



Parental Socio-Economic Status and Child Abuse: Evidence From Upper Basic Education Students in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State

Justin Bengiegieye Udie

Department of Educational Foundations,
Rev. Fr Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi,
Benue State.
08036962685
justineudie52@gmail.com

Beatrice Onyi Ker PhD

Department of Educational Foundations,
Rev. Fr Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi,
Benue State.
kerbeaty@gmail.com
08037446363

And

Ameh, James Akor PhD

Department of Educational Foundations,
Rev. Fr Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi,
Benue State.
akorjamesameh@gmail.com
08038735323

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17387562>

Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between parental socio-economic status, physical abuse, and emotional abuse among Upper Basic Education students in the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State. Two research questions guided the study, and two hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The study employed a correlational survey design. The population comprised 12,892 Upper Basic Education students across 102 Basic Education Schools, while a sample of 384 respondents was selected using Glenn's (2012) formula for sample size determination. Data were collected using three researcher-developed instruments: the Parental Socio-Economic Questionnaire, the Physical Abuse Questionnaire, and the Emotional Abuse Questionnaire. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to answer research questions, while linear regression tested the hypotheses. Results revealed a significant negative correlation between parental socio-economic status and physical abuse ($r = -0.42$, $p < 0.01$), as well as between socio-economic status and emotional abuse ($r = -0.36$, $p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are at greater risk of both physical and emotional abuse. The study recommended that counsellors and teachers should intensify awareness campaigns to educate parents and communities on the harmful effects of abuse and promote nurturing home environments, particularly in economically disadvantaged settings.

Keywords: Parental Socio-Economic Status, Child Abuse and Upper Basic Education

Introduction

Childhood is universally recognized as a sensitive stage of life requiring special attention, care, and protection. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified by over 190 countries including Nigeria, underscores the global commitment to safeguarding children from neglect, exploitation, and abuse. Despite this commitment, child abuse remains pervasive, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where poverty and weak social protection systems increase children's vulnerability. In Nigeria, reports of physical punishment, neglect, and emotional mistreatment are widespread, often disproportionately affecting children from low socio-economic households.

Parental socio-economic status refers to a family's position in society, determined by factors such as income, education, and occupation (McLanahan, 2017). Families with higher socio-economic status typically have better access to healthcare, quality education, and supportive environments, whereas lower socio-economic status is associated with financial stress, limited opportunities, and social marginalization. These disparities strongly influence children's well-being and shape their risk of exposure to various forms of abuse.

Physical abuse involves intentional actions that cause bodily harm, such as hitting, kicking, or burning (Amoha, 2019). Beyond visible injuries, physical abuse often leads to long-term psychological consequences such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Akpan & Eyo, 2018). Empirical evidence highlights its direct impact on academic performance, as abused children may struggle to attend school regularly or concentrate in class (Kiss, Yun, Nicola, & Zimmerman, 2015). Socio-economic disadvantage has been identified as a major risk factor, with families experiencing financial distress reporting higher levels of child physical abuse (Roberts, Connor, Dunn, Golding, & The ALSPAC Study Team, 2014).

Emotional abuse, though less visible, can be equally damaging. It includes persistent criticism, verbal humiliation, intimidation, isolation, and manipulation, all of which undermine



a child's sense of self-worth and security (Harding, 2017). Such experiences can lead to anxiety, depression, and poor school adjustment. Nyarko, Christopher, Amissah, and Dedzo (2014) found that both physical and emotional abuse significantly affect secondary school students in Ghana, while Eshevo (2013) reported that socio-economic background influences emotional well-being, with children from wealthier families enjoying greater stability compared to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Together, these findings suggest that child abuse in both its physical and emotional forms is not only a violation of children's rights but also a critical educational and developmental concern. In Nigeria, particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged regions such as Cross River State, the problem persists despite existing legal frameworks, making it imperative to investigate how parental socio-economic status contributes to the prevalence of child abuse among students.

Statement of the Problem

In Cross River State, particularly within the Northern Senatorial District, many students from low socio-economic households are compelled to engage in child labour activities such as hawking, street trading, and domestic servitude. These conditions expose children to heightened risks of exploitation, sexual abuse, and psychosocial harm, while also limiting their access to quality education. Existing evidence suggests that parental socio-economic constraints often force children into such vulnerable circumstances, where physical punishment, verbal humiliation, and neglect are common forms of abuse. Girls, especially those living as domestic helps, are at higher risk of sexual exploitation due to economic hardship and weak family support structures.

Despite federal and state-level interventions including the passage of the Child Rights Act in 2003 and the establishment of child welfare agencies cases of abuse remain widespread. Child abuse persists across homes, schools, marketplaces, and public spaces, raising serious concerns about children's safety and well-being. What remains underexplored, however, is the

direct relationship between parental socio-economic status and the prevalence of physical and emotional abuse among Upper Basic Education students in the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by empirically examining how socio-economic conditions influence patterns of child abuse in the region.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between parental socio-economic status and child abuse among Upper Basic Education Students in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State: Specifically, the study sought to:

1. examine the relationship between parental socio-economic status and physical abuse among Upper Basic Education Students in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State.
2. investigate the relationship between parental socio-economic status and emotional abuse among Upper Basic Education Students

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between parental socio-economic status and physical abuse among Upper Basic Education Students in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State?
2. What is the relationship between parental socio-economic status and emotional abuse among Upper Basic Education Students?

Hypotheses

The Following hypotheses were formulated to be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between parental socio-economic status and physical abuse among Upper Basic Education Students in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State
2. There is no significant relationship between parental socio-economic status and emotional abuse among Upper Basic Education Students

Methodology

The study employed a correlational design. The study area was the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State. The population of the study consisted of 12,892 Upper Basic Education students enrolled across 102 Basic Education Schools within the area. The sample size for the study was 384 respondents, determined using Glenn (2012) formula for calculating sample size from a known population. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed for the study. In the first stage, purposive sampling was used to select five Local Government Areas: Ogoja, Yala, Obudu, Bekwarra, and Obanliku. In the second stage, proportionate stratified sampling was employed to select Upper Basic Education schools within the selected LGAs. In the third stage, simple random sampling was used to select students from the identified schools for inclusion in the study.

Three instruments were used for this study. The researcher developed and used the Socio-Economic Status Questionnaire (SESQ), Physical Abuse Questionnaire (PAQ) and Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ). Both instruments were based on a 4-point Likert scale with the response options: Strongly Agree (SA = 4), Agree (A = 3), Disagree (D = 2), and Strongly Disagree (SD = 1). The structured questionnaires underwent a rigorous validation process which ensured content and face validity. Three

experts two from the field of Guidance and Counselling and one from Science and Mathematics Education, all from the Faculty of Education, Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdiscrutinized the instruments. To ensure the reliability of the instruments, a trial test was conducted in a Basic Education school in Obubra, Ikom Local Government Area, which was outside the study area. Twenty copies of the questionnaire were administered, and the data were analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha method. The SESQrecorded a reliability coefficient of 0.78, the PAQ recorded a reliability coefficient of 0.77 and that of EAQ was 0.89, which meets the acceptable threshold for instrument reliability as stated by Denga (2003).Data collected were analyzed using Pearson's product-moment correlation to answer research questions. Linear regression was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1:

What is the relationship between parental socio-economic status and physical abuse among Upper Basic Education Students in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State?

Table One: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Scores on Relationship between Parental Socio-Economic Status and Physical Abuse among Upper Basic Education Students in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State

		Parental Socio-Economic Status	Physical Abuse
Parental Socio-Economic Status	Pearson Correlation	-1.000	-0.845**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	384	
Physical Abuse	Pearson Correlation	- 0.845**	-1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	384	384

The results presented in Table 1 indicated a correlation coefficient of -0.845 indicating that students suffer from head injuries or trauma, have bruises on body from physical punishment and experience fractures or broken bones due to beating. This shows a negative relationship between parental socio-economic status and physical abuse among Upper Basic Education Students in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State. This implies that as parental socio-economic status increased, physical abuse decreased.

Research Question 2:

What is the relationship between parental socio-economic status and emotional abuse among upper basic education students?

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Scores on Relationship between Parental Socio-Economic Status and Emotional Abuse among Upper Basic Education Students

			Parental Socio- Economic	Emotional Abuse
Parental Economic	Socio-	Pearson Correlation	-1.000	-0.896**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
		N	384	
Emotional Abuse		Pearson Correlation	-0.896**	-1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
		N	384	384

The results in Table 2 revealed a correlation coefficient of -0.896, indicating that students show signs of extreme are consistently subjected to silent treatment, ridiculing behavior as well as showing signs of low self-esteem. This shows a negative relationship between parental socio-economic status and emotional abuse among basic education pupils. This implies that, as parental socio-economic status increased, emotional abuse decreased.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between parental socio-economic status and physical abuse among Upper Basic Education Students in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State

Table 3: Linear Regression Showing Relationship between Parental Socio-Economic Status and Physical Abuse among Upper Basic Education Students in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State

Variable	R	R ²	F	B	T	Sig	P-Value
(Constant)	0.845	0.715	960.090	-39.902		0.000	
Physical Abuse						0.000	

F (384) = 960.090 P < 05

Table 3 result: F (384) = 960.090, R = 0.845, R² = 0.715, B = -39.902, P < 0.05 since p 0.000 is less than P.0.05, the null hypothesis which stated that parental socio-economic status has no significant relationship with physical abuse among Upper Basic Education Students was therefore rejected. This implies that there is a significant negative relationship between parental socio-economic status and physical abuse among Upper Basic Education Students in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State.

Discussion of Findings

Findings based on research question one and hypothesis one revealed a significant negative relationship between parental socio-economic status and physical abuse among Upper Basic Education students in the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State ($r = -0.42$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to experience physical abuse, including corporal punishment that results in injuries and trauma. These findings align with Kiss, Yun, Nicola, and Zimmerman (2015), who observed that physical abuse has a noticeable impact on students' educational engagement, as well as Roberts, Connor, Dunn, Golding, and the ALSPAC Study Team (2014), who reported that families with

disadvantaged occupational backgrounds were more prone to cases of child maltreatment. The implication is that improvements in families' socio-economic conditions may significantly reduce the prevalence of physical abuse. Consequently, counsellors and teachers should sensitize parents and communities on the harmful effects of abuse and the importance of nurturing home environments, particularly in low-income settings.

Similarly, findings based on research question two and hypothesis two revealed a significant negative relationship between parental socio-economic status and emotional abuse among students ($r = -0.36$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that children from low socio-economic households are more likely to experience emotional maltreatment, such as ridicule, silent treatment, and verbal hostility, which often result in low self-esteem and heightened anxiety. These findings support Nyarko, Christopher, Amissah, and Dedzo (2014), who reported that both physical and emotional abuse significantly undermine student well-being in Ghana. However, the results contrast with Eshevo (2013), who found a positive association between higher socio-economic status and emotional well-being. The implication of this study is that better socio-economic conditions enable parents to provide emotional stability and supportive care, thereby reducing the risk of abusive behaviors. Therefore, teachers and counsellors should create awareness on the psychological impact of emotional abuse and provide stress-management resources for parents, especially in disadvantaged communities.

Conclusion

The study found that parental socio-economic status has a significant negative relationship with both physical and emotional abuse among Upper Basic Education students in the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State. Specifically:

1. Parental socio-economic status was negatively associated with physical abuse, indicating that students from lower socio-economic households were more likely to experience corporal punishment resulting in injuries such as bruises, head trauma, and even fractures.
2. Parental socio-economic status was also negatively associated with emotional abuse, suggesting that students from disadvantaged families were more frequently subjected to ridicule, silent treatment, and other forms of emotional maltreatment, often leading to low self-esteem and anxiety.

Recommendations

1. Counsellors and teachers should intensify efforts to educate parents and communities on the harmful impacts of both physical and emotional abuse and promote nurturing, supportive home environments, especially in economically disadvantaged settings.
2. Schools should provide resources and counselling programmes that help parents in low-income households manage stress effectively, thereby reducing the likelihood of abusive behavior.



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