

Research Article

Prevalence, factors and consequences of dating violence in a tertiary institution in Southern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: Dating violence occurs in a relationship and may have immediate as well as long term implications for victims, perpetrators, family and community. This study aimed to identify the prevalence of the different components or various types of dating violence, factors associated with dating violence and effects of dating violence on undergraduates in University of Benin.

Methods: The study was carried out in the campuses of University of Benin, Benin City. A cross-sectional descriptive study method was used and the study lasted for three months. Data were generated through the use of self-administered questionnaires distributed to respondents in all faculties and schools. A total of 400 respondents were selected using stratified sampling technique. Data were analysed with statistical package for social sciences software SPSS version 16.

Results: The findings showed a prevalence of 76.4% for dating violence. The highest number of reported cases was in the age range 19-24 years. There was a significant association between dating violence and age, sex, and co-habiting of partners of the respondents. Dating violence was not dependent on residence of the respondent. Physical violence was the highest suffered by the respondents 54.4%, while sexual violence was the least 23.3%.

Conclusions: The study has established that dating violence is a problem in the University which needs to be prevented through school-based education and awareness programmes.

Keywords: Dating violence, Prevalence, Undergraduates, Victims, Southern Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Dating violence is the perpetration of threat and act of violence by at least one member of an unmarried couple on the other in the context of dating or courtship. This violence encompasses all forms: sexual assault, physical violence, verbal, mental or emotional abuses.^{1,2} Dating violence can also be defined as the physical, sexual or psychological (emotional) violence within a dating relationship.

Relationship violence among adolescents can happen in a broad range of relationships including those with friends, acquaintances, strangers and partners.³ Research suggests

that transition from living at home to attending university may increase adolescents' vulnerability to relationship violence. Factors associated with this risk includes: less parental monitoring and support, isolation in an unknown environment and, a strong desire for peer acceptance that can change behaviour towards others.⁴

University fresher's are most likely to experience abuse by a dating partner.⁵ Violence in adolescents dating relationship is a large scale problem and may result in long term trauma and psychological sequence for victims.⁶ Also, violence in dating relationship may be viewed as a precursor of violence in adult relationship.⁶ Dating violence crosses all racial, economic, religious

and social lines. Abuse exists in gay, lesbians and transgender relationships at approximately the same rate as heterosexual relationship.⁷ Both young men and women are involved in inflicting and receiving physical violence within dating relationships. The reported injury rate among adolescent who experience dating violence is high and when dating violence occurs, young women are more likely to be the ones injured.⁹

Dating violence is a problem in university campuses that requires preventive intervention. There is need for continuing research into the causes of dating violence in order to develop effective preventive programs. Dating violence is a serious issue in the university campuses because it contributes greatly to morbidity and mortality arising as substance abuse, eating disorders, depression, early sexual behaviour, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and suicide that result from violence.¹⁷

In the university contexts, victims and perpetrators of dating violence are also likely to report increased academic problem, failures and primitive termination.¹⁸ A study of undergraduates reported that nearly 60% of men and women said that, they have been involved in a mutually violent relationship sometime in their life.¹⁶

METHODS

This study was carried out in the University of Benin located in Ugbowo and Ekenwan campuses in Edo State, Nigeria. Ugbowo campus is the main campus and is located in Egor Local Government Area while the Ekenwan campus is in Oredo Local Government Area of the State.

Presently, the University essentially operates the Faculty System except for the Schools of Medicine, Dentistry, Basic Medical Sciences, and Institute of Child Health, which reverted back to the Collegiate System in August, 1999, with a Provost as its administrative head.

The Faculties as presently constituted are those of Agriculture, Arts, Education, Engineering, Law, Life Science, Pharmacy, Physical Science, Management Sciences, Social Sciences, and College of Medical Sciences (which has three Schools: Basic Medical Sciences, Dentistry and Medicine and the Institutes of Child Health, Education and Public Administration).

The total number of full-time students enrolment in 2009/2010 was 23,917 consisting of 15,187 male and 8,730 female undergraduates shared among the various faculties and schools. A cross-sectional descriptive study design was used.

The study lasted for 3 months. The sample size was calculated using Fischer's formula at 95% level of confidence interval, based on prevalence of 50% at a degree accuracy of 0.05 giving a value of 384. Four hundred questionnaires were administered equally

amongst 200 male and 200 female undergraduates of University of Benin which were spread across the 10 faculties and College of Medical Sciences (Medicine, Dentistry and Basic Medical Sciences). The study population comprised of first to final year full-time unmarried male and female undergraduate students of University of Benin residing in the hostels within Ugbowo and Ekenwan campuses and Off-campus.

Stratified random sampling was done using sampling fraction and final respondents were selected using simple random sampling technique from all faculties, college and institutes as shown Agriculture (18), Arts (61), Education(43), Engineering (46), Law (19), Life Science (44), Pharmacy (14), Physical Science (38), Management Sciences (39), Social Sciences (41), and College of Medical Sciences and Institutes (which has three Schools: Basic Medical Sciences (10), Dentistry (4) and Medicine (14), Education (3) and Public Administration (3).

Quantitative method of data collection was employed using a self-administered structured questionnaire. Physical violence was defined as pushing, grabbing, slapping, choking, or hitting. Sexual violence was defined as being pressured, coerced, or forced into having sexual contact. Emotional violence was defined as being put down, made to feel bad about oneself, being isolated from friends and family or acting in a possessive manner. Data were analysed with SPSS software 16 and results presented in frequency tables. Univariate and bivariate analysis were done and statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics and Research Committee, University of Benin and informed consent from the respondents.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic profile of respondents. A majority of 182 (45.5%) of respondents were in the age range 19-24year. There were three hundred and five (76.3%) respondents in a dating relationship while 233 (76.4%) respondents reported dating violence. A total of 233 (76.3%) respondents reported at least a type of dating violence, while 72 (23%) did not report any form of dating violence.

The prevalence of dating violence among undergraduate students of University of Benin was 76.4% with a male: female prevalence ratio of 2.2:5 and this which implies that females are more likely to experience dating violence than males in this study. Factors observed to be associated with dating violence in this study included age, sex, residence and co-habiting with partners although there was no statistical significance as shown in Table 2.

The three types of dating violence were examined in this study, the results showed the following prevalence, physical violence (54.4%), emotional violence (50.8%) and sexual violence (23.3%) respectively as shown in Table 3.

The consequences of dating violence as proffered by respondents included distraction (17.8%) as the highest followed by loss of appetite and insomnia and the least was procurement of abortion (3.7%) in Table 4.

Table 1: Sociodemographic information of respondents.

Age (years)	Frequency n-400	%
<18	142	35.5
19-24	182	45.5
>24	76	19.0
Mean age (SD) 24 (5.2) Religion n- 400		
Christianity	367	91.8
Muslim	33	8.3

Table 2: Factors associated with dating violence.

Dating Violence (n=305)			
Variables	Yes	No	Total
Age (years)			
≤19	99 (83.2)	20 (16.8)	119
20- 24	109 (75.1)	36 (24.9)	145
≥24	25 (61.0)	16 (39.0)	41
X²=25.761 df=2 p=5.991			
Sex			
Male	70 (58.3)	50 (41.7)	120
Female	163 (88.1)	22 (11.9)	185
X²=76.521 df=1 p=3.841			
Residence			
Off- campus	115 (80.5)	28 (19.5)	143
On-campus	118 (72.8)	44 (27.2)	162
X²=0.560 df=1 p=3.841			
Co-habiting with partners			
Yes	51 (80.9)	12 (19.1)	63
No	182 (75.2)	60 (24.8)	242
X²=13.850 df=1 p=3.841			

Recommendations suggested by respondents for prevention of dating violence included provision of accommodation on campus for students which was the highest and others as listed in Table 5.

DISCUSSION

Dating in the University is supposed to be an enjoyable part of university experience; unfortunately, dating turns violent more often than many people would like to admit.⁷ All forms of dating violence are prevalent among male and female undergraduates of University of Benin. Dating violence can happen in a broad range of relationship including friends, acquaintances, strangers and partners.

The prevalence of reported cases of dating violence in this study was (76.4%). This value is in consonance with findings from reported studies on partner violence among college students which ranged from approximately 20 to

80 % in developed countries such as New Zealand, Germany, Greece, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada.^{4,5} However, this research work is unaware of any quantitative studies that have examined dating violence amongst university undergraduates in Nigeria. Thus it is difficult comparing prevalence of work done in Nigeria.

The prevalence of reported cases of dating violence in females was (60.6%) while males was (39.3%), prevalence ratio is 2.2:5 which implies that females were more likely to experience dating violence than male. This finding supports what researchers have found that female youths suffer more from relationship violence.⁹

They are also more vulnerable to dating violence because of intense social pressure to be in a dating relationship, secondly they may attempt to minimize or deny violence and abuse in their relationship, another reason is traditional belief which supports inequality in

relationships and normalisation of violence in society and dating relationship.² Other reasons for increased female prevalence may include that women were more likely than men to report being victims of all forms of relationship violence.⁴

Table 3: Types of dating violence.*

Physical Violence	Frequency n = 166	Percent
Kicking	36	21.7
Hitting	28	16.9
Biting	23	13.9
Shoving or pushing	22	13.3
Threat with violence	21	12.7
Inflicting injuries on partners	17	10.2
Sexual Violence	Frequency n = 71	%
Involuntary sexual Intercourse	42	59.2
Enforcing non- use of contraceptives	17	23.9
Involuntary sexual Intercourse	42	59.2
Enforcing non- use of contraceptives	17	23.9
Inflicting injuries during sexual intercourse	12	16.9
Total	71	100
Emotional Violence	Frequency n=155	%
Disagreement	47	30.3
Lack of freedom	38	24.5
Close monitoring	30	19.4
Always demanding	20	12.9
Always posing as the boss	20	12.9
Total	155	100.0

Physical Violence *Multiple responses, Prevalence of physical violence=54.4%; Sexual Violence *Multiple responses, Prevalence of sexual violence=23.3%; Emotional Violence * Multiple responses, Prevalence of emotional violence=50.8%

Table 4: Consequence of dating violence as perceived by respondents.

	Frequency	Percent
	n = 233	
Distraction	48	17.08
Loss of appetite and unable to sleep	42	15.06
Depression	36	13.03
Discouragement to study	35	13.00
Frequent visits to health centre for treatment	30	11.01
Contraction of STD	30	11.01
Addiction to alcohol	23	8.5
Pregnancy	16	5.93
Abortion	10	3.07

*Multiple responses

The highest proportion of respondents was in the age group 19 to 24 years (47.5%) and also had the highest frequency of reported cases of dating violence (75.1%).

Previous studies stated that young people between the ages of 16 to 24 years' experience the highest rate of relationship violence.⁹ Most university undergraduates are in this age range.

Another probable reason is that most students in this age range lack knowledge and skills about communication, problem solving, emotional management and healthy relationships. For some of them, it is a period of experimentation and how they handle these new roles and expectations in dating relationship will reflect the role models they have had and lessons learned about how to resolve conflicts.⁵

Table 5: Recommendations for prevention of dating violence.

Recommendations	n- 426	Frequency	Percent
Provision of accommodation on campus	164		38.5
Co-habiting should be discouraged	82		19.2
Provision of Guidance and counselling centres	80		18.8
Campus based initiative and awareness campaign	74		17.3
Leaders of religious bodies on campus should preach against dating violence	8		1.9
Dating violence should be included as a topic in General Studies and Orientation programme for freshers	7		1.6
Dating violence perpetrators should be punished	11		2.6

*Multiple responses

In this study dating violence was significantly associated with dating partners living together. This support previous study that people often experience their greatest risk of violence not from acquaintances and strangers but from their intimate partners.¹⁴ The prevalence of different components of dating violence were studied.

Physical violence was (54.4%), sexual violence (23.3%) and emotional violence (50.8%). This is in contrast to the findings of a survey of undergraduate students of Midwestern College in United States engaged in dating experience reporting emotional violence (82% of women and 87% of men) while physical abuse (29% women and 21% men).¹⁹

Research findings showed that effects of dating violence are harmful to the victims.¹⁹ The results of this study support these findings. Some of these effects include unintended pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases (mostly candidiasis and gonorrhoea).¹⁸

Dating violence in this study can be prevented as suggested by respondents via provision of accommodation on campus 86 (21.5%) so that students activities are regulated by the University Authorities, campus based initiative and awareness campaign 74 (18.5%), provision of guidance and counselling centres 80 (20.5%), cohabitation amongst students should be discouraged, and off campus accommodation should be discouraged 78 (19.5%). Research findings stated that university freshers were more likely to experience abuse by dating partners, so there is need for continuing research into the causes of dating violence in order to develop effective, preventive programmes.^{9,17}

CONCLUSION

The prevalence of dating violence is high and higher in females than males. Therefore, dating violence can be prevented by helping students develop skills for healthy relationships with others. Recommendations for prevention of dating violence include school based education, awareness program and campus-based campaigns and initiatives. University campuses should have functioning counselling centres to enable intending dating partners have access to adequate information before they begin to date. Victims of dating violence should be encouraged to visit the University health centres for treatment and reporting of violence

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