

Determinants and Consequences of Physical Abuse among Secondary School Students in Rural Areas of Lahore

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Abstract



This research work is an attempt to study the impact of physical abuse on the educational performance of adolescents. Researcher also highlighted risk factors associated with physical abuse among children. This study was quantitative in nature. Population of the study consisted of 400 students from seventh to tenth standard (class) of 10 public schools in rural areas of Lahore. Data were collected by administering a survey questionnaire. After removing records with missing data, 140 surveys were finally used for analysis. Percentages, t-test, and ANOVA were used to analyze collected data. The results of the study indicated that the main source of physical abuse for children is at school rather than at home. It was also found that there is no impact of physical abuse on the educational performance of a student as is generally believed to be the case in Pakistani society. Moreover, it was noticed that younger children at home tend to suffer higher levels of abuse. Gender seems to play no role in determining levels of abuse both at school and at home. Among other risk factors, nuclear family structure came out to be a significant risk factor compared to joint family. Furthermore, it was noticed that as the student moves along the higher-class level, abuse at home tends to decrease but this is not the same case for abuse at school. Study recommended that for creating a positive climate at school, concerning authorities may conduct mandatory training sessions for teachers and staff members. School administration may regularly monitor teacher-student interaction to ensure that students are safe within school premises.

Keywords: *Education, Physical Abuse, Adolescent, Rural Areas*

1. Introduction

Physical abuse among children is a very serious issue in Pakistan mainly due to the lack of relevant laws to protect children and sometimes the cultural values that do not look down upon physical abuse among children (Maul et al., 2019; Akhtar et al., 2022). For example, corporal punishment of children by parents or teachers is something culturally accepted because it is believed to be for the best of the children. Physical abuse among children is defined as a non-accidental use of physical abuse against a child that can result in harm to the

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recipient.

Hitting, slapping, shaking, kicking, punching, throwing, and bruising would be generally considered physical abuse (Tjaden et al., 1998). A study conducted by Brown et al. (2023) reported that in their lifetime, approximately one in four children experience neglect of parents or physical abuse. These findings are alarming and require serious consideration by researchers and concerned stakeholders as these violent exposures can have lifelong consequences on the physical, mental, and emotional health of children (Jawadi et al., 2019; Pur et al., 2016). It has been also endorsed by Rafique et al. (2020) that it is our shared and basic responsibility to protect school-going children from maltreatment and the prevalent social evil of physical abuse.

Further, it has been narrated by Collin-Vezina et al. (2013) that beyond the distinction of socioeconomic status, caste, creed, ethnicity, and color, child abuse has become a global issue. Corporal punishments have become very common in homes and schools with the purpose of maintaining discipline and teaching obedience to children, though studies proved that it is not the right solution (Bosede, 2010; Shmueli, 2010; Durrant & Ensom, 2012). It has been highlighted by Saddik and Hattab (2012) that emotional and physical abuse among children is prevalent in early grade schools and this issue needs to be addressed on a priority basis.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to exclusively deal with physical abuse among secondary school students in rural areas of Lahore (which is the largest city), Punjab province of Pakistan. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of two main sources of physical abuse among secondary school students at home and school and comprehend what the potential determinants of physical abuse are. Objectives of the study were to:

1. explore the impact of physical abuse among secondary school students on their educational performance in school.
2. examine the risk factors of physical abuse and the impact of this abuse on educational performance.

1.2 Hypotheses of the Study

This study addressed the following research hypotheses:

- H_{A1}: Mean score of abuse at home is higher than mean score of abuse at school
- H_{A2}: Female students are more likely to suffer abuse both at home and school as compared to male students
- H_{A3}: Children in Nuclear families tend to suffer higher abuse than in Joint family structure
- H_{A4}: Class of a student plays a role in physical abuse at home

H_{A5}: Being the youngest at home increases one's chances of suffering higher physical abuse at home

H_{A6}: Physical abuse at home and school has a significant effect on the educational performance of a student

1.3 Delimitations of the Study

This study though provided insights as to how physical abuse is linked with educational performance and what are the potential determinants of physical abuse, it has been delimited in certain areas. First, many additional factors may influence the educational performance of a student other than physical abuse; this study has not captured all of them. For example, researcher have not taken into account the interest of the student towards the educational program he or she is pursuing. If a student is not doing something he/she likes, performance can deteriorate significantly.

Similarly, the socioeconomic status of a student is something that should be accounted. A student from a well-off family can potentially perform better comparatively because of more resources at their disposal, or it can be the case that a student from a poor background is tempted to work harder to make up for the economic inadequacies. In any case, socio-economic status is a very important factor to be considered while studying the relationship between educational performance and physical abuse.

Secondly, the sample size for the study was not very large owing to the limited resources at the researcher's disposal. If it is intended to study physical abuse and its determinants and impact on educational performance in the rural areas of Lahore, then the researcher ought to have a much bigger sample size to represent the whole population.

2. Literature Review

Numerous studies have tried to capture the potential determinants and prevalence of physical abuse among children. Researchers have highlighted several features that may or may not intensify the severity of this abuse. Shah et al. (2023) performed research and collected data from various sources, mainly from non-government entities like Sahil. There were three study goals, highlighting the prevalence of child abuse in Pakistan, examining the age groups and genders who maltreat children, and identifying the forms of child abuse. The results showed that in 2022, Sindh fell into the second position for reporting child abuse cases. As per the data, 6-10 and 111 to 15 are highly vulnerable to females. Sexual abuse, sodomy, rape attempted abuse, child pornography, homicide leading to sexual abuse, and incest. Khawaja et al. (2015) conducted a study to explore abuse among school-going children and found that psychological stress is the major reason for defiant behaviors such as verbal abuse, child abuse, and

bullying among children.

Holt et al. (2008) indicated that children who faced domestic violence are more vulnerable to physical abuse and socio-emotional problems. Likewise, Hurt et al. (2001) reported that poor academic performance, low self-esteem, and depression among school-going children are correlated with their high exposure to violence (Silverstein et al., 2006). It has been identified by Rafique et al. (2020) that along with psychological and emotional abuse, lack of proper experience and knowledge about the recognition of signs and symptoms of abuse is also the major reason for physical abuse among school-going children. They suggested that to solve this issue, the government should take necessary measures and introduce a child protection policy, besides awareness sessions for teachers and parents may also be conducted in this regard. It has been indicated by Ullah (2023) that one of the key factors of physical abuse (mainly punishments, and beating with sticks) among children at school and home is their poor academic performance (Heekes et al., 2022). Along with that low economic class of children and lack of attention and love from parents and elders are also the main factors of physical abuse among them. Ullah (2023) suggested that subjects to create awareness among students about recognizing the symptoms of physical abuse and strategies to deal with physical abuse may be included in the curriculum to solve the issue of physical abuse at home as well as in schools.

Abbas et al. (2024) performed a survey to analyze the violence against neglected children and their health status in Punjab, Pakistan. Random sampling technique were used to collect data. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Test (CFA) and Structural Modeling Test (SEM) were used to analyze data. The results showed that a significant correlation was found between physical, sexual emotional, spiritual, and psychological health. Ishfaq and Kamal (2025) performed a study to find the emotional abuse to Delinquent Tendencies: Comparative study on Juveniles and Students in Punjab, Pakistan. The data were collected from 232 juveniles. The results of the study showed that emotional abuse positively predicted delinquent tendencies and emotional maturity as a personality trait, and physical-verbal aggression mediated this relationship among, juveniles and students. An emotional decline in maturity is a stronger predictor of delinquent tendencies among juveniles found in the research. Whereas, physical-verbal aggression played a stronger role for students.

Flynn-O'Brien et al. (2016) completed a survey study to highlight the prevalence of physical abuse among children in Haiti. They found that the two most common sources of physical abuse among children are parents and teachers of a student. They also found female students were more likely to be a victim of physical abuse compared to male counterparts. Leiter et al. (1997) performed a

longitudinal analysis of school performance and abuse among children. He also incorporated child neglect as part of the physical abuse definition and found that children suffering from higher levels of physical abuse performed poorly in school and had a higher absenteeism rate. Not only this, students who used to perform better in schools saw their grades falling which was found to be significantly tied to maltreatment at school.

Fusco et al. (2009) tried to study the varying impact of physical abuse based on the age of the student. They found that responses to physical abuse in school and social situations vary among children from different age groups. They highlighted that younger kids cannot understand violence among their parents and may point the finger at themselves, hence further worsening the severity of abuse. Bostock et al. (2009) studied the relationship between educational performance and physical abuse in a rural county in North England and found that physical abuse harms a child's educational performance.

Along the same lines, McGaha-Garnett and Valerie (2013) tried to highlight the personal, social, and academic factors that may play a role in physical abuse borne by a child. They concluded that physical abuse is negatively associated with the educational performance of a child. They also highlighted that children belonging to dysfunctional families tend to suffer higher physical abuse at home hence highlighting the effect of intimate partner violence on child abuse. Moreover, Breiding et al. (2013) surveyed females in Swaziland to assess the prevalence and risk factors associated with physical abuse. They found that every 5th woman in Swaziland was a victim of physical abuse. They also highlighted that a mother's death and a joint family system can be regarded as risk factors for severe physical abuse among children. In addition to this, Elarousy and Shaqiqi (2017) analyzed the impact of physical abuse on the Grade Point Average among secondary school female students in Jeddah. They found that students suffering from physical abuse had a Grade Point Average of 83.07 ± 8.02 , which was significantly lower than 88.19 ± 9.13 for students not suffering from abuse.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study was quantitative in nature and survey method was applied. It has been highlighted by Ponto (2015) that the survey method is a rigorous type of research that enables researchers to identify participants' perceptions regarding a particular phenomenon and it has the potential to reduce bias in research findings. Philosophical assumptions of the positivism paradigm were followed for this research as they indicated that there is a need to identify or assess the causes that have a great influence on outcomes and it is only possible by

conducting numeric observations and studying participants' behaviors (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

3.2 Population and Sampling

The survey data were collected from government secondary schools in rural areas of Lahore, mainly Raiwand. The target population was 400 students from classes 7th to 10th (4 classes) from 10 public schools. Keeping in view the rule of sample selection determination given by Adam (2020), the data were collected from a sample of 162 students by using a simple random sampling technique and after discarding surveys with missing values, 140 complete surveys were left for further analysis.

3.3 Instrumentation

The survey questionnaire employed for this study has 16 questions, mainly capturing three broad constructs viz. i) Physical Abuse at Home and School, ii) Educational Performance of a student, and iii) Family Structure of a student. To capture physical abuse, the researcher employed a 10-point Likert scale from 1-10 where 1 means 'Never Got Abused' and 10 means 'Abuse on Daily Basis'. For educational performance, three proxy variables were employed viz. i) Class rank, ii) Most recent exam marks, and iii) Previous exam marks. For family structure, the researcher tried to capture aspects like i) is the student living with parents, ii) is the family structure is a nuclear family or a joint family, iii) is mother a working woman or house, and iv) is intimate partner violence. Below is a brief overview of the 140 complete surveys that were obtained after discarding incomplete records.

Table 1

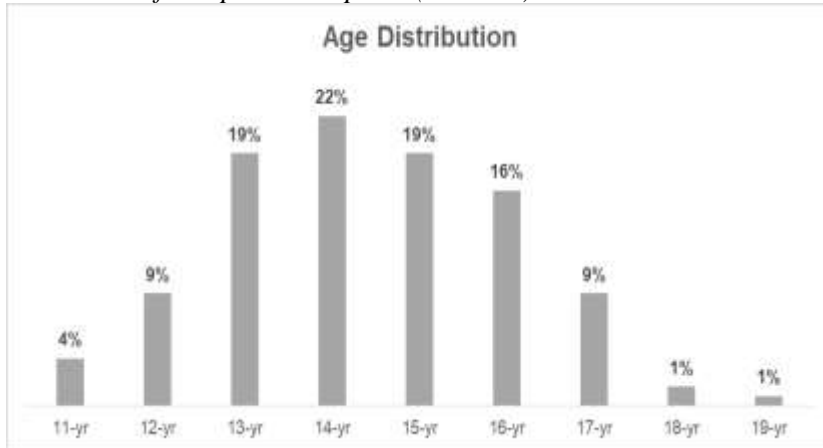
Data Overview (Demographics)

	Count	Percentage (%)
Total Surveys	140	100
Male Students	73	52.1
Female Students	67	47.9
7 th Class Students	32	22.9
Male	16	11.4
Female	16	11.4
8 th Class Students	36	25.7
Male	13	9.3
Female	13	9.3
9 th Class Students	34	24.3
Male	16	11.4
Female	18	12.9
10 th Class Students	38	27.1
Male	18	12.9
Female	20	14.3

The age range for the 140 students surveyed was 11 to 19 years. Below distribution will give an overview of how students were distributed based on their age.

Figure 1

Age Distribution of Sample Participants (Students)



It can be seen that the majority of the students were falling between 13-16 years age bracket. Data were collected by making personal visits to sampled participants.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

For the analysis of collected data, descriptive (percentages) and inferential statistic technical t-test and ANOVA were utilized

In this section, the collected data were analyzed to study determinants of abuse among children both at school and at home. Before proceeding further, it is important to note here that while doing analysis; the Likert scale variable was taken as continuous and assumed that the distance among each category level is the same across the whole scale of 1-10.

The first hypothesis was to see which source of abuse is presumed by students to be more severe. Means scores were calculated to check the level of abuse both at Home and School.

Table 2

Point of Abuse – Home vs. School

Point of Abuse	M	95% of CI for M	N	t(278)	P
Home	3.46	[3.18, 3.74]	140		
School	4.62	[4.34, 4.90]	140	6.88	<.001

Hypothesis testing was done to check if Abuse at home is the same as Abuse at school.

H_0 : mean of school abuse = mean of home abuse H_1 : mean of school abuse > mean of home abuse

Assuming equal population variance (though unknown), the calculated t-statistics is 6.88. Tabulated value of t-statistics is 1.65 (alpha = 5%, degree of freedom = 278). Given these stats, the researcher failed to accept the null hypothesis and concluded that mean abuse at school is significantly higher than mean abuse at home at a 5% level of significance.

The next hypothesis was developed to check if gender plays any role in determining the severity of abuse both at home and at school. Firstly, hypothesis testing was done for abuse at home. Below are the means scores for abuse at home by gender:

Table 3

Students' Gender and Home Abuse

Students' Gender	M	95% of CI for M	N	t(138)	P
Male	3.45	[3.00, 3.92]	73		
Female	3.45	[3.03, 3.87]	67	0.044	<.05

Hypothesis testing to compare mean home abuse scores by gender will be done as follows:

H_0 : mean home abuse for Male = mean home abuse for Joint Family H_1 : mean home abuse for Male < mean home abuse for Joint Family

Assuming equal population variance (though unknown), the calculated t-statistics is -0.044. Tabulated value of t-statistics is -1.655 (alpha = 5%, degree of freedom = 138). Given these stats, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is no difference in mean abuse levels at home based on gender at a 5% level of significance. Afterwards, the hypothesis was tested to check mean scores of abuse levels at school. Below are the mean scores along with their confidence intervals and hypothesis tests.

Table 4

Students' Gender and School Abuse

Students' Gender	M	95% of CI for M	N	t(138)	P
Male	4.64	[4.09, 5.20]	73		
Female	4.64	[4.25, 4.92]	67	0.197	.84

H_0 : mean school abuse for Male = mean school abuse for Joint Family H_1 : mean school abuse for Male > mean school abuse for Joint Family

Assuming equal population variance (though unknown), the calculated t-statistics is 0.197. Tabulated value of t-statistics is 1.655 (alpha = 5%, degree of freedom = 138). Given these stats, researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is no difference in mean abuse levels at school based on gender at a 5% level of significance.

In the next step, it was checked that the family status of a student has any impact on the severity of abuse he/she received at home. Family status has been categorized into two types namely i) Nuclear family and ii) Joint Family. Below are the mean home abuse scores for each family type:

Table 5

Family Status (Nuclear vs. Joint)

Family Status	M	95% of CI for M	N	t(138)	P
Nuclear Family	3.63	[3.30, 3.97]	79		
Joint Family	3.23	[2.91, 3.55]	61	1.655	.05

Next hypothesis testing was performed to see if mean home abuse score is different for Nuclear and joint family.

H₀: mean home abuse for Nuclear Family = mean home abuse for Joint Family

H₁: mean home abuse for Nuclear Family > mean home abuse for Joint Family

Assuming equal population variance (though unknown), the calculated t-statistics is 1.655. Tabulated value of t-statistics is 1.65 (alpha = 5%, degree of freedom = 138). Given these stats, Researcher fails to accept the null hypothesis and concludes that the mean abuse at home for a nuclear family is significantly higher than mean abuse at home for joint family at a 5% level of significance.

It was tested to determine if mean abuse is different based on the class level of a student. Class levels included here are 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th standards. Researcher tested this for both abuse sources i.e. abuse at home and abuse at school. Researcher initially tested this effect for school abuse.

H₀: The mean of school abuse for all classes is the same H₁: At least two of the means are not equal

ANOVA was applied to test this hypothesis as there were more than two sample means to be tested. F-statistics came out to be 3.121 with a p-value of 0.028. At 99% confidence level, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is no difference in the level of abuse at school based on students' class level.

For home abuse, hypothesis testing was also performed and its detail is as follows;

H₀: The mean of home abuse for all classes is same H₁: At least two of the means are not equal

Here ANOVA was applied to test this hypothesis as there were more than two sample means to be tested. F-statistics came out to be 4.957 with a p-value of 0.0027. At 99% confidence level, researcher failed to accept the null hypothesis and concluded that mean abuse at home is different based on the class of a student.

Here researcher also highlighted mean scores of home abuse at each class level along with their confidence intervals to see how these values change by class.

Table 6

Students' Class

Class	Mean Home Abuse	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
7 th Class (n = 32)	3.94	3.63	4.24
8 th Class (n = 36)	4.19	3.89	4.5
9 th Class (n = 34)	3.09	2.74	3.44
10 th Class (n = 38)	2.68	2.39	2.98

Based on the table 6, it is shown that mean score for abuse at home decreases as the student goes above class standard indicating that younger students are more likely to be abused at home compared to older students.

Researcher tried to study if being the youngest among siblings has any impact on the severity of abuse at home one has to go through. Below are the mean home abuse scores along with confidence intervals:

Table 7

Birth Order

Birth Order	M	95% of CI for M	N	t(138)	P
Youngest	3.87	[3.39, 4.34]	67		
Others	3.08	[2.64, 3.53]	73	3.309	<.001

Next, hypothesis testing was performed to test if mean abuse scores for each group is equal or not.

H₀: mean home abuse for Youngest = mean home abuse for Others H₁: mean home abuse for Youngest > mean home abuse for others

Assuming equal population variance (though unknown), the calculated t-statistics is 3.309. Tabulated value of t-statistics is 1.655 (alpha = 5%, degree of freedom = 138). Given these stats, the researcher failed to accept null hypothesis and concluded that being the youngest at home can significantly increase the mean home abuse score perceived by students.

Students' Living Status and Mother's Working Status

Researcher had to drop two variables i) the Mother's working status and ii) the student's live-in status as he did not have sufficient observation for each category to perform comparisons. For example, for Mother's working status, only 8% of the respondents replied that their mother is a working woman and 92% said she is a housewife. Similarly, for students' Live-in status, 90% of the respondents were living with their parents (both mother and father), 8% with their mother only, 1% with father only, and 1% with neither.

In the survey, researcher captured 3 proxy variables to measure the educational performance of a student viz. i) Class rank, ii) Most recent exam marks, and iii) Previous exam marks. All of these scores were normalized on a 1-100 scale and then their average was taken as a representative score of a student's educational performance.

This aggregated performance score was then further classified into five groups (more of a grade-level grouping) with the distribution of students in each group as below:

Table 8

Physical Abuse vs. Educational Performance

Group	Performance Score	Count	Percentage
A	63-80	25	18%
B	59-62	31	22%
C	55-58	30	21%
D	50-54	29	21%
E	35-49	25	18%

Above binning was done on an equal frequency binning rule to make sure each group will have a comparable number of observations to work with. After this, ANOVA was performed to test the equality of the mean abuse scores for each of these five groups.

First, the researcher compared means of abuse at home across these five groups.

H_0 : mean of home abuse for all five groups (grades) is the same H_1 : At least two of the means are not equal

F-statistics came out to be 3.184 with a p-value of 0.016. At a 99% confidence level, researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that there is no difference in the level of abuse at home based on the student's grade group. Now for school abuse, hypothesis testing has been performed and its details are as follows;

H_0 : mean of school abuse for all five groups (grades) is same H_1 : At least two of

the means are not equal

F-statistics came out to be 0.746 with a p-value of 0.056. At 99% confidence level, researcher failed to accept the null hypothesis and concluded that mean abuse at school is not different based on the grade of a student.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

It is found in this study that between the two main sources of physical abuse, students perceive abuse at school as more severe than abuse at home. Moving on, it was also noticed that the class level of a student does not play any role in physical abuse at school; meaning the same level of physical abuse at school irrespective of the class of a student. Likewise, it has been reported by Flynn-O'Brien et al (2016) that the two most common sources of physical abuse among children are parents and teachers of a student. While on the other hand, perceived physical abuse at home, as the student becomes mature, decreases. However, abuse at home is further affected by whether the family is a nuclear family or a joint one.

It was found that nuclear families have significantly higher physical abuse at home compared to a joint family. These results are in contrast with the findings of Breiding et al. (2013) as they indicated that a joint family system can be regarded as a risk factor for severe physical abuse among children. Researcher also analyzed how educational performance is linked with physical abuse at home and school. It was found that changes in the educational performance of a student do not change the severity of physical abuse borne by the student both at home and at school. On the other hand, Bostock et al. (2009) reported that physical abuse harms a child's educational performance. This link is important as it conveys the idea that physical abuse of a student is linked with his or her educational performance. Besides, it has been also reported by Ullah (2023) and Heekes et al. (2022) that one of the key factors of physical abuse (mainly punishments, beating with sticks) among children at school and home is their poor academic performance.

Hence, corporal punishment at home or school should not be seen as a way to improve the educational performance of a student (which often is the case in rural areas of Lahore), as Holt et al. (2008) also indicated that children who faced domestic violence are more vulnerable to physical abuse and socio-emotional problems. Furthermore, it was found that the gender of a student is not a significant determinant of physical abuse, both at school and at home. However, birth order and family structure do play a significant role when it comes to physical abuse severity at home, likewise, it has been stated by (Heekes et al., 2022) that low economic class of children and lack of attention and love from parents and elders are also the main factors of physical abuse among them.

It was found that being the youngest at home would increase the severity of physical abuse at home as perceived by the student.

6. Recommendations

On the basis of findings of the study following recommendations are being put forwarded;

1. It was recommended that to create a positive climate at school, authorities may conduct mandatory training sessions for teachers and staff members.
2. School administration may regularly monitor teacher-student interaction to ensure that students are safe within school premises.
3. Awareness campaigns may be launched by social workers to highlight the negative consequences of punishment at home.
4. Content related to the life skills and emotional well-being of students may be included in school curricula for developing resilience among students. The government may take necessary measures to introduce and implement policies of child protection at home and school.

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