

The Inflence of Child Abuse on the Primary School Pupil Academic Achievement in Yakurr Local Government area Cross River State Nigeria

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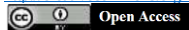
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ABSTRACT

Child abuse remains a major child-protection and educational concern because physical, sexual and emotional maltreatment can undermine children's well-being, classroom participation and learning. This study examined the influence of child abuse on primary school pupils' academic achievement in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey with a localized case-study focus was adopted. Five public primary schools were selected from the 42 public primary schools identified in the study area, and the inferential analyses reported in the manuscript were based on 80 valid questionnaire response units. Data were obtained through a structured questionnaire and personal interviews. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert response format and the reported test-retest reliability was approximately 0.95. Three null hypotheses covering physical, sexual and emotional abuse were tested using the chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic at the 0.05 significance level. The results showed strongly non-uniform response distributions in all three domains, with agreement that abuse adversely affects academic achievement dominating the response categories: physical abuse, $\chi^2(4) = 94.88$, $p < .001$; sexual abuse, $\chi^2(4) = 79.38$, $p < .001$; and emotional abuse, $\chi^2(4) = 94.88$, $p < .001$. The findings are consistent with evidence that maltreatment may impair concentration, emotional regulation, school engagement and educational progression. The study concludes that stronger prevention, reporting, counselling and non-violent discipline practices are needed in families and schools. Because the design is cross-sectional and perception-based, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of perceived association rather than proof of causality.

1. Introduction

Child abuse is a multidimensional social, health and educational problem that affects children across family, school and community settings. It includes acts of commission and omission that cause, or have the potential to cause, physical injury, sexual harm, psychological distress, developmental impairment or serious neglect. Leeb et al. (2008) conceptualized child maltreatment as acts or failures to act by a parent or caregiver that result in harm, potential harm or threat of harm to a child. This broad definition is important because abuse is not limited to visible injury; it also includes experiences that undermine emotional security, self-worth, cognitive development and the ability to participate effectively in school.

The educational consequences of maltreatment are increasingly recognized. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2026a) notes that child maltreatment can interfere with cognitive functioning and academic performance and is associated with poorer school completion. Toxic or prolonged stress can disrupt neurological development and contribute to anxiety, depression, withdrawal, aggressive behaviour and impaired concentration. These mechanisms are directly relevant to academic achievement because learning depends on sustained attention, emotional regulation, positive relationships with adults and peers, and regular participation in classroom activities.

The Nigerian context makes the issue particularly urgent. The national Violence Against Children Survey reported that violence against children is widespread and often recurrent. UNICEF Nigeria (2016) reported that six out of ten Nigerian children experienced at least one form of physical, sexual or emotional violence before age 18, while many victims did not disclose the abuse or receive support. Such patterns are likely to have educational implications, especially in communities where families, schools and child-protection services have limited capacity to identify and respond to abuse.

Physical abuse involves the intentional use of physical force that results in, or creates a substantial risk of, injury or harm. Examples include severe hitting, kicking, burning, choking, beating and other forms of violent punishment. Theoklitou et al. (2012) emphasized that physical and emotional violence can also occur in school settings. Although discipline practices vary culturally, international child-rights standards increasingly distinguish legitimate guidance from corporal punishment that humiliates, injures or threatens the dignity of the child. WHO (2026b) further reports that corporal punishment is associated with poorer educational outcomes and offers no demonstrated developmental benefit.

Physical maltreatment may affect school achievement through several pathways. Pain and injury can result in absenteeism; fear of adults can reduce classroom interaction; chronic stress can impair memory and attention; and repeated humiliation can lower motivation and self-efficacy. Isangedighi (2005) similarly argued that physical abuse may contribute to poor school performance, dropping out, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. These consequences suggest that the effects of abuse are not confined to the home but can appear in attendance, participation, behaviour and achievement at school.

Sexual abuse represents another serious threat to educational functioning. It may involve contact or non-contact sexual acts, exploitation, coercion or exposure that a child cannot understand, consent to or resist. Survivors may experience shame, fear, intrusive memories, depression, social withdrawal and difficulty trusting others. In school, these effects can manifest as declining concentration, avoidance of peers or adults, absenteeism and disengagement. The concern is especially important in contexts where disclosure may expose children to stigma or where services for survivors are difficult to access.

Emotional abuse, sometimes referred to as psychological maltreatment, includes persistent rejection, humiliation, intimidation, threats, isolation, degrading treatment and other caregiver behaviours that undermine a child's sense of worth or security. The National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information (2006) described emotional abuse in terms of acts or omissions capable of producing serious behavioural, cognitive, emotional or mental disorders. Khatri (2004) argued that repeated humiliation and rejection can contribute to withdrawal and poor concentration. In educational settings, these consequences may reduce participation, confidence, persistence and willingness to seek help from teachers.

The literature therefore suggests a plausible relationship between child abuse and pupils' educational outcomes, yet localized evidence remains necessary because the nature of abuse, disclosure, disciplinary practices and educational resources vary across communities. Yakurr Local Government Area provides an important setting for examining how stakeholders perceive the effects of physical, sexual and emotional abuse on primary school pupils' academic achievement. The present study focuses on these three forms of abuse and tests whether the response patterns concerning their influence on academic achievement differ significantly from an equal distribution across response categories.

The study is guided by three null hypotheses: (H01) physical abuse has no significant influence on primary school pupils' academic achievement; (H02) sexual abuse has no significant influence on primary school pupils' academic achievement; and (H03) emotional abuse has no significant influence on primary school pupils' academic achievement. By examining these dimensions together, the study seeks to provide evidence that can inform parental education, school safeguarding, counselling and community awareness in Yakurr LGA.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design with a localized case-study focus. This design was appropriate because the research sought to describe respondents' perceptions of the educational consequences of child abuse within a defined local context and to test whether the observed response distributions differed significantly from what would be expected under an equal-response pattern. The

analysis is quantitative at the hypothesis-testing stage, while personal interviews were used to complement the questionnaire-based evidence.

2.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Ugep, the headquarters of Yakurr LGA, is one of the major population centres in the area. The locality is socially and economically diverse, with households engaged in agriculture, trading, public service and other livelihood activities. The study area was selected because child-protection concerns and challenges affecting school participation were considered relevant to the local educational environment.

2.3 Population, Sampling and Analytical Sample

The sampling frame comprised 42 public primary schools in the study area. The names of the schools were written on separate slips, mixed and five schools were selected by simple random sampling. The original field procedure also involved the participation of teachers and pupils in the selected schools. For statistical consistency, the present analysis retains the 80 valid questionnaire response units shown in each of the three hypothesis tables ($N = 80$). No additional respondent characteristics are introduced beyond those documented in the source manuscript.

2.4 Instrumentation and Reliability

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and personal interviews. The questionnaire contained a demographic section and substantive items assessing respondents' views on physical, sexual and emotional abuse and their implications for academic achievement. Responses were organized on a five-point Likert-type scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree, Disagree and Undecided. The manuscript also reports the use of dichotomous Yes/No items for selected questions. Instrument stability was assessed through a test-retest procedure separated by approximately two weeks. The reported reliability estimates were about 95.0% at the first administration and 94.8% at retest, suggesting high response consistency.

2.5 Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed with the assistance of head teachers in the selected schools, who served as contact points between the researchers and respondents. Completed instruments were returned through the same school-based coordination process. Personal interviews were used to obtain contextual clarification where necessary. The analysis reported in this article is based on the response frequencies presented in the source dataset.

2.6 Data Analysis

Descriptive frequencies and the chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic were used to evaluate the three null hypotheses. With five response categories, the degree of freedom for each test was $df = 5 - 1 = 4$. Statistical significance was evaluated at $\alpha = .05$; the corresponding chi-square critical value is 9.488. The chi-square contributions were computed as $\sum[(Fo - Fe)^2/Fe]$, where Fo is the observed frequency and Fe is the expected frequency. Because each table contains $N = 80$ responses across five categories, the expected frequency under an equal-response distribution is $Fe = 16$ for each category. Results with calculated χ^2 values greater than 9.488 were considered statistically significant.

3. Results

The results are presented according to the three null hypotheses. In each case, the response frequencies were tested against an equal expected distribution across the five response categories. The tables reproduce the observed frequencies reported in the source manuscript and provide corrected chi-square calculations and decision thresholds.

3.1 Physical Abuse and Academic Achievement

H01: Physical abuse has no significant influence on primary school pupils' academic achievement.

Response category	Fo	Fe	Fo-Fe	(Fo-Fe) ²	(Fo-Fe) ² /Fe
Strongly Agree	50	16	34	1156	72.25
Agree	13	16	-3	9	0.56
Strongly Disagree	10	16	-6	36	2.25
Disagree	5	16	-11	121	7.56
Undecided	2	16	-14	196	12.25
Total	80	80			94.88

The calculated chi-square value was $\chi^2(4) = 94.88$, $p < .001$. Because 94.88 exceeds the critical value of 9.488, H01 was rejected. The response distribution was strongly concentrated in the agreement categories, indicating a statistically significant perception that physical abuse adversely affects pupils' academic achievement.

3.2 Sexual Abuse and Academic Achievement

H02: Sexual abuse has no significant influence on primary school pupils' academic achievement.

Response category	Fo	Fe	Fo-Fe	(Fo-Fe) ²	(Fo-Fe) ² /Fe
Strongly Agree	45	16	29	841	52.56
Agree	20	16	-4	16	1.00
Strongly Disagree	0	16	-16	256	16.00
Disagree	5	16	-11	121	7.56
Undecided	10	16	-6	36	2.25
Total	80	80			79.38

The calculated value was $\chi^2(4) = 79.38$, $p < .001$, which is greater than the critical value of 9.488. H02 was therefore rejected. Agreement responses substantially outnumbered disagreement responses, supporting the view that sexual abuse is perceived to have a harmful influence on academic achievement.

3.3 Emotional Abuse and Academic Achievement

H03: Emotional abuse has no significant influence on primary school pupils' academic achievement.

Response category	Fo	Fe	Fo-Fe	(Fo-Fe) ²	(Fo-Fe) ² /Fe
Strongly Agree	50	16	34	1156	72.25
Agree	13	16	-3	9	0.56
Strongly Disagree	10	16	-6	36	2.25
Disagree	5	16	-11	121	7.56
Undecided	2	16	-14	196	12.25
Total	80	80			94.88

The analysis produced $\chi^2(4) = 94.88$, $p < .001$. Since the calculated value exceeds the 0.05 critical value of 9.488, H03 was rejected. The dominant pattern of agreement indicates that respondents perceived emotional abuse as detrimental to pupils' academic achievement.

3.4 Summary of Hypothesis Tests

Variable	χ^2	df	p	Decision
Physical abuse	94.88	4	< .001	Reject H01
Sexual abuse	79.38	4	< .001	Reject H02
Emotional abuse	94.88	4	< .001	Reject H03

4. Discussion

The findings show a consistent pattern across all three forms of abuse examined. Respondents overwhelmingly endorsed the view that physical, sexual and emotional abuse undermine primary school pupils' academic achievement. Although the chi-square goodness-of-fit analysis does not establish causality, the non-uniform response distributions provide strong evidence that the adverse educational effects of abuse are widely perceived within the study setting.

The result for physical abuse is consistent with literature linking violent discipline and maltreatment to educational difficulties. Physical abuse can produce injury, fear, absenteeism, poor concentration and distrust of adults. Isangedighi (2005) associated physical abuse with poor educational performance, dropping out, anxiety and depression. More recent global evidence similarly indicates that corporal punishment and other forms of physical maltreatment are associated with impaired cognitive and socio-emotional development and poorer educational outcomes (WHO, 2026b). For primary school pupils, these effects are particularly serious because foundational literacy, numeracy and social skills are developed during this stage.

The significant response pattern for sexual abuse is also plausible in light of the psychological and social consequences described in previous studies. Sexual victimization can produce fear, shame, depression, intrusive thoughts and withdrawal, all of which may interfere with attention and participation in school. UNICEF Nigeria (2016) further showed that sexual violence affects both girls and boys and that many Nigerian children who experience violence do not receive formal support. Where disclosure is difficult, educational problems may appear before teachers or caregivers understand the underlying cause.

Emotional abuse also attracted a strong agreement pattern. This is important because psychological maltreatment is often less visible than physical injury but may have persistent effects on self-concept and learning. Repeated rejection, humiliation, intimidation or degrading treatment can reduce confidence, increase anxiety and discourage children from communicating with teachers and peers. Khatri (2004) emphasized the connection between emotional maltreatment, withdrawal and poor concentration. The present findings therefore reinforce the need to treat emotional safety as part of educational quality rather than as a separate welfare issue.

Taken together, the results support a whole-school and whole-community approach to child protection. Academic achievement is shaped not only by curriculum, teaching quality and school resources but also by whether children feel safe enough to attend, participate, ask questions and persist with difficult learning tasks. The findings also suggest that school personnel need practical procedures for recognizing possible abuse, responding without stigmatizing the child and referring cases to appropriate child-protection, health or law-enforcement services where necessary.

The study should nevertheless be interpreted within its methodological boundaries. First, the analysis is localized to Yakurr LGA and should not be generalized automatically to all primary schools in Cross River State or Nigeria. Second, the available results are based mainly on questionnaire response distributions and do not include a multivariable model linking verified abuse exposure to objective achievement scores. Third, chi-square goodness-of-fit demonstrates that the response categories are not equally distributed; it does not by itself prove that abuse caused a measurable decline in academic performance. Future studies should combine validated abuse measures with attendance records, standardized achievement scores and longitudinal designs.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that physical, sexual and emotional abuse are perceived as serious threats to the academic achievement of primary school pupils in Yakurr Local Government Area. All three response distributions were statistically significant and were dominated by agreement that abuse has harmful educational consequences. The evidence is consistent with broader research showing that maltreatment can impair emotional well-being, concentration, school engagement and educational progression. Protecting children from abuse should therefore be treated as an educational priority as well as a child-rights and public-health obligation. Stronger prevention, early identification, confidential reporting, counselling and family support can help create conditions in which pupils are safer and better able to learn.

6. Recommendations

- Parents and caregivers should replace beating, hitting, burning and other violent disciplinary practices with age-appropriate, non-violent forms of guidance and behaviour management.
- Primary schools should establish clear safeguarding and confidential reporting procedures for suspected physical, sexual and emotional abuse.
- Teachers and head teachers should receive regular training on recognizing behavioural and educational indicators of maltreatment and on appropriate referral pathways.
- Counselling and psychosocial support should be strengthened for children who disclose abuse or show persistent fear, withdrawal, aggression, absenteeism or sudden academic decline.
- Community awareness campaigns should explain the educational as well as health and social consequences of child abuse and should challenge norms that normalize violence against children.
- Future research should use larger multi-school samples, objective academic records, validated child-maltreatment scales and longitudinal methods to estimate the magnitude and direction of the relationship more precisely.

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