

“The wrong direction”: Childhood adversity and aggression in young children

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Global solutions for aggression are urgently needed. Young children are exposed to adversities on a daily basis, especially in South Africa, where violent crime figures are extremely high. In this study, South African children (8-9 years; n = 260) from four schools in vulnerable areas were asked to draw and narrate what made them angry. The main themes found related to acts of violence at home and school. Homes were generally described by the participants as lacking nurturing and protection; domestic issues mentioned were related to physical punishment or abuse and unjust behavior of parents and siblings. At school, these children were either violent themselves or experienced physical and verbal abuse. A significant theme related to self-centeredness. It is argued that if children are not nurtured and morally and psychologically guided on their journey to adulthood, their egoism and aggressive behavior might become their lived actualities, which could be devastating to society in general if the consequences of early chronic exposure to adversity and violence spill over into the broader community culture. This could in turn result in a narcissistic subculture characterized by violence, egoism and a general disregard for humanity. Preventative measures should focus on breaking the culture of violence.

Keywords: childhood adversity; young child; aggression; violence; constrained context; egoism; narcissistic subcultures

INTRODUCTION

Globally, children are experiencing adversities in their daily lives (UNICEF, 2016). As one of the most violent countries in the world (Burton & Leoschut, 2012), South Africa is regarded as a “risk society”. Several factors contribute to this situation, namely poverty, food insecurity, inequality, child-headed households, and more (Beck, 1992). Durham (2016: 115) comments that “[c]hildren’s lives are often the first and most serious casualties of the world’s conflicts, catastrophes and crises”, and therefore the “lived actualities” of children’s experiences need to be investigated.

Fifty-one people are murdered in South Africa every day (Evans & Verster, 2016). South Africa also has the most serious HIV/AIDS epidemic in the world, with 7.1 million people living with the disease (Hall & Sambu, 2016: 108). Poverty is widespread, with the rural poverty rate estimated at 78.2% compared with 28.9% in urban areas (Pauw, 2005). A third (17 million people) of the population lives on social grants, of which 11 million are younger than 18 years (Rossouw, 2017). Breetske (2018) also mentions that South Africa has the highest rate of inequality in the world, driven almost exclusively along racial lines, with indications that inequality is increasing. “Countrywide, more than 45% of Black Africans are unemployed compared with only 5% of Whites” (Mngxitama, 2015 in Breetske, 2018). Poverty, inequality and lack of access to education are some of the reasons why UNICEF labels South Africa the worst country in the world in which to raise children between the ages of five and 14 (Fuzile, 2016).

The correlation between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and long-term psychological health outcomes has been documented extensively (Thompson et al, 2018). ACEs have been linked to criminal justice involvement and victimization (Edalati et al, 2017), child-to-parent violence (Nowakowski-Sims & Rowe 2017), drug abuse (Anda, Brown, Felitti, Dube & Giles, 2008), adolescent pregnancies as well as long-term psychosocial consequences (Hillis et al, 2004). Cumulative adversity is also associated with behavioral problems and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Slopen, Koenen, & Kubzansky, 2014). Furthermore, children who are exposed to adversity are at high risk of developing psychiatric disorders later in life (Parade et al, 2017). Although the consequences of adverse childhood experiences are well documented, health providers and communities generally are ill equipped to identify and prevent these harms (Anda & Felitti, 2015: 5). Williamson et al (2017) report that low- and middle-income countries, such as South Africa, have high rates of child trauma exposure and limited access to psychological services.

Childhood adversity is described as traumatic experiences (all forms of abuse, witnessing violence, being victims of violence and prolonged illness) and chronic stressors (divorce, family conflict, poverty, loss, being bullied and drug use in family) that have a significant negative effect on the child (Jackson Nakazawa, 2015). For the purpose of this article, childhood adversity will also include any factor that a child perceives as detrimental to his or her wellbeing as expressed in drawings and narratives.

Violence is a common form of adversity. According to Daley (2014), violence against children is one of the most pervasive and silent horrors of our times and jeopardizes the right to education of millions of children around the world. South Africa has the highest percentage of child deaths in the world (Fuzile, 2016) – double the global average (UNICEF, 2016). Most cases of violence originate in the home. The Crime Research and Statistics Report of the South African Police Services (SAPS) indicates that 70 to 80% of all victims of crime in the last decade know the perpetrator (Kearney & Erasmus, 2013). Even more disturbing is the fact that 24.9% of all murders in South Africa are committed by a family member or someone whom the victim lives with (Statistics South Africa, 2014).

The correlation between physical abuse and later adulthood perpetration has also been established in several other countries. In a study conducted in 28 countries, 34% of reported child abuse cases were committed by a family member. It was also found that children who are exposed to child abuse, domestic violence or both are at an increased risk for depression, delinquency and violence later in life (Daley, 2014). Darby, Allan, Kashani, Hartke and Reid (1998) have also noted that a poor home environment is an important risk factor in the genesis of violence. Meyers and Vo (2012) found that abuse (physical, sexual and emotional) has been associated with 20 different psychological problems.

Another important adversity young children are often exposed to is bullying, which often manifests in verbal and physical harm, social exclusion and the spreading of rumors (Vlachou, Andreou, Botsoglou & Didaskalou, 2011: 333). In a study of bullying, over a third of the five thousand children involved in the study reported that they were involved with bullying (Liang, Flisher & Lombard, 2007). A positive correlation has also been established between bullying and violent behavior later in life (Ttofi, Farrington & Lösel, 2012). Being a victim of bullying causes anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and stress (Brendgen et al, 2013). Phillips (2011) postulates that children often skip school for fear of being bullied. During times of economic crisis, school issues (such as violence and bullying) may increase as economic and family stressors get worse (Phillips, 2011).

Trauma can have an equally devastating effect throughout a lifetime. Connolly (2011) takes the impact of adversity a step further and refers to research that indicates the intergenerational transmission of trauma, in other words, where experienced trauma may be transmitted to the next generation. Kellermann (2013) confirms this transgenerational transmission of trauma (TTT), postulating that trauma that has occurred in the first generation is passed to the second generation. He is of the opinion that adverse conditions such as early stress and emotional trauma of the first generation can alter the subsequent generations (Kellerman, 2013: 33). In families, stress can be transmitted epigenetically between the parent and the child. Stress can also be transmitted through “emphatic stress”. Studies indicate that merely observing someone else in a stressful situation may trigger a physical stress response in a person. If a child is not supported in regulating stress and anxiety, he or she is far more likely to develop health problems that may persist into adolescence and adulthood (Jackson Nakazawa, 2015).

What happens to children in their first years of their life not only affects their own development, but ultimately also the development of our society and our world (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2004: 3). Therefore, the nature and orientation of young children’s emotional experiences are significant when these and other social adversities have a negative impact on children’s lives. During the early years of development, children demonstrate the greatest ability to learn and develop, but are also prone to “unpredictable stressors, losses, and adversities” that may shape their “biology in ways that predetermine [their] adult health” (Jackson Nakazawa, 2015: xiii). Felti and Anda (2010) warn that childhood adversity has profound and enduring effects on a person’s health and behavior throughout life.

There is still little South African research and literature relating to the differential risks children face, as well as their perspectives, experiences and responses within diverse structural contexts. In this article, the researcher describes how exposure to adversity is contextually presented in young children’s responses on the basis of a study that identified and described the differential adversities that children aged eight to nine years had been exposed to by the analyzing their expression of associated emotions. The article further aims to describe how young children respond to adversities within their structural contexts and how they shape and are shaped by their localities.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the Western Cape. This province is characterized by high levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequalities in terms of income for the various population groups. Extremely high rates of violent crime characterize these areas; Williamson et al. (2017) state that 80% of the youth have

been exposed to severe trauma. Chariatte (2016) reports that the greater Cape Town area is affected by a high incidence of gang-related activities. Unemployment, overcrowding, social marginalization and drug abuse are some of the contributing factors (Chariatte, 2016: 51).

Four schools (n=260) in vulnerable areas were selected with the assistance of the Western Cape Department of Education (refer to Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic data of schools (Boys and girls between the ages of 8-9 years)

School	Boys	Girls
School 1: Stellenbosch region	42	31
School 2: Township school outskirts of Stellenbosch	43	51
School 3: Township school near Franschoek	30	37
School 4: Farm school near Wellington	14	12
Total	129	131

The schools were selected if they were in communities characterized by factors such as poverty, unemployment and violence. A researcher and registered psychologist were present at each research site. The study adhered to all ethical guidelines as set out by the South African Health Professions Council. The classroom teachers of the participating schools were interviewed informally. They reported that the majority of the children came from poor socio-economic backgrounds and that parents were not actively involved in school and extra-curricular activities. The majority of the parents work long hours, often for minimum wages. Some of the social problems reported by the teachers were gang violence, drug abuse, vandalism as well as emotional- and physical abuse in families.

A qualitative approach was selected as it focussed on exploring, interpreting and understanding personal and social experiences (Rule & John, 2011). A major focus of the qualitative approach is on a person's grasp of their world in terms of their perceptions and meanings (Smith, 2008). This approach further highlights people's cognitive and emotional processes in certain situations (Laws, Harper, Jones & Marcus, 2013). This qualitative study was approached from an interpretive paradigm, as this paradigm allows for understanding "human meanings and their behavior, without intervening in the process" (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010: 487). The interpretivist paradigm refers to knowledge constructed from observations that are made in a real and natural setting (Williamson, 2006: 84), and therefore this paradigm was especially well suited to this study as children were requested to draw pictures in a familiar setting, namely the classroom environment.

After reading the story of Anna Angrysauros, the participants were asked to draw and narrate anything that made them angry. Afterwards the participants were interviewed. They could elaborate on their drawings and add to their narratives verbally. It is argued that drawings reflect the inner worlds of children, depicting feelings with both conscious and unconscious meanings and offering information concerning psychological wellbeing, and that drawings can be used as a research tool (Hawkins, 2002). Drawings present a safe vehicle for children to express their desires as well as their fears (Steele & Kuban, 2013). Furthermore, most children experience drawing as a spontaneous activity that allows expression of desires as well as fears (Hawkins, 2002). According to Oguz (2010), children draw from their own lives and experiences, and these drawings are unique creations that give precise information about the children's lived experiences (Farokhi & Mashemi, 2011). Children between 4 and 8 years can relate to emotions such as joy, surprise, sadness and anger (Misailidi & Bonoti, 2008). By choosing the concept anger the researcher wanted to present young children with an emotion that they could relate to and understand. A simple and relatable emotion was therefore selected. By using the emotion of anger, the researcher wanted to understand how children in contextually adverse settings present their feelings and experiences through drawings and narratives.

In this study, the narrative inquiry assisted the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the children's experiences. The narrative also supported the drawings and interviews to deepen the insights gained from the research process. The children described their drawings to the researchers and elaborated on the experiences that angered them. They informally narrated their experiences and could share as little or as much information as they felt comfortable with.

The psychosocial findings were subjected to qualitative content analysis. According to Bauer and Gaskell (2000), qualitative content analysis is an explicit procedure for textual analysis in social research, and by utilizing this technique the researchers wanted to reduce the complexity of the collection of drawings and narratives and use it as a medium of expression (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000). Elo and Kyngäs

(2008) describe the aim of qualitative content analysis as a way to obtain and condense a broad description of the phenomenon under study. A coding system was constructed to analyze the complete sample. Themes were initially coded under headings such as for instance aggressive behavior at home. Interconnected categories were established, and continuous comparisons were made until saturation was reached. The drawings were analyzed for common themes, after which a psychological analysis of the aspects (such as color, spacing and content) was completed. After this phase the narratives were analyzed to determine the themes, and then the themes of the drawings and narratives were compared to determine the significant themes.

FINDINGS

When the children in this study were asked to draw and narrate the things that made them angry, the most significant theme that emerged related to violence. The children predominantly drew and described experiences of violence at home and at school. In the next section a subsample of the findings will be presented.

Physical violence at home

Experiences of violence in the home environment were prevalent in this study. The children described experiences of physical punishment, often at the hands of their mothers. They also described physical conflicts with their siblings. A theme that was highlighted in this study related to vulnerability. A large number of participants did not feel loved or safe in their home environments. Some of the participants also felt that they were treated unjustly by their parents.

The section below presents a number of drawings and descriptions that exemplify the children's adverse experiences in the home environment. Pseudonyms were used to protect the children's identities. In some instances, the children's descriptions of their drawings were translated. The descriptions were translated from Afrikaans to English by the researcher who is fluent in both languages. The translations were also reviewed by a language editor. The translations will be indicated with a *t*. The schools and participants will be indicated with numbers, e.g. 1-22*t*, to indicate school 1, participant 22, translated.

Sally (1-55*t*) said the following when asked what made her angry: "When my mother hits me I get angry." She drew her mother's hand bigger and added speech bubbles to emphasize her feelings. According to Blau (1992), a bigger hand can indicate hostility. If a child adds a speech bubble to their drawing, they want to emphasize a point or ensure that the message is clearly understood (Koppitz, 1968). In her drawing Sally added a baseline that the figures stand on. A number of children in the study drew a line across the bottom of the page. A baseline in children's drawings is often associated with feelings of anxiety and uncertainty (Van Niekerk, 1986) as well as an unstable family situation (Koppitz, 1968).

Drawing I: Rika



Rika (4-63) said the following about her drawing: "My dad beats me because I went to my friend." She drew herself without arms, with tears streaming down her face. The latter element (tears) was used by several children to emphasize their feelings of sadness in certain situations. Figures without arms can be associated with feelings of rejection and helplessness (Van Niekerk, 1986). An element that is omitted is usually significant to the individual (Koppitz, 1968); in this case the omission of arms can relate to feelings of helplessness and lack of confidence (Blau, 1992).

Drawing II: Freddy

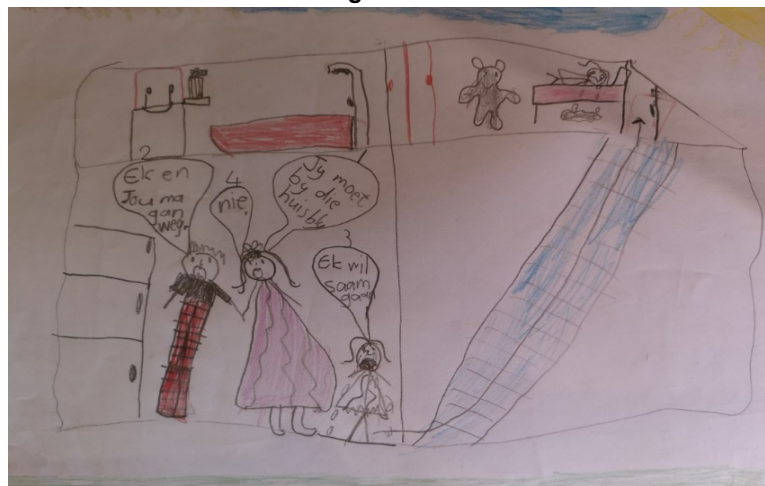


Freddy (3-3*t*) said the following: “My cousin took my ball. My brother bullied me.” Freddy drew pointed grass and added tears, clouds and a sun. The latter two elements, which occurred in several children’s drawings, can be associated with anxiety and depression (Van Niekerk, 1986). The sharp edges of the grass in the drawing reflect anger and aggression.

Another participant, Carl, related experiences of physical punishment from both his parents. Carl (1-10*t*) added the following when describing his drawing: “Mom hits me on my hand if I do not listen. Dad smacks me on my bottom with a belt.” Peter (4-2), on the other hand, related his experiences of physical punishment at the hands of his mother: “Mom beating me for not doing dishes.” Emma (3-7*t*) said: “If my brother takes my toys. When my mom hits me, I get angry.” Caren said the following about her family (2-5): “My brother tells me rude words. He is 6 years old. He fights with me. He hits me and tell mom. My parents fight. They pull each other.” Carry (1-23*t*) described a traumatic experience at home that made a lasting impression on her. Her mother and grandmother were shot in front of her. She said the following: “Grandmother was shot at home. Mom was also shot. I saw what they looked like afterwards.”

Vulnerability in the home environment

Drawing III: Samantha



Samantha (1-19*t*) conveyed feelings of rejection and insecurity when she described and wrote on her drawing: “My mommy and daddy are going away. I want to go with them. You are not coming with us.” She drew herself with tears falling on the floor. She also drew a crying girl lying on her bed. Mom and dad are holding hands, while she stands alone next to them. No one is holding her hand.

Remy (1-38*t*) also expressed feelings of family rejection. She did not include herself in her family drawing. She said the following: “They do not want me in the picture. I am rude...” When children do not include themselves in family drawings, it is never accidental (Koppitz, 1968) and this omission can be related to feelings of rejection (Van Niekerk, 1986).

Drawing IV: Priscilla



Priscilla (2-34) drew a picture of an incident where her mother took one of her toys. The mother has one hand that is bigger than the other. Priscilla drew herself with outstretched arms, an unhappy mouth and hollow eyes. A number of children drew figures with outstretched arms, which can be interpreted as expressing a need for love, nurturing and affection. It can also be associated with uncertainty (Van Niekerk, 1986). As indicated earlier, the excessively large hands of the mother can be an indication of hostility (Blau, 1992), while large eyes can be associated with aggression and egoism (Van Niekerk, 1986).

Perceptions of unjust treatment in the home environment

Some of the participants felt that they were not treated justly by either a parent or sibling. Lila (4-8) said the following about an incident at home that made her angry: "I dropped my plate at home and mom smacked me." Tammy (1-13t) said: "When mom shouts at me and when it wasn't me." A number of children described events where one sibling would get something, but they got nothing.

Ben (2-29t) got angry when his mother did not want to buy him a cellular phone. Calvin got angry when he was not allowed to play games. The theme of perceived and actual unjust treatment was often expressed by the participants in this study.

Participants described their homes as places where they felt vulnerable and unhappy. Nita (3-16t) said the following about her family: "I am angry at my mom. I am angry at my sister. My brother throws stones at me." Jo (3-9t) gets angry when the following happens: "When my brother hits me I get angry. When my mom hits me, I get angry." Andy (2-2t) added: "My brother makes me very angry! I do not like my brother! I am always angry at my mom!"

Physical and verbal violence at school

A number of children drew and narrated stories of violence against them at school, mostly inflicted by other children. Physical aggression and verbal bullying were noted. A number of children also described their own violent behavior towards other children.

Drawing V: Richard



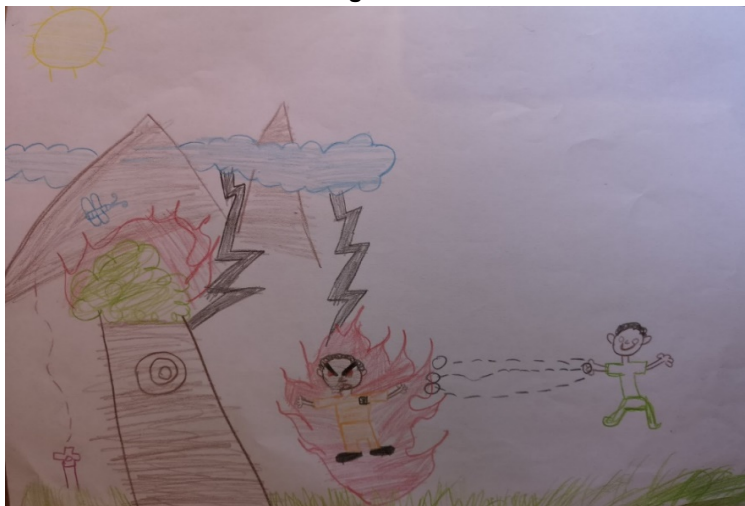
Richard (2-7) drew and described his feelings when being teased by other children as follows: "My friend makes me mad. I walk to school my friend makes funny" (sic) and added speech bubbles to ensure that his feelings about being teased were not misunderstood. He drew the children who teased him in a different color and grouped them together. In the drawing the other children are laughing and pointing at Richard and his friend. When children do not feel socially accepted, they will often draw themselves differently from the others (Wimmer, 2014). In this drawing the difference is highlighted by the use of different colors and a space between the bullies and the other children.

Drawing VI: Devon



Devin (1-24*t*) also indicated that being teased angers him. He said: "When someone teases me I get angry". The arms in the drawing are exaggerated, which can be associated with a poor body image and a desire to be stronger (Van Niekerk, 1986). The clenched fists in the drawing can be associated with rebelliousness (Blau, 1992).

Drawing VII: Varesh



Varesh (1-44*t*) said: "I am angry when someone teases me and says nasty things to me. Children that tease me are bullies and rude." He included fire and lightning to portray his anger at being bullied. Roven (3-18) expressed his feelings by saying: "It makes me angry when we are fighting at school." Olivia (2-3) described her drawing as follows: "I hate it when someone hits me in the face. I don't like it when someone kicks me on the bum."

Drawing VIII: Mpho



Mpho (1-4 t) said: “An older boy hurts me.” He drew a sharp object in a bigger boy’s hand and colored it red. The older boy is strangling him. The arms of both the figures are prominent. In the background another child is watching and smiling. He added a house, flowers, clouds and a sun. When children add a house to their drawing, they may be working through issues with their family and their immediate social environment (Wimmer, 2014; Van Niekerk, 1986). Several children added houses to their drawings. The house in children’s drawings symbolizes emotions and stability that is desired for life at home (Farokhi & Hashemi, 2011).

Drawing IX: Calvin



Calvin (1-9 t) drew and described physical violence perpetrated by another child. He said: “Braten hit me.” The bully is depicted with an angry expression on his face. The male reproductive organs are emphasized, which can indicate a sexual preoccupation (Blau, 1992). He has fang-like teeth and is showing a rude sign. The drawing is colored in a bright yellow. The overemphasis of arms as depicted in drawings 12 and 13 can be associated with feelings of uncertainty and anxiety (Van Niekerk, 1986; Blau, 1992). The overuse of color can be interpreted as an expression of aggression (Koppitz, 1968). Sello (2-16) said: “I get angry when someone hurts me. I want to hit them back.” He draws himself with steam coming from his ears. A number of children indicated that they wanted to retaliate or have retaliated in situations where they felt they were victims of violence or bullying.

DISCUSSION

Human history is replete with violence; it seems to be a constant throughout. In the past violence was perceived as a normal condition of humanity. However, currently it is rather considered a “disease that can

threaten our existence", a serious social problem (Relva, Fernandes & Mota, 2013: 47). To get an in-depth understanding of the roots of violence, the long-term community history must also be taken into account.

The participants in this study lived in communities with several historical environmental constraints and plagued by violence, drug abuse, poverty and HIV/AIDS (Hall & Sambu, 2016; Pauw, 2005). It is argued that the participants in this study who were continuously exposed to violence in their homes and at school might form a subculture of violence that can ultimately influence the broader community. The subculture of violence theory (Erlanger, 1974) posits that violence is the product of conformity to a pro-violent subculture that is in direct conflict with the dominant culture. A link between pro-violent values and violent behavior in schools where evidence of violent subcultures exists has been established (Ousey & Wilcox, 2005: 9).

In this study the children drew and narrated violent experiences at home and at school. It is well known that the environment in which a child is raised greatly affects its biological, social and psychological development (Thompson et al, 2018). Although the children in this study were exposed to various community stressors such as poverty, unemployment and violence (Pauw, 2005; Rossouw, 2017), they mostly related stories of violence in their homes and at school. It can be argued that this was because homes and schools were what the children were exposed to most in their daily lives; nevertheless, the violence in their communities was seldom mentioned by the participants. A possible explanation could be that community violence has become normalized in these communities. The participants drew and related stories of being beaten when, for instance, they did not wash the dishes, as well as cases of physical violence inflicted by parents and siblings which they witnessed and experienced. Mothers were often mentioned as the disciplinarians that used physical punishment for real or perceived infractions. Experiences of maternal violence are an important predictor of childhood depression, aggression and even anti-social behavior. The role of the mother as primary caregiver has been established. All children need a secure attachment to a primary caregiver, which is often the mother (Prock, 2015). The main purpose of attachment is to provide a safe and secure environment for children to explore their world in (Bowlby, 1988). According to Hirschi (1969), the bond between parent and child is crucial in preventing future criminal behavior by the child. Therefore, a negative or weak relationship with the mother is likely to have detrimental consequences for children who are already exposed to home and environmental stressors such as violence and abuse.

A number of the children also described and drew pictures of homes where they were physically punished and being treated unfairly by their parents. Some of them described home as a place where they did not feel cherished and secure. They narrated stories of unfair treatment, sibling violence and physical punishment. Relva, Fernandes and Mota (2013) noted that sibling violence is the most prevalent form of violence in families. There is a strong correlation between sibling violence and other forms of family violence. Psychological and physical aggression is highly prevalent among siblings. If parents are also violent towards their children, this can be a significant predictor of violence (Relva, Fernandes & Mota, 2013). In this study, the children also told stories of being physically and verbally bullied by other children at school. The identified themes of school violence related to being hit or hurt, stones being thrown at them and teasing. In some of the drawings and narratives, the children described their own violent thoughts and behavior towards other children. It seems that environments where children have to constantly distinguish between safe and unsafe can lead to a state of hypervigilance. Low and mild adversity, when chronic, can lead to a distressed physical state and even inflammation (Jackson Nakazawa, 2015). One can argue that young children exposed to adversity on a daily basis will find it difficult to maintain a healthy physical and mental state into adulthood.

Significantly, the children in this study were mostly focused on their own needs. They sometimes felt that their parents showed favoritism towards their siblings. They were angered when not receiving articles such as toys and cell phones when they asked for them. In these instances, they generally perceived their parents as biased and unfair. One can reason that these children came from poor families and that their parents might not be able to afford these things. It can also be posited that self-centered behavior is common for this age group. However, self-centeredness should gradually decline as a child gets older; children between the ages of seven and eleven are in the concrete operational stage, where more logical ways of thinking become possible and self-centeredness declines (Piaget, 1953); however, for self-centeredness to decline a child should have a healthy self-esteem and feel safe in their immediate environment (Johnson & Berdahl, 2016). In fact, it could be argued that if these children are not psychologically guided on their road to adulthood, their selfish behavior and demands might become a

lived actuality that can ultimately result in personality disorders and possibly in violence. A study conducted by Calvete, Orue, Gamez-Gaudix, and Bushman (2015) on 591 adolescents and their parents indicated that children who are exposed to permissive parenting, violence at home and little affection can develop into narcissistic adolescents who verbally attack and physically assault their parents. Research suggests that genetics, childhood trauma and abuse can cause several personality disorders later in life (Parade et al, 2016). This conclusion is supported by Huff (2004), who claims that children who experience verbal abuse are three times more likely than other children to develop narcissism, obsessive-compulsive disorder or paranoid personality disorders.

As mentioned before, children are increasingly becoming victims of violence and abuse in their communities, homes and schools. “They are being brought up in an aggressive society and they learn to view abuse and violence as the preferred way of dealing with other human beings” (Pretorius, Mbokazi, Hlase & Jacklin, 2012: 30). In this article I therefore postulate that if children experience and mimic violence, lack safety and love, and are trapped in egoism or have limited moral guidance, we might be looking at a future generation that is narcissistic, self-serving and violent.

In this study, the children did not feel safe and nurtured at home. They were exposed to violence, and at times they were violent themselves. They often felt that their needs were not adequately met. In a compelling number of drawings and narratives the participants’ own needs were emphasized. The children experienced violence against them as well as a disregard for their basic needs. If one takes into account that a personality disorder such as narcissism is characterized by egoism and little regard for others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), this might become imprinted on young malleable minds. One can even hypothesize that narcissism might spill over into the broader community and create a narcissistic community culture. Such a community culture would be defined by its violent nature and disregard for humans in general. Therefore, we theorize that the long-term psycho-social outcomes for communities exposed to contextual violence can be devastating to future generations. If interventions are not introduced, the culture of violence will continue and the so-called ‘broken record’ will keep on playing the same old violent tune. Further research could investigate this issue.

CONCLUSION

Violence against children is one of the most pervasive and silent horrors of our times (Daley, 2014) and holds negative long-term psychosocial consequences (Parade et al, 2016). The participants in this qualitative study were exposed to various adversities ranging from physical abuse to unjust treatment. Sadly, violent behavior in these communities, seemed to be the norm, and if no intervention strategies are planned and implemented, the long-term prognosis for the new generation seems bleak.

The main themes in this study related to experiences of violence at home and at school. The participants often drew and described their homes as unsafe and places where they did not feel nurtured or loved. An important theme related to the self-centeredness of the participants. Other themes in the home environment related to physical punishment and unfair behavior of parents and siblings. At school they experienced physical and verbal abuse, often inflicted by other children.

It is argued that if children are not nurtured and are not morally and psychologically guided on their road to adulthood, their selfish behavior and demands might become their lived actualities that can result in personality disorders and violent behavior. Ultimately, community cultures could then be labelled as narcissistic subcultures characterized by violence, egoism and lack of empathy. Violence is a global phenomenon, and long-term solutions by stakeholders should be at the forefront of discussions if we want to eradicate the culture of violence.

It is therefore imperative for stakeholders to focus on policies and intervention strategies that can be preventative. Parental and teacher education programs should be introduced in at-risk communities. Higher education institutions should focus on training teachers to identify and deal with adversities that are prevalent in their specific communities. Curriculum transformation at the higher education level, as well as at school level, is therefore suggested. Community support programs for parents are also suggested to assist parents with their daily stressors and with applying discipline in a non-violent way.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study might lack generalisability due to it being a small sample, however the focus of the study was on gaining an in-depth understanding of childhood adversity through the voices of young children. It might be

possible that by focussing only on the emotion anger that some of the childhood adverse experiences were not reported. The researcher however used an emotion that was familiar to this age group.

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