



INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE PERCEPTIONS AMONG FEMALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The problem of domestic violence has taken its toll on the wellbeing of many women in Nigeria. Regrettably, this problem has global ramifications since almost every society is affected by it. Several theories such as attachment theory (Bowlby, 1951) and learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975) purport to explain why these acts of violence against women continue and the reasons why abused women persist in the abusive relationship. This study investigated the perceptions of intimate partner violence among undergraduates within three academic groups in Lagos, Nigeria. A total sample size of 450 female respondents participated and the instruments utilized included the Severity of Violence against Women Scale (Thompson, Basile, Hertz, Sitterle D', 2006). The findings revealed significant differences between the experiences of single females as against married females in domestic violence. Also, postgraduate students were significantly more exposed to domestic violence than fresh undergraduates. These findings corroborate existing indices of such violence in Nigeria and were discussed in the light of current trends.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'domestic violence' should ideally be a misnomer because the domestic setting of the family should be the safest place for those who belong in it. The prevailing facts however, suggest a very different reality. For so many women and children across the world, the home has come to symbolise an environment where they experience victimisation, abuse, psychological torture and a denial of basic human rights (UNICEF, 2000). Anecdotal accounts as portrayed by the media reveal the extent to which some people are willing to go in hurting and destroying the lives of those who trust them as protectors, caregivers and significant others. In addition, there seems to be a tacit acceptance of violence as something that affects women. A key component of domestic violence is intimate partner violence. The World Health Organisation (WHO) factsheet (2013) puts global prevalence rates at 35% for women who have experienced either intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. The report also estimates that the proportion of women who had ever experienced physical or sexual violence or both by an intimate partner ranged from 15% to 71%, with the majority between 29% and 62% (WHO, 2013).

According to the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993):

"Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women..."

So far, there have been several classifications of this kind of violence. Austin & Sootsman Eicher (2004) have suggested the following types which are:

- a) Physical abuse: including hitting and all kinds of aggressive behaviours excluding outright sexual aggression.
- b) Verbal abuse: such as shouting, yelling, insults and scathing remarks of a verbal nature without physical contact.
- c) Sexual abuse: entailing all forms of coercion, rape, molestation and sexual assault.
- d) Psychological abuse: controlling and manipulative behaviours, monitoring and isolation from family and friends.

- e) Emotional abuse: criticisms, threats and intimidation; this is similar to psychological abuse.

It is also axiomatic to note that such violence and abuse occurs in virtually every society but what differs are the rates of occurrence. The spectrum of such violence is considerably broad but for the purposes of the current study, more emphasis will be placed on violence against women in the context of intimate partner relationships.

Heise, Pitanguy and Germaine (1994) suggested that a confluence of several factors contribute to the spate of violence against women within the domestic setting. Cultural factors entail definitions of gender roles as prescribed by the norms of the ethnic group. Most cultures endorse a view of the woman as a chattel of the man. These culturally promoted proprietary rights of men place women greatly under their control (Heise, Pitanguy & Germaine, 1994). In some cultures, it is even encouraged for men to discipline their wives when they challenge their authority or run afoul of their directives (Heise, Pitanguy & Germaine, 1994). Marriage customs accord men too much of the prerogative in decision making which translates into an unequal relationship largely favourable to the male. This sets the tone for future episodes of male domination riding roughshod over the preferences and fundamental rights of females (Heise, Pitanguy & Germaine, 1994).

Heise et al (1994) also remarked on the impact of economic dependence of females on males, on intimate partner violence. Women have traditionally had limited access to education and consequently, are less likely to be as highly qualified as their male counterparts. This provides a fertile ground for the incidence of economic abuse of females by their male partners (Heise, Pitanguy & Germaine, 1994). Laws of inheritance such as primogeniture have always favoured males leading to males controlling the economic and financial destiny of their families (Heise, Pitanguy & Germaine, 1994). Even when the woman is the sole breadwinner in the home, some anecdotal evidence exists to the effect that several men still expect that the woman should deposit her earnings at his feet for him to disburse as he deems fit.

Heise et al (1994) further remarked on the legal and political disadvantages women face. Since women are mostly underrepresented in politics, their voices are not able to generate the required level of momentum in policy formulation favourable to their sex (Heise, Pitanguy & Germaine, 1994). The implementations of laws by the police and the judiciary have not favoured women due to their generally low legal literacy which is hinged on their comparatively lower literacy level globally.

Domestic violence also poses some costs to the society both in economic and non-monetary terms (Buvinic, Morrison & Shifter, 1999). Monetary costs include decreased labour participation of women, lower earnings of women and reduced productivity of working women due to problems such as absenteeism (Buvinic et al, 1999). Non-monetary costs include increased mortality due to homicide, risk of psychological disorders and higher rates of suicide.

Without a doubt, domestic violence is a problem which we cannot afford to treat with levity. For a better appreciation of its precursors, it may be helpful to consider the theoretical underpinnings to this problem.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Several theoretical positions exist to provide explanations for the existence of domestic violence. They include psychodynamic theories, social theories, cognitive theories and the family systems theory. Each group of theories will now be considered in turn.

Psychodynamic theories

Object relations theory suggests that people are motivated from very early in their childhood to seek out significant relationships with others (Fairbairn, 1952). Apart from their role in psychic development, these early relationships form templates for future relationships for the child. These templates constitute mental representations which guide the child's interaction with others throughout life (Fairbairn, 1952; Zosky, 1999). Individuals who lacked sufficient nurturing in infancy may struggle to maintain their self-esteem and manage their emotions later in life. These nurturing and dependency needs which went largely unmet tend to re-emerge in adulthood with a considerable level of rage. The quest to satisfy these dependency needs could translate into either demanding or desperate approaches to relationships. The demanding person becomes the abuser while the desperate individual becomes the victim (Cogan & Porcerelli, 1996; Dutton, Starzomski & Ryan, 1996). Dutton et al (1996) found significant correlation between violence in the family of origin and parental rejection, with the perpetration of domestic violence as an adult.

Attachment theory focuses on reciprocity in the relationship between individuals. Attachment emerges in a reciprocal and lasting emotional connection between individuals as they both contribute to the quality of their relationship (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2010). Early attachment theorists such as Bowlby (1951) and Ainsworth (1967) proposed that children develop working models of what an ideal relationship is supposed to be based on the consistency of the caregiver in providing security for the child. It is within the context of the attachment bond that the child seeks to meet his/her security needs when threatened by the environment (Holmes, 2000). The child thus develops a perception of his/her worth based on the availability and willingness of the caregiver to provide the needed protection. Secure attachments are usually preferred but some other types such as avoidant, ambivalent and disorganised exist which all come under the rubric of insecure attachment (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2010). Insecure attachment occurs when the caregiver was unpredictable in conveying their availability to meet the needs of the child. This pattern of attachment has been strongly linked with violence in intimate relationships in adulthood. Furthermore, antisocial behaviour has been associated significantly with insecure patterns of attachment (Cicchetti & Lynch, 1993; Smallbone & Dadds, 2000).

Social theories

Control theory is based on the premise that violence occurs because an individual seeks to exert power over other people (Bostock, Auster, Bradshaw, Brewster, Chapin & William, 2002). Violence is thus employed by more powerful members of a relationship to keep the less powerful members in line (Goode, 1971). Attempts may even be made by the powerful and violent prone individuals to control the thoughts and beliefs of the less powerful thus brewing a more violent situation (Goode, 1971).

Exosystem theory focuses more on life stressors and how they impinge on the quality of the relationship between intimate partners. With increased perception and frequency of stressors, domestic violence may be seen to escalate (Cano & Vivian, 2001).

Cognitive theories

Social learning theory emphasises the ability of individuals to learn from models whose behaviours are observed and imitated at a later time (Bandura, 1977, 1989). People become aggressive toward others after having observed those behaviours in a similar context to the one in which they later portray these behaviours. For instance, children who grew up in violent homes in which one parent abused the other later display such behaviours in future relationships (Corvo & Carpenter, 2000). This theory helps to explain intergenerational trends of violence in which the abused as a child later turns around to become an abuser as a parent (Kaufman & Zigler, 1987).

Learned helplessness is another cognitive theory which may proffer answers as to why people in abusive relationships sometimes persist in these relationships. Seligman (1975) discovered that sometimes experimental subjects may have suffered an aversive situation repeatedly without hope of escape until they refuse to help themselves out of the situation when opportunities for escape present themselves. Battered women usually fall into this category when they must have suffered for so long that they begin to believe that nothing they do will help them. This leads to a defeatist outlook and general passivity (Walker, 1979)

Family systems theory

A major tenet of this theory is that the individual must not be viewed in isolation but must be considered along with interactions, transitions and relationships within the family. The relationship between the individual and the family is seen as recursive such that what affects the individual affects the family and what affects the family affects the individual (Gurman & Kniskern, 1981; McBride, 2003). This theory has aided the explanation of how violence gets perpetuated to the next generation while acknowledging that the family could also be affected by other systems such as the community (Nichols & Schwarz, 2004).

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Nigeria has been reported to experience unusually high levels of violence against women (Afrol News, 2007). UNICEF (2001) reports that at least a third of Nigerian women have suffered some form of abuse be it physical, sexual or psychological at least once in their lives and this violence was perpetrated by intimate partners. Cultural factors have also led to a gross underreporting of the problem of domestic violence since the victims themselves try to conceal the facts (Oyediran & Isugo, 2005). In Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, the beating of wives is a widely accepted form of discipline (UNICEF, 2001). It even gets worse when the woman is economically dependent on the man. When issues of domestic violence crop up, it is generally assumed that it is a private matter between a man and his wife which brooks no occasion for interference from outsiders no matter how well meaning they are. There is thus a culture of silence which strengthens the stigma attached to the victim and lets the perpetrator off the hook too easily (Afrol News, 2007). Obi and Ozumba (2007) conducted a study in South-Eastern Nigeria which investigated the matter of domestic violence and they found that 70% of respondents reported incidences of abuse in their families. Many women cannot tell if they have been abused or not (Afrol News, 2007). Even more disturbing is the finding that 64.4% of Nigerian women who have ever been married actually expressed consent for the practice of wife beating. The most common type of intimate partner violence in Nigeria is physical abuse as 83% of surveyed respondents in a study reported having suffered such (Obi & Ozumba, 2007). Even the police have also been known to dismiss domestic violence reports as private matters.

Age has also been seen to impact a woman's susceptibility to intimate partner violence. Hotaling and Sugarman (1990) have suggested that younger females were more likely to suffer from violence at the hands of their partners than older ones. Furthermore, Rennison (2001) found that the women who reported the most violence were aged between 35 to 49 years of age. More recently, Gage, Hotchkiss and Godha (2012) surveyed four African countries including Nigeria and they discovered that Nigeria was the only country intimate partner violence did not decline with the age of the respondent. The educational level of the victim of violence has also been involved in the narrative. Counterintuitively, Oluremi (2015) observed that women who were better educated actually reported greater incidence of intimate partner violence than those with more basic education. This may be due to their improved opportunities to earn better income and thus attain some economic independence from partners who may then feel affronted by this development (Oluremi, 2015)

These findings make it necessary to turn the searchlight of scientific inquiry upon this problem to gain insights which will contribute to the formulation of solutions to it. Based on the foregoing, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. Undergraduate students will significantly experience more domestic and sexual violence than postgraduate students.
2. Post-graduate students will significantly experience more domestic and sexual violence than diploma students.
3. Married students will significantly experience more domestic and sexual violence than unmarried students.

METHOD

Research Setting

This research was conducted within The University of Lagos, Akoka, Yaba, Lagos State. The school which is popularly known as UNILAG, was founded in 1962 and for over 5 decades has provided quality and research-oriented education to all those who have entered its domain in search of knowledge. Some of the programmes on offer at the university include Diploma (Foundation), Undergraduate and Postgraduate categories. The female students however, at these three categories of study are the target population for this research.

Sample Selection

With the aid of GPOWER 3 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang & Buchner, 2007), 450 participants were selected in such a way that at least 150 respondents were from each category of study. The participants were females between the ages of 17 years to 30 years from different departments and levels of study. Due to the different categories of study in the university (Diploma studies, Undergraduate studies and Post-graduate studies), participants were chosen from all of them so as to have opinions of people from these categories leading to better representativeness of findings. They were selected because they compose the population of the learned youths who have been exposed through education, civilization and globalization which has granted them access to a relatively modern life.

Sampling Technique

A combination of convenience and purposive sampling techniques were used to select participants. This ensured that participants from different demographic groups were considered for participation in the study. Also, this was to ensure that the information generated is not skewed in any way; hence, each relevant demographic classification had respondents drawn from them. Finally, the information obtained was dependent on the voluntary interest of the respondent in the study.

Research Instruments

The variables of interest were measured by administering questionnaires to a sample of students. The instrument consisted of questions that were structured in a way to yield closed-ended responses.

Data were collected using the following instrument composed of the following sections:

a. The Demographic Section

This was constructed by the researcher to obtain information about the participants which includes their sex, marital status, age, level of study, relationship status (single or married).

b. Severity of Violence against Women Scale

It is a 46 item instrument from 'Measuring Intimate Partner Violence Victimization and Perpetration: A Compendium of Assessment Tools by Thompson, Basile, Hertz, Sitterle



D' (2006) under the Physical Victimization Scales. It consists of simple questions to which the participants have 4 points to measure its severity. This scale measures physical violence in all ramifications such as sexual, emotional etc. Items 20-23 represent mild violence, items 24-28 represent minor violence, items 29-31 represent moderate violence and items 32-40 represents serious violence. Point values given in response to each item in the subscale were summed to create the subscale score. Higher scores are indicative of greater abuse.

Research Design

The research design adopted in this study is the cross sectional survey. A survey was undertaken in different faculties of the university to gather the opinions of respondents on the subject matter. The survey was done through the administration of questionnaires.

Procedure

At first, rapport was established with the participants at the different levels of study for the procedure and data collection. This research was conducted in three phases as shown below.

Phase 1: Diploma Students

One hundred and fifty questionnaires were set aside for the Diploma students of the university as well as for each of the other 2 groups. This group represents the youngest generation of students in the entire University.

Respondents were gotten from different faculties and put together in a hall. They were told that it was a voluntary act which attracts no payment in return for their participation and honesty is very essential to answering the questions.

Subsequently, respondents were advised to read the questions carefully and embark on the specific task of ticking/writing responses as may be applicable. They were assured that their responses would be used strictly for academic purpose. They were given 30 minutes to answer the questions and they should not leave anyone unanswered. Most of the respondents completed it in less than 30 minutes.

Phase 2: Under-graduate Students

One hundred and fifty questionnaires were set aside for these students. The data collection for this group took a week. Majority of this group were young adults which indicates that they had been in, or were currently in a relationship and could have experienced intimate partner violence in one form or the other.

The same instructions given to the Diploma students were also given to this category with a 30-minute timeline to answer all questions completely.

Phase 3: Post-Graduate Students

The last set of one hundred and fifty questionnaires was given to this group. The group consist of adults who are either studying for their Masters or PhD. Their opinion on the research work is of great importance because we believe that quite a number of them must have experienced either one or all types of domestic violence.

Just as was the case with the Under-graduate students, it took a week to administer and retrieve questionnaires from this group as well. Instructions given to the first 2 groups also applied to them.

Data analysis and statistics

The data was analysed with SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions) computer program. The mean and standard deviation were used to summarize the relative scores of each group. The Independent T-test statistics were the statistics used to analyse the data to find out which of the various comparisons was statistically significant.

RESULTS

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis one states that postgraduate students will significantly experience more domestic and sexual violence than undergraduate students.

Table 1: Independent t-test between undergraduates and post-graduate students' Domestic violence perceptions

V	Student Category	N	Mean (μ)	S.D (σ)	T	df	Sig.
Scale	Undergraduates	150	47.05	3.259	-.874	298	.383
	Post-graduates	150	47.37	3.212			

Note. *. Significant at the 0.05 level, df = 298, Critical t (at 0.05 level) = 1.65

The result in table 1 shows that female post graduates ($\mu = 47.37$) did not report significantly higher level of domestic violence than female undergraduates. ($\mu = 47.05$). Therefore, there was no significant difference between undergraduate females and post-graduate females domestic violence ($t = -.874$; $df = 218$; $p > 0.05$). This result implies that female undergraduate and female post graduate reported similar levels of domestic violence. The result did not support the hypothesis and it was therefore rejected.

Hypothesis Two states that Post-graduate students will significantly experience more domestic and sexual violence than diploma students.

Table 2: Independent t-test between diploma students and post-graduate students' Domestic violence perceptions

V	Student Category	N	Mean (μ)	S.D (σ)	T	Df	Sig
Scale	Diploma	150	46.04	2.52	-3.99*	298	.000
	Post-graduates	150	47.37	3.21			

Note. *. Significant at the 0.05 level, df = 298, Critical t (at 0.05 level) = 1.65

The result in the table 2 shows that female post graduates ($\mu = 47.37$) did significantly report higher level of domestic violence than female undergraduates. ($\mu = 46.04$). Therefore, there was a significant difference between reported levels of domestic violence of diploma females as against post-graduate females ($t = -3.99$; $df = 298$; $p > 0.05$). This result implies that female post-graduate report higher level of domestic violence than diploma students. The result supported the hypothesis and it was thus accepted.

Hypothesis three stated that Married students will significantly experience more domestic and sexual violence than students that are single.

Table 3: Independent t-test between single and married respondents in domestic violence.

V	Marital status	N	Mean (μ)	S.D (σ)	T	Df	Sig
	Unmarried	318	46.62	2.959	-2.093*	444	.037
	Married	128	47.29	3.228			

Note. *. Significant at the 0.05 level, df = 444, Critical t (at 0.05 level) = 1.64

The result in the table 3 shows that single females ($\mu = 46.62$) significantly report higher level of domestic violence than married females ($\mu = 47.29$). Therefore, there was significant difference between single females and married females in domestic violence ($t = -2.093$; $df = 444$; $p > 0.05$). This result implies that married females and single females do not have similar level of domestic violence. The result supports the hypothesis therefore it was accepted.

DISCUSSION

The study's prediction that post-graduate's students will experience more domestic and sexual violence than undergraduate's students was rejected. This supports the findings from the study conducted by Roberts (2006) in which it was found that domestic violence was no respecter of educational or socioeconomic status or attainment. The study also returned findings showing a significant difference between the Diploma and the postgraduate category of students in domestic violence. One common denominator in both findings is the intervening variable of age. According to the social clock (Neugarten, 1990), most females in Nigeria have been seen to consider getting married immediately they graduate from the university. The consequence of this is that most of the females who return to school for postgraduate programmes are either in a serious relationship or already married since the cultural expectation and practice demands this. Their relationship status thus increases their likelihood of encountering domestic violence from a significant other. In addition, their educational level as graduates means they could earn more than their less educated contemporaries. This is very different from the diploma students who are predominantly teenagers and more likely to be fully dependent on their parents. Any relationships they have are not as seriously intentioned as their postgraduate counterparts. The differences were insignificant between undergraduates and postgraduates since some of them could already be in serious relationships while a handful could already be married.

The differences in domestic violence between single and married respondents was also significant in the study. This is understandable given the statistics earlier cited which point to worrying rates of violence against women within the context of domestic family life in Africa. An unmarried female may more easily opt out of an abusive relationship than a married one since the investment into the relationship is relatively lower. Nonetheless, several anecdotal accounts have pointed to some singles persisting in abusive relationships though unmarried. However, the findings of the current study affirm a marked difference between the rates of domestic violence in singles compared to married respondents.



Recommendations

First, this study focused on the perceptions of intimate partner violence by women. Although this study focused on females being the victim, future research can investigate males being the victim or survivor and females being the perpetrators. Also, qualitative research and/or a mixed study investigating attitudes and beliefs about domestic violence of battered women from different ethnic backgrounds could prove informative against the backdrop of narratives of battered women from different ethnic backgrounds including their experiences of domestic violence. Finally, comparisons between educational levels and income of both partners in a violent relationship could proffer more insights into the etiology of the problem.



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