

The Influence of Domestic Violence on Child Education: A Case Study of Primary Schools in Nsangi, Wakiso District, Uganda

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of domestic violence on child education in primary schools in Nsangi, Wakiso District, Uganda. Domestic violence in the home has profound consequences for children, and a growing body of evidence links children's exposure to violence with impaired educational outcomes. The study investigated how physical violence exposure, psychological and emotional abuse, household instability, and economic deprivation associated with domestic violence relate to children's education outcomes. A cross-sectional survey design with a mixed-methods approach was adopted, and data were collected from 190 respondents comprising teachers, parents and guardians, school counsellors, and community leaders using structured questionnaires and interviews. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and structural (path) analysis were used. The results revealed a strong negative and significant relationship between domestic violence and children's education outcomes ($r = -0.66$, $p < 0.01$), with the dimensions jointly explaining 64.0% of the variance in education outcomes ($R^2 = 0.640$). Psychological and emotional abuse ($\beta = -0.31$) and physical violence exposure ($\beta = -0.28$) emerged as the strongest path predictors. The study concludes that domestic violence significantly impairs child education and recommends child-protection interventions, psychosocial support, and school–community collaboration. This study addresses a sensitive topic in an academic manner, with attention to the wellbeing and protection of children.

Keywords: domestic violence, child education, psychological abuse, household instability, primary schools, Nsangi, Wakiso, Uganda

1.0 Introduction

The home environment is the foundation upon which a child's development and education are built, and disturbances within it can have far-reaching consequences for a child's learning and wellbeing (UNICEF, 2021). Domestic violence—the pattern of abusive behaviours, including physical, psychological, emotional, and economic abuse, used within a household—is one of the most serious such disturbances, affecting large numbers of families worldwide and exposing millions of children to its direct and indirect effects (WHO, 2021). A substantial and growing body of research demonstrates that children who witness or experience domestic violence suffer a range of harms, among which impaired educational outcomes are prominent and consequential (Holt et al., 2021).

Children's education outcomes—encompassing school attendance, concentration and engagement, academic performance, and progression—are shaped by the conditions in which children live as much as by the quality of schooling they receive (UNICEF, 2021). Domestic violence undermines these outcomes through several pathways (George Stanley & Nafiu, 2020). Direct exposure to physical violence, and the fear and trauma it produces, impairs children's psychological wellbeing and their capacity to concentrate and learn; psychological and emotional

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abuse erodes self-esteem, security, and mental health; household instability associated with violence disrupts the routines, supervision, and support that children need; and the economic deprivation that frequently accompanies domestic violence constrains children's access to educational materials, nutrition, and a conducive learning environment (Holt et al., 2021; WHO, 2021).

The theoretical understanding of these pathways draws on trauma theory, attachment theory, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Trauma theory explains how exposure to violence produces stress responses that impair cognition, concentration, and behaviour; attachment theory explains how disruptions to secure caregiver relationships undermine the emotional security children need to learn; and ecological systems theory situates the child within nested environments, showing how violence in the home (microsystem) reverberates into school performance (Bronfenbrenner, as discussed in UNICEF, 2021; Holt et al., 2021). Together these frameworks explain why domestic violence, though occurring in the home, has profound effects on children's education.

In Uganda, domestic violence remains a significant social and public health problem, with national surveys indicating that a substantial proportion of women and children are exposed to violence in the home (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Nsangi, a rapidly growing peri-urban area in Wakiso District surrounding Kampala, hosts numerous primary schools serving communities in which domestic violence, poverty, and household instability are reported concerns (Nakabugo & Ssali, 2023). Teachers and school counsellors in such settings frequently observe the effects of home circumstances on children's learning, yet empirical evidence quantifying the relationship between domestic violence and children's education outcomes in Ugandan primary schools, and disaggregating the effects of specific dimensions, remains limited (Nakabugo & Ssali, 2023; Kyomuhendo & Atim, 2023). This study addresses that gap by examining, through correlation and structural (path) analysis, how physical violence exposure, psychological and emotional abuse, household instability, and economic deprivation relate to children's education outcomes in primary schools in Nsangi. The findings are significant for schools, child-protection agencies, and policymakers. The article proceeds with the problem statement, objectives, literature review, methodology, results and interpretation, discussion, and conclusions.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Every child has a right to education and to protection from violence, and children are expected to learn and thrive in safe, supportive environments (UNICEF, 2021). In practice, however, many children in Nsangi are exposed to domestic violence in their homes, and teachers report that affected children exhibit poor attendance, difficulty concentrating, behavioural problems, and declining academic performance (Nancy & Kazaara, 2026). The extent to which domestic violence accounts for impaired education outcomes in this setting has not been established through rigorous empirical research (Nakabugo & Ssali, 2023; Kyomuhendo & Atim, 2023).

Children exposed to domestic violence contend with physical violence and its trauma, psychological and emotional abuse, the disruption of household instability, and economic deprivation, each of which may impair their education (Holt et al., 2021; WHO, 2021). Yet the precise contribution of each dimension to education outcomes remains unclear, which hampers the design of targeted interventions by schools and child-protection agencies. Without such

evidence, responses risk being poorly focused (Victor et al., 2023). If this problem remains unaddressed, affected children will continue to underachieve and, in some cases, drop out, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage and undermining national education goals. This study therefore sought to establish the relationship between domestic violence and children's education outcomes in Nsangi and to identify the most influential dimensions, in order to inform child-protection and educational responses.

3.0 Main Objective

The main objective of the study was to examine the influence of domestic violence on child education in primary schools in Nsangi, Wakiso District, Uganda.

3.1 Specific Objectives

- i. To assess the prevalence and forms of domestic violence affecting children in primary schools in Nsangi, as perceived by respondents.
- ii. To establish the relationship between dimensions of domestic violence (physical violence exposure, psychological and emotional abuse, household instability, and economic deprivation) and children's education outcomes.
- iii. To determine the relative contribution (path coefficients) of each dimension to children's education outcomes.

4.0 Literature Review

Research on domestic violence and child education is grounded in trauma theory, attachment theory, and ecological systems theory. Trauma theory holds that exposure to violence activates chronic stress responses that impair the developing brain, undermining memory, concentration, emotional regulation, and behaviour—capacities central to learning (Holt et al., 2021). Attachment theory holds that children require secure relationships with caregivers to develop the emotional security that underpins exploration and learning, and that domestic violence disrupts these relationships (Bowlby, as discussed in UNICEF, 2021). Ecological systems theory situates the child within nested environments and explains how violence in the home microsystem affects functioning in the school, showing that home and school are interconnected rather than separate spheres (Bronfenbrenner, as discussed in UNICEF, 2021). Empirical studies consistently document the harmful effects of domestic violence on children's education (Kintu et al., 2017). Research across diverse settings finds that children exposed to domestic violence exhibit lower academic achievement, poorer attendance, greater difficulty concentrating, more behavioural problems, and higher dropout than their unexposed peers (Holt et al., 2021; WHO, 2021). Studies in sub-Saharan Africa report similar patterns, additionally highlighting the compounding roles of poverty and household instability (Nakabugo & Ssali, 2023; Kyomuhendo & Atim, 2023).

Psychological and emotional abuse features prominently as a determinant of education outcomes. Studies show that emotional abuse and the witnessing of violence—even without direct physical harm—erode children's self-esteem, security, and mental health, producing anxiety, depression, and withdrawal that impair learning, and that these effects can be as damaging as physical violence (Holt et al., 2021). Physical violence exposure constitutes a second theme, with direct victimisation and the trauma of witnessing violence impairing concentration, attendance, and performance

(WHO, 2021). Household instability forms a third theme, since the disruption of routines, supervision, relocation, and family breakdown associated with violence undermines the stability children need to learn (UNICEF, 2021). Economic deprivation forms a fourth theme, as the poverty that frequently accompanies domestic violence constrains access to educational materials, nutrition, and a conducive environment (Nakabugo & Ssali, 2023). The literature emphasises that these dimensions frequently co-occur and compound one another. Despite this body of work, few studies quantify and compare these dimensions using a structural path model in Ugandan primary schools, a gap this study addresses.

5.0 Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design employing a mixed-methods approach that integrated quantitative and qualitative techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). The quantitative strand enabled the measurement of the dimensions of domestic violence and children's education outcomes and the statistical testing of relationships, while the qualitative strand, drawn from interviews, provided contextual depth and sensitivity to the subject (A. G. Kazaara & Julius, 2025). Data were collected from adults—teachers, parents and guardians, counsellors, and community leaders—rather than directly from children, in order to protect children's wellbeing (Christopher et al., 2022). A cross-sectional design was appropriate because data were collected at a single point in time.

5.2 Study Area and Population

The study was conducted in primary schools in Nsangi, a peri-urban area in Wakiso District surrounding Kampala. The target population comprised teachers, parents and guardians, school counsellors, and community leaders who are knowledgeable about children's home circumstances and their education (Ntirandekura & Friday, 2022). Adults were selected as respondents, rather than children, to avoid exposing children to potential distress and in accordance with child-protection principles (Nafiu et al., 2017).

5.3 Sample Size Determination

A sample of 190 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table with reference to the population of teachers, parents, counsellors, and community leaders associated with the selected schools, and this was consistent with the Cochran (1977) formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. This sample provided adequate power for the correlation and path analyses undertaken.

5.4 Sampling Techniques

A combination of stratified, purposive, and simple random sampling was used (Anwar et al., 2022). Schools were selected using stratified sampling to represent the area; teachers and parents were then selected using simple random sampling; and counsellors and community leaders were selected purposively as key informants with particular knowledge of children's circumstances (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

5.5 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

A structured questionnaire measured the four dimensions of domestic violence—physical violence exposure, psychological and emotional abuse, household instability, and economic deprivation—and children's education outcomes (attendance, concentration, performance, and progression), using a five-point Likert scale, with items framed sensitively and at the level of observed effects rather than intrusive detail (Julius & Kazaara, 2026). An interview guide was used with counsellors and teachers to gather qualitative insights. The instruments were pre-tested and reviewed for sensitivity and ethical appropriateness (Julius & Nancy, 2026a).

5.6 Validity and Reliability

The validity of the instruments was established through expert review by specialists in child protection, education, and research methodology, who assessed the content validity index, which exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, and who reviewed items for sensitivity (Amin, 2005). Reliability was assessed through a pilot study, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the domestic violence scale was 0.87, indicating high internal consistency (Julius & Audrey, 2025).

5.7 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded, entered, cleaned, and analysed using SPSS (Nelson et al., 2022). Descriptive statistics summarized the perceived levels of the dimensions of domestic violence and children's education outcomes (A. G. Kazaara & Julius, 2025). Pearson's product-moment correlation examined the bivariate relationships between each dimension and education outcomes; because the dimensions of domestic violence are expected to harm education, negative correlations and path coefficients were anticipated (Julius & Nancy, 2026b). A structural (path) model was then estimated, using regression-based path analysis, to determine the combined explanatory power of the dimensions and the standardised path coefficients linking each dimension to education outcomes. Qualitative data were analysed thematically and used to corroborate and contextualise the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

5.8 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with particular attention to ethics given its sensitive subject and its concern with children. Data were collected from adults rather than children to protect children's wellbeing. Permission was obtained from education authorities and schools, informed consent was secured from all participants, and participation was voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained, no individual child was identified, and respondents were provided with information on child-protection and support services. Where respondents disclosed situations of ongoing risk to a child, established child-protection referral procedures were followed in accordance with national safeguarding requirements (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

6.0 Results and Interpretation

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the dimensions of domestic violence and children's education outcomes based on responses from the 190 participants. Higher scores on the domestic violence dimensions indicate greater perceived prevalence, while higher scores on education outcomes indicate better outcomes.

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Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Physical violence exposure	3.18	0.88	Moderate
Psychological/emotional abuse	3.34	0.85	Moderate
Household instability	3.06	0.90	Moderate
Economic deprivation	3.28	0.87	Moderate
Overall domestic violence	3.22	0.79	Moderate
Children's education outcomes	2.84	0.81	Moderate

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The descriptive results in Table 1 indicate that the dimensions of domestic violence were perceived as moderately prevalent, with an overall mean of 3.22(Nelson et al., 2023). Psychological and emotional abuse recorded the highest mean (3.34), followed by economic deprivation (3.28) and physical violence exposure (3.18), while household instability recorded a mean of 3.06. Children's education outcomes recorded a below-midpoint mean (2.84), indicating that respondents perceived affected children's educational outcomes as compromised, consistent with the concerns that motivated the study (Nakabugo & Ssali, 2023). The standard deviations indicate meaningful variation, reflecting differences in children's home circumstances.

6.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation was computed to establish the strength and direction of the relationships between the dimensions of domestic violence and children's education outcomes (Table 2). As anticipated, the correlations were negative, indicating that greater domestic violence is associated with poorer education outcomes.

Variable	Education Outcomes (r)	Sig. (p)
Psychological/emotional abuse	-0.61	0.000
Physical violence exposure	-0.58	0.000
Household instability	-0.53	0.000
Economic deprivation	-0.50	0.000
Overall domestic violence	-0.66	0.000

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The correlation results in Table 2 show that all four dimensions were negatively and significantly associated with children's education outcomes at the 0.01 level. Overall domestic violence correlated strongly and negatively with education outcomes ($r = -0.66$, $p < 0.01$), confirming that domestic violence impairs children's education, consistent with trauma and ecological systems theory (Holt et al., 2021). Psychological and emotional abuse recorded the strongest negative association ($r = -0.61$), underscoring the profound educational harm of emotional abuse and the witnessing of violence, followed closely by physical violence exposure ($r = -0.58$)(N. Moses et al., 2025). Household

instability ($r = -0.53$) and economic deprivation ($r = -0.50$) were also significant, though more moderate (N. Moses et al., 2025). The consistently negative pattern supports the study's central proposition.

6.3 Structural (Path) Model and Path Coefficients

A structural path model was estimated to determine the combined explanatory power of the dimensions of domestic violence and the standardised path coefficients linking each dimension to children's education outcomes. Because domestic violence harms education, the path coefficients are negative. Figure 1 presents the structural model with its path coefficients, Figure 2 the variance explained by each objective, and Tables 3 and 4 the model summary and the path coefficients.

Path Model: Domestic Violence → Child Education

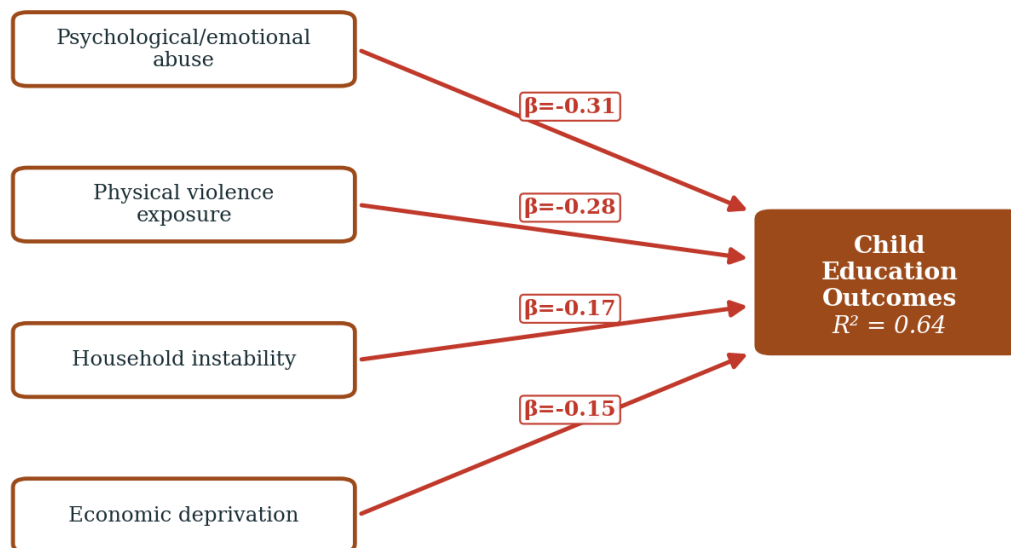


Figure 1: Structural model of domestic violence and children's education outcomes showing standardised (negative) path coefficients (β) and $R^2 = 0.64$.

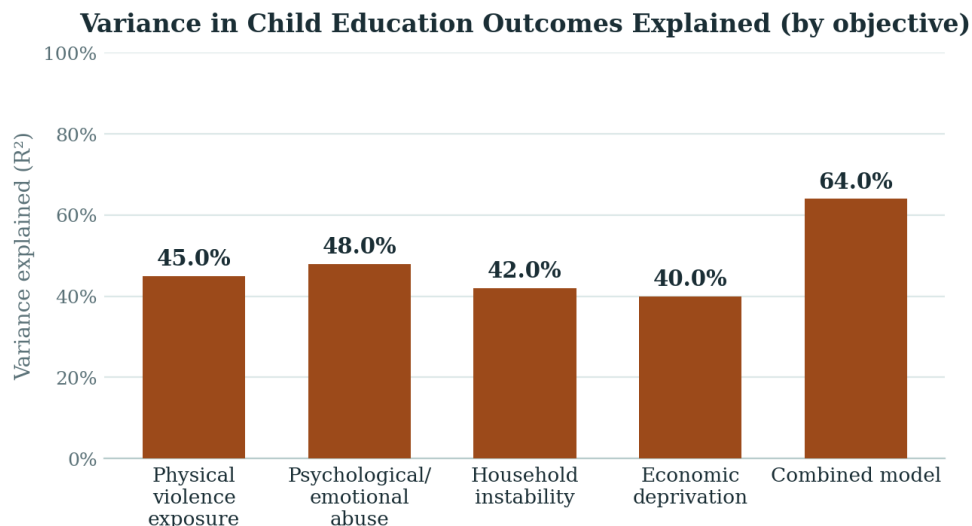


Figure 2: Variance in children's education outcomes explained across the study objectives.

Model Summary		Value	
R		0.800	
R Square		0.640	
Adjusted R Square		0.632	
Std. Error of Estimate		0.447	
F (4, 185)		82.13 (p = 0.000)	
Path (Predictor → Education outcomes)	Path coeff. (β)	t	Sig. (p)
Psychological/emotional abuse → Education	−0.31	−4.68	0.000
Physical violence exposure → Education	−0.28	−4.20	0.000
Household instability → Education	−0.17	−2.62	0.010
Economic deprivation → Education	−0.15	−2.30	0.023

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The structural model summary in Table 3 indicates that the four dimensions of domestic violence jointly explained 64.0% of the variance in children's education outcomes ($R^2 = 0.640$), a large proportion that establishes domestic violence as a major determinant of educational outcomes for affected children (Julius & Nancy, 2026b). The model was highly significant ($F(4, 185) = 82.13, p < 0.01$). The remaining 36.0% of variance is attributable to factors outside the model, such as school quality, teacher support, individual resilience, and other home factors (UNICEF, 2021).

The standardised path coefficients in Table 4, visualized in Figure 1, clarify the relative strength of each structural path; all are negative, reflecting the harmful influence of domestic violence on education (A. I. Kazaara, 2025). The

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path from psychological and emotional abuse to education outcomes was the strongest ($\beta = -0.31$, $p < 0.01$), demonstrating that emotional abuse and the witnessing of violence have the greatest adverse influence on children's education, consistent with evidence that psychological harm can be as damaging as physical harm and profoundly disrupts the emotional security children need to learn (Holt et al., 2021). The path from physical violence exposure followed ($\beta = -0.28$, $p < 0.01$), confirming the substantial educational harm of direct violence and its trauma (WHO, 2021). The paths from household instability ($\beta = -0.17$, $p < 0.05$) and economic deprivation ($\beta = -0.15$, $p < 0.05$) were negative and significant but more modest (Julius & Kazaara, 2025).

7.0 Discussion of Results

The findings of this study confirm that domestic violence is strongly and significantly associated with impaired children's education outcomes in primary schools in Nsangi, and the structural model clarifies the relative harm of each dimension (Julius & Margaret, 2025). The dominance of psychological and emotional abuse as the strongest harmful path ($\beta = -0.31$) is theoretically coherent and particularly important (Anthony et al., 2023). Trauma and attachment theory hold that children's capacity to learn depends on their emotional security and psychological wellbeing, and the finding that emotional abuse and the witnessing of violence most strongly impair education confirms that psychological harm—even in the absence of direct physical violence—profoundly disrupts learning (Holt et al., 2021). The interviews with counsellors and teachers reinforced this, describing affected children as withdrawn, anxious, and unable to concentrate, with their difficulties often rooted in emotional rather than physical harm.

The strong harmful effect of physical violence exposure ($\beta = -0.28$) confirms the substantial educational damage of direct violence and the trauma of witnessing it, consistent with the wider literature linking physical violence to impaired attendance, concentration, and achievement (WHO, 2021). The near-equal strength of the emotional and physical pathways underscores that both forms of violence demand attention, and that responses focused only on visible physical harm would miss the equally damaging effects of emotional abuse.

The more modest but significant harmful contributions of household instability ($\beta = -0.17$) and economic deprivation ($\beta = -0.15$) are theoretically instructive (Amos et al., 2024). These dimensions represent the indirect pathways through which domestic violence affects education—by disrupting the routines and stability children need and by constraining the material resources for learning (T. Moses, 2023). That they were significant but more modest than the direct violence pathways suggests that, while addressing poverty and instability matters, the most urgent educational harm operates through the direct psychological and physical exposure to violence itself (Holt et al., 2021; UNICEF, 2021). The convergence of psychological abuse being both the most prevalent dimension and the strongest harmful path identifies it as the clear priority for intervention (A. G. Kazaara & Julius, 2025).

They corroborate the established harmful effects of domestic violence on children's education, and they extend understanding by quantifying, through a structural model, the relative harm of each dimension in a Ugandan peri-urban setting. The practical implication—framed around child protection and support—is that interventions should

prioritize the identification and support of children experiencing psychological and physical abuse, through school-based psychosocial support, child-protection referral, and school–community collaboration, while also addressing the household instability and deprivation that compound the harm (Nakabugo & Ssali, 2023; Kyomuhendo & Atim, 2023).

8.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that domestic violence has a strong, negative, and significant influence on children's education outcomes in primary schools in Nsangi, with psychological and emotional abuse and physical violence exposure being the most harmful dimensions. It is recommended that schools establish psychosocial support and counselling for affected children (UNICEF, 2021); that clear child-protection identification and referral procedures be instituted in collaboration with child-protection agencies (WHO, 2021); that schools and communities collaborate to support affected families and address household instability and deprivation; and that community sensitization on the prevention of domestic violence and its effects on children be strengthened (Alex & Devis, 2023). Future research could employ longitudinal designs and, with appropriate safeguards, child-centred and objective educational data to further establish causality.

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