

Experience of Childhood Violence and Help-Seeking Behaviour of Students Exposed to Dating Violence at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife

Mapayi Boladale, Akinsulore Adesanmi, & Aloba Olutayo

Department of Mental Health

Obafemi Awolowo University

Ile-Ife

E-mail: daledosu@yahoo.com

Dating violence is a common occurrence with estimate of prevalence ranging from 28-96% (Johnson-Reids and Bimes 1999). The aim of the present study is to evaluate the prevalence of dating violence, experience of childhood violence and help seeking behaviour of university students exposed to dating violence in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. The study utilized a cross sectional survey design with a total of 400 students selected using a multistage, stratified, systematic sampling technique completed the Socio-demographic Data Schedule and the Conflict Tactic Scale. Univariate analysis was used to determine the prevalence of dating violence, exposure to childhood physical and sexual abuse and help seeking behavior and these were expressed in percentages. Association at bivariate level was assessed using chi-square. A p value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant in all cases. The age of the respondents ranged between 18 and 35 years ($M=21.44$, $SD =2.99$) with a median age of 21 years. In roughly one third (32.3%) of the cases, sexual intercourse was a part of the relationship. The prevalence of dating violence in the previous twelve months was 34%. One in three of the respondents (30.1%) had witnessed physical violence in their home of origin while about one in ten (13.3%) had history of childhood sexual abuse. One hundred and thirteen respondents (93%) did not report their experience of violence to anyone and only one respondent reported to the police. Of the respondents who experienced dating violence, more had witnessed physical violence in their homes of origin and the difference was statistically significant ($\chi^2 =6.80$, $df =1$, $p= < 0.01$). Also, of those who experienced violence in their relationships, more had a history of sexual abuse in childhood ($\chi^2 =3.53$, $df =1$, $p= < 0.06$). Sexual intercourse being a part of the relationship was associated with a statistically significant increase ($\chi^2 =22.29$, $df =1$, $p= < 0.001$) in violence. The magnitude of dating violence found in this study is slightly higher, though comparable to those found in other countries of the world. Students in relationships where violence takes place rarely told anyone and when they did, they were likely to be friends and colleagues rather than parents or authority figures, most did not make use of the legal support systems and this may have implications for effective intervention strategies in our environment.

Dating has been defined as any social activity performed as a pair or even as a group with the aim of each assessing the others suitability as their partner in an intimate relationship or as a spouse. The word refers to the act of agreeing on a time and date when a pair can meet and engage in some social activity (Havelin 2000). Courtship however is a system practiced by some Christian families where two people figure out if they are to get married without

modern dating practices. The courtship is a period of time when couples build a strong friendship along with the romantic relationship resulting in a strong intimacy between the two (Sizer-Webb, DeBruyne, DeBruyne 2000). In societies where individuals choose their partners, young people typically date prior to marriage. Dating is the process of spending time with prospective partners to become acquainted. When dating becomes more serious, it may

be referred to as courtship. Courtship implies a deeper level of commitment than dating does.

Although once narrowly conceptualized as involving only physical force, dating violence is now more broadly recognised as a continuum of abuse which can range from incidents of emotional and verbal abuse to rape and murder (Hickman, Jaycox, & Aronoff 2004). It involves a pattern of coercive, manipulative behaviour that one partner exerts over the other for the purpose of establishing and maintaining power and control (Jane and Erica 2006). Dating violence is not limited to a specific demographic; instead, individuals are vulnerable regardless of race, gender, socio-economic status or sexual orientation.

Dating violence can take many forms including psychological, emotional, physical and sexual abuse. In less severe forms, it includes jealousy, possessiveness, verbal put downs and coercive behaviour. More extreme forms of dating violence include punching, slapping, shoving, pulling hair, threats involving a weapon and rape (Zapanta, Kim & Messinger 2010).

Dating violence is a serious problem and while milder forms of violence may be more common, the potential exist for serious injury and death. Given the scope of the problem, and the very real possibility of physical and psychological injury, it becomes imperative for violence in dating relationships to be taken seriously as a research topic.

Another trend that adds to the worry in dating violence is that despite the alarming statistics, many individuals do not view dating violence as destructive or unhealthy and some actually believe it can improve a relationship. This perception may and does prevent individuals involved in dating violence from seeking help. Research consistently indicates that the occurrence of violence in dating relationship is rarely reported to the authorities (Burcky, Reuterman, & Kopsky 1988; LeJeune and Follette, 1994). Make Peace (1981) found that only 5.1% of respondents who experienced dating violence notified the police while LeJeune and Follette, (1994) found that none of the respondents in their

study who experienced dating violence told the authorities about the incident.

Dating violence is a common occurrence with estimate of prevalence ranging from 28-96% (Johnson-Reids and Bimes 1999). Using a national sample, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2000) reported that the average prevalence of dating violence or high school and college students is 22% and 32% respectively. Stetz and Henderson (1991) found that 30% of respondents from a nationally representative sample of dating people reported having either been a victim of or used some form of physical aggression while nearly 90% reported either having used or received verbal aggression. An examination of much of the literature indicates that the prevalence of courtship violence is approximately 33% of all dating couples (Hanley and O' Neill, 1997). Although the reported incidence of dating violence appears relatively high, it may be possible that it is underrepresented. This may be due to fear of retaliation or perhaps because the form the violence has taken has been of a milder nature and the victim may be hesitant to place these incidents into the category of abuse (Lloyd & Emery, 2000).

While it is true that both males and female may be victims of dating violence and in most cases violence in dating relationship is mutual, the nature of violence is usually different. In a recent survey of high school students, 36.4% of girls and 37.1% of boys reported experiencing physical violence in a dating relationship. Though rates were similar for both sexes, the nature of violence was different. Girls were more likely to report more severe forms such as being punched or forced to engage in sexual activities; boys were more likely to report being pinched, slapped or scratched (Molidor, Tolman & Kober 2000). Also the motive for violence for males was usually anger while female responded in self defence. There is evidence to suggest that dating violence may be part of a continuum of violence beginning in dating relationships and continuing through marriage. Despite the absence of many barriers to leaving found in marital relationships, dating relationships often

continue after violence occurs. Researchers have found that 20-80% of respondents in their samples who report experience with dating violence remain in the dating relationships following the incident. Some respondents report that the relationship improved following the violence (Burcky, 1988; Bergman, 1992). Researchers have also found similar patterns of violence in dating and marital relationships (Rouse, Breen and Howell, 1988). Lo and Sporakowski, (1989) found that 69.7% of their sample of 422 university students experienced violence in dating relationship. Of the respondents that experienced violence 76.8% planned to continue the relationship, 16% expected the relationship to last for a couple of years and 33.8% expected to marry the person with whom they experienced violence. The finding that over 30% of individuals who experienced dating violence expected to marry the person with whom they experienced violence is supported by other studies (Roscoe and Benaske, 1985; O'Leary and Arias, 1988).

Dating violence is a complex phenomenon and researchers continue to examine a wide range of precursors and contributing factors. Some of these include: the theory of intergenerational transmission of violence which is based on the tenets of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). The intergenerational transmission hypothesis states that because violence is a learned behaviour, exposure to violence in the family of origin may lead to violence in later intimate relationships. There can be little doubt that children who are later victims/perpetrators of dating violence are exposed to violence in their families of origin. Studies have found as many as 30-50% of children either witness or experience violence in their families (Marshall and Rose, 1988; Carlson, 1990; Foo and Margolin, 1995).

A diligent search of literature both electronic and manual brought to light few studies on courtship or dating violence in Nigeria. One was carried out by Izugbara and colleagues (Izugbara, Emmanuel & Peter 2008). They reported that dating violence broadly manifested in forms such as physical hurt, sexual

harassment and emotional abuse in public and private spaces, appeared to be a male strategy for sustaining women's place within certain culturally defined boundaries. They also found that women's views regarding their abuse reinforced the cultural belief that men are naturally violent and that women are sometimes to be blamed. Another study (Wubs *et al*, 2009) in Tanzania and South Africa showed a prevalence rate of 10.2%-37.8%. Moreover, studies on spousal violence in Nigeria showed figures ranging from 37% (Odujirin, 1993; Mapayi, Makanjuola, Fatusi & Afolabi 2011) to 87% (Owoaje and Olaolorun, 2006). If these figures are to be believed and the theory of intergenerational transmission of violence holds, then courtship /dating violence becomes an important public health concern even in Nigeria and a matter worth looking into.

In synthesizing the foregoing, dating violence is a public health concern that cuts across demographic barriers and appears to be directly linked to the perpetuation of spousal violence which also creates an environment for continued dating violence as children experience and witness violence at home. This downward spiral of dating violence continuing as spousal violence with children exposed to violence and thus developing the tendency to themselves be violent in their future relationships can only be broken if there are intervention strategies at every point along the continuum of violence.

Because of the dearth of information on these concepts in our environment, there is an immediate and urgent need to access the prevalence and correlates of dating violence in our environment so that we can be at par in comparison to information with others worldwide. Also, dating violence is an antecedent for marital violence and by reducing dating violence; it may be possible to consequently reduce the prevalence of marital violence (Ramisetty-Mikler, Goebert, Nishimura & Caetano 2006).

Objectives of the study

Thus the aim of the present study is to evaluate the prevalence of dating violence, experience of childhood violence and help seeking behaviour of university students

exposed to dating violence in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

The specific objectives include:

1. To determine the prevalence of dating violence among the students of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile – Ife.
2. To determine the prevalence of childhood violence in the home of origin of the study population.
3. To determine the association between childhood violence and dating violence in the study population.
4. To identify the help seeking behaviour of the study population

Significance of the study

Research into Dating Violence in the Nigerian environment is limited. There is a need to bridge this information gap because of the public health importance of dating. An electronic search revealed a dearth of studies in Nigeria that measured the concept of dating violence with standardized instruments. The current study is designed to bridge this research gap by using standardized instruments to measure dating violence. Data obtained through this study will provide the empirical base necessary for comparison of findings on prevalence in our environment with those published elsewhere and also for possible interventions and policy formulations and reviews.

Method

Research design

The study is a descriptive cross sectional design. The student population of Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife Osun state, situated in the South Western geographical zone of Nigeria constituted the population from which a sample was drawn. A multistage, stratified sampling technique was used to recruit students for the study.

Participants

The student body made up the population for the study out of which the sample was selected. There are 10 halls of residence. A sample of the population was selected to represent the larger student population using a multistage stratified sampling technique. There are four male halls, four

female halls, one postgraduate hall and one other female hall located within the university campus but managed by a private organisation.

Sample size determination

The sample size that was used for this study was computed based on the formula:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 P (1 - P)}{d^2}$$

by Length (2000) and Araoye (2004) where:

n = minimum sample size

p = crude estimate of the true proportion of dating violence in the population.

Z = the standard normal deviation at 95% confidence level (1.96)

d = maximum allowable margin of error which will be set at 5% (5% = 0.05).

Since there was a dearth of studies on dating violence in Nigeria, the figure of 32% given by the Center for Disease Control (2000) which used a national sample was employed. Thus,

P = 32%

Z = 1.96

D = 0.05

$$:- \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.32 \times (1 - 0.32)}{0.05^2}$$

$$= 334$$

A sample size of 334 was arrived at as the minimum but a sample size of 400 was used to increase the power of the study and account for instances of drop outs or incomplete data.

Sampling procedure

A multistage, stratified, systematic sampling technique was used in this study.

Stage 1: All the halls of residence were stratified into 2 based on gender. There are a total of 10 halls of residence within the university campus. Two of these 10 halls of residence were excluded from this study.

One of the halls of residence that was excluded was the Muritala Muhammed hall which is a post graduate student's hall while the other was a female hall built at the edge of the university and is being managed by a private body. The male halls included in this study were, Angola hall, Obafemi Awolowo hall, Adekunle Fajuyi hall and Education Tax fund hall. The female halls were Samuel Ladoke Akintola hall, Alumni hall, Moremi hall and Mozambique hall.

Stage 2: The total number of students and total number of rooms in each of the selected halls was obtained from the hall supervisors of the halls. The 400

questionnaires were distributed among the 6 halls. The number to be interviewed in each hall was determined by proportional sampling method using the equation below.

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Number of students to be interviewed in hall } X \\ & = \frac{\text{number of students in hall } X}{\text{total number of students in all halls (i.e } U + V + W + X + Y + Z)} \times 400 \end{aligned}$$

Stage 3: After determining the number to be interviewed in each hall, respondents were chosen by systematic random sampling. Odd numbered rooms on odd numbered floors were selected and then one student was randomly selected from each odd numbered room until the target study number for that hall was achieved.

Research instruments

The research instruments included a Socio-demographic Data Schedule and the Conflict Tactic Scale.

Socio-demographic Data Schedule

A semi structured Socio-demographic data schedule was designed purposely for this study to elicit information on variables such as age, average monthly allowance, cumulative GPA, family type, occupation of parents, history of childhood abuse (both witnessing and experiencing), Help seeking behavior and contact with the judiciary system.

Conflict Tactic Scale-Revised (CTS-R)

The CTS-R is a 78 item scale designed to measure the incidence of physical and psychological violence between members of a married, dating, or cohabitating couple as well as the strategies each partner might use to negotiate with the other partner to resolve interpersonal conflict (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy & Sugarman 1996). The scale examines the behavior of not only the respondent but also that of the respondent's partner in order to obtain data in various areas associated with relationship conflict.

The CTS is a widely used method of identifying intimate partners' maltreatment. It has been used in national surveys on the prevalence of family violence in the USA and other countries. These include the two National Family Violence Surveys (Straus &

Gelles, 1990), the National Violence against Women Survey (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), and the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being.

Data analysis

Data analysis was carried out using the SPSS 11 software. To achieve the objectives of the study, appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics were used for the data collected. Univariate analysis was used to determine the prevalence of dating violence, experience of violence in childhood and help seeking behavior and these were expressed in percentages. Association at bivariate level was assessed using chi-square and Pearson's correlation coefficient, as was appropriate depending on the type of variable. Multivariate analysis was carried out to determine statistical associations and to control for confounding effects. A p value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant in all cases.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Individuals were eligible to participate if they were:

- Single
- In a dating/courtship relationship or had been in a dating/courtship relationship within the past year.

Individuals were not eligible to participate if they were:

- Married

Ethical consideration

The study protocol was presented for approval to the Research and Ethical Committee of the Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospitals Complex. The nature of the study, its aims and objectives were explained to the participants and written consent freely obtained. The participants were assured of confidentiality

and information concerning where help may be obtained was made available.

Results

Socio-demographic and other characteristics of respondents

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, 200 among the male and 200 among the female respondents. The retrieved questionnaires were 380, out of which 18 were not included in the study due to their being poorly completed. This brings the response rate of this research to about 91%. A total of three hundred and sixty two respondents had their data included in the final analysis of this research. The age of the respondents ranged between 18 and 35 years (M=21.44, SD =2.99) with a median age of 21 years. Two hundred and fourteen (59.1%) were between the ages of 21-35 years. One hundred and seventy five (48.3%) of the subjects were males and 187 (51.7%) were females.

Two hundred and eighty four respondents (78.5%) received an average monthly income below 20, 000 naira. One hundred and forty eight (41%) of them were receiving between 10, 000- 19, 999 naira monthly. In 302 (83.3%) homes of origin of the respondents, parents were married while 20 (5.4%) were separated or divorced and 40 (11.3%) were widowed. Two hundred and sixty seven respondents (73.7%) had cumulative GPA of 3.50-4.90. In roughly one third (32.3%) of the cases, sexual intercourse was a part of the relationship (Table 1).

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

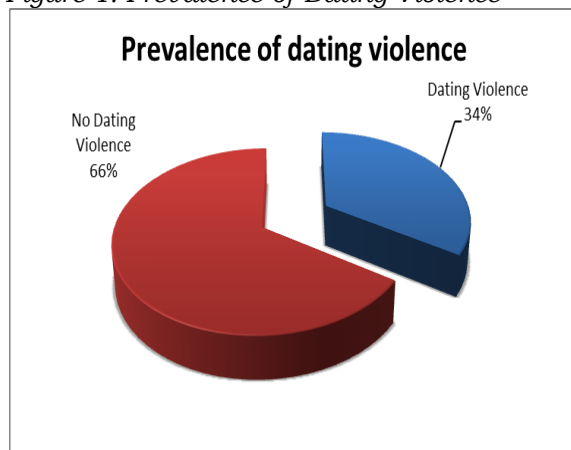
Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18-20	76	21.0
21-35	214	59.1
26-30	64	17.7
31-35	8	2.2
Total	362	100.0
Sex		
Male	175	48.3

Female	187	51.7
Total	362	100.0
Year		
1	30	8.3
2	64	17.7
3	71	19.6
4	89	24.6
5	73	20.2
>6	35	9.6
Total	362	100.0
Average monthly income		
<6000 naira	78	21.5
6001-9,999 naira	58	16.0
10,000-19,999 naira	148	41.0
20,000-29,999 naira	59	16.3
>30,000 naira	19	5.2
Total	362	100.0
Parent's marital status		
Married	302	83.3
Separated /Divorced	20	5.4
Widowed	40	11.3
Total	362	100.0
Cumulative GPA scores		
<2.00	1	0.4
2.00-2.99	29	8.1
3.00-3.49	44	12.0
3.50-4.49	267	73.7
4.50-5.00	21	5.8
Total	362	100.0
Sexual intercourse in the relationship		
Yes	117	32.3
No	245	67.7
total	362	100.0

Prevalence of dating violence

One hundred and twenty two respondents (34%) admitted having experienced dating violence in the last twelve months while 240 had not (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Prevalence of Dating Violence



Respondent's experience of violence in childhood

Fifty seven respondents (15.8%) had experienced physical abuse in childhood while 109 (30.1%) had witnessed physical violence in childhood. Conversely, 48 respondents (13.3%) had experienced sexual abuse in childhood, while 28 (7.7%) had witnessed sexual violence in childhood (Table 2).

Table 2: Respondent's experience of violence in childhood

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Experienced physical abuse before 18 years		
Yes	57	15.8
No	305	84.2
Total	362	100.0
Witnessed physical violence before 18 years		
Yes	109	30.1
No	253	69.9
Total	362	100.0
Experienced sexual abuse before 18 years		

Yes	48	13.3
No	314	86.7
Total	362	100.0
Witnessed sexual violence before 18 years		
Yes	28	7.7
No	334	92.3
Total	362	100.0

Relationship between childhood experience of violence and respondents' experience of violence in dating relationship

Of the respondents who experienced dating violence, more had witnessed physical violence in their homes of origin and the difference was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 6.80$, $df = 1$, $p = < 0.01$). Also, of those who experienced violence in their relationships, more had a history of sexual abuse in childhood ($\chi^2 = 3.53$, $df = 1$, $p = < 0.06$). Sexual intercourse being a part of the relationship was associated with a statistically significant increase ($\chi^2 = 22.29$, $df = 1$, $p = < 0.001$) in violence as 46.7% of those in violent relationships had sexual intercourse being a part of the relationship while 27.3% did not (Table 3).

Table 3: Relationship between socio-demographic and other characteristics of respondents and their experience of dating violence

VARIABLE	DATING VIOLENCE		X ²	df	P value
	NO (%)	YES (%)			
Age					
18-20	40(57.1)	30(42.9)	4.535	3	0.213
21-25	149(72.7)	56(27.3)			
26-30	47(61.0)	30(39.0)			
31-35	4(40.0)	6(60.0)			
Sex					
Male	101(63.9)	57(36.1)	0.707	1	0.400
Female	139(68.1)	65(31.9)			
Sex in the relationship					
Yes	64(53.3)	56(46.7)	22.289	1	<0.001
No	176(72.7)	66(27.3)			
Witnessed physical violence before 18 years					
Yes	66(60.6)	43(39.4)	6.804	1	<0.01
No	174(68.8)	79(31.2)			
Experienced sexual abuse before 18 years					
Yes	26(54.2)	22(45.8)	3.532	1	0.060
No	214(68.2)	100(31.8)			

Use of support system

Respondents who experienced violence rarely told anyone. One hundred and thirteen (92.6%) respondents who experienced violence in their dating relationship did not tell anyone while 9 (7.4%) did. Of the people who told, 4 told a parent, 4 told friends and 1 told a sibling. Table 4 shows the people the respondents told.

Table 4: Use of support system by respondents who experienced violence

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Informal sources		
None	113	92.6
parent	4	3.3
sister	1	0.8
Friend	4	3.3
Total	122	100.0
Formal sources		
None	121	99.2
Police	1	0.8
Total	122	100.0

Ninety seven respondents (85.8%) gave no reason for not talking to anyone when they experienced violence, 6 (5.3%) thought it wasn't serious enough and 2 (1.8%) felt they could cope with it (Table 5).

Table 5: Reasons for not reporting violence

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Reason for not reporting violence to others		
None	97	85.8
Afraid	6	5.3
Ignorance	2	1.8
Not serious	6	5.3
Can cope	2	1.8
Total	113	100.0
Reasons for not reporting violence to police		
None	75	66.4
Afraid	3	2.7
Ignorance	1	0.9
Not serious	26	23.0
Don't trust police	7	6.2
Can cope	1	0.9
Total	113	100.0

Use of the legal system

Although all 122 respondents who had experienced violence were aware that they could report acts of violence against them to the police, only 1 (0.8%) of those who had experienced violence reported to the police (Table 4). Table 5 show the reasons for not reporting violence in respondents who experienced violence.

The majority, 75 (66.4%) gave no reason while 26 (23%) felt it wasn't serious enough. Seven (6.2%) didn't trust the police and 3 (2.7%) were afraid of what might ensue.

Discussion

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

This study found that a greater number (52%) of the respondents were females while 48% of them were males. This higher proportion of females is similar to findings of Dunaway (2002) but contradicts findings of other studies that have been done among undergraduates Nigeria (Fawole, 2011). It is important to note that in the sampling technique that was adopted for this study, it was found that there were more male students overall than females and indeed more questionnaires were administered to the males. However, rates of response were better with the females. There were more bed spaces for male students than for female students. Also, previous studies have suggested that there are more male undergraduates than female undergraduates (Aloba, Adewuya, Ola & Mapayi 2007). The age of the respondents ranged between 18 and 35 years. Majority of the respondents (59%) were between the ages of 21-25 years with a mean age of 21.44 Years; this was similar to that by Aloba and his colleagues (2007). Above three fourths of the respondents received an average monthly income below 20, 000 naira. In over 80% of the homes of origin, parents were married. Over three fourths had a cGDPA between 3.5 and 4.9. The overall pattern seems to be a reflection of the demographic structure of the catchment area of the university and conforms to previous reports in other institutions in South-Western Nigeria (Okonkwo, Fatusi & Ilika 2005; Fawole, 2011).

Respondent's experience of violence in childhood

In this study, over one in four respondents had witnessed physical violence in childhood and over one in ten had experienced sexual abuse in childhood. This study found that exposure to physical violence in the home of origin increased the chances of experiencing violence in adult relationships. Exposure to violence, particularly multiple exposures, can interfere with a child's ability to think and learn and can disrupt the course of healthy physical, emotional, and intellectual development (Kracke and Cohen, 2008). Ehrensaft *et al* (2003) found that children who were exposed to violence between their parents subsequently were more likely to perpetrate violence against an adult partner and to be treated violently by an adult partner than were children who were not exposed to violence. Others also found a link between early exposure to violence and marital violence (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999; Xiaochun, 2007). A Freudian concept, repetition compulsion has been cited as a possible cause of a woman who experienced abuse in childhood seeking an abusive man (or vice versa); theoretically as a misguided way to "master" their traumatic experience (Chu, 1992).

The finding of sex as a part of the dating relationship in one third (32.3%) of the cases suggests that though sex is an important part of the dating relationship in this environment, sexual relations are not *sine qua non* in dating relationships. In this study, an important factor associated with dating violence included sexual intercourse being a part of the relationship. Conflict may arise from differences in opinion about when, how and where sexual intercourse should occur, some may even purport that disinterest may follow sexual intercourse and be a cause of conflict.

Prevalence of dating violence

One third (34%) of the sample population admitted having experienced dating violence in the last twelve months. This figure is similar to that of CDC (2000) of 32% of college students reporting dating violence as well as the prevalence of 25-30% reported by Sabina & Straus (2008). In a different study, Lo and Sporkowski

(1989) reported that 422 (69.7%) respondents they surveyed had experienced some form of abuse in their dating relationships within a one year period. The wide range in prevalence rates may be due to several factors. Similar to the research on spousal violence, there appears to be no standard definition of dating violence. Whereas some researchers include psychological and emotional abuse in their definition of dating violence (e.g., intimidation, verbal abuse, and monitoring a partner's whereabouts) (O'Keeffe, Brockopp, & Chew, 1986; Halpern, Oslak, Young, Martin, & Kupper, 2001), others use a more restrictive definition that includes only physically violent acts such as slapping, pushing, hitting, kicking, choking, etc (DeMaris, 1992; Bookwala, Frieze, Smith, & Ryan, 1992). Complicating the matter is that sexual violence is often excluded in the definition of dating violence. Another reason for the variation in prevalence rates is that many studies consider violence in a single or recent relationship and others consider violence occurring in multiple relationships (Arias, Samios, & O'Leary, 1987; Stacy, Schandel, Flannery, Conlon, & Milardo, 1994).

Confusion regarding rates of violence also arises from the mingling of perpetration and victimization data, that is, any exposure to dating violence either as a perpetrator or as a victim are merely added together (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1990). Some researchers have noted that rates of violence may be inaccurate. For example, since most dating violence research relies on self-report, socially desirable responses or other biases in reporting may affect prevalence rates (Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989). Males may tend to underreport and deny or minimize their own aggression whereas females may over report to accept blame. Although the percentage of reported abuse in dating relationships varies from study to study, it is obvious that courtship abuse is a very serious matter for many university students (Stith, Jester, & Bird, 1992).

Although dating violence is clearly an important problem for adolescents, no consensus has emerged about the prevalence and gender distribution of violence between adolescent dating partners

(Hickman *et al*, 2004). In this study, more males reported dating violence though the finding was not statistically significant.

Use of support system

In line with previous studies, respondents who experienced violence rarely told anyone. Studies suggest that adolescents typically do not seek help for problems (Saunders, Aasland, Babor, De La Fuente & Marcus Grant 1993). Barriers include stigma attached to problems requiring help and to the associated help-seeking process, concerns about privacy, importance of being self-sufficient, poor knowledge of resources, low self-awareness related to the need for help, and an external locus of control (Olivia and Vangie, 2005). Of the people who told, more people told other adolescents, friends and colleagues or family. This is consistent with reports by Olivia and Vangie (2005) who found that adolescents who sought help turned to friends and family, and the utilization of peers as confidants and educators is implicit in this data.

In a majority of cases, no reason was given for not reporting violence but for those who gave reasons, one that stood clearly was that they thought the violence was not severe enough to report. This might be a pointer to the acceptability of violence as a way of resolving conflicts in relationships in the community and this has serious implications for control and prevention.

Use of the legal system

Again, only a few people reported violence against them to the police and the top reason given for not reporting was that violence was not perceived to be serious enough. This finding is in keeping with previous studies (Burcky, Reuterman & Kopsky 1988; LeJeune and Follette, 1994; Tiffany, 2002) that young people would rather seek help from informal than formal sources and this is important in planning intervention strategies.

Limitations of the Study

1. The study was conducted in one university in the south-western zone of the country. Also the study population was limited to students who were residing within the halls of residence in the university. This might limit the generalization of the findings to all university students in Nigeria.
2. The study is subject to both recall and reporting bias because all measures of dating violence, experience of childhood violence and help seeking were based on self report, though it is expected that the estimates here would be no less reliable than those of other self-report surveys.

Conclusions

This study has shown that the magnitude of dating violence among the study population is high, though comparable to those found in other countries of the world. Students in relationships where violence takes place rarely told anyone and when they did, they were likely to be friends and colleagues rather than parents or authority figures, most did not make use of the legal support systems and this may have implications for effective intervention strategies in our environment.

Seeking assistance of others has obvious instrumental benefits for the person in need; for example, it is likely to expedite the solution of one's problem. Information received from help-givers may improve conflict negotiation and anger management skills; information from adults knowledgeable about healthy dating relationship behaviour may improve the adolescent's understanding of a dating partner as a person and of the adolescent's role as a dating partner. Therefore, understanding and promoting help-seeking behaviours of adolescents involved in dating violence is important for improving psychosocial and health outcomes. Moreover, identifying correlates of adolescent help-seeking for dating violence is important for developing interventions to reduce dating violence among adolescents.

Also, there is an urgent need to provide adolescent friendly health centres to which are attached peer educators as this study has noted that more people involved in dating violence would rather report to

peers. There must be adequate, safe and confidential counselling services and effective and prompt referral systems in these centres.

Students should be equipped with life skills as part of their orientation into the campus, giving information on where help can be obtained if and when necessary.

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