Abstract

Introduction

Dating violence is a major public health issue which has failed to gain recognition in the country. It was never studied in the local setting despite the higher prevalence/incidence reported in other countries.

Objectives

To determine the magnitude of dating violent acts, types, consequences and risk factors of dating violence and effectiveness of an educational intervention to improve knowledge and attitudes to develop healthy dating relationships among undergraduates in selected state universities in the Western Province.

Methods

The study had three phases with different study designs. Phase I of the study was a descriptive (retrospective) study. Three state universities of the seven were selected applying simple random sampling (SRS). It was conducted among second year

undergraduates who had established heterosexual relationships of ≥ six months prior to the main survey. The sample size computed was 1296 to determine the incidence of violent acts, types and consequences following dating violence. Multi-staged stratified cluster sampling method was used to select clusters. Questionnaires used were SAQ I (screening questionnaire), SAQ II (questionnaire on dating violence) and SAQ III (questionnaire on putative risk factors) as a combined self- administered questionnaire (SAQ combined) which were validated and pre tested. Incidence (related to past six months), types and consequences were described as percentages and 95% confidence intervals.

Phase II was conducted as a case control study to determine risk factors for dating violence. Cases and controls were selected applying SRS to serially numbered questionnaires from those who participated for the descriptive study (Phase I). Cases were those who experienced dating violence and controls, were those who did not experience dating violence during the past six months. The sample size calculated was 200 for each group. Data was collected using the SAQ III. Bivariate analysis was done using chi-square test. A probability level of 0.05 was considered as significant and the results were expressed as odds ratios with 95% confidence intervals. Multiple logistic regression was done using forward, stepwise selection to control for confounding. Model fit was assessed using Wald test and a p value less than 0.05 was considered as a good fit.

Phase III was a quasi-experimental study where an educational intervention was implemented to improve knowledge and attitudes to develop healthy dating relationships. Experimental and control groups were purposively selected from two different universities. The sample size calculated for each group was 65. Data was collected using a self administered questionnaire (SAQ IV) at pre-intervention and six months post-intervention. The intervention comprised a lecture on "Dating relationships and dating violence" followed by discussions on case scenarios and a distribution of a booklet entitled "Healthy Relationships" among study participants. Control group was only given a lecture entitled "Time management, sexual and reproductive health and psychological well-being". Effectiveness of the intervention between groups was calculated using chi-square test and within the group improvement using McNemar test.

Results

Response rate in Phase I was 95.4% (n=2219/2327) and 91% (n=262/288) in Phase III at the screening stage. Among those responded in Phase I, only 1296 (1296/2219= 58.4%) had an ongoing dating relationship of equal or more than six months duration. Overall cumulative incidence of violent acts for the last six months was 78.2% (95% CI: 75.8 – 80.4%, n=1013). The incidence of violent acts of controlling behaviours was 64.8% (95% CI: 62.2 – 67.4%, n=840), verbal abuse was 56.9% (95% CI: 54.2 – 59.7%, n=738), physical violence was 13.3% (95% CI: 11.5 – 15.2%, n=172) and sexual violence was 1.1% (95% CI: 0.6 – 1.8%, n=14) during the immediate six months prior to the survey.

Overall consequences of dating violence were sleeping problems in 7.4% (n=26/350) males and 5.7% (n=38/663) females and eating problems in 4.8% (n=17/350) males and 3.3% (n=22/663) females. Academic performances were affected in 6% (n=22/350) males and 7.5% (n=50/663) females. One percent (0.8%; n=8) have felt like committing suicide.

The two risk factors for dating violence were "fathers" violent behaviour after consuming alcohol" (adjusted OR= 3.3; 95% CI: 1.1 – 4.1%, p=0.04) and "mothers" education level of having ≤GCE O/L" (adjusted OR= 2.2; 95% CI: 1.3 – 3.7%, p=0.003).

There was a significant (p<0.01) improvement in good knowledge on dating violence and in favourable attitudes (p=0.001) on dating violence, gender stereotypes and gender roles, in the experimental group compared to the control group at six months post-intervention.

Conclusions and recommendations

Incidence of acts of dating violence is considered high. It was associated with two risk factors. The educational intervention conducted proved to be effective in improving knowledge and attitudes. Recommend the application of educational intervention among the university students to reduce dating violence.