

**UNDERGRADUATES' PERCEPTION OF CAUSES AND PREVENTION  
OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AMONG STUDENTS OF NNAMDI  
AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA, ANAMBRA STATE**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The study aimed at determining the undergraduates' perception of causes and preventive measures of family violence. Prevention of violence in the family aimed at promoting social health of the family members. Three research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey design was used and a sample size of 315 undergraduates was obtained using simple random sampling technique. Instrument for data collection was a 44-item questions structured validated questionnaire which was of modified likert-type of four-point rating scale. After administration of instrument, 300 copies were returned, correctly filled and same were used for analysis. The criterion mean of 2.5 was adopted. The study revealed some perceived causes and preventive measures for family violence by undergraduates. Based on the results, some recommendations were made, which if strictly followed can go a long way to prevent family violence and promote social health.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In a world where even ordinary stress on the job or at school can seem battering at times, and outside influences are in constant flux, home and family are expected to remain steady. Humans are very social beings; all of our essential needs are dependent in some way on relationships (Vision, 2011). Family violence is a social problem and majority of family violence takes place in the privacy of the home, and only a small percentage of occurrences are reported. And these tend to be the most tragic incidents that is, those that result in serious injury or death. Family violence is a situation in which one family member causes physical or emotional harm to another family member due to the abuser's need to gain power, dominion and control over the victim (Cleveland Clinic, 2011). Family violence also known as domestic violence, domestic abuse, spousal abuse and intimate partner violence, has been broadly defined as a pattern of abusive behaviours by one or both partners in an intimate relationship such as marriage, dating, family, friends or cohabitation (Wikipedia, 2001). Domestic violence can happen to anyone regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion or gender.

However, awareness, perception, definition and documentation of domestic/

family violence differ widely from country to country and from era to era. Wikipedia (2011) stated that according to some studies, less than 1 percent of family violence cases are reported to the police. And according to the Centers for Disease Control, family violence is a serious, preventable public health problem affecting more than 25 million American Woman. Also family violence has many forms, including physical aggression (hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, pushing, restraining, slapping, punching, throwing objects), or threats thereof; sexual abuse; emotional abuse, controlling or domineering; intimidation, stalking, passive/covert abuse (e.g. neglect), isolation and economic deprivation (Wikipedia, 2011). Causes of family violence include drugs and alcohol; money and health; media influence; power (due to low self - esteem, hostilities, stress or other reasons) (Byrne, 2011). According to All About Life Challenges (2011), causes of family violence include the continuation of a generational cycle of abuse and/or a history of abuse in the family of origin, an environment where violence is either taught by example; or accepted as "normal" will imprint upon a child's psyche; poor self-esteem; experience of loss of physical health and/or wage-earning power; absence of what the Bible refers to as living peaceably with all men. Family violence also results from the

need for one partner to control and dominate the other; because of extreme jealousy, difficulties in regulating anger and other strong emotions, or when they feel inferior to the other partner in education and socio economic background (Goldsmith, 2006). Factors related to an increased intimate – partner violence are cohabitation, lower socio-economic status, cultural attitudes condoning male violence against women, exposure to parental violence; failure to learn effective problem-solving and anger-management strategies in childhood; and marital dissatisfaction (Vision, 2011). The cycle of abuse: Abuse follows a cycle that has three stages viz: Stage one - Tensions build; stage two - abuse takes place and stage three - abuser feels remorse. (Cleveland Clinic, 2011).

The aim of family violence prevention is to reduce the death and disability associated with violence. Family violence can be prevented by so many ways which include: both partners must ensure they really want to be married; they must be mature enough to live together; they must take time to be intimate enough; learn how to argue; do not lie to each other; strike a comfortable balance between living as separate individuals and as a couple; practice civility; avoid dumping your unresolved emotions on your partner

indiscriminately (Christine, 2010 in Nwankwo, 2011). The couple should regularly organize family prayers, family meetings and reviews; they should struggle together to meet the needs of the entire family; fairness and justice to each other and to every member of the family; and the couple should learn to use words such as “I am sorry”, “ thank you”, and so forth (Nworie, 2002 in Nwankwo, 2011). According to Ezedioha (2002), intimate-partner violence can be prevented by marriage out of love; shun adultery; be faithful to each other; forgiveness is necessary; be hard working; do not be lazy; and react modestly on negative issues and so on.

According to Department of Planning and Community Development (2010), the Victorian Government since 2005 has invested over \$175 million in connection to A Right to Respect, Right to Justice and Safety and the Sexual Assault Reform Strategy. This aims at preventing violence against women by challenging its underlying causes and it sets out short, medium and long term measures to influence social norms, promote community leadership and embed a culture of equal and respectful relationships between men and women. Early efforts to promote healthy, respectful dating relationships are more likely to prevent dating violence before the problem begins and teen

dating violence requires a co-ordinated and comprehensive community response to stop it before it starts (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2011).

Moreover, the Violence Intervention Programme (VIP) supports health sector family violence programmes (Ministry of Health Manatu Hauora, 2011). There are many community organizations which work to prevent domestic violence by offering safe shelter, crisis intervention, advocacy, and education and prevention programs (Wikipedia, 2001). Counseling for person affected is very important especially for safety planning/strategies like avoiding confrontations in rooms where there is only one exit and avoiding certain rooms that contain many potential weapons, also counseling for offenders is important too (Wikipedia, 2011). Undergraduate refers to a university or college student who is studying for his/her first degree (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2005). The perception of undergraduates of causes and prevention of family violence is considered because All About Life Challenges (2011) stated that children who grow up in an environment where control is maintained through verbal threats and intimidation and conflicts escalate into physical violence, are more likely to resort to the same methods of abuse as adults. The undergraduates are our

future adults and they engage in dating and intimate relationships. Goldsmith (2006) opined that children who witness or are the victims of violence may learn to believe that violence is a reasonable way to resolve conflict between people. Boys who learn that women are not to be valued or respected and who see violence directed against women are more likely to abuse women when they grow up. Girls who witness domestic violence in their families of origin are more likely to be victimized by their own husbands.

According to Cleveland Clinic (2011) facts about family violence include: family violence occurs in all social and cultural groups; abuse is a form of control; many abusers show no signs of violent behaviour when out of the home; many abusers do not drink alcohol or use drugs, people who drink abuse both when they are drunk and when they are not drunk; and finally the abusers and victim often share times of happiness. Murray (2009) conducted a research on violence between parents: prevalence, severity, chronicity and mutuality using male and female university students. The result showed that from a sample of 1,313 university students , thirteen (13) per cent of them recalled one or more instances by physical violence between their parents when they were age 10 or 13, including six per cent who

reported a severe assault. In about half the cases violence was chronic rather than a single isolated instance. In two thirds of the cases the violence was mutual.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Health is multidimensional encompassing physical, social, emotional, spiritual, environmental, occupational and mental aspects. Social health involves good relationships with others, a supportive culture and successful adaptation to environment. Family violence is a challenge to social health promotion especially in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Family violence is a significant public health problem worldwide. It can lead to death and permanent physical and emotional scars. It can erode communities by reducing productivity, decreasing property values, decreased population, and disrupting social services (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2008). Family violence can occur in mixed gender relationship and same gender relationships and has profound consequences for the lives of children, individuals, families and communities (Wikipedia, 2001). Undergraduates are our future adults and they engage in dating and intimate relationships hence there is great need to ascertain their perception of causes and prevention of family violence. From literature,

studies are scarce in perception of causes and prevention of family violence among undergraduates, this study seeks to fill up this gap.

### **The Purpose**

The purpose of the study is to determine the undergraduates' perception of causes and prevention of family violence in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Anambra State, Nigeria. Specifically it tends to find out:

1. the undergraduates' perception of family violence.
2. the undergraduates' perceived major causes of family violence.
3. the undergraduates' perceived preventive measures for family violence

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the undergraduates' perception of family violence?
2. What are the undergraduates' perceived major causes of family violence?
3. What are the undergraduates' perceived preventive measures for family violence?

### **Method**

The study, which is delimited to family violence adopted a descriptive survey design, was carried out among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in

Anambra State. Based on the principle of simple random sampling technique, a sample size of 315 undergraduates were selected from Awka campus , Nnewi Campus and Agulu Campus of the university (190, 85 & 40 respectively). A 44-item-questions structured validated questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire was of the modified likert-type of four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The items in the questionnaire were scored 4, 3, 2 and 1, for SA, A, D and SD respectively. The data were analyzed using means, frequency and percentages. The criterion mean of 2.5 was adopted. In analyzing the data where the mean of any variable is equal or greater than 2.5 such an item is Agreed (A), while variables whose mean scores fall below 2.5 were Disagreed (D). Only 300 copies of the questionnaire were correctly filled and returned and were used (Awka=180, Nnewi=80 & Agulu=40).

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Respondents' Perception of Family Violence**

**N = 300**

SN	OPTIONS	RESPONSES				Total	$\bar{X}$	Decision
		SA	A	D	SD			
1.	Family violence is an abuse in a form of control	320	381	112	37	850	2.83	A
2.	Family violence is a normal activity in all social and cultural groups	496	300	140	6	942	3.14	A
3.	Family violence is a pattern of abusive behaviour by one or both partners in an intimate relationship such as marriage, dating, family, friends, or co-habitation	592	396	24	8	1020	3.40	A
4.	Abuse happens when the abuser is out of control.	48	66	96	218	428	1.42	D
5.	Abusers are drunks	248	453	92	41	834	2.78	A

**Table 2: Respondents' Perception of Major Causes of Violence.**

**N = 300**

**RESPONSES**

S/N	OPTIONS	SA	A	D	SD	Total	X	Decision
6.	Poor self-esteem	8	36	172	200	416	1.38	D
7.	Drug and/or alcohol use	584	402	22	9	1017	3.39	A
8.	Financial problem	608	390	18	9	1025	3.41	A
9.	Extreme jealousy	304	393	100	86	883	2.94	A
10.	Difficulties in regulating anger and other strong emotions	32	36	56	252	376	1.25	D
11.	Poor educational background / low educational level	16	18	98	241	373	1.24	D
12.	Cohabitation	8	9	90	250	357	1.19	D
13.	Cultural attitudes condoning male violence against women	552	426	22	9	1009	3.36	A
14.	Exposure to parental violence.	24	36	64	250	374	1.24	D
15.	Failure to learn effective problem solving and anger management strategies in childhood	4	12	40	275	331	1.10	D
16.	Marital dissatisfaction	392	522	32	12	958	3.19	A
17.	Media influence (TV, Movies, music)	32	36	56	252	376	1.25	D
18.	Ill-health (mental illness, deteriorating health)	288	426	94	39	847	2.82	A
19.	Adultery	552	426	22	9	1009	3.36	A

**Table 3: Respondents' Perception of Preventive Measures for Family Violence**

N=300

S/N	OPTIONS	RESPONSES				Total	$\bar{X}$	Decision
		SA	A	D	SD			
20.	Formal reporting of any case of family violence to police	584	402	22	9	1017	3.39	A
21.	Living peaceably with all men	608	390	18	9	1025	3.41	A
22.	Practice civility (Treat each other with same courtesy and respect)	288	426	94	39	847	2.82	A
23.	Do not dump your unresolved emotions on your partner indiscriminately.	66	48	218	96	428	1.42	D
24.	The couple should regularly organize family prayers family meetings and reviews.	248	453	92	41	834	2.78	A
25.	Shun adultery	304	393	100	86	883	2.94	A
26.	Fairness and justice to each other and to every member of the family	200	171	8	37	416	1.39	D
27.	Learn to forgive each other	496	300	140	6	946	3.15	A
28.	React modestly to negative issues	220	96	66	46	428	1.42	D
29.	Do not be lazy, get something doing to support the family	380	321	36	113	850	2.83	A
30.	Early efforts to promote healthy, respectful dating relationships	216	66	96	50	428	1.42	D
31.	Shun culture that condone family violence and adopt a culture of equal and respectful relationship between men and women	452	249	40	93	834	2.78	A
32.	Avoid excessive alcohol intake and substance abuse	392	306	90	95	883	2.94	A
33.	Good self-concept/self-esteem	20	15	96	242	373	1.24	D
34.	Be assertive	36	33	56	251	376	1.25	D
35.	Education and prevention programs	400	543	22	44	1009	3.36	A
36.	Advocacy	520	396	32	10	958	3.19	A
37.	Crisis intervention	300	495	140	7	946	3.15	A
38.	Right to respect	392	303	100	88	883	2.94	A
39.	Right to safety and justice	420	249	92	73	834	2.78	A
40.	Family violence protection act	36	90	56	194	376	1.25	D
41.	High level of education	16	12	140	163	331	1.10	D
42.	Couple counseling	360	381	72	37	850	2.83	A
43.	Avoid confrontations especially in rooms where there is only one exit.	80	36	172	128	416	1.38	D
44.	Women empowerment.	588	396	24	12	1020	3.40	A

**Table 1** revealed that perception of respondents about family violence include items numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4. From **table 2**, respondents' perception of major causes of family violence include items numbers 7, 8, 9, 13, 18 and 19. From **table 3**, respondents' perception of preventive measures for family violence include item numbers 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 29, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 42, and 44.

### **Discussion**

Assessing the causes and preventive measures for family violence is very essential in every setting because family violence imposes great challenges to promotion of social health of family members. Result of table 1 revealed that respondents perceived family violence as an abuse in a form of control; a normal activity in all social and cultural groups; a pattern of abusive behaviour by one or both partners in an intimate relationships such as marriage, dating, family, friends or cohabitation, and that abusers are drunks. The respondents disagreed that abuse happens when the abuser is out of control. These their responses were in agreement with Cleveland Clinic (2011) except for the option that abusers are drunks (it is myth and not a fact).

Table 2 revealed respondents' perceived causes of family violence to include

drug and / or alcohol use; financial problem, extreme jealous, cultural attitudes condoning male violence against women; marital dissatisfaction; ill-health (mental illness, deteriorating health), and adultery. These responses were in agreement with findings by Byrne (2006), All About Life Challenges (2011), Goldsmith (2006), and Vision (2011), The respondents disagreement with poor self-esteem, difficulties in regulating anger and other strong emotions, poor educational background/ low educational level, cohabitation, exposure to parental violence, failure to learn effective problem- solving and anger-management strategies in childhood, and media influence (TV, Movies, Music) contradicts findings by Vision (2011) and Goldsmith (2006). The researcher attributed these findings to the cultural prescriptions of families in Nigerian culture, where the father is always at the helms of affairs. He decides the number of wives to marry, how to control them and as well authoratively takes decisions which cannot be questioned by any member of the family.

Table 3 revealed the respondents' perceived preventive measures for family violence which include, formal reporting of any case of family violence to police. This supports the Wikipedia (2011) that only 1 percent of family violence cases are reported

to the police; living peaceably with all men. This finding is in agreement with statement by All About Life Challenges (2011) that family violence is absence of what the Bible refers to as living peaceably with men. Other preventive measures are practice civility, the couple should regularly organize family prayers, family meetings and reviews, shun adultery, learn to forgive each others, do not be lazy, shun culture that condone family violence and adopt a culture of equal and respectful relationships between men and women, avoid excessive alcohol intake and substance abuse, These findings are in support of the opinions of Christine (2010) in Nwankwo (2011), Nworie (2002) in Nwankwo (2011), and Ezedioha (2002). Also the respondents' agreement with measures such as education and prevention programme, advocacy, crisis intervention, right to respect, right to safety and justice, and couple counseling were in support of findings by Wikipedia (2001), Wikipedia (2011) and Department of Planning and Community Development (2010). The positive response to women empowerment supports the Millennium Development Goals 3(MDG3).

The respondents' disagreement with options such as do not dump your unresolved emotions on your partner

indiscriminately; fairness and justice to each other and to every member of the family; react modestly to negative issues; every efforts to promote healthy, respectful dating relationships; good self-concept/ self-esteem; be assertive; family violence prevention act; high level of education; and avoid confrontations especially in rooms where there is only one exit contradicts the results by Ezedioha (2002), Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2011) and Wikipedia (2011). The researcher was not comfortable with these disagreements because these measures are very vital in prevention of family violence and promotion of social health.

### **Summary**

Family Violence covers violence that occurs between current as well as former marital partners, separated marital partners, and current and former cohabiters or interpersonal violence among adults in a family setting called domestic violence, or marital abuse or spouse abuse. Prevention of this type of violence is essential because everyone has a right to feel safe within their family.

### **Conclusion**

From the study, it would be concluded that the respondents did not perceive some

items as causes and preventive measures for family violence. The above findings may be attributed to the students' belief that family violence is a normal activity in all social and cultural groups. Again it may be due to our the decision makers and

unresolved emotions on one's partner indiscriminately, reacting modestly to negative issues, and fairness and justice to each other so that they will be assertive enough.

Cleveland Clinic (2011). *Raising healthy infants, children and teens*. Retrieved September 6, 2011 from <http://my-clevelandclinic.org/healthy-living/violence/hic-family-violence.aspx>

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items as causes and preventive measures for family violence. The above findings may be attributed to the students' belief that family violence is a normal activity in all social and cultural groups. Again it may be due to our culture that men are the decision makers and have dominion over the women who are seen as weaker sex. Family violence is neither a new phenomenon, nor is it an uncommon one. And no society is immune to it, so all hands must be on deck to prevent it.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study and the discussion, the following recommendations are hereby made.

1. The undergraduates should be taught family health including family violence and family health promotion.
2. The undergraduates' perception that family violence is an abuse in a form of control, a normal activity in all social and cultural groups should be corrected.
3. The undergraduates should be made to understand other causes of family violence like poor self esteem, difficulties in regulating anger, poor educational level, and others.
4. The undergraduates should be well educated on the preventive measures for family violence like not dumping one's

unresolved emotions on one's partner indiscriminately, reacting modestly to negative issues, and fairness and justice to each other so that they will be assertive enough.

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