

Perception and Experience of Dating Violence Among Secondary School Adolescents In Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State: Implications Of Counselling

Dr. Love Nwamadi

*Department Of Educational Psychology, Guidance And Counselling, Ignatius Ujuru University Of Education
Rumulomeni, Port-Harcourt, Rivers State*

John Bright

*Department Of Educational Psychology, Guidance And Counselling, Ignatius Ajuru University Of Education
Rumuolumeni, Port-Harcourt*

Abstract

The study investigated perception and experience of dating violence among secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State. Descriptive survey design was adopted. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study consisted of 610 secondary school adolescents, out of which 400 adolescents were selected as sample size from the target population. Purposive sampling technique was used in carrying out this study. The instrument for data collection was a self-developed 12 item instrument. It was titled "Adolescents' Dating Violence Questionnaire (ADVQ)". ADVQ was used to get the desired information from the respondents (adolescents). The instrument was divided into two sections (A and B). Section A is called demographic data. While section B consisted of questions that elicited responses from the adolescents based on their experience, perceptions, feelings and opinion. The instrument was validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation from the Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. A reliability coefficient of 0.87 (87%) was obtained for the instrument. In other words, the reliability index of 0.87 shows that the instrument was 87 percent reliable. The Likert Scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, respectively was used in scoring the items in the questionnaire. The criterion was based on mean of 2.50. An item with the mean of 2.50 and above was regarded as Agree (A) while the item less than the mean 2.50 was regarded as Disagree (D). The researchers administered the instrument to the respondents with the help of research assistant, and upon completion, out of the 400 instruments administered only 392 instruments were retrieved for analysis. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions while independent t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The finding of the study revealed a significant difference in the perception and experience of dating violence among secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State. Based on the findings, the researchers recommend among others that parents, teachers and counsellors should advice and counsel their adolescents against dating violence to enable adolescents see dating violence as unhealthy and antisocial behaviours.

Key Words: Dating, dating violence, adolescent, psychological injury.

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I. Introduction

Disagreement between two individuals whether in marital, dating or casual relationships is inevitable. When two people are brought together by common interest or goal no matter the bond between them there is always impersonal differences that serve as sources of conflict to their relationship. However, a healthy relationship among couples, partner or friends is not a mirage but an attainable goal that requires effective communication, respect to each other's privacy, honesty, tolerance and mutual understanding from both parties. In healthy dating relationships, partners do not only respect and trust each other; they also accept and embrace each other's peculiarities and deficiencies (Ekechukwu & Atete, 2014). According to them, both partners are expected to effectively communicate their needs and work together to resolve conflicts in a rational and non-violent manner. Failure to resolve disagreement amicably among partners in dating relationships usually resorts to violent behaviours such as verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual or emotional abuse which is referred to as

dating violence. Thus, adolescents in dating relationships need to possess social skills that enhance interpersonal relationships.

Dating violence is an unsafe social phenomenon that characterized most young people's intimate and romantic relationships all over the world. So many intimate relationships suffer this incident but due to poor reportage it has not drawn needed attention of scholars, government and professional in humanitarian services. Over the years, dating violence as a global social dilemma among adolescents has become a serious public health concern. It is one major unhealthy social phenomenon that plagues intimate relationships among 21st century young people across the globe, but has been rarely mentioned in public discourse when addressing prevalent social menaces by scholars and professionals in education, public health, psychology, social work and social welfare, governmental and nongovernmental organizations and other bodies concerned in protection of human rights. World Health Organization declared dating violence as a health problem in different parts of the world, which is why action programmes and policies have been implemented, mainly in the school context, a scenario of socialisation and construction to identity in adolescents.

Discussion on violence in intimate relationships was birthed by the work of Makepeace in 1981 on physical intimate partner violence (IPV) in dating relationships. Ever since the time of that innovative work, researchers have continued to present an eye-opening picture of the extent to which violence occurs, not only in marital relationships, but in dating relationships as well. According to Martínez-Heredia et al. (2021), dating violence is understood as the threat or use of sexual, verbal or physical abuse by one partner against the other, which means that to properly identify situations of violence, physical and/or sexual aggression must be assessed alongside other forms of violence such as verbal aggression and/or threats, affecting couples who have either been together for a long time or are starting a relationship (Ontiveros et al. 2020).

Dating violence is a deliberate or unpremeditated act of aggression or hostility that inflicts physical, sexual, emotional or psychological maltreatment to a person by a current or former partner in a romantic or intimate relationship. Dating violence involves intentional or unintentional abusive behaviours that occur between two people – usually a man and a woman who are in a dating relationship and share an emotional, romantic and sexual connection beyond a friendship, but are not married or engaged. Dating violence occurs in different form which includes physical, sexual, and psychological or emotional abuse and is common among college students (Murray & Kardatzke, 2007). Dating violence is one behavioural issue young people experience most in their dating relationships. Both males and females experience dating violence, however it is reported that females have a stronger emotional reaction to dating violence than their male counterparts (Sears & Byers, 2010).

Adolescence is a transitory phase of an individual's life between childhood and adulthood, particularly from ages 10 to 19 depending on the individual's physiology. It is a distinctive stage of human development with unique characteristics, demands and challenges that provoke interest and desire for dating relationships. As a unique phase of human development filled with curiosity, adolescents engage in sexual experimentation through dating and romantic relationships. In such experimental relationships, adolescents experience different kinds of maltreatment from their partners but because of the fear of being scolded by parents and older adults for engaging into dating relationship they prefer to endure, sometimes resorting to risky behaviours such uncontrolled intake of alcohol, abuse of drugs and other substances, thought of murder for revenge and suicidal ideation. This unhealthy experience has a negative psychosocial effects on the victims, abuser and people around him or her. Taylor et al (2017) maintained that experiencing dating violence as an adolescent increases the risk for intimate partner violence (IPV) later in life. Long-term consequences of intimate partner violence include various health issues, such as chronic pain, heart disease, hypertension, and psychological distress (Vives-Cases et al., 2011).

Dating violence is a kind of assaultive and domineering behaviours that an individual uses against his or her partner in order to gain or maintain power to have undue advantage and control in the relationship. The abuser deliberately or unpremeditatedly behaves in manner that provokes physical or psychological strain or distress, degradation and humiliation to gain unwarranted and gratuitous control over his or partners. This can manifest in different form such as sexual, emotional, physical and psychological abuse. Abusers try to dominate their partners by controlling them in various ways. The abuser controls his or her partner in the forms of abuse:

Physical: This involves using or threatening to use physically assaultive behavior such as hitting, slapping, biting, shoving, strangling, kicking or using a weapon, seizing of cell phone or unauthorized taking of partner's call, grabbing, beating, etc. Attempting to excommunicate the victim from family and friends using jealousy to rationalize behaviour, threatening to harm, kill or abandon partner if she or he fails to comply are another forms of physical abuse that victims of dating violence experience.

Humiliation: This is carried out by the victim in front of his or her friends and family or making the victim feel guilty when she confronts the abuser about the abuse.

Sexual: In this form of abuse, the abuser forcefully engage on sexual intercourse with the victim or intentionally provoking victim's sexual urge without his or her consent.

Digital Abuse: This includes non-physical sexual behaviours like posting or sharing sexual pictures and videos without their consent or sexting someone without their consent on the internet or social media, or exposing his or nude pictures, videos or recorded conversations on the internet or social media.

Verbal/Emotional Abuse: This involves threatening and abusive verbal/non-verbal expressions that inflicts pain on the victims such as name-calling, shaming, isolation or stalking, threats, insults, constant monitoring, intimidation, etc. Blackmailing ex-partner and threatening to expose his or her nude pictures, videos or recorded conversations on the internet or social media is also another form of emotional abuse young people go through their relationships.

The abuser uses any or all of the above forms in compelling his or her victim (s) to meet his or her demands for immediate gratification. This act of “man inhumanity to man” has a serious psycho-social implication. This is because, the act inflicts the victim with pain, distress, injury or death and violates the basic human rights of the victims. Adolescents experience all forms of violence in their dating relationships due largely to ineptitude and poor social and emotional intelligence in handling relationship issues. Thus, it is worthy to explanatorily take an in-depth investigation of issues surrounding violence not only I marital relationships but also in dating relationships among secondary school adolescents so as reduce the growing wave of the social menace.

Statement of Problem

The incident of dating violence occurs repeatedly among adolescents and unmarried youths has continued over the centuries, manifesting in various forms and degrees in every societies and cultures of the world. The prevalence of dating violence has been on the proliferation all over the world, and adolescents of varying social, racial, economic, educational and religious backgrounds experience it in their relationships in different ways but due to poor reportage of the phenomenon in developing nations, scant attention is given to it by the government, human rights advocates, parents, teachers, counsellors, etc. So many adolescents have suffered series of physical, emotional and psychological injury while some have also lost their lives as a result violent behaviour of their partners. In 2021, a final year law student of Rivers State University was allegedly murdered by a supposed lover over a disagreement bothered on cheating. This was made public because it has taken life.

Truthfully, many young people go through different degrees of pain and torture in their relationship. This act is becoming epidemic as people who carried out violence behaviours against their partners in relationship sometimes do so because they believe they have the right to control the person they are dating. The abusive partner thinks he or she knows best. They believe that they should be in charge in the relationship as unequal relationships are ideal. Hence they carry out this unpleasant action against their partners which endangers both the victim’s and the abuser’s life. This is because the abuser in the quest to prove his or her superiority over his or her partner could be provoked to harm the victim which could lead to serious injury, disability or even death. On the other hand, the victim in self-defense could unleash a planned or unplanned physical harm or reprisal attack on the abuser which may lead to more devastating problem. Even though the number of dating violence that occur daily among secondary school adolescents in Rivers State has not drawn much public attention due largely to the fact that it is underreported in print and electronic medias, the news of dating violence among partners has always find its way out to public domains especially through social medias and “unconfirmed reports”

It is therefore against this backdrop that the researcher sought to investigate the perception and experience of dating violence among secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Aim/Objectives of the Study

The study aim was to investigate the perception and experience of dating violence among secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State. In specific terms, the study sought to;

1. Determine the perception of dating violence among male and female secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State.
2. Examine the experience of dating violence among male and female secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Research Question

1. What is the perception of dating violence among male and female secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State?
3. What is the experience of dating violence among male and female secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students on the perception of dating violence among secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students on the perception of dating violence among secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State.

II. Methodology

The study adopted survey design to investigate the perception and experience of dating violence among secondary school adolescents in the area. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study consisted of 610 secondary school adolescents, out of which 400 adolescent were selected as sample size from the target population. Purposive sampling technique was used in carrying out this study. This sampling technique according to Ogidi (2018) is a type of sampling technique where specific element which satisfies some pre-determined criteria are selected. The instrument for data collection was a self-developed 12 item instrument. It was titled “Adolescents’ Dating Violence Questionnaire (ADVQ)”. ADVQ was used to get the desired information from the respondents (adolescents). The instrument was divided into two sections (A and B). Section A is called demographic data. While section B consisted of questions that elicited responses from the adolescents based on their experience, perceptions, feelings and opinion. The instrument was validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation from the Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Ignatius Ajurur University of Education. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation. A reliability coefficient of 0.87 (87%) was obtained for the instrument. In other words, the reliability index of 0.87 shows that the instruments was 87 percent reliable. The Likert Scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, respectively was used in scoring the items in the questionnaire. The criterion was based on mean of 2.50. An item with the mean of 2.50 and above was regarded as Agree (A) while the item less than the mean 2.50 was regarded as Disagree (D). The researchers administered the instrument to the respondents with the help of research assistant, and upon completion, out of the 400 instruments administered only 392 instruments were retrieved for analysis. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions while independent t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

III. Results/Discussion

Research Question One

What is the perception of dating violence among male and female secondary school adolescent in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State?

Mean rating of male and female adolescents on perception of dating violence among secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State

S/N	ITEMS	Male (n=153)		Female (n=239)		Aggregate
		X	SD	X	SD	
1.	Dating violence should not be tolerated in relationships	2.50	0.94	2.92	0.7	2.71
2.	Dating violence is a normal phenomenon in dating relationships	2.76	0.73	2.51	0.82	2.63
3.	Female adolescents will not respect her boyfriend who does not beat her each time she errs	2.91	0.84	2.39	0.73	2.65
4.	Using violence to express your anger in your relationships makes your partner to respect you	2.89	0.91	2.47	0.86	2.68
5.	A violent partner is a respected partner	3.57	0.94	2.47	0.86	3.02
6.	There is nothing wrong if a boy beats his girlfriend if caught	3.24	0.9	2.28	0.86	2.76

The table above shows the data presentation and analysis for the perception and experience of dating violence among male and female secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State. Result in the table showed that male adolescents perceive dating violence as an act used in maintaining manish supremacy over their female counterparts. From the mean obtained by male respondents, there is nothing wrong in beating their girlfriends if she errs hence female partners respect their boyfriends who beat them. However, the female folk see dating violence as an act that should not be tolerated in relationships. They disagreed on item 2 (dating violence is a normal phenomenon in dating relationships), item 3 (female adolescents will not respect her boyfriend who does not beat her each time she errs), 4 (using violence to express your anger in your relationships makes your partner to respect you), 5 (a violent partner is a respected partner) and 6 (there is nothing wrong if a boy beats his girlfriend if caught) respectively, which shows that female adolescents disagreed on the act of dating violence in dating relationships.

Research Question Two

What is the experience of dating violence among male and female secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State?

Mean rating of male and female adolescents on experience of dating violence among secondary school students in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State

S/N	ITEMS	Male (n=153)		Female (n=239)		Aggregate
		X	SD	X	SD	
1.	Beating	2.11	0.89	3.2	0.90	2.65
2.	Hitting	2.23	0.75	3.08	0.86	2.65
3.	Seizing of cell phone	2.14	0.93	2.50	0.87	2.32
4.	Provoking sexual urge without my consent	2.47	0.86	2.88	0.89	2.67
5.	Raping	2.39	0.098	3.65	0.87	3.02
6.	Posting and sharing sexual pictures/videos without my consent	2.56	0.99	2.53	0.89	2.54
7	Name-calling	2.52	0.91	2.61	0.92	2.43
8	Insults	2.61	0.85	2.54	0.77	2.57
9	Isolation	2.15	0.88	2.47	0.89	2.31
10	Constant monitoring	2.54	0.79	2.67	0.87	2.60
11	Intimidation	2.48	0.92	2.65	0.79	2.56

The table above shows the data presentation and analysis for the experience of dating violence among male and female secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State. Result in table 2 showed that female adolescents experience more physical and sexual abuse in their dating relationships than their male counterparts. However, both parties experience digital, verbal and emotional abuse in their relationships

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference in the perception of dating violence among secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Summary of t-test on the mean rating of male and female students on perception of dating violence among secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State

Gender	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Df	t-test	Sig.	Remark
Male	153	2.58	.99	390	0.85	0.04	Significant
female	239	2.48	.68				

The data in table 3 above revealed that male had a mean value of 2.58 while female had a mean value of 3.83. This result suggests that females had a more positive perception of dating violence than their male counterparts, t-cal (0.45) $p < 0.05$. Hence the null hypothesis one that states that there is no significant difference in the perception of dating violence among male and female secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is a significant difference in the perception of dating violence among secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference on the experience of dating violence among male and female secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State.

Summary of t-test on the mean rating of male and female students on the experience of dating violence among undergraduate students in Rivers State

SES	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Df	t-test	Sig.	Remark
Male	153	2.99	.66	390	1.04	0.012	Significant

Female	239	2.51	.59
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The data in table 4 above showed that the mean rating and standard deviation of students from high socio-economic status on perception and experience of dating violence among undergraduate students in Rivers State are 2.99 and .66 respectively, while mean rating and standard deviation of students from low socio-economic status on perception and experience of dating violence among undergraduate students in Rivers State are 2.45 and .59 respectively. However, t-cal (1.040) $P > 0.05$ hence the null hypothesis two that states that there is no significant difference in the experience of dating violence among secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is retained. This result implies that there is a significant difference in the experience of dating violence among secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State.

IV. Discussion

The result of the analysis on the perception of dating violence among male and female secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State revealed a significant difference in the perception of dating violence among male and female adolescents. Female adolescents have more positive perception than their male counterparts. This finding agrees with Taylor et al. (2017) who revealed gender differences in perceptions toward dating violence. According to them, male adolescents perceive dating violence through action, perpetration, and physical consequences while female discuss dating violence by relating to the victim and the victim's emotions. Similarly, the findings is in line with the study by Martínez-Dorado et al. (2020) on dating violence in teen couples. The analysis of the violence perception profiles indicates that Spanish teenagers have a higher perception of it, and, also, that girls hold a greater perception than boys.

Finally, the result of the analysis on experience of dating violence among male and female secondary school adolescents showed that female adolescents experience more dating violence in dating relationships than their male counterparts. This finding is in consonance with Audrey et al. (2012) who observed that girls commit more physical and emotional abuse while boys commit more sexual abuse. Conversely, this finding conflicts with the study of Foshee (199) whose study revealed the following: females perpetrate more mild, temperate and severe violence than males towards partners even when controlling for violence committed in self-defense; females commit more violence than males out of self-defense; males commit more sexual dating violence than females; males and females sustain equal amounts of mild, moderate and severe dating violence; females sustain more sexual dating violence than males; females sustain more psychological abuse than males from their partners; and females sustain more injuries than males from dating violence.

V. Conclusion/Recommendations

Dating violence is a serious social problem bedeviling young peoples' relationships. It is one major abuse most adolescents face in their relationships but it is hardly reported in print and electronic media in developing countries unless in rare cases especially where serious physical injury or murder is committed. Some perpetrators believe that it is a way of punishing their erring partners, while others especially male abusers see it as a way of masculine supremacy over their partners. However, this study revealed that female have more positive attitude and experience of dating violence among secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State. Arising from the findings of the study, the researchers recommend the following:

1. Parents, teachers and counsellors should advice and counsel their adolescents against dating violence to enable adolescents see dating violence as unhealthy and antisocial behaviours
2. Adolescents should be counseled against resorting to violent behaviours when disagreement arises in their relationships. They should approach other conflict resolution methods such visiting the guidance counsellor for direction.

Counselling Implications

1. Guidance counsellors should carry out awareness on campuses to counsel students against exhibiting violent behaviours to their partners.
2. Those who have experienced dating violence should seek the help of counsellors in order to heal the psychological injuries arising from previous experience.
3. Government should employ enough guidance counsellors and establish well equipped counselling unit in all tertiary institutions to serve as a clinical base for psychological succor to those who are suffering abuse from their partner.
4. Federal government of Nigeria should sign the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) Code of Conduct passed by the two chambers of National assembly into law to enable professional counsellors establish

counselling clinic in every corner of our society to give people suffering from violent abuse in their relationships easy access to counselling services.

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