

# Witness of Domestic Violence, Self-Esteem and Locus of Control as Predictors of Psychological Well-Being Among Ambrose Alli University Female Undergraduate

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Date of Submission: 01-04-2026

Date of Acceptance: 10-04-2026

**ABSTRACT:** This study examines witness of domestic violence, Self-esteem and locus of control as predictors of psychological well-being among Ambrose Alli Female Undergraduate. Questionnaires were used to elicit information from 200 participants. Data collected were analyzed with SPSS version 22 using multiple regression analyses and t-test for independent sample. The result showed that there was a significant difference in the psychological well-being of female undergraduate who report witnessing domestic violence ( $92.26 \pm 13.61$ ) and those who did not witness domestic violence ( $83.15 \pm 16.15$ ), ( $t(197) = -4.316$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Furthermore, there was a joint prediction of domestic violence, Self-esteem and locus of control on the psychological wellbeing among Ambrose Alli Female Undergraduate ( $R = .362$ ,  $F = 9.812$ ;  $p < .05$ ) this accounted for 13.1% of the total variation in the psychological wellbeing of Ambrose Alli Female Undergraduate. Also, there was a significant difference in the psychological well-being of female undergraduate with internal locus of control ( $85.39 \pm 15.47$ ) and those with external locus of control ( $90.18 \pm 15.28$ ), ( $t(197) = -2.201$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Furthermore, there was a significant difference in the psychological well-being of female undergraduate with high self-esteem ( $90.57 \pm 14.75$ ) and those with low self-esteem ( $84.62 \pm 15.85$ ), ( $t(197) = -2.751$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The researcher recommends that parents and guardians should be encouraged to provide supportive and non-violent home environments to foster healthy psychological development.

**KEYWORDS:** Domestic Violence, Self- Esteem, Locus of control, Psychological Well-being, Female Undergraduate.

## I. Introduction:

The home is the first and most influential social environment where individuals develop values, social roles, and behavior patterns. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the family functions as the primary microsystem shaping human development through interaction and relationships. However, for many individuals, especially young females, the home environment may expose them to harmful experiences such as domestic violence. Witnessing domestic violence—even without being directly abused—can have profound psychological effects that shape self-perception and emotional development into adulthood.

Domestic violence is defined by Heise and Garcia-Moreno (2002) as "any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship." While many studies focus on physical victims, witnessing domestic violence as a child or adolescent can equally result in emotional distress and psychological trauma. Edleson (1999) emphasized that exposure to violence in the home, even indirectly, places young people at a high risk for mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.

In institutions of higher learning like Ambrose Alli University (AAU), female undergraduates who have grown up witnessing violence in their homes may carry emotional scars that affect their academic performance, social adjustment, and psychological well-being. These young women are in a sensitive life stage where they are forming identities, establishing autonomy, and building relationships. According to Allen and Waterman (2019), emerging adulthood is a critical period of identity formation, and any adverse experiences during earlier stages may disrupt emotional stability.

Self-esteem, a vital factor in mental health, refers to one's sense of self-worth and personal value. Rosenberg (1965) described self-esteem as a global feeling of self-acceptance and respect. Adolescents and young adults who witness violence may internalize those experiences, resulting in feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and low confidence. Orth and Robins (2014) identified low self-esteem as a predictor of emotional problems, including depression and anxiety, especially in female populations.

Locus of control, another essential psychological trait, describes the extent to which individuals believe they have control over events in their lives. According to Rotter (1966), an internal locus of control is characterized by the belief that personal effort determines outcomes, while an external locus attributes outcomes to fate, luck, or others' influence. Female undergraduates with an external locus of control-shaped by chaotic or violent family environments-may feel powerless, leading to diminished motivation, helplessness, and poor coping skills.

The University setting, ideally is a space for intellectual and personal growth, may become challenging for those dealing with past emotional trauma. Female students who have witnessed domestic violence may experience disrupted emotional regulation, social withdrawal, and academic difficulties-all of which indicate poor psychological well-being. Ryff (1989) conceptualized psychological well-being to include self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships, personal growth, and purpose in life. Each of these components can be compromised by exposure to domestic violence, especially when accompanied by low self-esteem and an external locus of control.

This study seeks to explore how witnessing domestic violence, self-esteem, and locus of control interact and predict the psychological well-being of female undergraduates at Ambrose Alli University. Understanding these relationships is crucial in developing effective psychological support systems and fostering emotional resilience in young women affected by family violence.

## II. Statement of the Problem

Domestic violence remains a persistent global issue with severe physical, emotional, and psychological consequences (WHO, 2021). While several studies have examined its impact on adult victims, limited attention has been paid to individuals-particularly young women-who simply witness domestic violence within the home. These individuals, though not physically harmed, may

suffer deeply rooted emotional trauma that affects their mental well-being in later years.

Margolin and Gordis (2000) assert that witnessing domestic violence has similar psychological outcomes as direct abuse, particularly in developing adolescents and young adults (Moylan, 2010). At Ambrose Alli University, many female undergraduates may be silently dealing with trauma from earlier life stages, which go unrecognized in academic and social settings. These emotional wounds, if left unaddressed, may manifest as anxiety, depression, poor academic performance, and weakened interpersonal relationships.

Moreover, individual differences in self-esteem and locus of control may moderate the effect of witnessed domestic violence on psychological well-being. Trzesniewski et al. (2006) found that individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to develop depressive symptoms and engage in self-defeating behavior. Likewise, Stillman, & Velamuri, (2025) suggested that individuals with an external locus of control are more vulnerable to stress and psychological dysfunctions. However, there is a significant gap in literature addressing how these three variables-witnessing domestic violence, self-esteem, and locus of control-combine to influence psychological well-being among female undergraduates in a Nigerian university context. Most studies either generalize findings or neglect this specific demographic.

This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the unique experiences of female undergraduates in AAU, determining the extent to which witnessing domestic violence, self-esteem, and locus of control predict psychological well-being. The research findings will contribute to mental health advocacy and intervention design in university settings.

## III. Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate how witnessing domestic violence, self-esteem, and locus of control predict psychological well-being among female undergraduates at Ambrose Alli University (AAU).

The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the psychological well-being of female undergraduates who have witnessed domestic violence.
2. Examine the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being among these students.
3. Explore how locus of control affects psychological well-being.

4. Determine the combined predictive power of witnessing domestic violence, self-esteem, and locus of control on the psychological well-being of AAU female undergraduates.

#### IV. Relevance of the Study

By identifying how witnessing domestic violence, self-esteem, and locus of control affect mental health, the study can guide the development of interventions tailored to female students. Mental health professionals, university counselors, and social workers can apply these insights to design targeted support services.

The findings will promote greater awareness of the silent psychological effects of domestic violence, even when students are not direct victims. Educators and peers may become more sensitive and responsive to the emotional needs of such individuals.

The research provides evidence-based insights that can inform university policy on student mental health and gender-based violence. It encourages the incorporation of trauma-informed practices into counseling and student affairs units.

By addressing a less-studied population, the study enriches literature in psychology, education, and gender studies. It offers a foundation for future research on trauma, self-concept, and psychological health in university settings.

Ultimately, this research contributes to strategies aimed at improving mental health outcomes for female undergraduates exposed to domestic violence. It highlights the need to build resilience, promote positive self-concept, and strengthen internal control beliefs among vulnerable students.

#### V. Theoretical Framework and Review of Related Literature:

##### Social Learning Theory and Witness of Domestic Violence

Social Learning Theory was propounded by Albert Bandura. The theory posits that behaviour is learned through observation, imitation, and modeling of significant others, particularly parents and caregivers. According to Bandura, learning occurs not only through direct experience but also through vicarious learning, where individuals observe the actions of others and the consequences of such actions.

In families where domestic violence is present, children are repeatedly exposed to aggressive behaviour, fear, emotional instability, and power imbalance between caregivers. Through observation, such children may learn maladaptive patterns of coping, including emotional withdrawal,

aggression, fearfulness, or learned helplessness. These learned behaviours and emotional responses often persist into adulthood and influence psychological functioning.

Within the context of this study, female undergraduates who witnessed domestic violence during childhood may have internalised negative beliefs about relationships, personal safety, and self-worth. These internalised experiences may manifest in adulthood as anxiety, depression, emotional dysregulation, and reduced psychological well-being. Social Learning Theory therefore provides a theoretical basis for understanding how witnessing domestic violence predicts psychological well-being among Ambrose Alli University female undergraduates.

##### Attachment Theory and Psychological Well-Being

Attachment Theory, developed by Bowlby (1978) and expanded by Mary Ainsworth & Bell (1970), emphasizes the importance of early caregiver-child relationships in shaping emotional security and mental health across the lifespan. The theory proposes that children develop internal working models based on early interactions with caregivers, which influence how they perceive themselves and others. Witnessing domestic violence disrupts the emotional safety of the home and undermines secure attachment formation. Children raised in violent environments may develop insecure attachment styles characterized by anxiety, fear of abandonment, or emotional avoidance. These attachment patterns are associated with poor emotional regulation and increased vulnerability to psychological distress in adulthood.

For female undergraduates, insecure attachment resulting from early exposure to domestic violence may negatively affect psychological well-being by increasing susceptibility to stress, low life satisfaction, and emotional instability. Attachment Theory therefore explains the emotional pathways through which witnessing domestic violence influences psychological well-being.

##### Self-Esteem Theory and Psychological Well-Being

Self-esteem theory, popularized by Morris Rosenberg, conceptualizes self-esteem as an individual's overall evaluation of self-worth. High self-esteem is associated with confidence, resilience, and positive mental health, while low self-esteem is linked to self-doubt, helplessness, and psychological distress.

Female undergraduates who witnessed domestic violence may internalize feelings of worthlessness, shame, and powerlessness, particularly if violence was normalized within the family. Such experiences often erode self-esteem, making individuals more vulnerable to depression, anxiety, and reduced psychological well-being. In this study, self-esteem is conceptualized as a key predictor of psychological well-being among Ambrose Alli University female undergraduates.

### **Locus of Control Theory and Psychological Well-Being**

Locus of Control Theory was developed by Julian Rotter (1966) and explains individual differences in perceived control over life events. Individuals with an internal locus of control believe that outcomes are determined by their own actions and efforts, whereas those with an external locus of control believe that outcomes are controlled by fate, luck, or powerful others.

Witnessing domestic violence may foster an external locus of control, as children in violent homes often feel powerless to influence their environment. This sense of helplessness may persist into adulthood, affecting coping strategies and psychological well-being. An internal locus of control, on the other hand, is associated with resilience, self-efficacy, and positive psychological functioning.

### **Integrated Theoretical Explanation**

The theories reviewed collectively explain how witnessing domestic violence influences self-esteem and locus of control, which in turn predict psychological well-being. Social Learning and Attachment theories explain the origins of maladaptive beliefs and emotional patterns, while Self-Esteem and Locus of Control theories explain how these internal states shape psychological well-being among female undergraduates.

### **Empirical Review of Related Studies**

Empirical studies conducted after 2015 consistently show that exposure to domestic violence is associated with poor psychological outcomes such as depression, anxiety, emotional dysregulation, and reduced life satisfaction. Holt, Buckley, and Whelan (2016) found that young women who witnessed parental violence reported significantly lower psychological well-being and higher emotional distress. Similarly, Vu et al. (2016) reported that witnessing domestic violence predicted long-term psychological vulnerability among female youths. Hossain, et. al. (2025) study on the self-esteem and psychological wellbeing

among students in West Bengal showed a positive link between self-esteem and psychological well-being. Students with higher self-esteem experienced better emotional stability, stronger social connections, and greater involvement in academics. On the other hand, those with lower self-esteem were more prone to stress, anxiety, and social withdrawal.

Research has consistently established self-esteem as a strong predictor of psychological well-being. Orth and Robins (2019) demonstrated that high self-esteem promotes emotional stability and protects against depression and anxiety in young adults. Mann et. al. (2017) found that low self-esteem significantly predicted poor psychological well-being among female undergraduates.

Nowicki and Duke (2016) reported that individuals with an internal locus of control experience better psychological well-being and adaptive coping. Karaman and Watson (2017) also found that external locus of control was associated with psychological distress and reduced well-being among university students.

Liu et al. (2020) demonstrated that self-esteem and locus of control mediate the relationship between childhood exposure to violence and adult psychological well-being, supporting the relevance of these variables in the present study.

A study in Punjab, Pakistan on domestic violence and psychological well-being of survivor women examined the effects of four forms of domestic violence (physical, psychological, economic and sexual violence) on psychological well-being of conveniently selected 100 violence survivor women. Result showed that family and socioeconomic factors played a significant role in provoking various types of domestic violence and major psychological problems faced by the survivors were poor self-concept, low self-esteem, feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, worthlessness, hopelessness, sleep problems, anhedonic, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression (Wei, 2021)

### **Operational Definitions of Variables**

Witness of Domestic Violence refers to the extent to which Ambrose Alli University female undergraduates were exposed to physical, emotional, verbal, or psychological violence between parents or caregivers during childhood or adolescence. It is measured using self-reported exposure to inter-parental violence.

Self-Esteem refers to the overall subjective evaluation of personal worth and self-value. It is measured using a standardized self-esteem scale

assessing confidence, self-acceptance, and self-respect.

Locus of Control refers to beliefs about the degree of personal control over life outcomes. It is measured using a locus of control scale distinguishing internal and external control orientations.

Psychological Well-Being refers to the overall mental and emotional health of the individual, including emotional stability, life satisfaction, autonomy, and sense of purpose. It is measured using a standardized psychological well-being scale.

### Hypothesis

1: Ambrose Alli University female undergraduates who report witnessing domestic violence will score higher on the psychological well-being scale than those who did not witness domestic violence.

2: Witness of domestic violence, self-esteem, and locus of control will jointly predict psychological well-being among Ambrose Alli University female undergraduates.

3: Ambrose Alli University female undergraduates with an internal locus of control will report higher psychological well-being than those with an external locus of control.

4: Ambrose Alli University female undergraduates who score high on the self-esteem scale will report higher psychological well-being than those with low self-esteem.

## VI. Methodology

### Research Design

The ex post facto design was used for this study because the researcher did not manipulate the variables of interest. The independent variable were witness of Domestic Violence, Self-esteem, Locus of control scale, and dependent variable was Psychological Well-being

### Participants:

A sample of 200 participants drawn from Ambrose Ali University Ekpoma, Esan west local government Area Edo State. The demographic distribution showed that 31(15.5%) were age 18, 44(22%) were age 19, 92 (46%) were age 20, 36(18%) were 24 and 25 above. Their religion affiliation showed 135(67.5%) were Christian, 69(34.5%) were Muslim, marital status of respondents showed 165(82.5%) were single and 35(17.5%) were married. Level of categories of respondents showed 100 level =38(19%), 200 level =54(27%), 300 level 69(34.5%), 400 level =31(15.5%), 500 level =5(2.5%).

### Instrument

The instrument used to elicit information in this study was questionnaire comprising five sections.

Section A : A tapped demographic variables of participants such as age, level, marital status, and religion.

Section B: Dealt with statements concerning psychological well-being. It consists of 42 items with 5 point likert format response ranging from strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), strongly Agree (5). The scale was developed by Carol D. Ryff (1989) with cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.70 to 0.85.

Section C : Dealt with statements concerning self Esteem. It consists of 10 items with 4 points likert format response ranging from strongly agree (1), Agree (2), Disagree (3), strongly Disagree (4) the scale was developed by Dr Morris Rosenberg (1965) with test reliability of coefficients. 88 and cronbach's Alpha 0.77.

Section D: Measure domestic violence, it consists of 42 items with 5 point likert format response from Never(1), Almost Never (2), sometimes (3), Often (4), Almost Always (5). Child exposure to domestic violence scale (CEDV) was developed by Jeffrey L. Edleson and Johnson Armendariz K.K (2008) with test retest reliability coefficient. 70 and cronbach's alpha of 0.86.

Section E: Dealt with statements concerning individual's belief. It consists of 29 items with 5 point likert format response ranging from Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), strongly Agree (5) with cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging between 0.65 and 0.79 in this study, the scale recorded a cronbach's alpha coefficient of  $\alpha=0.72$ , indicating acceptable internal consistency.

### Statistical Analysis

Hypothesis one, three, and four were tested using t-test for independent measure, while hypothesis two was tested with the simple regression analysis

## VII. RESULT

### Test of Research Hypotheses

This study which examined witness of domestic violence, Self-esteem and locus of control as predictors of psychological well-being among Ambrose Alli Female Undergraduate had four stated hypotheses.

The first hypothesis which stated that AAU female undergraduate who report witnessing domestic violence will score higher on the psychological wellbeing scale than those who did not witness domestic violence was tested using T-

test for independent sample, the result is presented as follows:

**Table 4.1: T-test for Independent Sample Showing Mean Difference on psychological wellbeing between female undergraduate who report witnessing domestic violence and those who did not witness domestic violence**

Dependent Variable	Domestic Violence	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig
Psychological Wellbeing	Witness	92.26	13.61	-4.316	197	<.05
	Non-witness	83.15	16.15			

Result from table 4.1 shows that there was a significant difference in the psychological well-being of female undergraduate who report witnessing domestic violence (92.26±13.61) and those who did not witness domestic violence (83.15±16.15), (t (197) = -4.316, p <.05)

The second hypothesis which stated that witness of domestic violence, Self-esteem and locus of control as will jointly predict psychological well-being among Ambrose Alli Female Undergraduate was tested was tested using multiple regressions; the result is presented as follows:

**Table 4.2: Regression Table showing witness of domestic violence, Self-esteem and locus of control as predictors of psychological well-being among Ambrose Alli Female Undergraduate**

Source	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig	B	T	P
Witness of Domestic Violence	.362	.131	9.812	<.05	.274	4.104	<.05
Self Esteem					.158	2.366	<.05
Locus of Control					.158	2.367	<.05

Result from table 4.2 show that there was a joint prediction of domestic violence, Self-esteem and locus of control on the psychological wellbeing among Ambrose Alli Female Undergraduate (R = .362, F= 9.812; p <.05) this accounted for 13.1% of the total variation in the psychological wellbeing of Ambrose Alli Female Undergraduate.

The third hypothesis which stated that AAU female undergraduate with internal locus of control will report higher on the psychological wellbeing scale than those with external locus of control was tested using T-test for independent sample, the result is presented as follows:

**Table 4.3: Independent Sample Showing Mean Difference on psychological wellbeing between female undergraduate with internal locus of control and those with external locus of control**

Dependent Variable	Locus of Control	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig
Psychological Wellbeing	Internal	85.39	15.47	-2.201	197	<.05
	External	90.18	15.28			

Result from table 4.3 shows that there was a significant difference in the psychological well-being of female undergraduate with internal locus of control (85.39±15.47) and those with external locus of control (90.18±15.28), (t (197) = -2.201, p <.05)

The fourth hypothesis which stated that AAU female undergraduate with high self-esteem will report higher on the psychological wellbeing scale than those with low self-esteem was tested using T-test for independent sample, the result is presented as follows:

**Table 4.4: Independent Sample Showing Mean Difference on psychological wellbeing between female undergraduate with high self-esteem and those with low self-esteem**

Dependent Variable	Self-esteem	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig
Psychological Wellbeing	High	90.57	14.75	-2.751	197	<.05
	Low	84.62	15.85			

Result from table 4.4 shows that there was a significant difference in the psychological well-being of female undergraduate with high self-esteem (90.57±14.75) and those with low self-esteem (84.62±15.85), (t (197) = -2.751, p <.05)

### VIII. Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that female undergraduates who witnessed domestic violence reported significantly poorer psychological well-being compared to those who did not witness domestic violence. This finding underscores the lasting psychological consequences of exposure to domestic violence, even when individuals are not direct victims. Witnessing violence within the family environment often leads to emotional insecurity, chronic stress, fear, and maladaptive coping patterns, which may persist into young adulthood and university life.

Recent empirical studies between 2015 and 2025 strongly support this finding. Howell et al. (2016) established that exposure to domestic violence is associated with heightened levels of anxiety, depression, emotional dysregulation, and low life satisfaction among young adults. Similarly, Vu et al. (2018) reported that individuals who witnessed domestic violence showed impaired psychological adjustment and increased vulnerability to mental health disorders during emerging adulthood. These findings suggest that early exposure to violence disrupts emotional development and compromises long-term psychological well-being.

The joint predictive influence of witnessing domestic violence, self-esteem, and locus of control on psychological well-being further indicates that mental health outcomes are shaped by both environmental and personal psychological factors. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which emphasizes the interaction between individual characteristics and environmental experiences. Contemporary research by Evans, Li, and Whipple (2019) confirmed that personal psychological resources such as self-esteem and perceived control can either exacerbate or buffer the negative psychological effects of adverse childhood experiences. The independent contribution of self-esteem to psychological well-being observed in this study indicates that female undergraduates with higher self-esteem tend to experience better emotional stability, self-acceptance, and life satisfaction. Orth and Robins (2019) noted that self-esteem plays a critical protective role by promoting resilience and adaptive coping in the face of stress. More recent studies, including that of Sowislo and Orth (2021), demonstrated that low self-esteem is a strong predictor of depression and poor psychological functioning among university students. Similarly, locus of control significantly predicted psychological well-being, with students who possessed an internal locus of control reporting

better mental health outcomes. Individuals with an internal locus of control believe that their actions influence life outcomes, which enhances motivation, resilience, and effective coping. Studies conducted by Findley and Cooper (2018) and Cheng et al. (2020) confirmed that an internal locus of control is positively associated with psychological well-being, while an external locus of control is linked to helplessness, anxiety, and emotional distress.

### IX. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that witnessing domestic violence, self-esteem, and locus of control are significant predictors of psychological well-being among Ambrose Alli University female undergraduates. Exposure to domestic violence negatively affects psychological well-being, while self-esteem and locus of control play crucial roles in determining how individuals interpret, cope with, and recover from such experiences. The findings highlight the complex interaction between environmental experiences and individual psychological characteristics in shaping mental health outcomes.

### X. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. University authorities should strengthen counseling and psychological support services, ensuring that trained professionals are available to assist students who have been exposed to domestic violence.
2. Programs aimed at enhancing self-esteem and promoting an internal locus of control should be integrated into student orientation programs and mental health initiatives.
3. Awareness campaigns should be organized within the university community to educate students about the psychological effects of domestic violence and available support systems.
4. Parents and guardians should be encouraged to provide supportive and non-violent home environments to foster healthy psychological development.
5. Government and non-governmental organizations should collaborate with tertiary institutions to implement intervention and prevention programs targeting domestic violence.

### XI. Limitations of the Study

Despite the significance of the findings, this study has certain limitations. The study was limited to female undergraduates of Ambrose Alli University, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other populations. The reliance on self-

reported data may also introduce response bias. Additionally, other psychological and socio-economic variables that may influence psychological well-being were not examined in this study.

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