

СОЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ В ОБРАЗОВАНИИ

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Neighbourhood safety and academic performance: the role of student gender and family socioeconomic status

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Abstract. *Introduction.* Neighbourhood safety is directly linked to the level of disadvantage in the area of residence. *Aim.* The present research aimed to examine the impact of neighbourhood safety on the academic performance of secondary school students, taking into account gender and socioeconomic background. *Methodology and research methods.* The current study used a quantitative cross-sectional study design. Data were collected from 448 secondary school students on a voluntary basis. Chi-square and Kendall's Tau-c (T^c) tests were used to analyse the data and determine the relationship and strength of direction between variables. *Results.* The findings indicated a significant and positive association between children's academic performance and neighbourhood crime safety ($P < 0.05$, $T^c = 0.202$), as well as feeling safe, walking in the neighbourhood during the day or night ($P < 0.05$, $T^c = 0.127$). However, bullying and harassment in the neighbourhood were found to be significantly and negatively associated with academic performance ($P > 0.05$, $T^c = -0.053$). When introducing family socioeconomic status as a control variable, the results indicated variation in academic performance in relation to neighbourhood safety. When controlling for student gender, neighbourhood safety had no different effects on academic performance. The findings showed that, in relation to neighbourhood safety, children from families with higher socioeconomic status academically outperform children from lower socioeconomic status families. *Scientific novelty.* The study not only focused on the connection between neighbourhood safety and academic performance but was also unique in the sense that it also dealt with differences in academic performance based on gender and family socioeconomic level. *Practical significance.* The study produces a number of interesting conclusions and makes valuable recommendations for significant stakeholders.

The primary study recommendations aim is to create a secure, supportive, and protective neighbourhood environment by enforcing the law and encouraging community involvement in order to reduce the threat of crime, violence, and harassment.

Keywords: academic performance, neighbourhood, safety, student gender, socioeconomic status

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Территориальная социальная безопасность и академическая успеваемость: роль пола студентов и влияние социально-экономического статуса семьи

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Аннотация. Введение. Территориальная социальная безопасность на локальном уровне имеет прямую связь с уровнем благополучия района проживания. Цель. Настоящее исследование было направлено на изучение влияния состояния территориальной социальной безопасности на академическую успеваемость учащихся средней школы в зависимости от пола и социально-экономического положения. Методология, методы и методики. В настоящей работе использовался количественный перекрестный дизайн исследования. Приведены результаты опроса на добровольной основе 448 учащихся средней школы. Тесты хи-квадрат Пирсона и тау-с Кендалла использовались для анализа данных и определения взаимосвязи и силы направления между переменными. Результаты. Полученные данные указывают на значительную положительную связь между академической успеваемостью детей и безопасностью проживания в районе ($P < 0,05$, $T_c = 0,202$), а также чувством безопасности при прогулках в районе проживания в течение дня или ночи ($P < 0,05$, $T_c = 0,127$). При введении социально-экономического статуса семьи в качестве контрольной переменной обнаружены различия в успеваемости в зависимости от территориальной социальной безопасности. При учете пола учащихся территориальная социальная безопасность не оказала влияния на успеваемость. Дети из семей с более высоким социально-экономическим статусом

академически превосходят детей из семей с более низким. *Научная новизна.* Впервые для Республики Пакистан проведено исследование связи между уровнем территориальной социальной безопасности и состоянием академической успеваемости детей, в том числе по признаку пола и социально-экономического уровня семьи. *Практическая значимость.* Результаты будут представлять интерес для исследователей, которые занимаются вопросами обеспечения территориальной социальной безопасности на локальном уровне.

Ключевые слова: успеваемость, соседство, безопасность, пол студента, социально-экономический статус

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La seguridad vecinal y el desempeño académico: rol del tipo de sexo del estudiantado y la situación socioeconómica familiar

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Abstracto. Introducción. La seguridad social territorial a nivel local tiene una relación directa con el nivel de desventaja en la zona de residencia. **Objetivo.** El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo examinar los efectos de la seguridad del vecindario en el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes de secundaria, teniendo en cuenta las diferencias en los efectos según el sexo y el entorno socioeconómico. **Metodología, métodos y procesos de investigación.** Para la ejecución del presente estudio se utilizó un diseño de estudio transversal cuantitativo y se recopilaron datos de 448 estudiantes de secundaria. Se utilizaron las pruebas de chi-cuadrado de Pearson y Tau-c de Kendall para analizar los datos y determinar la relación y la fuerza de dirección entre las variables. **Resultados.** Los hallazgos indican que hay una asociación significativa y positiva entre el rendimiento académico de los niños y la seguridad contra delitos en el vecindario ($P < 0,05$, $T_c = 0,202$), así como la sensación de seguridad al caminar en el vecindario durante el día o la noche

($P < 0,05$, $T_c = 0,127$). Sin embargo, se encontró que el acoso y la intimidación en el vecindario estaban significativa y negativamente asociados con el rendimiento académico ($P > 0,05$, $T_c = -0,053$). Cuando se introdujo el estatus socioeconómico familiar como variable de control, se encontraron diferencias en el rendimiento académico en función de la seguridad social territorial. Al tomar en cuenta el tipo de sexo de los estudiantes, la seguridad social territorial no tuvo impacto en el rendimiento académico. Los niños de familias con un nivel socioeconómico más alto superaron académicamente a los niños de familias con un nivel socioeconómico más bajo. *Novedad científica*. Por primera vez en la República del Pakistán se llevó a cabo un estudio de la relación existente entre el nivel de seguridad social territorial y el estado del rendimiento académico de los niños, incluidos el tipo de sexo y el nivel socioeconómico de la familia. *Significado práctico*. Los resultados serán de interés para los investigadores que se ocupan de cuestiones de garantía de la seguridad social territorial a nivel local.

Palabras claves: rendimiento académico, barrio, seguridad, tipo de sexo de los estudiantes, estatus socioeconómico

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Introduction

Neighbourhood safety is important for protection from crime, harassment, and bullying [1]. Children spend a lot of time in their neighbourhood, and a safe environment is crucial for their development [2]. The studies by L. T. Elizabeth et al. and Y. J. Choi & Matz-Costa have demonstrated that being exposed to violence can have detrimental effects on a child's cognitive development, mental health, and academic performance [3, 4]. High achievers in unsafe neighbourhoods are often unable to pursue higher education, despite their ability to gain admission to colleges and universities. The shadow of an unsafe neighbourhood can diminish the advantages of personal success [5, 6]. Growing up in high-crime neighbourhoods with bullying and drug use can negatively impact a child's academic performance [7]. These students may need psychological treatment and counselling to rebuild confidence and improve their educational experience [8, 9].

Socioeconomic status (SES) is closely linked to housing and educational opportunities [10]. People with lower incomes often live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, which can have a negative impact on their mental health and academic performance [11, 12]. Children from low SES backgrounds are less likely to have access to quality education, healthcare, and resources, leading to increased community stress, mental health issues, and lower academic achievement compared to children from higher SES backgrounds [13–15]. During adolescence, exposure to the neighbourhood varies based on gender leading to distinct effects on the academic achievements of boys and girls. Studies have shown that males are more likely to experience violent incidents in their neighbourhood, while traumatised females re-

port greater distress and impairment than traumatised males [16, 17]. However, one meta-analytic assessment found that the relationship between exposure to violence in the neighbourhood and academic outcomes was not moderated by sex [18].

Purpose

The influence of socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and neighbourhood safety on academic performance has been the subject of numerous studies in developed nations; however, in less developed nations, and especially in the study area, this crucial component of a child's educational development has received less attention. Therefore, the present study was conducted to deal with the association between neighbourhood safety and academic performance. Additionally, the study concentrated on the effects of family socioeconomic status (SES) and gender on the association between neighbourhood safety and academic performance.

Research Questions

- Is neighbourhood safety related to students' academic performance?
- Is variance in academic performance in relation to neighbourhood safety explained by student gender and family socioeconomic status?

The hypothesis

H_0 = There is no significant relationship between neighbourhood safety and academic performance.

H_1 = There is a significant relationship between neighbourhood safety and academic performance.

H_0 = Academic performance does not vary in relation with neighbourhood safety based on student gender.

H_1 = Academic performance varies in relation to neighbourhood safety based on student gender.

H_0 = Academic performance does not vary in relation to neighbourhood safety based on family SES.

H_1 = Academic performance varies in relation to neighbourhood safety based on family SES.

Limitation of the Study

The study was restricted to secondary schools in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Pakistan District Malakand. The study examined the effects of students' gender, neighbourhood safety, and family socioeconomic status on their academic performance.

Literature Review

The majority of a child's life and direct interactions occur at home, school, and neighbourhood. According to U. Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model, these layers are defined as micro-level systems, which have a direct influence on the overall personality development and educational outcomes of children [19, 20]. Accord-

ing to Build Healthy Places Network, there are three aspects of the neighbourhood impact on children's development: neighbourhood services, safety, and social cohesion [21]. L. Tomfohr-Madsen et al. and Q. K. Li found significant connections between neighbourhood traits, particularly deprivation, and children's behavioural, mental, and physical health [22, 23]. Protection from psychological and physical strain is a fundamental human need. Exposure to a dangerous environment can lead to a variety of issues, including isolation and alienation from mainstream society. C. L. Benjet and S. Sampson et al. found that a significant number of psychologically unwell or socially abnormal adults were exposed to unsafe neighbourhoods at a young age, which worsened their condition. This indicates that the living conditions of these children were not optimal in terms of neighbourhood safety. In addition to causing psychological stress, the fear of crime, harassment, and bullying in the neighbourhood also limited their ability to move around outside of their homes during the day. C. L. Benjet and S. Sampson et al. also noted that the presence of violence or the fear of violence can hinder children's mental development [24]. J. Cuartas and L. Tama found that the harmful effects of neighbourhood violence are more severe the more intense it is, and it may even lead to traumatic emotional stress and depression [25].-

According to B. Upham, growing up in a high-crime, violent neighbourhood can lead children to get involved in aggression, bullying, and crimes against vulnerable individuals [26]. Bullying, whether at home, school, or in the community, can result in conduct disorders and low self-esteem, as well as feelings of loneliness, depression, and other psychological problems. Children in these areas also experience a high rate of physical injuries and severe psychological issues. Furthermore, children, who face intimidation and humiliation in their communities, often show behavioural issues, physical injuries, poor academic performance, and low self-esteem [27, 28].

Y. Mori et al. and B. C. Otite et al. came to the conclusion that a child's financial status rather than their personal or living circumstances is the most significant element impacting their academic success [29, 30]. Other academics, on the other hand, contend that socioeconomic position functions as a catalyst, improving kids' academic achievement when paired with good parenting, encouraging peers, safe housing, and a positive school and neighbourhood environment. Living in an affluent area with good health care, good educational opportunities, recreational services and activities, and crime- and harassment-free neighbourhoods is linked to having a high socioeconomic status. These attributes all contribute to positive psychosocial well-being and higher academic achievements. However, children, living in underprivileged neighbourhoods, households with poor socioeconomic status, frequently have low enrollment rates and lower academic performance [31, 32].

Similar to how socioeconomic position has distinct consequences, gender plays a significant role in obtaining education and neighbourhood development services, particularly in patriarchal and male-dominated cultures across the globe. In egalitarian communities, the gender gap is less noticeable than in patriarchal societies,

when men are valued over women. The study by M. Warrington revealed that females were found to be more engaged in academic tasks and to be more enthusiastic about studying than boys, which led to better performance in school [33].

Methodology

Study Design

This investigation used a quantitative and cross-sectional research design.

Sample Size and Sampling

Data was collected in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan), District Malakand, by applying a multistage stratified random sampling technique. Geographically, the study area is distributed into Tehsil Batkhela and Dargai (Stage 1). The two Tehsils were further divided into 28 union councils (UCs) (5 urban and 23 rural, with a ratio of 1:5) (Stage 2). Based on the ratio of UCs, 2 urban and 10 rural UCs were randomly selected (Stage 3). From the selected 12 UCs, one government boys' school, one government girls' school, and one private school, were randomly selected as the study universe (Stage 4).

For which the required sample size is 448 (using equation I) that is proportionally allocated to each selected school based on students enrolment [34].

According to the school records, there were 7,952 students enrolled in the selected schools. The required sample size is 448, as determined by the sample size derivation formula of Sher Muhammad Chaudhry. Therefore, 448 secondary school students from classes 9 and 10 were selected as sample respondents for this study. The sample size of 448 was allocated proportionally to each selected school based on the number of enrolled students [34].

$$n = \frac{NpqZ^2}{pqZ^2 + Ne^2 - e^2} \dots \dots \dots \text{equation I}$$

Measurement of Variables

Neighbourhood safety was measured using 4 items: safety from crime, feeling safe walking in the neighbourhood day or night, absence of harassment in the neighbourhood, and absence of children bullying. Parental education, family monthly income, and occupation/income source were taken into account for measuring the socioeconomic status (SES) of the family in accordance with the Kuppuswamy modified socioeconomic (SES) scale. The combined score for the three SES domains was 14. Families with low socioeconomic status were classified as having a score of seven or less on the SES scale, while families with high socioeconomic status were classified as having a score of seven or higher [35]. Academic grade in the last exam was considered as the academic performance (dependent variable).

Data Analysis

For analysing data, the chi-square test and Kendall’s Tau-c test were used to assess the relationship between neighbourhood safety and academic performance in both bivariate and multivariate analyses. In the multivariate analysis, gender and family socioeconomic status were entered as control variables to assess the relationship between the aforementioned variables.

Ethical Approval Statement

This study followed the ethical guidelines outlined by the APA, which prioritise the protection of respondents’ humanity and dignity and aim to prevent any harm, distress, or discomfort. The interview schedule was pretested to ensure it was free of ethical issues before data collection began. The research was conducted under a university authorisation letter, specifying that the data would only be used for research and academic purposes. Additionally, authority letters were obtained from the District Malakand education departments (male and female) before data collection from secondary school students. Verbal assent was obtained from secondary school students in front of their teachers after formal approval from school administrators. The interviews were conducted in front of teachers, and only questions related to the study variables were included in the interview schedule. Students were assured of their confidentiality and had the option to end the interview at any time. In addition, data from female respondents were collected by a trained female investigator taking cultural considerations into account.

Results

According to Table 1, students’ academic performance was significantly and positively associated with neighbourhood safety from crime ($P < 0.05$, $T^c = 0.202$) and feeling safe walking in the neighbourhood during the day or night ($P < 0.05$, $T^c = 0.127$) with academic performance of children. In addition, the results illustrated that academic performance was significantly and negatively associated with harassment ($P < 0.05$, $T^c = -0.053$) and bullying in the neighbourhood ($P < 0.05$, $T^c = -0.086$).

Based on the study findings, the research hypothesis $H_1 =$ There is significant relationship between neighbourhood safety and academic performance, was accepted.

Table 1

Association between neighbourhood safety and children academic performance

Independent variable (neighbourhood safety)	Dependent variable (Academic performance)	Statistics
Safety from crime	Academic grade	$\chi^2 = 18.371$ $P < 0.05$ $T^c = 0.202$
Safely walking during the day or night	Academic grade	$\chi^2 = 10.016$ $P < 0.05$ $T^c = 0.127$
Harassment	Academic grade	$\chi^2 = 11.729$ $P < 0.05$ $T^c = -0.053$
Bullying	Academic grade	$\chi^2 = 26.798$ $P < 0.05$ $T^c = -0.086$

Table 2 presents the association of neighbourhood safety and academic performance after controlling for students gender. It was revealed that the association of the aforementioned variables was positive and non-significant for boys ($P < 0.05$, $T^c = 0.022$). Similarly, it was non-significant and positive for girls ($P < 0.05$, $T^c = 0.023$). As a whole the table indicates a non-significant and positive correlation ($P < 0.05$, $T^c = 0.017$) between neighbourhood safety and academic performance for both genders.

On the basis of above mentioned results, the research hypothesis H_1 = Academic performance varies in relation with neighbourhood safety based on student gender, was rejected.

Table 2
 Neighbourhood safety and academic performance controlling for respondents' gender

Gender	Independent variable	Dependent variable (Academic performance)	Statistics	Statistics for entire table
Male	Neighbourhood safety	Academic grade	$\chi^2 = 1.861$ $P < 0.05$ $T^c = 0.022$	$\chi^2 = 0.592$ $P < 0.05$ $T^c = 0.017$
Female	Neighbourhood safety	Academic grade	$\chi^2 = 3.963$ $P < 0.05$ $T^c = 0.023$	

Table 3 indicates the association of neighbourhood safety and academic performance after controlling for family socioeconomic status. It was revealed that the association of the aforementioned variables was significant and positive for students of high socioeconomic status families ($P < 0.05$, $T^c = 0.0225$). Similarly, it was significant and positive for students of lower high socioeconomic status families ($P < 0.05$, $T^c = 0.171$). The table as a whole indicates a significant and positive association ($P < 0.05$, $T^c = 0.125$) between neighbourhood safety and academic performance for students of several socioeconomic status families.

On the basis of the above results, the research hypothesis H_1 = Academic performance varies in relation with neighbourhood safety based on family socioeconomic status, was accepted.

Table 3
 Neighbourhood safety and academic performance controlling for family socioeconomic status

Family socioeconomic status (SES)	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable (Academic performance)	Statistics	Statistics for entire table
High SES	Neighbourhood safety	Academic grade	$\chi^2 = 22.334$ $P < 0.05$ $T^c = 0.0225$	$\chi^2 = 35.464$ $P < 0.05$ $T^c = 0.125$
Low SES	Neighbourhood safety	Academic grade	$\chi^2 = 19.056$ $P < 0.05$ $T^c = 0.171$	

Discussion

A neighbourhood that prioritises the well-being of children must focus on safety. Safety in a neighbourhood means freedom from crime and violence. On the other hand, crime and violence can lead to social, psychological, and physical problems such as fear, distress, deviant behaviour, anxiety, and lower learning abilities in children. Poor neighbourhood safety is also linked to lower academic performance in children. When there is fear of crime, children's mobility and interaction are limited. Children, who experience this fear, may find it more difficult to learn because it limits their interactions with peers and teachers, making it more difficult for them to ask questions about subjects. Youngsters, who grow up in a violent neighbourhood, are more likely to act violently and do poorly on exams. Children, who are exposed to neighbourhood violence, may exhibit aggressive or socially isolated behaviours as a result. A number of research studies have reported a negative relationship between academic achievement and crime in the neighbourhood. To minimise the negative impacts of crime on students and help them learn, extra efforts and support are required from parents and teachers [36]. Therefore, it is important for parents to monitor the activities of their children and limit their interaction with neighbourhoods stigmatised by crimes. Witnessing extreme violence can result in fear, depression, extreme trauma and emotional stress, which negatively affects children's learning capabilities and outcomes [37, 38]. Criminal activities are related to mental stress and poor academic performance among children [39]. Similarly, harassment (verbal, emotional, physical and sexual) and bullying are characteristics of unsafe neighbourhood that are associated with many problems among children, including lack of self-confidence, lower self-esteem, depression, lack of trust, lower social skills and poor academic outcomes [40, 41]. It was also found that children, who frequently experience harassment and bullying, face problem with conduct disorder, lower self-esteem and are more likely to achieve lower academic grades [42].

In patriarchal societies, girls have greater limitations on their movement throughout the community, particularly after puberty. Consequently, boys are more impacted by neighbourhood features than girls. Nonetheless, the results of this investigation showed that neighbourhood safety has the same impact on academic achievement for males and girls. The majority of the studied neighbourhood areas were crime-free, as evidenced by the research findings. As a result, neither boys nor girls seem particularly concerned about neighbourhood safety, and it has no bearing on how well they do in school. However, the findings of K. Hulya and B. Asude contradict these results. They discovered that the academic performance of boys is more negatively affected by an unsafe neighbourhood compared to girls [43]. This can lead to increased aggression and lower academic outcomes [44]. M. Drukker et al. and J. D. Hawkins et al. also suggested that strict discipline in the neighbourhood may decrease academic performance in boys, who may exhibit high aggression and risk-taking behaviour [45, 46]. In unsafe environments, boys are more drawn to deviant behaviour and crime compared to girls [47]. However, P. Cook and J. Laub made it evident that gender is not an influencing factor in the association between the safety of the neighbourhood and academic performance [48].

Socioeconomic status is another important factor shaping children academic outcomes. The results demonstrated varied academic performance among children with respect to neighbourhood safety for children from various SES families. It was found that higher SES children outperform children from lower SES. This is likely due to the fact that unsafe and violent neighbourhoods are more common among low-income families, which can negatively impact children's academic performance. Children from low SES families living in unsafe neighbourhoods are more likely to experience violence, which can perpetuate a cycle of victimisation and aggression [49, 50]. This unsafe environment can persist across generations, impacting both physical safety and psychological well-being, and hindering academic success [51, 52]. In contrast, children from high SES families are less exposed to community violence, leading to better physical and psychological safety and higher educational achievement [53–55].

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this study, neighbourhood safety was measured in terms of children's academic performance using the influence of family socioeconomic position. The study concluded that one of the key socialisation factors for kids directly influencing their development, particularly their educational outcomes, is their neighbourhood. According to the findings, it was determined that children's psychosocial development, which is linked to their improved academic performance, is positively related to their sense of safety when strolling around the neighbourhood at any time of day or night. However, the effect of neighbourhood bullying and harassment on children's academic achievement is detrimental. The findings also showed that differences in children's academic performance in connection to neighbourhood safety were explained by family socioeconomic position. Children from well-off families, who experienced a safe neighbourhood, performed better academically than children from poor families. However, the influence of neighbourhood safety on the academic performance of children remains the same for students of both genders (male and female). Enforcing strict punishment for criminals and involving the community in law enforcement will help reduce the threat of crime, violence, and harassment in the neighbourhood. This, in turn, will decrease fear of crime and improve children's psychological resilience and academic focus.

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