

Dating Violence among University Students: The Role of Gender and Age

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Abstract

In this study, the influences of gender and age on attitude to dating violence among students were examined. 1362 students from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka were used. 620 (45.5%) were males while 742(54.5%) were females. The ages of the participants ranged between 19 and 35 years with a mean age of 23.91 years and standard deviation of 5.76. A-25 item scale on dating violence was validated and used in the study. Two way analysis of variance was used to test two hypotheses in the study. The findings indicated that the first hypothesis which stated that there will be no significant difference between male and female students on attitude to dating violence was confirmed. The result also indicated that the second hypothesis which stated that there will be no significant difference between older and younger students on attitude to dating violence was confirmed.

Keywords: Age, Dating violence, Gender.

1. Introduction

Dating violence is like erosion menace which has menacingly eroded the social fabric of many dating students. According to Iconis (2013), dating violence is a significant problem on college campuses. It is a common problem affecting both male and female students of different age categories. For instance, in most Nigerian Universities, students are not only victims but also perpetrators of violent behaviors reflecting the rising incidence of violence in the Nigerian society as a whole (Ajuwon, Funmilayo & Osungbade,2011). One of such violent behaviors is dating violence. It is a significant problem in our society yet researchers have just begun to understand the destructive effect and scope of the problem in the last two decades. According to Jackson (1999) and Lewis and Fremouw (2001), as many as one in three college couples will be involved in at least one incident of violence during their dating relationship. Furthermore, many studies have found prevalence rates of dating violence close to fifty percent (Arias, Samois, O'Leary, 1987; Pederser & Thomas, 1992; White & Koss, 1991). Although prevalence rates widely fluctuate depending on the definition criteria of dating violence adopted for a particular study (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001), it is clear that dating violence is a significant issue that needs addressing. Addressing this issue empirically will help researchers and government agencies to proffer lasting solution to the problem.

Dating violence can be defined as a form of relationship abuse which involves insult or assault. It is a maladaptive behavior in relationship among couples which can have severe physical and psychological consequences and can lead to homicide or suicide in extreme cases as well as emotional symptoms stemming from depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Holtzworth-Munroe, 1992). According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2012), dating violence is defined as violence committed by a person who is or has been in a social relationship of a romantic nature with the victim. For the problems associated to dating violence to be controlled, there is a need to examine the factors that are likely to lead to dating violence. This can lead to better knowledge for prevention programs and clinical treatment.

Although researchers are beginning to understand more of the complexities of dating violence, there has been relatively little work examining dating violence among same gender couples particularly with regard to violence prevention specifically in Nigeria. Based on this perceived research gap, this present study is aimed at examining the gender and age as factors that are likely to influence attitude to dating violence.

1.1. Purpose of the study

1. To determine if there is any significant difference between male and female students on attitude to dating violence.
2. To determine if there is any significant difference between older and younger students on attitude to dating violence.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Theoretical framework

Feminist theory was one of the major theories used in this study. Feminist theory addresses gender hierarchy and power (Sprenkel & Moon, 1996). White and Klein (2002) defines feminist theory as an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it. This view suggests that women are suppressed and overpowered by male dominance. When specifically applied to dating violence, the feminist theory proposes that all forms of abuse are about power and control, embedded in a patriarchal value system (Jackson, 1999).

2.2 Empirical review

Ajuwon, Funmilayo and Osungbade (2011) carried out a cross-sectional survey to assess experience and perpetration of physical, sexual and psychological violent behaviours among school-based adolescents. A total of 1366 students (50.4% females and 49.6% males) randomly selected from six public secondary schools in Ibadan, Nigeria were interviewed using a 36-item questionnaire. Respondents answered questions regarding demographic profile, sexual behaviour, and the extent to which they had experienced or perpetrated physical, sexual and psychological violent behaviours. The predictors of experience of violence among males were use of alcohol, witnessing domestic violence, involving in work and parental use of alcohol. Among females parental use of alcohol and being young were predictors of violence. Reports of perpetration of physical, sexual and psychological violence among males were 75.3%, 44.9% and 13.3% respectively.

Existing research on the prevalence of verbal and physical abuse among college students provides further insight into this issue. For example, one study on dating violence among college students evaluated specifically verbally and physically abusive behaviors. Out of the 572 respondents, the results indicated that 82% reported being verbally abusive with a partner in the last year, and 21% reported physically aggressive behaviors towards a partner within the same time frame (Shook, Gerrity, Jurich & Segrist, 2000). Furthermore, an earlier study by Gryl, Stith and Bird (1991) assessed prevalence rates of physical dating violence among college students, by comparing violent relationships to non-violent ones. In reference to initiating violence respondents reported that 51% of the time their partners initiated violence, 41% reported they initiated and 8% reported both individuals were equally responsible (i.e. pushed, slapped, hit with object, kicked, use of lethal weapon, etc.).

2.3 Hypotheses

1. There will be no significant difference between male and female students on attitude to dating violence.
2. There will be no significant difference between older and younger students on attitude to dating violence.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

One thousand three hundred and sixty two (1362) students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka served as participants in this study. The participants were sampled from Departments of Psychology, Sociology, Political Science, Mass communication, Business Administration, Economics, Philosophy, and Marketing. The participants were selected from different levels (year one, year two, year three, year four and year five). 620 (45.5%) were males while 742 (54.5%) were females. The ages of the participants ranged from 19 to 35 years with a mean age of 23.91 years and standard deviation of 5.76. Those that were between 19 to 25 years were tagged younger students while those that were 26 years and above were tagged older students.

3.2 Instrument

A 25-item self developed scale on dating violence was used in the study. This scale was developed to determine the extent to which couples exhibit physical or verbal violence to their partners. The items were vetted by experts on psychological tests. After the vetting, the face and content validity of the instrument was approved. In addition, the instrument was subjected to pilot study using 100 students from a different University. Using alpha reliability test, an alpha coefficient of 0.57 was obtained. This indicated that the instrument is reliable.

3.3 Procedure

Simple random sampling technique was used to select the participants. This random method was carried out by writing Yes or No in different pieces of paper that were folded and gathered in a cellophane bag. Each potential participant was allowed to pick a folded paper. After the picking, those that picked yes were told to write their names in a paper, while those that picked no were thanked for the time they spent with the researcher. Those that picked yes were given the questionnaire to fill.

3.4 Design/Statistics

The research design was 2X2 factorial design. Based on this design, two- way analysis of variance (2- WAY ANOVA) was adopted as the statistical tool for data analysis.

4. Results

The results were presented in the order in which the hypotheses were tested.

TABLE: Summary table of two way analysis of variance on the influence of gender and age on attitude to dating violence among students

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	7273216.09	1	7273216.09	84888.43	.00
Gender	29.47	1	29.47	.34	.56
Age	42.74	1	42.74	.49	.48
gender * age	111.05	1	111.05	1.29	.26
Error	116353.05	1358	85.68		
Total	7621068.00	1362			
Corrected Total	116508.53	1361			

4.1 Discussion

The table above indicated that the first hypothesis which stated that there will be no significant difference between male and female students on attitude to dating violence was confirmed at $F(1,358) = .34, P > .05$ level of significance. This means that gender disparity is not a factor that can significantly influence attitude to dating violence in Nigeria. This result is not in line with the proposition of feminist theory. This view suggests that women are suppressed and overpowered by male dominance. When specifically applied to dating violence, the feminist theory proposes that all forms of abuse are about power and control, embedded in a patriarchal value system (Jackson, 1999).

The result also indicated that the second hypothesis which stated that there will be no significant difference between older and younger students on attitude to dating violence was confirmed at $F(1,358) = .49, P > .05$ level of significance. This showed that age does not have a significant influence on attitude to dating violence.

4.2 Conclusion

Based on the findings, the researcher arrived at the conclusion that gender and age do not have significant influence on dating violence.

4.3 Recommendation

More research should be channeled towards unraveling other factors that are related to attitude to dating violence other than gender and age. Government should invest more on research, workshops and seminars on the means of boosting students understanding of the implications of dating violence.

4.4 Suggestions for further studies

Any research of this nature should be conducted in different locations. This will help to increase the generalization of their findings. Subsequent researchers should learn how to employ adequate rapport creation and incentives on the course of looking for participants.

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