

# Sexual violence amongst female undergraduate students in institution of higher learning in Enugu: Prevalence and awareness

## Abstract

**Background:** The rising cases of domestic violence has been a great concern to the general public.

**Objective:** The prevalence and awareness of sexual violence on female undergraduates attending Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu was evaluated.

**Method:** The study was a cross-sectional study that involved 400 female students, self-administered questionnaires was employed. Data was analysed using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. Associations were tested using Chi square and  $p < 0.05$ , at 95% CI. Data was summarized as frequency distribution and chart.

**Result:** Mean age of participants was  $23.2 \pm 1.8$ . 354(88.5%) participants head about sexual violence prior to this study with one hundred and eighteen respondents (29.5%) being victims of sexual violence in one way or the other. 32.2% of them knew people who had suffered sexual violence. Commonest age of awareness was between 20-24 years ( $p=0.001$ ). The source of sexual violence awareness was largely from friends (26%), face book (23.2%) and whatsapp (20.3%) with least awareness from school teachers and newspaper (4.5%). Close relatives 52.6% were noted to be the commonest perpetrators of sexual violence, followed by family friends 31.6% and unknown persons 15.8%.

**Conclusion:** There is high prevalence of sexual violence with little or no institutional based awareness program on sexual violence that is a threat to the general public.

**Keywords:** sexual violence, prevalence, awareness, female undergraduate

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## Introduction

The rising cases of sexual violence has been a great concern to the general public. Sexual violence is defined as any unwanted sexual act committed against the victim's will by a person known or unknown to the victim.<sup>1</sup> These may include, but not limited to social, psychological,<sup>2-5</sup> sexual,<sup>6</sup> and physical health outcomes<sup>7-9</sup> that may have lifelong deleterious effects on survivors. According to WHO Sexual violence is 'any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work'.<sup>10</sup> Sexual violence is seen as a violation of basic human right,<sup>11</sup> while another describes it as a public health problem.<sup>12</sup> The victims of this crime suffers both mental, physical, psychological and emotional harm.

The regularity with which this societal ill presently occurs is due to lack of awareness, teaching of rural girl children on the threat and prevalence of rape, poor police investigation and poor judicial conviction and imprisonment of suspects. It could as well be due to hierarchical structure and a gender and power imbalance.<sup>13</sup>

Sexual assault is a pervasive social issue that does not discriminate against age, gender, ability or status, however, research indicates that women who are of colour,<sup>14</sup> Indigenous,<sup>15-18</sup> employed in the military, living and working in underprivileged environments,<sup>15</sup> have a disability,<sup>19</sup> student populations<sup>15,20</sup> and adolescent girls are more vulnerable to sexual violence because they lack awareness about it.<sup>21</sup> This shows that no one is spared from the clutches of perpetrators. It has become rampant despite several widespread condemnation

and punitive measures.<sup>22,23</sup> Sexual violence spares no sectors of the society, workplace, schools, hospitals homes, and even the churches where people consider to be sacred and safe. Both young and old experience sexual violence today on a daily basis.

The actual prevalence of sexual violence is unknown as a result of gross underreporting.<sup>2</sup> In one week at least five girls are reported being raped in Nigeria. Approximately one in three women in North America experience sexual assault in their lifetime.<sup>24</sup>

A study carried out in Southern Nigeria (University of Calabar) showed that 51.7% of female undergraduates had suffered one form of sexual violence or another.<sup>25</sup> while in another study done in Port Harcourt, South-south Nigeria, a prevalence of 47.6% was observed.<sup>26</sup> In South-East Nigeria, the prevalence of sexual violence is sketchy.

The burden of sexual violence is great that currently fathers, brothers indulge in sexual violence against their daughters and sisters respectively and this has adversely affected and posed a serious threat to the entire family structure and moral values.

One major problem in Nigeria is that sexual violence is grossly underreported even when reported, it is reported late and in most cases due to the fear of social stigma, as a result, victims lack the impetus and desire to litigate in order to avoid public embarrassment and the rigors of the procedure. Most parents would wish to protect their children's image from societal stigma and disgrace and this practice has largely contributed to the rising cases of rape in our environment and the world at large.<sup>27</sup> Even when reported many of such sexual assaults are not believed by police. Negative reporting experiences of sexual assault have been associated with secondary victimization and trauma among survivors.

The current situation of rising incidence of rape with low reporting and inadequate punitive action on the perpetrators to serve as deterrent has left rape awareness creation as a vital tool to spare the potential victims of sexual violence. It has been postulated that awareness and enlightenment initiatives in schools and communities will raise teenagers' awareness of rape.<sup>28</sup> A study that compared third-grade students in the United States who participated in sexual violence safety skill training to the control group discovered that those in the intervention group had raised their safety knowledge more than those in the control group.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, a study on the effectiveness of a structured training curriculum designed to raise adolescent girls' knowledge of sexual violence confirms a significant role of such awareness in reducing the incidence of sexual violence.<sup>29</sup> However, in our environment there is sketchy information on whether there is institutional(school) based program on awareness of sexual violence as a way of curtailing its incidence.

Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the prevalence and awareness of sexual violence among female undergraduate students of Institute of Management and Development, Enugu.

## Methods

### Study area

This study was carried out in Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) Enugu. IMT is located in Enugu metropolis in the South- Eastern geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The institution has an undergraduate population of about 14,654, Males- 6890 (47%) and females- 7764 (53%). There are about 1,600 female undergraduates resident in the five female hostels.

### Study population

The studied population were female undergraduates who had spent at least one year in the university hostels [due to their high risk of sexual violence (p=0.001)].

### Study design

A descriptive cross sectional study was employed. Using a prevalence rate of 47.6% from a previous study done in port-Harcourt<sup>26</sup> and a margin of sampling error set at 5%, a sample size of 364 was obtained and with 10% attrition rate, a sample size of 404 was used but properly filled 400 questionnaires were analysed.

### Sampling technique

A convenient sampling method was used to recruit respondents in the study. Three of the five female hostels were selected by simple random sampling. Employing proportionate sampling, 134, 133 and 133 students were selected from the three hostels. Starting from the first room, all the female undergraduates who met the criteria were recruited until the sample size was completed.

### Data collection

A structured, self-administered questionnaire comprising of five parts adapted from previous studies<sup>25</sup> was used. The study was conducted in the evenings after lectures. Female students who were found in the hostels at this time were recruited after counselling and obtaining their written consent. Permission for the study was obtained from the management and the Ethics committee of the university.

### Statistical analysis

Data was analysed using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0 (IBM Corporation, Armonk, USA).

Significance level was set at p< 0.05 and Confidence Intervals at 95%. Data was summarized as frequency distribution and chart.

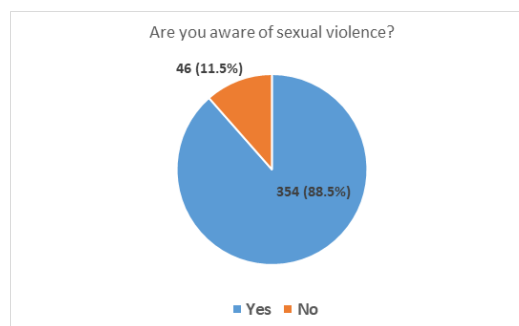
## Results

A total of 400 students participated in the study; majority of whom were between 20 and 24 years (49.0%). The single and married amongst them were 344(86%) and 52 (13%) respectively, while those divorced and separated were 1(0.25%) and 1 (0.25%) respectively. Almost (96.0%) all the participants were Christians with preponderance of Catholics (Table 1).

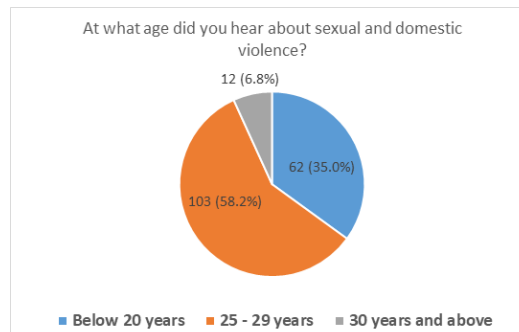
**Table 1** Demographics of research participants

Demographics	Options	Frequency (%)
Age (year)	<20	42(10.5)
	20 – 24	199(49.8)
	25 – 29	140 (35.0)
	30-39	15(3.8)
	>39	4 (1.0)
	Total	400 (100.0)
Marital status	Single	344(86.0)
	Married	52 (13.0)
	Separated	1(0.25)
	Divorced	1(0.25)
	Widowed	2(0.5)
	Total	400 (100.0)
Religion	Catholic	196(49.0)
	Protestant	76 (19.0)
	Jehovah's Witness	36 (9.0)
	Pentecostal	76 (19.0)
	Traditional	16 (4)

In total, 354 (88.5%) respondents heard about sexual violence prior to this study (Figure 1). Those who recalled to have heard about sexual violence before they attained 20 years of age were 62 (35.0%), however, the majority first heard about sexual violence between age 25 and 29 years, 206 (58.2%) (Figure 2).



**Figure 1** Previous awareness of sexual violence.



**Figure 2** Age at which first heard about sexual violence, (n = 354).

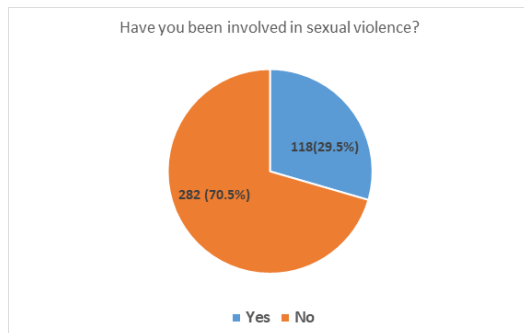
In response to the query, “In your own understanding, what is the meaning of sexual violence?” 128 (32.0%) understood sexual violence to mean, “Forcing people to have sex against their wish”, 2 (0.5%) defined it as, “Abuse”, and 76(19.0%) said sexual violence

means “rape”. It was defined as “maltreating and sexual advantage” by 2 (0.5%) people. Other descriptive terms used for sexual violence and the frequency use are listed in Table 2.

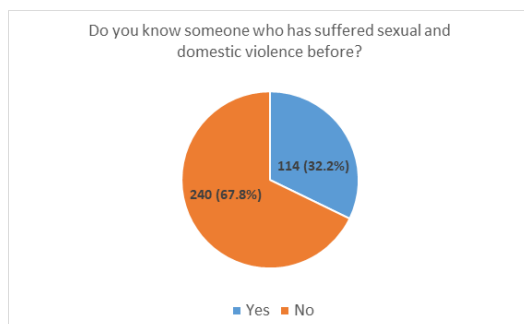
**Table 2** Meaning of sexual violence to ....

Definitions	Frequency (%)
Forcing people to have sex against their wish	128 (32.0)
Force a woman to have sex	88 (0.5)
Beating	4(1.0)
Forcing people to go against their wish	16 (4.0)
Husband forcing a wife to have sex	4(1.0)
Any form of harassment of a woman either sexually or physically	2 (0.5)
Misunderstanding between one another or between husband and wife	2 (0.5)
Maltreatment and rape of a woman by a man	2 (0.5)
It means for someone to do what is not good	2 (0.5)
It means for someone doing something he or she doesn't want to do	2 (0.5)
Maltreating and sexual advantage	66 (16.5)
Maltreatment	2(0.5)
Maltreatment given to either spouses without their consent	2 (0.5)
Physically abusing a person	2 (0.5)
Rape	76 (19.0)
Violence against woman	2(0.5)

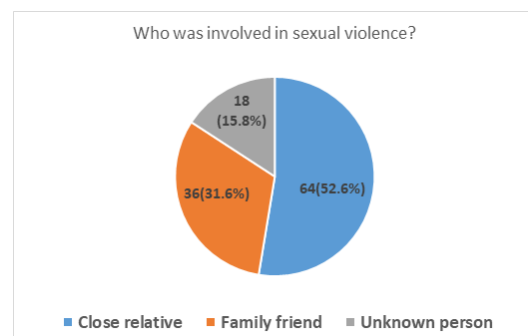
Only 118 (29.5%) of them said they have been involved in sexual violence (Figure 3). About 114(32.2%) of the study participants know someone who had suffered sexual violence (Figure 4). However, among these 118 people, 64 (54.2%) said it was a relative that was involved, 36(30.5%) said it was a family friend that was the perpetrator, while 18 (15.3%) implicated unknown persons (Figure 5).



**Figure 3** Number of students previously involved in sexual violence.



**Figure 4** Awareness of people who have suffered sexual violence (n= 354).



**Figure 5** Awareness of people who was involved in sexual violence.

Friends, 92 (26.0%), Facebook 82 (23.2%) and WhatsApp, 72(20.3%) were the top three channels of first awareness about sexual violence. Radio and television, 38 (10.7%) each, were twin fourth major sources of information (Table 3). While school teachers and newspaper were the list source of awareness to sexual violence.

**Table 3** Source of first knowledge about sexual and domestic violence (n = 354)

Sources	Frequency (%)
Friends	92 (26.0)
Radio	38 (10.7)
Television	38 (10.7)
Newspaper	16(4.5)
Facebook	82 (23.2)
WhatsApp	72(20.3)
School teachers	16(4.5)

## Discussion

This study evaluated the prevalence and awareness of sexual violence amongst female undergraduate students of Institute of Management and Technology, in Enugu. According to the findings of the study, about 88.5% of the research participants confirmed awareness of sexual violence as against 11.5% that were not aware of sexual violence. About 29.5% of the participants who were aware of sexual violence were victims at one point or the other and about 32.2% of the those aware of sexual violence new people that suffered sexual violence. This finding is similar to the awareness level of 83.9% documented from previous work that studied rape awareness amongst teenagers in Edo North senatorial district.<sup>1</sup> The number of victims and high level of sexual violence awareness as discovered in the present study has buttressed that rape is a common practice against the vulnerable female gender.<sup>30</sup> Most of the respondents (58.2%) new about sexual violence at the age range of 25-29. The population noted to perpetrate sexual violence include close relatives as the most common perpetrators (54.2%), family friends (31.5%) and unknown persons (15.8%). The Source of first knowledge about sexual violence include friends in about 26%, radio in about 10.7%, television in 10.7%, newspaper in 4.8%, Facebook in 23.2 %, WhatsApp in 20.3%, and from school teachers in 4.5% which is the list source of awareness of sexual violence.

The result above showed that awareness of sexual violence is not largely from school-based education program rather from friends and social media which may not confer the true situation/information necessary to forestall the rising incidence of sexual violence. Awareness and enlightenment initiatives in schools and communities will raise teenagers' awareness of rape. A study that compared third-grade students in the United States who participated in sexual violence safety skill training to the control group discovered that those in the intervention group had raised their safety knowledge more than those in the control group.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, a study on the effectiveness of a structured training curriculum designed to raise adolescent girls' knowledge of sexual violence confirms a significant role of such awareness in reducing the incidence of rape<sup>29</sup> just like findings of Hilton et al. (2014) who discovered that students from rural and urban regions who participated in an intervention program learned more about how to protect themselves from sexual assault.

## Conclusion

Sexual violence has been a recurrent crime and the rate at which it is increasing is alarming. There is high prevalence of sexual violence with little or no institutional based awareness program on sexual violence that is a threat to the general public. Prevention of sexual violence through educational based programs in schools seems to be the panacea, unfortunately this study discovered that institution of learning (school) was a poor source of sexual violence awareness. Therefore, concerted efforts towards sexual violence awareness programs like post-primary educational programs and advocacy organization are key to extending awareness of sexual violence to the girl child and thus reduce the menace of sexual violence in our society.

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## Ethical approval

Approval for the study was obtained from the management and ethics committee of IMT Enugu and written consent of the research participants obtained.

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## Conflicts of interest

Authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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