



# The Impact of Child Maltreatment on the Psychological Development of Primary School Learners

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study was to investigate how child maltreatment affected the psychological growth of primary school students in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. The study employed a qualitative approach, gathering data through observations, focus groups, and interviews. Ten educators, ten parents, and ten heads of schools took part in the research. The effects of child abuse on the psychological growth of students studying primary education were noted. Throughout the investigation, a total of eight students were monitored. The study's findings demonstrated the negative effects of child abuse on psychological development. Numerous types of child abuse were listed, including physical, sexual, emotional, and neglectful behaviour as well as a shortage of food in households and a lack of commitment from government agencies in charge of children's safety. The study suggests that in order to end child abuse, parents and teachers should get training on the value of protecting children's rights.*

**Keywords:** *Child Maltreatment, Psychological Development, Primary School Learners, Trauma, Resilience*

## How to cite this work (APA):

Chafa, A. (2024). The impact of child maltreatment on the psychological development of primary school learners. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 8(4), 480 – 488. <https://doi.org/10.59765/uw74rv3>.

## 1. Introduction

Child maltreatment is a broad term that encompasses various forms of abuse and neglect experienced by children, often within the home or in settings where they are under the care of adults. According to the World Health Organization (2020), child maltreatment refers to "all forms of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, development, or dignity." Maltreatment is a violation of children's fundamental rights and includes actions that cause significant harm or expose them to risk. Physical abuse involves bodily harm through hitting, kicking, or other forms of physical punishment. Emotional abuse is characterized by verbal assaults, humiliation, or rejection, while sexual abuse refers to engaging a child in sexual activities without their consent. Neglect, which is equally detrimental, involves the failure to meet basic needs such as nutrition, clothing, and healthcare (Save the Children, 2022). These various forms of maltreatment can severely impact

a child's well-being, especially their psychological development.

### 1.1 Overview of Psychological Development in Primary School Learners

Psychological development in primary school learners is critical as it shapes their cognitive, emotional, and social abilities. This phase, typically between ages 6 and 12, is marked by significant growth in cognitive functions like reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making, alongside emotional regulation and social interactions (Papalia & Feldman, 2021). Erikson's psychosocial theory identifies this period as one of "industry versus inferiority," where children begin to develop self-esteem through their abilities and accomplishments. The environment, particularly the family and school, plays a crucial role in nurturing or stifling this development. Maltreatment can interrupt this process by diminishing a child's self-worth, confidence, and ability to form healthy relationships, leading to long-term psychological

issues like anxiety, depression, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Glaser, 2020). Additionally, a supportive and stimulating environment is vital for fostering academic achievement, social skills, and emotional resilience in children (Zhou et al., 2021).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework: Ecological Systems Theory**

A prominent framework for understanding child maltreatment and its impact on psychological development is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. This theory posits that a child's development is influenced by the various environmental systems they interact with, which include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the context of child maltreatment, the family and school represent crucial elements of the microsystem, directly influencing the child's psychological development. Maltreatment can disrupt the child's ability to form positive relationships in these settings, thus leading to psychological damage, such as feelings of inferiority, fear, and anxiety. Research has shown that a child's development is heavily affected by these ecological systems, with maltreatment at home often spilling over into negative interactions in the school environment (Piel et al., 2020). The theory offers a holistic view of how maltreatment, while often occurring in the home, affects the broader developmental landscape.

#### **2.1.1 Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory, originally developed by John Bowlby, emphasizes the importance of early emotional bonds between a child and their primary caregivers (Bowlby, 1988). Secure attachment is crucial for psychological development as it fosters a sense of security and self-worth in children. However, when maltreatment occurs, particularly neglect and emotional abuse, it can lead to insecure or disorganized attachments, which severely impair a child's psychological development (Davis & Carter, 2021). Children who experience maltreatment are more likely to develop attachment disorders, which manifest in difficulty forming healthy relationships and emotional dysregulation. Research by Nelson et al. (2021) further supports this, showing that maltreated children often exhibit aggressive or withdrawn behaviours, both of which stem from disorganized attachments. Understanding the effects of maltreatment through the lens of attachment theory is crucial in highlighting the long-term emotional and social consequences of abuse.

#### **2.1.2 Trauma Theory**

Trauma theory is another significant framework for analysing the psychological effects of child maltreatment. This theory asserts that maltreatment,

particularly physical and sexual abuse, constitutes a traumatic experience that can disrupt normal psychological functioning (Van der Kolk, 2015). Children exposed to chronic maltreatment may develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression, as their psychological resources are overwhelmed by their experiences. Moreover, repeated exposure to trauma can alter brain development, leading to difficulties with emotional regulation, impulse control, and learning (Vasileva et al., 2021). Trauma theory emphasizes the lasting impact of abuse on a child's psychological development, underlining the need for early intervention and trauma-informed care. Longitudinal studies by McLaughlin & Lambert (2022) have demonstrated that children who experience maltreatment exhibit altered neural pathways, particularly in areas of the brain responsible for processing emotions and decision-making, further cementing the long-term psychological harm caused by trauma.

#### **2.1.3 Developmental Psychopathology**

The developmental psychopathology framework provides an integrated view of how maltreatment affects psychological development over time. This approach looks at how adverse experiences, like maltreatment, can contribute to the onset of psychological disorders (Cicchetti, 2020). It acknowledges the role of both genetic predispositions and environmental factors in shaping a child's mental health outcomes. Maltreatment during critical developmental periods can lead to a higher risk of developing psychological disorders, such as conduct disorders, depression, and anxiety (Lansford et al., 2021). This theory supports the idea that maltreatment does not merely result in immediate psychological harm but also increases the likelihood of long-term mental health problems, with developmental pathways being altered in significant ways. The research of Sheridan & McLaughlin (2022) highlights how early childhood maltreatment is linked to disruptions in emotional regulation, cognitive development, and social functioning, with these effects often persisting into adulthood.

#### **2.1.4 Resilience Theory**

Resilience theory offers a contrasting perspective by focusing on the capacity of children to overcome adversity, including maltreatment. This theory posits that, despite the damaging effects of maltreatment, some children demonstrate psychological resilience, defined as the ability to recover from trauma and continue developing healthily (Masten, 2020). Factors that promote resilience include strong social support networks, positive relationships with non-abusive caregivers, and access to mental health services. According to Wang et al. (2021), children who have access to a stable adult figure, such as a teacher or counsellor, are more likely to show resilience in the face of abuse. Resilience theory emphasizes that interventions

can be successful in mitigating the effects of maltreatment, especially if provided early and consistently. However, it also acknowledges that resilience is not inherent but developed through supportive environments, highlighting the importance of school and community systems in fostering recovery from abuse.

## **2.2 Previous Research**

### **2.2.1 Physical Abuse and Psychological Development**

Physical abuse is one of the most direct forms of maltreatment, with significant and often immediate psychological effects. A study by Norman et al. (2022) found that children who experience physical abuse are more likely to exhibit behavioural problems, such as aggression, defiance, and difficulties with authority. These behaviours are often a result of the child internalizing the abuse, leading to poor emotional regulation and a propensity for violent reactions. Moreover, physical abuse has been linked to cognitive impairments, including difficulties with attention, memory, and executive functioning (Vasileva et al., 2021). These impairments can result in academic underachievement, further exacerbating feelings of inadequacy and psychological distress. Additionally, physical abuse is associated with long-term psychological issues, such as depression and anxiety, with some studies indicating that these children are at higher risk for developing PTSD (McLaughlin & Lambert, 2022).

### **2.2.2 Emotional Abuse and Neglect**

Emotional abuse and neglect are often more subtle forms of maltreatment but can be equally, if not more, damaging to a child's psychological development. Research by Glaser (2020) emphasizes that emotional abuse, including verbal insults, humiliation, and rejection, can erode a child's self-esteem and sense of self-worth, leading to long-term emotional instability. Neglect, which involves the failure to provide basic needs, such as food, shelter, and emotional support, has been linked to developmental delays and attachment disorders (Nelson et al., 2021). Children who are neglected may struggle to form healthy relationships and may develop a range of psychological issues, including anxiety, depression, and behavioural disorders. Studies have shown that neglected children often feel isolated and unsupported, which further exacerbates feelings of abandonment and low self-worth (Davis & Carter, 2021).

### **2.2.3 Sexual Abuse and Its Psychological Impact**

Sexual abuse has been widely studied due to its particularly devastating effects on psychological development. Victims of sexual abuse often suffer from severe emotional distress, including feelings of shame, guilt, and worthlessness (Norman et al., 2022). These

emotional scars can lead to long-term psychological disorders, such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Sexual abuse is also strongly associated with difficulties in forming healthy relationships later in life, as victims may struggle with trust issues and emotional intimacy (McLaughlin & Lambert, 2022). Additionally, sexual abuse can disrupt normal sexual development, leading to confusion, fear, and in some cases, hypersexuality or sexual aversion (Van der Kolk, 2015). Research has shown that early intervention and trauma-informed care can help mitigate some of these effects, but the psychological damage often persists into adulthood if left untreated (Piel et al., 2020).

### **2.2.4 The Role of Schools in Psychological Development**

Schools play a critical role in either mitigating or exacerbating the psychological effects of child maltreatment. A supportive school environment can serve as a protective factor for children who experience abuse at home (Wang et al., 2021). Teachers and school counsellors, when trained to recognize the signs of maltreatment, can intervene early and provide emotional support to affected children. However, schools can also be environments where maltreatment continues or is ignored, particularly in cases of bullying or peer abuse. A study by Zhou et al. (2021) highlights the importance of school-based mental health programs in promoting resilience and psychological well-being among maltreated children. These programs can provide safe spaces for children to express their emotions, develop coping skills, and receive the psychological support they need to overcome the effects of abuse.

### **2.2.5 Family Dynamics and Child Maltreatment**

Family dynamics are often at the root of child maltreatment, with factors such as poverty, parental substance abuse, and domestic violence contributing to abusive behaviours (Nelson et al., 2021). Research has shown that children who grow up in dysfunctional family environments are at higher risk of experiencing maltreatment, which in turn affects their psychological development. Studies by Lansford et al. (2021) have demonstrated that children who witness domestic violence or experience neglect due to parental substance abuse often exhibit symptoms of anxiety, depression, and behavioural disorders. These children may also struggle with attachment issues, as they are unable to form secure bonds with their caregivers. Interventions that address these underlying family dynamics are crucial for preventing maltreatment and supporting healthy psychological development in children.

### **2.2.6 Impact of Poverty on Maltreatment and Psychological Development**

Poverty is a significant risk factor for child maltreatment, as families struggling with financial insecurity are more

likely to experience stress, which can lead to abusive behaviours (Save the Children, 2022). Children from impoverished backgrounds are also more likely to experience neglect, as their parents may be unable to provide for their basic needs. Research has shown that the psychological effects of maltreatment are often compounded by poverty, as children living in poverty are more likely to experience stress, anxiety, and feelings of hopelessness (Masten, 2020). These children may also have limited access to mental health services, which further exacerbates their psychological distress. Addressing the root causes of poverty is therefore essential for preventing child maltreatment and promoting healthy psychological development.

### 3. Methodology

The research utilized a qualitative approach, specifically an exploratory case study, to investigate the impact of child maltreatment on the psychological development of primary school learners in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences and perceptions, offering a rich understanding of how child maltreatment influences psychological development (Creswell & Poth, 2020). This approach provided flexibility in exploring complex phenomena such as emotional, physical, and cognitive impacts that are often difficult to quantify. Moreover, qualitative research is ideal when the aim is to uncover lived experiences and insights from key stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, and children, which can be critical in understanding the nuances of child maltreatment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2021).

The study was conducted in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, Zimbabwe. The total sample size consisted of 30 participants, including ten educators, ten parents, and ten school heads, in addition to observations of eight students who had exhibited signs of psychological effects due to maltreatment. Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate because the study required insights from individuals directly involved in or affected by child maltreatment, which random sampling might not have guaranteed.

Observations were conducted over several weeks to gain firsthand insight into the psychological effects of maltreatment on the selected students. Focus groups were conducted with educators and parents, allowing for dynamic discussions on the impact of child maltreatment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten school heads to explore their experiences and perceptions of child maltreatment in their schools.

Data analysis in this study followed thematic analysis, a widely used method in qualitative research for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The thematic analysis was conducted in several stages. First, all

interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim. The data from observations, interviews, and focus groups were then coded using open coding to categorize the data into relevant themes. This was followed by axial coding, where relationships between codes were identified, leading to the development of overarching themes that addressed the research questions.

Thematic analysis was particularly suited for this study because it allowed for the identification of patterns related to the psychological impacts of maltreatment, including emotional withdrawal, aggression, and learning difficulties. This approach also facilitated the comparison of different perspectives between educators, parents, and school heads, ensuring that the analysis captured the multifaceted nature of the issue (Nowell et al., 2017). NVivo software was employed to manage the large amount of qualitative data and ensure systematic coding and theme development.

Ethical considerations were paramount in conducting research involving vulnerable populations, particularly children who had experienced maltreatment. The researcher obtained informed consent from all adult participants, including educators, parents, and school heads. For students, parental consent was secured, and their participation was primarily observational, minimizing any direct interaction that could cause distress (Hammersley & Traianou, 2016). Furthermore, all participants were assured of confidentiality, with pseudonyms used to protect their identities in any published findings.

The study also adhered to strict guidelines regarding the handling of sensitive information, especially when discussing child abuse cases. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Data was securely stored, and only the researcher had access to the full transcripts. In cases where serious abuse was disclosed, participants were referred to appropriate child protection services as required by ethical guidelines (Hammersley, 2020).

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Findings from Observations

The observational data provided valuable insights into the emotional and behavioural conditions of primary school learners who experienced maltreatment. The observed students exhibited a range of behaviours consistent with the psychological effects of abuse, including withdrawal, aggression, and anxiety. Over several weeks, these students were monitored during school hours to document any changes in their emotional state, interactions with peers, and academic performance. Behavioural indicators of emotional distress, such as frequent tearfulness, refusal to engage in classroom activities, and physical symptoms like fatigue and headaches, were also noted. Teachers had reported that

these behaviours aligned with experiences of abuse at home.

Many of the students who were observed showed signs of emotional neglect, such as a lack of responsiveness to positive reinforcement or praise from teachers. For example, one child was observed consistently sitting alone during group activities, with minimal interaction

with peers. Similarly, another student exhibited aggressive outbursts when frustrated by school tasks, a behaviour commonly linked to experiences of physical or emotional abuse (Hughes & Tucker, 2021). In both cases, the students demonstrated reduced engagement with academic material, suggesting that the trauma of maltreatment was affecting their cognitive focus and motivation to learn.

**Table 1: Common Behaviours Observed in Maltreated Students**

Behaviour	Frequency of Observation	Psychological Impact
Withdrawal	6 out of 8 students	Emotional detachment, difficulty in forming relationships
Aggression	5 out of 8 students	Externalizing emotional pain through violent behaviour
Anxiety	4 out of 8 students	Nervousness, fear of failure, reluctance to participate
Lack of Concentration	7 out of 8 students	Cognitive impairment, poor academic performance
Fatigue/Headaches	3 out of 8 students	Physical manifestations of emotional distress

As seen in Table 1, withdrawal and lack of concentration were the most common behaviours observed among maltreated students. These findings align with previous studies, which suggest that emotional trauma can severely impact a child's ability to form social connections and engage in academic activities (McLaughlin & Sheridan, 2020).

## 4.2 Focus Group and Interview Insights

The focus group discussions with parents and educators, as well as interviews with school heads, revealed consistent themes regarding the impact of child maltreatment on psychological development. Participants in the focus groups discussed a general increase in behavioural problems among students who came from abusive households. They emphasized that children subjected to maltreatment often exhibited emotional volatility, either withdrawing into themselves or acting out aggressively. One educator noted, It's common to see children who have been mistreated at

home come to school angry or scared. They might lash out at other students or simply shut down.

Educators also reported that students who experienced maltreatment often struggled academically. This theme was corroborated by multiple participants who noted that these students exhibited poor concentration, a lack of motivation, and declining performance in key subjects like mathematics and reading. In addition, parents in the focus group expressed concern over the long-term psychological effects of maltreatment. One parent shared that their child had become "emotionally numb," showing little interest in activities that once brought joy.

In interviews, school heads expressed frustration over the limited resources available to address cases of child maltreatment. One head of school commented, "We have children who are clearly in distress, but as a school, we are limited in what we can do without the involvement of social services or child protection agencies." The interviews also highlighted the inconsistency in governmental support for child welfare, with some school heads expressing disappointment over the lack of follow-up on reported cases of abuse.

**Table 2: Key Themes from Focus Groups and Interviews**

Theme	Description	Example Quote
Emotional Volatility	Students exhibit extreme emotional responses to stress.	"Some children alternate between aggression and withdrawal."
Academic Decline	Maltreatment negatively affects cognitive focus and academic progress.	"We've seen a sharp drop in grades among these students."
Inadequate Resources	Schools face challenges in addressing child maltreatment effectively.	"We don't have the resources to provide adequate support."
Long-term Psychological Impact	Concern over the lasting effects of maltreatment on emotional health.	"The trauma will stay with them for years."
Lack of Governmental Support	Inconsistent follow-up and support from child welfare agencies.	"We report abuse, but nothing seems to happen afterward."

Table 2 highlights the major themes that emerged from the discussions, emphasizing the deep emotional and

academic impact of maltreatment, as well as the systemic issues that hinder effective intervention.

### 4.3 Impact on Psychological Development

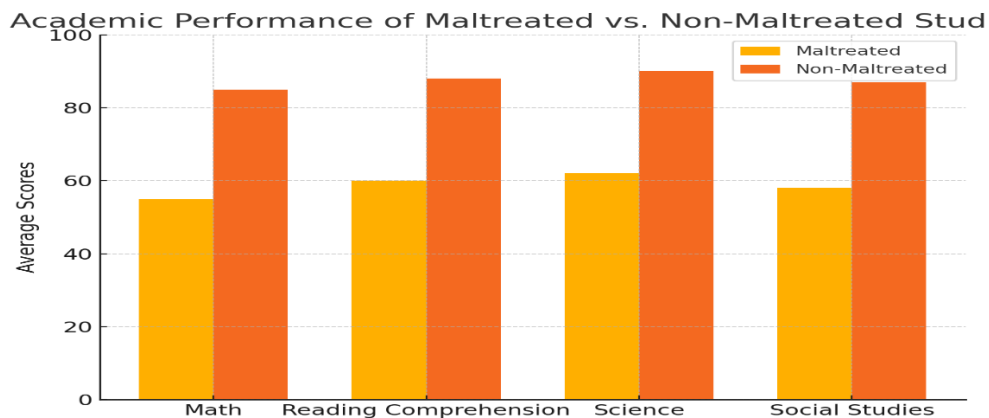
The study's findings indicate that child maltreatment has a profound and far-reaching impact on the psychological development of primary school learners. As observed in the students, maltreatment leads to a variety of emotional and cognitive difficulties that can significantly affect both their academic performance and social interactions. Emotional issues like withdrawal and aggression are often coping mechanisms for the trauma experienced at home, with children internalizing or externalizing their pain (Turner et al., 2021).

One of the most prominent effects of maltreatment observed in this study is the decline in academic performance. Children subjected to maltreatment often exhibit cognitive impairments, including difficulty

concentrating, memory problems, and a general lack of interest in learning. This finding aligns with existing research, which suggests that the stress and trauma of abuse can impair brain development and disrupt learning processes (Gilbert et al., 2020). Maltreated children may also exhibit a heightened sense of fear and anxiety, leading to difficulties in engaging with peers and teachers.

The data collected from focus groups and interviews further support these observations, with educators and school heads consistently pointing out the relationship between maltreatment and declining academic performance. This correlation suggests that children who experience abuse may be at greater risk of academic failure, which can have long-term consequences on their future educational opportunities and emotional well-being.

**Graph 1: Academic Performance of Maltreated vs. Non-Maltreated Students**



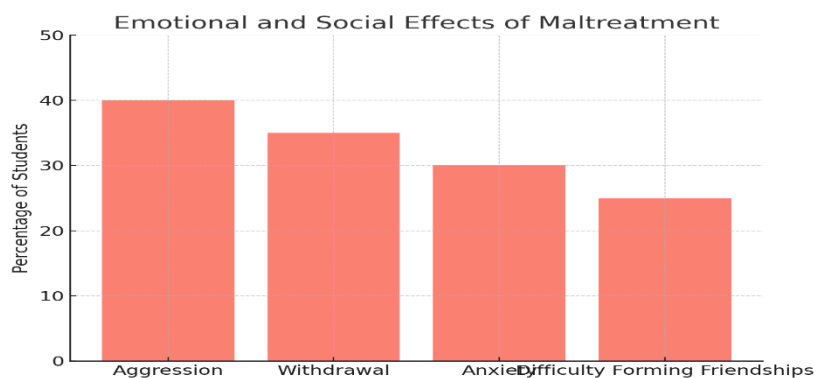
*Source: Researcher 2024*

**Graph 1** compares the academic performance of maltreated students against non-maltreated peers. As the graph illustrates, maltreated students consistently score lower across subjects, particularly in areas requiring sustained cognitive focus, such as mathematics and reading comprehension. The disparity in academic achievement highlights the profound impact that maltreatment can have on a child's ability to engage and succeed in school.

Moreover, the study found that emotional and psychological distress was often reflected in students'

interactions with peers. Maltreated children frequently struggled with forming friendships, often isolating themselves or reacting aggressively in social situations. This finding is consistent with attachment theory, which posits that early relationships with caregivers play a crucial role in shaping children's ability to form social bonds (Bowlby, 2021). Children who experience abuse or neglect may develop insecure attachments, leading to difficulties in socializing and trusting others.

**Graph 2: Emotional and Social Effects of Maltreatment**



*Source: Researcher 2024*

**Graph 2** outlines the emotional and social effects of maltreatment as reported by educators and observed in students. The categories include aggression, withdrawal, anxiety, and difficulty forming friendships. Aggression and withdrawal were the most common emotional responses observed, suggesting that maltreated children oscillate between externalizing their emotional pain and withdrawing into themselves. This emotional instability often leads to social isolation, as these children struggle to form trusting and positive relationships with their peers.

Additionally, participants in the study expressed concern over the long-term effects of child maltreatment. Both educators and parents reported that children who had been subjected to abuse were more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues as they grew older. One educator shared, "These children are not only struggling now; we're worried about what happens to them in the future if they don't get the help they need." This sentiment underscores the importance of early intervention to mitigate the long-term psychological damage caused by maltreatment.

The results of this study clearly highlight the significant psychological impact of child maltreatment on primary school learners, directly addressing the research questions posed. The observed behavioural problems, including withdrawal, aggression, and anxiety, are consistent with the literature on the emotional and cognitive effects of abuse. Children exposed to maltreatment often displayed diminished concentration and engagement, directly affecting their academic performance, which confirms the hypothesis that maltreatment negatively affects a child's psychological and cognitive growth (Gilbert, D 2020).

The findings also demonstrate that children who suffer from maltreatment experience a wide range of emotional responses, from heightened aggression to profound social withdrawal, which were observed and reported by teachers and parents alike. These responses suggest that maltreated children struggle with emotional regulation, which in turn affects their social and academic development (McLaughlin & Sheridan, 2020). The results provide compelling evidence that the

psychological effects of abuse manifest not only in emotional difficulties but also in a child's ability to focus and thrive academically, as evidenced by their poor performance in key subjects such as mathematics and language arts.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

The findings from this study demonstrate that child maltreatment has a significant and detrimental impact on the psychological development of primary school learners. The observed behaviours, combined with insights from educators, parents, and school heads, paint a comprehensive picture of how abuse manifests in emotional, cognitive, and social difficulties. The results clearly indicate that children exposed to maltreatment are at greater risk for academic underachievement, emotional distress, and social isolation. The study also highlights the urgent need for systemic interventions, including better resources for schools and stronger governmental support, to protect children from the lasting effects of maltreatment.

The study has demonstrated the profound and far-reaching effects of child maltreatment on the psychological development of primary school learners. The findings revealed that maltreated children exhibit a range of emotional and cognitive difficulties, including withdrawal, aggression, anxiety, and declining academic performance. Observational data, focus groups, and interviews all confirmed that these children face significant challenges in both their emotional well-being and educational outcomes. The lack of adequate support from government agencies and schools exacerbates these difficulties, leaving maltreated children vulnerable to long-term psychological trauma.

### 5.2 Recommendations

**Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations emerged:**

1. **Training and Awareness Programs:** There is a clear need for training programs that educate



both parents and educators on the psychological impact of child maltreatment. Such programs should focus on how to recognize signs of abuse, how to provide emotional support, and the importance of creating safe environments for children both at home and at school (Hughes & Tucker, 2021). Workshops for teachers should include training on trauma-informed teaching strategies, equipping them with the skills to address the emotional needs of students who have experienced abuse.

2. **Creating Support Systems in Schools:** Schools should establish support systems such as counselling services and peer support groups where maltreated children can express their emotions and receive professional help. Teachers and school counsellors should work together to monitor children at risk and ensure they receive timely psychological support. Encouraging peer-to-peer support networks can also help maltreated children feel less isolated.
3. **Parental Engagement:** Schools should involve parents in their efforts to address child maltreatment by conducting regular parent-teacher meetings, where the psychological and emotional development of children is discussed. Additionally, schools can create awareness campaigns targeting parents to educate them on positive parenting practices that prevent abuse and neglect.
4. **Policy Recommendations:** The study highlights the need for stronger government policies that protect children from maltreatment. Government agencies should prioritize the creation of policies that mandate schools and healthcare providers to report suspected cases of child abuse. Policies should also ensure that reported cases are followed up with appropriate interventions, including counselling services and legal action (McLaughlin & Sheridan, 2020).
5. **Improving Child Protection Services:** Government agencies responsible for child welfare must receive better funding to increase their capacity to investigate cases of abuse and offer timely interventions. This includes hiring more social workers and psychologists to provide support to families and children at risk.
6. **Awareness Campaigns:** Government-led awareness campaigns are essential to educate the general public about the consequences of child maltreatment. These campaigns should be targeted at both urban and rural areas to ensure that all communities understand the importance of safeguarding children's rights and well-being.

7. **School-Based Mental Health Services:** Policymakers should support the integration of mental health services in schools. Children who have experienced abuse often require long-term psychological support, which can be provided through school-based programs that offer counselling, therapy, and other interventions aimed at supporting emotional resilience.

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