

Determinants of dating violence among adolescents and young adults in Ile-Ife, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: Dating violence is becoming a challenge among adolescents and young adults.

Objectives: This study assessed factors determining dating violence among Nigerian adolescents and young adults.

Methods: It is a descriptive cross-sectional study of consenting previously or currently dating adolescents and young adults that completed a validated questionnaire on dating violence experience. Data were analysed using descriptive, bivariate and predictive statistics.

Results: None of the respondents received dating information from their parents or school with most respondents being introduced to dating by their peers. Dating violence was common after alcohol use (89.3%), refusal to have sexual intercourse (71.3%), previous childhood exposure to violence (71.3%) and experience of family violence (66.1%) with few victims walking away from an abusive relationship. The factors determining dating violence experience include being female (AOR 1.676, 95% CI 1.079-2.603, $p=0.021$), and having low income (AOR 2.936, 1.701-5.068, 0.0001).

Conclusion: Dating violence was commonly experienced by young females and those earning low income.

Keywords: Dating violence; adolescents; young adults; determinants

Abstrait

Contexte: La violence dans les fréquentations devient un défi chez les adolescents et les jeunes adultes.

Objectifs: Cette étude a évalué les facteurs déterminant la violence dans les fréquentations chez les adolescents et les jeunes adultes nigériens.

Méthodes: Il s'agit d'une étude transversale descriptive portant sur des adolescents et des jeunes adultes consentants ayant déjà ou actuellement fréquenté une relation amoureuse, qui ont rempli un questionnaire validé sur l'expérience de violence dans les fréquentations. Les données ont été analysées à l'aide de statistiques descriptives, bivariées et prédictives.

Résultats: Aucun des répondants n'a reçu d'informations sur les rencontres de la part de leurs parents ou de l'école, la plupart des répondants ayant été initiés aux rencontres par leurs pairs. La violence dans les fréquentations était courante après la consommation d'alcool (89.3%), le refus d'avoir des rapports sexuels (71.3%), l'exposition antérieure à la violence pendant l'enfance (71.3%) et l'expérience de violence familiale (66.1%), peu de victimes abandonnant une relation abusive. Les facteurs déterminant l'expérience de violence dans les fréquentations comprennent le fait d'être une femme (AOR 1.676, IC à 95% 1.079-2.603, $p=0.021$) et le fait d'avoir un faible revenu (AOR 2.936, 1.701-5.068, 0.0001).

Conclusion: La violence dans les fréquentations était couramment vécue par les jeunes femmes et celles à faible revenu.

Mots-clés: Violence dans les fréquentations ; adolescents ; les jeunes adultes ; déterminants

Introduction

Dating violence is domestic and gender based violence occurring between people in dating relationships with the perpetration or threat of an act of violence by at least one member which could be of male or female gender [1-4]. Several theories have tried to explain the causes of family violence. Such theories include the social learning theory which demonstrates that children are not born with characteristics such as violence but develop these characteristics through observing and imitating their parents and other adults engaged in domestic violence from childhood which predisposed them to behave likewise to their intimate partners as they grow up to become adults. Also, the psychoanalytic theory which focus on innate psychological processes that allow individuals to abuse or accept abuse from others; the cognitive behaviour theory focus on how violence are learned and transferred in the family from one generation to another; family and system theories that focus on how family members interact and shared responsibility for events occurring within the family [4,6]. Studies on family violence in Africa have reported some cultural norms and values, such as patriarchy, has pulled women and girls to inferior positions in relationships which encourages violence [5,6].

Dating is a period where intending couples are expected to get to know each other at close quarters before getting married. The different forms of dating violence such as physical violence, emotional violence, sexual violence and psychological violence do co-occur in some situations [6-8]. Relationship where both partners engaged in mutual violence against each other usually results in injuries with varying frequency and severity between the partners [6,7,9]. For instance, Jouriles et al., in a research on dating violence reported that mutual violence occurred in 45-72% of the youth studied [3]. Another study reported that a higher proportion of females experienced mutual violence compared to males (50.4% vs. 38.9%), however, a higher proportion of boys likely to report more violence compared to girls [7-9]. Previous studies have suggested that efforts targeted at reducing or stopping dating violence which leads to serious injury and death of either or both partners should start early in the relationship with early identification and intervention to prevent the causes of violence which could be suspicion of infidelity or envy with one partner feeling cheated [10-15].

Studies have shown that there is interconnectedness between dating violence and sexual victimisation. Though some victims of such

sexual aggression might not see such acts as dating violence, it is important to include it in violence preventive programmes consent and contraceptive use [14, 15]. Older partners, internet sexual harassments and internet non-sexual messages must be taken into consideration in such preventive programme if the adolescents and youths will develop a healthy dating and romantic relationship [10,15].

Culture and religion have been used to perpetuate violence especially against women by their male partners for generations [4]. Gender based violence has been known to occur in populations with high religious belief with perpetrators using religion to justify their abuse while the victims do not report such abuse because of shame and culture of silence [11,16,17]. The consequence of being seen by other members of the society as being disobedient against the culture, tradition and religion allows people to ignore or hide violence against the weak or the vulnerable in the community with these victims eventually seeing these abuses as normal or good [4,11].

Since dating violence continues to be reported on daily basis with morbidity and at times mortality in Nigeria, there is need for more studies that will influence policy and reduce its prevalence and disastrous consequences on the victims. Hence, this study which assessed determinants of dating violence among adolescents and young adults attending the pre-degree school of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

Methods

This study was conducted among the pre-degree students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. The pre-degree programme targets the youthful population who had just left the secondary schools and wishes to do entrance examinations such as A' levels to enter the university undergraduate degree programme.

A descriptive cross-sectional study design was used. The pre-degree student population made up of 2,488 students that were eligible to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria were pre-degree students that had previously dated or were dating at the time of the study. Non-consenting students were excluded. The sample size of 420 was calculated using an appropriate statistical formula for descriptive health studies ($n = Z^2pq/d^2$) with 50% experiencing dating violence and non-responders taken into consideration [12,18]. The sampling frame was the list of pre-degree students collected from the school authority. The sample consisted of 420 students. The

number allotted to each group of students was determined proportionately using the formula: $n/N \times 420$, where n is the number of students in class and N is the total number of students. There were three classes including Commercial class, Arts class and Science class. Simple random sampling technique using table of random numbers was used to select the study participants. Eligible students were then approached consecutively to participate in the study. The next student on the list was approached to participate if any student declined participation in the study. The questionnaire assessed the students' socio-demographic characteristics including their age, sex, parents' educational qualifications, socio-economic status, and occupation. Other sections of the questionnaire relate to types of dating violence, factors triggering dating violence, help seeking behaviour, coping strategies and determinants of dating violence. The questionnaire was developed through review of literature, pre-tested and face validity done by the authors to ensure that ambiguous questions were either re-phrased or removed. The questionnaire was in English which is the language of instruction in the school. The questionnaires were self-administered with the students encouraged to participate and fully complete the questionnaire through explanations of the study purpose to each student by the authors and two research assistants trained in questionnaire administration. The data were field-edited daily and statistical analysis was done using SPSS version 20. Simple descriptive statistics was done to give the socio-demographic characteristics and socio-economic status of the study respondents. Chi-square test was used to compare categorical variables while multivariate logistic regression model was built to identify significant factors associated with dating violence. Independent variables in the model were selected based on whether they were significant at bivariate level and/or whether they have been reported in literature as significant determinants of dating violence. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Adjusted odd ratio (AOR) and 95% confidence interval (CI) were obtained to identify determinants of dating violence among the respondents.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ife South Ethical and Review Committee with protocol number INLG 755/51. However, written consent was obtained from the respondents before the commencement of questionnaire administration. In addition, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the pre-degree programme officer, Centre for Distance Learning, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-

Ife, Nigeria. No names or identifiers were included in the questionnaire with the participants allowed to withdraw from the study at any stage.

Results

A total of 420 copies of self-administered questionnaire were distributed but only 401 (95.5%) with complete data were analysed. Nineteen incompletely filled questionnaires were not analysed.

There were 208 (51.9%) females and 193 (48.1%) males. Their mean age (SD) was 17.7 (1.5) years with majority 336 (83.8%) between 15-19 years. All respondents were single (never married) with majority being Christians (82.8%). As regards their parents, most fathers work in the civil service 242 (60.3%), while most mothers were self-employed 200 (49.9%), with most parents earning low income 283 (70.6%). None of the respondents had received any dating information from their parents or school. Majority (90%) were introduced to dating by their peers (Table 1).

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Frequency (n=401)	%
Age group (years)		
15-19	336	83.8
20-24	61	15.2
25-29	4	1.0
Gender		
Male	193	48.1
Female	208	51.9
Marital status		
Single (never married)	401	100
Religion		
Christianity	332	82.8
Islam	22	5.5
Traditional	47	11.7
Mother's occupation		
Self employed	200	49.9
Civil servant	180	44.9
Unemployed	21	5.2
Father's occupation		
Self employed	138	34.5
Civil servant	242	60.3
Unemployed	21	5.2
Income (USD)		
< 1	283	70.6
≥ 1	118	29.4
Received information about dating from parents/school (No)	401	100
Introduced to dating by		
Peers	361	90.0
Friends	40	10.0

Table 2 shows that all the respondents ever had a partner with 270 (67.3%) reported experiencing dating violence in such relationships. The types of dating violence experienced include physical violence (47.9%), psychological violence (57.1%), sexual violence (49.9%) and verbal violence (51.6%).

The factors that triggered dating violence among the respondents include partner's alcohol use 241 (89.3%), refusal of sexual intercourse 193 (71.3%), previous childhood exposure to violence 193 (71.3%) and experience of family violence 198 (66.1%).

Help seeking behaviour and coping strategies of dating violence victims included obeying the perpetrator 100 (37%) or begging the victim 137 (50.6%), seeking help from friends 137 (50.6%) and

counsellor 157 (58.1%). Only 97 (35.9%) walked away from an abusive relationship. Common reasons for help seeking in violent relationships include fear of getting into trouble with the law 153 (56.7%), avoiding shame and embarrassment 136 (50.4%), and fear of discontinuing the relationship with the partner 107 (39.6%).

Table 3 shows association between socio-demographic variables and experiencing dating violence among the respondents. A higher proportion of young adults (73.8%) compared with teenagers (66.1%) experienced dating violence; although this was not significant ($p=0.221$). Also, a higher proportion of Christians (69.6%) compared with Muslims (63.6%) and traditional religion adherents (53.2%) experienced dating violence, however, this

Table 2: Types, factors triggering, help seeking behaviour and coping strategies towards dating violence among pre-degree students

Variable	Frequency (n=401)	%
Ever experienced dating violence (Yes)	270	67.3
*Types of dating violence experienced (n=270)		
Physical	129	47.9
Psychological	154	57.1
Sexual	135	49.9
Verbal	139	51.6
*Factors that trigger dating violence (n=270)		
Anger after alcohol use	241	89.3
Anger after refusal to have sexual intercourse	193	71.3
Previous childhood exposure to violence	193	71.3
Coming from dysfunctional family	189	69.9
Exposure to sexually explicit media	102	37.8
General acceptance of violence	63	23.2
*Help seeking behaviour and coping strategies (n=270)		
Seek help from counsellors	157	58.1
Plead with the victim	137	50.6
Seek help from friends	137	50.6
Plead with the violent partner	100	37.0
Walk away from the violent partner	97	35.9
Start taking alcohol	90	33.3
Continue dating hoping partner will change	61	22.6
Fight back when violence is perpetrated	57	21.1
Succumb to having sexual intercourse with partner	45	16.7
*Reasons for help seeking behaviour and coping strategies (n=270)		
Fear of getting into trouble with the law	153	56.7
Avoiding shame and embarrassment	136	50.4
Fear of discontinuing the relationship	107	39.6
Prefer to keep such experience to self	91	33.7
People might not believe	57	21.1
Fear of further violence	50	18.5
Worried about confidentiality	41	15.2

*Multiple response

Table 3: Association between socio-demographic variables and experiencing dating violence

Variable	Dating violence experience		Test statistic
Age group (years)	Yes (%)	No (%)	
< 20	222 (66.1)	114 (33.9)	1.497; 0.221
≥ 20	48 (73.8)	17 (26.2)	
Gender			
Male	77 (40.0)	116 (60.0)	127.324; 0.001
Female	193 (92.8)	15 (7.2)	
Religion			
Christianity	231 (69.6)	101 (30.4)	5.171; 0.075
Islam	14 (63.6)	8 (36.4)	
Traditional	25 (53.2)	22 (46.8)	
Income (USD)			
< 1	229 (80.8)	54 (19.2)	80.715; 0.001
≥ 1	41 (34.7)	77 (65.3)	

Table 4: Logistic regression analysis of factors predicting dating violence experience among the respondents

Variable	Crude OR, 95%CI, p-value	Adjusted OR, 95%CI, p-value
Gender		
Male (ref.)	1	
Female	1.913, 1.248-2.932, 0.003	1.676, 1.079-2.603, 0.021
Religion		
Christianity	2.013, 1.084-3.737, 0.027	1.818, 0.960-3.445, 0.167
Islam	1.549, 0.544-4.360, 0.416	1.270, 0.431-3.745, 0.665
Traditional (ref.)	1	
Income (USD)		
< 1	3.162, 1.849-5.409, 0.0001	2.936, 1.701-5.068, 0.0001
≥ 1 (ref.)	1	

Ref. reference category

was not significant ($p=0.075$). Significant variables associated with experiencing dating violence include being female and having low income ($p<0.05$).

On logistic regression analysis, the significant variables determining dating violence include being female (AOR 1.676, 95% CI 1.079-2.603, $p=0.021$), and having a low income (AOR 2.936, 1.701-5.068, 0.0001) (Table 4).

Discussion

This study assessed the determinants of dating violence among adolescents and young adults attending a pre-degree university institution in Nigeria. It reported that all respondents were single with most being females, and from families with low income. These youths reported receiving no information on

dating or having no previous education on dating either from their parents or school. They relied on their peers and partners for this information. This could explain some dating violence reported by this population. The fact that these youths were expected by their parents and school to face their studies rather than engage in any dating relationship could explain why no dating information was given by the parents and no dating education given by the school.

This study reports that all the respondents ever had a partner with most experiencing dating violence in such relationships. Several studies have reported varying degrees of violence in dating relationships [2,12]. This shows that dating violence is a public health problem worth tackling in this population. Various studies have reported that

experience of domestic violence in marriage could be related to previous experience of violence in dating relationships [12,19,20]. Therefore, efforts targeting prevention of violence in dating relationships should be encouraged.

This study shows that higher proportion of females reported dating violence in their relationships compared to males. Studies have reported females as victims of violence in relationships with some women who experienced such violence called 'battered women' [15,21]. However, more recent studies have shown that males could as well be the victim rather than the perpetrator, a fact which suggests that violence has no gender preference [22,23]. Culturally, it is taboo for Nigerian males to displaying any form of weakness in public as victim of family violence while the society also abhors males who perpetrate intimate partner violence against their female partners [4,11].

The types of dating violence experienced shows psychological violence and verbal violence were reportedly more frequent than physical violence and sexual violence. This varying occurrence of the type of violence could be due to fear of stigma and discrimination as victims of sexual violence such as rape prefer to keep such information to themselves [12,23]. However, the effects of this type of violence might not be different from one another as they all have deleterious effects on the victim's life. Hence, every effort must target prevention of any form of violence in relationships [12,19,22].

Common factors triggering dating violence include alcohol use, refusal of sexual intercourse, previous childhood exposure to violence and one of the partners coming from a dysfunctional family. Various studies have reported these factors in varying proportions in dating relationships [19,22]. The need to counsel these youths to abstain from premarital sexual intercourse or to engage in protective consensual sexual intercourse cannot be overemphasized. Also, it is very important to focus on these factors to prevent dating violence especially the role played by alcohol use in the perpetration of dating violence as shown in this study.

This study reports that some respondents would rather obey the perpetrators demand, or seek help from friends than opt for separation from the violent partner or report the situation to the school counsellor. A study on help seeking and help giving in relation to dating violence reported that young people tend to seek help from their age group and do not confide or trust adults in their social network. It reported that the youth are reluctant to intervene in

dating violence situations with the quality of help offered being limited [22]. This shows that there is need for awareness creation about dating relationships, possibility of violence in such relationships, identifying and educating prospective victims and perpetrators of dating violence on what to do when violence occurs among this youthful population [21-23]. Common reasons for help seeking in violent relationships include fear of getting into trouble with the law, avoiding shame and embarrassment, and fear of discontinuing the relationship with the partner.

This study reports that young adults compared with adolescents were more likely to experience dating violence. This observation could be due to the likelihood of young adults getting more involved in relationships and exerting of their rights in such relationships compared with teenagers. This implies that dating violence prevention programs should target these age groups to reduce the prevalence and consequences of dating violence.

Also, Christians compared with Muslims and Traditional religion adherents were more likely to experience dating violence; however, these associations were not statistically significant. Several studies have reported religion supporting dominance of either gender in relationships and dating violence [4,11]. The need to target religious leaders in dating violence prevention can therefore not be overemphasized.

The significant determinants of dating violence reported in this study include being female, and having low socio-economic status. Previous studies have associated females and low socio-economic status with experiencing dating violence [19,22].

As far as we know, this is the first study on dating violence among these students in the study area. However, it is limited by its cross-sectional design and being self-reported; hence, its findings might not be generalised and no cause-effect relationship could be established. The study findings could help in formulating policies targeting dating violence prevention and treatment of victims. Further studies are needed among these youths, their parents, teachers, community and religious leaders on dating violence prevention.

In conclusion, the youths received no information on dating nor had previous dating education either from their parents or school. They relied on their peers and partners for this information. Dating violence is common and it is a public health problem worth tackling among the young population.

Common factors triggering dating violence reported in this study include anger after alcohol use, anger after refusal of sexual intercourse, previous childhood exposure to violence and one of the partners coming from a dysfunctional family. A common coping strategy is pleading and giving in to the perpetrator's demand. Common reasons for help seeking in violent relationships include fear of getting into trouble with the law, avoiding shame and embarrassment, and fear of discontinuing the relationship with the partner. The determinants of dating violence include being female, and having low socio-economic status. It is necessary to put in place strategies to identify, report, intervene and prevent dating violence such as provision of dating information and education among adolescents and youths. Also, the parents and guardians should be targeted to provide necessary preventive education to these adolescents and young adults.

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