

Physical Violence On Children's Rights In Garowe District, Puntland, Somalia

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Abstract: The study examined the effect of physical violence on children rights in Garowe District, Puntland in Somalia. The study employed a descriptive research design. A sample size of 158 respondents was targeted. However, the analysis was based on an accessible sample of 124 respondents. Quantitative data from the sample were generated using survey questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results revealed that Garowe District, physical violence is common because the area has been a battle ground for a long period, stretching over 3 decades. The prevalence of domestic violence has been precipitated by a state of hopelessness, socio-economic deficiencies, lawlessness and insecurity. The study concluded that conflict-infested environments are affected by physical violence which undermines the rights of children. The results provide insightful information to parties working towards the restoration of order in conflict-torn Somalia to prioritize child protection in their programme and project interventions.

Keywords: Child, Rights, Conflict, Violence, Somalia.

I. INTRODUCTION

Violence against children (VAC) is one of the serious and disastrous social issues of public concern across the globe (Biset et al., 2023; Cerna-Turoff et al., 2021). It is syndemic since it is public health, human rights and social problem (Ferrara et al., 2019). The levels of VAC are high in both developed and developing countries (Maternowska et al., 2024; UNICEF, 2024). In the recent past, it was reported that about 1 billion children aged 2 -17 years experienced some form of violence (Cerna-Turoff et al., 2021; WHO, 2024). Reports indicate that in the last decade alone, at least 50% of children in Africa, Asia and North America experienced some form of violence. However, comparably, Cerna-Turoff et al.(2021) and Pundir et al. (2020) concede that the toll of VAC is most pronounced in developing countries (also referred to in this paper as Low- and middle-income countries) (LMICS). Implicit from this, it is worth noting that prevalence rates of violence against children are higher in the LMICs because they are home of more than 80% of the world's children (Cerna-Turoff et al., 2021; UNICEF, 2024). VAC occurs physically, emotionally and sexually in homes, schools, communities, and online (PAHO, n.d; UNICEF, 2024).

The propensity of VAC to occur is higher in conflict affected communities and fragile societies (Biset et al., 2023) as well as in homes affected by gender based violence (Maternowska et al., 2024; WHO, 2024). It is feared that by 2030, over half of the world's poor will be living in fragile and conflict environments arising from intensifying conflicts, inequitable climate change impacts, and unstable governance (Baillie Abidi, 2021; O'Leary et al., 2018). The children living in such settings are vulnerable to violent parenting (Backhaus et al., 2024). They are more vulnerable to physical punishment at the hands of parents and caregivers (WHO, 2024) and consequently exposure to serious health and well-being consequences that undermine their right to life, to a healthy environment, belonging to a home, right to dignity, among others (PAHO, n.d). Further, it compels them to adopt high-risk behaviors such as smoking, alcohol, drug abuse and unsafe sex (PAHO, n.d). Somalia might not be an exception. Somalia is located in the horn of Africa. It is bordered by Gulf of Eden to the North, Indian Ocean and the Somali Sea to the East, Ethiopia to the West, Djibouti to the Northwest and Kenya to the Southwest. It gained her political independence on 1 July 1960. The country is one of the historical examples of conflict-infested countries in the world (Keating & Waldman, 2019;

Warm, 2005). The country has experienced 60 years of uninterrupted political violence (Gumbi, 2015; Ullan de la Rosa & Arrey, 2021).

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Studies (such as *Le et al.*, 2016; *Maternowska et al.*, 2024; *Miller & Jordans*, 2016; *O'Leary et al.*, 2018; *Pundir et al.*, 2020; *Stark & Landis*, 2016) have shown that children in low income and fragile settings are vulnerable to polyvictimization and high incidences of violence that undermine their rights, there is limited evidence about the magnitude of physical violence on children's rights in Somalia and particularly in Garowe District, Puntland, one of the worst-affected battle grounds in the country. Much as existing studies on human rights situation in Somalia (such as *Ashby*, 2011; *Herrenkohl*, 2018) have shown persistent breaches in human rights owing to the country's pervasive weak central authority and recurrent hostilities, its problems, especially those pertaining to children's rights, are not addressed and more so, in relation to physical violence. Hence, the purpose of this study was to assess the impact of physical violence in Garowe District on children's rights.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on Bioecological Systems Theory (BST). The theory was developed in 1979 by Urie Bronfenbrenner. The environment is emphasized by this theory as the key determinant of a child's social, biological, physical and emotional development. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), as the child develops, more complex interactions occur within its environment. The child's environment is multi-layered in a concentric circle. The layers are microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The microsystem is the closest to the child. The key structures in this layer include family, school, and neighborhood and childcare environments. It is within this layer that interpersonal relationships are developed by the child with their immediate surroundings. The mesosystem provides a milieu where the interconnection between the structures of the child's microsystem is realized. In this layer, we observe connections between a child's teachers and their parents as well as between the parents and/ or caregivers with their neighborhoods (Berk, 2000). The larger social system characterizes the exosystem and in this layer, the influence between the child and the environment is uni-directional. The relationships affect a child's development with no reverse influence from the child. For instance, authorities charged with child protection services can pass guidelines that should be upheld and observed by parents and / or caregivers. Such guidelines promote child wellbeing especially when they are ratified as community standards. However, a child may or may not be aware of such and therefore, cannot influence such directives. The macrosystem is the outermost layer of the bioecological concentric model. In this layer, are well-defined cultural virtues, social norms and established belief systems. The standards or beliefs upheld in this layer permeate the micro, meso and ecosystems. A case in point are community beliefs about child rearing. In communities where the local authorities are not committed to monitoring and enforcing child protection

against violence, family turmoil affects the wellbeing of children and consequently, their rights are undermined. What is gleaned from the above is that the interplay between different human, relational, group and societal factors influences child development (Sibisi, 2021; University of Washington, 2024).

This study was premised on the microsystem. Characteristically, the relationships that are formed between children with parents and caregivers affects their development and resilience (University of Washington, 2024). In conflict affected settings, debilitating environmental and psychological conditions which children are exposed to, impacts their development. Such include family turmoil, exposure to community violence, early childhood separation, substandard housing and exposure to toxins, noise and crowding. D'Angelo (2017) notes that an environment characterized by the just mentioned inequities undermines a child's wellbeing. These impede the formation of viable interactions between a child and microsystem. Thus, BST provided lenses through which the effects of physical violence meted on children in conflict affected environments such as Somalia were assessed. Importantly, whenever there is a break down in the microsystem, the children are grossly affected. The emerging stress caused by the breakdown in the interactions undermines the potential of the children to realize their needs and consequently, they become stressed. In extreme levels, the children can engage in child labor, some can escape from home and drop out of school. The girls can engage in risky sexual behaviors leading to early marriages and teenage motherhood. Collectively, the above undermine the propensity to realize and enjoy childhood rights.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Physical violence is concerned with acts that result in physical injury of children (Nationwide Children's Hospital, 2024; Venables et al., 2025). It is defined as the intentional use of physical force against a child which increases the likelihood of harming the health, survival, development and dignity of a child (Desai & Goel, 2018). It is a common social vice that affects both developed and developing countries (WHO, 2022). The social problem has become endemic and affects people who are under 18 years of age. It is perpetrated by parents and/or caregivers, peers, romantic partners or strangers (Ferrara et al., 2019; WHO, 2022). Much as some cases of physical violence occur outside the home, most are committed by parents and / or caregivers of by someone known to the children (Brockstedt et al., 2025; Nationwide Children's Hospital, 2024; It manifests in different forms, namely- maltreatment, bullying and physical assault (Venables et al., 2025; WHO, 2022).

Violence is harmful to children (Heilmann et al., 2021). UNICEF (2018) notes that in whatever forms they manifest, the violence, exploitation and abuse jeopardizes child development and constitute a blow to their wellbeing. Violence among children has short- and long-term impacts that are disastrous (Bhuller et al., 2024; Ferrara et al., 2019). This situation is reinforced by National Institute of Justice of US (2016) that violence against children has far-reaching, negative consequences. For instance, children who become victims of physical violence and/ or witness physical violence are vulnerable to health problems, dwindling levels of self-esteem and development of negative social coping strategies such as dropping out of school (Bhuller et al., 2024; Brockstedt et al.,

2025; Venables et al., 2025). The syndemic effect of dropping out of school is manifested in the choice of a child running away from home to the streets for safety and eventually, a higher propensity of partaking in child labor (Nkurunungi, 2024). Besides this, there is also a higher likelihood that a child living on the streets barely realizes their rights to education and health (Nkurunungi, 2024). It is therefore rife to deduce that in black and white, physical violence undermines a broad range of child rights.

V. METHODOLOGY

This study followed a descriptive survey design. The design was chosen because it enabled the researcher to obtain information needed for the study; also it helped the researcher to focus on a single unit of study. Equally, it helped the researcher to acquire deeper knowledge about the association between physical violence and child rights. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaires were distributed to Police officials working in the Family & Children Protection Unit and the residents of Garowe District, Puntland. Closed-ended questions that tapped into the feelings of respondent groups regarding effect of physical violence on children rights formed the questionnaire. The study's sample size was 158 determined using Slovin's formula.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}; \quad n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} = \frac{260}{1 + 0.65} = 158$$

respondents

Where: n = sample size; N = the population size and; e = level of significance, fixed at 0.05

The administered questionnaire was pretested in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. The questionnaire data were cleaned, coded and entered in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26 for analysis. Tabular devices were employed in the presentation of the findings while narrative text were used to analyze and interpret the findings.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. RESPONSE RATE

Out of 158 questionnaires that were distributed to the Police Family & Protection Unit officials and residents, only 124 of them were returned and this implies that the response rate was 78.4% as illustrated below;

$$\frac{124}{158} * 100\% = 78.4\%$$

This high response rate signifies that the researcher successfully gathered sufficient data to support the creation of a thorough and comprehensive report. Besides, the higher response rate realized in this study is indicative of the representativeness of the sample to the entire universe (Fosnacht et al., 2017) leading to generation of valid, reliable and generalizable results (Booker et al., 2021). Moreover, high quality findings that are devoid of non-response errors are eminent in studies with high response rates (Smith et al., 2019; Taherdoost, & Madanchian, 2025) and; are litmus of the high interest vested in the study by the respondents (Goodwin et al., 2021).

B. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES OF THE RESPONDENTS

The socio-demographic features captured by the study were: gender, education level and age of the respondents as shown in Table 1.

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	73	58.9
	Female	51	41.1
	Total	124	100
Education level	Primary	45	36.3
	Secondary	51	41.1
	Certificate	14	11.3
	Diploma	10	8.1
	Bachelor	3	2.4
	Degree	1	0.8
	Total	124	100
Age of respondents	20-35 years	18	14.5
	36-51 years	72	58.1
	Above 51 years	34	27.4
	Total	124	100

Source: Field Data

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 that males dominated at 73(58.9%) compared to females 51(41.1%), implying the dominance of males as perpetrators of physical violence in Garowe District. It is indicative of a patriarchal society. In terms of education, majority of the respondents has attained basic education (Primary and secondary) at 77.4%. This statistics implies that the findings reported in this study captured the informed views of the respondents. The different age-groups that participated in the study is indicative of how physical violence on children is a matter of concern for all categories of people in Garowe District.

C. DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS ON EFFECT OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN RIGHTS

This section mainly concerns the effect of Physical violence on children rights in Garowe District, Somalia. The study results are presented in the Table 2;

Indicators	Mean	S. D	Rating	Rank
Children witnessing the fights between parents are more likely to lose respect for their parents	4.09	1.02	High	4
Physical beatings and torture have broken families and left many children homeless	4.14	0.98	High	1
Children witnessing the beatings and	4.12	1.02	High	2

<p> fights are always traumatized by the events throughout their lives Children raised in families characterized with this kind of violence are more likely to become violent in future The abused parties are likely to carry on the hatred to children and thus deny them their rights </p>	<p> 4.10 3.04 </p>	<p> 1.01 1.06 </p>	<p> High None </p>	<p> 3 5 </p>
Average Mean	3.9	1.02	High	

Source: Field Data

Table 2: Effect of Physical violence on children rights in Garowe District, Somalia

As indicated in the Table 2, the mean of children witnessing the fights between parents losing respect for their parents was 4.09 with a standard deviation of 1.02. The high mean value implied that majority of the respondents agreed that whenever the children witness violence among parents and / or caregivers, they will vest less respect in their parents/ caregivers and therefore, they will be victims of circumstance. They will too, become targets of the parents/caregivers who will insist on re-asserting authority through physical abuses. This finding is amplified by Kadir et al. (2019) who observed that in conflict-infested environments, the harsh conditions precipitate causes of domestic violence especially orchestrated by failure of the husbands to meet the basic needs of the household. This situation culminates into inter-partner violence and consequently, direct and indirect effects on children including injuries, limited access to health and education as well as physical torture of the children, hence undermining their rights.

Physical beatings and torture have broken families in Garowe District leaving many children homeless with mothers. This inference is drawn basing on the high mean value, 4.14 and standard deviation of 0.98. According to Nkurunungi (2024), in instances where a child is forced to leave home, the stakes are high that they will run to the streets as the case of Uganda has shown. Violence-infested homes are debilitating for children and once these run to the streets for safety, they are prone to missing out on education and experiencing difficulty to access healthcare services. Besides, once the children run to relatives near and distant, they are most likely to be engaged in child labor activities and consequently abuse of their rights (Nkurunungi, 2024).

Study findings (Table 2) equally revealed that in Garowe District, the children who witnessed beatings and fights were always traumatized by the events throughout their lives. The high mean value, 4.12 and standard deviation of 1.02 are indicative of the negative impact that physical violence has had on children's rights in study context. This finding rhymes Margolin, and Vickerman (2007) who noted that when children are exposed to physical abuse and fights between parents develop pervasive traumatic stress and consequently post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD floods children with negative affect leading to poor impulse control and relationship problems (Margolin & Vickerman, 2007). Traumatized

children develop externalizing and internalizing problems and in case they are in school, they will become withdrawn and drop-out. This cripples their attempts to realize the right to education.

Children raised in families characterized by physical violence are more likely to become violent in future. The mean value, 4.10 and standard deviation of 1.01 implied that in Garowe District, there was cyclic physical violence, given the decades of civil strife in the country. This finding therefore reveals that violation of child rights through physical violence is an endemic challenge plaguing Garowe District in particular and Somalia in general. This finding coheres with the observations of Kelly (2018) that recurrent civil conflicts spark endemic domestic violence with children witnesses and victims becoming perpetrators of the same violence as grownups.

The results in Garowe District equally revealed that abused parties are likely to propagate hatred among children and thus deny them their rights. The split opinion from the respondents (Mean= 3.04; Standard deviation=1.06) implied that to some extent, exposure of the children to physical violence among the parents and caregivers resulted in displacement whereby the affected parties (usually, mothers) molested their children physically (Australian Government, 2015). Characteristically, this undermines the right of children to dignity and living in a violent and torture-free environment as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) as well as several statutes in Africa and beyond.

VII. CONCLUSION

Physical violence is a common challenge in conflict-affected areas of Somalia. Perennial conflict causes immense suffering, shortages of basic needs, increase in abject poverty and a state of restlessness and hopelessness. Consequently, the societal moral fabric is torn apart, leading to increase in domestic violence. Children become victims of circumstance. For instance, they witness ugly scenes and in many instances, they are physically assaulted and sustain lifetime grievous body injuries. The domino effects of physical violence undermine the social and emotional wellbeing of the children and consequently, violation of a broad range of their rights such as education, dignity, freedom from torture, among others. The case of Garowe District in Somalia, though one of the decades-long battle fields portrays a tainted image of how the perennial conflict that has rocked the state, has compromised the rights of children. This study provides insights that peace-keeping forces and more specifically AMISOM should.

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