Child Abuse in School Age at Assiut City: Correlates and Academic Achievement Consequences

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Abstract: Background In general, empirical studies indicate that various forms of child abuse negatively affect the victim's development physically, intellectually, and psychosocially. There is a considerable body of research that shows a strong relationship between exposure to abuse and poor academic performance. **Objectives:** this study aimed to assess exposure to abuse among primary school children in Assiut City and assess its effect on their academic achievement. **Design**: A descriptive cross sectional research design was used in this study. **Subjects and Methods:** The studied children were 1054 children from last two years of primary school at Assiut city, with age ranged from 10 to 14 years and both sex. Three tools were utilized to collect data. Tool (one) was self structured interview questionnaire included tow parts; the first part included personal data of child and the second part to assess social class by using Abd-El-Twab scale. Tool (two) Child abuse questionnaire it consists of 63 items. The third tool to assess level of academic achievement. **Results:** the present results revealed that the vast majority of studied children were identified as victims of emotional, followed by neglecting and physical abuse and also show significant correlation between all of them. It was found that higher percentage of children had failed score were abused compared to non abused children **Conclusion:** Abuse   may negatively affect children scholastic performance. **The study recommended** that a compelling need for intervention to prevent further abuse and to assist the child victims with their learning difficulties.

1. Introduction

All children are born to grow, to develop, to live, to love, and to articulate their needs and feelings for their self-protection. For their development children need the respect and protection of adults who take them seriously, love them, and honestly help them to become oriented in the world. But some children are hurt, neglected and maltreated by adults. Younger children may not be aware that what is happening to them is abuse **(Biernet, 2000).** Child abuse or maltreatment generally is defined as the intentional injury of a child. It can include physical abuse or injuries, neglect or failure to prevent harm, failure to provide adequate physical or emotional care or supervision, abandonment, sexual assault or intrusion, and overt torture or maiming **(WHO, 2010).**

Child abuse statistics do not accurately reflect child abuse, because child abuse is so under-reported. World wide, approximately 40 million children below the age of 15 are subjected to child abuse each year **(World Health Organization (WHO) 2001)**. An estimated 905,000 children were victims of child abuse or neglect in 2006 **(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008)**. UNICEF estimates that two million children died as a result of armed conflict during a recent 10-year period and that another six

million were injured or disabled **(Human Right Watch, 2001).**

Child abuse and neglect consists of any act of commission or omission those results in harm, potential for harm, or the threat of harm to a child (0-18 years of age) even if harm was unintentional. The five main types of child maltreatment are: physical abuse; sexual abuse; emotional maltreatment; neglect and witnessing domestic violence. Children may suffer from more than one type of abuse such as a combination of emotional, sexual, and physical maltreatment and neglect were victims of child abuse or neglect **(Gilbert et al., 2009).**

Physical abuse of a child includes "any physical injury as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap, or other object),burning, or otherwise harming a child" **(National Clearing house on Child Abuse and Neglect [NCCAN], 2004). Townsend, 2006** added, the most obvious way to detect it is by outward physical signs. However, behavioral indicators may also be evident.

In addition, neglect of a child includes refusal of or delay in seeking health care, abandonment, expulsion from the home or refusal to allow a runaway to return home, and inadequate supervision. Emotional neglect refers to a chronic failure by the parent or

caretaker to provide the child with the hope, love, and support necessary for the development of a sound, healthy personality **(Townsend, 2008)**.

Not all abused and neglected children will experience long-term consequences. Outcomes of individual cases vary widely and are affected by a combination of factors, including the child's age and developmental status when the abuse or neglect occurred, the type of abuse (physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, etc.) and the relationship between the victim and his or her abuser (**Chalk,** *et al***., 2002 and English et al., 2005;).**

The National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW), also found that children placed in out-of-home care due to abuse or neglect tended to score lower than the general population on measures of cognitive capacity, language development, and academic achievement **(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).**

Most people who work with school-age children know that what happens to a child at home has a profound and lasting impact on how she or he will function at school. Experiencing abuse may impact children's school performance in multiple ways, including lower grades, increased absences, increased disciplinary problems, and higher rates of school dropout **(Putnam, 2006) and Hurt,** *et al.***, 2001)**

Domestic violence is typically defined as violence between intimate partners. However, with regard to children, domestic violence can refer to those who have witnessed violence between their parents. The witnessing of family violence has been broadly defined as "a child being present (hearing or seeing) while a parent or sibling is subjected to physical abuse, sexual abuse or psychological maltreatment **(Vuong et al., (2009)**. Some researchers has shown that children who witness domestic violence tend to experience significant disruptions in their psychosocial wellbeing, often exhibiting a similar pattern of symptoms to other abused or neglected children. Children who live with domestic violence can lead to negative outcomes for them and clearly have an impact on them **(Bragg, 2003)**

Significance of the study

Child abuse statistics do not accurately reflect child abuse, because child abuse is so under-reported. Worldwide, approximately 40 million children below the age of 15 are subjected to child abuse each year **(World Health Organization (WHO) 2001)**. An estimated 905,000 children were victims of child abuse or neglect in 2006 **(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008)**. Violence against children, in its different forms, is widespread in Egypt. UNICEF estimates that 92 % of children in Egypt between ages 2-14 years experienced violent **(Hazou, 2007)**.

Studies indicate that every day a significant number of children are exposed to serious maltreatment and neglect leading to physical and psychological injury and serious long-term consequences. Researchers are continuously examining the wide range of potential consequences of child abuse and neglect. The consequences of child abuse and neglect that extend into adulthood will vary considerably **(Miller-Perrin and Perrin, 2007).**

The most destructive consequences of child abuse may be the detrimental effect on a child's school performance. Over and over again, research indicates that abused children demonstrate reduced intellectual functioning and perform very poorly in school. Cognitive implications of child abuse include difficulties in learning and in school performance **(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).**

Despite numerous researches in Egypt, reports on the effects of maltreatment on the development of children, relatively few have focused on academic performance or school adjustment. Data generated from this study will determine the impact abuse can have on children's academic achievement, help in determine the possible existence of abuse at primary school in Assiut, and based on this, establish whether there was a relationship between abuse and academic performance.

Aim of the study

The study aimed to assess exposure to abuse among primary school children in Assiut City and assess its effect on their academic achievement.

Research Hypotheses:

Primary school children in Assiut City may suffer from any types of abuse. Children may suffer from more than one type of abuse. A statistical significant relationship between child abuse and poor academic achievement may be found and academic achievement of those children may be vary widely and may affected by a combination of factors.

2. Subjects and methods

Research design:

Cross sectional descriptive research design was utilized for this study.

Sample:

Total coverage sampling was used and all students of the last two grades of primary school who understand the questionnaire in the 6 schools were enrolled in the study and the total number of the sample was (1054) students (males & females) from each category of school (private and governmental).

Setting:

This study was conducted at Assiut primary schools. The selected schools represented all geographic areas of Assiut city including both private schools (El-Tahreir, Dar Heraa and Assiut

Experimental Language) and governmental schools (El-Nahdaa, El-Wheda El-Arabea and Al- Gamea).

Tools:

Tool (1): **A Self structured interview questionnaire**: it consisted of two parts:

Personal Data includes the as sex and age of student

Socioeconomic Status Scale: It was developed by (Abd El-Twaab 1998); used to assess the socio-economic status of the children. It included four items; level of education of parents (8 items), family income (6 items), job of parent, life styles (3 items). Each item have one score the total score were divided into three classes as high degree from 85-100%, moderate from 60-84%, low less than 60%. It has been modified the item of income of social class by the researchers as following; according to the rate of inflation and increase to be conforming with recent income through comparing difference of the value of the golden pound at 1998 to that at 2012 and multiplying the rate of inflation to the scale.

Tool (2): Child abuse questionnaire: it was adopted from (El-Masehr, 2007) the model includes **3** parts:-

Part one: Physical abuse (19 items)

This pattern is any injury cannot be the result of accident, injury may include bruises or scratches or traces of blows or punches body or choking, biting and run over and musk violently pulling hair, spitting or disk, broken bones, burning or internal injury or even injury leading to death.

Part two: Emotional abuse (26 items):

Customarily the pattern is an ongoing pattern of behavior characterized by abuser withdrawal from the natural emotional relationship with the child, and that it needs to growth his personality, and include of abuse of words, and of abuse mental, and psychological abuse. It may be in the form of a strange punishment methods are used, including the imprisonment of a child in a bath or a dark room or connect with home furnishings, or threatened with torture, disregard child (about the use of speech degrades from his status, or Tanifa or for blame and insulted him)

Part three: Neglecting (18 items):

Neglect knew the absence of behavior that should be responsive to the needs of the construction. Here, Parents not harm child physically or verbally but do not respond to him needs and neglect the objectives of his feelings and needs. It includes forms of child abandonment, neglect of food, lack of warmth, lack of proper clothing and unhealthy household circumstances. Also, include protection from hazards, lack of appropriate supervision for his age, failure to sponsorship and witness domestic violence.

Scoring system:

The number of statement equal 63 (Physical abuse 1-19; Emotional abuse20- 45; neglect 46- 63). Every statement answered with Yes / or No, and Yes was scored (1) and No was scored (0).The scoring was reversed for negative items. It was a quantitative measure of abuse by the total score obtained by the student on a scale of abuse. The scores of the items were summed-up and the divided by the number of the items.

Tool (3):

Assessing level of academic achievement:

Based on marks given to each student by their teacher, an average mark was calculated to be used as a global score. We preferred to define academic performance as done in other studies (Gonzailez-pienda *et al.,* 1992), using the teacher's evaluations or average mark given. There is empirical evidence to support that teacher evaluations are a sufficiently valid and reliable criterion of student performance. Also, used teacher evaluations as a criterion of school performance, obtaining high coefficients between different evaluations at different point of time. The teacher evaluations were summed-up and mean scores are adapted to a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 =fail, 2=pass, 3=good, 4=very good, 5=excellent.

Methods:

Administrative approval was obtained from the Dean of Faculty of Nursing, Assiut University to the Ministry of Education research committee before implementation of the study. Meetings with school managers to explain the objectives of the study where help to gain their cooperation and to allow the release of students during minimal workload activities.

Pilot study: After developing the tools, a pilot study was conducted on 5 children in each primary school in Assiut City. A pilot study was conducted for purpose to testing clarity, completeness, and to determine the time involvement. According to the results of pilot, the needed omissions, and/or additions were done. A jury acceptance of the final forms was secured before actual study work and the reliability was assessed in a pilot study by measuring their internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha coefficient method.

Ethical consideration:

The oral consent was taken from all children participate in the study. The purpose and nature of the study was explained by the researcher through direct personal communication prior starting to their participation in the study. This data will be confidential between students and the researcher and it will be used for the purpose of the research only.

Field of the work

The field work was carried out through a period of 6 months starting from October 2011 to March 2012; the time required for the data collection was in six months. In the beginning the researchers met the class teacher and gave her/his a back ground about the study and ask her about students' name list to take a copy from it. After that we put serial number on each

questionnaire according to students' name list. Then actual work started by meeting the students, the researchers first introduced themselves to them and gave them a complete back ground about the study, pre- designed questionnaires in Arabic Language was distributed in order to collect the required data. To make students feel freedom and avoid impressed told them not to write their names. The researcher was available for more clarification whenever needed.

Statistical Analysis:

Data were analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20. Descriptive statistics and Correlation coefficient tests were used in the analysis. A significance level was considered at P ≤ 0.05.

3.Results

The present study included 1054 children; more than two-thirds of them aged between 10-14 years, with mean age 11.82 ± 0.68 years and 51.2 % of the studied children were male. Nearly half of children were come from middle social class. The great majority of them 84.1% didn't witness domestic violence. According to academic achievement 35.6% of studied children had excellent score compared to 20% of them were failed.

Fig. (1) Shows distribution of subtypes of abuse among studied children. It illustrates the majority of abused children were emotionally abused (96.7%).

Fig. (2) Shows correlation between physical abuse and emotional abuse, the more the physical abuse increase, the more emotional abuse increase with highly statistically significant difference.

Fig. (3) shows correlation between physical abuse and neglect ion score, the more the physical abuse increase, the more neglecting increase with highly statistically significant difference.

Fig. (4) shows correlation between emotional abuse and neglect ion score, the more the emotional abuse increase, the more neglecting increase with highly statistically significant difference.

Table (1) describes the distribution of studied sample regarding to their total academic achievement. It was found that a higher percentage of the studied children had failed score of their total academic achievement were physical, emotional and neglecting abuse (26.4, 20.1, and 22.8, respectively) compared to non abused children (2.4, 8.6, and 4.1, respectively) with highly statistically differences. On the other hand the excellent score of total academic achievement was higher in non abused children (78.5, 68.6, and 58.7 respectively) than in abused children (19.1, 34.4, and 31.1 respectively)**.**

Table (2) shows Distribution of studied sample regarding to their sex. It was noticed that all percentages of subtypes of abuse (physical, emotional and neglecting) were higher in male child than female.

Table (3) shows relation between social classes with subtypes of abuse. It was noticed that all percentages of subtypes of abuse (physical, emotional and neglecting) were low in children from high level social class (23.7, 22.8 and 19.1 respectively) compared by low and middle social class children, with statistically significant differences.

Table (4) Displays relation between violence toward mother and subtypes of abuse among studied children. It was revealed that the more witness domestic violence increase, the more child abuse increases with highly statistically significant difference (P≤0.000).

Table (5) Displays relation between gender of abused children and their academic achievement. It was found that the fail total score of academic achievement was higher among male abused children than female with highly statistically significant difference (P≤0.000).

Table (6) Displays relation between witness domestic violence and academic achievement among studied children**.** It noticed that the excellent total score of academic achievement was higher among children hadn't witness domestic violence while the children who violence witness domestic violence had higher percentage of failed score with highly statistically differences.
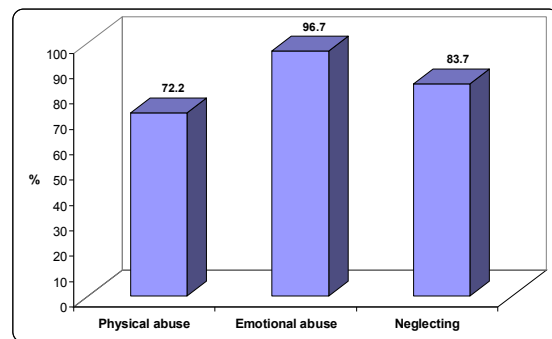
Figure (1): Distribution of subtypes of abuse among studied children.
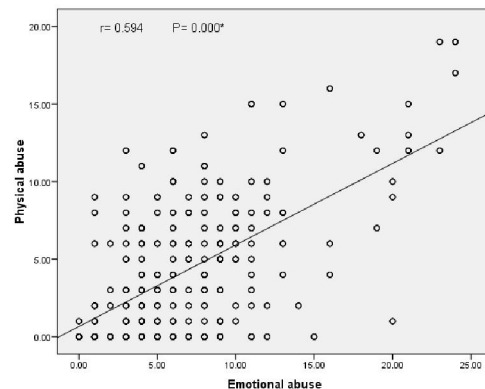
Figure (2): Correlation between physical and emotional abuse
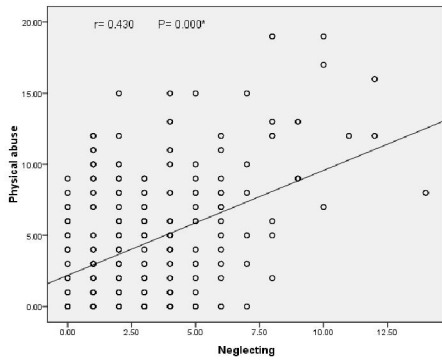
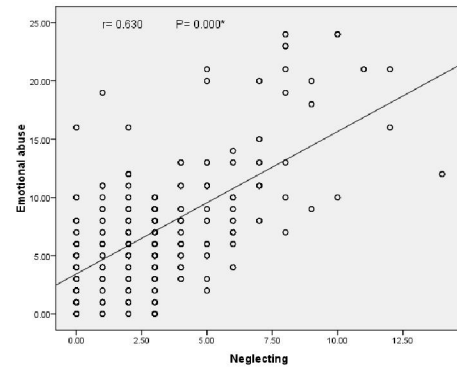**Figure (3): Correlation between physical abuse and neglecting**

Figure (4): Correlation between emotional abuse and neglecting

Table (1): Distribution of studied sample regarding to their total academic achievement.

	academic achievement									
	Excellent		**Very good**		**Good**		**Pass**		**Failed**	
	No.	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Physical abuse:										
Yes	145	19.1	156	20.5	111	14.6	148	19.4	201	26.4
No	230	78.5	24	8.2	20	6.8	12	4.1	7	2.4
P-value	0.000*									
Emotional abuse:										
Yes	351	34.4	176	17.3	127	12.5	160	15.7	205	20.1
No	24	68.6	4	11.4	4	11.4	0	0.0	3	8.6
P-value	0.001*									
Neglecting:										
Yes	274	31.1	148	16.8	119	13.5	140	15.9	201	22.8
No	101	58.7	32	18.6	12	7.0	20	11.6	7	4.1
P-value	0.000*									

Table (2): Distribution of studied sample regarding to their sex.

	Male (n= 540)		**Female (n= 514)**	
	No.	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Physical abuse:				
Yes	452	83.7	309	60.1
No	88	16.3	205	39.9
P-value	0.000*			
Emotional abuse:				
Yes	532	98.5	487	94.7
No	8	1.5	27	5.3
P-value	0.001*			
Neglecting:				
Yes	472	87.4	410	79.8
No	68	12.6	104	20.2
P-value	0.001*			

Table (3): Relation between social classes and subtypes of abuse.

	Low social class		Middle social class		High social class	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Physical abuse:						
Yes	276	36.2	305	40.1	180	23.7
No	20	6.8	217	74.1	56	19.1
P-value	0.000*					
Emotional abuse:						
Yes	284	27.9	503	49.3	232	22.8
No	12	34.3	19	54.3	4	11.4
P-value	0.112					
Neglecting:						
Yes	288	32.7	426	48.2	168	19.1
No	8	4.7	96	55.8	68	39.5
P-value	0.000*					

Table (4): Relation between witness domestic violence and subtypes of abuse.

	Witness domestic violence	
	No.	%
Physical abuse:		
Yes	156	92.8
No	12	7.2
P-value	0.000*	
Emotional abuse:		
Yes	168	100.0
No	0	0.0
P-value	0.009*	
Neglecting:		
Yes	164	97.6
No	4	2.4
P-value	0.000*	

Table (5): Relation between gender of abused children and their academic achievement.

	Excellent		Very good		Good		Pass		Failed		*P.*
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	value
Physical abuse:											
Male	108	22.9	72	15.3	52	11.0	92	19.5	148	31.4	
Female	166	40.5	76	18.5	67	16.3	48	11.7	53	12.9	0.000*
Emotional abuse:											
Male	144	27.1	76	14.3	56	10.5	104	19.5	152	28.6	
Female	207	42.5	100	20.5	71	14.6	56	11.5	53	10.9	0.000*
Neglecting:											
Male	88	19.5	68	15.0	48	10.6	100	22.1	148	32.7	
Female	57	18.4	88	28.5	63	20.4	48	15.5	53	17.2	0.000*

Table (6): Relation between witness domestic violence and academic achievement among studied children.

	Witness domestic violence				*P*-value
	Yes		No		
	No.	%	No.	%	
Excellent	28	16.7	347	39.2	
Very good	44	26.2	136	15.3	
Good	24	14.3	107	12.1	0.000*
Pass	12	7.1	148	16.7	
Failed	60	35.7	148	16.7	

4. Discussion

The present study found that all percentages of subtypes of abuse (physical, emotional and neglecting) were high. This increase may be a result of expansion of the definition of child abuse and decreasing acceptance of what had been considered acceptable child-rearing patterns in the past. This finding was supported by **El-hadedy and Gahshan (2004)** who found that some of behaviors that are considered abuse in a community may be considered normal behaviors in another and this disparity in the definition depends on the situation, general economic society and the concept of society toward role of the family and the prevailing concept of physical punishment and social care of family.

Also, the present results revealed that the vast majority of studied children were identified as victims of emotional, followed by neglecting and physical abuse. This can attributes due to emotional abuse is a component of all forms of child abuse. This is in the line with **Goldman et al. (2003)** who reported that emotional abuse is the most form of child maltreatment to identify. In contrast with this finding **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, (2007)** found that, Child neglect is the most prevalent form of child maltreatment in the United States.

In addition, the present study showing many children are victims of more than one types of abuse also show significant correlation between all of them (emotional, physical and neglecting). This may indicate that the forms of abuse overlap. Similarly finding reached by **Lowenthal (1999)** who demonstrated that children may suffer from more than one type of abuse such as a combination of emotional, sexual, physical and neglecting.

Results from this study indicate that children abuse may adversely impact on their academic performance. We found that higher percentage of children had failed score were abused compared to non abused children. In same line **Slade and Wissow (2007)**, who concluded that the maltreatment may negatively affect scholastic performance, were below average school performance. Also, in agreement with the study conducted at school age by **Lowenthal (1999)** who reported that all types of maltreated children were considered more at risk for school failure and dropping out than their non maltreated classmates.

Furthermore, our study noticed the children with physical and neglecting abuse had more failing of score achievement. Perhaps these children learned the necessary survival skills out of necessity because of the lack of care in their homes. This finding agrees with **Lowenthal (1999)** who found that neglect was associated with the poorest academic performance among the groups of maltreated students.

In spite of the present study found that the fail total score of academic achievement was higher among abused children but there were some of them had excellent total score of academic achievement. In a trail to explain that the consequences of child abuse will vary considerably. For some children, the effect of child abuse is chronic and debilitating; others have more positive outcomes, despite their abuse and neglect histories. This finding was supported by **Miller-Perrin and Perrin (2007)** who reported that not all children exposed to violence suffer the negative consequences.

Over the past few decades, there has been a growing awareness of the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child maltreatment **(Rennison, 2003).** In this regard our results noticed there is a positive association between children who witness domestics' violence and their abuse. It is in agreement with a national study by the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2003)** which found that approximately 903,000 children were identified by child protective services (CPS) as victims of abuse or neglect that in an estimated 30 to 60 percent of the families where domestic violence is identified. Moreover, our results revealed that all children had witness domestic violence was emotionally abused. Similarly finding reached by **Smith and Segal (2013)** who reported that witnessing domestic violence in terrifying to children and emotionally abusive.

Recent theories on child- parents / caregiver attachment have suggested that negative interactions between the youngster and the parents/caregiver may account for some of this poor school achievement. In an effort to measures the impact of domestic violence on academic achievement of their children, the present study was found that negative outcomes for children had witness domestic violence and had higher percentage of failed score with highly statistically significant differences. This in congruence with **Carrillo and Carter, (2001)** who found that Children who live with domestic violence had lower cognitive functioning and poor school performance.

It was noticed that all percentages of subtypes of abuse (physical, emotional and neglecting) were low in children from high level social class compared by low and middle social class children, with statistically significant differences. This finding derives from a belief that high level social class families afford their children an array of services, goods, parental actions, and social connections that potentially redound to the benefit of children and a concern that many low and middle social class children lack access to those same resources and experiences. This finding in agreement with **Bradley and Corwyn, (2002)** who noted that maltreatment and low Socio-Economic Status (SES) are positively correlated, the number of maltreated

children in the high SES group is smaller than the number of maltreated children from low SES families. This contradicts with **Smith and Segal (2013)** who stated that there is no relationship between social class and child abuse. Abuse is apparent across all classes of families.

The present study has demonstrated statistically significant association between all subtypes of child abuse and their gender. All percentages of subtypes of abuse (physical, emotional and neglecting) were higher in male child than female. This finding is quite expected and is congruence with **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2006)** reported that boys had a greater risk of emotional, neglect and of serious injury than girls.

It was viewed in the present study the fail total score of academic achievement was higher among male abused children than female. This finding is in agreement with **(Buckner *et al.*, 2004)** who reported that the consequences of abuse depend on the child's gender. In contrast with the present study finding **Lowenthal (1999)** demonstrated that the effects of maltreatment on academic achievement did not vary by gender, with adverse out- comes being observed equally for both male and female students.

Finally, we believe that our study represents one of the most comprehensive attempts to document the effect of child abuse on academic achievement in the school setting. As with any research, however, there are several limitations to this study that should be considered when interpreting our results. The results of this study may not generalize to other populations of school children. In recent years, the community in which this study took place has experienced difficult economic conditions. In addition, the system for identifying abused children in Assiut City may vary somewhat from others. Likewise, there are many potential biological and psychological mediators of the effects of abuse that we could not measure (e.g., child's IQ).

Conclusion:

Based on the results of the present study, it was concluded that all percentages of subtypes of abuse (physical, emotional and neglecting) were high in studied children. Children exposed to abuse are at risk of poor academic performance. Of the abused children, neglected children showed the poorest outcomes on academic performance. Variations in abuse effects by gender, social class and witness domestic violence.

Recommendation:
In the light of the study findings, the following recommendations are suggested:

- A compelling need for intervention to prevent further abuse and to assist the child victims with their learning difficulties.
- Research of preventive methods and interventions that assist the child victims are needed and should be advocated by concerned professionals, families, and community members.
- The effects of maltreatment should be taken into account in developing schools' and educators' responses to poor performance among their students and in guiding the development of service interventions.

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