

The Relationship between Family Challenges and Academic Performance of High School Students

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Received: 5 October 2024 | Accepted: 6 December 2024 | Published: 20 December 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55057/ajress.2024.6.7.20>

Abstract: *This research investigates the relationship between family challenges, specifically socio-economic status (SES), family structure and stability, and domestic violence with academic performance among high school students. Utilizing a quantitative research design grounded in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the study explores how these factors may influence students' academic success. Data from 152 secondary school students were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), ensuring a robust statistical foundation for the study's findings. The results reveal that SES has a lower positive correlation with academic performance, indicating that while higher SES is advantageous, its impact on academic success is relatively limited. Family structure and stability show a moderate positive correlation with academic performance, emphasizing the critical role of a stable and supportive family environment in enhancing students' academic achievements. The researcher found that domestic violence demonstrates a very high correlation with academic performance, underscoring the severe negative effects that domestic violence can have on students' educational outcomes. These findings offer essential insights for educators, policymakers, and social work practitioners, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address family challenges and improve students' academic potential.*

Keywords: family challenges, socio-economic status (SES), family structure, domestic violence, academic performance

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

Academic performance is a fundamental indicator of achievement and success for high school students. Beyond securing entry into higher education institutions, strong academic grades open doors to better job opportunities and contribute significantly to personal and professional development. In today's competitive academic environment, students rely on their intelligence and navigate the challenges posed by their family environments.

According to Clark et al. (2007), the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process in schools depends upon a supportive home environment. Family challenges such as socio-economic status, family structure and stability, and exposure to domestic violence present tough barriers to learning and subsequently impact academic performance.

Observations by Mashable SEA highlighting over 76,000 divorces in Malaysia since March 2020 suggest a positive correlation between family instability, increased mental health issues

and poor academic performance among children (Mashable Sea 2021, September 24). This trend underscores the urgent need for interventions that provide stability and support for students affected by domestic disturbances. By examining the extent and nature of these influences, the study seeks to propose effective strategies for intervention and support. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing targeted initiatives that foster a conducive learning environment and promote academic success among students facing familial difficulties.

1.2 Problem Statement

High school academic achievement is essential for a student's future, yet many face substantial challenges because of family-related problems. There are still GAPS regarding the combined effects of domestic violence, family stability and structure, and socio-economic level (SES) on students' academic achievement, despite a wide range of research. Existing literature often fails to comprehensively explore these variables' interconnected nature or doesn't provide a holistic analysis of their combined effects on high school students.

Academic performance is vital for future opportunities and personal development (Hunt, 2020; Jones & Schneider, 2019). However, the influence of family challenges, including inequalities in SES, unstable family structures, and exposure to domestic violence, remains ineffectively explored in academic outcomes. These challenges significantly affect students' mental health, contributing to heightened stress and anxiety (Smith et al., 2018; Brown & Jones, 2021), which in turn detrimentally impacts concentration, motivation, and overall academic achievement.

Moreover, poverty, a critical element of SES, worsens these challenges by limiting access to important educational resources (Johnson, 2017; Thomas & Adams, 2020). Financial strain within families often forces students into employment, diverting their focus from academic pursuits (Miller & Thompson, 2019). Family structure instability, such as single-parent households or frequent familial transitions, fosters emotional instability and insecurity (Wilson & Davis, 2018; Lee & Peters, 2022).

To address these concerns, this research aims to widely examine how SES, family structure and stability, and domestic violence collectively impact the academic performance of high school students. By clarifying these compound relationships, the study seeks to inform targeted interventions and support mechanisms to mitigate these challenges. Finally, this research attempts to enhance educational outcomes and promote the overall well-being of high school students facing challenges in their familial environments.

1.3 Research Objectives

In this study, the researcher intends to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To identify the relationship between high school students' socio-economic status (SES) and their academic performance.
- 2) To identify the relationship between the family structure and stability of high school students and their academic performance.
- 3) To identify the relationship between domestic violence and the academic performance of high school students.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What is the relationship between high school students' socio-economic status (SES) and their academic performance?

- 2) What is the relationship between family structure and stability of high school students and their academic performance?
- 3) What is the relationship between domestic violence of high school students and their academic performance?

1.5 Research Framework

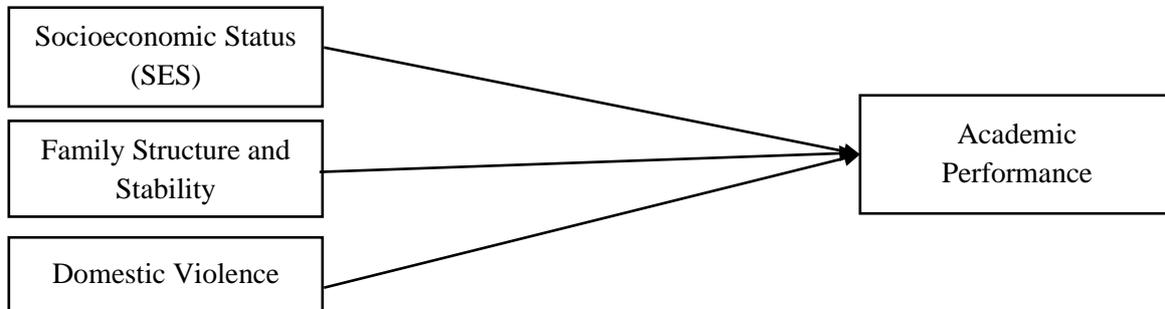


Figure 1: Research framework

1.6 Significance of the Study

Knowing how SES, family dynamics, and domestic violence impact academic achievement can give educators and School management the knowledge they need to modify their support systems and approaches. With this information, students who are at risk may be identified early, targeted interventions can be placed, and a more inclusive learning environment that supports student achievement can be fostered. By providing empirical data on the impact of family challenges on academic outcomes, this study advances the fields of educational psychology and counseling. It creates opportunities for more investigation into the subtle facets of family relations and how they affect students' success in various settings and demographics.

Students in high school stand to benefit from this research since it clarifies elements outside of their control that impact their academic direction. Students aware of these difficulties may be more motivated to ask for help, take an active role in their education, and push for the provision of tools that promote intellectual and personal development.

2. Theory and Literature Review

2.1 Theory Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is the foundation theory for exploring the impact of home environment challenges on student success in high school. Introduced in 1943, Maslow's theory provides a framework for understanding how failing to meet basic needs may hinder higher-level cognitive processes essential for academic success. It's particularly relevant to understanding how socio-economic status (SES), family structure and stability, and home violence impact the outcomes of students.

In what has become widely known as Maslow's Hierarchy of wants, this model postulates that human motivation is built up of needs organized into a sequence of hierarchical wants. Moving from the most basic needs to more abstract and sophisticated psychological wants for personal fulfilment and self-actualization, the hierarchy includes physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and finally, self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943).

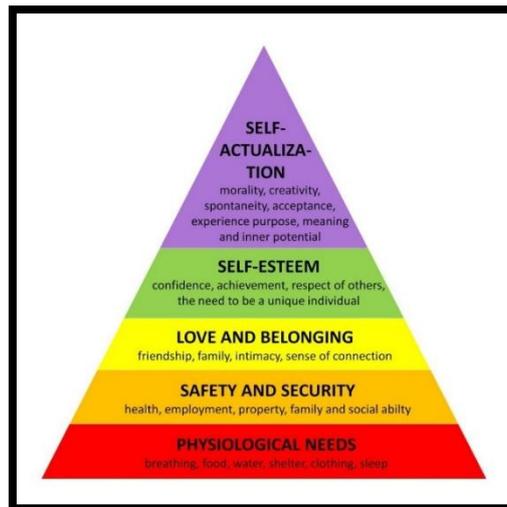


Figure 2: Maslow's Hierarchy frameworks

This hierarchy, typically portrayed in educational psychology as a pyramid with five tiers, posits that if people are to function as 'healthy' human beings and reach their full potential to flourish, they need to address their basic needs (at the lower tiers of the pyramid) before they can focus on more complex, higher-order human needs (at the top of the pyramid). Again, according to Maslow, if people do not address their basic needs at lower levels of the hierarchy, they are unlikely to achieve their full potential at higher levels. For example, people are less likely to enter a state of self-actualization or become emotionally fulfilled if their basic safety needs or physiological needs are not met.

2.2 Literature Review

Socio-economic status, often known as SES, is a composite measure that represents the position of a person or family within a society. It is generally evaluated using variables such as income, educational achievement, and occupational status. Since it incorporates a variety of elements that influence the overall quality of life and social mobility, socio-economic status (SES) is an essential component in comprehending the discrepancies that exist in terms of access to resources and opportunities, as stated by Johnson and Wang (2020). At the same time, Smith and Lee (2021) highlight that socio-economic status (SES) is a multidimensional construct that substantially influences health, education, and economic outcomes.

Accordingly, it includes both the visible (e.g., income) and the invisible (e.g., educational attainment) material and non-material assets that, taken together, inform the versatile concept of access to resources and experiences. Given its salience to several diverse life outcomes, including health, longevity and educational attainment, SES is among the most powerful and ubiquitous predictors of disparities in important outcomes. Additionally, a study by Thompson and Wilson (2021) brought attention to the fact that low-income families are more likely to experience housing instability. The researchers noted that such circumstances lead to higher stress and worse academic attainment for the children.

Recent studies have shown a significant association between a lower socio-economic level (SES) and poor academic achievement, and this correlation continues to be substantial. Compared to their counterparts from richer homes, students from households with lower incomes routinely obtain poor marks and perform lower on standardized examinations. For instance, Jackson and Singh (2020) conducted research that shows that kids from families with

a lower socio-economic status are at a considerable disadvantage in terms of their academic attainment and performance on standardized tests.

In addition, economic insecurity causes a significant amount of low SES students to work part-time to make ends meet, decreasing the time available for studying and how much time is devoted to academics (Miller 2019; Miller 2019; Thompson 2019). The students will be worn out trying to make the money to pay the bills and study, which will lower their academic performance. In conclusion, the homes do not academically support the students in the low SES environment because the parents work very long hours or are uneducated.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

To address the research questions and meet the objectives of this study, a structured quantitative research methodology was employed. The study involved the distribution of questionnaires to high school students, enabling the collection of numerical data that can be statistically analyzed. This quantitative method was chosen because survey research is widely regarded as a popular and effective means of gathering quantifiable data. It provides opportunities for honest and unambiguous feedback. Furthermore, all respondent data was protected for private purposes.

3.2 Samples and Sampling Technique

A representative sample is crucial for the generalizability of the study's findings. This study involves a sample of 152 respondents from Selangor, which is sufficient for achieving statistical significance and capturing diverse experiences and backgrounds. The Krejci and Morgan table determined the sample size, which helps researchers estimate the appropriate sample size for a given population. The calculation was made to ensure that the sample size is statistically significant and representative of the broader student population in Selangor. The chosen sample size of 152 is sufficient to achieve a 95% confidence level, ensuring the generalizability of the study's findings.

The sampling technique used in this study is random sampling. This method helps in obtaining a representative sample that includes students from various socio-economic backgrounds, family structures, and experiences with domestic violence. Furthermore, the researcher selected respondents from Forms 1 to 5 within these schools. This stratification allows the study to encompass a broad age range and educational stages, providing insights into how family challenges and academic performance evolve throughout the high school years. By including students at different points in their educational journey, the research can better understand the longitudinal impact of family dynamics on academic outcomes.

3.3 Instrumentation

In developing the questionnaire for this study, careful consideration was given to adapting questions from past research studies to ensure their validity and reliability. The areas covered include socio-economic status, family structure and stability, experiences with domestic violence, and academic performance. Each section was chosen and tailored to explore the connections and impacts on students' academic outcomes. The questions derived from the research conducted by Wilson and Brown (2018) offer valuable insights into various aspects of family dynamics and support. Their study examines the effectiveness of emotional support and encouragement provided by families during difficult times, the maintenance of a positive and nurturing family environment, the quality of time spent together to strengthen family

bonds, the role of family traditions in fostering a sense of belonging and stability, and the management of conflicts and disagreements within the family. These aspects collectively shed light on how family interactions and support systems contribute to the overall well-being and stability of its members.

3.4 Procedures

Before the full survey distribution, a pilot test was conducted with 20 high school students to ensure the reliability of the questions. The reliability results were Socio-economic Status: 0.941, Family Structure and Stability: 0.861, Domestic Violence: 0.775, Academic Performance: 0.980.

The researcher also sent emails to the selected schools requesting approval to conduct the research. The emails included details about the study's purpose, procedures, and the importance of student participation. Once approval was obtained from the schools, the researcher obtained informed consent from the students. This step ensured that participants were fully aware of the study's purpose and procedures and that their participation was voluntary.

3.5 Analysis

The researcher adopted a Likert scale for all but the first section, which asks for background information. The material obtained during this investigation was condensed using descriptive analysis. By focusing on the current study, descriptive analysis assists researchers in achieving and summarizing the basic features of the data, such as mean, median, mode, and standard deviation. These statistics provide a general overview of the data and highlight any significant patterns or trends. To ascertain the strength of the variables and whether they are connected, correlation analysis in SPSS Version 26 is utilized. The Pearson Correlation Analysis technique examines the relationships between the variables of interest. Specifically, it helps to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between:

4. Results

4.1 Correlation between family challenges and the academic performance of high school students.

A correlation is considered low if it is less than 0.35, according to Gay et al. (2012). A moderate correlation falls between 0.36 and 0.65. Above 0.66 is a high correlation. The interpretation and correlation size are explained in the following Table 1.

Table 1: Interpreting the size of the correlation

Size of Correlation	Interpretation
0.35 and below	Low correlation
Between 0.36 - 0.65	Moderate correlation
Above 0.66	High correlation

RQ1: What is the relationship between the socio-economic status (SES) of high school students and their academic performance?

H1: There is no significant relationship between high school students' socio-economic status (SES) and their academic performance.

Table 2: Correlation between SES and academic performance

		MEAN SES	MEAN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
MEAN SES	Pearson Correlation	1	.341
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	152	152
MEAN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE	Pearson Correlation	.341	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	152	152

The correlation coefficient of 0.341 indicates a low positive correlation between socio-economic status (SES) and academic performance. This means that while there is a positive relationship (higher SES is associated with slightly better academic performance), the relationship is relatively weak.

According to the size of correlation interpretations, a coefficient between 0.36 - 0.65 is considered a moderate correlation. (Gay et.al, 2012). Since 0.341 falls below this range, it is categorized as a low correlation. Based on the results, the researcher rejected Ho1 to answer RQ1. The statistically significant correlation ($p < 0.001$) indicates that there is indeed a relationship between socio-economic status and academic performance, although it is a low positive correlation. Therefore, the result from this first research objective has been answered.

4.2 Family structure and stability and academic performance

RQ2: What is the relationship between family structure and stability and the academic performance of high school students?

H2: There is no significant relationship between family structure and stability and the academic performance of high school students

Table 3: Correlation between family structure and stability and academic performance

		MEAN FSS	MEAN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
MEAN FSS	Pearson Correlation	1	.815
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	152	152
MEAN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE	Pearson Correlation	.815	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	152	152

Based on the above table, the correlation coefficient of 0.815 indicates a strong positive correlation between family structure and stability and academic performance. This means that improvements in family structure and stability are significantly associated with better academic performance. This coefficient falls into the range considered a high correlation (above 0.66), suggesting a robust relationship. Statistical Significance falls at ($p < 0.001$) means the result is statistically significant, reinforcing the reliability of the finding that family structure and stability have a strong impact on academic performance. Based on the results, the researcher rejected Ho2 that there is no significant relationship between family structure and stability and the academic performance of high school students. The statistically significant correlation ($p < 0.001$) indicates that there is a significant relationship between family structure and stability and academic performance, highlighting the crucial role of a stable family environment in academic success. Therefore, the result from this second research objective has been answered.

4.3 Domestic violence and academic performance.

RQ3: What is the relationship between domestic violence and the academic performance of high school students?

H3: There is a significant relationship between exposure to domestic violence and the academic performance of high school students.

Table 4: Correlation between domestic violence and academic performance

		MEAN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE	MEAN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
MEAN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE	Pearson Correlation	1	.850
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	152	152
MEAN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE	Pearson Correlation	.850	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	152	152

Based on the above results, the correlation coefficient of 0.850 indicates a very strong positive correlation between non-domestic violence environments and academic performance. This suggests that increasing non-domestic violence leads to better academic performance while increasing domestic violence is associated with poorer academic outcomes. This coefficient falls within the range considered a high correlation (above 0.66), demonstrating a robust and significant relationship. The strong correlation indicates that non-domestic violence environments are a crucial factor in supporting academic success, while domestic violence significantly hinders academic performance. Statistical Significance ($p < 0.001$) show the result is statistically significant, confirming the reliability of the finding that increasing non-domestic violence environments is strongly associated with better academic performance, while increasing domestic violence is linked to poorer academic outcomes. These results accepted the Ho3 and answered Research Question 3.

5. Discussion

5.1 Socio-economic Status (SES) and Academic Performance

The study found a low positive correlation ($r = 0.341$) between SES and academic performance. This suggests that while SES does contribute to academic success, it is not the predominant factor. Students from higher SES backgrounds often have better access to educational resources, tutoring, and extracurricular opportunities, which can enhance their academic performance.

Past research has often reported a moderate positive correlation between Socio-economic Status (SES) and academic performance. These studies typically indicate that SES is a significant contributor to educational success, providing students with better access to educational resources, support systems, and extracurricular activities. However, this study's finding of a low positive correlation ($r = 0.341$) suggests that the relationship between SES and academic performance may not be as strong as previously reported.

Several factors could account for this discrepancy. One possibility is the geographical or contextual differences between this study's sample and those of earlier studies. Variations in educational systems, economic conditions, and cultural contexts can influence how SES impacts academic outcomes. Additionally, the current study's sample might differ in terms of demographic characteristics, such as regional economic disparities, availability of educational resources, or community support structures, which could affect the strength of the correlation.

5.2 Family Structure and Stability and Academic Performance

A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.815$) was identified between family structure, stability, and academic performance. This finding underscores the importance of a stable and supportive home environment. Students from stable family environments typically benefit from consistent emotional support, encouragement, and a conducive learning atmosphere. This stability can enhance students' focus, motivation, and overall ability to succeed academically. The high correlation highlights that interventions that foster family stability could be highly effective in improving academic outcomes. Programs that support family cohesion and provide resources to strengthen family relationships may significantly benefit students' educational achievements. Past research has reported a moderate to strong correlation between family structure stability and academic performance. This research's strong positive correlation ($r = 0.815$) highlights an even more pronounced relationship, suggesting that a stable family environment significantly benefits academic success. Differences in sample characteristics or recent changes in family dynamics may explain this stronger correlation. The findings emphasize the value of interventions that support family stability, which could significantly improve students' academic performance.

5.3 Domestic Violence and Academic Performance

The high positive correlation ($r = 0.850$) between domestic violence and academic performance indicates that a high level of non-domestic violence is associated with better academic performance. In contrast, higher levels of domestic violence are linked to poorer academic outcomes. This result aligns with the expectation that domestic violence negatively impacts academic success due to the associated stress, trauma, and instability. In this context, a high level of domestic violence is likely to have a detrimental effect on students' academic achievements. The finding underscores the significant negative impact of domestic violence on academic performance, highlighting the importance of addressing this issue through targeted support and interventions. Further research is needed to explore the specific mechanisms through which domestic violence affects academic outcomes and to develop effective strategies to mitigate these negative effects.

One possible explanation for this discrepancy could be related to the study's specific context. The researcher's choice of location and sample characteristics might have contributed to the heightened correlation. Additionally, cultural and socio-economic factors unique to the study location may have amplified the effects of domestic violence on students' academic achievements.

It is also worth considering the methodology employed. Differences in data collection procedures, such as the survey instruments used and the timing of data collection, might influence the strength of the observed correlations. The heightened correlation in this study could reflect the specific challenges faced by students in the chosen location, which may differ from those reported in other research settings.

Overall, the research illustrates that while SES, family structure, and exposure to domestic violence all impact academic performance, their effects are nuanced and multifaceted. A comprehensive approach to supporting students must consider these complexities and recognize that factors influencing academic success extend beyond simple correlations.

5.4 Research Implications

5.4.1 Pedagogical Implication

The research reinforces the need for a holistic approach to education that extends beyond academic instruction. Schools should integrate social and emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum to help students develop resilience, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills. This approach can mitigate the negative impact of family challenges on academic performance. Additionally, by fostering strong family bonds and secure attachments, as suggested by attachment theory, schools can positively influence students' motivation and academic achievement.

5.4.2 Theoretical Implications

This research contributes to the understanding of how external factors, such as family challenges, influence academic performance. This can support or challenge existing theories related to educational attainment and social determinants of learning. Additionally, considering Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the research underscores the critical role of basic needs (such as safety and security) in academic achievement. Students from higher socio-economic backgrounds often have their basic needs met, which allows them to focus on higher-level cognitive tasks, whereas those from lower SES backgrounds may struggle with unmet basic needs, hindering their academic progress.

5.4.3 Practical Implications

The findings highlight the need for policies that support students facing family challenges. Educational institutions, in collaboration with government agencies, could develop policies that ensure access to resources like free or subsidized meals, school supplies, and mental health services for students from low-income families or those experiencing domestic violence. Schools may need to strengthen partnerships with community organizations to provide comprehensive support for students. This could involve collaborations with social services, mental health professionals, and community centers to address the broader needs of students beyond the classroom. By fostering strong relationships between schools and communities, students can receive the support they need to overcome family challenges and succeed academically.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the research provides valuable insights into the relationship between family challenges and academic performance among high school students. While socio-economic status has a moderate impact, family structure and stability are crucial determinants of academic success. The unexpected positive correlation between domestic violence and academic performance highlights that increasing non-domestic violence is likely to have a positive effect on academic performance, indicating that homes with lower levels of domestic violence and higher levels of non-domestic violence are associated with better academic outcomes.

The findings highlight the importance of a holistic approach to supporting students, addressing their educational needs and emotional and psychological well-being. By understanding and mitigating the impact of family challenges, educators, policymakers, and community organizations can create more supportive environments that foster academic success for all students.

Acknowledgment

The authors thank UNITAR International University for the support of the publication of this research.

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