



## Assessment of practices and attitudes of undergraduate students toward family violence in the University of Baghdad

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### ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** The aim of this study was to assess undergraduate student's practices and attitudes toward family violence in the University of Baghdad.

**Methods:** This was a descriptive study on non-probability (purposive) sample of 100 undergraduate students from different colleges at the University of Baghdad from November 15, 2022 to May 20, 2023. A validated questionnaire was prepared with 43 questions, which consisted of three parts: eight items related to students' demographic data, 13 items related to students' attitudes, and 22 items related to students' practices.

**Results:** Positive attitudes toward family violence were used by the parents, and with respect to the total relative sufficiency (86.18%), the attitude level was moderate. Undergraduate students reported low levels of family violence practices from their parents with respect to the total mean scores (1.43) and the relative sufficiency (47.5). There was a significant relationship between students' practices and their parents' perception of family violence ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** This study concludes that students in the University of Baghdad had positive, moderate attitudes toward parents' violence. They also experienced a low level of practice toward family violence, as well as parents' level of education has an impact on students' violence practices.

**Recommendations:** There is a need to raise community awareness about the consequences of family violence and mistreatment of the family members through mass media, and to establish family violence counseling centers for students.

*Keywords:* assessment, attitudes, undergraduate students, family violence, University of Baghdad

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## INTRODUCTION

Family violence or domestic violence is the mistreatment of one family member by another to gain power and control.<sup>1</sup> Domestic violence is defined as “an individual creates control over the other individual in private relationships and practices physical and emotional mistreatment to maintain that control”.<sup>2</sup> Research suggests that between 80 and 90% of these children are aware of the violence.<sup>3</sup> According to another study, 27.2% of women faced violence from their spouse or ex-spouse at least once, and the most common forms of violence experienced were psychological (39.4%), economic (24.4%), physical (23.2%), and sexual (9.8%).<sup>4</sup> Children raised in violent homes are at high risk of developing emotional, behavioral, and physical problems that last a lifetime.<sup>5</sup> Depression, anxiety, violence toward peers, suicide attempt, drug and alcohol abuse, and running away from home are just some of the problems that result from violence in the home.<sup>6</sup> Children can also be injured as a direct result of abuse. Sometimes batterers intentionally harm children to intimidate and control the partners.<sup>7</sup> Boys are twice as likely to become batterers and girls are more likely to find themselves in abusive relationships.<sup>8</sup> Children in violent homes are fearful and powerless. Reports of infanticide, mutilation, abandonment, and other forms of violence against children date back to ancient times.<sup>9</sup>

It was shown that male students were more likely to hide domestic abuse and to feel negatively about violence against women and other students.<sup>2</sup> Intimate relationship abuse was described differently by college students, and their views varied depending on what variables influenced their beliefs.<sup>10</sup> The parent–child relationship in families suffering from domestic violence could be related to children’s complex feelings and attitudes such as ambivalence toward parents and parenting behavior, as well as the child’s exposure to domestic violence.<sup>11</sup> Children exposed to adult violence at home may show ambivalent feelings and attitudes toward love, hatred, compassion, and blame toward the battered mother and battering father.<sup>12</sup> According to recent studies, there are cultural differences in students’ beliefs regarding abuse in intimate relationships. For example, compared to students in other countries and ethnic minority groups, American and ethnic majority students often displayed less permissive attitudes toward intimate relationship violence.<sup>13</sup> Domestic violence in Iraq has increased dramatically since the 2003 invasion. According to a study from Iraq, 81.2% of women had experienced abuse (100% verbal/emotional and 39.18% physical), typically from their husbands (41.4%) or brothers (20.4%). This was primarily attributed to a demanding and turbulent life (41.9%).<sup>14</sup> Therefore, this study was carried out to assess the attitude of undergraduate students toward family violence in the University of Baghdad.

## METHODS

### Study design

A descriptive, cross-sectional design study was carried out among undergraduate students from different colleges at the University of Baghdad using an assessment approach, which was conducted in the period from November 15, 2022 to May 20, 2023. A purposive “non-probability” sample of 100 undergraduate students was used. Data were collected through using personal interviews with the study samples.

### Ethical considerations

Approval was obtained from the participating colleges at the University of Baghdad, Iraq. Full consent was obtained before their participation in the study. The protection of the privacy of the participants was ensured.

### Study instrument

A structured paper-based self-report questionnaire was used to collect data and was administered by the researchers/interviewers using interview technique. All questionnaires were completed through personal interviews. The questionnaire was designed, developed, and constructed by researchers after reviewing relevant literature. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: sociodemographic characteristics of the participants (age, sex, marital status, number of children in the family, and monthly income). Students’ attitudes toward family violence were assessed using 13 items. Family violence practices were assessed using 22 items. Students’ attitudes were rated on three-point Likert scales: I agree, Not Sure, and I don’t agree, rated as 3, 2, and 1, respectively. Students’ practices were rated on three-point Likert scales: Always, Sometimes, and Never, rated as 3, 2, and 1, respectively. The

cut-off value was 2 and the lower limit for students' attitudes and practices was 66.66. Relative sufficiency (RS) was calculated using the following formula:  $(\text{Cut-off point} \times 100) / (\text{Number of scale levels}) = 66.66$  (low: less than 66.66, pass: 66.66–77.77, moderate: 77.78–88.88, high: 88.89–100). These values were calculated using following formula:  $(100 - 66.66) / 3 = 11.11$ . The content validity of the constructed questionnaire was determined using a panel of experts who investigated the content of the questionnaire for clarity and adequacy to achieve the objectives of the present study. A preliminary questionnaire was designed and presented to 12 experts to determine its validity.

### Statistical analysis

Data were analyzed using the SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistical measures (frequency, percentage, and mean) and inferential statistics (chi-square) were applied.

### RESULTS

Table 1 shows that 60% of the students were male, approximately one-third of them (32%) were between 19 and 20 years old, 83% of them were single, 28% were first-year students, the majority of the sample (78%) came from urban areas, and 50% of the families had four to six children. Regarding the sequence of the students, 38% were four and above. Furthermore, 50% of the students reported that the monthly income was enough to some extent and 78% of them had their own home, while 60% of them lived in an extended family. Finally, regarding the social status of their parents, 91% of them reported that their parents lived together at the time of study.

Table 2 shows students' overall attitudes toward family violence, highlighting that students had positive attitudes toward family violence exhibited by their parents, and with respect to the total relative sufficiency (RS) (86.18%) it corresponded to a moderate attitude level.

**Table 1. Distribution of the study sample according to sociodemographic characteristics.**

No.	Sociodemographic characteristics	Total sample (n=100)	
		F	%
1.	<b>Sex</b>		
	Male	60	60.0
2.	Female	40	40.0
	<b>Age (years)</b>		
3.	19–20	32	32.0
	21–22	22	22.0
	23–24	24	24.0
	25 and above	22	22.0
4.	<b>Marital status</b>		
	Single	83	83.0
	Married	15	15.0
5.	Other	2	2.0
	<b>Level of education</b>		
	First-class college	28	28.0
	Second-class college	24	24.0
6.	Third-class college	22	22.0
	Fourth-class college	26	26.0
	<b>Residential area</b>		
	Urban	78	78.0
7.	Rural	22	22.0
	<b>Number of children in the family</b>		
	1–3	30	30.0
8.	4–6	50	50.0
	7 and above	20	20.0
	<b>Sequence of students in the family</b>		
	First	19	19.0
9.	Second	28	28.0
	Third	15	15.0
	Fourth and above	38	38.0
	<b>Social status of parents</b>		
10.	Living together	91	91.0
	Divorced	7	7.0
	Widowed	2	2.0

F: frequency, %: percentage.

**Table 2. Assessment of students' attitudes toward family violence.**

No.	Standard items	N=100					
		Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	MS	RS	Severity
		F	F	F			
1.	I think domestic violence should not be allowed to practice.	72	20	8	2.64	88.0	M
2.	Domestic violence in the home is justified.	80	17	3	2.77	92.3	H
3.	The practice of kicking and slapping has negative consequences, so you must stop this.	74	11	15	2.59	86.3	M
4.	Family violence is important as a means of disciplining.	61	19	20	2.41	80.3	M
5.	The threat of a knife or gun is emotionally harmless.	86	11	3	2.83	94.3	H
6.	It should put the stick in the house.	60	5	35	2.25	75.0	P
7.	Psychological punishment is less painful than domestic violence.	52	26	22	2.30	76.6	P
8.	Emotional deprivation is less painful than family violence.	61	33	6	2.55	85.0	M
9.	Violence is necessary in the house, but I did not use it on my children.	50	15	35	2.15	71.6	P
10.	Although I am aware of the danger of hitting children, I do not know how to avoid it with my children.	92	6	2	2.90	96.6	H
11.	Father beats my children more often in my family Father is more beaten for children my children.	75	15	10	2.65	88.3	M
12.	Girls are more likely to be beaten than boys in my family.	78	18	4	2.74	91.3	H
13.	I think that the type of violence must be commensurate with the type of mistake.	86	11	3	2.83	94.3	H
<b>Total</b>		<b>927</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>2.59</b>	<b>86.18</b>	<b>M</b>

MS: mean score, RS: relative sufficiency, P: pass (66.66–77.77), M: moderate (77.78–88.88), H: high (88.89–100).

Table 3 shows the assessment of students' practices toward family violence and highlights that all items in this table have low levels of family violence practices exhibited by their parents, with a total mean score of 1.43 and an RS of 47.5.

## DISCUSSION

The result shows that the attitude of the total students toward family violence was positive and at a moderate level (86.18%). This result agrees with the study by Green and Yamawaki,<sup>15</sup> which assessed university students' attitudes toward blame in domestic violence, such as blaming stalking victims. It found that there were significant gender predictors of participants' attitudes toward stalking. Significant differences were also found between students with and without a history of violence in their family of origin. Students with previous experience of violence were more likely than their counterparts to attribute the blame for domestic violence to societal factors. This result is consistent with a study assessing domestic violence among individuals of lower socio-economic status, which found that the study sample expressed positive attitudes toward engaging with women who experienced abuse as a form of gender-based violence.<sup>16</sup> People mistakenly believe that harassment and abuse are less harmful to women in poverty than to women in affluence.<sup>17</sup> To find a logical explanation for this positive attitude of students, it can be stated that the attitude of the students is against domestic violence because it destroys the family and contributes to the creation of social dilemmas.<sup>18</sup> This positive attitude of the students toward family violence may be because they occupy a prestigious position as university students at a higher level of education.

Furthermore, this study found that parents' practices toward family violence are at low levels. This finding agrees with a survey from Papua New Guinea that assessed the relationship between woman's real-world exposure to interparental violence and intimate partner violence.<sup>19</sup> The current findings revealed that women experienced higher levels of intimate partner violence and were exposed to interparental violence [OR? = ?1.45, 95% CI? = ?1.13, 1.86] compared to women who were not exposed

**Table 3. Assessment of students' practices toward family violence.**

No.	Standard items	N=100					Severity
		Always	Sometimes	Never	MS	RS	
		F	F	F			
1.	Once my parents called me a devoted title, which was disgraceful.	8	24	68	1.40	46.7	L
2.	Once my father came to me screaming, rebuking, and grumpy.	7	27	66	1.41	47.0	L
3.	My guardian has a habit of verbal abuse without any reason.	9	12	79	1.30	43.3	L
4.	My father does not understand me.	12	36	52	1.60	53.3	L
5.	My father hurts my feelings verbally.	15	14	71	1.44	48.0	L
6.	My father makes fun of me in front of others when I do not agree with him.	8	26	66	1.42	47.3	L
7.	I was severely battered by one of my family members.	7	20	73	1.34	44.7	L
8.	I saw one of my family members being severely battered.	6	18	76	1.30	43.3	L
9.	My father beat me with a stick when I got low grades in school.	12	24	64	1.48	49.3	L
10.	I had suffered a burn when I failed to do what was required of me.	4	18	78	1.26	42.0	L
11.	I was beaten so severely that I had to go to the hospital.	6	16	78	1.28	42.7	L
12.	I have been slapped on my face more times than anywhere else.	10	28	62	1.48	49.3	L
13.	I was severely beaten and others noticed the effects on me.	8	22	70	1.38	46.0	L
14.	I suffered from different types of severe and harmful violence.	12	16	72	1.40	46.7	L
15.	My ear was clamped when I refused to obey my father's order.	11	42	47	1.64	54.7	L
16.	My father feels that I am not important.	12	15	73	1.39	46.3	L
17.	My parents prevent from me the things that I love.	11	26	63	1.48	49.3	L
18.	One of my parents neglected me when I disobeyed their orders.	13	25	62	1.51	50.3	L
19.	My father prevents me from playing.	14	21	65	1.49	49.7	L
20.	One of my parents would not allow me to watch TV programs that I loved.	9	37	54	1.55	51.7	L
21.	My parents forced me to follow their favorite programs	11	29	60	1.51	50.3	L
22.	I had previously been expelled from my home by one of my family members.	6	19	75	1.31	43.7	L
<b>Total</b>		<b>211</b>	<b>515</b>	<b>1474</b>	<b>1.43</b>	<b>47.5</b>	<b>L</b>

MS: mean score, RS: relative sufficiency, L: low (less than 66.66).

to violence. To find an interpretation for this result, this low level of family violence could be related to the influence of religion, which insisted on the importance of respecting wives after marriage.

### CONCLUSION

The study concluded that students have positive attitudes toward family violence. This study highlighted that few students who had experienced violence tended to attribute the blame for domestic violence to societal factors. The students also experienced low levels of family violence from their parents.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study suggests increasing community awareness of the risks of family violence and mistreatment of family members through mass media and coordination between the public and private sectors. The study also highlights the importance of establishing counseling centers with a focus on family violence.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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