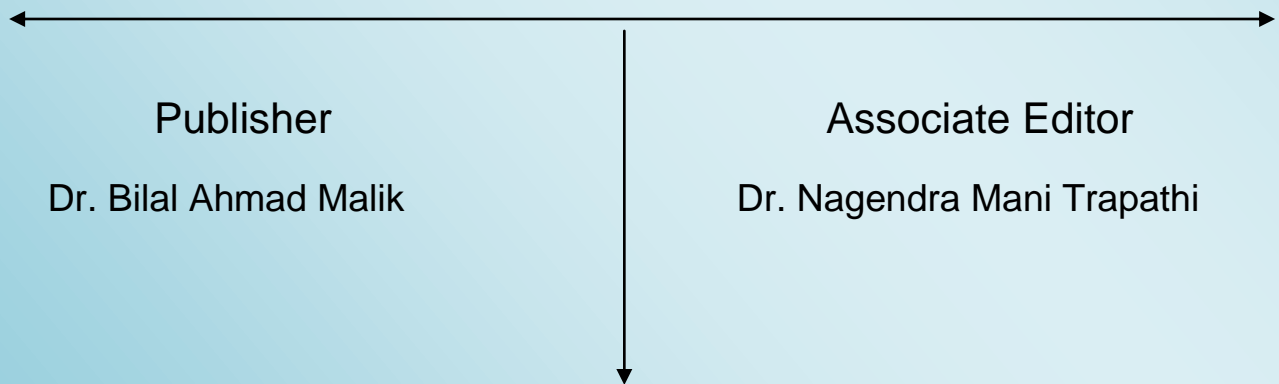


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## GENDER DIFFERENCES, SELF ESTEEM AND DATING VIOLENCE AMONG UNDERGRADUATES OF UNIVERSITY OF UYO, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The study investigated the influence of gender differences and self-esteem on dating violence among undergraduates. There were 1002 undergraduate students selected randomly from two faculties (Law and Social Sciences) in the University of Uyo. The ages of participants ranged between 16 – 21 years and their mean age was 39.4 years. A survey approach was adopted for the study. Questionnaires were used as instruments for data collection. The Index of Self Esteem Scale (ISE) and the Conflict in Adolescent's Dating Relationship Inventory scale (CADRI) were also administered on participants to elicit data. A 2X2 factorial design was adopted in the study. Using A 2 – way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), hypotheses formulated in the study were tested. The results revealed that gender differences had a significant influence on perpetuation of dating violence among undergraduates,  $F(1,1001) = 9.78; p < .005$ . It was also found that self-esteem had a significant influence on the perpetuation of dating violence among undergraduate students ( $F(1, 1001) = 38.48; p < .051$ ). The results also revealed that there were significant main influences of gender and self-esteem on dating violence perpetuation;  $F(1,1001) = 38.484; p < .051$ . Finally, the authors concluded that gender, as well as self-esteem are predictors of perpetuation of dating violence perpetuation.*

*Key words: Gender difference, Self-esteem, Dating violence, University of Uyo and Undergraduates.*

### INTRODUCTION

Dating violence has emerged as a significant public health issue occurring across all social, economic, cultural and ethnic groups. Although it was once narrowly conceptualized as involving only physical force, dating violence is now more broadly recognized as a continuum of abuse which can range from emotional and verbal abuse to rape and murder (Hickman & Jaycox, 2004). It involves a pattern of coercive, manipulative behaviour that one partner exerts over the other for the purpose of establishing and maintaining power and control (Hickman & Jaycox, 2004).

Anderson & Danis (2007), define dating violence as the threat or actual use of physical, sexual, psychological or verbal abuse by one member of an unmarried couple on the other member within the context of a dating relationship. Examples of sexual abuse in violent dating relationships include forced or coerced sexual activity (Aosved & Long, 2005), while examples of psychological abuse in dating relationships include dominating behaviours, verbal denigration, and social isolation (Murphy & Hoover, 1999). According to Lewis, Travea, & Fremould (2002), physical, sexual and psychological violence often co-occur in abusive dating behaviour.

Researches consistently demonstrate that approximately 20-30% of dating couples experience at least one act of physical aggression, 70-90% experience psychological aggression, and 3-20% experience sexual aggression each year (Shorey, Cornelius, and Bell, 2008).

## THE PROBLEM STATEMENTS

Dating violence among students is of interest in this study because despite the increasing global concern in the incidence of dating violence there is paucity of researches in Nigeria investigating this problem among our young adult population. According to Lloyd & Emery (2002), dating violence is an unfortunately common experience for many students today. Jackson (1999) and Lewis & Fremouw (2000) posit that as many as one in three college [couples] students will be involved in at least one incident of violence during their dating relationships. Furthermore, some studies have found prevalent rates of dating violence close to 50% (Arias, Samois & O'Leary, 1987; White & Koss, 1991). Rates of severe aggression are less commonly reported in the literature, but it is estimated that approximately 8-16% of individuals in college dating relationships experienced at least one act of severe physical aggression (such as punch, choke, kick partner), 12-13% experienced severe psychological aggression (such as threaten to hit partner, destroy personal belonging of partner) and 3-9% experienced severe sexual aggression (like the use force/threats to have sex with partner) each year (Bell and Naugle, 2007).

The modal forms of aggression experienced by students is often classified as minor which include insulting, yelling, swearing or doing something to spite one's partner and insisting on sex with a partner when he/she does not want to (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy & Sugarman, 1996). One of the earliest studies on students dating violence showed that approximately 20% of students had experienced at least one incidence of physical dating violence. Since that time, rates of physical dating violence among students have ranged from 16.7% to 48% (Amar & Gennaro, 2005). A recent study by Straus (2004) revealed that 29% of students reported that they had

been physically violent toward a dating partner within the past year. Straus (2004) reported there are high rates of dating violence among University Students worldwide.

Dating violence have the potentials of leaving the victim with psychological scars as well as a wide range of negative health consequences or put properly psychological scars. Sexual violence brings not only the risk of physical injury, but also the additional risk of contracting HIV & AIDS or other sexually transmitted infections. The emotional harm for men and women who experience dating violence include depression, anxiety, feelings of sadness and hopelessness and suicidal thoughts and attempts (Straus, 2004). Coping with dating violence can also lead to health problems. Survivors are more likely to use and abuse alcohol, drugs and tobacco. They are more likely to withdraw from school relationships, putting them at increased risk of dropping out of school. Both males and females who are victims of dating violence are also more likely to engage in harmful eating behaviours and are significantly more likely than non victimized peers to attempt suicide (Straus, 2004).

Dating violence has been found to be a strong prediction of marital violence (White, Merrill & Ross, 2001). In fact, many believe that dating during the young adult years provides a training ground for behaviour in subsequent long-term relationships. Because violent behaviour that begins in the dating context often continues into the marital relationship (O'Leary, Barling, Arias, Rosenbau, Malone, & Tyree, 1989), it is critical to intervene while couples are dating to stop the cycle of violence. There are various factors associated with an increased probability of the perpetration of dating violence which include age, race, ethnicity, geographical location, peer influence and socio-economic status. Apart from the above listed factors, other factors such as gender and self esteem are presumed to increase the perpetration of dating violence. It is in relation to these that this study is anchored.

Researchers have found mixed findings regarding the perpetration of dating violence and gender (Lewis & Fremouw, 2000), with some studies reporting that men and women commit violent acts at similar rates (Straus, 2004). For example, Harned, (2002) reported no difference between men and women in their use of violence with other studies showing that women have higher rates of dating violence perpetration than do men (Hendy, Weiner, Bakerof , Eggen, Gustitus, & McLeod, 2003). Dekeseredy & Kelly (1993) found that 17.2% of male University students reported using physical violence against their dating partners as compared with 43-3% of female students. Furthermore, White & Koss (1991) in their Survey of 4, 707 College students found that of the male participants, 81% had perpetrated dating violence, while 87% of female participants had perpetrated dating violence.

However, men and women may perpetrate dating violence for different reasons and with different outcomes. For example, Makepeace, (1986) found that college women who perpetrated dating violence reported that their violence was performed in self defence, while men who perpetrated dating violence reported that their motives were related to uncontrollable anger or a desire to intimidate or control their partners. In addition, dating violence perpetrated by men tended to be more severe and more likely to result in injury as compared with violence perpetrated by women (Lewis & Fremouw, 2000).

Self esteem is another factor influencing dating violence. Research has shown that low self esteem correlates with dating violence perpetration for boys (O'Keefe, 2005). According to O'Keefe (1997), males that have low self esteem are more likely to initiate dating violence, suggesting that low self esteem influences violence in males because males want to defend their image. There has been tremendous effort by researchers to study those factors that predispose dating violence, but the relationship between the variables in this study has not been studied. Thus, there exists a gap in existing literature as regards dating violence among undergraduates. The present study examined how gender and self esteem influence dating violence among undergraduates. It was hypothesized that:

1. Male undergraduates will perpetuate dating violence more than their female counterparts.
2. Gender and self esteem will jointly have significant influence on dating violence behaviour among undergraduates.

## METHOD

### Design

This study is a survey, which used questionnaire as instrument of data collection using a 2x2 factorial design. The design allows the researchers to test for the independent and interaction effects among the variables of interest in this study. There are two independent variables (Gender differences vs self esteem), while the dependent variable is Dating violence.

### Participants

A total number of 1002 participants were drawn conveniently from amongst 100 level males (358) and females (644) students from two faculties (Law and Social Sciences) in the University of Uyo participated in this

study. The participants were drawn from the Faculty of Social Sciences (Department of Psychology (two hundred and sixty seven (267); 98 males and 169 females; Political Science (two hundred and fifty three (253); 79 males and 174 females), and Faculty of Law (four hundred and eighty two (482); 181 males and 301 females) using convenience sampling technique. Their ages ranged between 16- 21 years with a mean age of 39.4years.

## Instruments

The study made use of a questionnaire which is made up of two major instruments. The questionnaire had three subsections; Section A asked the participants to provide their demographic information and these included age and sex. **Section B was the Index of Self Esteem Scale (ISE) developed by Hudson (1982). And Section C was the Conflict in Adolescent's Dating Relationship Inventory (CADRI) developed by Wolf, Scott, Reitzel, Weker, Grasley and Straatma (2001).**

The index of self esteem scale is a 25- item scale designed to measure the degree, severity or magnitude of a problem a client has with his or her self-esteem. The items are rated on a Likert scoring format scale of 1-5 (1 = Rarely or none of the time, 2 = A little of the time, 3 = Some of the time, 4 = A good part of the time and 5 = Most of the time or All of the time), with a score of 30 or above indicating that participants have low self-esteem and a score below 29 indicating participants have high self-esteem. The I.S.E. scale was revalidated using Nigerian Sample. Thirty (30) participants were drawn from the department of Business Management, University of Uyo for the pilot study. The Cronbach coefficient alpha of .78 was obtained during the pilot study reported a Cronbach alpha of .78, and item total correlation revealed that all the items loaded up .30; none of the items were discarded. Hudson, (1982) reported ISE to have a good construct validity and a Cronbach alpha of .93.

The CADRI scale is a 35 item Likert type (1-4) scale designed to assess abusive behaviour among adolescents dating partners. The CADRI comprises of 5 primary factors (subscales); Sexual Abuse (items 2, 13, 15, & 19), Threatening Behaviour (items 5, 29, 31, 32, 33) ,Verbal or Emotional Abuse (items 4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 21, 23, 2), Relational Abuse (items 3, 20, 25), Physical Abuse (items 8, 25, 28, 30, & 34). Out of these 35 items only 25 items were used for the study, the remaining 10 items refer to conflict resolution behaviour and are not scored as part of the CADRI score. The items were scored on a scale of 1- 4; 1 = Never, 2 = Section, 3 = sometimes and 4 = often. The scores for the items are summed for the score for each subscale, and the total scores are the result of summing the subscales with higher scores indicating greater amount of abuse. The scale was also revalidated and



a Cronbach alpha of .87 was reported from the pilot study result. Wolfe et al (2001) reported a test-retest reliability of 0.68 - 0.75 and a range of internal consistency of 0.54 - 0.81.

## Procedure

Permission was obtained from the University authority before the questionnaire was administered on the students. Participants voluntarily expressed their consents to participate in the study, after being assured that the study is strictly for academic purpose and that their confidentiality is guaranteed. The English language was used as official language of communication in the course of this study. Copies of questionnaires were administered to the participants in two faculties. The questionnaires were administered after each lecture with the aid of the lecturer in-charge of the courses. The students were instructed to fill the questionnaire appropriately and thereafter return for analysis. Out of 1050 copies that were administered, 1025 were returned, while only one thousand and two (1002) copies were correctly filled and found useful for analysis.

## Statistics

A 2- way Analysis of Variance was used for analyzing the data collected in this study.

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Summary Table showing the mean score for gender and self on esteem dating violence**

(B)	(A)				Total
	Male		Female		
	$\bar{X}$	Sd	$\bar{X}$	Sd	
Low	42.54	13.14	37.25	8.52	39.90
High	43.56	8.05	40.46	11.47	42.01
Total	43.05		38.86		81.91

**Note: A & B have been used to represent the two independent variables; where A = Gender and B = Self Esteem**

Table 1 above shows that male undergraduates has a higher mean score than female undergraduate ( $\bar{X}$  43.05 vs 38.86). This means implies that male undergraduates perpetuated dating violence more than their female counterparts. Table 1 also revealed that undergraduates with low self esteem had a higher mean score than their



undergraduates counterparts with high self esteem ( $\bar{X} = 42.01$  vs 39.90). This implies that undergraduates with low self esteem perpetuated dating violence more than undergraduates with high self esteem.

Hypothesis one which states that male undergraduates will perpetuate dating violence more than their female counterparts was significant [ $F(1, 1001) = 38.48; p < .05$ ]. These significant main influence was revealed by the significances in mean scores where undergraduates with low self esteem has a higher means score than undergraduates with high self esteem in their perpetuation of dating violence more than their female counterparts. The hypothesis is therefore confirmed.

Hypothesis two which states that undergraduates with low self esteem will perpetuate dating violence more than undergraduates with high self esteem was tested using t test for independent samples. The result is presented in Table 2.

Hypothesis two which states that gender and self esteem will jointly have significant influence on dating violence behaviour among undergraduates was tested using 2x2 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), however, the result was not significant [ $F(1, 1001) = 2.656; p > .05$ ].

**Table2: ANOVA showing the main and interaction influence of gender differences and self esteem on dating violence**

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Pp
Self esteem (A)	1009.921	1	1009.921	9.779	<.05
Gender (B)	3974.561	1	3974.561	38484	<.05
A * B	274.347	1	274.347	2.656	>.05
Error	103070.538	998	103.277		
Corrected Total	109296.906	1001			

Note:  $p \leq .05$  (this means the calculated value is greater than or equal the table value) hence significant.  $p \geq .05$  (this means the calculated value is greater than or equal the table value) hence not significant.

The result in table 4 shows that there were significant main influences of gender and self esteem on dating violence perpetuation [ $F(1, 1001) = 9.779; p < .005$ ;  $F(1, 1001) = 38.484; p < .051$ ]. These main influences were revealed by the significances in mean scores where male undergraduates had a higher mean score than female participants in their perpetuation of dating violence and undergraduates with low self esteem had a higher mean score than undergraduates with high self esteem in their perpetuation of dating violence. However, the interaction

influence of gender and self esteem on dating violence perpetuation was not significant [ $F(1, 1001) = 2.656$ ;  $p > .05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

This section discusses the results of the hypotheses tested in this study. Conclusions are drawn, some useful recommendations are offered and the implications of the study highlighted. The first hypothesis which states that males will perpetuate dating violence more than their female counterparts was significant and thus accepted.

Research findings show inconsistencies with findings of Hendy et.al (2003) who found that women have higher rates of dating violence perpetuation than men. Furthermore, Dekeseredy & Kelly (1993) found that 17.2% of male university compared with 43.3% of female students reported using physical violence against their dating partners. This significance can be explained where males see themselves as being stronger than females, and use this medium to suppress females when they are in a dating relationship.

The second hypothesis which states that gender and with self esteem will jointly have significant influence on dating violence behaviour among undergraduates was also accepted. This finding is consistent with O'Keefe (2005), study which reported that low self esteem correlates with dating violence perpetuation. An explanation for this significance is that perpetrators of dating violence have a poor self image, and victimize others to make themselves feel better or more powerful. Furthermore, the use of violence could be adjudged to be compensatory of the defective personality of those with low self esteem.

On gender variables, finding is not consistent with the findings of O'Keefe, (1997) who found that males with low self esteem are more likely to initiate violence in their dating relationship because males want to defend their image. The two independent variables impact on dating violence differently, given the significant results obtained, however, the mean differences obtained could not account for significant interactions between the variables to account for dating violence. Researchers have expressed mixed opinions on the perpetuation of dating violence and gender (Lewis and Fremouw,2000).While some studies points at men and women perpetuating dating violence at almost the same rate( Straus,2004).Other scholars reported that women displayed higher rates of dating violence than men( Harned,2002).And there are studies that showed that the male partners are more violence than the females( Hendy, Weiner, Bakerof , Eggen, Gustitus and McLeod,2003).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study findings revealed that gender had a significant influence on dating violence perpetuation. Self esteem was also found to have significantly influenced dating violence perpetuation among the study participants. The reasons being that, the males view themselves as being stronger and more superior to females. Also, individuals with low self esteem exhibit poor self image and may be tempted to perpetuate dating violence to make for their perceived inadequacies and feel better. Further studies should pay attention to factors such as age, education attainment, parenting style, parent's attitude, peer influence, social vices, personality type, socio-economic status etc. as potential precursors to dating violence.

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are put forward as our moderate attempt to offer solution to substantive issues examined in this study:

It is important to educate students' early on early signs and risk factors of violence in relationship. School counselors, parents, and other educators need to put in place proactive measures such as sexuality education to raise awareness in schools and communities regarding safe dating practices and other sexuality related issues.

Parents and teachers should expose their wards to some life-skills that could assist in boosting their self esteem. Anger management skills should be cultivated in children at very tender age to enhance anger-moderated personality. Parents, teachers and other care givers should improve on the level of confidence between them and their wards, this will encouraged them to report dating violence experiences and other sexual abuse in time for early intervention.

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