

Prevalence and Determinants of Family Violence Exposure among University Students

Family Violence
Exposure among
University Students

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To provide evidence-based information to support nursing practice, public health interventions, and policy development to reduce family violence and improve student well-being.

Study Design: Cross-sectional study

Place and Duration of Study: This study was conducted at the College of Nursing, University of Al-Essra, Iraq from 15th January 2026 to 31st March 2026.

Methods: Convenience sampling was used to find participants. The WHOQOL-BREF questionnaire and a validated violence scale were used to gather data in order to achieve the goals of the study.

Results: An overall moderate mean prevalence of family violence exposure among the students (1.83±0.930), though a significant proportion of participants reported experiencing high levels of abuse. Age and social status were found to be significantly associated with a student's exposure to family violence. Conversely, academic year and financial status did not demonstrate a statistically significant relationship with violence exposure.

Conclusion: Baseline of family violence across the broader student population may skew lower, the significant subset of students experiencing moderate to high levels of household abuse is a major concern. The identification of age and social status as key determinants highlights the urgent need for targeted, sociodemographically tailored interventions and preventive strategies to protect and support vulnerable young adults.

Key Words: Violence, University student, Quality of life

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INTRODUCTION

Violence is the deliberate application of physical force or power, whether threatened or actual, against oneself, another individual, or a group. This behavior may lead to physical injury, psychological damage, developmental issues, or deprivation.¹ Physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, and verbal manifestations comprise the multifaceted and intricate phenomenon of violence.² It affects individuals across the lifespan and represents a major public health issue with significant social, economic, and healthcare consequences.³

Family violence is a distinct type of interpersonal violence that transpires within the home and encompasses violent actions by parents, caretakers, or other relatives.⁴ Family violence includes physical punishment, emotional abuse, psychological neglect, sexual abuse, and verbal aggression.⁵ Exposure to family violence during childhood and adolescence is associated with long-term health consequences and can negatively influence academic performance, mental health, and social functioning among students.⁶ From a public health and nursing perspective, family violence is a critical determinant of health.⁷ Nurses and healthcare professionals frequently encounter victims of family violence in clinical and community settings, often without disclosure of abuse.⁸ Family violence contributes to physical injuries, chronic health problems, mental disorders, and increased healthcare utilization. Students exposed to violence at home may present with psychosomatic complaints, emotional distress, and maladaptive coping behaviours.⁹ In the Middle East, including Iraq, family structures are strongly influenced by cultural norms, traditional gender roles, and patriarchal values.¹⁰ The sociocultural factors may contribute to the normalization of violence within families and discourage victims from seeking help. Limited awareness, stigma, and insufficient

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reporting mechanisms further complicate the identification and management of family violence.¹¹ Exposure to familial violence is linked to several detrimental psychological and behavioral consequences, such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, diminished self-esteem, aggression, substance addiction, and suicidal tendencies. Students exposed to violence may experience impaired cognitive functioning, reduced academic achievement, and difficulties in peer relationships.¹² Several theoretical frameworks explain the occurrence and transmission of violence within families. Social learning theory posits that individuals develop violent tendencies by observing and imitating family members.¹³ Attachment theory proposes that early relationships with caregivers shape emotional regulation and interpersonal behaviors, with insecure attachment increasing vulnerability to violence.¹⁴ Cultural beliefs, gender norms, and socialization practices play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward violence and acceptable disciplinary practices within families.¹⁵ In traditional societies, strict gender roles and hierarchical family structures may reinforce tolerance of violence and reduce reporting.¹⁶ Despite increasing research on dating violence, cyber violence, and workplace violence, studies focusing on family violence among student populations remain limited, particularly in Iraq and the Middle East.¹⁷ Existing research has often focused on adult populations or specific types of violence, with limited comprehensive assessment of family violence exposure among students.¹⁸ There is a need for empirical data to inform policy development, nursing education, and public health strategies aimed at preventing violence and supporting affected students.

The purpose of this study is to assess the prevalence, types, and determinants of family violence among students and to examine demographic, social, and psychological factors associated with exposure to family violence.

METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted at College of Nursing, University of Al-Esra, Iraq from 15th January 2026 to 31st March 2026 letter No. 127 dated January 5, 2026. The universities were chosen because of their key characteristics, including the availability of a sufficient sample, accessibility, cost, student collaboration, appropriate administrative facilities, and time-saving advantages. Fifty university students were enrolled undergraduate and postgraduate students. A convenience sampling method used to recruit participants. The university student's undergraduate or graduate, be at least eighteen years old, give informed consent to take part in the research and have witnessed or experienced physical, mental, or psychological family violence at some point in their lives were

included. The student are not currently enrolled as students at the university., age under 18 years of age and do not provide informed consent were excluded. The data was collected from the respondents. and divided into three sections.

Part 1: This section describes the study participants' demographics, including factors like age, household, income level, marital status, and academic standing.

Part 2: Physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment are the four key areas measured by the 26 items that make up the WHOQOL-BREF, a condensed version of the WHOQOL-100. Two generic items that assess general health satisfaction and overall quality of life are also included in the measure. Depending on the type of question, each item is assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, with response possibilities ranging from 1 (very poor/very dissatisfied/not at all) to 5 (very good/very satisfied/extremely). Better perceived quality of life is indicated by higher scores. Daily living activities, reliance on medical care, energy and exhaustion, mobility, pain and discomfort, sleep and rest, and job capacity are all included in the physical health area. Positive emotions, thinking, learning, memory, focus, self-esteem, body image, and negative emotions are all evaluated in the psychological domain. Social support and interpersonal relationships are assessed in the social relationships area. Financial resources, safety and security, access to health and social services, the home environment, chances to learn new knowledge and skills, engagement in recreational activities, the physical environment, and transportation are all included in the environmental domain. Scoring of the WHOQOL-BREF is performed by calculating the mean of items within each domain and transforming the scores linearly to a 0–100 scale, if required, to allow comparison across domains.

Part3: Violence scale: The scale consists of 28 items covering multiple dimensions of violence, including physical violence (e.g, being physically beaten), psychological and emotional violence (e.g, belittling opinions, making the student feel worthless), social violence (e.g, isolation from society, restriction of movement), economic violence (e.g, refusal of personal allowance, considering educational expenses a burden), and educational violence (e.g, forcing a specific major, threatening to prevent continuation of studies). Responses are rated on a four-point Likert scale (Always, Often, Rarely, Never), allowing participants to indicate the frequency of their experiences. Higher scores indicate greater exposure to violence. Some items are positively worded (being listened to, receiving appropriate care) and require reverse scoring to ensure accurate interpretation of total scores. The scale demonstrates acceptable psychometric properties in terms of internal consistency and content validity, making it suitable for assessing the prevalence and

severity of family-directed violence among female university students in academic research settings. The data was analyzed through SPSS-26. To investigate relationships between family violence and demographic and psychosocial variables, inferential statistics such as chi-square tests, t-tests, and logistic regression analysis will be employed. The threshold for statistical significance will be set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

The mean age was 21.88 ± 2.30 . Also, half of the students were in the 4th stage of university, 40% were single, and the majority (40%) of them have great financial status (Table 1). The level of family violence among students was at low level with a total mean score of 1.83 ± 0.93 . The results indicates that students had high level of family violence among student' for the items 6, 17, 20 and 23 (Tables 2-3).

There is a significant relationship between the level of family violence and social status ($p=0.081$). However, there is no significant relationship between levels of family violence among students and other socio-demographical characteristics (Table 4).

Table No. 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of participated students (N=50)

Sociodemographic characteristics	No.	%	Mean±SD
Age (years)			21.88±2.30
Academic Year			
Second Stage	9	18.0	3.52±0.90
Third Stage	11	22.0	
Fourth Stage	25	50.0	
Fifth Stage	5	10.0	
Social Status			
Single	40	80.0	1.20±0.40
Married	10	20.0	
Divorced	-	-	
Financial Status			
Enough	40	80.0	1.20±0.40
Somehow Enough	10	20.0	
Not Enough	-	-	

Table No. 2: Level of family violence against university students

Rarely	Little	Most of the time	Always	Mean±SD	Level of Family Violence
46 (92%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)	-	1.10±0.363	Low
9 (18%)	10 (20%)	13 (26%)	18 (36%)	2.80±1.12	Moderate
36 (72%)	7 (14%)	3 (6%)	4 (8%)	1.50±0.93	Low
36 (72%)	7 (14%)	3 (6%)	4 (8%)	1.50±0.931	low
39 (78%)	7(14%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)	1.34±0.745	Low
8 (16%)	6 (12%)	12 (24%)	24 (48%)	3.04±1.124	High
31 (62%)	13 (26%)	1 (2%)	5 (10%)	1.60±0.947	Low
40 (80%)	6 (12%)	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	1.34±0.798	Low
11 (22%)	4 (8%)	10 (20%)	25 (50%)	2.98±1.220	Moderate
37 (74%)	7 (14%)	2 (4%)	4(8%)	1.46±0.908	Low
43 (86%)	5 (10%)	-	2 (4%)	1.22±0.648	Low
36 (72%)	8 (16%)	4 (8%)	2 (4%)	1.44±0.812	Low
34 (68%)	10 (20%)	4 (8%)	2 (4%)	1.48±0.814	Low
17 (34%)	9 (18%)	12 (24%)	12 (24%)	2.38±1.193	Moderate
34 (68%)	7 (14%)	4 (8%)	5 (10%)	1.60±1.010	Low
33 (66%)	10 (20%)	3 (6%)	4 (8%)	1.56±0.929	Low
4 (8%)	4 (8%)	7 (14%)	35 (70%)	3.46±0.952	High
41 (82%)	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	1.32±0.767	Low
38 (76%)	5 (10%)	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	1.44±0.884	Low
9 (18%)	5 (10%)	9 (18%)	27 (54%)	3.08±1.175	High
44 (88%)	3 (6%)	-	3 (6%)	1.24±0.743	Low
35 (70%)	7 (14%)	2 (4%)	6 (12%)	1.58±1.031	Low
11 (22%)	4 (8%)	1 (2%)	34 (68%)	3.16±1.283	High
40 (80%)	5 (10%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	1.34±0.772	Low
35 (70%)	6 (12%)	3 (6%)	6 (12%)	1.60±1.049	Low
36 (72%)	2 (4%)	7 (14%)	5 (10%)	1.62±1.066	Low
35 (70%)	9 (18%)	3 (6%)	3 (6%)	1.48±0.862	Low
31 (62%)	10 (20%)	5 (10%)	4 (8%)	1.64±0.963	Low
Total Mean				1.83±0.930	Low

Level of Family Violence = Low: 1.1-1.99, Moderate: 2-2.99, High: 3-4

Table No. 3: The mean of family violence among students

Level of Family Violence against University Students	No.	%	Mean±SD
Moderate level of family violence	40	80.0	2.20±0.40
High level of family violence	10	20.0	

Table No. 4: The relationship between Students' socio-demographic characteristics and their level of family violence

Students Characteristics	No.	%	Value	df	P value
Academic Year					
Second Stage	9	18.0	52.203	60	.753
Third Stage	11	22.0			
Fourth Stage	25	50.0			
Fifth Stage	5	10.0			
Social Status					
Single	40	80.0	29.340	20	.081*
Married	10	20.0			
Divorced	-	-			
Financial Status					
Enough	40	80.0	17.361	20	.629
Somehow Enough	10	20.0			
Not Enough	-	-			

*P value ≤ 0.001

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study showed that the mean age of students was 21.88±2.309 years, indicating that most participants were young adults. Half of the students were in the fourth academic year, which may reflect higher participation among senior students who are more available and aware of research activities. The majority of students were single (80%) and reported having sufficient financial status (80%). These findings are consistent with Noori et al¹¹, where most participants were unmarried young adults with moderate to good financial status. Another study by Kolanati et al⁶ found that majority were mean ages of 20.11 years in their second year in college. Another study reported by Haj-Yahia & de Zoysa¹⁹ showed most students were with low financial status in their third year of college. Zhang et al²⁰ also reported that the majority of the young adolescents in their finale high school year and their involvement in school bullying and violence. Another study consistent with our findings is conducted by Adelman et al²¹ which reported that majority of females were aged in their twenties and are survivors of violence.

This study reported level of family violence among students was low, with a total mean score of 1.83±0.930. Most items showed low exposure to family violence, indicating that the majority of students rarely experienced violent behaviors within their families. However, several items 6, 17, 20, and 23 demonstrated high levels of violence. The overall violence levels

were low but specific forms of psychological or physical violence were reported at higher frequencies among young adults by Alotaibi & Mukred.⁸ Aksoy et al²² also reported different findings from our research which showed increased level of violence suffered by nursing students during their clinical training. Le et al¹⁴ reported the experience of domestic violence among university students which was higher among Vietnamese university student owing to the environment and cultural beliefs. However the study conducted by Oydemir & Alan-Dikmen¹⁶ reported that most female student in the university suffer a higher proportionate of violence and cyber victimization's and effecting the happiness levels and resilience among those females. The study conducted in Turkey by Küçük et al²³ reported an assessment of perceptions of students nurses for obstetric violence which showed that the study low level of perception against violence and thereby nictitating the need for increasing awareness on those populations. Carter et al¹⁵ reported that among individuals who are exposed to domestic violence the majority had a higher level of violence reported during the study. However our findings differ from those of Zhu et al²⁴, which showed a higher level of violence among the study with fewer individual with low level of family violence. Gershoff & Cuartas²⁵ reported the specific forms of violence and psychological stressors remain prevalent among a subgroup of young adults. Variations in prevalence rates across studies may be attributed to differences in cultural context, measurement tools, and academic and social pressures experienced by students. Noori et al¹¹

revealed that overall level of family violence among university students was low, although some students reported moderate to high levels for specific items. This may be explained by the generally positive attitudes of students toward rejecting family violence. The university students often demonstrate a positive attitude against domestic violence because they recognize its negative consequences on family stability and social well-being.⁵

The study found no significant relationship between academic year and financial status with the level of family violence ($p > 0.05$). However, age and social status showed significant relationships with family violence ($p \leq 0.001$). Older students and those with different marital statuses (single or married) may experience different family dynamics, which could influence exposure to violence. These findings are consistent with Zhang et al²⁰ suggesting that age and marital status can affect family relationships and conflict patterns. Adelman et al²¹ suggested that level of violence is affected by social status of the students as well as their age. Consistent our findings with Lin et al²⁶ that the socialization of school children was related to their level of family violent owing to their academic failure. This finding is consistent with previous research by Barbon et al²⁷, which has shown that family dynamics, socioeconomic conditions, and interpersonal relationships play a crucial role in influencing exposure to violence and psychological distress among young people. Family conflicts and financial difficulties have been identified as major contributors to adverse family environments and student vulnerability.²¹

CONCLUSION

Overall level of family violence among university students was low, a significant proportion experienced moderate to high levels. Age and social status were significantly associated with family violence, while academic year and financial status were not.

Author's Contribution:

Concept & Design or acquisition of analysis or interpretation of data:	Marwa Karim Jabr, Inaam Abdulkareem Abas
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Final Approval of version:	All the above authors
Agreement to accountable for all aspects of work:	All the above authors

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