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FACULTY OF ALLIED HEALTH SCIENCE

DEPARTMENT OF NURSING

DIPLOMA PROGRAMMES



**EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF CHILD ABUSE ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
ON STUDENTS: A STUDY AT FREEMAN METHODIST JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL,
BEREKUM**

SUBMITTED BY:

LAWRENCE ASANTE - 8774124

EVELYN ASARE - 8779024

**[HOLY FAMILY NURSING AND MIDWIFERY TRAINING COLLEGE,
BEREKUM]**

AFFILIATED TO KNUST, KUMASI

HOLY FAMILY NURSING AND MIDWIFERY TRAINING COLLEGE, BERKUM



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LAWRENCE ASANTE - 8774124

EVELYN ASARE - 8779024

2025

DECLARATION

We hereby declare that this submission is our own work towards the Diploma in Registered Midwifery and that, to the best of our knowledge, it contains no material previously published by another person nor material which has been accepted for the award of diploma of the University, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

LAWRENCE ASANTE



24-07-2025

8774124

SIGNATURE

DATE

EVELYN ASARE



24-07-2025

8779024

SIGNATURE

DATE

CERTIFIED BY:

EMMANUEL ALI



24/07/2025

(SUPERVISOR)

SIGNATURE

DATE

MONICA NKRUMAH

.....

.....

(PRINCIPAL)

SIGNATURE

DATE

ABSTRACT

This study explored the impact of child abuse on academic performance among students at Freeman Methodist Junior High School in Berekum. Using a mixed-methods cross-sectional design, the study gathered quantitative data from 150 students aged 10–18 years through structured questionnaires. The objectives were to identify the forms of abuse students experience, examine the coping mechanisms they adopt, and analyze how these experiences affect their academic engagement and performance.

Findings revealed that physical abuse (58.1%), verbal abuse (78.4%), and sexual abuse (45.1%) were the most prevalent, with parents or guardians identified as the primary perpetrators in over half of the cases. Most students employed passive coping mechanisms such as crying, staying silent, or speaking to no one, which reflect emotional distress and limited support systems. Academically, abuse was found to hinder students' school attendance, concentration, participation in class, and overall confidence in their academic abilities. For instance, 67.3% of students reported difficulty concentrating, and 76.5% described themselves as silent in class.

The study concludes that child abuse significantly undermines students' emotional well-being and academic performance. It recommends strengthening school counseling services, implementing child protection policies, promoting positive parenting, and deploying social workers to provide continuous support. These measures are crucial in ensuring a safe, supportive learning environment for children.

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ABBREVIATION

JHS	Junior High School
CSA	Child Sexual Abuse
MoE	Ministry of Education
GES	Ghana Education Service
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the study

Child abuse, encompassing physical, emotional, sexual abuse, and neglect, is a pervasive global issue with profound implications for children's development. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines child maltreatment as "all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, or commercial or other exploitation" that results in actual or potential harm to a child's health, development, or dignity . Globally, it is estimated that up to 1 billion children aged 2–17 years have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect in the past year (World Health Organization, (WHO) 2024).

The impact of child abuse extends beyond immediate physical injuries, affecting various aspects of a child's life, including their academic performance. Research indicates that children who have experienced maltreatment often exhibit lower academic achievement, increased absenteeism, and higher dropout rates compared to their non-abused peers . These academic challenges are attributed to the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consequences of abuse (Zhang et al., 2025).

Neurological studies have shown that chronic abuse or neglect can lead to alterations in brain development, particularly in areas responsible for learning and memory. For instance, maltreated children often display reduced cerebral volume and impaired development of the corpus callosum, which can hinder cognitive functions essential for academic success . Furthermore, the stress associated with abuse can result in elevated cortisol levels, adversely affecting the hippocampus and leading to difficulties in concentration and memory retention (Neupane et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2025).

Behaviorally, abused children may exhibit increased aggression, withdrawal, or anxiety, which can disrupt classroom dynamics and impede learning. Emotionally, they may struggle with low self-esteem and trust issues, making it challenging to form positive relationships with teachers and peers . These factors collectively contribute to a hostile learning environment, further diminishing academic performance (Neavel, 2024) .

Several studies have empirically established the link between child maltreatment and poor academic outcomes. A meta-analysis by Romano et al. (2015) found that children with a history of maltreatment had significantly lower educational attainment compared to their non-abused counterparts . Similarly, a study by Slade and Wissow (2007) reported that adolescents who experienced more intense forms of maltreatment were more likely to have lower grade point averages and difficulties completing homework assignments (Zhang et al., 2025).

In the context of developing countries, the situation is exacerbated by limited resources and inadequate support systems. For example, a study conducted in Lusaka District, Zambia, revealed that child abuse significantly impacted learners' academic performance, with abused children showing lower grades and higher absenteeism rates . These findings underscore the urgent need for interventions tailored to the unique challenges faced by children in such settings .

Addressing the academic repercussions of child abuse requires a multifaceted approach. Schools must implement trauma-informed practices, providing safe and supportive environments for affected students. Educators should receive training to recognize signs of abuse and respond appropriately. Additionally, collaboration between educational institutions, child protection agencies, and mental health services is crucial to ensure comprehensive support for abused children.

In summary, child abuse has a detrimental effect on students' academic performance, mediated through cognitive impairments, emotional disturbances, and behavioral issues. Understanding this relationship is vital for developing effective interventions aimed at mitigating the educational disadvantages faced by abused children.

1.1 Problem statement

Child abuse, encompassing physical, emotional, sexual abuse, and neglect, remains a pervasive issue globally, with profound implications for children's well-being and development. In Ghana, despite legislative measures and child protection policies, instances of child abuse persist, often going unreported due to cultural norms and societal stigmas. This silent crisis adversely affects various aspects of a child's life, notably their academic performance (Assinor, 2023).

Empirical studies have established a strong correlation between child maltreatment and diminished academic outcomes. Children subjected to abuse often exhibit cognitive impairments, reduced concentration, and behavioral issues, all of which hinder academic achievement. For instance, a study conducted in Ghana revealed that psychological abuse was the most prevalent form, affecting 69.4% of junior high school students, followed by physical abuse at 46.9%, and sexual abuse at 36.7%. The analysis showed that as psychological and physical abuse increased, academic performance tended to decrease (Assinor, 2023).

Furthermore, the psychological ramifications of abuse, such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, can disrupt a student's ability to engage effectively in the learning process. These mental health challenges often lead to increased absenteeism, disengagement from school activities, and higher dropout rates. Research indicates that coping strategies and social support mediate the relationship between childhood maltreatment and mental health problems, suggesting that positive coping mechanisms can mitigate some adverse effects (Qu et al., 2024).

Empirical studies have established a strong correlation between child maltreatment and diminished academic outcomes. Children subjected to abuse—be it physical, emotional, sexual, or neglect—often exhibit cognitive impairments, reduced concentration, and behavioral issues, all of which hinder academic achievement (Assinor, 2023; Su et al., 2022). Despite the growing body of international literature on this subject, there is a paucity of localized studies in Ghana that delve into the specific dynamics of child abuse and its impact on academic performance within the Ghanaian context. This gap in knowledge underscores the need for context-specific research to inform targeted interventions and policies. Therefore, this study aims to explore the various forms of child abuse experienced by students at Freeman Methodist Junior High School in Berekum, examine the coping mechanisms they employ, and assess how these experiences influence their academic performance. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and child protection agencies to develop effective strategies to support affected students and enhance their educational outcomes.

1.2 General objective

To explore the impact of child abuse on academic performance on students. A study at Freeman Methodist Junior High school, Berekum.

1.3 Specific objective

1. To identify the forms of child abuse experienced by students.
2. To find out coping mechanisms used by students who experience abuse
3. To examine the relationship between child abuse and students' academic performance.

1.4 Operational definition of terms

Academic Performance: *Academic performance* is defined as the measurable outcomes of a student's school work, including test scores, grades, class participation, assignments, and overall academic achievement as recorded by the school.

Child Abuse: For the purpose of this study, *child abuse* refers to any act of physical, emotional, sexual harm, or neglect inflicted upon a student by parents, guardians, teachers, or peers, which negatively affects their wellbeing and learning capacity.

Coping Mechanisms: These are strategies (emotional, behavioral, or psychological) employed by students to manage stress, trauma, or difficulties resulting from experiences of abuse.

Emotional Abuse: *Emotional abuse* involves actions or language that harm a student's self-esteem, including verbal insults, humiliation, threats, and persistent criticism.

Neglect: *Neglect* in this context refers to the failure of caregivers or responsible adults to provide necessary support such as food, shelter, emotional care, supervision, or education, which affects the student's school engagement and achievement.

Physical Abuse: *Physical abuse* refers to any non-accidental physical harm or injury inflicted on a student (e.g., beating, slapping, burning), whether by caregivers, teachers, or others in authority.

Sexual Abuse: *Sexual abuse* refers to any unwanted or inappropriate sexual contact or behavior with a student, including touching, exploitation, or exposure to sexual materials.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Child abuse remains a pervasive global issue with far-reaching consequences on children's physical, emotional, and cognitive development. Defined by the WHO (2022) as any form of maltreatment that harms a child's well-being, child abuse manifests in physical, emotional, sexual, and neglectful forms. In Ghana, studies indicate that approximately 23% of children experience some form of abuse, with significant implications for their educational outcomes (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), 2021).

A study in Nigeria found that abused students scored 15% lower in standardized tests compared to their non-abused peers (Alokan & Bisi-Olawumi, 2019). However, limited research has explored this phenomenon in Ghana's junior high school context, particularly in Berekum, where socioeconomic and cultural factors may shape abuse patterns and coping strategies.

1 Forms of Child Abuse Experienced by Students

In Egypt, a descriptive survey assessed the awareness of different forms of child abuse among 1,688 university students from health science and non-health science colleges. The study found that approximately two-thirds of the students had experienced physical child abuse, with males and first-year students being more exposed. Additionally, the study revealed a significant lack of awareness about the complications of female genital mutilation (FGM) among students. The authors recommended awareness campaigns against child abuse and FGM targeting children, parents, and university students (Welson & Mohamed, 2019).

A cross-sectional study in Enugu, Nigeria, investigated the prevalence and predictors of child sexual abuse (CSA) among 325 senior secondary school students. The study reported a CSA prevalence of 35.7%, with the majority of victims being forced to watch pornography. Most perpetrators were neighbors, and the abuse predominantly occurred at home. The study identified students in Senior Secondary School Class 2 (SSS2) and those whose fathers were employed as significant predictors of CSA. The authors advocated for comprehensive sexuality education and legislative policies to educate adolescents and deter perpetrators (Chime et al., 2021).

A descriptive cross-sectional study in Mandan-Deupur Municipality, Kavrepalanchowk, Nepal, aimed to determine the prevalence of child sexual abuse among school children. The study surveyed 405 students under 18 years of age using a simple random sampling technique. Findings revealed that 15.8% of participants reported experiencing sexual abuse, with a higher prevalence among boys (73.43%). The study concluded that child sexual abuse is a significant issue in the area and emphasized the need for awareness programs targeting children, parents, and the community (Shrestha et al., 2021).

A mixed-method study conducted in Ghana during the COVID-19 lockdown surveyed 853 adolescent girls aged 13 to 19 years to examine the prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA).

The study reported a CSA prevalence of 32.5% during the lockdown period. Protective factors against CSA included feeling safe in the neighborhood and having parents who often listen to their opinions. Risk factors identified were physical activity, living with relatives other than parents, and certain ethnic backgrounds. The study highlighted the need for CSA prevention programs, especially during disruptive events like pandemics (Owusu-Addo et al., 2023).

A cross-sectional study in Shahroud, Iran, assessed the prevalence of child abuse among 400 elementary school children. The study found that 63.8% of children reported emotional abuse, 27% reported physical abuse, and 90.3% reported neglect. Significant associations were observed between the mother's employment status and neglect, father's education and physical abuse, and father's smoking and emotional abuse. Lower family socioeconomic status was also significantly associated with higher rates of neglect and emotional abuse. The study underscored the influence of family factors on child abuse and the need for targeted interventions (Rafaiee et al., 2021).

A descriptive cross-sectional study in Osun State, Nigeria, explored the experiences of child abuse among secondary school students. Using multistage sampling, the study surveyed 50 students in Senior Secondary School Class Two (SS2). Results indicated that 76% of students reported being slapped on the face or head, 62% were hit by thrown objects, and 54% were hit with a closed fist. The study emphasized the need for adequate and efficient handling of child abuse cases to improve educational development (Adeyemi et al., 2020).

2. coping mechanisms used by students who experience abuse

Perry and Cuellar (2021) conducted a mixed-methods study involving 146 undergraduate and graduate students from a northeastern U.S. university to explore coping strategies used during childhood adversities. Participants responded to open-ended questions about tools they used to cope with traumatic events. Thematic analysis revealed two primary coping strategies:

emotion-focused coping (including emotional regulation, expression, and avoidance) and problem-focused coping (such as seeking therapy and personal connections). Approximately 49% of participants reported using emotional expression activities like arts, sports, and writing, while 7.5% relied solely on problem-focused methods. The study recommends integrating these coping strategies into institutional practices to support children during vulnerable times (Perry & Cuellar, 2021).

A quantitative study was conducted to investigate how coping styles and resilience mediate the effects of childhood maltreatment on mental health among college students. The study found that positive coping styles were associated with higher resilience and better mental health outcomes, while negative coping tendencies led to decreased resilience and increased mental health symptoms. The authors suggest that interventions focusing on enhancing positive coping strategies and resilience could mitigate the adverse mental health effects of childhood maltreatment (Cao et al., 2022).

A mixed-methods study by Asante et al. (2021) explored mental health difficulties and coping mechanisms among 405 senior high school students in the Techiman Municipality of Ghana. Quantitative data were collected through surveys, while qualitative insights were obtained from interviews with 35 students and 18 teachers. Findings indicated that students employed various coping strategies, including seeking social support, engaging in religious activities, and participating in extracurricular activities. The study recommends implementing school-based mental health programs and strengthening support systems to address adolescents' coping needs (Addy et al., 2021).

3. Relationship between child abuse and students' academic performance.

Mercer and Karim (2023) conducted a comprehensive review analyzing the effects of physical abuse and neglect on primary school students' academic achievement in Bangladesh. The study

synthesized data from multiple sources, highlighting that children subjected to physical abuse and neglect exhibited lower academic scores and higher dropout rates. The authors emphasized the necessity for interventions and support services to address these issues, recommending the implementation of counseling, mental health services, and educational resources to mitigate the adverse effects on students' academic performance (Mercer & Karim, 2023).

Tsegba et al. (2021) investigated the effect of child abuse on the academic performance of primary school pupils in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. Employing a descriptive survey design, the study sampled 946 respondents from ten public primary schools using a multi-stage sampling technique. Findings revealed that child abuse significantly affected pupils' class participation and assessment outcomes. The researchers recommended government-led enlightenment campaigns to educate parents and guardians on the detrimental consequences of child abuse on children's educational achievements.

Awopetu and Akomolafe (2020) explored the influence of child abuse on academic performance among secondary school students in Ondo State, Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive survey design, sampling 900 Junior Secondary School Class 3 students from 18 secondary schools across three senatorial districts using a multi-stage sampling technique. Data collected through a "Child Abuse Questionnaire" and students' scores in English and Mathematics were analyzed using regression analysis. Findings revealed a significant positive correlation between child abuse and students' academic performance, indicating that higher instances of abuse were associated with poorer academic outcomes. The authors recommended that teachers and school counselors assist parents in avoiding abusive behaviors to enhance students' academic performance.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlined the methods and procedures that were employed to conduct the study. It described the research design, study area, population, sampling methods, data collection instruments and procedures, data analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and the limitations of the study.

3.1 Study Area

Freeman Methodist Preparatory and Junior High School, located in Berekum, Ghana, was the selected study site. The school, established on September 25, 1990, by the Methodist Church of Ghana, was founded with the mission to provide quality education to the Berekum community, especially to members of the Methodist Church, while instilling Christian ethics and Methodist values in its students. The school was situated in Biadan, off the Holy Family Hospital road, and shared boundaries with the Methodist Church and Holy Family Nursing and Midwifery Training College, Berekum. The major inhabitants of the area were Akans,

with other ethnic groups forming the minority population. The Junior High School had a total student population of 250.

3.2 Study Population

The target population comprised students aged 10–18 years enrolled in the selected school, as well as school counselors and teachers who were included for triangulation purposes in the qualitative phase.

3.3 Study Design

A cross-sectional mixed-methods design was adopted, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. By integrating numerical data (quantitative) and detailed personal insights (qualitative), the researcher gained a holistic understanding of the issue. The quantitative component assessed the prevalence and forms of child abuse and measured academic performance outcomes, while the qualitative component provided contextual insights into students' experiences of abuse and its impact on their schooling. Freeman Methodist JHS, located behind Freeman Methodist A, B, and C schools and adjacent to the Holy Family Hospital and Nursing and Midwifery Training College, was strategically situated to serve the educational needs of the Berekum community.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

A sample size of 51 students was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different age groups, grade levels, and gender.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Students aged 10–18 years.
- Enrolled in the selected school.

- Willing to provide assent/consent.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Students with diagnosed cognitive disabilities affecting comprehension.
- Refusal to participate or lack of parental/guardian consent (for minors).

3.5 Data Collection Tools

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The student survey included:

- A demographic section.
- Validated child abuse screening items (e.g., adapted from the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire – CTQ).
- Academic performance indicators (e.g., average grade score, class rank, attendance).

3.6 Data Analysis Technique

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26. SPSS provided an intuitive, menu-driven interface suitable for both novice and experienced researchers, enabling efficient data entry, manipulation, and analysis without requiring advanced coding knowledge. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and means were employed.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from Freeman Methodist JHS. An introductory letter was acquired from Holy Family Nursing and Midwifery Training College, Berekum. All participants were provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose and asked to sign informed consent forms. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any point without repercussions. Data were

anonymized during analysis and reporting. Counseling services were made available for any participant who became distressed due to the content of the study.

3.8 Limitations

The study faced potential recall bias in self-reported experiences of abuse and social desirability bias due to the sensitivity of the topic. The cross-sectional design limited causal inference between abuse and academic performance. Time constraints coincided with school studies, which affected data collection timelines. The absence of external sponsorship meant the research team bore the full cost of the study. Furthermore, conducting the study in a single school in Berekum limited the generalizability of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the analysis of data collected from the field of study and the results obtained from the analysis. The study findings are presented in tables or figures.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

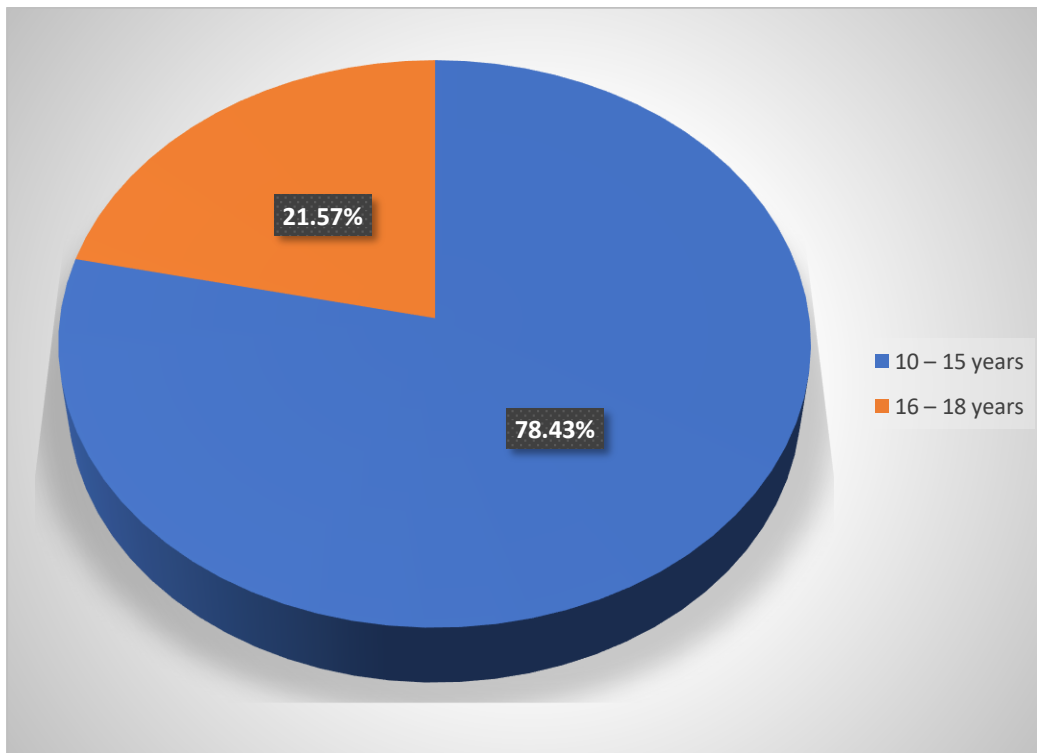


Figure 1: Age of respondents

A substantial majority of respondents, 40 representing (78.43%), were between the ages of 10 and 15 years, while 11 representing (21.57%) were between 16 and 18 years. This reflects the

expected age range for students in lower junior high school levels (JHS 1 and JHS 2) and highlights the importance of targeted interventions in areas such as child protection and early adolescence education.

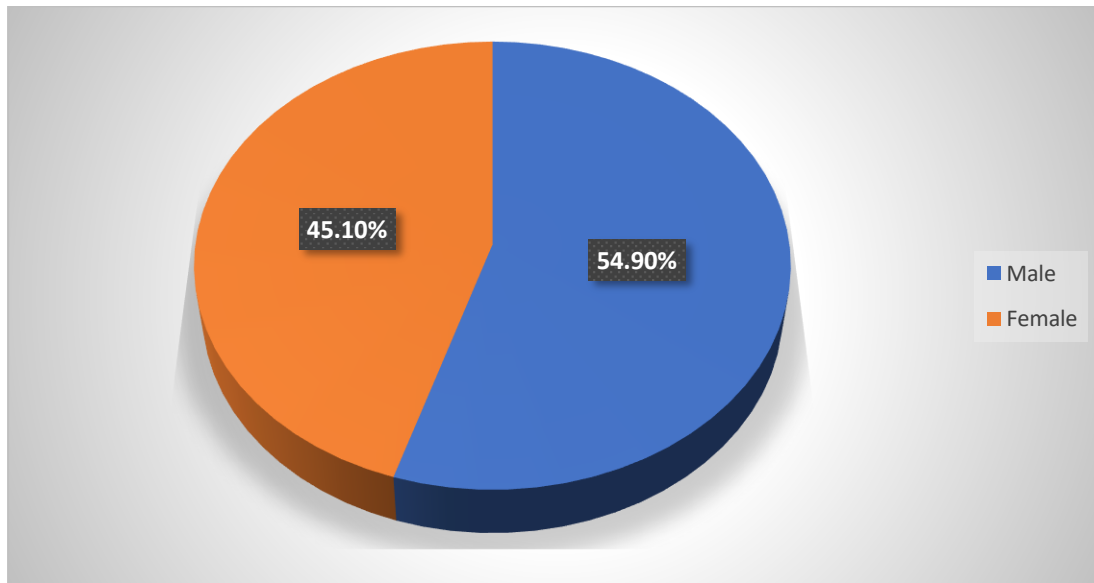


Figure 2: Gender distribution of respondents

A higher proportion of respondents, 28 representing (54.90%), were male compared to 23 representing (45.10%) who were female. This near gender balance allows for a fair comparison of male and female perspectives and experiences, particularly in relation to family dynamics and possible abuse.

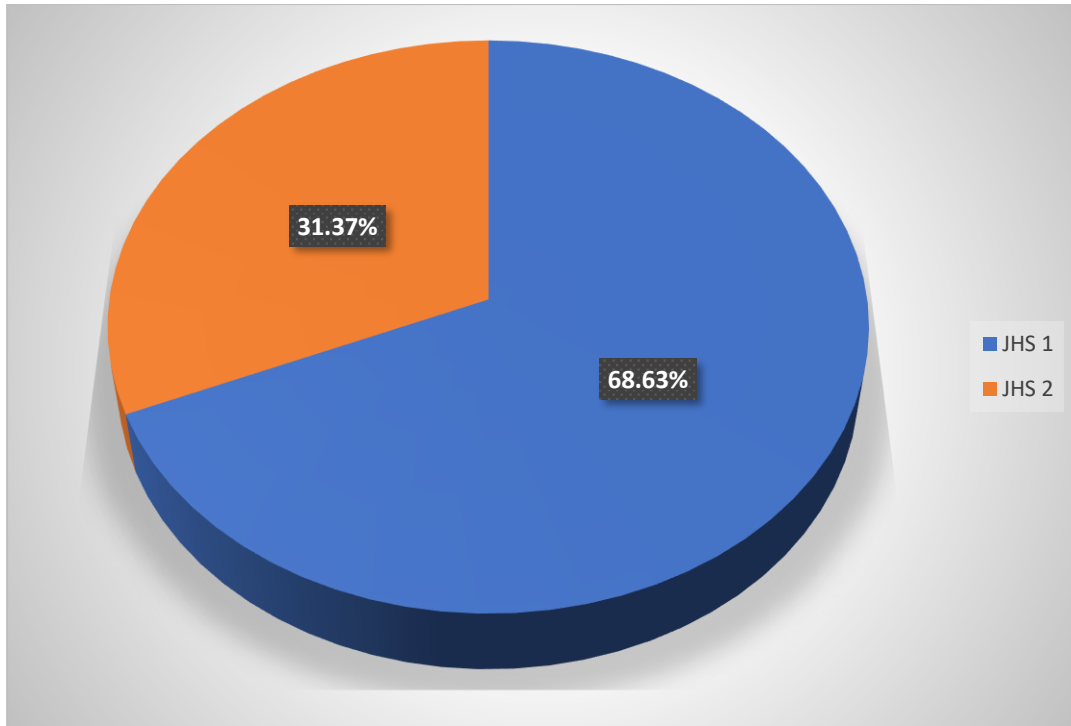


Figure 3: Class of respondents

The majority of the students, 35 representing (68.63%), were in JHS 1, whereas 16 representing (31.37%) were in JHS 2. This indicates that most respondents were in the early stages of junior high school, which may influence their level of emotional maturity, exposure to social experiences, and understanding of personal rights.

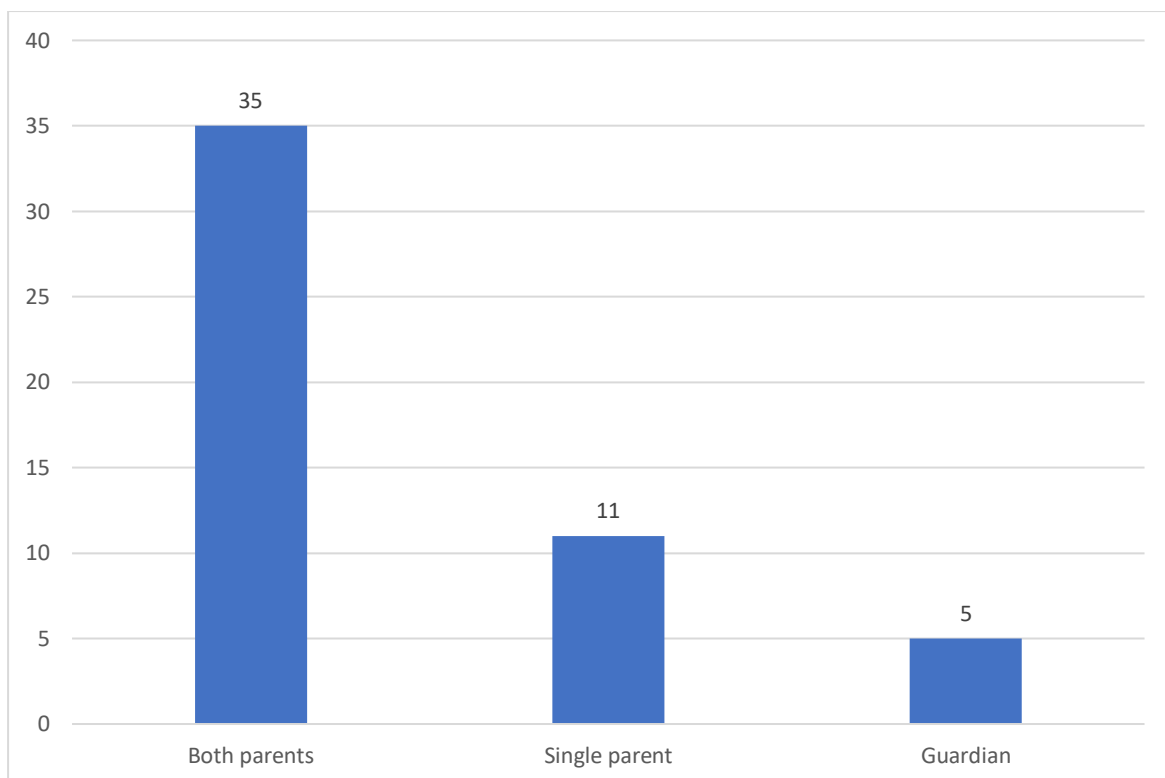


Figure 4: Who respondents live with

When asked about their living arrangements, 35 representing (68.63%) reported living with both parents, 11 representing (21.57%) lived with a single parent, and 5 representing (9.80%) lived with a guardian. The responses suggest that a significant number of children were not living in a traditional two-parent household, possibly due to family breakdowns, migration, or orphanhood—factors that could affect emotional support and protection.

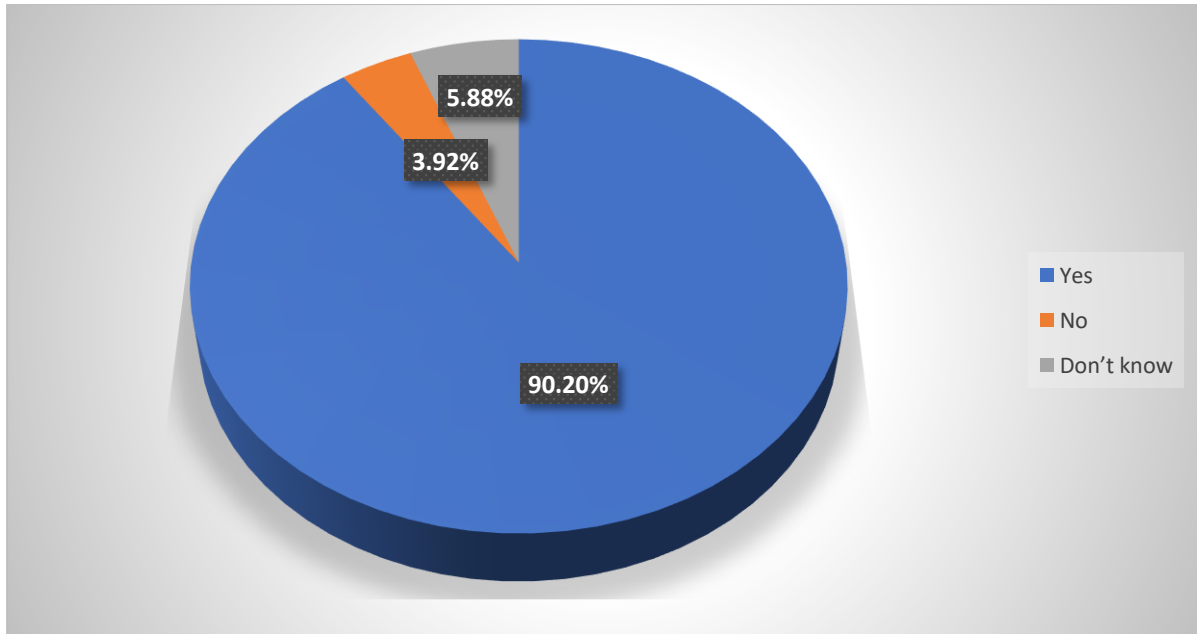


Figure 5: Employment status of respondents parent/guardian

Concerning the employment status of parents or guardians, 46 representing (90.20%) stated that their caregivers were employed, 2 representing (3.92%) indicated their parents or guardians were not working, and 3 representing (5.88%) did not know. The high employment rate may reflect a relatively stable economic background, although it does not necessarily guarantee quality care or supervision.

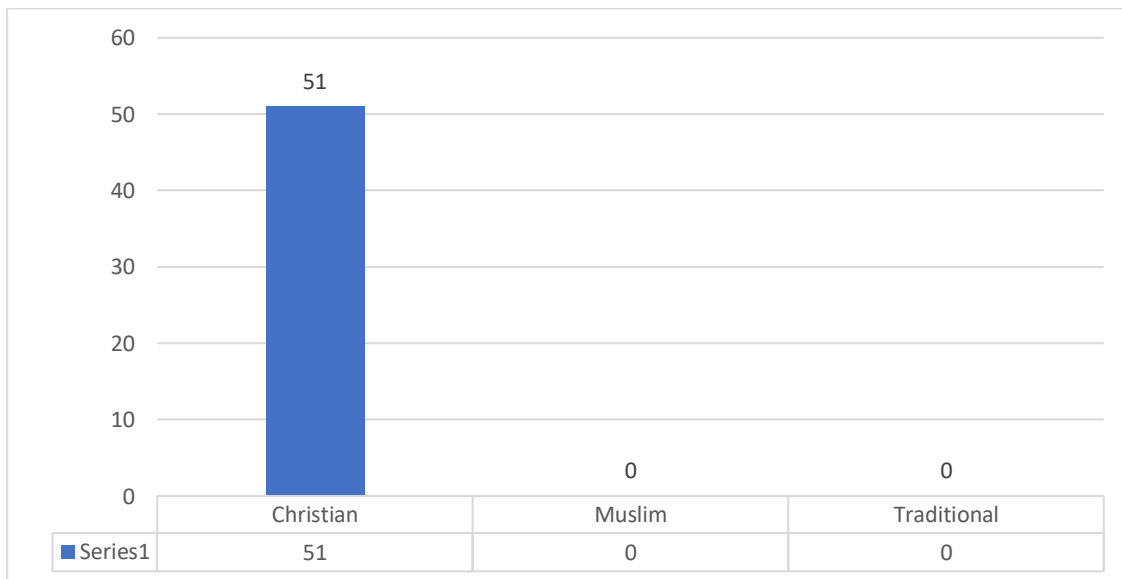


Figure 6: Religion of respondents

All the respondents, 51 representing (100%), identified as Christians. This religious homogeneity may mirror the dominant faith tradition in the study area and could influence the students' values, perceptions of discipline, and coping mechanisms within a religious context.

4.2 Forms of Child Abuse Experienced

Table 1: Forms of Child Abuse Experienced

Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Have you ever been hurt physically by a parent, teacher, or someone close to you? (N = 51)	Yes	31	60.8%
	No	20	39.2%
How were you hurt? (N = 31)	Beaten harshly	18	58.1%
	Burned	2	6.5%
	Locked outside	2	6.5%
	Denied food	6	19.4%
	Other	3	9.7%
Insulted/shouted at/threatened? (N = 51)	Yes	40	78.4%
	No	11	21.6%
Touched uncomfortably? (N = 51)	Yes	23	45.1%
	No	28	54.9%
Sexual comments or advances? (N = 51)	Yes	11	21.6%
	No	40	78.4%

Neglected (no care/support)? (N = 51)	Yes	9	17.6%
	No	42	82.4%
Who abused you mostly? (N = 27)	Parent/Guardian	15	55.6%
	Teacher	5	18.5%
	Older adult	3	11.1%
	Other	4	14.8%

A total of 31 respondents, representing (60.8%), indicated they had been physically hurt by a parent, teacher, or someone close to them, while 20 representing (39.2%) stated they had never experienced such harm. This suggests that a significant proportion of students have been exposed to physical abuse, highlighting a pressing concern within the home and school environments.

Among those physically hurt (n = 31), the most common form of abuse reported was being beaten harshly, with 18 respondents representing (58.1%) selecting this option. 6 representing (19.4%) said they were denied food, while 2 representing (6.5%) each reported being burned or locked outside. Additionally, 3 respondents representing (9.7%) selected “other” forms of abuse. These findings indicate that while physical punishment is prevalent, various other harmful practices are also occurring, some of which may be overlooked or normalized within families and schools.

A large majority, 40 representing (78.4%), indicated they had been insulted, shouted at, or threatened, whereas 11 representing (21.6%) had not experienced such verbal or emotional abuse. This highlights the widespread nature of emotional mistreatment, which can have

long-term effects on a child's self-esteem and mental health, despite often being dismissed as non-serious.

On the issue of sexual abuse, 23 respondents representing (45.1%) acknowledged being touched in a way that made them uncomfortable, while 28 representing (54.9%) had not experienced such touching. Furthermore, 11 representing (21.6%) reported receiving sexual comments or advances, whereas 40 representing (78.4%) denied such experiences. These results are deeply concerning, indicating that a significant portion of students are at risk of or have been exposed to sexual misconduct, which may be underreported due to fear or stigma.

With regard to neglect, 9 respondents representing (17.6%) stated that they had been left without care, support, or basic necessities, while 42 representing (82.4%) did not report such experiences. Although the proportion appears smaller, it still indicates that some children face challenges that could hinder their physical and emotional development and academic success.

Finally, when asked who had mostly abused them ($n = 27$), the majority, 15 respondents representing (55.6%), identified their parent or guardian as the abuser. 5 representing (18.5%) named a teacher, 3 representing (11.1%) identified an older adult, and 4 representing (14.8%) cited other individuals. This points to a distressing reality in which caregivers and authority figures — those entrusted with children's well-being — are often the source of harm.

4.3 Coping Mechanisms of Abused Students

Table 2: Coping Mechanisms of Abused Students

Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Who do you talk to when hurt/sad? (N = 52)	Parent/Guardian	23	44.2%
	Friend	15	28.8%
	Teacher	1	1.9%
	No one	13	25.0%
How do you feel after abuse? (N = 54)	Sad	28	51.9%
	Angry	5	9.3%
	Afraid	3	5.6%
	Confused	8	14.8%
	Don't feel anything	10	18.5%
What do you do when scared/sad? (N = 57)	Cry	22	38.6%
	Stay quiet	17	29.8%
	Talk to someone	12	21.1%
	Run away	3	5.3%
	Fight back	3	5.3%
Do you feel safe at home/school? (N = 51)	Yes	37	72.5%

	No	3	5.9%
	Sometimes	11	21.6%

Understanding how students cope with abuse provides insight into their emotional resilience and support systems.

Who They Talk to When Hurt or Sad

Out of 52 respondents, 23 representing (44.2%) indicated that they talked to a parent or guardian when hurt or sad. 15 respondents representing (28.8%) said they confided in a friend, whereas 13 representing (25.0%) stated that they talked to no one. Only 1 respondent representing (1.9%) reported speaking to a teacher. This finding is concerning as it reflects a considerable number of students experiencing emotional isolation, with very limited reliance on school staff for emotional support.

Emotional Responses to Abuse

Among the 54 respondents, 28 representing (51.9%) said they felt sad after experiencing abuse. 10 representing (18.5%) reported feeling emotionally numb, stating they did not feel anything. 8 representing (14.8%) felt confused, while 5 representing (9.3%) felt angry. Only 3 respondents representing (5.6%) indicated feeling afraid. The emotional responses indicate a predominant experience of sadness and emotional disconnection, highlighting the psychological burden of abuse on children.

Actions Taken When Scared or Sad

From a total of 57 respondents, 22 representing (38.6%) said they cried when scared or sad, while 17 representing (29.8%) preferred to remain quiet. 12 respondents representing (21.1%) reported talking to someone about how they felt. A few, 3 respondents each representing

(5.3%), resorted to running away or fighting back. These findings demonstrate that most students adopt passive coping mechanisms, which may not be adequate for processing trauma or fear. This points to the urgent need for accessible emotional support and mental health services within schools.

Perceived Safety at Home or School

Out of 51 respondents, 37 representing (72.5%) affirmed that they felt safe at home or school. 11 representing (21.6%) said they sometimes felt safe, while 3 representing (5.9%) reported feeling unsafe. Though the majority felt secure, the fact that over a quarter of the students experienced inconsistent or absent feelings of safety underscores the need for stronger child protection frameworks in both home and educational settings.

4.4 Academic Performance and the Effects of Abuse

Table 3: Academic Performance and the Effects of Abuse

Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Missed school due to problems? (N = 51)	Yes	15	29.4%
	No	36	70.6%
Find it hard to concentrate? (N = 52)	Yes	14	26.9%
	No	17	32.7%
	Sometimes	21	40.4%
Does home affect school performance? (N = 51)	Yes	22	43.1%
	No	17	33.3%

	Not sure	12	23.6%
How do you feel in class? (N = 51)	Confident	6	11.8%
	Nervous	2	3.9%
	Afraid	4	7.8%
	Silent	39	76.5%
Proud of school performance? (N = 51)	Yes	35	68.6%
	No	7	13.7%
	Sometimes	9	17.6%

This section assesses how abuse affects students' engagement, attendance, and confidence in school.

School Attendance

Out of 51 respondents, 15 representing (29.4%) reported that they had missed school due to problems either at home or school, while 36 representing (**70.6%**) said they had not. This indicates that nearly one-third of students experience challenges serious enough to disrupt their education, which could negatively affect their academic progress and consistency.

Classroom Concentration

Among 52 students, 14 representing (26.9%) said they found it hard to concentrate in class, and 21 representing (40.4%) indicated they sometimes had difficulty concentrating. Only 17 representing (32.7%) reported no difficulty. In total, 67.3% of respondents (those who answered *yes* or *sometimes*) experienced some level of concentration difficulty. This highlights a significant cognitive impact potentially linked to emotional distress or trauma.

Perceived Impact of Home Environment on Academic Performance

Out of 51 students, 22 representing (43.1%) felt that their home situation affected their academic performance, while 17 representing (33.3%) believed it did not. The remaining 12 representing (23.6%) were unsure. These responses show that nearly half of the students recognized a direct negative link between their home life and school performance, underscoring the influence of external stressors on learning.

Feelings in Class

When asked how they felt in class, 39 students representing (76.5%) said they remained silent. Only 6 representing (11.8%) felt confident, while 4 representing (7.8%) felt afraid and 2 representing (3.9%) felt nervous. The overwhelming silence among students suggests a lack of active classroom participation, which may be rooted in fear, low self-esteem, or emotional withdrawal related to abuse.

Self-Evaluation of Academic Performance

Out of 51 respondents, 35 representing (68.6%) said they were proud of their school performance. In contrast, 7 representing (13.7%) were not, and 9 representing (17.6%) expressed mixed feelings (sometimes). Although a majority expressed pride in their performance, nearly a third lacked consistent academic confidence, which may reflect the emotional effects of abuse or neglect.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter includes a brief discussion on the research process, main objectives, and findings. In this section, there was a provision of well-referenced facts in sequentially backing arguments.

5.1 Discussions

5.1.1 Forms of Child Abuse Experienced by Students

This study revealed that physical abuse was the most commonly reported form of maltreatment, with 58.1% of respondents stating they had been harshly beaten, and 19.4% denied food. Additionally, 78.4% reported being verbally abused, while 45.1% experienced inappropriate touching and 21.6% had received sexual comments or advances. Notably, 55.6% of perpetrators were parents or guardians.

These findings align with global and regional studies. For instance, Welson and Mohamed (2019) found that two-thirds of Egyptian university students had experienced physical abuse in childhood. Similarly, Adeyemi et al. (2020) in Nigeria reported that over 70% of secondary school students experienced physical abuse such as slapping or being hit by objects, mirroring the experiences shared by students in this study.

Sexual abuse, although slightly less reported, remains significant. In this study, 45.1% of students experienced inappropriate touching, consistent with Chime et al. (2021) who reported a 35.7% prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) in Enugu, Nigeria. In Ghana, Owusu-Addo et al. (2023) noted a 32.5% prevalence during the COVID-19 lockdown, highlighting how socio-environmental stressors may worsen CSA risks.

Neglect, experienced by 17.6% of students in this study, was highly prevalent in Rafaiee et al. (2021)'s research in Iran, where 90.3% of children reported some form of neglect. The lower figure in this study may be due to differences in cultural perceptions or underreporting. The predominance of parents as abusers reflects Mercer and Karim (2023) and Tsegba et al. (2021) who noted that abuse within households is a significant factor influencing children's development and performance in school. These findings confirm that home environments are critical in shaping students' well-being and that abuse is not only perpetrated by strangers or outsiders.

5.1.2 Coping Mechanisms Used by Students Who Experience Abuse

The data shows that students predominantly use emotion-focused coping strategies, such as crying (38.6%), staying quiet (29.8%), or doing nothing (25% said they talk to no one). Only 21.1% actively seek support by talking to someone. These responses indicate passive or avoidant coping patterns, which are often associated with prolonged emotional distress.

This aligns with the findings of Perry and Cuellar (2021), who identified emotional regulation and avoidance as the most common coping strategies among individuals with histories of childhood adversity. Similarly, Cao et al. (2022) found that negative coping styles reduce resilience and increase mental health risks, which may explain why many students in this study remain emotionally withdrawn or silent in class (76.5%).

Furthermore, Asante et al. (2021) found that Ghanaian students turn to religious and peer support as coping tools. While 44.2% of students in this study did talk to parents or guardians, and 28.8% to friends, the significant number who remain silent highlights a need for more accessible and trusting support systems within the school.

Thus, this study supports previous research indicating that coping mechanisms play a vital role in how students deal with trauma, and passive coping correlates with reduced classroom engagement and emotional well-being.

5.1.3 Relationship Between Child Abuse and Students' Academic Performance

The study found a clear association between abuse and poor academic performance. A substantial 67.3% of students admitted to struggling with concentration, while 43.1% explicitly said that their experiences at home affected their school performance. Additionally, 29.4% had missed school due to home or school problems. Participation in class was low, with 76.5% identifying as silent during classroom activities.

These findings confirm those of Mercer and Karim (2023) and Awopetu and Akomolafe (2020), who reported that abused children perform poorly in school, experience higher absenteeism, and often lack motivation or confidence. The correlation between child abuse and limited class engagement is also supported by Tsegba et al. (2021), who found that abuse significantly impacted class participation and assessment performance.

The finding that only 11.8% felt confident during class discussions suggests that emotional trauma, stemming from abuse, impairs cognitive engagement and expression. Additionally, 31.4% of respondents said they were either not proud or unsure of their academic performance, indicating low academic self-esteem, as also noted in Alokun & Bisi-Olawumi (2019), where abused students scored significantly lower than their peers.

5.2 Conclusions

Child abuse in its various forms—physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect—is a significant and ongoing concern for school-aged children in Berekum. The study confirms that students who experience abuse often struggle to concentrate, miss school, and feel disengaged or silent in class, all of which impact their academic performance negatively.

The findings are consistent with national and international literature that highlights the detrimental effects of abuse on children's cognitive and emotional development. Particularly, the data reflect that abuse from caregivers and educators, rather than strangers, remains a pervasive issue. The emotional responses and coping strategies employed by students reveal a lack of structured psychological support systems in the school environment.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by offering empirical evidence from the Ghanaian junior high school context, where socioeconomic and cultural dynamics influence both the experience and reporting of abuse. The need for multi-level interventions—family, school, and policy—is therefore urgent and necessary to protect students and enhance their academic success.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

A. For Schools

1. **Strengthen school counseling services** to provide students with a safe space to report abuse and receive psychological support.
2. **Implement child protection policies** and ensure all staff are trained to identify and respond to signs of abuse.
3. Organize **periodic workshops and awareness programs** for students on abuse, self-esteem, and safe ways to report incidents.
4. Introduce **peer support groups** to promote emotional well-being and reduce isolation among students.

B. For Parents and Guardians

1. **Promote positive parenting techniques** and discipline without resorting to physical or emotional harm.
2. Attend **community-based education sessions** organized by the school or social welfare units on the consequences of abuse.
3. Build **open communication channels** with children to encourage them to express their needs and fears.

C. For Policy Makers and Social Services

1. **Enforce existing child protection laws** and ensure cases of abuse—especially in schools—are addressed with appropriate sanctions.
2. **Deploy social workers** in schools to provide ongoing support and conduct follow-ups on students from vulnerable households.
3. **Integrate abuse prevention education** into the junior high school curriculum to promote awareness from an early age.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear student,

We are final year students from HFNMTC, Berekum. We would be grateful if you could spare us a few minutes of your time to answer this questionnaire. This information is strictly confidential and is solely for academic purposes. Kindly complete each section honestly. We are collecting data about the Impact of Child Abuse on Academic Performance of Students: A Study at Freeman Methodist Junior High School, Berekum

Section A: Background Information

1. Age: ☐ 10 -15 ☐ 16-18
2. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
3. Class: ☐ JHS 1 ☐ JHS 2 ☐ JHS 3
4. Who do you live with? ☐ Both parents ☐ Single parent ☐ Guardian ☐ Other:

5. Do your parents/guardians work? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I don't know
6. Religion: ☐ Christian ☐ Islam ☐ Traditional Other:

Section B: Forms of Child Abuse Experienced

7. Have you ever been hurt physically by a parent, teacher, or someone close to you? ☐ Yes
☐ No
8. If yes, how were you hurt? (Tick all that apply)
☐ Beaten harshly ☐ Burned ☐ Locked outside ☐ Denied food ☐ Other: _____
9. Have you ever been insulted, shouted at, or threatened at home or school? ☐ Yes ☐ No
10. Have you been touched in a way that made you uncomfortable? ☐ Yes ☐ No

11. Has anyone ever made sexual comments or advances toward you? ☐ Yes ☐ No
12. Has anyone neglected you (e.g., left you without care, support, or food)? ☐ Yes ☐ No
13. Who did the above happen with mostly?
- ☐ Parent/guardian ☐ Teacher ☐ Other adult ☐ Other: _____

Section C: Coping Mechanisms

14. When you are hurt or sad, who do you usually talk to?
- ☐ Parent/Guardian ☐ Friend ☐ Teacher ☐ No one
15. How do you usually feel after being abused or shouted at?
- ☐ Sad ☐ Angry ☐ Afraid ☐ Confused ☐ I don't feel anything
16. What do you do when you feel bad or scared? (You may tick more than one)
- ☐ Cry ☐ Stay quiet ☐ Talk to someone ☐ Run away ☐ Fight back
17. Do you feel safe at home and at school? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes

Section D: Academic Performance and Effects of Abuse

18. Have you ever missed school because of problems at home or school? ☐ Yes ☐ No
19. Do you find it hard to concentrate in class? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes
20. Do you think what happens to you at home affects your performance in school? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I'm not sure
21. How do you feel when taking part in class activities?
- ☐ Confident ☐ Nervous ☐ Afraid ☐ Silent
22. Are you proud of your performance in school? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes
23. What help would make it easier for you to do better in school?
- _____

Thank you for participating. Your answers will be kept private and used only to help us understand and support children better.

NATIONAL CATHOLIC HEALTH SERVICE (DIOCESE OF SUNYANI)
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P.O. Box 21,
Berekum, B/A
Ghana, W/Africa
Tel. 0352222124
Fax: 0352222474

June 16, 2025

Date

Headmaster
Freeman Methodist Preparatory and JHS
P.O. Box 315
Berekum

Headmaster

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I wish to introduce to you the under listed names of final-year students of the College:

1. Asante Lawrence
2. Asare Evelyn

As part of the pre-requisite for the award of Diploma in Nursing, they are to conduct a research study on the topic: "Exploring the impact of child abuse on academic performance on students at Freeman Methodist Junior High School."

We would be grateful if you could assist them with any material or help they may need to accomplish the task.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully

Emmanuel Ali
Supervisor
Principal

Asst. Adm

Is for your attn

20/6/25

HEADMASTER
FREEMAN METH. J.H.S.
P. O. BOX 435
BEREKUM, B/A

20/6/25

Seen
At 20

20th June, 2025

20/6/25