

Building Emotional Strength in Broken Homes: Protective Factors for Domestic Violence-Affected Adolescents

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Article History:		<i>Adolescents exposed to domestic violence (DV) often experience profound emotional, behavioral, and academic disturbances that can derail their developmental trajectories. However, not all adolescents respond to such adversity in the same way. This research paper explores the protective factors that foster emotional strength and resilience among adolescents living in violent household environments, with a specific focus on the Pakistani socio-cultural context. Drawing upon Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and attachment theory, this study investigates how individual coping mechanisms, peer and teacher support, school engagement, and community-based interventions contribute to adaptive functioning among DV-exposed adolescents. Using a cross-sectional design and a sample of 200 adolescents from urban and peri-urban schools in Bahawalpur, Pakistan, data were gathered through standardized psychological instruments and self-reported academic records. Quantitative analysis revealed that perceived social support, emotional regulation skills, and a sense of school belonging significantly moderated the negative effects of domestic violence on psychological well-being and academic performance. Furthermore, gender, type of school (public vs. private), and parental employment status emerged as influential demographic variables shaping resilience outcomes. The findings underscore the urgent need to embed trauma-informed practices within school systems and to enhance peer mentorship and teacher sensitivity training. This paper contributes to the global discourse on childhood adversity by highlighting culturally relevant protective mechanisms that can help adolescents not only survive but thrive in the face of domestic violence. Policy implications for educational institutions, child protection agencies, and mental health professionals are discussed to support the creation of emotionally safe environments for vulnerable youth.</i>
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Introduction

Domestic violence (DV) is a widespread and trans-national, trans-class and trans-cultural problem. It has been commonly described as a set of abuse acts, which could include physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual behaviors toward one spouse or family member by another human being in an intimate or a familial partnership (Walker-Descartes et al., 2021). This violence can take place inside a home and can be characterized by such acts of violence as hitting, coercion, degradation by words, intimidation, and controlling behavior. Although the bulk of discussion on DV gravitates towards adult victimization mainly females, children and adolescents that observe or reside in these violent homes are the casualties that are often cast aside and forgotten as the victims of this home front battle. They are not mere spectators of the violence but the emotional, cognitive, behavioral uptake is at play, and the effects may be visible in many aspects of their development.

Within the context of teenagers, domestically induced violence is a continuous and harmful stress factor that imbalances not only emotions but also mental and scholarly efficiency. The home should provide emotional safety and support during adolescence, which is a crucial step in the life of an individual when identity development, emotional control, and academic motivation are crucial. Should that safety be impaired, the adolescents usually feel anxious, depressed, maladjusted in their behaviors, and they have a problem with concentrating at school (Yule et al., 2019). The constant dose of violence may affect neurobiological development with a decrease in academic motivation and can lead to social withdrawal or aggression, depending on the coping strategies adopted by an individual (Fogarty et al., 2019). Teenagers with these conditions can experience poor concentration at school, problems in peer relations, or failure to plan their futures. Emotional neglect and psychological trauma may also have long-lasting effects even when there is no actual physical abuse that is committed against them.

Although the impact of the domestic violence to children in other parts of the world has been documented in various research studies, there is an urgent need to conduct a research on this in specific socio-cultural and geographic environment. Domestic violence is present and unreported in Pakistan. Traditional patriarchal values, privacy of family life, and lack of legal protections to women and children also contributes to DV as a matter of normalcy in most families. The data of the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) indicate that about 28 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 49 have suffered physical violence by a spouse and the levels of emotional violence are even likely higher although less reportable. In the conservative area of South Punjab, Bahawalpur, socio-economic deprivation, low literacy, lack of counseling access, and gender norms are additional contributing factors to this problem (Khan, 2021; Mehmood et al., 2018). Schools, as the realms of the public sphere and the only institutions that regularly meet youth, are little prepared to recognize or treat trauma of environmental origin, found in domestic settings.

Whether the reason is less harmful than the domestic violence it causes, it would be important to learn about those factors that might both protect and empower the adolescents who are exposed to domestic violence in such a setting. Most of the established studies have focused on the deficit-psychological damage, behavioral problems, and poor academic performance. Although these findings are vital, they also fail to take into consideration those teenagers who live in bad environments, yet exhibit great emotional strength, social flexibility, and academic resilience. These youths provide necessary information about the coping and recovery processes. Why can some young individuals resist the trauma whereas others embrace it? How do peer relationships,

engagement at school, community structure and temperament influence the development of resilience? These are the questions, which should be explored as a matter of urgency.

Protective factors are specific conditions or elements that reduce risk and increase an individual's capacity to deal with an adverse situation and as such is a potentially helpful way of reframing the discussion about domestic violence. Such factors may be by different levels such as individual (e.g., self-esteem, problem solving skills), relational (e.g., supportive peers/teachers), institutional (e.g. safe and inclusive schools), and community based (e.g. access to mental health services or religious networks). Per ecological systems theory, these spheres of influence interact and all affect the development of the child and their reaction to trauma. In a similar way, we can elaborate on attachment theory advancing that although they may lack a safe adult connected to them, other consistent relationships with adults (e.g. teacher or elder sibling) can provide compensatory sources of emotional regulation and trust-building (Page, 2017; Clifford, 2017).

Such theoretical richness notwithstanding, protective factors among adolescents exposed to domestic violence have received little empirical studies in Pakistan. Most research addresses either battered women or children under the age of 17 and little research is done on adolescents and the issues of unique developmental problems. In addition, there is a sparse number of frameworks specific to the cultural adaptation of Pakistani youth, which are complexly intersected with adolescent experience through joint family systems, gender segregation, and moral codes. This research aims to address this important research gap through examining the protective factors among a sample of adolescents living with domestic violence survivors in the City of Bahawalpur in the state of South Punjab. It seeks to know how these younger people combat their psychological, emotional and academic problems and what causes or leads to development of emotional strength and resilience in them, whether these are internal or external factors.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the emotional and academic effects of domestic violence on adolescents in the Pakistani context.
2. To identify and analyze key protective factors that foster emotional resilience and academic adjustment among adolescents exposed to domestic violence.

Research Questions

1. What emotional and academic challenges do adolescents face as a result of exposure to domestic violence in the Pakistani context?
2. Which protective factors contribute to emotional resilience and academic adjustment among adolescents affected by domestic violence?

The research on the coping of adolescents in regards to domestic violence is needed not merely due to an academic interest but also in guiding culturally applicable interventions in the educational and social field in Pakistan. In reference to protective factors and not specifically on harm, the study presents a strengths-based view and therefore the resilience potential amidst the affected youth. The findings can guide policymakers, counselors, and schools to develop trauma-informed, student-centered support systems that empower teenagers to come out of poor situations at home.

Literature Review

Domestic Violence and Adolescent Development

Domestic violence (DV) has consistently been shown to have adverse consequences on the developmental process of adolescents, especially in the emotional, social, and educational realms. Even when DV is not accompanied by direct and physical abuse, it has a serious impact in impairing the sense of psychological safety and impedes developmental tasks revolving around the issues of adolescence emotional regulation, autonomy and identity formation. Fogarty et al. (2019) suggest that in adolescents, secondary exposure to inter-parental conflict frequently results in a significant rise in the stress reactivity pattern and the probability of developing maladaptive emotional patterns of fear, guilt, and confusion, which may last long after the exposure has ended.

The psychological impacts of DV are reportedly comparable all over Western and South Asian regions. In fact, a study conducted by Yule et al. (2019) reveals that children exposed to arguments between family members are at risk of becoming affected by internalizing types of disorders such as anxiety, depression, and somatic complaints. At the same time, some of them also develop externalizing behaviors (aggression, risk-taking, and conduct problem) particularly in male adolescents (Weir et al., 2021). This twofold vulnerability exemplifies the discrepancy in the way adolescents process the traumatic events, which is commonly determined by age, gender, and previous patterns of attachments. Not only do internalizing and externalizing symptoms portend an indication of emotional distress, they also determine poor academic and social adjustment.

Scholarly, the victims of domestic violence often have lower levels of engagement, absence, and attention issues, as well as develop lower academic performance (Walker-Descartes et al., 2021). Moylan et al. (2010) conducted a meta-analysis, which determined that children growing up in violent households are academic performers much worse off as compared to their unexposed counterparts and the magnitude of the trends proves even higher in adolescence on account of the raised cognitive and social demands. An additional problem is that students who have emotional disturbances tend to have a break in executive functioning, especially working memory and attention, which are vital to academic performance.

Violent home environments also undermine the social development of the adolescents. According to Bezuidenhout (2017), young people brought up at home of constant conflict are usually inefficient when dealing with peers, trust management and communication on emotions. It applies particularly to the collectivist societies such as Pakistan where family organization, honor and obedience are prioritized above personal welfare. In those conditions, domestic violence may be normalized or concealed, further exacerbating its impact on the psyche and decreasing the chances of external assistance (Khan, 2021).

The literature also pays much attention to gendered reactions to exposure to DV. Girls tend to develop more internal disorders, such as withdrawal and self-blame, whereas boys externalize their suffering in the form of aggression or disobedience (Mehmood et al., 2018). These discrepancies indicate gender responsive interventions at the school and the community levels. More importantly, the experience of DV in adolescence can also lead to the increased chances of transmission of violence across generations. Yildiz et al. (2024) conducted a longitudinal study. These authors found that teenagers who witnessed conflict in their homes were at the higher risks of developing bad relationships in adulthood that could spread trauma.

Among the South Asian countries, research studies on Pakistan are few but increasing. According to Eisman et al. (2015), the resilience scores and depressive symptoms were significantly lower in adolescents in domestic violence-exposed households than in their peers in Punjab. Amedu et al. (2025) pointed out that the urban youth, especially those going to government schools, failed to receive school-based psychological interventions, which increased the psychological effects of trauma within households.

Protective Factors in Violent Contexts

Although it is no doubt damaging to the development of adolescents, research institutions have paid a lot of attention to the coping conditions that allow certain adolescents to sustain their feeling of competence and adaptive functioning despite such adversity. This change is consistent with the resilience theory that posits resilience as a dynamic process as opposed to inherent qualities whereby it is a process that entangles individual, relational and environmental protective factors that absorb the attendant effect of risk exposure (Chen et al., 2024). These protective aspects can be applied at various levels, including in the home, the school system, the peer group, and the overall culture, to alleviate the psychological discomfort and enhance the development of academic interest in the case of domestic violence.

Emotional support in the home, especially by a non-abusive parent, noble grandparent, or elder sibling is one of the most influential sources of resistance. The psychological effects of being exposed to inter-parental violence can be diminished by a significant margin in the event that there exists at least one emotionally attuned caregiver (Yildiz et al., 2024). This encouragement serves the adolescents with an exemplar of emotional stability, which gives them a sense of safety and emotional validation as well as advice. The grandparents in a South Asian family tend to stabilize the parents that have become abusive or detached emotionally. Arshad (2024) observed that in the Punjabi region, the long-distance kin could be instrumental in the absorption of the impacts of household violence through the provision of alternative care and education.

Protective mechanisms in schools are another very important area of resiliency particularly in situations where home environment is unstable. Compensatory relationships can be ensured by teachers, counselors, and groups of peers as a source of emotional scaffolding and skills practice opportunities. According to the research by Yule et al. (2019), positive teacher-student relationship is linked with the promotion of adolescent academic motivation and decrease in the level of behavioral issues among such adolescents that were exposed to DV. In the same line, Eisman et al. (2015) reported that even under-resourced schools with dedicated counseling personnel were at a better position to detect symptoms of trauma and apply classroom interventions that can lead to reduced re-traumatization. The role of peer support also should not be overlooked: when adolescents were admitted to stable friendship groups, their emotional control was rated higher, and the risk of their isolation was significantly lower, according to the results of the study developed by Mehmood et al. (2018).

Individually, teenagers apply personal resources in combating misfortune. Some of the internal tools that lead to resilient outcomes include emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and goal orientation. The fact is that emotionally intelligent adolescents are more skillful in their emotional understanding and control and therefore are less likely to tend to internal or external manifestations of traumatic experiences (Weir et al., 2021).

However, the interplay between risk and support plays a very important role in calculating the effectiveness of these protective factors. Resilience is dynamic, as Masten (2021) observes, and varies depending on life situation, age of the child, and system-based support. An example of this is that school-based counseling may be protective, but is not suitable when the adolescent is not able to receive the counseling because of stigma, gender-based disallowance, or financial inability. In much the same way, extended families can be a safe harbor or a source of secondary trauma, given the degree of adherence to patriarchal ideologies or victim-blaming mentality. This means that protective factors should be put into perspective and interventions focused on the respective social, cultural and institutional processes.

Theoretical Frameworks

To understand the emotional and academic resilience of adolescents affected by domestic violence, this study draws upon three key theoretical lenses: Attachment Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and Resilience Theory. These frameworks provide a layered, complementary understanding of how trauma operates and how protection and recovery are facilitated across personal, interpersonal, and systemic levels.

Attachment Theory

Originally developed by Bowlby (1978) and later expanded by Ainsworth, (1978) Attachment Theory posits that early emotional bonds with caregivers form the blueprint for future emotional regulation, relationship-building, and coping mechanisms. In the context of domestic violence, the attachment bond is often disrupted due to emotional unavailability, fear-inducing behavior, or inconsistent caregiving. This disruption can manifest in anxious, avoidant, or disorganized attachment styles, all of which affect an adolescent's ability to regulate emotions, trust others, and seek help (Bowlby et al., 1992; Antony, 2022).

However, secure attachment with at least one consistent and emotionally attuned caregiver; even if not a parent, can serve as a protective buffer. Yildiz et al. (2024) emphasize that children exposed to inter-parental violence fare better psychologically when they maintain a secure relationship with one adult, which helps them regulate distress and internalize stability. This theory underpins the study's interest in identifying such caregiving dynamics and understanding their long-term role in resilience-building.

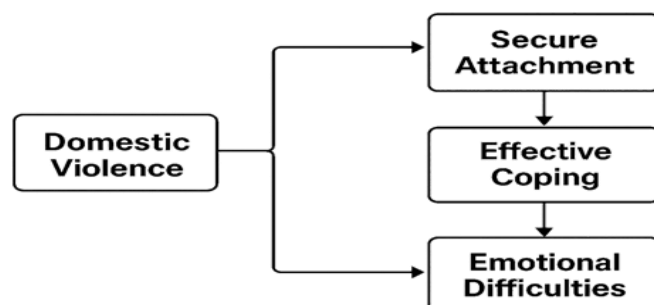


Figure 1: Attachment Theory in DV Context

Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) offers a multi-level perspective on how various environments—ranging from the immediate family to broader societal influences—interact to shape adolescent development. It conceptualizes development as occurring within nested systems:

- **Microsystem:** Family, school, peers
- **Mesosystem:** Interactions between microsystems (e.g., parent-teacher relations)
- **Exosystem:** Parental workplace, extended family networks
- **Macrosystem:** Cultural norms, laws, religion
- **Chronosystem:** Changes over time, such as prolonged exposure to violence

In this framework, domestic violence is not an isolated event but a risk factor situated within a larger context of socioeconomic pressures, patriarchal norms, weak institutional responses, and cultural silencing. This model allows for analyzing both risk and protective elements simultaneously across various life domains.

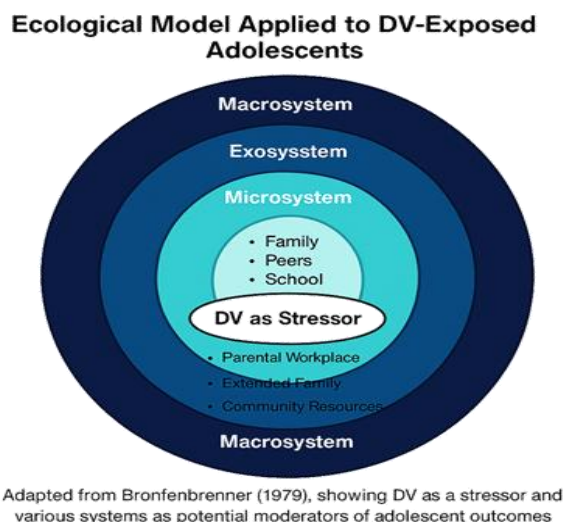


Figure 2: Ecological Model Applied to DV-Exposed Adolescents

Resilience Theory

Resilience Theory serves as the conceptual backbone of this research, explaining how and why some adolescents are able to recover and even thrive despite trauma. Rather than viewing resilience as a fixed trait, current literature treats it as a process that involves adaptive responses to adversity, supported by protective factors across personal and environmental systems (Masten, 2021). These include individual assets (e.g., emotional intelligence, optimism), relational supports (e.g., a caring adult), and environmental structures (e.g., trauma-informed schooling).

The interactional nature of resilience means that even in the face of chronic exposure to DV, adolescents are not doomed to negative outcomes if they have access to protective scaffolding. This framework justifies the paper's shift from a deficit-based view of trauma toward one that identifies and analyzes strength-based recovery mechanisms.

Together, these three theories; Attachment, Ecological, and Resilience, enable a comprehensive analysis of adolescent development under the strain of domestic violence. Attachment Theory grounds the emotional experience of trauma; Ecological Systems Theory reveals the multi-layered contexts of risk and support; and Resilience Theory directs attention to the mechanisms of recovery. These frameworks jointly inform the study's methodological lens and interpretation of findings.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the emotional and academic effects of domestic violence (DV) on adolescents, as well as to identify protective factors that support resilience. The sample consisted of 200 adolescents (Grades 9 and 10) from public and private schools in Bahawalpur, Pakistan, selected through simple random sampling. Inclusion criteria required participants to be between 13–17 years old and currently enrolled in school. Exclusion criteria included cognitive disabilities or orphanhood, as these conditions could confound exposure experiences.

Data were gathered using a structured, self-administered questionnaire, incorporating validated scales to measure five constructs: DV exposure, emotional and behavioral outcomes, academic performance, support systems (family/school), and personal coping (e.g., emotional self-efficacy). All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, and the instrument was pilot tested, yielding a high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.887$). Ethical approval was secured, and informed consent was obtained from both parents and students. Data were collected under supervision in classroom settings.

Analysis was conducted using SPSS v27, applying descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and multiple regression models. A moderation analysis was performed using Hayes' PROCESS macro to determine whether specific protective factors weakened the relationship between DV exposure and negative academic or emotional outcomes. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

School Type	Class Level	Gender	f	%	Total
Private	Class 9th	Boys	18	56.3%	100.0%
		Girls	14	43.8%	
	Class 10th	Boys	14	42.4%	100.0%
		Girls	19	57.6%	
Govt./Public	Class 9th	Boys	31	47.7%	100.0%
		Girls	34	52.3%	
	Class 10th	Boys	46	65.7%	100.0%
		Girls	24	34.3%	

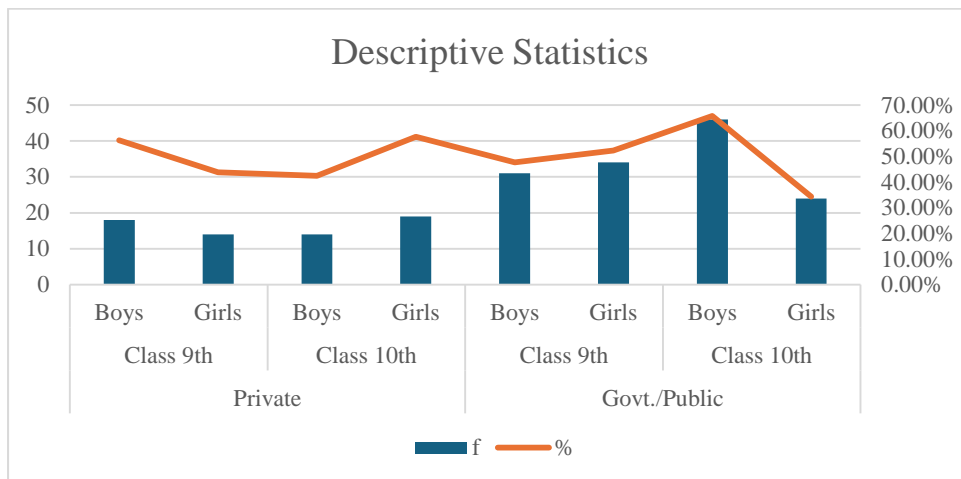


Figure 1: Descriptive Statistics

The demographic analysis reveals meaningful patterns in gender distribution across school types and class levels. In private schools, 9th-grade students comprised 56.3% boys and 43.8% girls, indicating a modest male majority. Conversely, in 10th grade, girls slightly outnumbered boys, representing 57.6% compared to 42.4% boys. This balanced gender representation in private institutions across grades suggests relatively equal access to secondary education for both genders in these settings. In government schools, 9th-grade composition was nearly balanced, with girls at 52.3% and boys at 47.7%. However, in the 10th grade, a sharp gender gap emerged: boys made up 65.7% while girls accounted for only 34.3%. This disparity may reflect underlying challenges in the public education system, such as higher female dropout rates, cultural or financial barriers to girls' continued schooling, or a lack of parental support for female education in certain socio-economic strata. These variations in gender distribution across school types and class levels are critical for understanding how structural and social contexts may intersect with the experiences of adolescents exposed to domestic violence, particularly in shaping their educational and emotional resilience.

Correlation Results

Table 2: Correlation Results

		Domestic Violence Exposure	Academic Performance	Behavioral Adjustment
Domestic Violence Exposure	Pearson Correlation	--		
	N	200		
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	.452**	--	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	200	200	
Behavioral Adjustment	Pearson Correlation	.552**	.501**	--
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	200	200	200

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

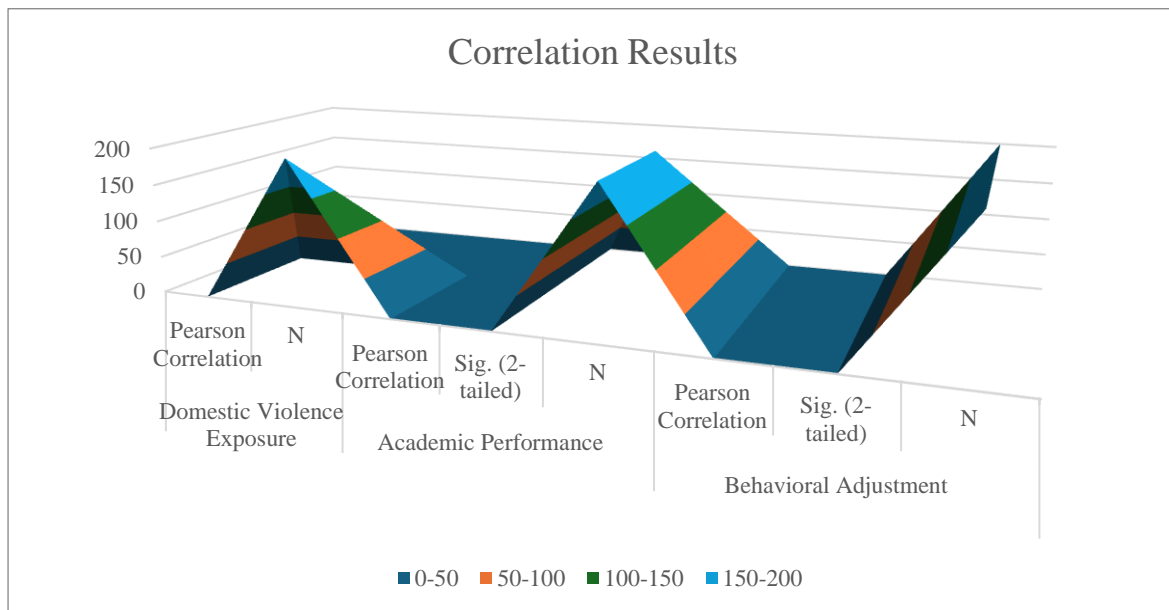


Figure 2: Correlation Results

The results of Pearson correlation analysis revealed statistically significant associations among domestic violence exposure, academic performance, and behavioral adjustment. A moderate positive correlation was observed between domestic violence exposure and behavioral adjustment difficulties ($r = .552$, $p < .001$), indicating that as adolescents' exposure to domestic violence increases, their behavioral and emotional maladjustment also tends to rise. Similarly, a moderate positive correlation was found between domestic violence exposure and poorer academic performance ($r = .452$, $p < .001$), suggesting that adolescents exposed to higher levels of domestic violence tend to report lower academic achievement. Furthermore, academic performance and behavioral adjustment were also significantly correlated ($r = .501$, $p < .001$), implying that students with more emotional and behavioral problems also tend to struggle academically. All correlations were significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), highlighting the robustness of these relationships. These findings align with existing literature that underscores the detrimental impact of domestic violence on adolescents' emotional regulation and educational outcomes, and they reinforce the need to address both psychological well-being and academic support in intervention frameworks.

Regression Analysis

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Academic Performance from Risk and Protective Factors (N = 200)

Predictors	B	SE B	β (Beta)	t	p-value
(Constant)	0.558	0.198	—	2.824	.005
Sibling Violence	0.213	0.070	.220	3.070	.002**
Parents' Profession	-0.030	0.016	-.107	-1.832	.068
School Type	0.075	0.052	.086	1.456	.147
Home-Based Support	0.253	0.071	.257	3.581	<.001**
School-Based Support	0.244	0.084	.226	2.920	.004**

Model Summary: $R = .585$, $R^2 = .343$, Adjusted $R^2 = .326$, Std. Error = 0.337

ANOVA: $F(5, 194) = 20.228$, $p < .001$

Note: B = Unstandardized Coefficient; SE B = Standard Error of B; β = Standardized Beta, $p < .01$

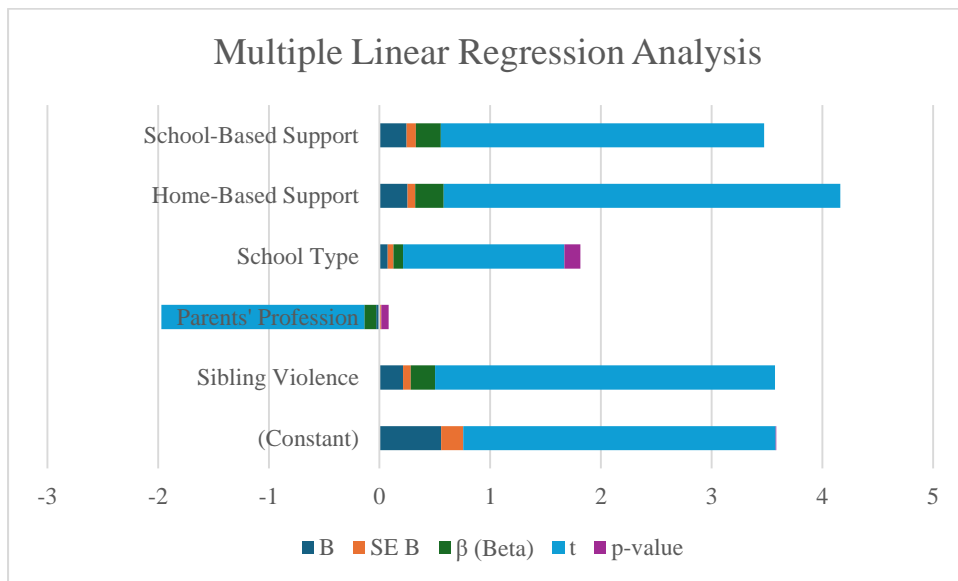


Figure 3: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Academic Performance from Risk and Protective Factors

To identify the predictive role of both risk and protective factors on adolescents' academic performance, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The independent variables included sibling violence, parents' profession, school type, home-based support, and school-based support. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(5,194) = 20.228$, $p < .001$, indicating that the combination of predictors reliably explains variance in academic performance. The R^2 value of .343 suggests that approximately 34.3% of the variation in academic performance among adolescents can be explained by the five predictors combined. The adjusted R^2 (.326) confirms this effect after accounting for the number of predictors.

Among the predictors, home-based support ($\beta = .257$, $p < .001$) and school-based support ($\beta = .226$, $p = .004$) were the strongest positive predictors of academic performance. This finding emphasizes the importance of emotional scaffolding and academic reinforcement from both familial and institutional contexts in mitigating the negative consequences of domestic distress. Adolescents who reported higher perceived support at home and school demonstrated significantly better academic outcomes. Interestingly, sibling violence also showed a significant positive standardized coefficient ($\beta = .220$, $p = .002$). This counterintuitive result may suggest that in this specific cultural context, self-reported sibling conflict could correlate with assertiveness or adaptive behaviors that co-exist with academic engagement—or it may reflect measurement overlaps that warrant deeper qualitative follow-up.

On the other hand, parents' profession ($\beta = -.107$, $p = .068$) and school type ($\beta = .086$, $p = .147$) did not significantly predict academic performance at the 0.05 level. This indicates that structural indicators like occupational class and institutional category may play a less direct role than relational and psychosocial support systems.

The regression model validates the central hypothesis that protective factors, especially those rooted in supportive adult and peer relationships, are significant buffers against the academic risks associated with domestic violence exposure.

Moderation Effects

Table 4: Multiple Regression Predicting Behavioral Adjustment from Emotional Difficulties, Support, and Moderators

Model	Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
1	DV Centered	0.299	0.050	.334	5.996	<.001
	Home Support Centered	0.368	0.053	.431	6.985	<.001
	School Support Centered	0.114	0.053	.137	2.171	.031
	Age Centered	0.014	0.051	.017	0.276	.783
	Gender Centered	0.018	0.049	.022	0.365	.716
	$R^2 = .482$					
	$F(5, 194) = 32.74$					<.001
2	DV x Home Support	0.039	0.057	.047	0.680	.497
	DV x School Support	0.043	0.057	.050	0.758	.449
	DV x Age	0.027	0.053	.033	0.504	.615
	DV x Gender	0.011	0.051	.014	0.212	.832
	$R^2 = .484$					
	$F(9, 190) = 26.03$					<.001
	$\Delta R^2 = .002$.527

Note. DV Centered = emotional/behavioral difficulties score; Home Support Centered and School Support Centered = centered support scores; Age Centered, Gender Centered = centered demographic variables; DVx terms = interaction terms. Significant predictors are in bold. N = 200.



Figure 4: Multiple Regression Predicting Behavioral Adjustment from Emotional Difficulties, Support, and Moderators

The results of the combined moderated multiple regression analysis revealed important insights into the role of support systems and demographic factors in influencing behavioral adjustment among adolescents facing emotional or behavioral difficulties. In Model 1, which included only the main effects, the regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.482$, $F = 32.74$, $p < .001$), indicating that approximately 48.2% of the variance in behavioral adjustment could be explained by the predictors. Among the predictors, emotional/behavioral difficulties

(DV_Centered) had a significant negative effect on behavioral adjustment ($\beta = .299$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher levels of emotional difficulties were associated with poorer behavioral outcomes.

Importantly, both home-based support ($\beta = .368$, $p < .001$) and school-based support ($\beta = .114$, $p = .031$) emerged as significant positive predictors of behavioral adjustment. This highlights the protective role of perceived support from family and educational institutions in promoting better behavioral functioning, even in the presence of internal or external difficulties. However, the demographic variables, age and gender (centered), were not statistically significant, indicating that they did not exert a direct influence on behavioral adjustment in this sample.

Model 2 introduced the interaction terms to examine whether the relationship between emotional difficulties and behavioral adjustment was moderated by levels of support or demographic characteristics. The change in explained variance was negligible ($\Delta R^2 = .002$), and the overall model remained significant ($F = 26.03$, $p < .001$). However, none of the interaction terms showed significant moderation effects. Specifically, the interaction between DV_Centered and Home Support Centered ($\beta = .039$, $p = .497$), School Support Centered ($\beta = .043$, $p = .449$), Age ($\beta = .027$, $p = .615$), and Gender ($\beta = .011$, $p = .832$) all failed to reach statistical significance.

This indicates that while home and school support directly improve behavioral adjustment, they do not significantly buffer or amplify the negative impact of emotional difficulties on behavior. Likewise, age and gender do not alter the strength of this relationship. These findings suggest that interventions targeting behavioral adjustment may benefit more from enhancing support systems rather than focusing on age or gender differences as potential moderators.

Discussion

Adolescents exposed to domestic violence in Pakistan face a complex array of emotional and academic challenges that deeply affect their overall well-being and development. This research exposes that emotional problems posed significant predictors of behavioral maladjustment, which is consistent with worldwide evidence on domestic violence as a high-priority risk determinant of psychological suffering in youth (Cage et al., 2022). This distress often manifests as internalizing symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress, as well as externalizing behaviors including aggression and withdrawal, which negatively influence adolescents' capacity to function adaptively within their social and academic environments (Hildebrand et al., 2019). The Pakistani context, with its unique sociocultural dynamics, adds layers of complexity, where stigma and limited access to formal mental health resources exacerbate the vulnerability of these adolescents (Ahmad & Koncsol, 2022). Being exposed to the emotional difficulties imposed by domestic violence does not only damage their mental state but directly impacts academic progress by impairing concentration, motivation, and schooling attendance (Cage et al., 2022; Supol et al., 2021). To emphasize further the extent of the widespread effects of violence that extend beyond the domestic setting into educational and social contexts where adolescent development is so crucial, it has been found that 50 percent of the respondents were the targets of the violence: The other 50 were on the receiving end of the violence.

In addition to emotional challenges, academic difficulties emerge as a profound concern for adolescents affected by domestic violence. The findings of the study provide support to the view that exposure to family violence is related to lower academic performance and poor behaviors when compared to the meta-analyses by other professionals regarding childhood adversities as factors that led to reduced performance in schools. Literature provides extensive descriptions of

the impairment of the learning processes when dysregulated emotional responses and poor behavioral adjustments disrupt education. This interaction is particularly pertinent in situations such as Bahawalpur where schooling infrastructures can be difficult and the psyche social stimulus in the school is weak. The combined effect of familial violence and inadequate institutional resources creates an environment where affected adolescents struggle to meet academic expectations, thus reinforcing cycles of disadvantage (Arshad, 2024). This result goes to support the growing concern to introduce trauma-friendly educational framework to the Pakistani educational system to close this divide (Roeser et al., 2024). As such, the academic challenges faced by these adolescents are not merely individual deficits but reflect systemic failures requiring comprehensive policy responses.

Conversely, the study identifies protective factors that bolster emotional resilience and facilitate academic adjustment among adolescents exposed to domestic violence. Specifically, home-based support was found to be a potent indicator of positive behavioral adjustment, confirming the resilience theory focus on fostering relationships as the pillar of recovery (Burnette, 2018; Yule et al., 2019). Non-abusive parents, extended family members, and caregivers serve as emotional anchors that help adolescents navigate trauma, fostering a sense of security and self-efficacy (Page, 2017). This observation adds to earlier studies of South Asia that have indicated the absolute importance of familial support to counter the negative impacts of domestic violence (Timshel et al., 2017). In the specific Pakistani culture, the extended family can serve as an essential resource to alleviate lapses in institutional mental health services and support stable, ongoing asks (Qureshi, 2024). The strengthening of secure attachment in such family systems is thereby a major avenue through which the emotional security of adolescents can be reinforced in adverse situations (Clifford, 2017).

The school-based support was also substantive in enhancing improved behavioral adjustment, which is consistent with the rest of the world findings on the protective effects of safe and supportive learning conditions (Fogarty et al., 2024). Alternative sources of social capital include teachers, school counselors, and peer groups having the effect of buffering against stress and helping to develop positive identity (Chen, 2023). In Pakistan, where community stigma and limited awareness around domestic violence persist, schools represent one of the few formal spaces where adolescents may access psychosocial support (Nasir, 2024). Nonetheless, the present research did not show any major moderation role of school support to alter the relationship between violence and behavioral adjustment implying that school support positively relates to the behavioral outcomes but does not seem to alter the severity of trauma effect. The observation touches on the commentary of educational support systems that lack resources and training in addressing complex trauma in depth. Strengthening school-based mental health infrastructures and trauma-informed practices thus remains a priority for enhancing the resilience of violence-affected adolescents.

Interestingly, the results were not significant showing that age and gender were not significant moderators in the relationship between exposure to and behavioral adjustment to domestic violence. The given finding contradicts the findings of some Western-based researches which are focused on the difference in genders in terms of trauma response and resilience (Taquette et al., 2021; Yakubovich et al., 2022). Yet, it is consistent with other studies that pointed to the omnipresent nature of the trauma impacts on demographically diverse population in socioeconomically marginalized groups (Hultmann et al., 2023). The absence of age moderation is possibly the consequence of the relatively same age range of adolescents in the sample or the cultural specifics of the influence on the presentation of emotion identical in both genders

(Ishimoto et al., 2022). This suggests that interventions should be broadly inclusive rather than narrowly targeted, ensuring support services are accessible and relevant to all adolescents regardless of demographic differences.

The results of this study validate and contribute to world literature that offers emotional and academic impacts of domestic violence, and offer culturally-sensitive South Asian voices on the theme of resilience. The importance of adult support (family and institutional) reflects the protective processes that have been reported elsewhere (Yule et al., 2019). However, the Pakistani setting adds new dynamics, including the role of the extended family and low rates of penetration into formal psychological treatment, which is instead prioritized in the West in the form of clinical intervention (Burnette, 2018). This cultural consideration makes it even clearer how culturally appropriate models will be important in the creation of policies and programs to assist the adolescents suffering traumas and resilient interventions in Pakistan.

There are policy implications that are founded on the results that a multi layered approach is needed. The schools are supposed to be intelligent with trauma-sensitive teacher training and counseling opportunities and awareness of the widespread impact of domestic violence on learning and behavior (Howell et al., 2018). Such endeavors could be supplemented by peer mentoring schemes that help to provide a safe social setting within which positive peer affiliations, which might otherwise minimize the impact of perturbing experiences, could be nurtured. Social assistance through community support is also essential, especially with single-parent and non-abusive caregiver households, with prompting a social welfare program in minimizing structural weaknesses (Burnette, 2018). These multi-faceted strategies can collectively build emotional strength and academic resilience among adolescents.

Promoting trauma-informed care on a large scale and fostering public awareness are two of the most important goals on the way to building trauma-informed environments. In addition, the leadership of the education sector should accord priority to the creation of safe and healthy school climates, as recommended by the ecological systems theory in the work of Bronfenbrenner, which emphasizes the role of stratified social contexts in defining the development of teenagers (Bronfenbrenner, 2013; Evans, 2024).

The research has both value and limitation despite its contribution to empirical evidence. Given that the research is cross-sectional, it will be impossible to interpret it as a causal relationship and self-reports may be considered as a social desirability or memory effect. Future longitudinal studies are needed to track trajectories of resilience and maladjustment over time, and qualitative research could deepen understanding of cultural and familial factors shaping adolescents' coping strategies. Generalizability would also be improved by extending the research population to rural and low social economic strata.

In conclusion, this study highlights the profound emotional and academic challenges faced by adolescents exposed to domestic violence in Pakistan and identifies crucial protective factors, especially consistent adult support within home and school environments. The results confirm that emotional resilience does not only thrive in the absence of the hardship but in the availability of an effective set of help and supportive relationships. By strengthening these supports through policy and practice, Pakistan can better safeguard the well-being and future prospects of vulnerable adolescents.

Conclusion

This study underscores the significant emotional and academic challenges faced by adolescents exposed to domestic violence within the Pakistani context. Based on the findings, it can be noted that violence has a negative impact on behavioral adjustment and educational achievement which supports the prospects of domestic unrest influencing the growth of young people. Importantly, the study establishes that one of the important protective factors is home- and school-based support, which is essential in enhancing resilience and positive adjustment. Unlike demographic variables, e.g. age, gender where the moderating role was not evident, there was an apparent consistency in the role of adult support, especially with non-abusive caregivers and learning environment, which was critical in the development of emotional resilience and the reduction of behavioral challenges.

The results have great practical and policy implications in the country of Pakistan. To enhance the well-being of violence-affected adolescents, comprehensive interventions are needed that prioritize trauma-sensitive training for educators, establish counseling and peer support programs in schools, and strengthen family and community support structures. By addressing both the emotional and academic needs of these adolescents through culturally responsive frameworks, stakeholders can contribute to breaking cycles of violence and promoting healthier developmental trajectories. The conclusions of the current research should be developed in future studies which can focus on longitudinal results and expand the analysis to new populations and will eventually allow creating more effective and inclusive youth empowerment strategies in cases of domestic adversity.

Recommendations

Family and Home Support

Enhance Non-Abusing Caregiver Roles: Promote programs that facilitate the development of secure parent child relationships for single parent or non-abusing caregivers.

Use of Extended Family: In the Pakistani society, grandparents, uncles and aunties pursue the role of emotional cushions in case the parent is not available.

Community Parenting Workshops: Facilitate community-based awareness-raising meetings to promote stigma reduction around family-level violence and teach coping strategies to families.

School-Based Interventions

Trauma-Informed Teacher Training: Teachers should be trained to recognize symptoms of trauma, respond empathetically, and refrain from punitive measures against troubled teens.

Peer Help: Peer support groups where teenagers can share in safe, monitored settings should be established in schools.

School Counseling Units: Create or enhance in-school counseling services to assist teens with emotion regulation and dealing with academic stress.

Community and Policy-Level Recommendations

Awareness Raising Campaigns: Implement community-wide campaigns to promote negative attitudes regarding domestic violence, suicide and mental illness and encourage help-seeking behaviours amongst families.

Collaboration with NGOs: Work with child protection agencies and NGOs to establish safe spaces and counseling services.

Government Policy Level: Incorporate trauma informed frameworks into national educational policy to ensure that they are sustainable.

Academic and Developmental Support

Flexible Learning Techniques: Create remedial and flexible learning schedules for adolescents failing to advance academically as a result of the trauma.

Extracurricular Involvement: Encourage sports, arts, and team activities so that teens can develop self-esteem and positive friendships with peers.

Monitoring Systems: Schools need a monitoring system for attendance, achievement, and behavior patterns that will catch signs of trouble early.

Culturally Responsive Practices

Faith-Based Coping: Given that religious activities serve as a buffer, schools and communities may incorporate culturally appropriate religious- or mindfulness-based prayer.

Expanded family networks: Promote greater involvement of culturally favored (ideal) family structures in adolescent support.

Respectful Confidentiality: To guard against disclosure of interventions and to encourage adolescent participation without fear of stigma, ensure that all interventions are culturally sensitive and protect adolescent dignity.

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