International Journal of Innovative Psychology & Social Development 14 (3):399-409, July-Sept, 2026

© SEAHI PUBLICATIONS, 2026 www.seahipublications.org ISSN: 2467-8546

DOI:10.5281/zenodo.22663970

Psychosocial Determinants Of Dating Violence Among Young Adults: Prevalence, Effects And The Role Of Counseling

Dr (Mrs) Patricia Ellah Okim Agbor[1] & Chidiebere Happiness Chukwuma[2]

Department of Guidance and Counselling-Educational Psychology
Faculty of Education
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
[1]patriciaagbor@ust.edu.ng
[2]Chidiebere.chukwuma1@ust.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Dating violence among young adults is a major psychosocial and public health concern with far-reaching implications for emotional well-being, academic functioning, and social development. This paper examined the psychosocial determinants, prevalence, effects, and the role of counselling in addressing dating violence among young people. The literature reviewed that dating violence is influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including family background and early exposure to violence, psychological vulnerabilities, peer influence, media and digital exposure, substance use, and gender-based cultural expectations. These factors interact to increase the likelihood of both victimization and perpetration within intimate relationships. The review further revealed that dating violence is increasingly prevalent among young adults, often manifesting in emotional, psychological, physical, sexual, and digital forms of abuse, with many cases remaining under reported due to stigma and lack of awareness. The effects were found to be multidimensional, affecting psychological health, academic performance, social relationships, behavioral adjustment, and long-term relational functioning. The paper also highlighted counselling as a critical intervention strategy, emphasizing preventive, individual, group, family, and institutional counselling approaches as effective means of reducing risk factors and promoting healthy relationships. It concluded that addressing dating violence requires a coordinated effort involving families, educational institutions, counsellors, and policymakers to foster safe and respectful relationship environments.

Keywords: dating violence, young adults, psychosocial determinants, counselling, mental health, intimate relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Healthy relationships constitute an essential foundation for human development, emotional stability, psychological adjustment, and overall social well-being. During young adulthood, individuals enter a critical developmental stage characterised by increasing independence, identity formation, emotional exploration, and the establishment of intimate relationships that often shape future family and social experiences. Romantic relationships at this stage serve important functions, including companionship,

emotional support, self-discovery, and the development of interpersonal competence. When nurtured in an atmosphere of respect, trust, communication, and mutual understanding, such relationships contribute positively to self-esteem, mental health, and healthy social integration. However, contemporary realities indicate that many young adults increasingly encounter unhealthy relationship dynamics that undermine these developmental outcomes (Oyebola et al., 2022). One growing concern attracting scholarly and public attention is dating violence, which has emerged as a significant psychosocial and public health issue among young adults in both developed and developing societies. Aigbodion and Duma (2022) argued that the growing visibility of violent behaviours within dating relationships and the influence of social and interpersonal factors in shaping such experiences.

Dating violence refers to a pattern of abusive behaviours occurring within a romantic relationship and involves the intentional use of power, intimidation, manipulation, or coercion by one partner to dominate or control another. These behaviours may manifest in physical assault, emotional humiliation, psychological intimidation, sexual coercion, digital surveillance, social isolation, threats, or economic restriction. Unlike occasional disagreement or normal relationship conflict, dating violence reflects persistent patterns of unequal power and harmful control that may leave long-lasting consequences for victims. Among young adults, such experiences are often overlooked or normalised due to peer influence, cultural expectations, fear of social judgement, emotional dependency, or misconceptions that possessiveness and control signify affection. Chime et al. (2022) explained that factors such as exposure to violence in childhood, peer socialisation, alcohol use, poor relationship education, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities increase the likelihood of experiencing dating violence among adolescents and young adults. These realities underscore the urgent need for preventive interventions, awareness creation, and counselling services that promote healthy relationship behaviours and emotional resilience among young people.

Healthy relationships are widely recognised as a cornerstone of human development, contributing significantly to emotional stability, psychological well-being, and social functioning across the life course. During young adulthood, individuals undergo a critical developmental transition marked by identity exploration, emotional independence, and the formation of intimate relationships that often shape future relational patterns and family life trajectories. At this stage, romantic relationships may provide emotional support, companionship, and opportunities to develop interpersonal competence and self-understanding. However, when such relationships become characterised by control, coercion, or abuse, they can undermine developmental progress and lead to significant psychological harm. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2021) noted that violence in intimate relationships is a major public health concern affecting mental health outcomes, particularly among adolescents and young adults who are still developing emotional regulation and coping capacities. Global evidence indicates that early exposure to unhealthy relationship dynamics increases the risk of long-term maladaptive relational behaviours in adulthood (Vagi et al., 2013).

Dating violence has therefore become an important global concern due to its wide-ranging consequences on mental health, academic functioning, social relationships, and long-term emotional development. Young adults are particularly vulnerable because this developmental stage is characterised by heightened emotional sensitivity, peer influence, social media exposure, and evolving societal expectations regarding gender roles and intimacy. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2023) reported that intimate partner violence among young people can result in depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, reduced academic achievement, and increased risk of future victimisation or perpetration if not addressed early. This issue also aligns with global development priorities, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 3, which promotes health and well-being by reducing violence-related harm; SDG 5, which targets the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence and harmful practices; and SDG 16, which seeks to build peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. In this regard, UN Women (2022) stresses that prevention-focused interventions, including education, empowerment, and psychosocial support, are essential for addressing the root causes of violence in intimate relationships and promoting safe, equitable partnerships among young people.

Despite increasing awareness of interpersonal violence, dating violence among young adults continues to be a persistent and growing psychosocial problem with significant implications for mental health, academic performance, and social development. Many young adults engage in or remain in abusive romantic relationships without fully recognising the severity of emotional, physical, sexual, or digital forms of abuse, often due to psychological vulnerabilities, family background influences, peer pressure, substance use, and distorted social norms surrounding relationships. In many cases, these psychosocial determinants interact in complex ways, making both prevention and intervention difficult. Furthermore, the prevalence of dating violence appears to be increasing within educational and social settings, yet it remains underreported due to fear, stigma, and lack of adequate support systems. Although counselling services are known to play a crucial role in prevention and rehabilitation, there is still insufficient empirical clarity on how effectively counselling addresses the underlying psychosocial factors driving dating violence among young adults. This situation creates a gap in knowledge regarding the prevalence, effects, and therapeutic responses to dating violence, thereby necessitating a systematic investigation into its psychosocial determinants and the role of counselling in mitigating its impact.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dating Violence

Nwamadi and John (2022) defined dating violence as 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. Oyebola et al. (2024) defined dating violence as a pattern of abusive behaviours perpetrated by one partner against another within a dating or intimate relationship with the intention of gaining power, control, or dominance. It encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, verbal, digital, and economic forms of abuse that may occur in casual, steady, or long-term romantic relationships. Unlike isolated disagreements or conflicts, dating violence is characterised by repeated acts of intimidation, coercion, manipulation, threats, and aggression that undermine the victim's safety, autonomy, and psychological well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2021) described intimate partner violence as behaviour that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm within an intimate relationship, a definition that extends to dating relationships among unmarried young people. Dating violence has become an increasing public health and social concern due to its adverse consequences on the emotional, academic, and social functioning of young adults.

Dating violence is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by interacting psychological and social factors, including poor emotional regulation, childhood exposure to violence, substance use, peer pressure, low self-esteem, and ineffective conflict management. Victims of dating violence often experience anxiety, depression, fear, diminished self-worth, social isolation, poor academic performance, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress, while perpetrators may continue patterns of aggression into future intimate relationships if appropriate interventions are not provided (Betron et al., 2025). Consequently, professional counselling plays a crucial role in preventing dating violence by promoting healthy relationship values, improving communication and emotional regulation skills, challenging maladaptive beliefs that justify abuse, and providing therapeutic support for both victims and perpetrators. Counselling also empowers young adults to recognise warning signs of abusive relationships, establish healthy boundaries, and develop constructive strategies for resolving interpersonal conflicts (Azuji & Ofojebe, 2025).

Dating Violence
Among Young Adults

Dating violence involves intentional behaviours designed to control, manipulate, intimidate, or harm a dating partner. It extends beyond visible physical abuse to include emotional humiliation, verbal aggression, sexual coercion, stalking, social isolation, threats, and digital harassment through communication technologies. 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 among youths has increasingly attracted scholarly attention as a significant psychosocial and public health concern due to its growing prevalence and adverse consequences on emotional, social, and developmental outcomes. Although youthful romantic relationships are expected to promote emotional support, identity development, and interpersonal competence, evidence suggests that many young people experience unhealthy relationship patterns characterised by abuse, coercion, and control. Dating violence has been defined from different scholarly perspectives. Oyebola et al. (2022) conceptualised dating violence as abusive behaviours occurring within a romantic relationship that expose adolescents and young adults to physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological harm and are often influenced by social and environmental factors. Similarly, Aigbodion and Duma (2022) defined dating violence as a public health problem involving behaviours intended to dominate, manipulate, threaten, or inflict harm on a dating partner, with severe implications for social, psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being.

From a behavioural perspective, Ifeoma et al. (2021) explained dating violence as patterns of aggression and coercive conduct occurring within adolescent relationships that are reinforced by social learning processes, exposure to violence, and environmental influences. These definitions collectively suggest that dating violence extends beyond physical assault and includes emotional abuse, verbal hostility, sexual coercion, intimidation, digital surveillance, and controlling behaviours that undermine the dignity and autonomy of the victim. Among youths, the phenomenon has become increasingly concerning because of developmental vulnerabilities associated with identity formation, emotional dependence, peer influence, media exposure, and inadequate relationship education. Nwamadi and John (2022) observedthat many young people lack structured guidance on healthy relationships and are often introduced to dating practices through peers rather than family or educational institutions, thereby increasing susceptibility to violent relationship experiences. Existing evidence further associates dating violence among youths with exposure to family violence, childhood adversity, substance use, economic vulnerability, and social norms that normalise aggressive relationship behaviours.

Ifeoma et al. (2021) argued that dating violence among youths should not be viewed merely as an interpersonal issue but as a broader developmental and social challenge requiring counselling interventions, preventive education, and supportive institutional responses to promote healthier relationship outcomes among young people. Young adults may fail to recognise abusive behaviours because certain harmful patterns are normalised through social influences, media portrayals, peer expectations, and cultural beliefs. Consequently, many victims remain in unhealthy relationships due to emotional attachment, fear of social judgment, dependency, or inadequate support systems.

1. Psychosocial Determinants of Dating Violence

Dating violence among youths is influenced by several psychosocial factors that shape attitudes, behaviours, and patterns of interaction within romantic relationships. The major determinants of dating violence among youths include the following. .Family Background and Early Exposure to Violence: Family background and early exposure to violence is one of the strongest psychosocial determinants of dating violence among youths because the family serves as the earliest environment for social learning and behavioural formation. Family background refers to the emotional, relational, and social conditions under which an individual is raised, while early exposure to violence involves witnessing or experiencing physical, emotional, verbal, or psychological aggression during childhood and adolescence. According to Adebayo and Kolawole (2021), young people who grow up in homes characterized by conflict, domestic violence, harsh parenting, neglect, or inconsistent discipline may internalize aggression as a normal means of expressing affection, resolving conflict, or maintaining control within relationships. Through observational learning, youths may unconsciously reproduce abusive patterns in their own romantic relationships or become more tolerant of victimization. Nigerian evidence further suggests that exposure to hostile family environments weakens emotional regulation and increases the likelihood of both perpetration and acceptance of dating violence among young adults.

2. Psychological Factors:
Psychological factors refer to internal emotional, cognitive, and personality-related conditions that influence behaviour and interpersonal interactions. These factors include low self-esteem, emotional instability, anxiety, depression, insecurity, poor impulse control, unresolved childhood trauma, jealousy, fear of abandonment, and ineffective coping strategies. Psychological vulnerabilities may increase susceptibility to unhealthy relationship dynamics because affected youths often struggle to establish boundaries, regulate emotions, or respond appropriately to conflict. Umeh and Nwosu (2022) argued that youths with poor emotional adjustment are more likely to display controlling tendencies, emotional dependency, or aggressive reactions during disagreements. Conversely, individuals with diminished self-worth may remain in abusive relationships due to fear of rejection or feelings of inadequacy. Consequently, psychological functioning significantly shapes how young people perceive intimacy, respond to relational stress, and manage interpersonal disagreements. 3. Peer Influence and Social Norms: Peer influence and social norms constitute another important determinant of dating violence among youths because adolescence and young adulthood are developmental periods strongly shaped by social acceptance and group expectations. Peer influence refers to the effect that friends and social groups exert on individual attitudes and behaviour. In contrast, social norms represent shared expectations regarding acceptable conduct within a community or social setting. Odukoya (2023) explained that youths often model relationship behaviours observed within peer groups, especially where aggression, possessiveness, dominance, and emotional manipulation are normalised. In some settings, controlling behaviours may be incorrectly interpreted as evidence of affection or commitment, leading victims to tolerate abuse and perpetrators to justify violent conduct. The desire for social approval and fear of exclusion may therefore discourage help-seeking and reinforce unhealthy relationship practices.

4. Media and Digital Influence:
Media and digital influence refer to the role of traditional media platforms and digital technologies in shaping beliefs, attitudes, and behavioural patterns among youths. Contemporary youths increasingly interact through social networking sites, messaging platforms, streaming services, and digital entertainment, all of which influence perceptions of intimacy and acceptable relationship conduct. Chukwu and Akinwale (2022) noted that repeated exposure to media content that glorifies jealousy, dominance, emotional manipulation, or aggressive masculinity may gradually normalise abusive relationship behaviours. In addition, digital environments have introduced newer forms of dating violence such as cyberstalking, online harassment, coercive monitoring, revenge sharing of private information, and excessive digital surveillance. These practices may intensify emotional distress and create constant opportunities for control and intimidation within romantic relationships.

5. Substance Use and Risk Behaviour:
Substance use and risk behaviour have consistently been identified as major contributors to dating violence among youths. Substance use involves the consumption of alcohol and psychoactive substances, while risk behaviour includes impulsive actions that expose individuals to harmful outcomes. These behaviours often impair judgement, reduce self-control, and increase emotional reactivity, thereby heightening the possibility of conflict and violence in intimate relationships. Nwankwo and Ezeh (2021) stated that alcohol and substance misuse among youths are associated with increased aggression, poor decision-making, and diminished ability to resolve disagreements constructively. Young people under the influence of substances may misinterpret social cues, engage in coercive behaviour, or become more vulnerable to victimisation. Persistent involvement in risky behaviours also limits healthy communication and increases exposure to unstable relationship environments.

6. Gender and Cultural Expectations:
Gender and cultural expectations refer to socially constructed beliefs regarding the roles, responsibilities, and acceptable behaviours of males and females within society. Cultural beliefs and traditional gender norms shape how youths interpret authority, emotional expression, conflict, and power within romantic relationships. In some contexts, dominant masculinity norms may encourage control, emotional suppression, and aggressive behaviour, while submissive gender expectations may discourage victims from reporting abuse or leaving harmful relationships. Olatunji and Ibrahim (2023) observed that rigid

cultural beliefs regarding male authority and female obedience may reinforce unequal power structures and contribute to the normalisation of dating violence. Among youths, these expectations may distort perceptions of love and commitment, making controlling or abusive behaviours appear socially acceptable. Addressing such beliefs through counselling, relationship education, and social reorientation is therefore essential for reducing dating violence and promoting healthier interpersonal relationships.

Prevalence of Dating Violence Among Young Adults

The prevalence of dating violence among young adults has become an increasing concern in contemporary literature due to its widespread occurrence and implications for emotional, social, and developmental well-being. Dating violence is one of the common experience among young people engaged in romantic relationships and includes physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and digital forms of abuse. Ojo (2022) argued that a substantial proportion of young adults experience one or more forms of violence within dating relationships, although many cases remain hidden because victims often perceive abusive behaviours as normal expressions of affection, commitment, or relationship conflict. Emerging evidence suggests that emotional and psychological forms of dating violence occur more frequently than physical violence and are often associated with factors such as poor family relationships, substance use, peer pressure, socioeconomic stress, and inadequate relationship education (Umeh & Nwosu, 2022).

Oyebola et al. (2022), in a study conducted among adolescents and young adults in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, reported a considerable occurrence of dating violence and identified emotional abuse and controlling behaviours as dominant patterns within youthful relationships. Aigbodion and Duma (2022) observed that experiences of dating violence among female university students reflected both interpersonal and contextual influences that increased vulnerability to abuse. In another Adebayo and Ojo (2023) found that exposure to unhealthy social environments and weak support systems contributed significantly to the persistence of violent relationship behaviour among undergraduates. These findings suggest that dating violence among young adults is not an isolated phenomenon but a growing social and psychosocial challenge that requires sustained counselling intervention, awareness creation, and relationship education to reduce its prevalence and promote healthy interpersonal relationships. The widespread occurrence of dating violence demonstrates that this issue is not merely an individual problem but a societal concern requiring preventive education and psychosocial intervention.

Effects of Dating Violence

Dating violence among youths produces a wide range of negative outcomes that cut across emotional, academic, social, behavioral, and long-term developmental domains. These effects not only disrupt the immediate well-being of young people but also influence their future relationships, mental health, and overall life adjustment.

The major effects of dating violence among youths are therefore outlined as follows:

1. **Psychological Effects:**

Dating violence among youths has profound psychological consequences that significantly affect emotional stability and mental health. Victims often experience anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, post-traumatic stress symptoms, fear, and emotional insecurity as a result of sustained abuse within intimate relationships. These psychological outcomes are largely driven by continuous exposure to control, intimidation, and humiliation, which erode a young person's sense of self-worth and emotional safety. The World Health Organization (2021) stressed that intimate partner violence is strongly associated with long-term mental health disorders, particularly among adolescents and young adults who are still in the process of identity formation and emotional development.

2. **Academic and Occupational Effects:**

Dating violence also negatively affects academic performance and occupational functioning among youths. Victims often struggle with concentration, reduced academic motivation, absenteeism, and poor classroom participation due to emotional distress and trauma-related symptoms. In severe cases, students may withdraw from school activities or experience declining academic achievement. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2023) noted that young people exposed to dating violence are at

higher risk of reduced educational attainment and diminished career prospects, as psychological distress interferes with learning and productivity

3. **Social Effects:**

Socially, dating violence can lead to isolation, mistrust, and difficulties in forming healthy interpersonal relationships. Victims may withdraw from friends and family due to shame, fear, or controlling behaviours imposed by the abusive partner. This often results in reduced social support networks, which further worsens emotional vulnerability. Vagi et al. (2013) observed that adolescents exposed to dating violence frequently experience impaired social functioning and difficulties in establishing stable, supportive relationships in later life.

4. **Behavioural Effects:**

Behaviourally, dating violence may contribute to harmful coping strategies such as substance abuse, aggression, self-harm, or risk-taking behaviours. Some victims may also develop maladaptive responses, including emotional withdrawal or retaliatory aggression. These behaviours often arise as attempts to manage emotional pain or regain a sense of control. Black et al. (2011) explained that exposure to intimate partner violence among young people is associated with increased engagement in risky behaviours, including alcohol misuse and violent conduct.

5. **Long-Term Effects:**

The long-term effects of dating violence can extend into adulthood, affecting future relationships, mental health, and overall life satisfaction. Victims may develop patterns of mistrust, fear of intimacy, or repeated involvement in abusive relationships due to unresolved trauma and distorted perceptions of healthy relationships. Long-term exposure may also increase the risk of chronic mental health conditions such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. The World Health Organization (2021) emphasises that early exposure to intimate partner violence significantly increases the likelihood of revictimisation and long-term psychological impairment if not properly addressed.

Counselling

Counselling is a professional helping relationship through which trained counsellors assist individuals to understand themselves, manage personal and interpersonal difficulties, make informed decisions, and develop healthier patterns of behaviour. It is founded on empathy, acceptance, confidentiality, and purposeful communication that enables clients to explore their thoughts, emotions, and experiences in a safe and non-judgemental environment (Lasisi & Ibraheem, 2024). Contemporary counselling has evolved beyond problem-solving to promoting psychological well-being, emotional resilience, healthy relationships, and positive social adjustment among individuals across the lifespan. In Nigeria, counselling is increasingly recognised as an indispensable intervention for addressing emerging psychosocial challenges among young people, including violence, substance abuse, depression, and maladaptive relationship behaviours (Azuji & Ofojebe, 2025). Evidence-based counselling approaches such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), and psychoeducational interventions are effective in reducing harmful behaviours, strengthening emotional regulation, and equipping young adults with the life skills required for healthy interpersonal relationships (Fashina et al., 2023; Betron et al. (2025)).

Counselling provides a practical framework for preventing dating violence and addressing the psychosocial conditions that predispose young adults to abusive intimate relationships. Young adults who experience adverse psychosocial conditions such as poor emotional regulation, family conflict, peer pressure, low self-esteem, substance use, or exposure to violence are more vulnerable to becoming victims or perpetrators of dating violence (Oyebola et al., 2024). Professional counselling addresses these underlying risk factors through relationship education, anger management, emotional regulation training, conflict resolution, cognitive restructuring, and self-esteem enhancement, thereby promoting healthier relationship patterns (Fashina et al., 2023). Counsellors also assist victims in recognising abusive behaviours, rebuilding self-worth, developing safety plans, and accessing appropriate social support, while helping perpetrators challenge distorted beliefs, accept responsibility for their actions, and adopt non-violent behaviours (Betron et al., 2025). It is important to integrate counselling services into schools,

universities, healthcare facilities, and community-based programmes for reducing the prevalence and adverse effects of dating violence among young adults in Nigeria.

Young Adult

Young adults are individuals who are in the transitional stage between adolescence and full adulthood, typically characterised by significant physical, psychological, emotional, and social development. Although there is no universal age range, young adulthood is commonly defined as spanning 18 to 35 years in many African and Nigerian studies, while some international organisations define it as 18 to 24 years or 15 to 24 years, depending on the context (United Nations, 2022). This developmental period is marked by increasing independence, identity exploration, establishment of intimate relationships, career development, and assumption of adult responsibilities.

Young adults represent a population particularly vulnerable to dating violence because they are actively forming romantic relationships while navigating emotional, social, and economic transitions. During this stage, factors such as peer influence, poor emotional regulation, low self-esteem, substance use, family experiences, and exposure to violence may shape relationship behaviours and increase the likelihood of experiencing or perpetrating dating violence (Oyebola et al., 2024). However, this period also presents an opportunity for preventive interventions, as counselling can help young adults develop healthy relationship skills, effective communication, emotional resilience, conflict resolution strategies, and respect for personal boundaries, thereby reducing the risk of abusive intimate relationships (Fashina et al., 2023).

The Role of Counselling

Through different counselling approaches, individuals, families, and institutions are empowered to recognise early warning signs of violence, develop coping skills, and build respectful interpersonal relationships. The roles of counselling in addressing dating violence are explained below:

1. Preventive Counselling

Preventive counselling focuses on equipping young people with the knowledge and skills needed to avoid involvement in abusive relationships before they occur. It involves relationship education, emotional intelligence training, assertiveness skills, and awareness programmes that help youths identify unhealthy behaviours such as control, jealousy, and coercion. According to the World Health Organization (2021), early prevention strategies that strengthen life skills and promote respectful relationships are essential in reducing intimate partner violence among adolescents and young adults. This form of counselling helps youths develop self-awareness and make informed relationship choices.

2. Individual Counselling

Individual counselling provides a confidential and supportive environment where victims or perpetrators of dating violence can explore their experiences, emotions, and behavioural patterns. It helps victims recover from trauma, rebuild self-esteem, and develop emotional resilience, while also assisting perpetrators in recognising harmful behaviours and learning healthier ways of relating. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2022) emphasises that individual therapeutic intervention is effective in addressing trauma-related symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress, which are common among victims of relationship violence.

3. Group Counselling

Group counselling brings together individuals with shared experiences of dating violence to promote healing through peer support and shared understanding. It provides a safe space for participants to express feelings, learn from others, and reduce feelings of isolation and shame. Through guided discussions, participants develop new coping strategies and interpersonal skills. Research indicates that group-based interventions enhance emotional recovery and foster a sense of belonging, which is essential for rebuilding trust and confidence after abusive experiences.

4. Family Counselling

Family counselling addresses underlying family dynamics that may contribute to dating violence, such as poor communication, domestic conflict, or lack of emotional support. It aims to strengthen family

relationships, improve communication patterns, and create a supportive home environment for young people. Family-based interventions are effective in reducing behavioural risks among adolescents by promoting emotional stability and healthier relational modelling within the home.

5. Institutional and School-Based Counselling

Institutional and school-based counselling provides structured support systems within educational settings where many young people can be reached effectively. These programmes include awareness campaigns, relationship education, guidance services, and early intervention strategies designed to identify and address dating violence. Schools serve as critical environments for prevention because they allow counsellors to reach youths during formative developmental stages. UNESCO (2020) emphasises that school-based psychosocial support systems are essential in promoting safe learning environments and reducing gender-based and interpersonal violence among studen

POSITION STATEMENT

This paper posits that dating violence among young adults is a serious psychosocial issue influenced by family experiences, psychological conditions, social pressures, cultural
expectations, and environmental factors. Its effects are extensive and can hinder healthy personal and societal development. Counselling should therefore be prioritised as a strategic intervention for prevention, rehabilitation, emotional healing, and the promotion of respectful and violence-free relationships.

Dating violence among young adults represents a growing challenge that threatens emotional health, social stability, and sustainable human development. Addressing the psychosocial determinants that sustain abusive relationship patterns is essential for reducing prevalence and protecting young adults. Through comprehensive counseling services, education, supportive policies, and collective societal action, healthier relationship cultures can be established. Promoting respectful and non-violent relationships is not only a personal responsibility but also a contribution toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and creating safer communities for present and future generations.

In view of the discussions above, the following suggestions are proposed as ways forward to guide prevention, intervention, and policy action:

1. Government and educational authorities

They should integrate comprehensive relationship education into school curricula at secondary and tertiary levels. This should focus on emotional intelligence, communication skills, consent, conflict resolution, and recognition of abusive behaviour in relationships.

2. Schools

Universities, and youth centers should establish well-equipped counselling units staffed with trained professionals to provide accessible psychosocial support, early identification of at-risk youths, and timely intervention for victims and perpetrators of dating violence.

3. There is a need for sustained awareness campaigns through media

Religious institutions, and community programmes to challenge harmful gender norms, reduce stigma around help-seeking, and promote respectful, non-violent relationship behaviours among young people.

4. Parents and Guardians

Should be actively involved through parenting education and family counselling initiatives aimed at improving communication, emotional support, and positive role modelling within the home, as family environment significantly influences youths' relationship behaviours.

5. Government agencies

Should develop and enforce policies that explicitly address dating violence in educational institutions, including clear reporting mechanisms, protection systems for victims, and disciplinary measures for perpetrators, in alignment with national gender-based violence frameworks.

6. Youth Empowerment Programmes

There should be increased investment in youth empowerment programmes that enhance self-esteem, decision-making skills, and economic independence, alongside accessible mental health services to support emotional well-being and reduce vulnerability to abusive relationships.

REFERENCES

Adebayo, A. O., & Kolawole, T. O. (2021). Family environment and interpersonal violence among Nigerian adolescents. Nigerian Journal of Social and Development Issues, 18(2), 66–71.

Adebayo, A. O., & Ojo, T. A. (2023). Relationship experiences and psychosocial adjustment among undergraduate students in Nigeria. Nigerian Journal of Educational Psychology, 21(1), 73–89.

Aigbodion, A. O., & Duma, S. E. (2022). Female students' perceptions of interpersonal risk and protective factors for dating violence in a Nigerian university. African Journal of Reproductive Health, 26(3), 85–95. https://doi.org/10.29063/ajrh2022/v26i3.9

American Psychological Association. (2022). Trauma. https://www.apa.org/topics/trauma

Azuji, I. M., & Ofojebe, E. N. (2025). Counselling for social change: A review of behavioural interventions targeting violence, addiction, mental health, and value reorientation among youths in Anambra State, Nigeria. Journal of Guidance and Counselling Studies, 9(2), 46–61.

Betron, M., Bryce, E., Obafemi, S., Yusuf, S., Abdullahi, H., Ifemenam, E., Dikeocha, N., Maiakwai, A., Kabir, B., Oduenyi, C., Nwankwo, E., & Siangulube, S. (2025). Effectiveness of a clinic-based counselling intervention on risk of experiencing intimate partner violence and reproductive coercion: A matched-pair cluster-controlled trial in Ebonyi and Sokoto, Nigeria. BMJ Global Health, 10(10), e016000. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2024-016000

Black, M. C., Basile, K. C., Breiding, M. J., Smith, S. G., Walters, M. L., Merrick, M. T., Chen, J., & Stevens, M. R. (2011). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 summary report. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023, October 9). Preventing teen dating violence. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen_dating_violence.html

Chime, O. H., Nduagubam, O. C., & Orji, C. J. (2022). Prevalence and patterns of gender-based violence in Enugu, Nigeria: A cross-sectional study. The Pan African Medical Journal, 41, 198. https://doi.org/10.11604/pamj.2022.41.198.32583

Chukwu, C. C., & Akinwale, A. A. (2022). Social media exposure and relationship behaviours among Nigerian youths. African Journal of Behavioural Studies, 12(1), 41–56.

Fashina, A. Y., Modebelu, O. J., & Adegun, A. O. (2023). Gender-based violence in Nigeria: Implications for counselling. Journal of Professional Counselling, 6(2), 255–261.

Ifeoma, J., Nweze, T., Ugwoke, E., Odo, V. O., & Aniekwe, C. (2021). Substance abuse and media violence exposure as factors in acceptance of dating violence among in-school adolescents. Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 31(8), 1040–1053. https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2020.1830919

Lasisi, A. K., & Ibraheem, I. O. (2024). The role of guidance and counselling services in addressing indiscipline among secondary school students in Nigeria. Journal of Educational Management and Instruction, 3(2), 86–94.

Nwamadi, L., & John, B. (2022). Perception and experience of dating violence among secondary school adolescents in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State: Implications for counselling. IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education, 12(2), 21–27. https://doi.org/10.9790/7388-1202022127

Nwankwo, B. E., & Ezeh, P. S. (2021). Substance use and aggressive behaviour among undergraduate students in South-East Nigeria. Nigerian Journal of Psychological Studies, 21(1), 54–68.

Odukoya, J. A. (2023). Peer pressure and adolescent relationship behaviours in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Journal of Educational and Social Research, 13(2), 91–104. https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2023-0023

Okafor, I. P., & Ede, M. O. (2022). Childhood exposure to family violence and social adjustment among young adults. International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Review, 12(3), 120–133.

Ojo, T. A. (2022). Prevalence of dating violence and coping strategies among undergraduates in Nigerian universities. Journal of Interpersonal Relations, 15(1), 44–58.

Olatunji, O. A., & Ibrahim, M. Y. (2023). Gender norms and violence in intimate relationships among Nigerian youths. Journal of African Social Development, 8(1), 33–49.

Oyebola, D. E., Olowookere, S. A., Idowu, A., Fehintola, F. O., Ilori, T., Faremi, F. A., Ogundokun, A. O., Ayandiran, E. O., & Owoeye, O. A. (2022). Determinants of dating violence among adolescents and young adults in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences, 51, 294–301.

Oyebola, D. E., Olowookere, S. A., Idowu, A., Fehintola, F. O., Ilori, T., Faremi, F. A., Ogundokun, A. O., Ayandiran, E. O., & Owoeye, O. A. (2024). Determinants of dating violence among adolescents and young adults in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences, 53(4), 7–13.

Umeh, C. S., & Nwosu, K. C. (2022). Psychological adjustment and relationship outcomes among emerging adults in Nigeria. Nigerian Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 27(1), 87–101.

UN Women. (2022). Violence against women and girls: Ending intimate partner violence. UN Women. https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women

United Nations. (2022). World Youth Report 2022: Reimagining the futures of youth. United Nations. https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2022/09/WYR2022.pdf

UNESCO. (2020). Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all. UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373718

Vagi, K. J., Rothman, E. F., Latzman, N. E., Tharp, A. T., Hall, D. M., & Breiding, M. J. (2013). Beyond correlates: A review of risk and protective factors for adolescent dating violence perpetration. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 42(4), 633–649. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-013-9905-6

World Health Organization. (2021). Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018: Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women. World Health Organization. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240026681