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The Effects of Corona Virus Pandemic on Children

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ABSTRACT

With the outbreak of the deadly COVID-19 worldwide, children are at the risk of child abuse due to rising unemployment rates and school closures. The corona virus pandemic has caused much stress, especially to parents and guardians who have lost their jobs, and such stress has heightened and increased family violence, especially abuse against children. A sample of 26 child welfare professionals (64% female and 36% male) practicing in Uganda completed a web survey regarding the COVID-19 experiences especially in connection to child welfare service delivery and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study identified parental job loss during the COVID-19 pandemic as the main cause for child maltreatment and physical abuse. Nevertheless, the findings support cognitive reframing as a measure to control physical abuse by parents. The financial hardships caused by COVID-19 pandemic will continue to negatively impact children's safety and well-being. The consequences of COVID-19 pandemic are evident that the risk of child maltreatment increases as stress accumulates. In conclusion, as world leaders and scientists make efforts to tackle the public health and economic threat resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, further research on the impact of COVID-19 on family existence and functioning will be significant in establishing empirically based policies, interventions and different practices to support victims of child maltreatment and physical abuse.

KEY WORDS: COVID-19, Child Maltreatment, Children.

INTRODUCTION

In order to mitigate the spread of the deadly COVID-19, emergency lockdowns were implemented in different countries worldwide. This led to closure of restaurants, hotels, schools davcare centers. and universities. These measures implemented different by governments worldwide to contain the spread of the corona virus, more specifically the closing of daycare schools, centers and negatively impacted the lives of children and many adolescents. This increased

prevalence of child abuse the especially for parents and guardians, who were abusive before the pandemic hit, and parents who lost their job as a result of COVID-19 (World Health Organization Global, 2020). Most child services and activities, such as schools and community health centers, were closed. For example, in Norway, according to Muladal (2020), child protection services reduced their work capacity because of selfisolations measures taken on by the different social service workers,

leading to increased child abuse. However, few child abuse and neglect cases were reported. This study investigates the relationship between parental job loss, school and daycare centers closure, and other stressors due to corona virus pandemic and physical abuse towards children.

Deater-Deckard (2004) argued that stressors lead to emotional, cognitive and physical tiredness and in turn they strain the relationship between parents and a child. The more parents are stressed, the more they are likely to indulge in harsh parenting habits, increasing the risk of child abuse (Mesman, Beckerman, van Berkel & Alink, 2017). The greater impact of the global corona virus provides a major challenge to investigate how external stressors to a family may increase child abuse.

In March 2020, The World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 a pandemic, and this had severe devastating consequences on many families and businesses. This is because many governments around world the announced lockdowns and curfew, and people were only allowed to travel to access necessities like health care and food. According to the Department of Labor (2020a & 2020b), in the USA only, unemployment rose from 3.5%, approximately 5.7 million people, to 4.4%, approximately 7.1 million people, after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. The lockdown guidelines implemented due to the outbreak of the deadly coronavirus had impacts on all children around the world. However, children living in violent domestic households are the most at risk of child abuse due to the pandemic. During times of crisis like

the coronavirus pandemic, children are more vulnerable to physical Against Violence abuse (End children. 2020). The number of violent and abuse cases against women and girls has increased since the outbreak of the COVID-19, and insecurity, ill-health, and financial hardships are predicted to increase homes (World in Health Organization, 2020a). Many studies have highlighted the impact of pandemics on violence against women and children. Besides, the fear of such pandemics has created a platform to spark all forms of violence against children (Peterman et al., 2020).

coronavirus has created The many challenging situations between parents and their children. The unemployment has increased the amount of time parents and children spend together, and the rising financial stress has led to parenting stress. This has pushed parents to adopt harsh parenting techniques with the possibility of perpetrating abuse and violence against children (Cuartas, 2020; Humphreys et al., 2020; Griffith, 2020). Abramson (2020) argued that the parental stress caused by the coronavirus pandemic has led to the increase of child maltreatment since children are staying at home with their parents. Studies have found out that parents have engaged in many conflicts with their children to the point of yelling at them more often during the COVID-19 pandemic than before the breakout of the pandemic (Brooks & associates 2020). The global COVID-19 pandemic has not only directly affected by contracting the virus but also indirectly affected many people, especially children and adolescents, in a way that children and young individuals are much preoccupied with thoughts regarding the disease. For example, depression, anxiety, and sleep problems range from 18% to 35% among children and adolescents (Huang & Zhao, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODS

Due to the major outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide, it has been a driving force behind the increase in domestic violence especially abuse against children. After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and different governments and states instituted lockdowns as a measure to curb the spread of the deadly coronavirus, reports of child abuse and domestic violence began to emerge from different parts of the world during the COVID-19 crisis. As a child welfare researcher interested in policies that enhance the welfare of children, I decided to conduct an internet-based survey, and T distributed the survey to child welfare officers in Uganda. I decided to make the survey anonymous whereby the respondents were not required to give any personal information about themselves nor about their clients. This made it possible for them to respond positively to the survey without any favor regarding fear or the information they provided. Therefore, ethical approval was not required. The survey was carried out 20. 2021 on Mav to gather information or insight into the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the causalities of child abuse.

The survey was designed with open questions to give a chance to the respondents to provide extra information and examples, and it included ten items. Twenty-six child welfare officers participated in the survey, and they all responded positively with a 100% feedback rate. I surveyed between May 20 and June 30, 2021, and it covers all the periods that followed after the government of Uganda announced а total lockdown as a mechanism to curb the spread of the COVID-19. The survey covered the following areas: the change in service delivery and accessibility during the COVID-19 child psychological pandemic, maltreatment and physical abuse. In order not to be exhausting to the respondents. the survev was designed to take approximately 20-35 minutes.

ANALYSIS

A significant number of the respondents reported an increase in the rate of domestic violence, especially child abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic. They further stated that the victims of domestic violence the lockdown. during especially children. were not receiving the needed protection services amidst the pandemic. Respondents were asked about any specific group they feared were not able to access the protection services needed. The respondents thev reported children as the most at risk. Because children most and adolescents were forced to stay at during the COVID-19 home pandemic and many parents became unemployed, parents and their children spent most time together at home. This increased the risk of violence against children, hence children's inability to seek the protection they needed due to the pandemic.

Dismay for children living with child abuse outside of their household

In regard to the children living their household outside and experiencing child abuse, the child protection social worker showed great concern for children living with abusive guardians and relatives who may be experiencing stress due to unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, half of the respondents disclosed that their clients believed that the full-time existence of children at during pandemic home the increased the risk of child abuse. A significant number of the respondents agreed that their clients expressed their concern that the COVID-19 control measures and the fear of contracting the coronavirus increased stress for child abusers. One of the child protection social workers explained that:

> "I believe children who lived with abuse prior to the outbreak of the coronavirus are now even exposed to physical abuse the more."

The second child protection social worker expressed the following:

"A parent living with prolonged stress due to unemployment and with no hope for the future is at high risk of perpetuating domestic violence. Our worst fear is that we will see a lot of child abuse cases". In efforts to control the spread of the novel coronavirus, schools and daycare centers remain closed in most countries. The closed schools and daycare centers resent great concern for child protection social workers because children living with abuse seek relief at school and they remain free from abusive parents. In addition, teachers at school and other staff offer support to children experiencing hard times, especially victims of abuse from parents. One respondent explained that:

> "Closed schools and daycare centers are of much concern to children living with abusive parents because they provide free zones from abusive parents."

In addition, the child protection staff was concerned that children who experience abuse and living outside their households would not be able to access the help they need from social service professionals. Therefore, the violence they are exposed to would continue and remain unnoticed. This is because the contact between an abused child and the abusive family is constantly reducing as one child protection professional explained that:

> "Because schools and daycare centers remain closed, we are more worried about those abused children who are not able to access social services support and remain isolated at the same time."

Another child protection official explained the following:

"Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many groups of children vulnerable to child abuse who were previously in contact with the social services sector or child welfare sectors are hard to be traced and cannot be followed up."

Dismay for children living at orphanage centers

Many orphanage centers collaborate with Non-Government Organizations, for example Save the Children and UNICEF. Such children's organizations arrange activities and help them with the basic needs of life especially for the most vulnerable children. Some orphanage centers created zones for play activities for children. The NGOs help such centers by sending those children to schools. However, such arrangements have been halted due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. A respondent explained that:

> "Most of the collaboration and activities arranged by different styles for children such as playing trips, visitations by volunteers, and others have stopped. Visitors outside the centers are no longer allowed".

Another one expressed the following:

"All the educational activities offered to the children by different stakeholders such as daycare centers, volunteer tutors, and schools are stopped." The COVID-19 pandemic, without any doubt, has created many demands on child protection social workers. The child welfare systems had to redesign their structures in order to accommodate COVID-19 guidelines while carrying out their duties to provide support and shelter to victims of child abuse. However, the most challenging part was that making adjustments in the best interest of children is not just demanding but impossible.

One of the supporting staff responded as follows:

"All children staying at the day all is center verv demanding because there are no alternative activities we can offer to them. Our partners and volunteer organizations are no longer able to support them due to the pandemic. The resources are so demanding in this crisis."

The child protection staff explained how daily life for children has changed since the coronavirus outbreak. This is because professionals' and supporting volunteer's visits to families have been cancelled. The child protection staff explained that:

> "In accordance with the COVID-19 pandemic control guidelines, children only play within their household; they can't play or eat with other children. This is somehow traumatizing for children because they can't visit their friends".

DISCUSSION

Undoubtedly, there is much fear COVID-19 worldwide that the will pandemic create many unexpected negative consequences children's safety. for hence compromising their wellbeing. The most devastating risk for child abuse among parents will be the parental unemployment due to the COVID-19 crisis (World Health Organization global, 2020). In addition, with different countries adopting different COVID-19 spread control measures, the reopening of the world or societies will be at different stages (World Health Organization, 2020b). This will create room for child abuse cases to rise due to the economic crisis. The current crisis is a major contributor to psychological and physical abuse towards children due to parental unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19, social distancing and quarantining have led to increased rates of depression as well as trauma and alcohol abuse among parents, and these are risk factors for child abuse (Sganga, 2020; Safai, 2020; Crayne, 2020). Children who have lost their parents due to COVID-19 experience psychological may trauma and distress because of the grief, anxiety, and fear of an uncertain future.

The lives and future of many children are much affected by the COVID-19 outbreak because since COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020, there has been an increase in violence against children worldwide. With schools and daycare centers remaining closed. parents have the responsibility taken on of homeschooling their children. However, for children with learning problems, pre-existing behavior, and mental health problems, parents are not in position to adequately provide the learning support they need, which has made it difficult for children to adequately concentrate on academic goals (Phelps & Sperry, 2020). In addition, violence against children and abuse remain undisclosed. and such abused children do not access the support they need to address their situations.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions that provide safety and support to children exposed to abuse and domestic violence are vital during the pandemic, but they remain out of reach. Furthermore, since the coronavirus crisis has profound created social and economic distress, especially for low-income families and to those parents who have lost their jobs, parents are finding a hard time looking after their children and keeping them busy and safe at home during the pandemic, especially in crowded households (Cluver et al., 2020).

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are so devastating that it has caused financial crises and physical and mental illnesses in marital relationships, which could lead to high divorce rates. This has created room for domestic violence to prevail during quarantine (Fegert et al., 2020). Such domestic violence has resulted in increased substance abuse, which has increased the risk of child maltreatment (Usher et al., 2020; Fegert et al., 2020). Therefore. exposure marital conflicts to between parents increases the risk of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse against children.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased tensions between parents and their children due to a lot time being spent together at home during quarantine. In this case, where parents are unemployed with no financial support and children are prohibited from interacting with their peers, children are unable to access their social needs. This has negatively impacted their parents. relationship their with According to Shapiro et al. (2006), a disaster effect like a hurricane parents-and-children worsens relationships. Therefore, the unlimited time parents and children are spending together in isolation increases parental violence against their children. For children who already had poor relationships with parents, the COVID-19 situation may increase their risk of child maltreatment (Phelps & Sperry, 2020).

Coping Measures during COVID-19 pandemic

In efforts to curb down the rampant child abuse and violence brought up by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, government institutions and NGOs should help out parents, guardians, and relatives by providing social and financial support. This is because this helps reduce post-traumatic stress that leads to violence and increases psychological well-being. Polizzi et al. (2020) argued that the use of positive coping measures helps parents build distress tolerance. It helps them increase their social support whereby they can embark on value-driven actions during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, abuse child and violence

perpetuated especially by parents or relatives during COVID-19 can be reduced by subjecting parents to different types of coping options. For example, the use of a cognitivefocused coping mechanism is of great importance because it helps parents change their thinking about impacts of the COVID-19 the pandemic. They can re-assess the impacts of the pandemic on their family lives and construct measures to counter the challenges caused to the family by the pandemic. For example, those who lost their jobs can start an online business. This is all done to curb the emotional stress that can lead to child abuse. This is because parents with fewer appropriate coping measures are more likely to mistreat their children (Abramson, 2020; Lawson et al., 2020). Therefore, increased emotional stress, lack of social support, and inappropriate coping techniques such as the use of violence may lead to child abuse.

wake of In the protecting children against child maltreatment during the COVID-19 pandemic, service delivery methods, especially for children, must shift. The child welfare agencies and child welfare professionals must support children and their families to avoid child abuse. The shift in service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic can be operated virtually by providing services instead of virtual the traditional means of service delivery to control the barriers affiliated with social distancing. from Apart increasing access and financial support child protection to professionals to be able to continue providing the needed services during the COVID-19 pandemic, the most important aspect in the fight against child maltreatment during the COVID-19 pandemic should be building community accountability for the child well being and his or her family. This is because creating increasing community and awareness of child protection by enhancing social and financial support to families during the COVID-19 pandemic helps to lower down parent's emotional stress. Thus, it helps to enhance positive parenting and promotes child wellbeing, which is very important throughout the pandemic.

Establishing а good understanding of how to prevent maltreatment during child the ongoing outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and pay attention to different elements of intervention is the most needed aspect. This is child maltreatment because prevention programs tend to contain elements of cognitive training. It also includes support evidence bv indicating that such training reduced harsh parenting and enhanced child well-being (Bugental et al., 2020). Among the factors that lead to child maltreatment the lack of is employment by parents. Job loss affects the economic stability of a family hence increasing the risk of Financial child maltreatment. instability resulting from job loss of increases the risk child maltreatment, but the job loss itself negatively impacts the family the more. This is because it leads to the decline in social contact whereby the parent ends up with no emotional support from friends and relatives. Hence, the distress of a job loss and the safety concerns associated with COVID-19 pandemic the push further the stress of parenting onto resulting children. in child maltreatment. Therefore, the effects job loss, such as child of maltreatment caused bv the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, need social policies and programs that deal with the issues of trauma and child protection. Social child welfare workers or professionals need to be trained in the areas of trauma practice and how the traumatic experiences impact child maltreatment. In addition. child welfare agencies should embark on identifying the various factors of resilience more than solving the primary risk factor, and if this is carried out, it can solve the problem of parental emotional stress child well prevent as as maltreatment during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

As COVID-19 continues to be a global health crisis, the major concern is how the world can protect the vulnerable. especially the children, by reducing the risk for child abuse as well as promoting public health and safety. According to the research findings, job loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has been and continues to be harmful to children's safety because it has increased the risk for child maltreatment and physical abuse. Therefore, governments and different world organizations should support families' mental health and enhance effective coping measures during the COVID-19 pandemic to curb the negative impacts of mental health, which lead to actions such as child abuse, especially to families known to have a history of child maltreatment. In order to address the problems of COVID-19,

organizations governments and must embrace new models of service delivery such as online counseling to effectively address the challenges of job loss. This will help prevent future child abuse or child COVID maltreatment -19 as continues to be a global threat.

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ABOUT

SALASIKA etymologically derived from Javanese language meaning 'brave woman'. SALASIKA JOURNAL (SJ) is founded in July 2019 as an international open access, scholarly, peerreviewed, interdisciplinary journal publishing theoretically innovative and methodologically diverse research in the fields of gender studies, sexualities and feminism. Our conception of both theory and method is broad and encompassing, and we welcome contributions from scholars around the world.

SJ is inspired by the need to put into visibility the Indonesian and South East Asian women to ensure a dissemination of knowledge to a wider general audience.

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All articles will be preceded by an abstract (150-200 words), keywords, main text introduction, materials and methods, results, discussion; acknowledgments; declaration of interest statement; references; appendices (as appropriate); table(s) with caption(s) (on individual pages); figures; figure captions (as a list); and a contributor biography (150 words). Word length is 4,000-10,000 words, including all previous elements.

TIMELINE AND SCHEDULE

Twice a year: February and July.

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