


## Influence of Family Violence on Academic Performance of Secondary School Students

Grace Igaba Onongha, Dr., Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria,  
grace.onongha@uniosun.edu.ng  0009-0001-7784-7707

### Keywords

Family Violence  
Academic Performance  
Secondary school

### Article Info:

Received : 14-02-2025  
Accepted : 05-10-2025  
Published : 24-12-2025

DOI: 10.52963/PERR\_Biruni\_V14.N3.03

### Abstract

This study investigated influence of family violence on the academic performance of secondary school students in Etung-Obubura constituency, Cross River State, Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive survey design of the ex-post facto approach. Four towns were selected from the constituency using simple random technique. Ten secondary schools (5 in Etung and 5 in Obubura) were randomly selected with family violence as stratum. Approximately Twenty-six to Twenty-seven students (earlier identified in a previous visit) were randomly selected. In all three hundred (300) students constituted the study sample. Two research instruments (Family Violence Questionnaire (FVQ)) and students' first term examination scores in English and Mathematics) provided data for the study. Results demonstrated a significant difference in the academic performance of students from violent and non-violent families respectively for English Language and Mathematics with a p-value of less than .05); male and female students (t-value of 5.69 and 4.46 with a p-value of less than 0.05 respectively); and students exposed to high and low intensity of violence (t-value of 5.03 and 5.12 respectively with a p-value of less than .05). The study recommended the need for cohesion among parents and entirely members of the family.

**To cite this article:** Onongha, G. I. (2025). Influence of family violence on academic performance of secondary school students. *Psycho-Educational Research Reviews*, 14(3), 122-130. doi:10.52963/PERR\_Biruni\_V14.N3.03

## INTRODUCTION

Attaining success in academic pursuit is the bed rock in a child's education programme. It is one of the best contributory factors to the future experience of a child. Tadese et al. (2022) and Arora (2016) defined academic performance as the extent of some academic work attainment. It represents the performance outcome that reveals the level to which an individual has accomplished specific goals that formed the main focus of activities in instructional environments, specifically in schools, colleges and universities (Ormroid, 2011). In furtherance, Ormroid, stressed that the definition of academic performance, is however relative to its measuring indicator such as, continuous assessments, tests and examinations. However, there is no universal consensus on how best it is tested or the more important aspects, procedural knowledge like skills or declarative knowledge like facts. According to Giami and Alete-Omoni (2023), academic performance of students could be influenced by factors like learning environment. Therefore, a learning environment which is devoid of bullying, antagonism, rejection and extreme stress provides the student with enabling ground for academic pursuit, which is likely to translate into better academic performance. It would be correct then to say that an environment characterised by violence is not a fertile ground for sound academic endeavour. It is against this background that the present study sought to examine the influence of family violence on academic performance of secondary school students in Etung-Obubura constituency, Cross River State, Nigeria.

The family is the base for child developmental process. What the child is taught at home and the motivation provided towards education, contributes to the child's academic performance in school. Therefore, the family being a powerful factor on the child and the important role it plays as the first agent of socialization could undoubtedly make or mar the academic performance of the child depending on the psychosocial climate in the home.

Violence is the application of coercive type of power. Here, the perpetrator uses force or threat to compel an individual to do something that the individual might not ordinarily do. It is an aspect of a continuum ranging from legitimate power (a person does something because of its rightness) through utilitarian power (a person does something because of the reward attached) to coercive power (Tony, 2002). Violence has been defined by World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) as the intentional use of physical force or power, threat or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group, or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation. Violence could also be directed at limiting or denying another person certain rights and freedom. Violence can take different forms, such as physical abuse (slapping, punching choking or throwing things); emotional abuse (yelling, making insult or threats); sexual abuse (such as unwanted touching, incest or rape, neglect, withholding: affection, money, food, health care or other needed things).

Family Violence (FV) or Domestic Violence (DV) is violence in close relationship or family setting which can take the form of physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or threats of psychical or sexual violence that are inflicted on members of the family (Akpan & Usoroh, 2005; Lanchimba et al., 2023). Family violence can occur to anyone irrespective of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender (Siemienuk, Krentz, Gish & Gill, 2010). According to UNICEF (2014) Domestic violence is the victimization of an individual who the abuser has or has had an intimate, romantic, spousal relationship.

A number of children are affected by violence exposure in their lifetime (U.S Department of Justice, 2012). For example, UNICEF (2006) reported that over 275 million children globally are reported to have been victims of domestic violence. Similarly, Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, and Hamby (2015) indicated that 58% of adolescents have been victims of violence in their community and 32% have likewise been exposed to some sort of family violence in their lifetime. Exposure to home violence has been said to be related to internalizing and externalizing problems (Mrug & Windle, 2010). Additionally, Orr et al. (2023) revealed that witnessing home or family violence is associated with lower

academic achievement. The lower academic achievement may emanate from emotional and behavioural problem witnessed by youth after exposure to violence (Schwartz & Gorman, 2003). Internalizing problems, like depressive and anxious symptoms, are linked with diminished concentration in school, decreased motivation and school refusal, which adversely affect achievement (Flannery et al., 2004).

Similarly, Osborne et al. (2024) stated that adolescents with behaviour problems are prone to truancy and less engaged in school, which down play achievement. Students exposed to DV or FV are more vulnerable compared to their counterparts who experience many difficulties, as well as the likely effects varying in age and developmental stage. (National Child Traumatic Stress Network in Child Welfare Gateway, 2014). Seimeniuk Krentz, Gish, and Gill, (2010) revealed that students with abused mothers have intelligence quotients (IQs) lower than usual. Similarly, Silverstein, Augustyn, Cabral and Zuckerman (2006) indicated that children who have higher experience of family violence possess lesser abilities in reading, Mathematics, and general knowledge. Studies have reported varied findings on the association between cognitive development and witnessing family violence. For instance, Mathias, Mertin and Murray (1995) did not find difference in the academic abilities of children who witness violence and other students. On the other hand, Tsunga et al. (2025) found that increase in violence exposure was associated with lower cognitive functioning. Lawal and Ishaq (2010) showed that children with higher levels of adjustment tend to withstand the effect of family violence. Tambawal (2012) demonstrated that family violence has significant effects on the academic performance of secondary school students. Gaylord, Holt, Kenny and Kitzman (2003), indicated that children exposed to violence showed academic outcomes similar or better than the non-exposed children.

Feminist theory postulated that violence is the manifestation of the patriarchal composition in our culture, which is reflected in the patterns of behaviours and attitudes of individuals, that means that violence instead of being an individual psychological problem is an expression of male domination of females (Denmark et al., 2006; Mshweshwe, 2020). This theoretical perspective suggests that the unequal power relations between males and females create a social context in which violence is used as a means of control, thereby producing differential experiences and outcomes for both genders. In the context of the present study, feminist theory provides the basis for examining whether such patriarchal structures, as expressed through family violence, might differentially affect the academic performance of male and female students, hence shaping the hypothesis regarding gender differences. Prior research on gender revealed no significant difference in the academic performance of students exposed to violence (Margolin & Gordis, 2000). Elujekwute et al. (2021) concluded that the environment in which a student comes from can greatly influence his performance in school (irrespective of gender) which results in jealousy and poverty. Contrarily, Medina (2013) reported that family violence exerted impact on the cognitive development of both male and female children. They argued that male and female children who have difficulty with attention and memory may not be sensitive to important social cues and expectations, and thus find themselves struggling with school rules, peer relationships, and classroom instructions.

Therefore, the cognitive effects of violence exposure may disrupt students' successful functioning in the school environment in addition to hindering academic competence. Experiencing violence in the family has been associated with poorer academic performance. Family violence has equally been viewed as a social malady that threatens the stability, psychological development and academic performance of children in our society.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the present study is to examine the influence of family violence on the academic performance of secondary schools in Etung-Obubura constituency, Cross River State. The specific objectives of this study are to:

- i. Examine the academic performance of students from non - violent families and violent families.
- ii. Ascertain gender difference in the influence of family violence on the academic performance of students.
- iii. Determine difference in family violence intensity on the academic performance of students.

## **HYPOTHESES**

The following hypothesis was raised

H1: There will be no significant difference in the academic performance of students from non - violent families and violent families.

H2: There will be no gender difference in the academic performance of students from violent families

H3: There will be no significance difference in the academic performance of students exposed to low and high intensity of violence.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design of the ex-post facto type. The researcher did not have direct control on the independent variable because their manifestations have already occurred or because inherently they cannot be manipulated.

### **SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE**

The population for the study comprised all senior secondary school students in Etung-Obubura constituency in Cross River State, Nigeria. The multi-stage selection procedure was adopted in the study. Four towns were randomly selected from the constituency. Ten secondary schools (5 in Etung 5 in Obubura) were randomly selected. Twenty-six or twenty-seven as the case may be (among the earlier identified in a previous visit) were randomly selected. In all, three hundred (300) students constituted the study sample. Their age ranged between 13 and 19 years. Gender distribution was 137 males and 163 females. The demographic information of the respondents was presented in Table 1.

### **INSTRUMENT**

A self-developed instrument was utilized in the study, titled Family Violence Questionnaire (FVQ) as well as first term scores of students in English Language and Mathematic to determine academic performance of students. The FVQ is a self-constructed instrument, developed by the researcher through interactions with previous literature. The instrument contained two sections of A and B. Section A sought demographic data of respondents, while section B contained 14 items (example of an item is 'the use of corporal punishment, e.g., beating, kicking, pushing, chocking, pushing'). The instrument was formatted on a four point scale, Strongly Disagree (SD=1), Disagree (D=2), Agree (A=3), Strongly Agree (SA=4). The obtainable score range between 1 and 56. Score between 1 to 19 was considered non-violent; while a score between 20 to 56 is considered violent. Further, a score between 20 to 37 is considered low intensity of violence, and 38 to 56 is high intensity of violence. The test-retest over a period of two weeks was used to establish the internal consistency of FVQ. Copies of the questionnaire were administered on thirty 30 students who were not part of the study sample. The Pearson product moment correlation was used to analyse both test scores. The reliability index of 0.86 was established.

### **PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION**

The researchers sought and obtained the permission of the principals and class teachers as well as the consents of the participants. Following the identification, selection and numbering of participants, the researchers personally administered the instruments employing the help of two research assistants. The exercise lasted for a period of ten working days. The participants were

required to fill the questionnaires on the spot and were retrieved. Data collected were analysed using the t-test statistical method.

## RESULTS

### HYPOTHESIS 1

There will be no significant difference in the academic performance of students from Non - violent families and violent families

**Table 1.** *T-test of Academic Performances of Students in Non-violent and Violent Families*

Family type	Subject	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	P	Remarks
Non-violent	English Language	146	65.01	14.84	6.97	298	.000	Significant
Violent		154	52.73	15.62				
Non-violent	Mathematics	146	59.85	15.30	4.97	298	.000	Significant
Violent		154	51.38	14.21				

The result revealed that 51.68% of the students came from violent families, indicating more than half of the sample. The mean score of the students from violent families in both subjects is comparably lower to their non-violent counterpart. The t-test statistic revealed t-value of 6.97 and 4.97 respectively for English Language and Mathematics with a p-value of less than 0.05. This showed a significant difference in mean scores of students in both English Language and Mathematics of non-violent and violent families; indicating that students from non-violent families performed in better in both subjects than students from violent families.

### HYPOTHESIS 2

There will be no gender difference in the academic performance of students from violent families

**Table 2.** *T-test of Academic Performances of Male and Female Students in Violent Families*

Gender	Subject	N	Mean	SD	T	df	p	Remarks
Male	English Language	74	59.58	15.34	5.69	152	.000	Significant
Female		80	46.56	13.04				
Male	Mathematics	74	56.31	14.62	4.46	152	.000	Significant
Female		80	46.68	12.12				

The result showed that more than half of the sample (51.95%) of the students in violent families are females. The results revealed that mean scores of male students in both subjects were higher than their female counterpart. The t-test statistics revealed t-value of 5.69 and 4.46 with a p-value of less than 0.05 respectively. This showed a significant difference in mean scores of students in both English Language and Mathematics of male and female families; indicating that male students outperformed the female students.

### HYPOTHESIS 3

There will be no significance difference in the academic performance of students exposed to low and high intensity of violence.

**Table 3.** *T-test of Academic Performances of Students Exposed to Intense Violence*

<i>Intensity of violence</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Remark</i>
Low	English Language	78	58.23	17.11	5.03	152	.000	Significant
High	Mathematics	76	46.42	11.40				
Low	English Language	78	56.71	13.39	5.12	152	.000	Significant
High	Mathematics	76	45.83	12.96				

The result revealed that 49.35% of the students in violent families are exposed to high level of intense violence, indicating about half of the sample. Their mean scores in both subjects are comparably lower to those that are exposed to low level of intense violence. The t-test statistic revealed t-value of 5.03 and 5.12 respectively with a p-value of less than .05. It showed a significant difference in means of students in the low and high levels of violence exposure; indicating that students exposed to low levels of violence outperformed students exposed to high level of violence.

## DISCUSSION

Results of this study revealed that students in families with no violence performed academically better than those from violent families. This was clearly shown as the academic performance of students from non-violent families in both Mathematics and English was higher than that of students who came from families with violence. This finding further affirms what several other scholars have earlier observed. For instance, Augustine and Ihongu (2019), Williams, Oyundoyin and Adeyemi (2024), and Okite (2021) all found that students from families where there is domestic violence are more likely to experience academic failure than those from non-violent families. Probable reason for this result may be that family violence affects students in several domains — physical, psychological, emotional and even spiritual (Sim and Fulu, 2023; Williams, Oyundoyin, Adeyemi, 2024). When students are unable to maintain an appropriate balance in all these areas, they are likely to experience distractions that make it difficult to focus in class or during examinations, which ultimately results in poor academic performance. This also agrees with López-Martínez et al. (2023) who noted that violence creates a stressful environment that impairs cognitive functioning, such as the ability to concentrate. This aligns with the author's observation that such students may struggle to keep up with schoolwork, which then reflects in their poor performance.

In addition, the results of this study showed that male students from violent families performed better than their female counterparts from similar backgrounds. This was evident in both Mathematics and English results, where male students outperformed female students. This finding is consistent with the work of Williams, Oyundoyin and Adeyemi (2024), and Wotango, Walka and Tadesse (2021), who found that the effect of violence is more pronounced on female students than male students. The author could not find studies that contradict this, which makes the result even more interesting. From the author's perspectives, a probable reason for this is that women are often at the receiving end of family violence. In many traditional settings, women are expected to submit within the home, with limited rights to defend themselves. Moreover, the emotional effects of family violence may weigh more heavily on female students, as females are generally regarded as more emotionally expressive and, in some contexts, more emotionally vulnerable than males (Oliffe et al., 2023). It is then believed that this heightened emotional impact may explain why female students tend to have lower academic performance compared to their male counterparts in violent family contexts.

The results also revealed a difference in academic performance based on the intensity of violence. Students who experienced low levels of violence performed better in both subjects than

those exposed to high levels of violence. At the time of conducting this study, the author could not find other research that examined students' performance based on levels of violence exposure. However, it is my opinion that high levels of violence are likely to result in increased psychological and social distress (Sim and Fulu, 2023). This heightened distress can, in turn, limit students' ability to concentrate on academics and other aspects of their lives (López-Martínez et al., 2023). This could explain why students experiencing lower levels of family violence performed better than those subjected to high levels.

## CONCLUSION

From the above study, it can be concluded that family violence affects the academic performance of students in secondary schools. In addition, it was found that family violence had more pronounced effects on female students than male students, implying that female are at the receiving ends of family violence than male students. Also, those who came from family with high level of violence were more affected academically than those from family with non-violence. This study underscore the adverse effects of domestic violence on the stability and performance of students, with female students being more affected as they tend to be at the receiving ends due to the societal pressures and expectations placed on them. This also signifies that family violence magnifies distress level among students and lead to distraction as well as the cognitive disruption of the students. This highlights the cumulative and compounding nature of violence on a child's academic performance. Addressing family violence, therefore, is not only a social and moral responsibility but also an educational priority that requires the collective effort of parents, teachers, policymakers, and community stakeholders to ensure that students are given a safe and supportive environment in which to thrive.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES AND RECOMMENDATION

This study was conducted in a selected constituency in Cross Rivers State, it is suggested that further research focus on other areas and/or expand the sample to include samples from other areas of Nigeria, such as the Southwest and Northern regions. This will help in knowing the levels of family violence in these areas as well as the effects on students.

It is also suggested that further research be conducted on the strategies which could be used in heling students from violent families. This could be achieved through research into the social and psychological effects of family violence on students and how best this could be addressed in order to enhance the performance of these students in their academic and other areas.

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