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Dating Violence among Undergraduates in Campus-based Relationships in a South Western Nigerian University

Ijadunola MY,¹ Mapayi BM,² Afolabi OT,¹ Ojo TO,³ Adewumi AO,¹ Adeuyi D,¹ Adetula AO,¹ Adesina A¹ Adesunkanmi Ak¹

1. Department of Community Health, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria

2. Department of Mental Health, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria

3. Community Health Department, Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospitals Complex, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Background: The present study set out to determine the prevalence of dating violence, assess the perception and patterns of dating violence, and the related behaviours among undergraduates in campus-based relationships.

Methods: This was a cross-sectional descriptive study. Data were collected from undergraduates in established intimate relationships, using self-administered questionnaires. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences for Windows, version 16.

Results: Out of 400 respondents, 253 (63.2%) were aged 20-24 years. Overall, 186 (46.5%) of the respondents experienced dating violence. Higher proportion of females (56.4%) than males (37.7%) experienced dating violence in the preceding 12 months. Three hundred and three (75.8%) of the respondents were aware of dating violence. More males (63.3%) than females (46.7%) agreed that dating violence was strictly a private affair. More females (60.7%) than males (39.3%) agreed that the male partner was the main perpetrator. emotional violence was the commonest form of violence among both sexes. On the whole 90.6% of females and 72.5% of males considered it important to seek help. In practice, 61.3% of females, 21.3% of males sought help from their peers; and 38.5% of females, 7.5% of males sought help from their parents. In addition, 25.5% female and 7.5% male, 17.0% female and 2.5% male, and 3.8% female and male respondents sought help from clergy men, lecturers, and police respectively.

Conclusion: The prevalence of dating violence in the present study was high, confirming the fact from literature that it is a public health issue. Counseling undergraduates by giving them information and educating them about the warning signs of dating violence in a relationship and avenues to seek help are important in reducing the prevalence of dating violence and the associated problems on campuses.

Keywords: Dating violence, campus-based relationships, undergraduates

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INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognized that relationships between partners in marital, cohabiting, and dating relationships are often violent.^{1,2} However, it is not well known whether dating couples, are even more likely to be violent than married couples.^{3,4,5} Dating is a central activity in the lives of many adolescents whose very identities can be shaped and clarified by their dating experiences.⁶ Adolescents may enter their dating relationships with expectations of love, friendship and happiness.⁷ For most, this will likely be their experience but as many as 12% of high school and 36% of college students will encounter physical, sexual or psychological aggression early in their heterosexual relationships.⁷

Dating violence (DV) is a type of intimate partner violence (IPV).⁸ It can be defined as any abuse or mistreatment that occurs between dating partners. The nature of dating violence can be physical, emotional, sexual or stalking. Dating violence can also take place electronically, in form of repeated texting or posting

sexual pictures of a partner online.⁸

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines intimate partner violence (IPV) against women as 'the range of sexually, psychologically, and physically coercive acts used against adult and adolescent women by current or former male partners.'⁹ Dating violence may take place at any point in the dating process when two people first meet or become interested in each other, on their first date, during their courtship, or after their relationship has ended.¹⁰ The abuse may be perpetrated by an abuser acting alone or with a group of people against the victim.¹⁰

Some of the literature reviewed focused on men as victims of abusive relationships. It is however recognized that women are more likely than men to be the victims of IPV.^{11,12} Higher levels of repeated violence was reported among females. Women are also more likely to experience more serious injuries.¹² Although women can be violent against their male partners, often times, it is in retaliation and self-defense to an initial violence they have suffered.¹²

The negative effects of dating violence on the victims are enormous. These includes physical injuries, sexual

Correspondence to: Dr. Macellina Y. Ijadunola, Department of Community Health, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife 220005, Nigeria
Email: yijadun@yahoo.com

and reproductive problems like unwanted pregnancy, behavioral problems like drug and alcohol abuse, depression, poor academic performance, attempt at suicide.¹³ Perpetrators of violence tend to continue with violent behaviors when they become older adults.¹⁰

Dating violence is an important but understudied public health issue in adolescents.¹⁴ Substantial effort has been made to understand the magnitude of this problem since the 1980s.¹⁵⁻¹⁹ Studies using adult samples have indicated that dating violence is a relatively frequent event with prevalence estimates of dating violence victimization ranging from 21%²⁰ to 45%.²¹ These estimates refer to the percentage of individuals rather than the percentage of couples experiencing dating violence.¹⁴

Studies in the United States and Canada have found an extremely high prevalence of physical assault on dating partners by university students. About 20-40% of the students reported one or more assaults in the previous 12 months.^{4,10} In 1993, the Canadian National Survey (CNS) in their research, asked university and college students about their experience of dating violence, 20-30% reported physical and sexual coercion and the estimates were even higher when verbal threats and emotional abuse were considered.²² According to the 1998 Canadian campus survey, which included a sample of 7,800 university undergraduate students, many students reported having experienced violence: 13% had experienced sexual assault during their lifetime;²³ one in five students had experienced physical assault in their lifetime.²⁴

The International Dating Violence Study which focused on dating relationships of university students across 31 universities in 15 countries (5 in Asia and Middle East, 2 in Australia-New Zealand, 6 in Europe, 2 in Latin America, 16 in North America) reported that at the median university in the study, 29% of the students had physically assaulted a dating partner in the previous 12 months.⁵ This was consistent with a large number of studies done among Canadian and US students.^{5,10}

Studies done locally and internationally focused on violence occurring among campus students in intimate relationships, exploring gender-based violence among female undergraduates only.^{25,26} Previous studies conducted in Ile-Ife, Nigeria focused on intimate partner violence and domestic violence among married couples.^{27,28} Furthermore, most of the relevant previous research conducted on dating violence among undergraduates were conducted in developed countries.

This present study therefore set out to assess the perception and pattern of dating violence in campus-based relationships in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. The specific objectives were to determine the prevalence of dating violence, assess the perception of dating violence, assess the patterns of dating violence among undergraduates in intimate relationships; and assess the help-seeking behavior among

undergraduates who had experienced dating violence.

METHOD

The study was carried out in Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Campus; Ile-Ife, Osun state, South-western Nigeria. The major religions practiced include Christianity and Islam. This was a descriptive cross-sectional study. Undergraduates in dating relationships that have lasted at least one year were studied. Sample size calculated using the formula for estimation of proportions,²⁹ and 45% prevalence rate from a study on Canadian university students.²¹ Levels of confidence interval (CI) and precision were set at 95% and 5%, respectively.

Sampling technique: A multistage sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, the 13 faculties in OAU, were grouped into four clusters consisting of 4, 3, 3, and 3 faculties. One faculty was chosen from each cluster using a simple random sampling technique by means of balloting. Faculties of Social Sciences, Arts, Sciences and Agriculture were selected. In the second stage, two departments were chosen from each of the four faculties by simple random sampling technique using balloting. Sixty questionnaires were distributed in each of the departments. In the third stage, students in 300 and 400 levels were purposively selected. Thirty questionnaires were distributed in each level. Students in 100 and 200 were excluded because they might be well represented since they were taking most of their lectures outside their faculties. Questionnaires were given to the first 15 consenting female and male students in each of the two levels. The 400 properly filled questionnaires were selected for data analysis.

Pre-test: A preliminary survey was carried out among female and male students in The Polytechnic, Ile-Ife where the students shared similar characteristics with the students in the study institution. A total of 20 respondents, comprising 10 males and 10 females were approached. The purpose of the pre-test was to adjudge the strength and weakness of the research questionnaire and necessary adjustments were made in the final design of the instrument.

Instrument for data collection: Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire approach. Some questions were adapted from composite abuse scale.³⁰ The questionnaire was made up of the five sections which included Section A: Socio-demographic data, Section B: Perception of Dating Violence, Section C: Pattern of Dating Violence, Section D: Consequences of Dating Violence, and Section E: Help Seeking Behavior after Dating Violence. The questionnaires were collected after completion.

Data Processing and Analysis: Data were field-edited by the researchers. Data entry and analysis were achieved using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows, version 16. Frequency tables

were generated. Univariate and bivariate analysis was done using Chi-square. Level of statistical significance was set at p value below 0.05.

Table I: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Characteristics	Frequency N (%), N = 400
Age	
15-19	106 (26.5)
20- 24	253 (63.2)
25- 29	39 (9.8)
-	2 (0.5)
Sex	
Male	188 (47.0)
Female	212 (53.0)
Religion	
Christianity	315 (78.8)
Islam	67 (16.7)
Others	18 (4.5)
Ethnicity	
Yoruba	322 (80.5)
Igbo	59 (14.7)
Hausa	2 (0.5)
Others	17 (4.3)

Ethical Consideration: Ethics approval was obtained from the Research and Ethics Committee of the Institute of Public Health (IPH), OAU, Ile-Ife. Informed consent was obtained verbally from respondents and they were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

RESULTS

Sample Demographics: All 400 questionnaires that were given to the undergraduates were returned, giving a 100% response rate. The respondents were made up of 188 (47.0%) females and 212 (53.0%) males. Table I shows the distribution of respondents into age, ethnic and religious groups. Two hundred and fifty three (63.2%) of the respondents were aged between 20-24 years. Three hundred and fifteen (78.9%) were Christians while 322 (80.5%) were of Yoruba ethnicity

Table II shows that the respondents were almost evenly distributed among the four faculties While two hundred and fourteen (53.5%) of respondents were in the 400 level.

Figure I shows gender distribution of the respondents

in percentages; 153 (72.2%) the female respondents and 150 (79.8%) of the male respondents were aware of dating violence, Thus, a higher proportion of male than female respondents were aware of dating violence.

Prevalence of Dating Violence: One hundred and eighty six (46.5%) of the respondents had experienced dating violence in the preceding 12 months to the survey. One hundred and five (56.4%) of the 186 were females.

Perception of Dating Violence: Perception of the respondents about dating violence is presented in Table III. The statistical significant findings were that a higher proportion of males than females agreed that dating violence was strictly a private affair ($p = 0.002$); a higher proportion of male respondents when compared with females disagreed that the female partners were the main perpetrators of dating violence ($p = 0.001$) whereas, a higher proportion of female respondents as against males agreed that the male partners were the main perpetrators of dating violence ($p < 0.001$).

Respondents' awareness about the common forms of dating violence (figure II) shows that sexual violence was perceived to be the most common by 90.8% of respondents. Emotional, verbal and physical violence were reported by 81.3%, 79.3% and 71.82% of all respondents respectively. Stalking was mentioned by 59.6% of the respondents as shown in Figure 2.

Table II: Distribution of respondents in selected faculties.

Characteristics	Frequency N (%), N = 400
Faculty	
Agricultural Science	93 (23.3)
Arts	106 (26.4)
Sciences	93 (23.3)
Social Sciences	108 (27.0)
Levels of study	
3 rd level	186 (46.5)
4 th level	214 (53.5)

Pattern of Dating Violence: Table IV shows the pattern of dating violence among female respondents within the twelve months preceding the survey. The common patterns of dating violence were various forms of emotional abuse, including name calling, low self worth, threatening, humiliation, controlling). Various forms of sexual and physical abuse were also mentioned.

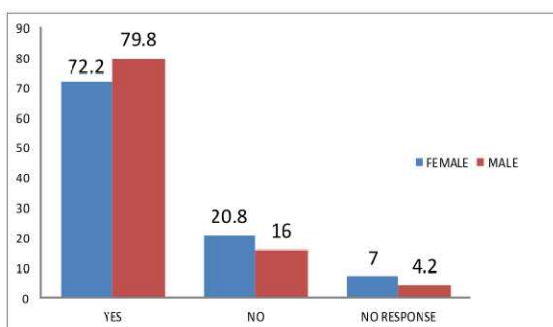


Figure 1: Respondents's awareness of dating violence in OAU, Ile-Ife.

X-axis = awareness of dating violence

Y-axis = Response rate in percentages

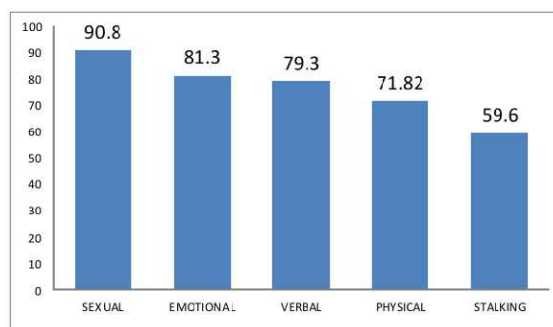


Figure 2: Respondents' awareness of common forms of dating violence in O.A.U, Ile-Ife.

*There were multiple representation of opinions:

X-axis = Forms of dating violence

Y-axis = Percentage

Table III: The perception of the respondents about dating violence

Characteristics	Agree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	No response n (%)	Statistical comparison
Dating violence is a health problem				$\chi^2 = 1.76$
Male (188)	96 (49.0)	57 (48.3)	35 (40.7)	df = 2
Female (212)	100 (51.0)	61 (51.7)	51 (59.3)	p = 0.415
Dating violence is a private affair				$\chi^2 = 12.689$
Male(188)	119 (54.6)	51 (41.1)	18 (31.0)	Df=2
Female (212)	99 (45.4)	73 (58.9)	40 (69.0)	p = 0.002
Dating violence is an issue of power and control				$\chi^2 = 2.365$
Male (188)	125 (45.6)	37 (45.7)	26 (57.8)	Df= 2
Female (212)	149 (54.4)	44 (54.3)	19 (42.2)	P= 0.307
Female partner is the main perpetrator				$\chi^2 = 15.039$
Male (188)	68 (42.0)	97 (57.7)	23 (32.9)	Df= 2
Female (212)	94 (58.0)	71 (42.3)	47 (67.1)	P= 0.001
Male partner is the main perpetrator				$\chi^2 = 12.244$
Male (188)	101 (39.3)	80 (66.7)	7 (30.4)	Df= 2
Female (212)	156 (60.7)	40 (33.3)	16 (69.6)	P<0.001

Table V shows that the patterns of dating violence recorded among male respondents who experienced dating violence within twelve months preceding the survey. Like their female counterparts, males experienced emotional violence more than other forms of dating violence.

Help Seeking Behaviour of Respondents: Help seeking behaviour of respondents is presented in Table VI. Ninety six (90.6%) of the female respondents that experienced dating violence in the twelve months preceding the survey considered it important to seek help. Sixty (56.6%) had actually sought help; 65 (61.3%) from peers, 38 (38.5%) from parents and 27 (25.5%) from pastor/Imam.

Among male respondents that experienced dating violence in the 12 months preceding the survey 58 (72.5%) of considered it important to seek help. Only 20 (25.0%) actually sought help; 17 (21.3%) from peers and 6 (7.5%) from parents and pastor/Imam respectively.

Table V shows that the patterns of dating violence recorded among male respondents who experienced dating violence within twelve months preceding the survey. Like their female counterparts, males experienced emotional violence more than other forms of dating violence.

Table IV: Pattern of dating violence among 106 female respondents.

Variables	Never n (%)	Rarely n (%)	Always n (%)	No response n (%)
Physical				
Beating	94 (88.7)	5 (4.7)	5 (4.7)	2 (1.9)
Slapping	90 (84.1)	7 (6.5)	7 (6.5)	2 (1.9)
Kicking	92 (86.2)	7 (6.5)	7 (6.5)	2 (1.9)
Throwing objects	90 (85.0)	6 (5.6)	8 (7.5)	2 (1.9)
Pushing grabbing or shoving	82 (77.6)	10 (9.3)	11 (11.3)	3 (2.8)
Emotional				
Name calling	57 (53.3)	24 (22.4)	25 (24.4)	1 (0.9)
Low self-worth	71 (67.3)	15 (14.1)	19 (17.1)	1 (0.9)
Threatens, humiliates, controlling	84 (79.4)	12 (11.3)	9 (8.4)	1 (0.9)
Downgrading	92 (86.0)	6 (5.6)	7 (6.6)	2 (1.9)
Public embarrassment	83 (78.5)	10 (9.3)	10 (12.1)	3 (2.9)
Sexual				
Forceful sex	88 (83.2)	6 (5.6)	11 (10.2)	1 (0.9)
Attempted forced sex	88 (83.2)	6 (5.6)	11 (10.2)	1 (0.9)
Electronic				
Posted my picture online	96 (90.7)	6 (5.6)	3 (2.8)	1 (0.9)
Sends humiliating repeated text	84 (79.4)	12 (11.2)	8 (7.5)	2 (1.9)

*There were multiple representation of opinions

Table V: Pattern of dating violence among 80 male respondents.

Variables	Never N (%)	Rarely N (%)	Always N (%)	No response N (%)
Physical				
Beating	66 (82.5)	10 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	4 (5.0)
Slapping	70 (87.5)	8 (10.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.5)
Kicking	69 (86.2)	9 (11.3)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.5)
Throwing objects	67 (83.8)	8 (10.00)	2 (2.5)	3 (3.7)
Pushing, grabbing or shoving	58 (72.5)	15 (18.8)	2 (2.5)	5 (6.2)
Emotional				
Name calling	59 (73.7)	17 (21.3)	2 (2.5)	2 (2.5)
Low self-worth	58 (72.5)	21 (26.3)	1 (1.2)	0 (0.0)
Threatens, humiliates, controlling	63 (78.8)	15 (18.8)	1 (1.2)	1 (1.2)
Downgrading	62 (77.5)	15 (18.8)	2 (2.5)	1 (1.2)
Public embarrassment	59 (73.8)	18 (23.7)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.5)
Sexual				
Forceful sex	62 (77.5)	15 (20.0)	2 (2.5)	0 (0.0)
Attempted forced sex	67 (83.8)	12 (15.0)	1 (1.2)	0 (0.0)
Electronic				
Posted my picture online	72 (90.0)	7 (8.8)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.2)
Sends humiliating repeated text	66 (82.5)	13 (16.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.2)

*There were multiple representation of opinion

Help Seeking Behaviour of Respondents: Help seeking behaviour of respondents is presented in Table VI. Ninety six (90.6%) of the female respondents that experienced dating violence in the twelve months preceding the survey considered it important to seek help. Sixty (56.6%) had actually sought help; 65 (61.3%) from peers, 38 (38.5%) from parents and 27 (25.5%) from pastor/Imam.

Among male respondents that experienced dating violence in the 12 months preceding the survey 58 (72.5%) of considered it important to seek help. Only 20 (25.0%) actually sought help; 17 (21.3%) from peers and 6 (7.5%) from parents and pastor/Imam respectively.

Perception of Dating Violence: The present study recorded some statistically significant differences in terms of respondents perception of dating violence. More males than females agreed that dating violence is strictly a private affair ($p = 0.002$). This may explain why females seek help after experiencing dating violence unlike males who often times keep this issue to themselves.³² Also more females than males agreed that the male partners are the main perpetrators of violence in dating relationships ($p < 0.001$); a finding that supports the fact from literature that females are often times the victim of an abusive relationship.¹¹

Pattern of Dating Violence: Emotional abuse was the commonest pattern of violence found in the present study. This finding was in contrast with those found in studies done in the United States and Canada where an extremely high prevalence of physical assaults was found to be the commonest pattern in dating partners among university students.^{4,10} Sexual abuse found in 12% in the present study was the second mostly reported pattern, in keeping with what was reported in a 1998 Canadian campus survey which found that 13% of university undergraduate students had experienced sexual assaults during their lifetime.²³

Help Seeking Behaviour: Over 90% of female and over 70% male respondents in the present study considered dating violence important to seek help. This was in keeping with the findings in a study on African American youths which indicated that they were willing to seek help from others when confronted with dating violence.³³ Females sought help more than their male counterparts after experiencing dating violence. The gender differences reported in the present study were consistent with findings by Watson et al in 2001³² in a study which showed youths' willingness to seek help following dating violence. They reported that female students were significantly more likely than males to talk to someone about dating violence they had

Table VI: Respondents' opinions toward help-seeking behaviour about dating violence

Variables	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	No response n (%)
Female			
Important to seek help	96 (90.6)	10 (9.4)	0 (0.0)
Continued with relationship	20 (18.7)	74 (69.2)	12 (12.1)
Sought help	60 (56.6)	34 (32.0)	12 (11.4)
Sought help from Police	4 (3.8)	66 (2.3)	36 (33.9)
Sought help from Pastor/Imam	27 (25.5)	44 (41.5)	35 (33.0)
Sought help from Lecturer	18 (17.0)	54 (51.0)	34 (32.0)
Sought help from Parents	38 (38.5)	32 (30.2)	36 (43.3)
Sought help from Peer	65 (61.3)	7 (8.7)	34 (32.0)
Male			
Important to seek help	58 (72.5)	12 (15.0)	10 (12.5)
Continued with relationship	8 (10.0)	56 (70.0)	16 (20.0)
Sought help	20 (25.0)	28 (35.0)	32 (40.0)
Sought help from Police	3 (3.8)	35 (43.8)	42 (52.4)
Sought help from Pastor/Imam	6 (7.5)	28 (35.0)	46 (57.5)
Sought help from Lecturer	2 (2.5)	32 (40.0)	46 (57.5)
Sought help from Parents	6 (7.5)	28 (35.0)	46 (57.5)
Sought help from Peer	17 (21.3)	18 (22.5)	46 (56.2)

experienced, whereas males were significantly more likely to do nothing.³² Another finding in this study was that respondents mostly sought help from their peers. This was followed by seeking help from parents and clergy men. They least sought help from the police or their lecturers. This corroborates the finding from a study by Jaffe et al who in 1992 found from London, and Ontario that there was a low behavioral intentions of high school students and teens to seek out teachers or school guidance counselors for assistance in dating violence situations.³⁴ Reasons why young people are less willing to go to older adults for help may be due to fear of being blamed. Overall, this findings suggest that dating violence is a significant public health issue to be addressed.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the findings from this study suggest that violence in dating relationships is not uncommon. More female undergraduates compared to males had experienced dating violence. Emotional abuse was the commonest pattern reported with sexual abuse being the second most common. Finally, most of the respondents considered it important to seek help after dating violence. More females than males were recorded to have sought help after experiencing dating violence. Given the seriousness and complexity of the problem, an effective action is required to prevent the menace of violence in dating relationships. Based on the findings in the present study, it is recommended that: telephone (hotlines) and websites for making reports online (E-mail) should be established on campuses by student affairs division and the guidance and counselling in various faculties; there is need for proper orientation package (handbills, web address e.t.c) for students on dating violence and the warning signs of abuse in a relationship; and education on anger management and coping skills; and devising educational messages for peers and parents on dating violence prevention. Victims of violence in dating relationships should be coached to cautiously discuss the issue rather than demanding that the abused partner end the violent dating relationship. Lastly, there is need for further research on dating violence with focus on both sexes in other Nigerian universities so that other racial and socio-economic groups do not remain invisible in the dating violence literature.

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