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The Impact of Physical and Emotional Child Abuse Experiences on the Academic Performance of Primary School Pupils in Edo State

Augusta Ibhade Oriabure
Correspondence to: blessedausta@gmail.com

Mobile: +2348059516422

Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the impact of physical and emotional child abuse experiences on the academic performance of primary school pupils in Edo State. Three research questions were raised and one hypothesis was formulated to guide the study. The population of the study comprised 38,856 pupils in public primary schools across the three senatorial districts in Edo State. A sample size of 1,506 pupils was selected using multistage sampling technique. Two instruments were used for data collection: the Child Abuse Questionnaire (CAQ) and a Pupils' Academic Performance Proforma in English Language and Mathematics. The instruments were validated by three experts in Early Childhood Education to ensure face and content validity. The reliability of the instruments was established using Cronbach's alpha. The Child Abuse Questionnaire yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.882, while the Pupils' Academic Performance Proforma yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.851. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Linear Regression Analysis was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that physical and emotional child abuse experiences jointly and significantly predict the academic performance of primary school pupils in Edo State. However, physical abuse was found to be a significant individual predictor of academic performance, while emotional abuse did not significantly predict academic performance independently. The findings also revealed that female pupils experienced slightly higher levels of both physical and emotional abuse compared to male pupils, and that the level of abuse increased slightly with age, with older pupils reporting higher mean scores than younger pupils. Based on the findings, it was recommended that parents and teachers should avoid all forms of physical abuse and adopt positive disciplinary strategies, while schools and government should strengthen counselling services and awareness programmes to reduce child abuse in order to improve pupils' academic performance.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Child Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Physical Abuse, Primary School Pupils.

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INTRODUCTION

Children are globally recognised as an important foundation for societal development, and education is widely regarded as a key tool for economic advancement, national growth, and the development of human intellectual capacity. It plays a central role in equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills needed for personal and societal progress. In educational settings, academic performance is one of the major indicators used to assess learning outcomes. Academic performance refers to the level of achievement attained by a pupil in school after a period of instruction, usually measured through tests, examinations, assignments, and classroom activities. It reflects how well a learner is able to understand, retain, and apply what has been taught. Duruji et al. (2014) described academic performance as the degree of a pupil's accomplishment in his or her academic studies. In addition, academic achievement refers to the extent to which learners meet educational goals and demonstrate mastery of school subjects through measurable outcomes such as grades and test scores (Steinmayr et al., 2014). Despite the importance of academic performance, it is influenced by several factors both within and outside the school environment. One major external factor is the child's home environment, particularly exposure to adverse experiences such as child abuse.

Child abuse is a serious global concern that refers to any act or failure to act by a parent, caregiver, teacher, or guardian that results in actual or potential harm to a child's physical, emotional, or psychological well-being. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2022), child abuse includes physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that harm a child's health, development, dignity, or survival. Child abuse is widely recognised as a violation of children's rights and has long-term effects that extend into schooling and learning outcomes. Child abuse is generally classified into physical abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. However, this study focuses specifically on physical and emotional abuse due to their direct relevance to pupils' behaviour and academic performance. Physical abuse refers to the intentional use of physical force that results in injury, pain, or harm to a child. It includes actions such as hitting, beating, slapping, shaking, burning, or excessive corporal punishment. Gilbert et al. (2009) describe physical abuse as acts that cause actual bodily injury or suffering to a child. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2022) also identifies physical abuse as deliberate use of force that can harm a child's health or development. From a developmental perspective, physical abuse can affect brain development and cognitive functioning. Teicher and Samson (2016) explain that early exposure to physical abuse can alter brain structures responsible for memory, attention, and emotional regulation. Cicchetti and Shonk (2001) further note that maltreated children often show deficits in academic competence, particularly in attention, task completion, and classroom engagement.

Emotional or psychological abuse refers to a consistent pattern of behaviour that damages a child's emotional development, self-worth, and psychological stability. It includes rejection, humiliation, intimidation, isolation, constant criticism, and lack of emotional support. Emotional abuse has been linked with long-term psychological and cognitive consequences. Hughes et al. (2017) found that adverse childhood experiences, including emotional abuse, are associated with poorer mental health outcomes and reduced functioning in educational and social settings. Norman et al. (2012) also reported that child abuse is associated with long-term cognitive and psychological impairments that can interfere with learning capacity. Teicher and Samson (2016) further explain that chronic emotional stress during childhood can disrupt brain regions responsible for learning, memory, and emotional regulation. In the school environments, children exposed to emotional abuse may experience

difficulty concentrating, low motivation, poor self-esteem, and reduced participation in classroom activities.

This study is anchored on the Ecological Systems Theory propounded by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). The theory explains that a child's development is influenced by different environmental systems that interact with one another. The microsystem refers to the child's immediate environment where direct interactions occur, such as home, school, and peers. Experiences like physical and emotional abuse within this system may affect a child's behaviour, emotional stability, and learning ability. The mesosystem explains the interaction between different parts of the child's immediate environment, such as home and school, and how experiences in one setting influence performance in another. The exosystem describes external environments that do not directly involve the child but still influence development, such as parents' work conditions and socio-economic stress, which may contribute to pressures within the home. Furthermore, the macrosystem refers to the broader cultural values, beliefs, and norms that shape attitudes toward child-rearing and discipline in society, thereby influencing how children are raised and treated. The chronosystem captures changes over time, including life transitions and accumulated experiences, which may gradually shape a child's development and academic outcomes. This theory is relevant to the present study because it explains how environmental factors across different systems—particularly exposure to physical and emotional abuse—can influence children's behaviour, emotional wellbeing, and cognitive development, all of which are essential for academic performance in school.

Several studies have been carried out on the relationship between child's abuse and academic performance. For instance, Wafaa and Shaqiqi (2017) investigated the effect of physical abuse on the academic achievement among secondary school female students in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The descriptive design was used. The study was conducted among female secondary school students in Jeddah- Saudi Arabia. Two hundred female students in secondary school in Jeddah were recruited for the study using non probability convenience sampling technique. The questionnaire was tested for validity and necessary modifications were done. Reliability index for the instrument was 0.813 using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient test. The result showed that 29% of participants reported that they were physically abused. The result further showed that there is a significant effect of physical abuse on the academic achievement of students. Alokan and Olatunji (2014) examined the relationship between child abuse and children's attention span in class; and the relationship between child's active involvement in parent's business and attitude to class work in Ekiti State, Nigeria. A descriptive research design of survey type was adopted for the study. The population for this study comprised all teachers in primary and secondary schools in both public and private sectors in Ado Local Government Area of Ekiti State, Nigeria. The sample consisted of 200 teachers drawn from 10 schools through stratified random sampling. A questionnaire tagged-Child Abuse and Classroom Behaviour Questionnaire (CACBQ) was used to collect data. The result revealed that there is a significant relationship between child abuse and students' academic performance.

Furthermore, Owo (2014) carried out a study on the effects of child abuse on the education of the primary of the primary school in Enugu North Local Government Area of Enugu State. The descriptive survey design was employed. The target population of the study comprised of all the victims and perpetrators of child abuse in Enugu North Local Government Area. Sample drawn were five selected primary schools within Enugu North Local Government Area. The schools were selected by the use of stratified random sampling, a total of five schools were selected from all the zones that made up the Enugu North Local

Government Area. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include those mentioned above and hospital, police stations and magistrate court, on the secondary sources were from journals and memoirs, publications, newspaper reports and magazines. Result showed that child abuse had effect on academic performance of students.

Statement of the Problem

Effective education is expected to translate into positive academic outcomes among learners, as schools are designed to provide the foundation for intellectual and developmental growth. However, in Nigeria, persistent poor academic performance among primary and secondary school pupils has remained a major concern to educators, parents, and stakeholders in the education sector. This situation continues to raise questions about the factors responsible for the declining standard of academic achievement despite increasing investment in education.

Parents and educators often express dissatisfaction with the inability of many pupils to perform well in both internal and external assessments. This persistent underperformance has generated concern about the effectiveness of the learning environment and the influence of external factors on pupils' academic outcomes. Kolo (2015) attributed poor academic performance among school children to socio-psychological factors such as child abuse, child labour, and child neglect, which negatively affect concentration, emotional stability, and school engagement. Among these factors, child abuse, particularly physical and emotional abuse has been identified as a significant challenge that may hinder pupils' academic development. Exposure to such experiences can disrupt emotional wellbeing, reduce motivation, and affect pupils' ability to concentrate and participate effectively in learning activities, thereby influencing their academic performance. Although, several studies have examined the factors associated with poor academic performance in different contexts, most of these studies were conducted outside Edo State or focused on secondary school students. Limited attention has been given to primary school pupils in Edo State, particularly regarding the combined influence of physical and emotional child abuse on their academic performance. It is this gap in literature that this study seeks to address by examining the impact of physical and emotional child abuse experiences on the academic performance of primary school pupils in Edo State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide this study:

1. What is the extent of physical abuse among male and female primary school pupils in Edo State?
2. What is the extent of emotional abuse among primary school pupils with respect to age in Edo State?
3. To what extent do physical and emotional child abuse experiences predict the academic performance of primary school pupils in Edo State?

Hypothesis

Research questions one and two were answered using descriptive statistics, while research question three was formulated into a hypothesis and tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

1. Physical and emotional child abuse experiences do not significantly predict the academic performance of primary school pupils in Edo State.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the ex-post facto research design. This design was considered appropriate because the variables of interest physical and emotional child abuse had already occurred and could not be manipulated by the researcher. The population of the study comprised 38,856 public primary school pupils in Primary Six (6) in Edo State. A sample size of 1,506 Primary Six pupils was selected using multistage sampling technique. In the first stage, Edo State was stratified into three senatorial districts: Edo Central, Edo South, and Edo North. In the second stage, all the 18 Local Government Areas in the three senatorial districts were included. In the third stage, two primary schools were selected from each LGA using simple random sampling technique. In the final stage, all Primary Six pupils in the selected schools were included in the study. The sample size was considered adequate to ensure proper representation of pupils across the state.

Two instruments were used for data collection. The first instrument was a structured questionnaire titled Child Abuse Questionnaire (CAQ), adapted fromFarah and Syed (2007). The CAQ was used to collect data on physical and emotional child abuse among Primary Six pupils. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A collected demographic information such as school, sex, and age, while Section B focused on child abuse. Section B contained ten (10) items, with items 1–5 measuring physical abuse and items 6–10 measuring emotional abuse. The items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).The second instrument was a Pupils' Academic Performance Proforma, which was used to obtain pupils' scores in English Language and Mathematics. The instruments were administered by the researcher with the assistance of a trained research assistant to ensure proper coordination and a high response rate.For data analysis, descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The mean scores were used to determine the extent of physical and emotional abuse among primary school pupils, including variations based on sex and age while inferential statistics were used to test the hypothesis. Specifically, linear regression analysis was employed to determine the predictive influence of physical and emotional child abuse on pupils' academic performance. A benchmark mean score of 2.50 was used as the criterion for determining the presence of child abuse among the respondents.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional authorities and/or review boards prior to the study. Informed consent was obtained from parents or guardians of all participants because the participants were minors. Parents/guardians were provided with full information regarding the purpose of the study, procedures involved, voluntary nature of participation and their right to withdraw their child at any time without penalty. In addition, age-appropriate explanations were given to all participating children, and their assent was obtained. Participation was entirely voluntary. All information collected was treated with strict confidentiality, anonymised during analysis and used solely for this study. Data were stored securely in accordance with data protection guidelines.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the extent of physical abuse among male and female primary school pupils in Edo State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Physical and Emotional Child Abuse among Primary School Pupils by Sex.

Variables	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Physical Abuse	Male	678	2.47	0.89
	Female	828	2.62	0.93
	Total	**1506**	**2.55**	**0.91**
Emotional Abuse	Male	678	2.42	0.88
	Female	828	2.57	0.92
	Total	**1506**	**2.50**	**0.90**

The results in Table 1 show the mean and standard deviation of physical and emotional child abuse among primary school pupils based on sex. For physical abuse, male pupils recorded a mean score of 2.47 (SD = 0.89), while female pupils recorded a higher mean score of 2.62 (SD = 0.93). The overall mean score of 2.55 indicates that physical abuse among the pupils is slightly above the criterion mean of 2.50, suggesting a moderate level of physical abuse. For emotional abuse, male pupils had a mean score of 2.42 (SD = 0.88), whereas female pupils had a higher mean score of 2.57 (SD = 0.92). The overall mean score of 2.50 shows that emotional abuse is at the threshold of the criterion mean, indicating a moderate level of emotional abuse among the pupils.

Overall, the findings reveal that female pupils experience slightly higher levels of both physical and emotional abuse compared to male pupils. The standard deviation values indicate a moderate spread of responses, suggesting some variability in the experiences of abuse among the pupils.

Research Question 2: What is the extent of emotional abuse among primary school pupils with respect to age in Edo State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Physical and Emotional Child Abuse among Primary Six Pupils by Age.

Variables	Age Group	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Physical Abuse	Below 10 years	250	2.38	0.94
	10 years	420	2.54	0.92
	11 years	530	2.57	0.90
	12 years	200	2.60	0.86
	13 years	106	2.63	0.84
	Total	**1506**	**2.56**	**0.91**
Emotional Abuse	Below 10 years	250	2.30	0.93
	10 years	420	2.50	0.91
	11 years	530	2.52	0.89
	12 years	200	2.55	0.85
	13 years	106	2.58	0.83
	Total	**1506**	**2.50**	**0.90**

The results in Table 2 present the mean and standard deviation of physical and emotional child abuse among Primary Six pupils based on age. For physical abuse, pupils aged 13 years recorded the highest mean score (2.63, SD = 0.84), followed by those aged 12 years (2.60, SD = 0.86) and 11 years (2.57, SD = 0.90). Pupils aged 10 years had a mean score of 2.54 (SD = 0.92), while those below 10 years recorded the lowest mean score (2.38, SD = 0.94). The overall mean score of 2.56 indicates that physical abuse among the pupils is slightly above the criterion mean of 2.50, suggesting a moderate level of physical abuse. For emotional abuse, a similar pattern is observed. Pupils aged 13 years had the highest mean score (2.58, SD = 0.83), followed by those aged 12 years (2.55, SD = 0.85) and 11 years (2.52, SD = 0.89). Pupils aged 10 years recorded a mean score of 2.50 (SD = 0.91), while those below 10 years had the lowest mean score (2.30, SD = 0.93). The overall mean score of 2.50 indicates that emotional abuse is at a moderate level among the pupils.

Overall, the results show that as age increases, the mean scores for both physical and emotional abuse also increase slightly, indicating that older pupils tend to report higher levels of abuse.

Hypothesis 1: Physical and Emotional Child experience do not significantly predict the academic performance of primary school pupils in Edo State.

Table 3: Regression Analysis of Physical and Emotional Child Abuse on Pupils' Academic Performance

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Sig.
Regression	58.900	2	29.450	30.229	.000
Residual	736.920	1503	0.490		
Total	795.820	1505			

Table 4: Parameter Estimates of Regression Analysis

Variable	β	Std. Error	Beta	r	r^2	Adjusted r^2
Constant	4.305	0.259		0.272	0.074	0.072
Physical Abuse	-0.577	0.087	-0.274			
Emotional Abuse	-0.007	0.070	-0.004			

Result in Table 3 revealed that the F-value of 30.226, which tests the overall significance of the regression model, is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that physical and emotional child abuse jointly have a significant influence on pupils' academic performance in Edo State. The R-value of 0.272 shows a weak positive relationship between physical and emotional child abuse and pupils' academic performance. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.074$) and adjusted R^2 (0.072) indicate that approximately 7.4% to 7.2% of the variation in pupils' academic performance is explained by the model, while the remaining variation is accounted for by other factors not included in the study. Furthermore, Table 4 presents the individual effects of the predictor variables. Physical abuse ($B = -0.577$, $\beta = -0.274$, $p < 0.05$) is statistically significant and negatively related to pupils' academic performance, indicating that an increase in physical abuse leads to a decline in academic performance. In contrast, emotional abuse ($B = -0.007$, $\beta = -0.004$, $p > 0.05$) is not statistically significant, showing that it does not independently predict pupils' academic performance.

The constant value ($B = 4.305$) represents the expected level of academic performance when both physical and emotional abuse are absent. Therefore, physical and emotional child abuse jointly influence pupils' academic performance in Edo State, with physical abuse exerting a significant negative effect, while emotional abuse does not significantly influence academic performance.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed that physical and emotional child abuse jointly and significantly predict pupils' academic performance in Edo State. This indicates that child abuse plays an important role in determining pupils' academic outcomes. However, the result further showed that while both forms of abuse jointly influence academic performance, only physical abuse has a significant independent effect. The findings clearly showed that physical

abuse and pupils' academic performance are inversely related. This implies that as the level of physical abuse increases, pupils' academic performance declines. This may be because pupils who are exposed to physical abuse often experience maltreatment, harsh punishment, and physical aggression, which can negatively affect their emotional stability, concentration, and willingness to engage in academic activities. Pupils who are constantly subjected to harsh treatment may develop low self-esteem and reduced confidence, making them withdrawn and less active in class. The findings of this study also revealed differences in the extent of physical and emotional child abuse based on sex and age. The results showed that female pupils experienced slightly higher levels of both physical and emotional abuse compared to male pupils. This suggests that female pupils are more exposed to abusive experiences than their male counterparts. Furthermore, the findings indicated that the level of abuse increased slightly with age, as older pupils reported higher mean scores in both physical and emotional abuse than younger pupils. This implies that as pupils grow older, they are exposed to more situations where abuse occurs.

This finding also aligns with Heckman and Rubinstein (2001), who found that abused children tend to have lower grades and a higher tendency of repeating classes. Similarly, Shonk and Cicchetti (2001) noted that child abuse delays students' academic progress. In the same vein, the finding agrees with Wafaa and Shaqiqi (2017), who reported that physical abuse has a significant effect on students' academic performance. It also corroborates the findings of Simba et al. (2016), who observed that physical abuse contributes to variations in pupils' academic performance. The result further supports Alokan and Olatunji (2014), who established a significant relationship between child abuse and students' academic performance. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Owo (2014), who found that child abuse negatively affects students' academic performance, and Isah (2013), who observed that abused children tend to have poor school attendance and low academic achievement. Likewise, Azi and Saluhu (2016) noted that abused children often perform poorly due to difficulty in concentrating on academic work.

The study also agrees with Chalk et al. (2002), who found that abused and neglected children tend to perform poorly in school, as reflected in low academic achievement and repeated grades. Similarly, Martin et al. (2010) reported that child maltreatment has adverse effects on students' academic performance. In addition, Ayodele (2002) stated that abuse is not restricted by gender. On the other hand, the study found that emotional abuse does not have a significant independent effect on pupils' academic performance. This suggests that although emotional abuse may affect pupils psychologically, it does not directly predict their academic performance when considered alongside physical abuse. Overall, the findings of this study show that child abuse, particularly physical abuse, has a negative impact on pupils' academic performance, as pupils who experience abuse are more likely to face challenges such as poor concentration, low motivation, and emotional instability, which ultimately affect their academic success. This finding is in agreement with Martin et al. (2010), who reported that child maltreatment has adverse effects on students' academic performance.

CONCLUSION

Physical and emotional child abuse are among the psychological challenges confronting primary school pupils in Edo State. Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that while physical and emotional child abuse jointly predict pupils' academic performance, only physical abuse independently and significantly predicts pupils' academic performance in primary schools. Consequently, the study concludes that child abuse, particularly physical

abuse from parents, teachers, and significant others, adversely affects pupils' academic performance in primary schools in Edo State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

2. Parents and guardians should be sensitised on the negative effects of physical abuse on pupils' academic performance and encouraged to adopt positive and supportive methods of child upbringing instead of harsh punishment.

3. Teachers should avoid the use of physical punishment in schools and instead employ child-friendly disciplinary strategies that promote pupils' confidence, participation, and academic engagement.

4. School authorities should establish and strengthen counselling services to provide emotional and psychological support for pupils who may be experiencing abuse.

5. Government and educational stakeholders should enforce existing policies against child abuse and implement awareness programmes to educate the public on its adverse effects on pupils' development and academic performance.

6. Workshops and seminars should be organised for parents and teachers to equip them with effective parenting and classroom management strategies that do not involve physical or emotional abuse.

Conflict of Interest

The researcher declares no conflict of interest. The study was conducted objectively, and the researcher had no financial, personal, or professional interests that could have influenced the design, data collection, analysis, or interpretation of results.

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