

The relationship between emotional abuse and pupils' retention in UPE schools in Mityana district. A cross-sectional study.

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Abstract

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Background

Emotional abuse is the infliction of psychological harm, such as emotional mistreatment, humiliation, intimidation, and manipulation, on an individual. It encompasses behaviors that undermine a person's self-worth and emotional stability, often resulting in long-term psychological consequences. This study examined the relationship between emotional abuse and pupils' retention in UPE schools in Mityana District.

Methods

The study used a descriptive correlation and cross-sectional survey design. The study used primary seven pupils, teachers, and parents (school management committee members) as respondents. 123 respondents were selected from a population of 180 participants, who were selected from primary schools in Mityana District. These were selected using simple random sampling, convenience sampling, and purposive sampling techniques. The researcher used self-administered questionnaires and interview guides to collect primary data and a documentary review checklist for secondary data.

Results

Findings showed that the majority of the respondents were female (63.0%), belonged to the age range of 0-20 years (66.7%), were single (66.7%), and had a primary level of education (66.7%). Emotional abuse of pupils is school contributes to school drop outs in primary schools with a significant negative correlation ($r=-0.451$, 0.011) between emotional abuse and pupils' retention in PUE schools in Mityana District.

Conclusions

There was a significant negative correlation between emotional abuse and pupils' retention in PUE schools in Mityana District; hence, emotional abuse is fairly common in Mityana District and forces pupils to leave primary schools. Generally, Child abuse in the form of emotional abuse has a negative impact on school enrolments in Mityana District.

Recommendations

Schools should establish counseling services within UPE schools to provide emotional support to students. Trained professionals should be available to listen, support, and guide students who have experienced abuse, helping them navigate their emotions and recover from trauma.

Keywords: Child Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Mityana District, pupil's retention in school.

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Background of the study.

Emotional abuse refers to the infliction of psychological harm, such as emotional mistreatment, humiliation, intimidation, and manipulation, on an individual. It encompasses behaviors that undermine a person's self-worth and emotional stability, often resulting in long-term psychological consequences (Khambati et al., 2018). Understanding the impact of emotional abuse on school children is crucial for developing effective intervention strategies to improve their overall academic performance and well-being.

Globally, studies have shown that emotional abuse and other forms of child maltreatment negatively affect pupils' motivation, engagement, and educational persistence. Slade

and Wissow (2007) found that adolescents who experienced emotional or physical maltreatment during childhood had significantly poorer academic performance and higher absenteeism than their non-abused peers. The researchers emphasized that emotional abuse interferes with pupils' concentration and self-esteem, contributing to reduced school retention.

Similarly, Khambati et al. (2018) reported that children who experienced emotional neglect or rejection during early childhood exhibited poorer educational outcomes in adolescence, including increased dropout rates. These findings demonstrate that emotional abuse has enduring effects on both emotional well-being and academic participation.

In related research, Mohammed (2023) examined the association between child abuse and poor academic performance in public primary schools in Sudan and found that pupils who experienced emotional or physical abuse were more likely to perform poorly and drop out of school. This aligns with evidence from Brown and Taylor (2008), who found that bullying, a form of psychological abuse, significantly reduces pupils' academic achievement and retention by creating a hostile and unsafe learning environment.

Furthermore, emotional abuse has been linked to psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal, which hinder pupils' ability to focus on learning and persist in school (Khambati et al., 2018). These emotional disturbances often translate into absenteeism, low participation, and eventual school dropout.

The reviewed literature, therefore, demonstrates that emotional abuse, whether in the form of humiliation, rejection, neglect, or bullying, has a detrimental effect on pupils' retention in primary schools. Pupils who experience emotional abuse are more likely to withdraw from school, leading to lower retention rates. Understanding this relationship is essential for implementing effective interventions and creating safe, supportive learning environments that promote pupils' academic success. Based on this evidence, the present study aimed to assess the relationship between emotional abuse and pupils' retention in UPE schools in Mityana District.

Methodology

Research design

Table 1: Target population

Respondents	Nabembezi p/s	Buyinza p/s	Kyudaya p/s
Pupils (p7)	32	45	42
Teachers	8	9	8
Parents (SMC)	12	12	12
Total	52	66	62

Source: Mityana District Education Department, (2023)

Therefore, the three selected schools had 180 respondents that were targeted for this study.

The study used a descriptive correlation and cross-sectional survey design. A descriptive survey was useful in gathering information by administering different research instruments of a sample of individual to obtain data in evaluating the present particular situation. Using this type of survey, a researcher looked at the nature of the existing condition in the study area. During the study, a researcher obtained views from respondents on how child abuse influences pupils' retention in UPE schools in Mityana District.

Study setting

The study was carried out in selected primary schools within Mityana District. Mityana District is bordered by Kiboga District to the north, Nakaseke District to the northeast, Wakiso District to the east, Mubende District to the west, Mpigi District to the southeast, and Butambala and Gomba Districts to the south. The district headquarters at Mityana are approximately 77 kilometres (48 mi), by road, west of Kampala, Uganda's capital and largest city. The coordinates of the district are 00 27N, 32 03E. The selected primary schools were: Buyinza primary school, Naamebzi primary school, and Kiyudaya primary school. The study covered a period of three years from 2020 to 2021. This period provided enough information in relation to the study variables

Target population

The study used primary seven pupils, teachers, and parents (school management committee members) as respondents. According to the Mityana District Enrollment Report (2022), the selected schools had the number of stakeholders.

Sample size

The researcher adopted Kreijcie & Morgan (1970) table of determining sample size. Therefore 118 respondents were selected as respondents of the study. Therefore, the study consisted of 71 pupils from the selected schools, 26 teachers, 21 parents (members of the school management commit).

Table 2: Population size, sample size, sampling techniques

Respondents	Population size	Sample size	Sampling techniques
Teachers	25	20	Purposive sampling
Parents	36	24	Convenience sampling
Pupils	119	79	Simple random sampling
Total	180	123	

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Sampling technique

The researcher used simple random sampling, convenience sampling, and purposive sampling techniques to select the respondents.

A simple random technique was used to give a chance to primary school pupils to participate in the study without bias, since the method gives everyone the opportunity to be selected. The purposive sampling technique was used to select teachers because they provided detailed information on the study topic. Convenience sampling was used to collect information from parents who were easily accessible and willing to participate in the study.

Research instruments

Self-Administered Questionnaires

The researcher used self-administered questionnaires to collect data from teachers and primary seven pupils of the selected primary schools. Using this instrument, a list of questions on paper was drawn for the respondents to answer. These were open and closed ended questions. This too was used because they were simple to apply and use on respondents who had less time to sit with the researcher for an exclusive interview, hence helped the researcher to collect more data in a short period of time.

Interview

An interview method was used to collect data, and the researcher used an interview guide to collect data from the parents through discussions that were held with them as key respondents.

Data collection methods

Data collection methods and techniques were used to collect primary and secondary data. Secondary data was collected to fill gaps left by earlier researchers on child abuse and pupils' retention using information from newspapers and other relevant records. Primary data about the study was collected through an interview guide and Self-Administered questionnaires, on which based conclusions have been

drawn. Both secondary and primary data supplemented each other to enable a researcher to critically analyze the information.

Data quality control and validity

Validity: Validity of the instrument was measured using the content validity of the instrument; this was determined by logical judgment and relevancy of items in regard of the content validity of the instrument or formula after assessment by the research supervisor as the expert in this field. A Content Validity Index of 0.87 was obtained and compared with 0.7 as suggested by Amin (2009) as a good measure of validity.

Reliability: Reliability of instruments was determined by pre-testing. The researcher formulated the instruments and tested them with a neutral group outside a research area. The consistence of the instrument in delivering the needed information was considered; in case of ambiguity, some amendments were made to ensure reliability.

Data analysis

Data was analyzed manually and tallied using the SPSS computer program. The results were converted into frequencies, percentages, and presented by use of tables, graphs, and then the analysis, discussion of findings were done to reach a comprehensive conclusion.

Ethical consideration

The researcher sought to uphold key ethical issues as follows:

1. Informed consent was realized through the inclusion of a section explaining the purpose of the study and the rights of respondents.
2. Confidentiality was upheld by avoiding exposure of information to other people without authorization.
3. Anonymity was realized through asking respondents not to write their names on the instrument, while coding of schools and

interviewees was also adopted to hide their identities for the sake of confidentiality.

4. Originality was upheld by ensuring proper citation and referencing, while the study was also subjected to a plagiarism test.

3. The researcher scheduled an appropriate date for issuing questionnaires and conducting interviews with selected respondents.

4. After issuing the questionnaires, the researcher collected them after two weeks. This was aimed at giving ample time to respondents to fill in answers.

Research procedure

1. The researcher obtained an introductory letter from the University to allow him to undertake the research study after successfully defending his research.
2. The researcher then made preparatory arrangements with the chief administrative officer for acceptance and a consent letter.

Results

Response rate

According to the findings, of the 123 instruments issued, 108 were returned complete hence the response rate was 87.9%. This was in line with (Amin,2022) who proposed that a response rate above 70% is good thus the researcher continued to analyze and present the finding since the number of respondents was sufficient for the study.

Table 3: Response rate of the study

Respondents	Research instruments issued	Instruments returned and completed	Response rate (%)
Teachers	20	20	100
Parents	24	16	66.7
Pupils	79	72	91.1
Total	123	108	87.8

Demographic characteristics of the study

According to findings in table 4, 37.0% of the respondents were male, while 63.0% were female. Therefore, majority of the respondents were female.

Further, findings showed 66.7% of the respondents were in the age range of 0-20 years, 24.1% were in the age range of 21-35 years and 9.3% were in the age range of 36+ years. Therefore, majority of the respondents were primary pupils.

Table 4: Demographic characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	40	37.0%
Female	68	63.0%
Total	108	100.0%
Age (years)		
0-20	72	66.7%
21-35	26	24.1%
36+	10	9.3%
Total	108	100.0%
Marital status		
Single	72	66.7%
Married	23	21.3%
Separated	13	12.0%
Total	108	100.0%
Level of education		
Primary	72	66.7%

Secondary	14	13.0%
Tertiary	19	17.6%
University	3	2.8%
Total	108	100.0%

Source: Primary data (2023)

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On the Marital status, 66.7% of the respondents were single, 21.3% were married and 12.0% were separated. Therefore, majority of the respondents were primary pupils that were neither married nor separated. Further, findings show that majority of the teachers and parents that participated in the study were married.

On the Level of education, 66.7% of the respondents had a primary level of education, 13.0% had a secondary level of education, and 17.6% had a tertiary level of education, 2.8% had a university level of education. This shows that other than primary seven pupils selected for the study, most teachers (20.4%) have tertiary and university level of education.

These demographic characteristics provide an overview of the respondents in terms of their gender, age, marital status, and level of education. It can be inferred that the majority of

the respondents were female (63.0%), belonged to the age range of 0-20 years (66.7%), were single (66.7%), and had a primary level of education (66.7%). However, it should be noted that the sample size for this analysis is 108 respondents, and these findings are specific to the selected primary schools in Mityana District.

Emotional abuse and pupils' retention in UPE schools in Mityana District

The Researcher used Likert 5-point scale and descriptive statistics to capture the opinions of the respondents on the study variables. For this particular section 1 = Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree and 5 = Strongly Disagree.

Table 5: Emotional abuse and pupils' retention in UPE schools in Mityana District

	Mean	std
Use of harsh or demeaning language, insults, name-calling, mocking, or belittling a child in front of peers or teachers discourages pupils from coming to school	1.3	0.8
Humiliation or public shaming of pupils during school assembly discourage pupil retention	2.6	0.4
Ignoring or neglecting emotional needs of pupils discourages pupils from coming to school	2.9	0.7
Intimidation or threats of poor academic performance and divulging personal information discourages pupils from coming back to school	1.5	0.6
Ridiculing or mocking personal characteristics of learners have long-lasting emotional impacts, causing deep shame and insecurity hence school dropout	1.2	0.1

Findings in table 5, on the statement “Use of harsh or demeaning language, insults, name-calling, mocking, or belittling a child in front of peers or teachers discourages pupils from coming to school”, the average response was 1.3 with standard deviation of 0.8. This shows that respondents agree that use of harsh or demeaning language, insults, name-calling, mocking, or belittling a child in front of peers or teachers discourages pupils from coming to school.

On the statement “Humiliation or public shaming of pupils during school assembly discourages pupil retention”, the average response was 2.6 with standard deviation of 0.4. This shows that respondents agree that Humiliation or public shaming of pupils during school assembly discourage pupil retention.

On the statement “Ignoring or neglecting emotional needs of pupils discourages pupils from coming to school”, the average response was 2.9 with standard deviation of 0.7. This shows that respondents agree that ignoring or neglecting emotional needs of pupils by their care givers discourages pupils from coming to school

On the statement “Intimidation or threats of poor academic performance and divulging personal information discourages pupils from coming back to school”, the average response was 1.5 with standard deviation of 0.6. This shows that respondents agree that intimidation or threats of poor academic performance and divulging personal information discourages pupils from coming back to school.

On the statement “Ridiculing or mocking personal characteristics of learners have long-lasting emotional impacts, causing deep shame and insecurity hence school dropout”, the average response was 1.2 with standard deviation of 0.1. This shows that respondents agree that ridiculing or mocking personal characteristics of learners have long-lasting emotional impacts, causing deep shame and insecurity hence school dropout.

Generally, finding show that use of harsh or demeaning language, insults, name-calling, mocking, or belittling a child in front of peers or teachers discourages pupils from coming to school, humiliation or public shaming of pupils

during school assembly discourage pupil retention, ignoring or neglecting emotional needs of pupils by their care givers discourages pupils from coming to school, intimidation or threats of poor academic performance and divulging personal information discourages pupils from coming back to school and ridiculing or mocking personal characteristics of learners have long-lasting emotional impacts, causing deep shame and insecurity hence school dropout.

Therefore, emotional abuse of pupils is school contributes to school drop outs in primary schools in Mityana District

Correlational findings

Table 6: Correlation findings on Emotional abuse and Pupils’ retention in UPE schools in Mityana District.

		Emotional abuse	Pupils’ retention
Pupils’ retention	Pearson Correlation	-0.451**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.011	
	N	72	72

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to findings in table 6, there was a negative significant correlation ($r = -0.451$, 0.011) between emotional abuse and pupils’ retention in PUE schools in Mityana District. Therefore, emotional abuse is fairly common in

Mityana District and significantly forces pupils to leave primary schools.

Generally, Child abuse in form of emotional abuse has a negative impact on school enrolments in Mityana District.

Table 7: Regression findings on child abuse and pupil’s retention in UPE schools in Mityana District

Model		R		R Square	Adjusted R Square	
Emotional		0.670 ^b		0.449	0.451	
EModel		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.631	.000		3.434	.000
2	Emotional	1.514	.011	.013	1.397	.010
a. Dependent Variable: Pupils’ retention						

Regression analysis of child abuse and pupil’s retention in UPE schools in Mityana District.

Findings showed that pupil retention was 45.1% explained by the emotional abuse (Adjusted R Square =0.451, sig=0.010) and the remaining 54.9% was explained by other variables that were outside the study. Therefore, emotional abuse of pupils significantly contributes to pupils’ retention in UPE schools in Mityana District.

Discussion of Findings

The findings indicated that respondents generally agree with the statements related to emotional abuse of pupils in schools and its impact on school attendance and retention. Specifically, respondents agree that the use of harsh or demeaning language, insults, name-calling, mocking, or belittling a child in front of peers or teachers discourages pupils from coming to school. They also agree that humiliation or public shaming of pupils during school assembly, ignoring or neglecting emotional needs of pupils, intimidation or threats of poor academic performance and divulging personal information, and ridiculing or mocking personal characteristics of learners have long-lasting

emotional impacts that can result in school dropouts. Therefore, the findings suggest that emotional abuse of pupils in primary schools in Mityana District contributes to school dropouts.

The findings of this study revealed a negative and significant correlation ($r = -0.451$, $p = 0.011$) between emotional abuse and pupils' retention in UPE schools in Mityana District. This implies that as emotional abuse increases, the likelihood of pupils remaining in school decreases. The adjusted R square value (0.451) further indicates that emotional abuse accounts for 45.1% of the variation in pupils' retention, while the remaining 54.9% is influenced by other factors outside the study. These results demonstrate that emotional abuse is fairly common in Mityana District and significantly contributes to pupils dropping out of primary school.

This finding is consistent with global evidence showing that emotional abuse negatively affects children's academic persistence and performance. Slade and Wissow (2007) found that childhood maltreatment, including emotional abuse, significantly lowers adolescents' academic achievement and increases absenteeism. Pupils who experience emotional harm often struggle with concentration, develop low self-esteem, and have reduced motivation to continue schooling. This aligns with the current study's observation that emotional mistreatment in the school environment contributes to early school leaving among pupils in Mityana District.

Similarly, Khambati et al. (2018) established that children who experienced maltreatment in early childhood whether physical, emotional, or neglect displayed poorer educational and emotional outcomes in adolescence compared to their non-abused peers. The authors emphasized that emotional abuse has lasting effects on a child's psychological well-being, which undermines learning outcomes and school retention. These findings provide a strong theoretical basis for understanding the observed relationship between emotional abuse and pupils' retention in Mityana District.

In addition, Mohammed (2023), in a study conducted in public primary schools in Sudan, reported a strong association between child abuse and poor academic performance. Pupils who experienced any form of abuse, especially emotional abuse, were more likely to perform poorly, lose interest in learning, and eventually drop out. This supports the current findings, suggesting that emotional abuse contributes to declining retention rates in UPE schools by creating a hostile and discouraging learning environment.

The relationship observed in this study can be explained by the fact that emotional abuse—such as verbal insults, humiliation, rejection, and neglect interferes with pupils'

psychological and social adjustment. Affected pupils may develop anxiety, fear, and feelings of worthlessness, which reduce their ability to engage meaningfully in learning activities. Over time, this emotional distress translates into absenteeism and dropout. As Slade and Wissow (2007) noted, children exposed to maltreatment often face behavioral and emotional challenges that directly hinder their educational attainment.

Overall, the present findings reinforce the argument that emotional abuse significantly undermines pupils' retention and academic progress. The results from Mityana District mirror international evidence that emotionally safe and supportive school environments are crucial for improving school attendance and learning outcomes. Therefore, efforts to improve retention in UPE schools should include strategies to eliminate emotional abuse, such as training teachers on positive discipline, establishing child protection policies, and providing counseling services for affected pupils. By addressing emotional abuse, schools can foster a nurturing environment that promotes pupils' emotional well-being and enhances retention rates.

Conclusions

There was a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.451$, $p = 0.011$) between emotional abuse and pupils' retention in UPE schools in Mityana District; hence, emotional abuse is fairly common in Mityana District and forces pupils to leave primary schools. Generally, Child abuse in the form of emotional abuse has a negative impact on school enrolments in Mityana District.

Recommendations

Provide counseling and support services: Schools should establish counseling services within UPE schools to provide emotional support to affected students. Trained professionals should be available to listen, support, and guide students who have experienced abuse, helping them navigate their emotions and recover from trauma. Additionally, establish referral systems to connect students with external support services when necessary.

Areas for further Research

Research should delve deeper into the emotional abuse experienced by pupils in UPE schools. This study found that emotional abuse significantly contributes to pupil dropouts, but it did not explore the specific forms and contexts of emotional abuse. Further investigation could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the emotional abuse experienced by pupils and its impact on retention.

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I take this moment to thank God for the wisdom and provision in all spheres that have enabled me to successfully complete the course, a lifetime blessing. Thank you, God, for making my dreams come true

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List of acronyms

MDEDR Mityana District Education Department Report

NGO Non-Government Organisation

SAQ Self-Administered Questionnaire

SPSS Special Package for Social Scientists

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