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Depression and Its Association with Physical Abuse and Parental Neglect Among Primary School Pupils

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To assess levels of depression, physical abuse, and parental neglect among primary school pupils in Basrah, and to examine their interrelationships and associations with demographic characteristics.

Methods and Materials: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in five government primary schools across Basrah (November 15, 2023–November 25, 2024). Using purposive sampling, 300 pupils in grades 5–6 (boys and girls) completed a researcher-adopted Physical Abuse and Parental Neglect scale and the Birlson Children's Depression Scale. Demographics included age, sex, family structure, parental education/occupation, and economic status. Data were analyzed in SPSS 26 using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and Pearson correlations.

Findings: Most participants were male (61.7%); ages were predominantly 11–12 years. Levels of physical abuse and parental neglect were low in 13.3%, moderate in 66.3%, and high in 20.3% of pupils. Depression levels were low in 8.7%, moderate in 71.0%, and high in 20.3%. Depression showed a positive correlation with physical abuse and parental neglect (reported Pearson $r=0.931$, $p<0.001$). No significant associations were found between physical abuse/neglect and demographics (age, sex, family type, parental education/occupation, economic status).

Conclusion: Among primary school pupils, moderate levels of depression, physical abuse, and parental neglect were common, and depression increased with higher levels of abuse/neglect. School- and family-based prevention and early identification programs are warranted. Future studies should consider probability sampling, validated cutoffs, and multivariable models to clarify causal pathways.

Keywords: Depression, Physical Abuse, Parental Neglect, Primary School Pupils.

Introduction

The phenomenon of child abuse has spread widely, especially at present, and it is a social phenomenon that has many forms and causes. Parents or educators. Many researchers and specialists concerned with the child and the ways of treating and raising him are interested in this problem, which is increasing day after day, despite the availability of laws and agreements to protect the child from ill-treatment, and urging the Islamic religion to take care of the child and provide him with his material and moral needs and raise him in a good upbringing. Not using force, cruelty, and severe beatings, treating him well, encouraging and motivating him to perform the best, all of these things have an impact on building the child's personality (Nanda et al., 2016).

When parents don't adequately attend to their children's emotional needs, it's known as parental or childhood emotional neglect. A child need not experience emotional maltreatment in order to be considered emotionally neglected. While emotional neglect can be a deliberate disrespect for a kid's feelings, or a failure to recognize these feelings or attend to a child's emotional needs, abuse is frequently intentional and takes the shape of an act meant to damage a child. Parents who ignore their children's emotional needs in providing care and the necessities of life, but mishandle their children in the emotional field (Rybakowski, 2020).

The inability of parents or other caregivers to meet a child's emotional needs is known as parental or childhood emotional neglect. Neglect of this kind may have immediate or long-term effects. Parents, teachers, and caregivers are advised to have a clear picture of the causes of neglect in childhood, to learn how a neglected child behaves, and what they can do to correct or help the child overcome it (Alshehri & Drei, 2021).

An act or inaction that causes death, severe bodily or psychological suffering, sexual abuse, or exploitation, or that causes preventable danger or significant harm to anyone under the age of eighteen, is considered child abuse (Al Dosari et al., 2017). Physical abuse is when someone intentionally hurts or injures another person by using their body (Anana, 2023). Extreme melancholy or despair that persists for longer than a few days is called depression. It disrupts everyday activities and might result in physical symptoms including discomfort,

weight loss or increase, irregular sleep patterns, or low energy (Mrazek et al., 2014).

The definition of child abuse has witnessed a remarkable development in the past decades. One of the classic concepts put forward in this regard is what Kempe and his colleagues presented about the tortured child syndrome, which describes child abuse as the infliction of dangerous harm, the infliction of Serious injuries to young children by parents or caregivers, which often result in injuries, fractures, blood clots in the brain, multiple soft tissue injuries, permanent disability and even death. Helfer Kemp and Helfer defined abuse as "any child who receives non-accidental and intentional physical harm as a result of neglectful behavior on the part of his parents or caretaker (Massullo et al., 2023). Physical abuse, mental abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse are the four primary forms of child abuse (Mikaeili et al., 2013).

Child neglect can arise from numerous causes. This phenomenon cannot be explained by a single theoretical framework. The literature has a variety of theoretical formulations and models that aim to explain child abuse and neglect (Blumenthal, 2015). Summarizes every theoretical concept in three distinct models of causal neglect: the ecological-transactional model, the environmental deficit model, and the parental deficit model. The premise of the parental deficit model is that poor parenting is the root cause of child neglect and that people (parents, guardians), rather than communities, are ultimately in charge of safeguarding the well-being of children (Cameron et al., 2007). The main causes of child neglect are traits of the parents (psychopathology, cognitive distortions, or receiving unsuitable care). The social and economic factors that can influence parenting, as well as the identification and validation of neglect, are not taken into account by this approach (Smith & Fong, 2004). According to the environmental deficit model, the main reason why children are neglected is material hardship. A child's brain development is significantly influenced by the first few years of life. Because a child's experiences can alter their neurological pathways and mental processes, neglect can be quite damaging (Merrick & Latzman, 2014).

Methods and Materials

A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out in Basrah's schools between November 15, 2023, and November 25, 2024. The current study was carried out at Basrah City's primary schools in the Basrah Governorate. Non-probability (a purposive sample of 300 students (males and females) in five schools (Al-Rand School for Boys, Al-Hayat School for Girls, Dahoun School for Boys, Al-Israa School for Boys, and the Martyr Karim Mazal Al-Baydani School) in different regions according to the following. Inclusion criteria: Boys' and girls' sixth and fifth-grade students and sixth and fifth-grade students who agree to participate in the study. Exclusion criteria: Sixth and fifth-grade students who are absent and sixth and fifth-grade students who refuse to participate in the study.

Following a thorough analysis of the relevant research and existing literature, the questionnaire was adopted. There are three components to the study tool: The first concerns the demographics of the student. Consists of age, gender of the student, class, residence, number of family members, number of children in the family, student hierarchy in the family, father's and mother's certificates, father's profession, mother's profession, and monthly income, as for the second part, it relates to the physical child abuse and neglect scale (Quilty et al., 2008).

The scale was developed by examining the psychological literature that was relevant to the investigation, as well as by analyzing earlier research on the topic. There were 31 items on the entire scale. The

scale's components were rated as follows: yes, for approval, neutral for lack of opinion, and no for disagreement.

The third part is related to the scale of children's depression (Birlleson et al., 1987). This scale was created using 27 phrases that were replied using a three-point rating system. The answer is often in the case of the condition being present commonly, and sometimes in the case of the condition being present at a rate less than the first case, and rarely.

Each student in the study was directly interviewed to get the demographic information, and a questionnaire style was created and accepted. The period covered by the data collection process was January 2023–February 2024. Each respondent was given fifteen to twenty minutes to finish out the questionnaire. Using SPSS version 26, the following statistical data analysis techniques were used to examine the study's data: Arithmetic Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD), Percent (%), Chi-Square, Frequency, and Pearson Correlation.

Findings and Results

The findings indicate that men make up more than half (61.7%) of the study sample. The findings indicate that 46.7 percent of the sample was 11 years old, and 32.3% was 12 years old. The results show that the majority of students (55 %) are in the fifth class. Also, the majority of samples (61%) their an economic status that was enough, and (24%) had not enough, and only (15.3%) there was hardly enough.

Table 1

Participants' Type of family, Number of family members, Number of children in family, Arrangement of children in family, Mother and father education, and occupation

	Frequency	Percent%
Type of family		
With father and mother, and brothers	254	84.7%
With just mother and brother	15	5.0%
With just father and brothers	9	3.0%
With all family (extended family)	22	7.3%
Total	300	100 %
Number of family members		
1-3	2	7%
4-7	207	69%
More than 8	91	24%
Total	300	100%
Number of children in the family		
1-3	181	60.3%
4-7	116	38.7%
More than 8	3	1%

Total		300	100%
Arrangement of children in the family			
1-4		256	85.3%
5-8		41	13.7%
More than 9		3	1%
Total		300	100%
Mother education			
Lower than preparatory		193	64.3%
Preparatory		52	17.3%
Institute		14	4.7%
College and above		41	13.7%
Total		300	100 %
Father education			
Lower than preparatory		139	46.3%
Preparatory		55	18.3%
Institute		26	8.7%
College and above		80	26.6%
Total		300	100%
Mother occupation			
Unemployed		250	83.3%
Employed		39	13%
Retired		11	3.7%
Total		300	100%
Father occupation			
Unemployed		123	41%
Employed		160	53.3%
Retired		17	5.7%
Total		300	100 %

The majority of the sample (84.7%) lives with their father, mother, and brothers, according to the results (69%) their family member number between (4-7), (60.3%) Number of children in family between (1-3), (85.3%) their arrangement in family between (1-4),

(64.3%) their mother education was low than preparatory, (46.3%) their father education also low than preparatory, (83.3%) their mother was unemployed, (53.3%) their father was employed (Table 1).

Table 2

The Total Level of Physical Abuse and Parental Neglect

Level of Physical Abuse and Parental Neglect	F	Percentage
Low	40	13.3%
Moderate	199	66.3%
High	61	20.3%
Total	300	100%

F = Frequency, ((Cut of point= 0.66)) ((1 -1.66 = Low; 1.67 - 2.33 = Moderate; 2.34 - 3=High))

According to the findings, only 13.3% of the students in the study group had low levels of physical abuse and

parental neglect, whereas 66.3% had moderate levels, and 20.3% had high levels (Table 2).

Table 3

The Level of Depression

Level of depression	Frequency	Percent %
Low	26	8.7%
Moderate	213	71%
High	61	20.3%
Total	300	100%

((Cut of point= 0.66)) ((1 -1.66 = Low; 1.67 - 2.33 = Moderate; 2.34 - 3=High))

According to the findings, almost 71% of the students in the study group experienced moderate depression,

20.3% experienced high depression, and just 8.7% experienced low depression (Table 3).

Table 4

the Relationship Between Levels of Physical Abuse and Parental Neglect and level of depression.

		level of Physical Abuse and Parental Neglect	level of depression
level of depression	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1	.931* 0.000
	N	300	300
level of Physical Abuse and Parental Neglect	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.931* 0.000	1 300
	N	300	300

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The Table 4 demonstrates that the scales have meaningful correlations with one another. The findings showed a positive correlation (P<0.05)

between the degree of depression and the levels of physical abuse and parental neglect.

Table 5

The Relationship Between Students' Level of Physical Abuse and Parental Neglect and Their Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Data	Physical Abuse and Parental Neglect				Chi-Sq	DF	Level of Significance
	Rating	Low	Moderate	High			
Age	10	5	27	1	8.361a	6	0.213 NS
	11	20	91	29			
	12	12	60	25			
	13	3	21	6			
Gender	Male	22	120	43	2.919a	2	0.232 NS
	Female	18	79	18			
Family type	With father, mother& brothers	32	169	53	2.146a	6	0.906NS
	With mother brothers	2	11	2			
	With father & brothers	2	6	1			
	With all (extended family)	4	13	5			
class	5 th	25	108	32	1.111a	2	0.574 NS
	6 th	15	91	29			
Father education	Lower than preparatory	21	91	27	2.324a	6	0.888 NS
	Preparatory	7	34	14			
	Institute	3	17	6			
Mother education	College and above	9	57	14	5.142a	6	0.526
	Lower than preparatory	27	122	44			
	Preparatory	6	35	11			
Father occupation	Institute	1	12	1	5.295a	4	0.258
	College and above	6	30	5			
	Unemployed	20	77	26			
Mother occupation	Employed	20	107	33	4.062a	4	0.398
	Retired	0	15	2			
	Unemployed	32	162	56			
Economic status	Enough	24	125	34	3.518a	4	0.475 NS
	Not Enough	7	48	16			
	Hardly Enough	9	26	11			
N. of family	1-3	0	2	0	1.225a	4	0.874
	4-7	29	136	42			
	More than 8	11	61	19			
Number of children in the family	1-3	26	119	36	2.643a	4	0.619
	4-7	8	55	22			
	More than 8	0	2	1			
Arrangement of students in a family	1-4	32	174	50	3.097a	4	0.542
	5-8	7	24	10			
	More than 9	1	1	1			

Table 5 shows that there is no relationship between Physical Abuse and Parental Neglect and the student demographic characteristics.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study's findings indicate that men make up more than half of the sample (61.7%). This study supported other research that indicated the majority of participants were men (Kadhim et al., 2023; Shaban et al., 2024; Bachi & Kadhim, 2021; Hussein et al., 2022)

According to the findings, the bulk of the sample (46.7%) was 11 years old. And (32.3%) their age is 12 years old. This result was consistent with Appel, Gerorgew, who showed about (50.7%) their age (11 years) and about (44.5 %) their age (12 years) (Cherlin et al., 2004).

According to the findings, the majority of pupils (55%) are enrolled in the fifth grade. This result was consistent with Ghumri, which shows about 80% of the study in the fifth class (Aftab & Younas, 2023; Jabbar et al., 2023; Mohammad et al., 2024; Mohammad, Al-Timary, et al., 2023; Mohammad, Jassim, et al., 2023; Mohammad et al., 2025; Zainel et al., 2022).

According to the findings, 61% of the samples had an adequate economic status, 24% had an inadequate one, and only 15.3% had a barely adequate one. This finding is in line with numerous studies Attiyah, (2016), which indicate that the majority of participants have sufficient financial standing.

According to the findings, most sample members (84.7%) reside with their parents and about the number of family the result show (69%) their family member number between (4-7), regarding the number of children in family the result show (60.3%) Number of children in family between (1-3), about the arrangement the child in family the result show (85.3%) their arrangement in family between (1-4), regarding the mother education the result show (64.3%) their mother education was low than preparatory, and about the father education the result show (46.3%) their father education also low than preparatory, regarding the mother occupation the result show (83.3%) their mother was unemployed, and about father occupation the result show (53.3%) their father was employed (46.3%).

This result was inconsistent with Ghumri that show the majority of sample (77.5%) live with all family and about number of family their result show (40%) their family member between (2-9), regarding the number of children in family was (88.6%) number of children in

family between (3-9), about the arrangement the child in family was (50.2%) their arrangement in family between (5-8), regarding the mother education (70.2%) their mother education was high than preparatory, and about the father education (48.5%) their father education was also high than preparatory, regarding the mother occupation (80.6%) was employed and regarding father education (66.2%) was unemployed (Aftab & Younas, 2023).

According to the results, approximately 66.3% of the students in the study group experienced moderate levels of parental neglect and physical abuse, 20.3% experienced high levels, and only 13.3% experienced low levels. The study ascribes this to poverty, unemployment, domestic violence, and drug use. A number of factors, including inadequate planning, a lack of confidence in the future, financial difficulties, emotional immaturity, a large number of children, high levels of stress, and unfavorable social and economic circumstances, increase the likelihood of neglect. This result is inconsistent with Ismail, Ahmed, Tawfiq, and Abdel Moneim that around 71.4% of the study group students had a high level of Physical abuse and parental neglect (Shaban et al., 2024).

Results shows that around 71% of the students in the study group had moderate depression, 20.3% had high depression, and just 8.7% had low depression. This result is consistent with a study showing that about 75.7% had a Moderate level of depression (Livingston et al., 2020).

The results demonstrates that the scales have meaningful correlations with one another. The findings showed a positive correlation between the degree of depression and the levels of physical abuse and parental neglect. This outcome is in line with Ghumri's findings, which indicate a positive correlation between depression and the degree of physical abuse and parental neglect (Aftab & Younas, 2023).

The results demonstrates that there is no correlation between the demographic traits of the students and physical abuse or parental neglect. This finding contradicts Appel and Gerorgew's findings, which indicate a strong correlation between the demographics of students and the degree of physical abuse and parental neglect (Aftab & Younas, 2023).

Students experienced moderate levels of physical abuse, parental neglect, and depression. The degree of

depression is positively correlated with the degree of physical abuse and parental neglect. Parental neglect and physical abuse do not significantly correlate with the demographic traits of students.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study were that participation was entirely optional.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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