

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY MEMBERS/SPOUSES VIOLENCE AND ADVERSE COGNITIVE OUTCOME AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between family violence and adverse cognitive outcome among school age children in Abraka metropolis. Five research questions and five hypotheses guided the study. Expo-facto research design was adopted for this study. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 145 respondents. The study was carried out using a validated questionnaire measured on a four point scale. The questionnaire was titled "Relationship between family violence and cognitive problems of primary school children". Data obtained were analyzed using mean statistical tool to answer research questions and t-test and Anova to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study showed that there is strong relationship between family violence and adverse cognitive outcomes among school age children just as there is no significant difference in the manifestation of adverse cognitive outcomes among children that experience family violence based on gender. Significant difference exists in the manifestation of adverse cognitive outcomes based on class level, school type and age. It was recommended that a conducive environment should be created for victims through regular time out for activities. This will turn help community members who are victims of violence.

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**KEYWORDS:** cognitive problems" is used interchangeable with "adverse cognitive outcome", family violence, adverse cognitive outcome, cognitive malfunctioning

### INTRODUCTION

Family violence causes social, psychological and cognitive problems. When adults engage in violent acts at home all segments of the family are affected. Literature report that at least 3.3 million children are at risk of exposure to parental violence (Carlon, 2000). The U.S Census Bureau (2000) reported that approximately 14 million American children are exposed to adult domestic violence while Thompson, Salzmann and Johnson (2003) said 33.2% of Canadian abused women and 40.2% of US battered women who responded to national surveys stated that their children witnessed domestic violence. In our society, there is a dearth of literature as to the number of families where domestic violence is exhibited in presence of primary school age children, hence the need for this research.

The reports discussed above give insight into the trauma children go through in the society. Children exposed to domestic violence experience physical assaults like slaps, shoves, beating and other acts that do not inflict injuries on the children directly such as verbal, emotional, financial and sexual abuse. Others are threats, forcing children to watch abuses inflicted on other victims or participate in the abuse, or made to be within the sound of the violence (Edleson,

Amanda, Ellerton, Seagreen, Kirchberg, Schmudt, and Ambrose, 2007).

Family violence becomes multifaceted when registered in the victim's memory and influences the individual's manner of processing actions and reactions towards unpleasant events. These violent actions seriously threaten the psychological and cognitive well-being of children, and are manifested in a variety of adjustment difficulties including cognitive malfunctioning. Evidence from literature attest that children's development is expected to unfold within a secure and nurturing environment but where the environment is infested with violence and fear, the normal task of growing up is adversely affected. For example, exposure to violence results in regressive symptoms such as increased bedwetting, delayed language development, anxiety over attachment with parents, regressive behavior and other health related problems as well as academic and cognitive problems (Margolin & Godis, 2000; Strauss, Murray, Smith, 1990; HIS/BIA Child Protection Handbook, 2000; Cummings, Pepler and Moore, 1999; Scott, and Mederos, 2012). Furthermore, some cognitive and attitude problems are associated with children that witness or experience domestic violence. They have difficulties at school and have lower scores in the assessment of

verbal, motor and cognitive skills. UNICEF (2005) noted that children, who experience abuse and violence, are associated with insecure attachment during childhood and adulthood as well as cognitive distortion associated with safety, controllability and internal attribution. Also, they manifest emotional numbing, low level social competence, poor academic performance, low level of problems solving skills and low scores in the assessment of verbal motor and cognitive skills at school.

Acts of violence, according to Perry (1997) and Ebenuwa-Okoh (2015), change the organization of children's brain structure resulting in difficulties of dealing with stress in the future. Such traumatized children experience delay in cognitive development resulting in deficit physical constitution due to neuropathological hormonal imbalance. Children exposed to domestic violence whose brain structures (amygdale, hippocampus, prefrontal cortex) are suppose to carry out executive functions such as planning, memorising, focusing of attention, impulse control and using of new information to make decisions can become impaired. (Horner, 2005).

The National Scientific Council on the Development of the Child (2010) identified unmediated hyperactivity, academic confusion, short attentive span, among other cognitive challenges, as some of the problems encountered by children from violence ridden families. Children who are exposed to violence at home tend to be more aggressive and exhibit behavioral adjustment problems at school, have difficulties in cognitive and academic functioning which include impaired ability to concentrate in academic activities, significant lower scores in measure of verbal motor and cognitive skills when compared with children from non-violent homes. (Fantuzzo and Mohr, 1999).

According to Cohen, Deblinger, Namarino & Steer (2004), both boys and girls are exposed to or do experience domestic violence. They reported that, in general, boys exhibit more externalized behavior (e.g. aggression or acting out) while girls exhibit more internalized behaviors (withdrawal, depression). Akpan, Ojinnaka and Ekanem (2010) and Conseil Superieure de Education, (2001) observed that boys and girls exhibit behavioural problems but girls use interactive styles in which violence is overwhelmingly covert whereas boys use more turbulent styles which may include physical aggressiveness because they are often competing with one another to ensure their predominance and maintain their status. The behavioural patterns distract them from actively participating in cognitive activities, and are, in turn, exhibited as cognitive problems.

School environment influences children's behavior. When they leave home for school, their social group enlarges; this group has its norms and rules. The

norms influence the child's speech, associations and thinking. This experience helps to foster social development and to give qualification (Conseil Superieur Del' Education, 2001).

Most private schools charge higher fees compared to fees paid in public schools. It can be inferred that, on the average, individuals that attend private schools are of higher social economic status than those of public schools. As the child leaves home, he/she interacts at the school environment with different types of people with varying behaviors and body of knowledge, and outlook to life changes. They adopt coping skills needed for life adjustments. Hence, the need to assess difference in response to family violence based on school type has become necessary. (Boland, 2012). Schools, irrespective of ownership, are set-up to inform, educate and equip learners with necessary skills, knowledge and competence that would enable them to cope with the challenges the environment provides on daily bases. School type is described on the basis of ownership in our cultural setting; we have private and public schools. Currently, the mode of operation in private schools is mostly with close supervision of workers in their discharge of duties particularly for maximum impartation of knowledge to learners while in public schools, workers are not closely monitored.

At school, there are different class levels as the children advance academically. They begin to internalize skills and knowledge which the schools provide. Students understanding of their world is bettered by the knowledge and skills they acquire from the school environment. Also, their ability to confront or face life challenges is increased. Hence, adverse cognitive outcome in violent laden families base on class level.

Children are born neutral and, as they grow up, begin to internalize values, virtues, traditions and culture of the immediate environment. At this time, they are easily affected by whatever their environment provides; if a child is born and lives in a violent-ridden environment, they internalize it and exhibit psychosomatic distress because their body chemistry is disorganized and fashioned into fight and flight mode. Infants who are living in violent-ridden environments suffer developmental damages such as inadequate amount of maternal, emotional and physical attachment needed for their personal wellbeing. Such infants develop a high-pitched, excessive scream, poor eating habits and disruptive sleeping patterns (James, 1994). Toddlers who are exposed to same manifest behavioral and emotional problems that have significant negative impact on their early socialization skills. At school, these negative emotions are expressed through aggressive plays, lashing out, defensive behavior and fantasies.

Brown & Bzostek (2003) and Debe, Felithi, Dong, Anda (2003) pointed out that such children are emotionally worn-out, withdrawn, turned inward and display difficulties with attention, school achievement and engagements. Cumming et al (2000) asserted that they equally manifest physical and mental health problems as well as learning disabilities. Their findings further revealed that younger children exhibit higher levels of emotional and psychological distress than older children because older children have developed better cognitive abilities which understand violence and select various strategies to alleviate upsetting symptoms. After some time of exposure, children often have heightened level of anxiety and fear immediately after a violent event. Hence, Edleson et al (2007) observed that children of any age who are traumatized by violent acts within the family are likely to develop psychological behavioural and cognitive problems later in life. Also, they manifest symptoms of PTSD. The consequences of family violence on the cognitive functioning of children are detrimental to humanity. Not much research seem to have been done in this area in our cultural setting, hence, the need to assess the extent of damage in this regard. This is the gap in literature this study intends to fill.

#### STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Violence within families is on the increase, particularly now that many communities are insecure because of ethno-religious violence and political instability. These violent activities have caused unquantifiable damage to victims' adjustment to academic work within the school setting.

Exposure to and experience of violence over-time cause distortion of victims' perception of the world, low self-esteem and disorganize, disrupt and delay development of the brain thereby lowering setting of life goals. They are not able to participate in productive cognitive activities. The problem of this study put in a question form, therefore, is: what is the relationship between family violence and cognitive outcome of primary school pupils? What are the differences that exist among victims based on gender, school type, class level, age and cognitive outcome at school.

The following research questions guided this study:

- (1) What is the extent of relationship between family violence and cognitive problems of primary school pupils?
- (2) What is the difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violence laden families based on gender?
- (3) What is the difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violence laden families based on school type?

- (4) What is the difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violence laden families based on class-level?
- (5) What is the difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violence laden families based on age?

#### HYPOTHESES

- Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between family violence and adverse cognitive problems of primary school pupils.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference in the manifestation of adverse cognitive problems of pupils from violence laden families based on gender.
- Ho<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violence laden families based on school type
- Ho<sub>4</sub>: There is no significant difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violence laden families based class level.
- Ho<sub>5</sub>: There is no significant difference in manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violence laden families based on age.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant to individuals and stakeholders in a variety of ways.

- **Counsellors:** will utilized the findings of this study to counsel, provide psychological conducive atmosphere to enable victims express their emotions, fears and desires. They also use information for the findings as foundation for generating appropriate therapeutics skills for assisting victims on ways to modify their dysfunctional thought patterns.

- **Pupils:** will utilize the information gathered as basis to understand negative effects exposure and experience of family violence have on them which form basis for seeking help from understanding translators.

- **Parents:** This will enable parents to examine themselves work on themselves and work through themselves to become more civilized in the presence of their children. They will also work towards providing conducive environment and peaceful positive emotional climate in their homes.

This study will be significant to **Schools**. Some of the pupils are victims. For victims to benefits from educational objectives. Human and non-human resources must be mobilized by the schools to assist victims to benefits from academic activities. This creates confidence in them to outlive, and develop from negative experiences.

#### SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study is centered on identification of the relationship between family violence and adverse cognitive outcome of public primary school pupils in Abraka metropolis. It also examined

differences in the manifestation of adverse cognitive outcome of victims based on gender, level (class) and type of school.

**LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

The limitation of the study is on the design. This is because the research only studied relationship between family violence and adverse cognitive outcome; others factor can contribute to cognitive malfunctioning such as personality make-up, intelligence quotient etc.

**METHODS**

The target population is all senior primary school pupils in Abraka metropolis. A sample size of 145 (67 females and 78 males) was randomly drawn from public and private schools in Abraka metropolis. The researcher administered the instrument after interacting with respondents. The instrument used for this study is a questionnaire titled “*Relationship between family violence and cognitive problems of primary school children*”. It had two parts. The first section solicited information on the bio-data of respondents which include class, age, gender and type of school. The second part had sub-sections on family violence and cognitive problems.

**Family Violence**

Scoring was a four-point scale of measurement of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) options with four point format of SA=4, A=3, D=2 and SD=1 and vice verse.

The instrument had face and content validity was worked on and established by experts in counselling. Items were checked for relevance, clarity and whether they were capable of eliciting right responses and corrections were effected. Factor analysis was used to obtain the content and construct validity of the instrument. However, school type, gender and age were treated as biodata. The three variables did not go through the process of validation. Hence, school type which consisted of public and private were scored as public = 0, private =1; gender which is indicative of sex had male = 0, female =1; and age subdivided into two dimensions below 8 years = 1 above 8 years 2. Cronbach Alpha was used to assess the reliability index which yielded 0.89 for adverse cognitive outcome and 0.60 for family violence. Its reliability process assessed inter item analysis and construct validity. Descriptive and regression statistics were used to analyze the data. The hypotheses were tested using regression and t-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance.

**PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

**Research Question 1:** What is the extent of relationship between family violence and cognitive problems of primary school pupils?

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship between family violence and cognitive problems of primary school pupils.

*Table 1: Mean, standard deviation and regression analysis on the relationship between family violence and pupils cognitive problems*

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	r <sup>2</sup>	r <sup>2</sup> (adj)	Standard Error Estimate
Cognitive Problems	145	13.52	3.60	0.362	0.131	0.125	3.36
Family Violence	145	14.67	3.25				
<b>ANOVA</b>							
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig		
Regression	243.630	1	243.630	21.55	.000		
Residual	1616.536	143	11.304				
Total	1860.166	144					
<b>CO-EFFICIENT</b>							
		Unstandardized co-efficient	Standard Error	Standardized co-efficient	beta	t	Sig
Constant	7.65	1.296				5.900	000
Family violence	.401	.086			.362	4.64	000

P ≤ 0.05 level

Table 1 shows that there is significant relationship between family violence (M = 14.67, SD= 3.25) and cognitive problems (M=13.52, SD= 3.60) as shown by r=.362. Also, statistical significance as indicated

by the regression model is F(143) = 21.55 at 0.00. The null hypothesis, is therefore, rejected. There is significant relationship between family violence and cognitive problem of primary school pupils.

The Adjusted  $r^2$  value of .125 shows that 12.5% of cognitive problems among the respondents is due to family violence.

**Hypothesis 2:-** There is no significant difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violence laden families based on gender.

**Research Question 2:-** What is the difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violence laden families based on gender?

Table 2: T-test analysis of pupils' manifestation of cognitive problems from violence laden families based on gender

Gender	N	X	SD	DF	T	Decision
Male	78	13.65	3.11			
Female	67	13.37	4.10	143	.458	.089 Accepted

The table shows that there is no significant difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violence laden families based on gender. The value for males is  $X=13.65$ ,  $SD=3.11$  while the value for females is  $X =13.37$ ,  $SD=4.10$  and means difference is 0.28;  $t (143) = .458$ ;  $p = .089$ . The null hypothesis is, therefore, rejected.

**Research Question 3:** What is the difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violent laden families based on school type?

**Hypotheses 3:** There is no significant difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violence laden families based on school type.

Table 3: T-test analysis on the manifestation of cognitive problems from family violence laden primary school pupils based on school type

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D	df	T	Sign	Remarks
Private schools	49	12.27	2.67	143	3.10	0.002	Rejected
Public schools	96	14.17	3.84				

The above table shows that pupils in public schools are exposed to domestic violence more with  $X = 14.17$ ,  $SD=3.84$  when compare to those in private schools whose  $X =12.27$   $SD =2.67$ ,  $t=3.10$   $sign=0.002$ . The null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the manifestation of adverse cognitive problems from family violence laden primary school pupils based on school type is, therefore, rejected. The alternate is accepted. This means that there is significant difference in the level

of adverse cognitive problems manifested by public and private schools pupils.

**Research Question 4:** What is the difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violent laden families based on class level?

**Hypothesis 4:** There is no significant difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violence laden families based class level.

Table 4a: Mean and standard deviation on the manifestation of adverse cognitive outcome on children that experience family violence based on class level

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D
Below primary 5	43	12.41	2.12
Primary 5	22	12.00	4.61
Primary 6	80	14.51	3.65

Table 4a shows the mean scores for children below primary five (5) to be  $\bar{X} 12.41$  and  $SD 2.12$ ; primary 5 is  $\bar{X} = 12.00$ ,  $SD 4.61$  and primary six,  $\bar{X} =14.51$ ,  $SD=3.65$ . This shows that children in

primary six (6) manifested the highest cognitive problems among the respondents that experienced family violence.

Table 4b: Analysis of Variance on Adverse Cognitive Outcome of pupils from violence laden families based on class level

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	Mean F	Sign	Decision
Between groups	177.702	3	59.23	4.96	0.003	Rejected
Within groups	1682.464	141	11.96			
Total	1800.166	144				

Table 4b shows that the F value of 4.96 is significant at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted. This means that there is significant difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems based on class level.

**Research Question 5:** What is the difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violence laden families based on age?

**Hypothesis 5:** There is no significant difference in manifestation of cognitive problems of pupils from violence laden families based on age.

Table 5: T- test analysis on manifestation of adverse cognitive outcome of pupils from violence laden families based on age

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D	Df	T	Significance	Decision
Below 8	9	12.56	2.88	143	-1.024	.639	Accepted
Above 8	136	13.56	3.64				

Table 5 shows that there is no significant difference in the manifestation of adverse cognitive problems based on age. The value for children below 8 which is  $X = 12.56$   $SD = 2.88$  and the value for children above which is  $X = 13.56$ ,  $SD = 3.64$ , and  $t = -1.024$ ,  $p = .639$  are not significant at 0.05 level of significance.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

This study revealed that respondents either experienced or are exposed to varying degrees of family violence. This is implied in the cognitive problems they manifested.

The first finding is that there is significant relationship between family violence and cognitive problems of primary school pupils. This implies that children who experience or are exposed to violence have cognitive challenges because their brains have developed to respond to fear and cannot act appropriately when they are placed in situations where there should be no need to respond to fear; their thought is always “fight or flight” mode instead of logically and objectively assessing situations before acting. The part of the brain that is for comprehension is impaired and involved in multi-cognitive difficulty and malfunctioning, diminished capacity to differentiate construct, learn and develop problem solving skills. This finding agrees with Perry (1997) and Ebenuwe-Okoh (2015) who attest that victims of domestic violence suffer from neuropathological hormonal imbalance resulting from the child’s difficulty to exhibit cognitive activities.

The second finding is that there is no significant difference in the manifestation of cognitive problems due to family violence irrespective of gender. The reason for this finding could be that when an individual is exposed to violence, they are hurt and it registers in their brain overtime. This influences or affects the neurotransmitters, which affect the individual’s perception of life and expression of emotions. It further results distortion, disorganization and difficulty in comprehension of facts and figures. The finding agrees with HIS/BIA (Child Protection

Handbook) (2005) which opined that children who are raised in violent homes have part of their brain, which controls learning, logic and empathy, “on hold” because it is busy responding to danger that does not exist in the school setting.

The third finding shows that there is difference in the manifestation of adverse cognitive problems based on school type; that is, there is significant difference in manifestation of adverse cognitive outcome by victims. The difference may be due to differences in school environment. In most private schools in our society, education is mainly child centered. If a child is manifesting adverse cognitive behaviors, he/she is shown empathy, reassurance, made to do home-work and counsel led. When these skills are used to work on the child, desire in adjustment is achieved. It is unlike in public school settings where there is no close monitoring of children to identify those that have adjustment problems.

Finding on hypothesis four showed that there is significant difference based on class level. The difference might be due to increased level of internalized body of knowledge acquired as pupils progressed in class level. This finding agrees with Edleson et al (2007) who opined that age related difference might result from older children in higher class who have fully developed more cognitive abilities to understand violence, and select various strategies to evaluate upsetting symptoms.

On the fifth hypothesis, findings showed that there is no significant difference in adverse cognitive family problems based on age. This findings is in line with Edleson et al (2007) which attested that children, irrespective of age difference, who are traumatized by violent acts within their families are likely to develop psychological behavioral and cognitive problems later in life.

**CONCLUSION**

Family violence is a multihydramonster that drains the constructive energies of victims and leave them with multi problems which manifest in form of impaired means of processing information, irrational

actions and reactions towards events. Also, the victim always experiences intellectual confusion and malfunctioning. The study confirmed that family violence has devastating effects on victims' long term and short term life in every respect.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) Victims should seek help from social workers or counsellors.
- (2) Counsellors should utilize information provided in school setting to provide assistance to identified victims.
- (3) Children's safety and protection from adult victims should be ensured.
- (4) Children should be helped to find loving and supportive adults that they can be spending quality time with consistently.
- (5) A conducive environment should be created for children who are victims by giving them regular time out for relaxation activities
- (6) Different therapies should be used to teach victims on how to help themselves from dangerous situations.

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