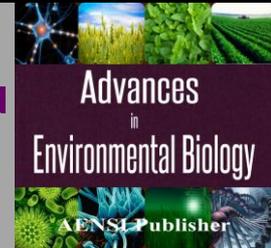




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The incidence of witnessing interparental violence and some of its psychological consequences among high school student in Bandar Abbas, Iran.

¹Sedigheh Abedini, ²Mohammadali Morowatisharifabad, ³Masoume Abbasi Shavazi

¹Reserch center for social determinates in health promotion, school of health, Department of Public Health, Faculty of Hormozgan University of Medical Sciences, Bandar Abbas, Iran, PhD candidate of Health Education, Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Science, Yazd, Iran.

²Department of Health Education, School of Health; Faculty of Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Science, Yazd, Iran.

³PhD candidate of Health Education, Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Science, Yazd, Iran.

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ABSTRACT

Background: The issue of domestic violence has been increasingly recognized as a persistent social and public health problem, particularly because of the tremendous, negative effects it has on children's health and well-being. The study had two aims; to examine the incidence of interparental violence witnessed by high school students and to examine the psychological effects of their exposure. **Martial and methods:** A descriptive-analytic survey was conducted among a sample of 302 high school students from Bandar Abbas, Iran. Different forms of Conflict Tactics Scale were utilized to measure the extent of interparental psychological aggression and physical violence witnessed by samples. The Haplessness Scale for Children, the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, and the Anxiety Scale were used to measure the above – mentioned psychological states. **Results:** The results indicate that participants witness high rate of psychological and physical violence between their parents. Significant amounts of variance in high school students' hopelessness and low self-esteem are explained by witnessing physical violence from father to mother. No significant differences were found between witnessing interparental violence and anxiety in participants. **Conclusion:** The results provided strong support for the hypothesis that witnessing interparental aggression and violence has a strong detrimental impact on adolescents' psychological states. These results suggest that there are negative psychological effects of domestic violence on the children and early intervention are needed to prevent later problems among children in families experiencing domestic violence.

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INTRODUCTION

Violence is a global issue by which the body of a society can collapse and threaten the man's life, health and freshness. Violence is a hidden and constant epidemic matter [1]. Although violence increasing on the streets and public places has made a lot of psychiatrics, sociologists and criminologists deeply worried, it is more probable to be beaten and cursed in the family than the outside, because family is the most critical and essential core of the society as well as the center of mental health and soundness. It plays a great role in the children's characters formation and can be replaced by no other resort. The victims of the domestic violence, mostly women, are often threatened to murder, sexual rape, and economic deprivation [2].

Women might be assaulted in the family, but children can be harmed as well, due to violence and struggle between their parents [3]. Domestic violence is known as a public health problem ,because of its extensiveness and negative influences on the victim's health and welfare as well as the children's well-being [4]. In a study by Haj -Yahia et al (2001) desperation and the problems against better consistency and low self-esteem among the Arab youth, who had faced domestic violence, was reported [5]. It is obviously specified via the performed studies that those children who have already faced the domestic violence, experience a great deal of harmful psychological consequences such as: introvert and extrovert behaviors increase, growth in depression, anxiety and stress symptoms. Moreover, these children may reveal more physical dispute and higher levels of behavioral problems. This may also cause to stroke symptoms outbreak and higher degrees in comparison with the posttraumatic stress disorder [6, 7]. Witnessing domestic violence in childhood will increase mental-spiritual,

Corresponding Author: Mohammadali Morowatisharifabad, Department of Health Education, School of Health; Faculty of Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Science, Yazd, Iran.
Tel/Fax: +98 351 6240691 E-mail: morowatisharif@yahoo.com

behavioral and in sociable problems in adulthood [8]. Children and the youth who observe domestic violence may experience behavioral problems (e.g., stroke, escaping from school), affective problems (e.g., anxiety, depression, low self-esteem), cognitional problems (e.g., poor performance of the university) and physical problems (e.g., insomnia, weak motor skills). Inclination for suicide, feelings of loss, anger, feeling guilty, physical-mental problems (e.g., headache, stomachache, asthma, sleep-walking, anorexia, nightmare), less empathy, weaker skills in solving the problems and paradox, hold more problems at school, higher levels of aggression, violence towards siblings, and abusing alcohol and drug [5, 9, 8].

In Iran, accordance with several studies, incidence of domestic violence 38%, physical violence 15%, sexual violence 42.4%, and affective- mental violence 81.5% of domestic violence has been already reported [10, 11]. Despite high incidence of this matter in the society, very few studies, about the relationship between observing the domestic violence and its psychological consequences among our country's youth have been done. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the incidence of witnessing interparental violence and some psychological consequences among high school students in Bandar Abbas, Iran. It was hypothesized that witnessing verbal and psychological aggression and physical violence between parents is significantly related to the extent to which high schools experience haplessness, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study was descriptively – analytically implemented to determinant the incidence of parental violence and its consequences towards the high school students in Bandar Abbas, Iran.

After receiving permission from the authorities of the education department of Bandar Abbas and explaining the aims of the research to the students and gaining their satisfaction to join the research, a self-administered questionnaire based on the following items and scales was used to collect variables in this study. The students were randomly chosen simply from the high schools of Bandar Abbas. Sampling was randomly done in a simple way among the students of the high schools in Bandar Abbas. Considering the level of certainty, the size of the sample is 95% and the error of evaluation is 5%, and in view of the previous studies through which it has been observed that 50% of children have witnessed parental violence [7] and by using the formula $N = \frac{pq}{d^2} \frac{z^2 - \alpha}{2}$, the size of the sample was evaluated 300 people, and 320 questionnaires were distributed for assurance and the samples falling possibility.

Instrument package:

Demographic and background data:

The first part of the instrument package consisted of questions about the demographic and background characteristics of the participants and their families as follows: participants' gender and age; father's and mother's age, parent's level of education, and occupation; average family's monthly income and number of the family members.

Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS):

Different forms of two CTS subscales (verbal and psychological aggression, and physical violence) were used to measure the frequency of the incidence of father-to-mother and mother-to-father verbal and psychological aggression and physical violence (i.e., how many times such aggression or violence occurred during the 12 months preceding the study), as witnessed by the high school students.

This scale was first translated into Persian by Mohammad khani (2005 –6). The internal reliability value of this scale as utilized in the current study was 0/88 for witnessing father-to- mother and mother-to- father verbal and psychological aggression, and, 0/96 for witnessing father-to- mother and mother-to- father physical violence [12, 13] and used in a variety of studies [14, 5, 15, 16, 9, 17, 12]. The English translation of the Iran version of the two CTS subscales is presented in Table 1. Items 1 through 5 measure verbal and psychological aggression, and items 6 through 10 measure physical violence.

The Hopelessness Scale for Children (HSC):

This scale was established by Kazdin et al. 1983, to measure the rate of hopelessness in children. Hopelessness, or negative expectations for the future, is considered a central feature of depression. The HSC consists of 17 items. For each item, children are asked to indicate whether it is true or false for them. The maximum grade which represents the highest rate of hopelessness is 17. The current study utilized a pension version of the HSC to measure hopelessness among high school students. This scale has been normalized in Iran [18]. The internal reliability value of this scale as utilized in the current study was 0/97.

Spielberg's anxiety scale:

It consists of 20 sentences and each sentence was given a mark of likert grade-4 scale (e.g. never, a little, fairly high and really high). The hidden anxiety scale suggests one's overall and general sensations, thus, it is used to determine a worried and anxious character. The current study utilized a pension version of the Spielberg's anxiety scale to measure anxiety among high school students. It is a reliability and validity scale to measure the rate of anxiety [5, 19].

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE):

This scale includes 10 general phrases in which there are five sentences expressed with negative words and five with the affirmative ones that was designed in 1962 to measure the self-esteem of high school students. Each sentence will be marked according to a four-choice scale as Completely Consistent, Consistent, Opponent, and Completely Opponent choices. The marks of this scale is arranged from zero to three and the highest possible mark is thirty. The current study utilized a pension version of the RSE to measure self-esteem among high school students. It is a reliability and validity scale to measure the rate of self-esteem [20, 5, 21-23]. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 19 software. Descriptive statistics including abundance, percentage, average and standard deviation as well as the analytic statistics including Pearson's Linear Unity factor, and T-test for analyzing the data, were used. Significant level in the tests considered as 0.05.

Results:

10 questionnaires out of 320 distributed ones were leaved out of the study due to one of the parents death (9 for fathers and one for mothers), while 8 questionnaires were cancelled because of incompleteness. 136 people out of 302 participants in this research (45%) were females and 166 of them (54%) were males. The average age of the participants was 16.09 ± 0.92 (minimum of 14 and maximum of 18). Fifty-three (53) people (17.5%) were in the first grade, 87 people (28.7%) were in the second grade, and 163 people (53.8%) were in the third grade. Ninety-seven (97) people (32%) were studying in mathematics course, ninety-six (96) people (31.7%) in experimental sciences course and fifty-six (56) people (18.5%) were studying in Human sciences course. The average age for participants' fathers was 45.65 ± 6.51 (i.e. minimum 34 and maximum 82). Their mothers' average age was 40.36 ± 5.92 (i.e. minimum 28 and maximum 63). From the view point of education, for fathers, there 102 people (33.8%) were lower than high school diploma, 95 people (31.5%) were with high school diploma, and 81 people (26.8%) were higher than high school diploma. Among the mothers checked in the research as the samples, 140 people (46.4%) were lower than high school diploma, 81 people (26.8%) had high school diploma and 53 people (17.5%) were higher than high school diploma. Of the under-the-study participants' mothers, 248 of them were housekeepers and 43 of them (14.5%) were employed (11 participants had not answered to this question). 10 fathers were unemployed and 267 of them (88.4%) had a job (25 participants had not answered to this question).

Witnessing fathers' verbal and psychological aggression violence represented a significant statistical difference in girls and boys ($P=0.01$). Observing mothers' psychological aggression violence showed a significant statistical difference between the two genders as well ($P=0.03$).

Comparing the rate of the both fathers and mothers' physical violence, no statistical differences were seen between the two genders ($P>0.05$).

There were no significant statistical differences between seeing fathers and mothers' physical violence by the students with parents' age and level of education ($P=0.05$). Forms of the parents' psychological aggression and physical violence observed by the students are shown in table 1.

Table1: The incidence of witnessing interparental verbal and psychological aggression and physical violence (each act at least once over the past 12 months) (N=320)

Forms of verbal and psychological aggression and physical violence	Father-to-mother	Mother-to-father
Insulted, yelled, or swore	36/8%	36/8%
Sulked and refused to talk about conflicts	53%	50/7%
Leaving the room or house	39/1%	38/1%
Threw or smashed something but not at the other person	22/5%	18/9%
Threatened to hit or throw something at the other person	22/2%	17/2%
Threw something at the other person	17/9%	15/6%
Pushed, grabbed, or shovel the other person	15/2%	12/3%
Hit or tried to hit the other person (slapping, kicking, punching)	19/5%	16/5%
Hit or tried to hit the other person with harmful objects (stone, knife, chair, wooden stick, ...)	15/2%	13/2%
Threatened to divorce	13/9%	16/2%

There were no significant statistical differences between witnessing fathers' verbal and psychological aggression with hopelessness ($P = 0.9$), self-esteem ($P=0.1$) and anxiety ($P=0.08$) in the research samples.

The relationship between witnessing fathers' physical violence and rate of hopelessness, self-esteem and anxiety of the research samples is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Relationship between witnessing fathers' physical violence and rate of hopelessness, self-esteem and anxiety of the research samples

Variables	M±SD	T	sig
Hopelessness	5/0±3/52	-2/682	0/008
Self-esteem	18/69±5/58	2/014	0/04
Anxiety	50/30±4/82	-421/0	0/6

There were no significant statistical differences between witnessing mothers' verbal and psychological aggression with hopelessness ($P = 0.5$), self-esteem ($P=0.06$) and anxiety ($P=0.3$) in the research samples.

There were no significant statistical differences between witnessing mothers' physical violence with hopelessness ($P = 0.3$), self-esteem ($P=0.6$) and anxiety ($P=0.3$) in the research samples.

Discussion:

The aim of this study was to investigate the incidence of witnessing interparental violence and some psychological consequences among high school students in Bandar Abbas, Iran.

The results of this study showed a high rate of psychological aggression and physical violence between the parents (esp. for mothers' verbal and psychological aggression and physical violence), which were observed by the students. This finding is consistent with the other studies accomplished in this field [14, 5, 15].

The reason of this higher rate of violence observance, especially those for the mothers' in comparison with the fathers', might be due to the media's influence in recent years and as a result of that, can be upon the change in the culture of the society, because previously the harsh faces mainly shown by the media were only men and in fact women were submissive and obedient faces who, under any circumstances, were giving up against their husbands and abandoning all their rights. However, currently, women are mostly presenting the action and fighting roles through the TV series, movies and cartoon as much as the men are doing and even sometimes in some programs it is the women who are playing the lead-role to perform the violent programs and women are always looking for their rights. Moreover, during the previous years, girls were taught and trained in the families for those kinds of sports, special arts and soft activities which were never related to the violence in anyway and the rough sports such as Karate, Box, Judo, etc. as well as the toys like guns, machine gun, sword, etc. were particularly for boys, while today these are no more considered seriously as an issue or they have even faded. These altogether may have made our participants in this study to report more violence from their mothers than their fathers.

The difference incidence in the observance of the violence in different studies can be resulted by different definition of types of the violence in each study. Furthermore, it is possible that some of the students have refused to talk about the violence due to their fear or shame (esp. in the countryside and villages). Additionally, children who are raised in the homes encountering violence might have no possibility to enter the school or continue their education and it could not be possible to find them among the high school population.

The result of this study also revealed that it is more probable for girls to face the parents' verbal and psychological aggression than for the boys ($OR = 2.6$). This finding is consistent with a previous study [23], while in the study accomplished by Haj -Yahia et al (2001), it was shown that the boys and girls had faced the similar rate of the parents' utterance violence [5].

The reports presented in this study by most of the girls about the observing the aggression between the parents can likely be due to the girls' more presence at home comparing with the boys or it might be due to the possible inhibitor effect that prevents boys' presence during the violence occurrence. It is also possible that the girls can explain the violence they have observed easier and simpler than the boys and boys attempt more to keep the inter-family secrets hidden, because of their personal characteristics.

Through the current research there is a significant statistical relationship between the students' witnessing of their parents' physical violence and their hopelessness which is fully in compliance with the results of the study accomplished by Haj -Yahia et al (2001). However, we couldn't see any significant statistical differences between the students' witnessing of their mothers' physical violence against the fathers and the rate of their hopelessness; while Haj -Yahia et al. (2001) had found this kind of statistical relationship [5].

Witnessing the physical violence of the fathers against the mothers by children might be interpreted more important, serious and effective; therefore, it can result to children's more hopelessness, while observing the same things from mothers against the fathers seem to be less threatening and thus, causes less hopelessness in the observers. Since 88.4% of the fathers included in this study were employed, while only 14.5% of the mothers were employed, the children, despite observing mothers' violence towards fathers, may consider it less serious and threatening and therefore, it has not caused any significant desperation in them.

Moreover, the results of the current research, presented a significant statistical difference between witnessing fathers' physical violence towards mothers and the lower rate of self-esteem of the research samples, which is in compliance with the study implemented by Haj -Yahia et al. (2001). However, observing the physical violence from mothers towards fathers by the students and their lower rate of self-esteem did not show any significant statistical differences, while Haj -Yahia et al. (2001) had seen a great statistical difference among

the observers between the physical violence from mothers towards fathers and lower self-esteem[5]. Holt et al. had reported a lower self-esteem in children who had observed domestic violence, as well [8].

Obtaining the rate of hopelessness may have caused a lower self-esteem in the students, because they had become more hopeless while watching physical violence from fathers towards mothers and therefore they had got a lower self-esteem, because the participants had not felt hopelessness while observing the physical violence from mothers towards fathers, thus, we did not see any significant statistical differences in their rate of self-esteem.

During the accomplishment of the current study, we did not see any significant statistical difference between the parental violence (verbal and physical) observed by the participants and their rate of anxiety. This finding is consistent with Alaghband et al study [24]. However, some studies have shown that the parental violence observance is accompanied with anxiety enhancement [5, 7, 2].

What causes this difference is dissimilarity of the tools used in this study with those used in other studies and also the participants' age difference, so that the age of the participants joined the current study and those of Alaghband et al and his colleagues' study were the students of the 1st to 3rd grades in high school (14-18 years), while in some of the other studies, they were college students [5]. The rate of the observed violence could possibly less stressful or even so low that it could not encounter the students with any danger and increase their anxiety, or the participants' threshold in distress experienced from the observed violence has not been that high to show a significant statistical difference.

In addition, in this study girls has reported more parental violence than boys (OR=2/6). This finding is consistent with Vameghi et al [23], while another study showed a similar rate of psychological and physical violence reported by both the boys and the girls [5].

The reason of the girls more reports about observing the violence between the parents may related to their longer presence at home than the boys or it may be because of the boys' presence preventing effects during the violence occurrence. Also, girls might talk about the violence easier than the boys and boys attempt more to keep the inter-family secrets hidden, because of their personal characteristics.

Conclusion:

The results obtained from other studies and researches showed that the parental physical violence can undesirably affect the children's mental health. Therefore, the media should inform the public in this regard. If they do so, it will become possible to restrict the domestic violence to spread out and hence, decrease its mental and psychological side effects.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical issues (including plagiarism, information consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/ or submission, redundancy, etc.) have been completely observed by authors.

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Authors' contributions: SA helped design the study, carried out data collection and drafted the manuscript. MM helped design the study, draft the manuscript and interpretation. BE helped design the study, draft the manuscript and interpretation .HF helped design the study, and helped draft the manuscript, AB helped design the study.All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Limitation: The findings of the qualitative research cannot be generalized to other communities, there are some ways for providing acceptability and objectivity for data and increasing the accuracy of used data, which can help in applying these results for similar communities.

Conflict of interest: The authors have no conflicts of interest.

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