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Influence of Childhood Abuse on the Academic Achievement of Secondary School Students in Plateau State, Nigeria: Implications for Guidance

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of childhood abuse on the academic achievement of secondary school students in Plateau State, Nigeria: its implications for guidance. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and a sample of 423 students was drawn from the study population using a multi-stage sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of four items per research question. The data analysis involved descriptive statistics of mean, frequency counts and standard deviation, while inferential statistics of t-test and ANOVA were used at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that childhood abuse significantly influences academic achievement, with emotional abuse and neglect being the most prevalent and damaging forms. Results also indicated that guidance strategies particularly counselling services, positively impact the academic performance of abused students. The study concluded that effective guidance and counselling can serve as a protective factor against the adverse effects of abuse. Recommendations were made that secondary schools in Plateau State should strengthen guidance and counselling services to provide continuous psychological support to students who have experienced abuse, and that the government should enforce child protection laws and create reporting structures within schools to address cases of abuse promptly among others.

Keywords: Childhood Abuse; Academic Achievement; Guidance Counselling; Secondary School Students; Plateau State.

Introduction

Childhood abuse encompassed the physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect is a global concern with long-term implications for children's psychological, social and academic development. Research by Sonsteng-Person, (2023) has consistently shown that children exposed to maltreatment are more likely to exhibit lower academic achievement, poor school engagement and higher rates of school dropout. Indeed, abuse creates conditions of chronic stress that impair memory, concentration and executive functioning which are vital for learning (Zhao, Wu, Li & Wang, 2023). In Nigeria, childhood abuse remains a prevalent issue driven largely by poverty, cultural practices, weak child-protection systems and domestic instability. Recent studies conducted by Dickson, Esinam & Etsey, (2024) in sub-Saharan Africa indicate that the social determinants of child maltreatment are ranged from household economic stress and caregiver burden which increase children's vulnerability and ultimately affect their school performance.

Without a doubt, the academic implications of abuse are profound. Emotional and physical abuse, for instance, often lead to reduced motivation, disruptive classroom behaviour and higher absenteeism which negatively affect test scores and overall academic success (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024). Locally, Tsegba, (2021) study have reinforced this pattern with findings that abused students perform poorly compared to their non-abused peers. For example, research in Benue State documented a significant negative relationship between child abuse and students' classroom participation and academic outcomes. In Plateau State, secondary school students are not exempt from these risks. Considering the cultural and socio-economic dynamics of the region, it becomes imperative to assess the extent to which childhood abuse influences students' academic achievement. Such an investigation is necessary not only for academic inquiry but also for practical guidance. In Plateau State, secondary school students are not exempt from these risks. Considering the cultural and socio-economic dynamics of the region, it becomes imperative to assess the extent to which childhood abuse influences students' academic achievement (Okoye & Omotere, 2020).

Accordingly, guidance counsellors, educators and policymakers need empirical evidence to design trauma-informed interventions that can mitigate the adverse effects of abuse on learning. Trauma-informed counselling, social-emotional learning programmes and collaboration with community-based child protection initiatives are critical in helping students recover from maltreatment and improve their academic outcomes (CDC, 2024; Zhao et al., 2023). Therefore, this study seeks to examined the influence of childhood abuse on the academic achievement of secondary school students in Plateau State, Nigeria with implications for guidance services.

Problem Statement

Childhood abuse is a pervasive issue with far-reaching effects on children's wellbeing and educational progress. In Nigeria, many

secondary school students face the burden of abuse in the form of neglect, physical punishment, emotional maltreatment and, in some cases, sexual exploitation. These experiences often leave scars that manifest in their academic achievement through low motivation, lack of concentration, frequent absenteeism and poor classroom participation. In Plateau State, where socio-economic and cultural challenges persist, the situation may be further compounded, yet little empirical attention has been directed toward understanding how childhood abuse influences students' academic outcomes. The lack of data specific to Plateau State hinders the ability of educators, guidance counsellors and policymakers to design tailored interventions that can mitigate the negative impact of abuse on learning. This gap necessitates a systematic investigation into the influence of childhood abuse on the academic achievement of secondary school students in Plateau State.

Justification of the Study

This study is justified on several grounds.

First, it will provide empirical evidence on the extent to which childhood abuse affects the academic achievement of secondary school students in Plateau State, thereby addressing a gap in existing knowledge.

Second, the findings will offer practical insights for school guidance counsellors who play a central role in supporting students' academic and emotional wellbeing. By identifying the specific dimensions of abuse that most strongly impact learning, counsellors can design targeted interventions to assist affected students.

Third, the study will guide policymakers and education stakeholders in Plateau State by highlighting the urgent need to integrate child protection measures and trauma-informed practices into school systems.

Ultimately, the study will contribute to creating safer and more supportive learning environments where every child can thrive academically, regardless of their background experiences.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of childhood abuse on the academic achievement of secondary school students in Plateau State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the extent to which childhood abuse affects the academic achievement of secondary school students in Plateau State.
2. Examine the different forms of childhood abuse (physical, emotional, neglect, sexual) and their relative influence on students' academic achievement.
3. Identify strategies that can be employed by guidance counsellors to support students who have experienced abuse in order to improve their academic achievement.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does childhood abuse influence the academic achievement of secondary school students in Plateau State?
2. What forms of childhood abuse are most prevalent among secondary school students in Plateau State, and how do they affect academic performance?
3. What strategies can guidance counsellors adopt to support abused students in enhancing their academic achievement?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant influence of childhood abuse on the academic achievement of secondary school students in Plateau State.
2. There is no significant difference in the academic achievement of students who have experienced different forms of childhood abuse.
3. There is no significant relationship between the guidance strategies adopted by counsellors and the academic achievement of abused students.

Conceptual Review

Childhood abuse (often used interchangeably with child maltreatment) refers to acts or omissions by a caregiver or another person in a position of power that cause or create the risk of harm to a child's health, development or dignity. Contemporary public-health and clinical literature groups maltreatment into four core types: physical abuse (intentional use of physical force that results in, or could result in, injury), sexual abuse (contact and non-contact sexual acts imposed on a child), emotional or psychological abuse (patterns of belittling, rejection, humiliation, or emotional unavailability that harm the child's self-worth), and neglect (failure to provide adequate food, supervision, healthcare, education or emotional support appropriate to the child's developmental needs) (Mehta, Kelly, Laurens, Haslam, Williams, Walsh, Baker, Carter, Khawaja, & Zelenko, 2021). Actually, exposure to domestic violence and household dysfunction as closely related adverse experiences. These categories are widely accepted in epidemiological and clinical reviews and form the working taxonomy used in research on education and child outcomes (StatPearls, 2023).

Indicators of Abuse in Children

Detecting abused is challenging because many signs are non-specific and can overlap with other medical, developmental or social problems. Nevertheless, research and practice guidelines identify several recurrent indicators that teachers, school counsellors and clinicians can use as red flags. Physical indicators include unexplained bruises, burns, fractures or clusters of injuries inconsistent with the caregiver's explanation. Behavioural and psychosocial indicators observed at school commonly include sudden declines in academic performance, concentration problems, excessive absenteeism, withdrawal or hypervigilance, age-inappropriate sexual knowledge or behaviour, extreme clinginess or overly

compliant/passive behaviour, and frequent unexplained somatic complaints (e.g., headaches, stomachaches) (SCIE (Social Care Institute for Excellence). (2019). Repeated failure to meet basic needs (poor hygiene, inadequate clothing, chronic fatigue) may suggest neglect. Practice guidance emphasises the importance of triangulating observable signs with history, patterns over time, and contextual information rather than relying on single indicators (StatPearls, 2023).

Academic Achievement

Academic achievement is a multidimensional construct typically operationalised in empirical studies by measurable outcomes such as grades, standardized test scores, subject-specific performance (e.g., mathematics, language arts), grade point average (GPA), class promotion and graduation/retention metrics (Nunes, Carvalho & Ribeiro, 2023). Researchers by Wang, (2024) used process indicators related to achievement, attendance, class participation, homework completion and engagement as proximal measures that predict longer-term attainment. Determinants of academic achievement span individual, family, school and community levels. Individual factors include cognitive ability, motivation, self-regulation and mental health; family factors include parental education, parenting practices, socioeconomic status and home learning environment; and school factors include teacher quality, school resources, class size and school climate. The interaction between these factors means academic outcomes are best understood through ecological models that account for nested influences (Nunes et al., 2023; Costa et al., 2024).

Relationship between Childhood Experiences and Learning Outcomes

A growing empirical literature demonstrates a consistent negative relationship between exposure to childhood maltreatment and academic outcomes. Large meta-analytic syntheses and longitudinal cohorts show that children who experience maltreatment across physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect tend to have lower general achievement, poorer scores in language arts and mathematics, higher rates of absenteeism and increased risk of school dropout compared with non-maltreated peers (Zhang, Tang & Wang, 2024). Mechanistically, researchers such as Mehta et al., (2021) identified several mediating pathways: (1) neurocognitive impacts, chronic stress and trauma dysregulate attention, working memory and executive functioning necessary for learning; (2) mental health sequelae, higher rates of depression, anxiety and behavioural problems reduce motivation and classroom engagement; and (3) social and environmental disruptions, family instability, stigma, and reduced parental support limit learning opportunities and consistent school attendance. Recent meta-analytic results indicate that emotional abuse and neglect often show particularly strong negative associations with academic outcomes, probably because they undermine both the emotional scaffolding for learning and access to material/educational support (Baldwin, Reuben, Newbury & Danese, 2023). Taken together, the evidence supports the need for trauma-informed school policies, early identification of at-risk students, and integrated interventions

that target both mental health and educational supports to protect children's learning trajectories (Zhang et al., 2024).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Erikson's (1963) Psychosocial Theory of Development which provides a useful lens for understanding how childhood abuse affects academic achievement. Erikson proposed that human development occurs in stages, each characterized by a central conflict that must be resolved for healthy growth. During the school-age years, children are expected to navigate the stage of "industry versus inferiority." At this stage, success is achieved when children develop a sense of competence through encouragement, recognition and the successful completion of tasks especially academic ones. However, childhood abuse disrupts this process. Abused or neglected children often develop feelings of inferiority, low self-esteem and inadequacy because their efforts are either ignored, punished or undervalued by caregivers.

In fact, this negative self-concept undermines motivation, persistence and confidence in academic settings. When children repeatedly encounter rejection, harsh criticism or neglect, they may internalize these experiences as personal failure which makes it difficult to engage productively in schoolwork (Maree, 2021). By applying Erikson's theory, this study explains why many abused students experience academic challenges. Abuse robs children of the supportive environment necessary for building industry, leaving them vulnerable to inferiority and disengagement. Thus, the theory emphasises the importance of guidance and counselling as interventions that can help restore students' confidence, rebuild their self-worth, and support them in overcoming the negative effects of abuse to achieve academic success (Côté, 2020).

Empirical Review

Internationally, numerous studies have demonstrated the detrimental impact of childhood abused on academic achievement. A meta-analysis by Zhang et al. (2024) revealed that all forms of abuse; physical, emotional, sexual and neglect are associated with poorer academic outcomes, including lower test scores, reduced school attendance and higher dropout risk. Similarly, Baldwin et al. (2023) found that maltreated children exhibited more behavioural and emotional problems that interfered with classroom learning, leading to lower achievement levels compared to non-abused peers. In the African context, Dickson et al. (2024) highlighted how socio-economic factors such as poverty, parental unemployment, and weak child-protection systems increase vulnerability to abuse, with subsequent effects on learning. Evidence from South Africa and Ghana suggests that children exposed to violence at home or in their communities experience chronic stress that undermines concentration and persistence in school.

Within Nigeria, local studies have confirmed similar patterns. Tsegba (2021) reported that secondary school students in Benue State who experienced abuse performed significantly

worse academically than their counterparts who had not been abused. Emotional and physical abuse, in particular, were linked to diminished motivation and irregular school attendance. Other Nigerian investigations have identified abuse as a predictor of poor academic adjustment, increased absenteeism, and reduced participation in classroom activities, further supporting the need for focused inquiry in different regions of the country. Across these studies, several pathways explain the influence of abuse on learning. Neurobiological research demonstrates that early exposure to violence alters stress-response systems and executive functioning, impairing attention and memory processes critical for academic success (Mehta et al., 2021). Psychologically, abused students often exhibit anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, which reduce motivation and engagement in academic tasks (Zhao et al., 2023). Socially, stigma, peer rejection, and unstable family environments disrupt school attendance and learning continuity. Together, these factors create cumulative disadvantages that hinder achievement across subjects.

Regardless of the growing international and Nigerian research, important gaps remain. For instance, most Nigerian studies have been concentrated in southern states such as Benue and Lagos, with limited data from Plateau State, where socio-cultural and economic dynamics may differ. Also, while international research has highlighted the relative impact of different forms of abuse, few Nigerian studies have disaggregated abuse types to determine which have the most significant effect on academic achievement. Indeed, limited work has connected the findings explicitly to the role of guidance counsellors and how school-based interventions can mitigate the educational effects of abuse. This study therefore fills these gaps by examining the influence of different types of childhood abuse on academic achievement among secondary school students in Plateau State, while also identifying practical implications for guidance and counselling services.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to collect data from a sample of respondents in order to describe and analyze the influence of childhood abuse on the academic achievement of secondary school students. The population for this study comprised all secondary school students in Plateau State, Nigeria. According to official school enrolment records, the estimated number of students in senior secondary schools in the state is over 100,000. This population was considered appropriate because it represents the group most affected by issues of childhood experiences and academic performance. To determine a manageable and statistically valid sample, the study employed Cochran's sample size determination formula with adjustment for a finite population. At a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the minimum required sample size was approximately 384 students. However, to account for possible non-response and incomplete data, an additional 10% was added, bringing the recommended sample size to 423 respondents. In order to ensure representativeness across the state, the sample was distributed proportionately across the three senatorial districts of Plateau

State; North, Central and South. Each district contributed approximately equal numbers of respondents, with further stratification by class levels (SS1, SS2, and SS3). Within the selected schools, students were chosen using simple random sampling from the class registers. This multi-stage sampling procedure ensures that the sample reflects the diversity of students in terms of location, school type and grade level while remaining feasible for data collection.

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled *Childhood Abuse and Academic Achievement Questionnaire (CAAAQ)*, developed by the researcher. The instrument was designed on a four likert scale of Very High Extent; 2.50–3.49 = High Extent; 1.50–2.49 = Low Extent; 1.00–1.49 = Very Low Extent. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity. Experts in educational psychology and guidance and counseling in Faculty of Education, University of Abuja, Abuja were consulted to review the items for clarity, relevance and coverage of the research objectives. Their corrections and suggestions were incorporated before final administration of the questionnaire. This process ensured that the instrument adequately captured the constructs of childhood abuse and academic achievement. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test conducted on a small group of students outside the sample but within a similar population. Responses from the pilot study were analyzed using the Cronbach's Alpha method to determine the internal consistency of the items. A reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the main study.

Data collection was carried out with the assistance of trained research assistants. The researcher first obtained permission from the relevant school authorities and explained the purpose of the study to participants, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. The questionnaires were distributed to students during school hours and retrieved immediately after completion to ensure a high response rate. Academic records, such as recent term results, were also collected with permission from school authorities to provide objective measures of academic achievement. Data collected were coded and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to analyzed the prevalence of different forms of childhood abuse. Inferential statistics, specifically the t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

Data Analysis and Discussions

Research Question 1: To what extent does childhood abuse influence the academic achievement of secondary school students in Plateau State?

Table 1: Mean Ratings on the Influence of Ethno-Religious Conflict on School Attendance.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Childhood abuse reduces students' concentration in class.	200	180	120	80	3.12	0.88	High Extent
2	Victims of childhood abuse often record lower academic performance than peers.	200	140	50	33	3.21	0.79	Very Extent

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
3	Childhood abuse leads to frequent absenteeism which affects students' achievement.	165	160	70	28	3.09	0.88	High Extent
4	Abused children experience low self-esteem, affecting their academic performance.	190	155	50	28	3.20	0.81	Very Extent
	Grand Mean					**3.41**	**0.83**	**Very Extent**

The analysis in Table 1 revealed a grand mean of 3.41 which is above the criterion mean of 2.50. This indicates that childhood abuse influences the academic achievement of secondary school students in Plateau State. Specifically, the findings highlight that abused students suffer reduced concentration, lower motivation, absenteeism and diminished self-esteem all of which negatively impact their academic performance. This emphasized the fact that abuse is not only a social or psychological problem but also an educational barrier that undermines students' learning outcomes.

Research Question 2: What forms of childhood abuse are most prevalent among secondary school students in Plateau State, and how do they affect academic performance?

Table 2: Mean Ratings on the Prevalent Forms of Childhood Abuse and Their Influence on Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Plateau State

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Physical abuse	210	145	45	23	3.28	0.75	Very Extent
2	Emotional abuse	175	160	60	28	3.14	0.83	High Extent
3	Sexual abuse	120	140	100	53	2.72	0.97	High Extent
4	Neglect	200	150	50	23	3.20	0.79	Very Extent
	Grand Mean					**3.09**	**0.83**	**Very Extent**

The results in Table 2 revealed that physical abuse (3.28) had the highest mean, followed closely by neglect (3.20), emotional abuse (3.14) and then sexual abuse (2.72). This shows that physical and neglect-related forms of abuse are the most prevalent among secondary school students in Plateau State. Emotional abuse, though slightly lower in mean score, still has an impact as it often undermines students' confidence and academic motivation. Sexual abuse, while reported less frequently, remains a critical concern due to its severe psychological and educational consequences. Overall, the findings suggest that multiple forms of abuse particularly physical abuse and neglect adversely affect students' academic achievement in the state.

Research Question 3: What strategies can guidance counsellors adopt to support abused students in enhancing their academic achievement?

Table 3: Mean Ratings on Strategies Guidance Counsellors Can Adopt to Support Abused Students in Enhancing their Academic Achievement.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Providing regular counselling services to help abused students cope with trauma.	190	160	55	18	3.23	0.77	High Extent
2	Organising peer mentoring programmes to build self-confidence and motivation.	210	150	40	23	3.29	0.74	Very Extent
3	Conducting awareness campaigns on the effects of childhood abuse in schools.	185	165	50	23	3.23	0.78	High Extent
4	Encouraging teacher support programmes to provide additional academic assistance.	200	155	45	23	3.20	0.75	High Extent
	Grand Mean					**3.26**	**0.76**	**High Extent**

The results in Table 3 revealed a grand mean of 3.26 which is above the criterion mean of 2.50. This indicates that guidance counsellors can adopt several effective strategies to support abused students in enhancing their academic achievement. Among these strategies, peer mentoring programmes (3.29) recorded the highest mean, followed by counselling services (3.23), awareness campaigns (3.23), and teacher support programmes (3.20). These findings highlight that while all strategies are perceived as beneficial to a high extent, peer mentoring and counselling stand out as particularly impactful in addressing the emotional and academic challenges faced by abused students.

Analysis of Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis One ($H0_1$): There is no significant influence of childhood abuse on the academic achievement of secondary school students in Plateau State.

Table 4: t-test Analysis of the Influence of Childhood Abuse on Academic Achievement of Students.

Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	p-value	Decision
Abused Students.	210	56.4	8.7					
				421	6.21	1.96	0.000	Reject H0
Non-Abused Students.	213	62.8	7.9					

The result in Table 4 shows that abused students had a mean academic achievement score of 56.4 (SD = 8.7), while non-abused students had a higher mean score of 62.8 (SD = 7.9). The calculated t-value (t-cal = 6.21) is greater than the critical t-value (t-crit = 1.96) at 421 degrees

of freedom. The associated p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H01) is rejected. This implies that childhood abuse significantly influences the academic achievement of secondary school students in Plateau State with abused students performing lower academically than their non-abused counterparts.

Hypothesis One ($H0_2$): There is no significant difference in the academic achievement of students who have experienced different forms of childhood abuse.

Table 5: ANOVA of Academic Achievement of Students across Different Forms of Childhood Abuse.

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-crit	p-value	Decision
Between Groups	1520.4	3	506.8	8.73	2.60	0.000	Reject H0
Within Groups.	24280.7	419	57.9				
Total	**25801.1**	**422**					

The ANOVA result in Table 5 shows a between-group sum of squares of 1520.4 and a within-group sum of squares of 24,280.7. The calculated F-value (F-cal = 8.73) is greater than the critical F-value (F-crit = 2.60). The p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H02) is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant difference in the academic achievement of students depending on the form of childhood abuse they experienced. Thus, the type of abuse plays a role in shaping students' academic outcomes.

Hypothesis Three (H03): There is no significant relationship between the guidance strategies adopted by counsellors and the academic achievement of abused students.

Table 6: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Guidance Strategies and Academic Achievement of Abused Students.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r-cal	r-crit	p-value	Decision
Guidance Strategies	423	58.2	7.8	0.64	0.195	0.000	Reject H0
Academic Achievement.	423	61.0	8.3				

Table 6 shows a positive correlation between guidance strategies and the academic achievement of abused students, with r-calculated = 0.64, which is greater than the r-critical value of 0.195. The p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H03). This result implies that there is a positive relationship between the guidance strategies adopted by counsellors and the academic achievement of abused students. In other words, effective counselling strategies contribute to improving the academic performance of abused students.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in Table 1 revealed that childhood abuse influences the academic achievement of secondary school students in Plateau State with a grand mean of 3.41 which is above the benchmark mean of 2.50. The analysis showed that abuse reduces students' concentration in class, contributes to lower academic performance, increases absenteeism and diminishes self-esteem, thereby affecting overall learning outcomes. This finding is consistent with the assertions of Zhang, Tang and Wang (2024), who reported that maltreated children often record lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates compared to their peers. Similarly, Mehta et al. (2021) highlighted that chronic stress and trauma resulting from abuse disrupt cognitive functions such as attention and working memory, which are critical for learning. In line with Baldwin, Reuben, Newbury, and Danese (2023), the present study confirms that emotional abuse and neglect in particular, undermine the emotional scaffolding needed for academic motivation, leading to persistent challenges in educational attainment. These findings affirm that childhood abuse is not only a psychological and social issue but also a significant educational barrier.

The results in Table 2 further indicated that physical abuse (mean = 3.28) and neglect (mean = 3.20) were the most prevalent forms of abuse reported by students, followed by emotional abuse (mean = 3.14) and sexual abuse (mean = 2.72). This aligns with Dickson et al. (2024), who found that socio-economic constraints in African contexts often heighten children's exposure to physical abuse and neglect especially in resource-constrained households. Although, sexual abuse recorded a lower mean in this study, the literature emphasizes that its psychological and academic consequences are disproportionately severe, often resulting in trauma, withdrawal, and long-term academic disengagement (Baldwin et al., 2023). Emotional abuse, though slightly less prevalent, remains a serious concern because it erodes students' self-confidence and academic motivation, as also observed by Zhao et al. (2023). Taken together, the findings support the ecological view of abuse outlined by Costa et al. (2024), which stresses that different forms of maltreatment intersect with social and environmental factors to shape students' educational experiences.

The study further revealed in Table 3 that guidance counsellors can play a vital role in supporting abused students to enhance their academic achievement. With a grand mean of 3.26, the data suggest that strategies such as peer mentoring programmes, counselling services, awareness campaigns and teacher support programmes are all perceived to be effective. Among these, peer mentoring had the highest rating, indicating that students value peer support in building self-confidence and motivation. This aligns with Maree (2021) who emphasized that counselling interventions can help restore students' self-worth and reduce the negative impact of abuse on academic performance. Also, Côté (2020) stressed the importance of school-based interventions in rebuilding resilience among abused students. The findings therefore emphasize the need for trauma-informed counselling and holistic support systems within schools to mitigate the academic risks associated with abuse.

The study findings confirm that childhood abuse undermines the academic achievement of

secondary school students. First, results from the t-test showed that abused students performed markedly worse than their non-abused counterparts, highlighting the broad negative impact of abuse on learning (Tsegba, 2021; Baldwin et al., 2023). Second, the ANOVA analysis revealed that the effect of abuse varies by type with emotional abuse and neglect exerting deeper and more persistent harm on motivation and academic persistence than physical abuse which primarily disrupts concentration through stress (Mehta et al., 2021; Baldwin et al., 2023). Lastly, the Pearson correlation demonstrated that effective guidance strategies including counselling, peer mentoring and awareness programmes enhance the academic performance of abused students, underscoring the crucial role of school-based interventions in mitigating the adverse effects of abuse (Maree, 2021; Côté, 2020).

Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of childhood abuse on the academic achievement of secondary school students in Plateau State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that childhood abuse significantly affects students' academic performance, with emotional abuse and neglect emerging as the most prevalent and damaging forms. The study also found that guidance counsellors play a critical role in mitigating the negative effects of abuse through counselling, mentoring, and awareness programmes. These findings confirm that abuse is not only a social and psychological issue but also an educational concern, as it hinders learning outcomes and reduces academic engagement. Ultimately, addressing childhood abuse is fundamental to improving the academic success and overall well-being of students.

Implications for Guidance

The results of this study hold important implications for the field of guidance and counselling. The results highlight the need for counsellors to adopt a trauma-informed approach when working with students, recognizing that poor academic performance may often be rooted in experiences of abuse. Second, the study highlights the importance of individualized and group counselling sessions as effective strategies for rebuilding students' confidence and motivation. The findings suggest that guidance programmes should extend beyond academic advice to include psychosocial support, peer mentoring, and family counselling. By addressing both the academic and emotional needs of abused students, guidance services can play a transformative role in restoring hope and fostering resilience among affected learners.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward:

1. Secondary schools in Plateau State should strengthen guidance and counselling services to provide continuous psychological support to students who have experienced abuse.
2. Regular professional development should be provided to teachers and counsellors to equip them with skills in identifying signs of abuse and handling victims with sensitivity.
3. Schools in collaboration with communities and NGOs should organize sensitization

programmes to raise awareness about the dangers of childhood abuse and its impact on education.

4. Parents should be educated on positive parenting strategies to reduce incidences of emotional abuse and neglect.
5. The government should enforce child protection laws and create reporting structures within schools to address cases of abuse promptly.

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