

Influence of Domestic Violence on Pupils' Social Skills Development in Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Domestic violence is widely recognised as a violation of human rights and a significant public health concern affecting individuals across all age groups and socio-economic backgrounds. This study examined its influence on preschool pupils' social skills development in Akure South and Akure North, Ondo State. A descriptive survey design using a quantitative approach was adopted, and simple random sampling was used to select ten public and private schools, comprising 120 pre-primary pupils in intact classes and 30 pre-school teachers. Data were collected using two validated instruments: the Domestic Violence Exposure Questionnaire (DVEQ) and the Preschool Social Skills Rating Scale (PSSRS). The DVEQ measured exposure to physical, emotional and psychological violence, while the PSSRS assessed communication, empathy, cooperation and self-regulation skills. Reliability was confirmed through a pilot study with reliability coefficients of 0.80 for the DVEQ and 0.70 for the PSSRS, as determined using Cronbach's alpha. Data were analysed using frequency count, percentage, and graphs. Findings indicated that childhood exposure to domestic violence was a major contributing factor (40%), with the overall level of violence rated as moderate. Communication skills were the most affected domain (50%). Legal reform and enforcement were perceived as the most effective strategies for addressing domestic violence. The study concluded that domestic violence significantly influences pupils' social development and recommended structured Social and Emotional Learning programmes and strengthened school-community collaboration for reporting and support.

Key words: Domestic Violence, Pupils Social Skills Development

Introduction

Reports from various regions of the world suggests that numerous households experience serious forms of domestic violence, with harmful consequences for children growing up in such environments. Domestic violence is widely acknowledged as both a violation of fundamental human rights and a significant public health issue affecting individuals irrespective of age, gender or socio-economic status. The World Health Organization (2021) defines domestic violence as behaviour within an intimate relationship that results in physical, emotional or sexual harm. Likewise, UN Women (2023) describes it as a repeated pattern of conduct aimed at establishing or maintaining dominance and control over a partner. Such conduct may involve physical assault, emotional degradation, sexual coercion, financial restriction or psychological intimidation.

Children who witness or directly experience domestic violence frequently display emotional instability, behavioural challenges and academic difficulties (Alabi, 2017). Exposure can reduce participation in school activities, weaken peer relationships and negatively influence attendance and academic performance. The World Health Organization (2021) categorises domestic violence into physical, emotional, sexual, psychological and economic abuse. Within Nigeria, the Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act further

recognises these forms and includes verbal abuse and controlling behaviours within its legal provisions.

Scholarly evidence indicates that domestic violence results from interconnected structural and individual factors. Cultural practices and gender inequality that reinforce male dominance are strongly implicated (Jewkes, 2015). Substance misuse, especially alcohol abuse, has also been identified as a contributing factor (Capaldi, 2021). Economic hardship and unemployment may heighten stress within households, thereby increasing the likelihood of violent behaviour (Igbolekwu, 2021). Intergenerational transmission is equally significant, as children raised in violent homes are more likely to reproduce similar patterns in adulthood (Igbolekwu, 2021). The World Health Organization (2021) further emphasises that the consequences of domestic violence extend beyond the family, contributing to adverse health outcomes, poor academic performance, increased risk of future victimisation or perpetration and broader socio-economic costs.

In the present study, domestic violence was conceptually grounded in these international and national frameworks and operationally defined as pupils' exposure to physical, emotional, psychological or economic violence within the home. From the wide range of determinants identified in prior research, four principal contributory factors were selected: substance abuse, childhood exposure to domestic violence, economic hardship and parental unemployment. These variables were chosen due to their consistent empirical support and contextual relevance. Measurement was conducted using a structured Domestic Violence Exposure Questionnaire (DVEQ), developed in alignment with classifications provided by the World Health Organization (2021) and the Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act (2015). The instrument contained clearly organised subscales representing each selected factor and employed a Likert-type response format to assess frequency and severity of exposure. Teachers acted as proxy respondents, drawing on observable behavioural indicators, documented parental interactions and school records.

This structured measurement approach demonstrates the potential of the study to systematically capture multidimensional aspects of domestic violence. However, reliance on proxy reporting and observable indicators may limit full disclosure of sensitive home experiences, thereby posing constraints on transparency and measurement precision. Despite these limitations, explicit operationalisation of domestic violence enhances clarity, strengthens methodological rigour and provides a coherent foundation for examining its influence on preschool pupils' social skills development.

Statement of the Problem

Despite increasing awareness of domestic violence, there remains limited research on its impact on the social skills development of preschool pupils in Nigeria. Most existing studies focus on adolescents or adults, leaving critical gaps in understanding how early exposure affects foundational social competencies such as communication, cooperation, empathy, and teamwork. Ideally, preschool environments should provide structured support for children exposed to domestic violence, fostering the development of essential social skills. In such settings, pupils would demonstrate effective communication, collaboration, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution, while teachers would be equipped to implement targeted Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programmes tailored to vulnerable children. In reality, many preschools currently lack systematic interventions for pupils affected by domestic violence. Children exposed to such environments often exhibit aggression, low self-esteem, poor communication, and difficulty forming healthy relationships; however, these challenges are frequently misinterpreted or overlooked by educators. If these issues are not

addressed, affected pupils may fail to develop key social competencies, resulting in poor peer relationships, classroom disruptions, lower academic performance, and long-term societal consequences. Schools may also incur increased costs for remedial programmes, behavioural interventions, and reduced productivity, while society bears the broader burden of perpetuated cycles of violence and underdeveloped human capital. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the influence of domestic violence on the social skills development of preschool pupils in Ondo State.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of domestic violence on preschool pupils' social skills development in Akure South and North of Ondo State, while also considering existing interventions and protective factors that may mitigate its negative impact. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Identify the main factors that contribute to domestic violence in households.
- ii. Examine the prevalence and level of domestic violence affecting preschool pupils in Ondo State.
- iii. Determine the social skills most affected in pupils exposed to domestic violence, such as communication, cooperation, empathy, and teamwork.
- iv. Investigate the effectiveness of strategies and interventions including legal measures, school-based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programmes, and supportive home environments in mitigating and preventing domestic violence.

Research Questions

- i. What are the main factors that cause domestic violence in Ondo State?
- ii. What is the level of domestic violence experienced by preschool pupils in Ondo State?
- iii. Which social skills are most affected in pupils exposed to domestic violence in Ondo State?
- iv. What interventions and strategies are most effective in mitigating domestic violence and supporting pupils' social skills development?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Ecological Systems Theory

This study is anchored in Ecological Systems Theory (EST), developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), which emphasizes that a child's development is influenced by multiple, interrelated layers of environmental contexts. According to EST, a child's social, emotional, and cognitive growth is shaped by interactions within and between these layers, which include the microsystem (immediate environment), mesosystem (connections between immediate settings), exosystem (indirect environments), and macrosystem (cultural and societal norms).

Domestic violence represents a significant disruption within the microsystem, which includes the home, family, and school environment. Exposure to violence at home can compromise the development of critical social skills such as communication, empathy, cooperation, and teamwork. The mesosystem is affected when strained family relationships interact with school settings, potentially leading to misunderstandings, reduced classroom participation, and poor peer interactions. Furthermore, societal norms and economic pressures in the macrosystem such as gender inequality, cultural acceptance of violence, and economic hardship can exacerbate the prevalence and impact of domestic violence (Jewkes, 2015;

Capaldi, 2021). The exosystem, including parental workplaces or community institutions, may indirectly influence children by affecting parents' stress levels, availability, and coping mechanisms.

By applying EST, this study recognises that a child's social skills development is not solely determined by individual characteristics but by the dynamic interplay of environmental influences. Understanding these multiple layers allows the research to explore not only the negative effects of domestic violence but also the protective factors such as supportive teachers, school-based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programmes, and community interventions that can buffer its impact and promote positive social development (Denham et al., 2021; Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2023).

Impact of Domestic Violence on Child Development

Domestic violence refers to patterns of abusive behavior within a relationship, where one partner seeks to exert power and control over the other. When such violence occurs in a household where children are present, it becomes a serious public health concern due to its potential to disrupt children's psychological, emotional, cognitive, and social development (UNICEF, 2021). Children in these environments may not only witness acts of abuse but may also experience direct victimization. Such exposure can result in both immediate and long-term developmental difficulties. The challenges faced by children exposed to domestic violence include:

Effects on Psychological and Emotional Development

Exposure to domestic violence can significantly impair a child's psychological and emotional well-being. Such children are more vulnerable to conditions such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and diminished self-esteem (Evans, Davies, and DiLillo, 2008). In early childhood, these effects may manifest as clinginess, disrupted sleep patterns, or regression to earlier developmental milestones. In contrast, adolescents may exhibit increased aggression, emotional withdrawal, or difficulty forming healthy relationships (Kitzmann, 2003).

Cognitive and Academic Impact

The chronic stress of witnessing domestic violence can interfere with a child's cognitive processes and hinder academic achievement. Affected children often struggle with attention, concentration, and information retention, which can result in declining school performance (Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008). Sustained exposure to such trauma may also disrupt neurological development, particularly in brain regions responsible for executive functioning, memory, and emotional regulation (Margolin and Vickerman, 2007).

Social and Behavioral Consequences

Children raised in homes marked by violence often face significant challenges in building and sustaining healthy relationships. They may imitate aggressive behaviors observed in their environment, experience conflict with peers, and encounter difficulties in managing anger (Edleson, 1999). While some internalize their distress leading to withdrawal and social isolation others externalize it through actions such as bullying, defiance, or other delinquent behaviors (Fantuzzo and Mohr, 1999).

Long-Term Developmental Risks

Gilbert (2009) found that the impact of domestic violence often extends well into adulthood. Individuals exposed to such environments during childhood face a heightened risk of developing substance use problems, experiencing mental health challenges, and entering violent relationships themselves thereby continuing the cycle of abuse. Addressing these risks requires timely intervention to build resilience and promote healthy coping mechanisms. Jones (2015) emphasized that domestic violence is a complex societal issue, not merely a private matter. Combating it effectively demands coordinated efforts involving policy reforms, public education, and strong support systems. By fostering values of respect, equality, and safety, communities can help prevent its occurrence. Furthermore, evidence shows that children with strong social skills are more likely to achieve academic success and demonstrate fewer behavioral challenges in school.

Effect of Domestic Violence on Child Social Skills Development

Domestic violence, especially when witnessed or directly experienced by children, impacts far more than their physical safety it disrupts healthy psychological, emotional, and social growth. Social skills development refers to a child's ability to interact positively, communicate effectively, and build constructive relationships with others. In households characterized by fear, ongoing conflict, and instability, this development is often severely compromised (Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008). Children exposed to such environments may struggle with trust, cooperation, empathy, and conflict resolution. These deficits can hinder their ability to form healthy peer relationships and navigate social situations successfully. If left unaddressed, these challenges often persist into adolescence and adulthood, affecting academic achievement, emotional well-being, and future relationships.

Disruption of Social Learning

Children acquire much of their social behavior by observing and imitating the interactions they see in their immediate environment. In households affected by domestic violence, the behavioral models are often marked by aggression, hostility, and dominance. Consequently, children may internalize these patterns as normal or acceptable ways of relating to others (Bandura, 1977). This distorted learning process can lead to persistent challenges with empathy, cooperation, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation (Kitzmann et al., 2003).

Withdrawal and Social Isolation

Not all children exposed to domestic violence react with outward aggression; some respond by retreating from social interactions. The fear and emotional distress caused by a violent home environment can erode trust in others, prompting them to avoid peers and social situations (Evans, Davies, & DiLillo, 2008). This withdrawal often interferes with their ability to communicate effectively, collaborate with others, and engage in group activities all of which are vital for healthy social growth.

Aggressive and Antisocial Behavior

For some children, exposure to domestic violence manifests in aggressive or antisocial tendencies. Research indicates that these children may be more prone to bullying classmates, disrupting lessons, or challenging the authority of teachers and caregivers (Edleson, 1999). Such behaviors often result in peer rejection, academic setbacks, and

disciplinary actions, all of which hinder the development of healthy and supportive relationships with others.

Impaired Emotional Regulation and Empathy

The growth of social skills depends heavily on a child's capacity to understand and manage emotions. Children who have experienced domestic violence frequently struggle with recognizing their own feelings and controlling their emotional responses (Margolin & Vickerman, 2007). This difficulty often limits their ability to connect with others and show empathy. As a result, they may overreact to small disagreements or interpret neutral actions as hostile, creating barriers to positive social interactions.

Long-Term Social Consequences

The negative impact of domestic violence on children's social development can extend well beyond childhood, often continuing into adolescence and adulthood. Those who have lived in violent homes may find it difficult to establish and sustain healthy personal relationships, adapt to workplace environments, or may even repeat the cycle of violence within their own families (Gilbert et al., 2009). Without timely intervention, these patterns can become deeply ingrained. Overall, domestic violence shapes a child's social growth in complex and far-reaching ways. Whether expressed through aggressive behavior, withdrawal from social interaction, or emotional dysregulation, the consequences can hinder their ability to form positive relationships. Providing counseling, ensuring safe living conditions, and offering targeted educational programs are essential steps toward helping affected children develop the social skills needed for long-term personal and social well-being.

The Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Nigeria

Domestic violence remains a pervasive and deeply entrenched problem in Nigeria, cutting across socio-economic classes, ethnic backgrounds, and religious affiliations. It encompasses various forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and economic, with women and children being the most vulnerable groups. Despite its widespread occurrence, domestic violence is significantly underreported, largely due to cultural stigma, societal norms, and weak enforcement of protective laws.

According to the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS, 2018), 35% of women aged 15–49 have experienced at least one form of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse from a partner during their lifetime. Emotional abuse was the most reported (33%), followed by physical violence (25%) and sexual violence (7%) (NPC & ICF, 2019). Research by Adedokun (2016) found that the prevalence of domestic violence among pregnant women in Nigeria ranged from 2.3% to 44.6%, while lifetime exposure to intimate partner violence ranged from 33% to 63%.

In Lagos State, Okenwa-Emegwa (2019) reported that 73.3% of ever-partnered women had experienced at least one form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime. Similarly, a 2021 study conducted in Benin City during the COVID-19 lockdown revealed a sharp rise in domestic violence cases. Within the previous 12 months, 35.9% of women reported abuse—54.3% experienced psychological violence, 30.8% physical abuse, 17.2% sexual violence, and 16.3% economic abuse (Edewor et al., 2021).

Ways of Eradicating Domestic Violence

Domestic violence remains a widespread global issue, inflicting serious physical, emotional, and psychological harm on its victims. In Nigeria, the problem is further intensified by cultural norms that condone gender inequality, insufficient enforcement of existing laws, and inadequate support systems for survivors. Addressing this challenge effectively requires a comprehensive, well-coordinated strategy that integrates legal, educational, social, and healthcare measures. The Key approaches to eradicating domestic violence include:

Legal Reform and Enforcement

A robust legal system is essential for both deterring offenders and safeguarding victims of domestic violence. In Nigeria, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) 2015 represents a significant legislative milestone, as it criminalizes multiple forms of abuse physical, sexual, psychological, and economic (WARD, 2024). However, the Act’s full impact is hindered by limited adoption; as of 2023, only 19 of the country’s 36 states had domesticated it (UN Women, 2023). For the law to achieve its intended effect, it must be implemented nationwide, accompanied by rigorous enforcement. This requires adequately trained police officers, effective prosecution processes, and victim-sensitive judicial mechanisms to ensure survivors receive justice (UNODC, 2021).

Public Awareness and Education Campaigns

Shifting societal attitudes is essential for ending the cycle of domestic violence. Community-centered education initiatives that address harmful gender stereotypes and promote respectful, equitable relationships have been shown to yield positive results (Heise, 2011). Broad-based approaches such as media advocacy, integration of gender equality topics into school curricula, and active engagement of religious and community leaders are powerful tools for influencing public perception. Additionally, involving men and boys through programs like *MenEngage* has demonstrated success in fostering non-violent expressions of masculinity and encouraging shared responsibility in preventing abuse (Flood, 2011).

Economic Empowerment of Women

Financial hardship and dependence often force victims to remain in abusive relationships. Strengthening women’s economic independence through initiatives such as vocational training, access to microcredit, and employment opportunities can provide the means to break free from cycles of abuse (Jewkes et al., 2015). Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa shows that programs like Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) can reduce women’s vulnerability to violence by improving their financial security and bargaining power within households.

Support Services for Survivors

Accessible and confidential resources such as shelters, hotlines, counseling facilities, and legal assistance are essential in addressing the needs of domestic violence survivors. A well-coordinated support network should provide safety, medical treatment, psychological care, and access to justice. Multidisciplinary crisis response models exemplified by the Mirabel Centre in Lagos demonstrate effective practices in offering holistic assistance to survivors (Mirabel Centre, 2022).

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design using a quantitative approach to examine the influence of domestic violence on preschool pupils’ social skills development in Ondo State, allowing systematic collection of data from a representative sample without manipulating variables. The population comprised pre-primary school pupils and teachers in two local government areas, from which ten schools were selected using simple random sampling, including 120 intact pre-primary classes and 30 teachers from both public and private schools. Two research questions guided the study: identifying the main factors contributing to domestic violence among families and examining how such exposure affects pupils’ social skills development.

Data were collected using two validated instruments: the Domestic Violence Exposure Questionnaire (DVEQ), which assessed pupils’ exposure to physical, emotional, psychological, and economic abuse, and the Preschool Social Skills Rating Scale (PSSRS), which measured key social skills, including communication, cooperation, listening, and teamwork. Both instruments underwent expert review and pilot testing to ensure content validity and appropriateness for the study population, with reliability coefficients of 0.80 for the DVEQ and 0.70 for the PSSRS, as determined using Cronbach’s alpha.

Methodological challenges included participant recruitment, as some parents, guardians, and teachers were initially hesitant due to the sensitive nature of domestic violence, which was mitigated by emphasizing informed consent, confidentiality, and the study’s objectives; instrument sensitivity, particularly for emotional or psychological abuse, addressed by combining teacher observations with validated tools to ensure clarity and age-appropriateness; and control of confounding variables such as prior social skills training, family support, and socioeconomic status, which were partially managed through random sampling and inclusion of diverse school types. Ethical considerations were critical, as discussions of domestic violence could provoke emotional distress, necessitating confidentiality and support resources while limiting the detail of information collected. Despite these challenges, methodological rigor was maintained through careful sampling, validated instruments, pilot testing, and transparency, ensuring the findings are credible and interpretable within the context of these constraints.

Results and Discussion

The result of this study is presented according to the sequence of the research questions and the hypothesis which were tested. The interpretation of the results was given after which a discussion of finding was presented.

Research Question 1

What are the main factors that cause domestic violence in Ondo State?

To determine the, the main factor that cause domestic violence data from DVQ were subjected to descriptive analysis. The result is presented in table 4.1

Table 4.1: Factors That Cause Domestic Violence in Ondo State.

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Substance Abuse	10	33.3	33.3
Childhood Exposure to Domestic Violence	12	40.0	73.3
Economic Hardship	5	16.7	90.0

Parent Unemployment	3	10.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	

Table 4.1 indicates that the primary cause of domestic violence is childhood exposure to domestic violence, accounting for 12 cases (40%). Substance abuse follows as the next most significant factor, with 10 cases (33.3%). Economic hardship and parental unemployment are less prominent, representing 5 cases (16.7%) and 3 cases (10%), respectively. This shows that childhood exposure to domestic violence is the predominant factor in Ondo State, with substance abuse and economic issues also contributing.

Figure 4.1.1 **Factors that cause Domestic Violence**

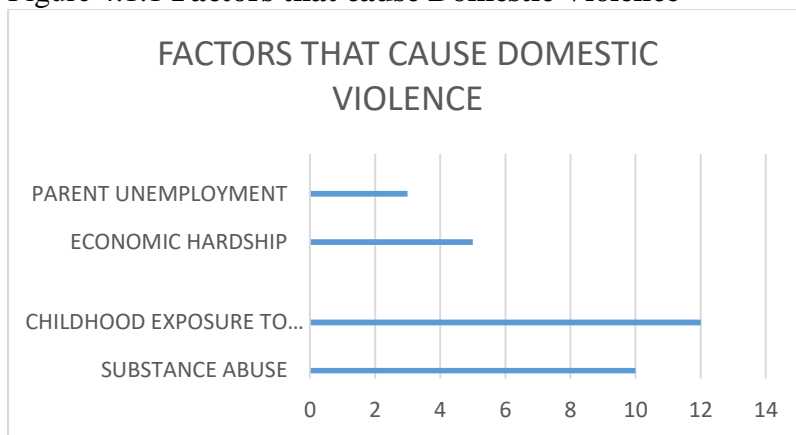


Figure 4.1.1 shows the main factor that cause domestic violence in Ondo State.

- I. What is the level of domestic violence experienced by preschool pupils in Ondo State?

Research Question 2

What is the level of domestic violence experienced by preschool pupils in Ondo State?

To determine the, level of domestic violence in Ondo State preschools data from DVQ were subjected to descriptive analysis. The result is presented in table 4.2

Table 4.2: Level of Domestic Violence in Ondo State Pre Schools

Level Of Domestic Violence	Score Range	F	%
Low	0---10	6	20.0
Moderate	11--40	15	50.0
High	41---60	9	30.0
Total		30	100,0

Table 4.2 reveals the distribution of domestic violence levels in Ondo State preschools. Of the respondents, 6 (20%) reported a low level of domestic violence, 15 (50%) reported a moderate level, and 9 (30%) reported a high level. Based on these results, the overall level of domestic violence in Ondo State preschools is moderate.

Research Question 3: Which social skills are most affected in pupils exposed to domestic violence in Ondo State?

To determine the main social skills affected pupils exposed to domestic violence in Ondo State

Preschools, data from DVQ were subjected to descriptive analysis. The result is presented in table 4.3

Table 4.3: the main social skills affected pupils exposed to domestic violence in Ondo State.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Communication	60	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Listening	30	25.0	25.0	75.0
	Cooperation	20	16.7	16.7	91.7
	Team Work	10	8.3	8.3	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.3 shows that communication is the main social skill affected by pupils exposed to domestic violence in Ondo State, with 60 cases (50%). Listening is the next most impacted skill, with 30 cases (25%), followed by cooperation among pupils at 20 cases (16.7%). Teamwork is the least affected, with 10 cases (8.3%). This indicates that exposure to domestic violence primarily impacts communication abilities but also affects listening, cooperation, and teamwork.

Figure 4.2.1: Social Skills Exhibited By Preschool Pupils Exposed To Domestic Violence

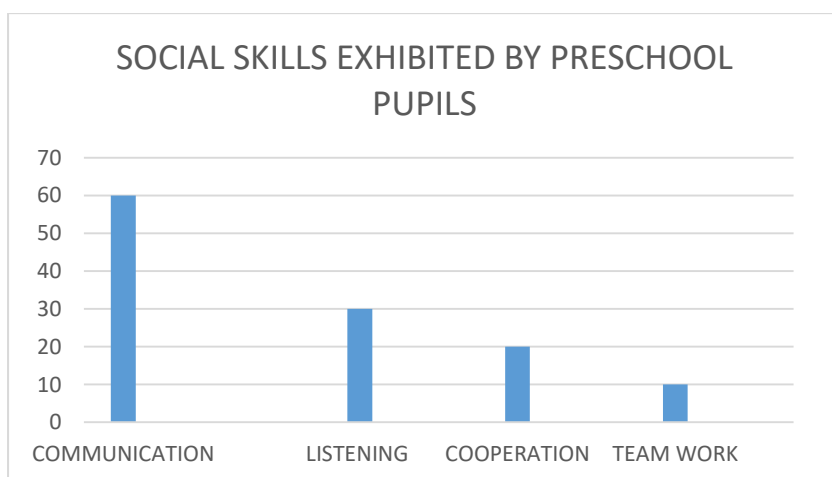
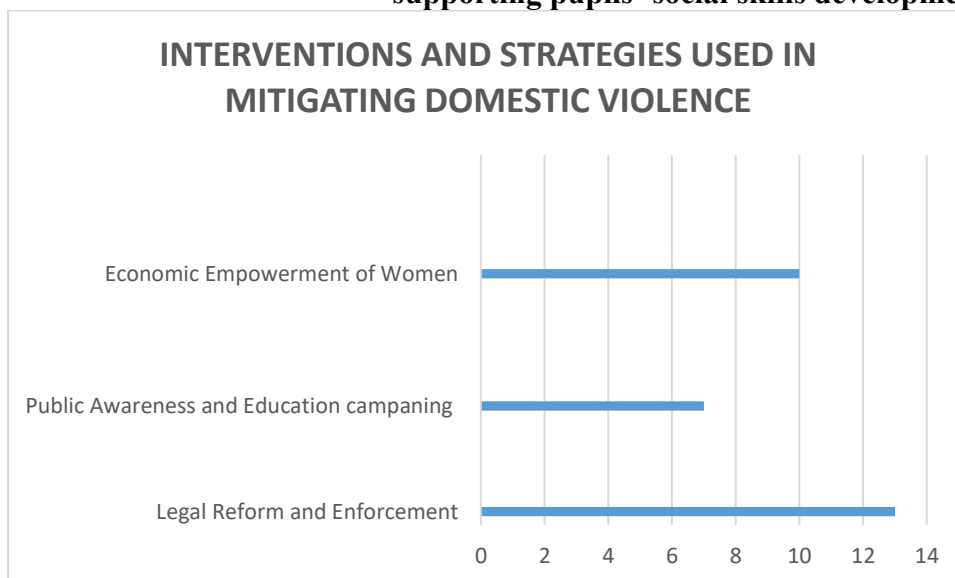


Figure 4.2.1 shows the social skills exhibited by preschool pupils exposed to domestic violence

Research Question 4: What interventions and strategies are most effective in mitigating domestic violence and supporting pupils’ social skills development?

To determine the interventions and strategies used in mitigating domestic violence and supporting pupils’ social skills development, data from DVQ were subjected to descriptive analysis. The result is presented in figure 4.3.1

Figure 4.3.1: **The interventions and strategies used in mitigating domestic violence and supporting pupils’ social skills development**



The descriptive statistical analysis of the data related to interventions and strategies used in mitigating domestic violence, as presented in Figure 4.3.1, indicates that legal reform and enforcement is identified as the most effective interventions and strategies. This approach received the highest frequency among respondents, signifying strong support for strengthening laws and ensuring their enforcement to reduce domestic violence. Other methods, such as counseling services, community support programs, and victim protection, were also acknowledged but with lower frequencies.

Conversely, public awareness and education campaigns were reported as the least utilized or least effective interventions and strategies for domestic violence to the frequency distribution. This suggests that while raising awareness is important, respondents believe that tangible legal actions have a more immediate and impactful effect in interventions and strategies used in mitigating domestic violence.

Discussion of the Findings

This section discusses the major findings of the study in line with its objectives, purpose, methodology, and population. The study was designed to investigate the main causes of domestic violence, determine its level in Ondo State, examine the social skills most affected among preschool pupils exposed to domestic violence, and identify effective strategies for eradicating the problem. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, involving 120 preschool pupils and 30 teachers selected from ten schools in Ondo State through simple random sampling.

With respect to the first objective, the study found that childhood exposure to domestic violence was identified as the main causal factor, accounting for 40% of responses.

This finding supports the work of Capaldi (2021), who identified childhood exposure, substance abuse, and economic hardship as major contributors to domestic violence. The implication is that violence is often learned behaviour transmitted across generations. The finding is also consistent with UNICEF (2021), which noted that children exposed to domestic violence may suffer immediate and long-term developmental consequences. However, it differs in emphasis from the World Health Organization (2021), which focused more on the consequences of domestic violence rather than its root causes.

Regarding the second objective, the study revealed that the level of domestic violence in Ondo State is moderate. This finding aligns with the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (2018), which reported that 35% of women aged 15–49 had experienced some form of spousal violence. It also agrees with findings by Adedokun (2016) and Edewor et al. (2021), who reported moderate prevalence rates in different parts of Nigeria. However, the result contrasts with Okenwa-Emegwa (2019), who reported a much higher prevalence rate of 73.3%, suggesting that domestic violence levels may vary significantly across regions and populations.

In relation to the third objective, the study found that communication was the main social skill affected among pupils exposed to domestic violence, accounting for 50% of responses. This finding is consistent with the work of Gresham and Elliott (2017), who described social skills as behaviours that facilitate effective interaction and communication. It also aligns with Riggio (2017), who identified communication, empathy, cooperation, and emotional regulation as key elements of social competence. Furthermore, Evans, Davies, and DiLillo (2008) noted that children exposed to domestic violence often struggle with communication and group participation, reinforcing the present finding.

Concerning the final objective, the study identified legal reform and enforcement as the most effective method for eradicating domestic violence. This finding supports the position of Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (2024), which emphasised the importance of effective policing and victim-sensitive judicial processes. However, it differs from Heise (2011), who highlighted the role of media campaigns, school curricula, and community engagement programmes such as Men Engage in preventing violence. The finding also aligns with Jewkes et al. (2015), who found that economic empowerment initiatives such as conditional cash transfers can reduce women's vulnerability to abuse.

Despite these important contributions, the study has some limitations. The sample need to increase more than the size used in this study. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples across multiple states to improve generalisability. Researchers should adopt mixed-method or longitudinal designs to better understand the long-term impact of childhood exposure to violence. There is also a need to assess the effectiveness of combined intervention strategies, including legal enforcement, educational programmes, economic empowerment, and community-based initiatives. Addressing these gaps will enhance understanding of domestic violence and its broader social and developmental impact. In conclusion, the study established that childhood exposure is a major factor contributing to domestic violence that the level of domestic violence in Ondo State is moderate, that communication skills are significantly affected among exposed preschool pupils, and that legal reform and enforcement are perceived as key strategies for eradication. While the findings contribute valuable insight, broader and more rigorous research is necessary to fully address the complexity and societal implications of domestic violence.

Recommendation

Based on the findings that domestic violence negatively impacts pupils’ social skills development manifesting in poor peer relationships, low self-esteem, withdrawal, aggression, and difficulty in communication it is recommended that:

- i. Schools should incorporate structured SEL programmes to help pupils develop empathy, communication, conflict resolution, and self-regulation skills, mitigating the adverse effects of domestic violence.
- ii. Teachers and school counsellors should be trained to identify behavioural and emotional signs of domestic violence in pupils and promptly refer them for psychosocial support services.
- iii. Establish well-equipped counselling units in schools with trained child psychologists or social workers to provide regular emotional support, therapy, and coping strategies for affected pupils.
- iv. Organise community sensitization programmes to educate parents/guardians on the harmful effects of domestic violence on children’s social and emotional growth, and promote positive parenting practices.
- v. Schools should partner with government and non-governmental organisations to create a safe reporting and referral pathway for victims of domestic violence, ensuring children’s safety both in and out of school.
- vi. Develop policies and classroom management strategies that foster inclusivity, trust, and a sense of belonging, allowing pupils from violent homes to feel secure and socially connected.
- vii. Conduct regular training for teachers on trauma-informed teaching practices, enabling them to support learning while being sensitive to the experiences of children exposed to domestic violence.

The findings of this study show that domestic violence significantly affects pupils’ social skills development, limiting their ability to form positive peer relationships, communicate effectively, and adjust socially in school. Children exposed to violent home environments are more likely to display withdrawal, aggression, low self-esteem, and mistrust, which can negatively influence their emotional wellbeing and future relationships.

The study contributes to knowledge by providing empirical evidence within the Nigerian context that childhood exposure to domestic violence directly impairs key aspects of social competence. It highlights the need for collaborative efforts among schools, families, and communities to create supportive and protective environments for affected children. However, further research is needed to examine the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as school-based programmes, and to conduct longitudinal studies that track long-term outcomes. Broader studies across different regions would also strengthen the generalisability of findings. Overall, sustained and coordinated action is essential to mitigate the impact of domestic violence and promote healthy child development.

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