

The relationship between physical and psychological abuse and Self-Esteem

العلاقة بين الإيذاء الجسدي والنفسي وتقدير الذات

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Abstract:

The current study aimed to reveal the relationship between physical and psychological abuse and self-esteem among school-attending adolescents. The sample consisted of (230) male and female students from different academic levels studying in the state of Chlef. A descriptive-analytical approach was followed to collect and analyze data, being the most suitable for the nature of the study. The sample members were selected purposively. Data collection tools included the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Physical and Psychological Abuse Scale by researcher Fatima Mohamed El-Sayed. After statistical analyses, the results revealed a positive correlation between both physical and psychological abuse and self-esteem. The results also indicated a variation in the degrees of physical abuse according to gender, educational level, and the interaction between them.

Keywords: Physical abuse, psychological abuse, self-esteem, educational level.

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An introduction:

The family is considered the primary unit of society, as it influences the personal formation of the individual, being the first environment, they enter and grow up in. It is the first habitat that embraces them as soon as they see life, influencing their behavior guidance, determining their directions and future. Events witnessed within the family become ingrained in their personality, and the cruelty or tenderness, care or neglect they receive imprint on their feelings (Akrush, Al-Farah (2007), p 01).

Child abuse is defined as repeated hitting leading to physical or psychological harm to a minor through intentional blows, uncontrolled physical punishment, mockery, continuous humiliation, or exposure to sexual abuse. This abuse is most often committed by parents or others responsible for the children’s care (Al Saud, Muneera, (2005), p 45)

There are patterns of mistreatment summarized as physical abuse, which includes punching, severe beating with or without intent, burning, and others, leaving visible marks, there is also psychological or emotional abuse, represented by mocking the child, failing to meet their emotional and material needs, and neglecting them, sexual abuse may also be found.

The types of child abuse vary depending on factors such as age, gender, or the level of parental care; The memorandum of the Secretary-General of the United Nations (2006) indicated that male children are more susceptible to physical abuse than females, while females are more exposed to psychological and sexual abuse and neglect. High rates of parental care during childhood and close relationships between the child and parents protect them from abuse (Ghanem Asha, and Darwish, p178).

Experiences of abuse differ between genders, a study by (Courtenay et al (2015)), conducted a survey among genders regarding psychological experiences in childhood. The results indicated that males’ experiences were more positive than females, while experiences of abuse and neglect were higher among females.

Similarly, a study by the National Family Safety Program (2016) aimed to understand the impact of adverse childhood experiences on adult health by gender. The findings showed that (80%) of the sample reported experiencing at least one adverse childhood experience, and the rate of exposure to two adverse childhood experiences was higher among females (65%) than males (55%). (Ghoneim (2017), pp251-252)

Physical abuse is defined as harm inflicted on a child’s body by caregivers, such as: wounds, burns, branding with fire, kicking, sleep deprivation;

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Psychological abuse is defined as emotional neglect of children, exposing them to immense pressure, disturbing their peace, causing instability in their psychological well-being, rejecting children, or expressing lack of affection towards them (Al-Qatrous (2013), pp. 19–23).

From the foregoing, we can conclude the following:

- Abuse is a type of harmful and dangerous parenting style affecting the child’s psychological and social development.
- Physical and psychological abuse contribute to threatening the child’s security and stability.
- Abuse, in its various forms, affects the individual’s adjustment with themselves and others.
- Abuse contributes to the child’s poor estimation of themselves and others.

Self-esteem refers to a person’s evaluation of themselves based on their perception of others’ opinions about them. One’s idea of oneself is the pattern of self-perception. This concept is closely related to the self-concept and indicates the individual’s positive view of themselves, including sufficient self-confidence and a sense of competence (Ben Dahnoun (2017), p 99).

(Al-Nashif (1993)) suggests that others act as a mirror for the child, reflecting their image. Therefore, the way parents and other close individuals interact with the child and their opinions about them significantly impact the image the child forms of themselves... This means that self-esteem is nurtured by the reactions of others towards them. If a child receives care, encouragement, security, love, and guidance, they are likely to develop positive self-esteem. Conversely, a child who experiences neglect or rejection, is constantly punished, and receives no encouragement will likely form a negative self-image (Ait Mouloud, Baali (2018), p 252).

Coopersmith defined it as an evaluation an individual makes and maintains about themselves. Self-esteem includes the individual’s positive and negative attitudes towards themselves. It is a subjective judgment of self-worth expressed through the individual’s attitudes towards themselves; it represents conscious or felt judgments regarding the individual’s importance and distinction (Hamzawi, Zahia (2017), p 8).

We note from the above that: - Self-esteem is formed through good parental treatment, attention, and responsiveness to the child’s psychological needs. - Self-esteem is a personal evaluation and self-perception of others’ estimations of the individual. - Self-esteem is influenced by childhood and adult experiences, consequently affecting the individual’s positive and negative outlook.

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➤ **Previous Studies:**

1. Study by Musa (2020):

This study highlighted the relationship between psychological abuse among adolescents and self-esteem and deviant behavior. The research was conducted at Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University in Niger State, the study included 250 participants, each completing the childhood Trauma, questionnaire developed by Bernstein and Walker, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the diverse deviant Behavior questionnaire developed by Sanchez; The results revealed a weak positive significant correlation between childhood emotional abuse and self-behavior, there were no statistically significant differences when comparing emotional abuse and self-behavior based on participants' gender, esteem, and deviance; Traumatic experiences resulting from abuse and neglect were negatively associated with self-esteem and positively associated with hostility, aggression, and negative attribution patterns. (Bello Musa (2020), p15)

2. Study by Ateret Gewirtz-Meydan (2020):

This study examined the relationship between child sexual abuse (CSA), self-concept, psychopathology, and the mediating role of social support and perceived parental quality. The current study tested a theoretical model of the impact of CSA on psychopathology, analyses were based on three waves of the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV), conducted in 2008, 2010, and 2014. Children and youth aged 10-17 who reported experiencing CSA (n=414) were compared to a control group matched for age, gender, and socioeconomic status (N=414). Using structural equation modeling, a theoretical model of the impact of CSA on the development of psychopathology was examined; Children who experienced sexual abuse had lower self-concept, social support, and perceived parental quality, and higher self-esteem than the control group; Higher self-concept, social support, and perceived parental quality were associated with lower levels of psychopathology (Ateret Gewirtz-Meydan, 2020, p1).

3. Study by Çiğdem & Hatice (2019):

The purpose of this study was to determine the direct and indirect effects of child abuse on self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and stress levels. The study participants were 636 students (477 females and 159 males) studying at three different public universities in Turkey. Data were collected using the "Childhood Trauma Questionnaire," the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS), the "Two-Dimensional Self-Esteem Scale (Self-Liking, Self-Competence)," and a demographic information form. The data obtained were analyzed using correlation coefficient and path analysis techniques via AMOS 22. The results indicated that

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child abuse is negatively associated with self-esteem, while it is positively associated with depression, anxiety, and stress. Path analysis results showed that child abuse directly affects self-esteem negatively. It was also found that self-esteem has a direct and negative effect on depression, anxiety, and stress. Furthermore, child abuse was found to have an indirect effect on depression, anxiety, and stress (Çiğdem & Hatice, (2019), p171).

4. Study by Adela & Yu (2019):

This study revealed the relationship between childhood psychological maltreatment, self-esteem, and psychological distress among adolescents in Tanzania; This was a community-based cross-sectional study of secondary school students conducted in randomly selected secondary schools in five regions of Tanzania between April 2016 and February 2017. A multi-stage cluster sampling technique was used to obtain the required number of study participants; The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), and Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) were used to measure the variables in the study. A sample of 1000 secondary school students was selected for this study, of whom 553 (55.3%) were male and 447 (44.7%) were female; The results showed a strong positive correlation between psychological maltreatment and self-esteem, while the correlation between psychological maltreatment and psychological distress was significant but weak, the results also show a strong positive relationship between psychological distress and self-esteem (Adela & Yu, 2019, p1).

5. Study by Chuqi & Dongping (2018):

This study attempted to test the hypothesis that childhood emotional abuse would be positively associated with fearful attachment, while negatively associated with secure attachment and self-esteem, with attachment mediating the link between childhood emotional abuse and self-esteem. Chinese university students (N=554) completed the Childhood Emotional Abuse Scale, Secure Attachment Scale, Fearful Attachment Scale, and Self-Esteem Scale; Results of dual mediation analysis based on 5000 bootstrap samples showed that childhood emotional abuse affected self-esteem through both secure attachment and fearful attachment, with the indirect effect via secure attachment being stronger compared to that via fearful attachment (Chuqi & Dongping, 2018, p793).

6. Study by Özlem Karakuş (2012):

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between child abuse and self-esteem in adults and to reveal the potential of child abuse in determining self-esteem. The study consisted of 915 secondary school students from the central district of Konya city who were randomly selected, 583 of the sample students (58.3%) were female versus 382 males (41.7%). The results indicated a statistically

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significant negative relationship between child abuse and self-esteem. Child abuse significantly predicted self-esteem; It was revealed that even emotional abuse is the main determinant of self-esteem. The finding achieved regarding this issue indicates that students' self-esteem levels decrease as child abuse increases (Özlem Karakuş, 2012, p753).

▪ **Problem Statement:**

Previous studies have indicated a statistically significant negative relationship between child abuse and self-esteem, with child abuse significantly predicting self-esteem. Childhood emotional abuse has also been shown to affect self-esteem. However, other studies have found a strong positive correlation between psychological maltreatment and self-esteem. The current research follows this line of inquiry, attempting to highlight the relationship between both physical and psychological abuse and self-esteem among secondary school students; The research problem is formulated as follows:

What is the magnitude of the effect of the relationship between physical abuse, psychological abuse, and self-esteem?

- **Sub-problems:**

- Is there a correlational relationship between physical and psychological abuse and self-esteem?
- Do the degrees of physical and psychological abuse differ according to gender, educational level, and their interaction?

➤ **Partial Hypotheses:**

- There is a correlational relationship between physical and psychological abuse and self-esteem.
- The degrees of physical and psychological abuse differ according to gender, educational level, and their interaction.

➤ **Study Objectives:**

The objectives of the study are summarized as:

- To highlight the relationship between physical and psychological abuse and self-esteem.
- To highlight the variation in the degrees of both physical and psychological abuse according to gender and their interaction.

➤ **Significance of the Study:**

The significance of the study is manifested in two aspects:

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A. Theoretical Significance:

The study contributes to presenting the theoretical literature on abuse, its types, causes, prevention methods, and the prevalence rates of abuse between genders. It also benefits parents by raising awareness about treating children well, proper upbringing, and the danger of using excessive punishment, which affects the child’s adjustment and psychological security.

B. Applied Significance:

The study benefits experts in developing treatment programs and plans for individuals subjected to psychological and physical abuse by suggesting targeted guidance programs.

➤ **Operational Definitions:**

1. Definition of Physical Abuse: Intentional physical harm resulting from the use of violent and harsh methods by parents or caregivers, such as hitting, biting, kicking, and burning, under the pretext of disciplining the child, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Operationally, it is the score obtained by answering the items related to this specific dimension.

2. Definition of Psychological Abuse: Emotional neglect of children, exposing them to immense pressure, disturbing their peace, causing instability in their psychological well-being, rejecting children, or expressing lack of affection towards them. Operationally, it is the score obtained by answering the items related to this specific dimension.

3. Definition of Self-Esteem: Coopersmith defined it as an evaluation an individual makes and maintains about themselves. Self-esteem includes the individual’s positive and negative attitudes towards themselves. Operationally, it is the score obtained by answering the items of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

➤ **Study Limits:**

The study limits were represented by:

- **Temporal Limits:** The study was conducted during the period 2023-2024, within the months of January and March.
- **Spatial Limits:** The study was conducted in the secondary education stage in the state of Chlef, western Algeria.
- **Qualitative Limits:** The study was applied to secondary school students across all specializations.
- **Thematic Limits:** The study aimed to highlight the relationship between physical and psychological abuse and self-esteem.

➤ **Methodology and Procedure:**

The statistical method was followed to analyze the study data statistically, as it is the appropriate method for the nature of this study.

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• **Method of Selecting the Main Sample and its Characteristics:**

The final sample, after applying the Mahalanobis distance method and excluding outliers and extreme values, consisted of (225) individuals selected purposively based on the students' willingness to cooperate voluntarily and availability for contact after explicit approval from the institution's director, as shown in the table:

Table (01): Distribution of the main sample according to gender, age, and educational level

Sample Characteristics	Male	Female	Total
Gender	100	130	230
Educational Level	First Year	Second Year	Third Year
	63	69	98
	Total=230		
Age	14-16	17-19	
	78	152	
	Total=230		

Source: Prepared by the researcher

We observe from the table that the number of females (130) is greater than the number of males (100). The third-year level (98) is larger than the first-year level (63) and the second-year level (69). The age group 17-19 (152) is larger than the age group 14-16 (78).

➤ **Study Tools:**

1. Physical and Psychological Abuse Scale:

The researcher (El-Sayed, Fatima Mohamed, (2015)), developed a scale for the concept of abuse experiences by adopting the following definition: behavior aimed at inflicting physical, psychological, and sexual harm on the child, originating from one or both parents or the caregiver, resulting in a threat to the child's safety.

The scale contains (30) items divided into three dimensions (physical, psychological, and sexual abuse). Only physical and psychological abuse will be considered, thus the number of items in the scale applied in the current study becomes (20) as they align with the current study variables. The scale is answered by choosing from (Does not apply- Applies to a small extent- Applies to a moderate extent- Applies to a large extent).

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Validity and Reliability of the Physical and Psychological Abuse Scale: Pearson correlation coefficient was used, showing the relationship of each item to the dimension, to demonstrate consistency; Cronbach’s alpha and stratified alpha methods were used to ensure reliability. The results showed:

Table (02): Construct validity and reliability extraction methods for the Physical and Psychological Abuse Scale

Item	Item correlation with Physical Abuse dimension	Item	Item correlation with Physical Abuse dimension
1	0.62	2	0.64
3	0.84	4	0.78
5	0.77	6	0.75
7	0.83	8	0.78
9	0.69	10	0.69
11	0.79	12	0.80
13	0.72	14	0.70
15	0.73	16	0.75
17	0.72	18	0.80
19	0.72	20	0.75
Cronbach’s Alpha=0.91		Cronbach’s Alpha=0.91	
Stratified Alpha=0.90			

Source: Prepared by the researcher

We note that all validity coefficients were significant at the 0.01 level, and the reliability coefficient values were also quite good and excellent. Therefore, the scale can be confidently used in the current study.

2. Self-Esteem Scale:

“ **Rosenberg** ” designed the self-esteem scale bearing his name in 1960 to study self-esteem among adolescents, involving 5024 adolescents. It contains (10) items, 05 positive and 05 negative. It is a Likert-type scale with four alternatives: (Strongly Agree- Agree- Disagree-Strongly disagree).

Validity and Reliability of the Self-Esteem Scale: Pearson correlation coefficient was used, showing the relationship of each item to the scale as a whole, to demonstrate consistency. Cronbach’s alpha method was used to ensure reliability. The results showed:

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Table (03): Construct validity and reliability extraction methods for the Self-Esteem Scale

Item	Item correlation with the scale as a whole
1	0.40
2	0.48
3	0.35
4	0.47
5	0.38
6	0.45
7	0.37
8	0.23
9	0.39
10	0.48
Cronbach's Alpha=0.647	

Source: Prepared by the researcher

We note that all validity coefficients were significant at the 0.01 level, and the reliability coefficient value was also acceptable. Therefore, the scale can be confidently used in the current study.

3. Statistical Methods Used for Data Processing:

Pearson correlation coefficient, as well as two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and interaction analysis between variables, were used according to the nature of the study hypotheses, utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

➤ **Presentation and Discussion of Hypotheses:**

*** Presentation and Discussion of the First Hypothesis:**

Which states: **There is a correlational relationship between physical and psychological abuse and self-esteem.**

To test this hypothesis, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used. The results indicated, as shown in the following table:

Table (04): Correlation coefficient between abuse and self-esteem

Variable	Physical Abuse	Psychological Abuse	Self-Esteem
Physical Abuse	-		
Psychological Abuse	0.866***	--	

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Self-Esteem	<u>-0.228</u>	<u>-0.259</u>	--
Effect Size	<u>5%</u>	<u>6%</u>	--

Source: Prepared by the researcher

We observe from the table above a negative correlation between self-esteem and physical abuse with a coefficient of (-0.22) at the 0.01 significance level, meaning that as physical abuse increases, self-esteem decreases. There is also a negative correlation between self-esteem and psychological abuse with a coefficient of (-0.25) at the 0.01 significance level, meaning that as psychological abuse increases, self-esteem decreases, and vice versa.

✓ **Discussion of the Hypothesis:**

The statistical analysis results indicated a negative correlation between self-esteem and physical abuse with a coefficient of (-0.22) at the 0.01 significance level. This can be interpreted in light of theoretical literature and previous studies, as physical abuse leads to material damage manifested in leaving marks on the body such as bruises, burns, etc., and moral damage which is the psychological suffering experienced by the abused child. This abuse is considered among the wrong parenting methods in upbringing. This was pointed out in Sedlak’s study (2010), which aimed to determine the extent of abuse experienced by children in 122 counties in the United States. The results showed that approximately (1,256,000) children were abused in the United States in the years (2005-2006). The rate of exposure to physical abuse was 58%, sexual abuse 24%, and emotional abuse 27%. As for neglect, the rate of physical neglect was 38%, emotional neglect 25%, and educational neglect 47%. Additionally, the results indicated that in most cases, the mother is the perpetrator of abuse, reaching 75%, followed by the father at 43%. Parents are most often accused of physical and emotional abuse of children, at a rate of 81%. Undoubtedly, this physical abuse affects the self-esteem of the abused child and impacts their psychological and social adjustment.

The results of the current study are consistent with the findings of the study by Bello Musa (2020, p15), which indicated that traumatic experiences resulting from abuse and neglect are negatively associated with self-esteem. It also aligns with the results of the study by Çiğdem & Hatice (2019, p171), which found a negative relationship between abuse and self-esteem.

The statistical analysis results also indicated a negative correlation between self-esteem and psychological abuse with a coefficient of (-0.25) at the 0.01 significance level. This can be interpreted in light of theoretical literature, where psychological or emotional abuse is defined as the failure to provide the child with

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the necessary affection and support for their emotional, psychological, and social growth. It includes any behavior by parents or caregivers, lack of love and affection directed towards the child, increasing the child’s feelings of guilt and shame, diminishing their self-worth compared to peers and siblings, and making scathing remarks against the child’s personality and behavioral and physical characteristics. This negatively affects their psychological development and social and psychological adjustment. This also contributes to poor self-esteem in the child, resulting from those painful memories that affect and lead to poor adjustment with oneself and others alike.

This finding does not align with the study by Adela & Yu (2019), which found a strong positive correlation between psychological maltreatment and self-esteem. However, it aligns with the study by Chuqi & Dongping (2018, p793), which found that childhood emotional abuse affected self-esteem through both secure and fearful attachment.

*** Presentation and Discussion of the Second Hypothesis:**

Which states: **The degrees of both physical and psychological abuse differ according to gender, educational level, and their interaction.**

To test this hypothesis, a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and interaction analysis between variables (Gender and Educational Level) were used. The results indicated the following:

Table (05): Two-way ANOVA and interaction between variables

Source of Variance	Variable	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F-value	Sig
Gender x Educational Level	Physical Abuse	5	2339.116	467.823	6.36	Sig. at 0.01
	Psychological Abuse	5	1835.132	367.026	4.81	Sig. at 0.01
Error	Physical Abuse	224	16457.671	73.472	--	--
	Psychological Abuse	224	17088.299	76.287		
Total	Physical Abuse	230	83477.000	--	--	--
	Psychological Abuse	230	84749.000	--		

Source: Prepared by the researcher

We observe from the source of variance that there are differences in physical abuse with an F-value of (6.36) at the 0.01 significance level, according to gender, educational level, and their interaction. The differences between genders were in

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favor of males with a mean score of (18.29), and in educational level in favor of the third year of secondary school with a mean score of (20.08). There are also differences in psychological abuse with an F-value of (4.81) at the 0.01 significance level, according to the interaction of gender and educational level, in favor of males with a mean score of (18.58), and in educational level in favor of the third year of secondary school with a mean score of (19.59).

*** Discussion of the Hypothesis:**

The results from the source of variance indicated differences in physical abuse according to gender, educational level, and their interaction. The differences between genders were in favor of males compared to females. This interpretation can be attributed in light of theoretical literature and some previous studies, where females are found to possess greater sensitivity. Painful and traumatic experiences like hitting and burning, which leave bruises and physical marks, cause poor self-esteem and narcissistic distress and embarrassment among them. This largely explains the existence of differences in physical abuse in their favor compared to males. Such negative experiences affecting their psychological entity are considered painful memories forming a narcissistic wound.

The results of the current study align with the study by Courtenay et al. (2015), which conducted a survey among genders on psychological experiences in childhood. Its results indicated that males' experiences were more positive than females', while experiences of abuse and neglect were higher among females. Similarly, the study by the National Family Safety Program (2016), aimed at understanding the impact of adverse childhood experiences on adult health by gender, found that (80%) of the sample reported experiencing at least one adverse childhood experience, and the rate of exposure to two adverse childhood experiences was higher among females (65%) than males (55%).

The statistical analysis results also indicated a variation in physical abuse according to the interaction of gender and educational level, in favor of the third year of secondary school. This might be interpreted in light of the fact that this type of physical abuse among third-year female students is considered a trauma for them, given they are at the beginning stage of envisioning adulthood and the future. This contributes to crystallizing negative images of themselves and their future, especially since they will experience marriage, making them fearful due to these traumatic experiences. Adulthood here represents a shift in social roles; the older they get, the heavier the burden of carrying those memories, especially if there are burns, bruises, and marks that cannot heal or fade over time.

The results of this study differ from the study by (Razan Turki, 2020), which confirms that the rate of child abuse for three to four-year-olds is lower than for

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children aged eight to nine years, and that the highest rate of physical abuse was among children aged 14-17 years.

-Practical suggestions:

To combat physical and psychological abuse, it is suggested to give the phenomenon the attention it deserves through comprehensive programs that include elements of prevention, early intervention, and psychological and social support.

1. Establish rehabilitative guidance programs for victims of physical and psychological abuse to achieve their psychological and social adjustment.
2. Design guidance programs for parents on correct and sound treatment methods that help in the individual’s adjustment with themselves and others.

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