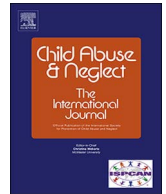


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Research article

The relationships between violence in childhood and educational outcomes: A global systematic review and meta-analysis

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ABSTRACT

This is the first study to estimate the association globally between violence in childhood on educational outcomes, addressing a significant gap in the current evidence base. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses were conducted to identify 67 and 43 studies respectively from 21 countries to estimate the relationship between different types of violence in childhood on educational outcomes including school dropout/graduation, school absence, academic achievement and other educational outcomes such as grade retention, learning outcomes and remedial classes. Findings show that all forms of violence in childhood have a significant impact on educational outcomes. Children who have experienced any form of violence in childhood have a 13% predicted probability that they will not graduate from school. Males who are bullied are nearly three times more likely to be absent from school and girls who have experienced sexual violence have a three-fold increased risk of being absent, AOR 2.912, 95% CI (0.904–4.92) and AOR 3.147, 95% CI (0.033–4.57) respectively. Violence in childhood also has a significant impact on children's academic achievement on standardized tests. This study shows how different forms of violence in childhood contribute to inequalities in education—for both boys and girls and that an increased investment in prevention is needed in order to meet the global Sustainable Development Goals of ending violence, raising learning outcomes and creating safe, non-violence and inclusive learning environments. More work is also needed to further define, monitor and measure the link between violence in childhood and educational outcomes in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

1. Introduction

Addressing violence in childhood is a key development challenge for many countries and a major focus for international development since the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which include targets specifically aimed at eliminating, reducing and preventing violence everywhere. While violence in childhood has been shown to impact the health and well-being of children in every country where it has been measured, there is less evidence of the impact of violence on educational outcomes (Gilbert et al., 2009; Fry, 2016; Fang et al., 2015) despite the realization that education goals cannot be met when children live in fear (UNESCO, 2017; UN Secretary General, 2016). This study assesses the impact of a wide range of types of violence in

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childhood on educational outcomes through a global systematic review and meta-analyses. As the first study to do so, it aims to fill a gap in existing knowledge about this relationship and identify key issues for future research. The study is part of a larger program of research intended to support the achievement of SDG education Target 4.a which calls for the provision of *safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all*.

The past ten to fifteen years have seen substantial improvement in the analysis of both the prevalence and consequences of violence in childhood as demonstrated by a number of reviews and meta-analyses looking at this field of study which include both a global (see Barth, Bermetz, Heim, Trelle & Tonia, 2013; Hillis, Mercy, Amobi & Kress, 2016; Pereda, Guilera, Forns & Gómez-Benito, 2009; Stoltenborgh, van IJzendoorn, Euser & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011) and regional perspective (see Fry, McCoy & Swales, 2012; UNICEF, 2012). Furthermore, there have been systematic reviews and meta-analyses exploring individual countries where enough empirical literature exists (see Ji, Finkelhor, & Dunne, M. 2013; Fang et al., 2015). However, fewer literature reviews and meta-analyses focus on educational outcomes. Those that do typically examine variables such as enrolment, attendance and learning outcomes as measured by test scores (Cuesta, Glewwe & Krause, 2016; Glewwe et al., 2011; Mitchell, Wylie & Carr, 2008; Snilstveit et al., 2015). Measuring learning and other educational outcomes such as enrolment is important because enrolment does not ensure attendance and attending school does not necessarily mean children will learn (Rose & Alcott, 2015). Nevertheless, the measurement of learning outcomes has become an important focus of policy and programming efforts – including the SDGs – as a means of ensuring equitable and inclusive education for all (SDG 4), reducing poverty (SDG 1), and improving life skills (a focus area for many goals). Though there have been improvements in defining and measuring educational outcomes, including learning, there is a clear need to better understand how violence impacts children's educational outcomes.

Although no systematic review has yet examined the myriad forms of violence in childhood and their impact on educational outcomes, there have been both literature reviews and meta-analyses conducted on some specific violence types and academic outcomes. For example, a literature review by Espelage et al. (2013) concluded that bullying and peer victimization are related to poor academic performance in college. Another review examining violence and aggression in urban minority youth in the United States concluded that violence adversely affects academic achievement by negatively impacting cognition, school connectedness and school attendance (Basch, 2011). A further recent review exploring the relationship between violence in childhood and educational outcomes which utilized 20 articles, of which sixteen were empirical and four were research syntheses, concluded that violence in childhood frequently impairs academic performance resulting in special education requirements, grade retention and lower grades (Romano, Babchishin, Marquis & Fréchette, 2015). A recent report by UNESCO (2017) has also shown that school violence and bullying victimization impacts children's education in a number of ways, such as being afraid to go to school, difficulties concentrating in class and poorer performance in subjects, particularly mathematics. Nakamoto and Schwartz (2010) conducted a meta-analytic review of 33 studies that explored the association between peer victimization and academic performance. This systematic approach reported a small but significant negative correlation between peer victimization and academic performance using random effects and fixed-effects models (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010). Clearly these reviews offer important insights about the impact of violence on academic and other educational outcomes but equally there has been a lack of systematic attempts to explore these associations.

This paper is the first to comprehensively explore the impact of violence in childhood on various educational outcomes including learning. A global systematic review was conducted and meta-analyses estimating the impact of violence on educational outcomes were developed. The meta-analyses calculated the magnitude of associations with school dropout, absenteeism, academic achievement, grade repetition, engagement and other outcomes, and thereby estimated (at least to the lower bound) the educational burden, separately for seven major types of violence in childhood: physical, sexual, emotional, and community violence as well as bullying, neglect, and witnessing parental violence.

2. Methods

2.1. Systematic review of the impact of violence in childhood on educational outcomes

A systematic review was conducted to identify studies reporting on the consequences of violence in childhood on educational outcomes. The term 'violence in childhood' is used to cover violence against children, violence by children towards others (such as bullying) and violence to which children are exposed (such as witnessing parental violence). Definitions of different types of violence used in the study are presented in Table 1. Educational outcomes are those specified in the studies included in the review. These include measures of school performance including academic performance and test scores; student engagement; and attendance, truancy, absenteeism suspension and expulsion (see Table 2).

We searched PubMed, Embase, PsycInfo, CINAHL-EBSCO, ERIC and SocINDEX for papers published from the start of January 2000 to the end of November 2016 utilizing both free text and controlled vocabulary of subject heading and keyword terms consisting of population (children); type of violence and type of educational outcome [systematic review protocol with full list of search strings is available from the authors]. Languages were restricted to English and the geographic scope was global. Two reviewers identified and screened potentially relevant articles and independently assessed each study against the inclusion criteria. To identify additional relevant studies; we also hand searched several journals including *Child Abuse and Neglect*; *Child Maltreatment*; *Child Abuse Review*; *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*; *International Journal of Educational Development* and *Developmental Psychology*.

Based on the methods of previous reviews, studies were included if they were: primary research that explored the relationship between at least one form of violence in childhood (occurring before the age of 18), regardless of the setting (home, school, community, institution) where the violence occurred including: (1) sexual violence (including unwanted touching, forced sex, attempted

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