the findings of the study are limited to the research sample and can be different among all individuals being subjected to domestic violence as children.

Further analysis must be done to understand the various facets, compounding factors, barriers, and needs within this demographic to develop individualized therapies that suit these factors. In short, this analysis demonstrates the urgent necessity to take quick and proper steps to stop the atrocity of domestic abuse that affects children's hearts. One can also be convinced that interventions, support, and healing are necessary to create resilient children and young adults.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The research's conclusions about how domestic abuse affects kids are explained and placed in context. The goal of this study was to detect patterns and differences between my findings—which covered subjects including emotional scars, coping, and well-being reduction—and previously published research by comparing the information gaps. It is possible to argue that the study findings that have been provided either support or undermine the established frameworks. Further research was done on the theoretical ramifications. The panellists engaged in a discussion about how research can serve as a point of reference to assist in the creation of treatments, programs, and policies for traumatized children and their families. The study's shortcomings and conclusions are emphasized, along with the necessity for more research.

Limitations of the Research

This study's sample size is small, limiting the applicability of the findings across a large or diverse population. The participants' experiences can be partial to fully capture the range of exposures suffered by other children exposed to domestic violence. Data triangulation was not done; study data was obtained from interviews only and not verified from different data sources, which can be a potential source of self-report bias. Qualitative data analysis always involves the subjective interpretation of the themes and codes and could result in the researcher’s bias and subjectivity. The participants were allowed to talk with a psychologist for catharsis if needed. The nature of the study was sensitive and had the potential to cause anxiety and feelings of distress among participants. They were provided with a thorough debriefing at the end of the interview.

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Hajra Shoukat is an M.Phil. Scholar, Gender Studies, Fatima Jinnah Women University Rawalpindi

Dr. Sahira Zaman is an Assistant Professor, Gender Studies, Fatima Jinnah Women University Rawalpindi