



## COMPLIANCE WITH DOMESTIC SAFETY MEASURES AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN HALLS OF RESIDENCE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES, RIVERS STATE

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### Abstract

This study investigated the compliance with domestic safety among undergraduates in halls of residence in public universities, in Rivers State. The descriptive survey design using the triangulation mixed method was adopted with a population that consisted of 9,050 hostel residential undergraduate students in the three public universities in Rivers State with a sample size of 995, which was selected using the multi-stage sampling procedure. The instruments for data collection were an unstructured interview guide and a structured questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.91 for compliance with domestic safety measures. The retrieved copies of the questionnaire were coded and analysed with the aid of SPSS using percentages. The findings of the study showed a high extent of compliance with domestic safety measures such as housekeeping (81.4%), and fire safety (67.9%). It was concluded that hostel residential undergraduate students in public universities in Rivers State generally had a high but not encompassing extent of compliance with domestic safety measures as poor compliance was found in some vital aspects. It was recommended that the government should employ more porters/portresses who will work the morning and night shifts for better supervision both in the male and female hostels as most of the unsafe acts reported were confirmed to occur during the hours when the porters were not on duty, particularly at night or evening hours.

**Keywords:** Compliance, Domestic Safety, Hostel, Undergraduates

### Introduction

The home is where everyone retires back to after the day's activities for rest, relaxation, and refreshment in readiness for further activities. Therefore, it must be safe for the health and general well-being of individuals. Domestic safety is among the most powerful drivers of human development as it affects the quality of life at many levels, including improved health and economic status. There is growing awareness among public health practitioners that, until safety measures are consistently practiced, both at home and in the community as a whole and institutions, the desired impacts of improved health benefits of safety cannot be realized (Szanto & Rabinowicz, 2012). This is because poor domestic safety practices put the health of everyone at stake given that every human has a home which is the first point of contact with the external world. Fasoranti (2015) defined safety as the condition of being free from harm. Domestic safety refers to measures put in place to ensure that the home is free or protected from danger, harm, or any health-threatening condition (Nikkanen, 2005) or the control of recognized hazards in the home to achieve an acceptable level of risk (Neumann, 2019). Poor domestic safety practices have led to domestic accidents. Hossein (2009) reported that every year, close to 50% of people are injured or killed as a result of accidental poisoning, falls, burns, and bites at home. In the same vein, Stewart (2001) noted that there are more accidents in the home than in many other environments, yet local authorities have not taken it as a duty to promote domestic safety.

The rate of domestic accidents is alarming and this necessitates the need to bring to the fore domestic safety practice which is a key strategy to curb the high prevalence of domestic accidents. Global records from the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013) showed that, annually, 830,000 people died due to domestic accidents worldwide. The Center for Disease Control (2011) reported that, in the United States of America (USA), home accidents comprise the third leading cause of emergency department visits. In the United Kingdom, Rospa (2012) reported that 40% of all accidents occur at home and that 2,700,000 people are treated due to domestic accidents, with 7,000 deaths annually. In Turkey, domestic accidents, with a prevalence of 25.0%, were reported as the second leading cause of death following traffic accidents (Koçer, 2006). In Ghana, Amoh (2015) reported that 160 fire outbreaks were recorded by the Ghana National Fire Services between January first and January seventh

of the same year, at various places including halls of residence and hostels, leaving many students' items lost, such as fridges, gas cylinders, stoves, laptops, books, electrical appliances, clothes, and kitchen utensils, among others. In Nigeria, Arulogun et al. (2013) reported that the prevalence of domestic accidents was 46%. Even more disturbing, is the report of Tanir (2012) that says, though the actual number of accidents and associated harms cannot be established because records are insufficient and data from hospitals alone does not represent all relevant figures, among types of accidents, it is true that domestic accidents are greater than occupational accidents. Previous studies carried out in Nigeria showed that most burn injuries reported were domestic and flames constituted the highest cause of burns (Olaitan et al., 2004), with a mortality rate which ranged from 21.8% to 36% (Olabanji et al., 2003).

Yet, domestic safety has been a silent issue both among safety professionals and scholars. The National Safety Council (2020) posited that the leading causes of home injury for which domestic safety must be targeted are slips, falls, fires, burns, poisonings, and carbon monoxide exposure; thus, domestic safety must encompass a wide range of practices including good housekeeping, safe food handling, safe disposal of domestic waste, and fire safety practices, to be free or protected from these hazards at home. Operationally, compliance with domestic safety was conceptualized as the consistent observance of domestic safety measures, which are domestic fire safety, safe disposal of domestic wastes, safe food handling, and good housekeeping. Good housekeeping is a very vital aspect of domestic safety that cannot be ignored in any attempt to concretize its practice in any home setting, including hostels. Polo and Tweed (2020) stated that housekeeping includes all aspects of organization, tidiness, maintenance, and safety of the household. There must be a good organization of the items, including furniture, and maintenance of cleanliness in the hostel and its environs to ensure safety in the home. According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (2018), housekeeping is not just cleanliness, it includes keeping the home neat and orderly, maintaining halls and floors free of slip and trip hazards, and removing waste materials (e.g., paper, cardboard), and other fire hazards from the home. The school hostel is the home of residential students, where these students carry out all the basic activities that are done in their homes whenever they are in school and as such, different items are available, such as those they have at home to make them feel comfortable to sleep, cook, eat, bath, play, and read their books. It is worth noting that if the items in the hostels, including flammable and electrical appliances, are not well kept, it could lead to a disastrous fire outbreak.

Fire safety is essential given the high rate of fire accidents reported in hostels. The Life Safety Development (2020) posited that fire safety is the set of practices intended to reduce the destruction caused by fire, and it includes measures that are intended to prevent the ignition of an uncontrolled fire and those that are used to limit the development and effects of a fire after it starts. Such practices include: keeping combustible materials or flammable liquids and gases away from fire or ignition sources; minimizing the use of flammable liquids in the hostel; and closing containers tightly when not in use (Scottish Fire Rescue Service, n.d). In the year 2015, a fire accident was reported at the female hostel of the University of Uyo, caused by an electrical fault when one of the female students was cooking and in which the properties of some students were destroyed. Also, in 2016, another report showed that in Lagos State, there was an outbreak of fire accidents in a student hostel, leaving some students injured, several rooms burnt down and loss of a lot of students' items like laptops, phones, books and mattresses (News Agency of Nigeria, NAN, 2016). It was recorded that there was no fire extinguisher around. The only available one was in the hostel manager's room (who was not around at the time). This is the scenario in many Nigerian student hostels. Even when they are made available, students do not know how to use them. To buttress this, in Nigeria, where there is a poor reporting system even among students, several such incidences occur in several hostels but are not reported due to the fear that the perpetrator will be punished. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the compliance to domestic safety measures among the residential students is unravelled to be able to identify specific areas for intervention and mitigation to prevent loss of both properties, good health and life. According to Mamady (2016), safety behaviour is required to prevent direct contamination and exposure to household substances that are injurious to health and can lead to domestic accidents.

In Rivers State, the prevalence of domestic accidents was reported to be very high (90.4%), with the most common causes being sharp objects like knives, razor blades, and broken bottles (88.9%), followed by slippery floors (65.7%), broomsticks (62.6%), kerosene stove fire (47.0%), electric shock (46.8%), insect bites (43.6%), and fall from furniture (40.5%) (Eleki, 2020); which are indicative of poor domestic safety practices. Observation has shown that this scenario is not different from the experiences of residential undergraduate students however, the poor reporting system has masked the magnitude of the problem in the dormitories. Rivers State is one of the hubs

of educational institutions in Nigeria, ranging from the basic to the tertiary levels. According to Jones (2012), over the last 20 years, the student population engaged in the higher education sector has been increasing consistently.

### Statement of the Problem

Most tertiary institutions, including universities, provide accommodation (hostels or halls of residence) for their undergraduate students who have to study away from home, as it keeps them close to the lecture rooms and libraries. The majority of these undergraduates, who for the first time in their lives are becoming relatively independent, find it challenging to gain a balance between their domestic chores and academics. In that case, some hostels happen to have a reflection of poor domestic safety syndrome in their students' rooms in the hostel facilities and its environs. This is evidenced in the several cases of near misses in fire outbreaks and even fire incidences, including domestic accidents and cases of foodborne and airborne diseases reported among residential students. Thus, the domestic safety practices of these students, if left unspotted, can lead to more damaging health and economic losses for individuals, institutions and the government. Hence, the researchers deemed it necessary to carry out this study to investigate the compliance with domestic safety measures among hostel residential undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State.

### Aim and Objectives of the study

This study investigated the compliance with domestic safety among undergraduates in halls of residence in public universities, in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the extent of compliance with fire safety among undergraduates in halls of residence in public universities, Rivers State
2. determine the extent of compliance with good housekeeping among undergraduates in halls of residence in public universities, Rivers State
3. find out the relationship between gender and compliance with domestic safety among undergraduates in halls of residence in public universities, Rivers State

### Research questions

The study provided answers to the following research questions:

4. What is the extent of compliance with fire safety among undergraduates in halls of residence in public universities, Rivers State?
5. What is the extent of compliance with good housekeeping among undergraduates in halls of residence in public universities, Rivers State?
6. What is the relationship between gender and compliance with domestic safety among undergraduates in halls of residence in public universities, Rivers State?

### Hypothesis

The hypothesis below guided the study

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between gender and compliance with domestic safety among undergraduates in public universities, Rivers State

### Materials and Methods

The research design adopted for this study was a descriptive survey design using a triangulation mixed method. According to Wisdom and Creswell (2013), the mixed method of research design refers to the systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative data within a single investigation for a more complete and synergistic utilization of data. Triangulation research design is a type of mixed method which is used when a researcher wants to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic to best understand the research problem or to expand quantitative results with qualitative data (Creswell et al., 2003). The population for this study consisted of nine thousand, five hundred residential undergraduate students in public universities in Rivers State (Report of the student affairs division of public universities, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, 2020). The sample size for this study was nine hundred and ninety-five, which is 10% of the population (905) added to 10% attrition (90). A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for the study. In the first stage, a simple random sampling technique (balloting without replacement) was used to select two hostels in each of the universities, making a total of six hostels to be used for the study, as shown in the table below. In the second stage, the proportionately stratified sampling technique was used to determine how many respondents were to be selected from each of the hostels; in the third stage, the systematic sampling technique was used to select the respondents for the study. The instruments for data collection were an unstructured interview guide and a structured questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.91 for compliance with domestic safety measures. The retrieved copies of the questionnaire were coded and analysed with the aid of SPSS using percentage and binary logistic regression at a 0.05 level of significance.

## Results

**Table 1: Extent of compliance with fire safety among respondents**

SN	Fire safety	Compliance		Decision
		Low, F(%)	High, F(%)	
1	Storage of flammable materials like cooking gas or kerosene stove in a safe area	65(7.1)	845(92.9)	HE
2	Cooking late night	478(52.5)	432(47.5)	LE
3	Answering cell phone close to a cooking gas or stove	530(58.2)	380(41.8)	LE
4	Answering cell phone while it is charging	746(82.0)	164(18.0)	LE
5	Electrical equipment are put off when not in use	391(43.0)	519(57.0)	HE
6	Portable heaters used are not protected by a strong spark-proof fireguard	423(46.5)	487(53.5)	HE
7	Camp gas cylinder are not stored or kept outside	536(58.9)	374(41.1)	LE
8	Smokes cigarettes or cigars in or around the hostel	518(56.9)	392(43.1)	LE
9	Refilling a stove with kerosene when it is on	367(40.3)	543(59.7)	HE
10	Proper storage of combustible materials such as waste-papers and wrappings	147(16.2)	763(83.8)	HE
11	Regular maintenance of electrical installations	344(37.8)	566(62.2)	HE
12	Use of candles to read in the night	388(42.6)	522(57.4)	HE
	<b>Total</b>	<b>401(44.1)</b>	<b>509(55.9)</b>	<b>HE</b>

**Key: HE = high extent; LE = low extent**

Table 1 revealed the extent of compliance with fire safety among undergraduates in halls of residence in public universities. The result showed that overall 509(55.9%) of the respondents had a high extent of compliance with fire safety while 401(44.1%) had a low extent of compliance. Thus, the extent of compliance with fire safety among residential undergraduates in public universities was high. However, poor compliance was found in storing camp gas cylinders inside and answering cell phones close to cooking gas. The findings from the qualitative data provided more light on the result above: A key informant confidentially stated that: "We have experienced cases of fire outbreaks or even near misses for fire outbreaks, but we always put it out very fast and do not have to tell the school authority because we do not want any student to be expelled." The cause of the fire was a wrongly constructed socket by a student who cuts people's hair in the hostel at night when the porter has closed for work. There was a spark from the electrical wire, but, we were able to put it out immediately". A key informant also affirmed that, "there was someone selling kerosene in the hostel but, as the hostel rep, I ensured that the kerosene was kept outside the hostel, where the hostellers buy and bring it to the room to pour it into their stove".

**Table 2: Extent of compliance with housekeeping among respondents**

SN	Housekeeping	Compliance		Decision
		Low F(%)	High F(%)	
1	Beds are properly arranged in the room	43(4.7)	867(95.3)	HE
2	Items in the room are properly arranged	45(4.9)	865(95.1)	HE
3	Proper installation or maintenance of electrical appliances	344(37.8)	566(62.2)	HE
4	Keeping charging phones close to self while sleeping	790(86.8)	120(13.2)	LE
5	Leaving electrical appliances on while going out	787(86.5)	123(13.5)	LE
6	Cooking in the room while others are sleeping	387(42.5)	523(57.5)	LE
7	Trying to fix faulty electrical appliance by oneself	760(83.5)	150(1)	LE
8	Ensures the room is swept daily	201(22.1)	709(77.9)	HE
9	Ensures that the floors are free from slip and trip hazards by removing items that can pose as hazards	143(15.7)	767(84.3)	HE
10	Clothes are soaked in water until it starts producing foul smell	414(45.5)	496(54.5)	LE
11	Fluids are spilled on the floor	389(42.7)	521(57.3)	HE
12	Sharp objects are properly arranged to avoid cuts or injuries to others	86(9.5)	824(90.5)	HE
13	Luggage are arranged in such a way that does not obstruct any passage way	74(8.1)	836(91.9)	HE
	<b>Total</b>	<b>343(37.3)</b>	<b>567(62.3)</b>	<b>HE</b>

Table 2 revealed the extent of compliance with housekeeping among undergraduates in halls of residence in public universities. The result indicated that overall, 567(62.3%) had high extent of compliance with housekeeping. Therefore, residential undergraduates in public university had high extent of compliance with housekeeping. However, low extent of compliance was found for leaving electrical appliances on while going out, and trying to

fix faulty electrical appliances by oneself. This could be buttressed by the responses of the key informants. A key informant said: *“in my hostel, the students are very much compliant with domestic safety measures in terms of good housekeeping, though there are some which you need to always monitor but, on a general note, they are trying in terms of good housekeeping”* In the same vein, another key informant also specified that: *“students construct electrical sockets by themselves which they use for hand dryer in the hostel to make people’s hair”*.

**Table 4.3: Binary Logistic Regression analysis showing relationship between gender and compliance with domestic safety among residential undergraduates**

Gender	Compliance		Total	df	$\chi^2$	p-value	Odds Ratio (OR)	95%CI Lower Upper
	Good F(%)	Poor F(%)						
Male	226(63.0)	133(37.0)	359(100)	1	255.17	0.00	Ref	
Female	241(43.7)	310(56.3)	551(100)				8.44*	6.03-11.82

**\*Significant. p<0.05**

Table 3 showed the binary logistic regression of relationship between gender and compliance with domestic safety measures among residential undergraduates. On bivariate analysis, the findings of the study showed a significant relationship between gender and compliance with domestic safety ( $p<0.05$ ). The result showed that the females were about 8 times more likely to comply with domestic safety measures (OR = 8.44, 95%CI: 6.03-11.82) compared to the males. Thus, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between gender and compliance with domestic safety measures among residential undergraduates was rejected. The respondents in the key informant interview also mentioned that gender could be a determinant. A key informant said: *“gender is related to compliance with domestic safety because the boys are not like the girls who are very careful with domestic activities, unlike the girls, the boys do not care”*. Another key informant said: *“gender can be related to compliance with domestic safety measures because there is a difference between girls and boys in the way they handle things”*.

### Discussion of findings

The finding of this study in Table 1 showed a high extent of compliance with fire safety as one of the domestic safety measures. The finding of this study may be due to the timing of the domestic activities of the students and the diligence of the hostel representatives in going around the different rooms for their monitoring timely, to ensure no domestic activities like cooking is going on outside the stipulated time and also ensuring that electrical appliances are in their right structure. The finding of this study is in line with that of Vincent (2003) whose study on fire safety among students at the University of Nairobi established high compliance with fire safety. This similarity might be due to the homogeneity of the study respondents. The finding of this study is also in consonance with that of Agyekum et al. (2016), where high compliance with fire safety measures was found. The finding of this study gives credence to that of Armbrust et al. (2015) whose study on fire safety behaviours among students at a regional Midwestern university showed a high extent of compliance with fire safety. This similarity found might be due to the similarity in the sample size as the sample sizes were in close range. The finding of this study is at variance with that of Kikwasi (2015) whose study on fire safety measures in a shopping mall in Tanzania revealed a low extent of compliance with fire safety. This variation might be due to the difference in the study location and the settings where the studies were carried out as the present study was carried out in an institution while the previous one was carried out in a shopping mall, this could explain the difference in the findings of the study. However, poor compliance with fire safety was found in storing camp gas cylinders inside and answering cell phones close to cooking gas. This finding is at variance with that of Agyekum et al. (2016) whose finding showed that the mostly practiced fire safety measure in the hostel was the storage of flammable materials in a safe area. This variation might be due to the difference in the study sample, as the sample size in the previous study was much smaller than the sample size used in the present study.

The result of this study showed a high extent of compliance with good housekeeping. This finding is not surprising because it is possible that both the hostel representative and the porters/portresses are doing a good job of ensuring that the hostels are well-kept at all times. The finding of this study is in line with that of Abalo et al. (2017) in Ghana where the majority of the respondents practiced good housekeeping. This similarity found might be due to the homogeneity of the study respondents. Although, the finding of this study is at variance with that of Odaudu and Yahaya (2019) among students in male hostels of the university in Nigeria showed poor housekeeping. This variation might be due to the difference in the sample size as the sample size of the previous study was just one-tenth of the sample size in the present study. Also, the previous study investigated only males while this study

investigated females. In an African setting, women are mostly responsible for housekeeping while males indulge in more strenuous jobs, this might have explained the variance established. The finding of this study is also at variance with that of Dube and January (2012) which showed poor housekeeping practices. The finding of this study is also at variance with that of Naliaka (2014) whose study in Kenya showed poor housekeeping practices. This variation could be due to the heterogeneity of the study respondents.

The result in Table 3 showed that, high extent of compliance with domestic safety measures was found more among the females who are more likely to comply with domestic safety than their male counterparts. This finding may not be surprising because of the patriarchal nature of the area where the study was carried out; as females are seen as solely responsible for domestic chores thus, even from childhood are taught more about domestic upkeep, making them more proficient in domestic activities than their male counterparts. The finding of this study is in keeping with that of Lazou et al. (2012) whose study of university students in Greece showed that a high extent of compliance with food safety measures was found among female students. This similarity found between the previous study and the present one might be due to the homogeneity of the study respondents as both studies were focused on undergraduate students. The findings of this study are not in line with that of Vincent (2003) whose study on safety among university students at Nairobi where there was a high extent of compliance with domestic safety among females more than males. This variation found might be due to the difference in the sample size and study design as the previous study used a small sample size which is not up to one-quarter of the sample used in the present study; the previous study also used a cross-sectional study design whereas the present study used a mixed method. The findings of this study are at variance with that of Agyekum et al. (2016) whose findings showed high compliance with domestic safety measures majority of who were males with only a few being females. This difference found might be due to the difference in the study location and the sample size.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that residential undergraduates in public universities in Rivers State generally had a high but not encompassing extent of compliance with domestic safety measures as poor compliance was found in storing camp gas cylinders inside the rooms, and answering cell phone close to cooking gas, leaving electrical appliances on while going out, and trying to fix faulty electrical appliances by themselves.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. The government should employ more porters/portresses who will work morning and night shifts for better supervision both in the male and female hostels as, most of the unsafe acts reported were confirmed to occur during the hours when the porters were not on duty, precisely at night or evening hours.
2. The school management should play their role in ensuring fire safety by installing fire detectors and mounting functional fire extinguishers in all the hostels.
3. The porters/portresses should also play their role effectively in ensuring fire safety by working confidentially with the hostel representative, to be able to fish out any activity threatening the fire safety of the hostels such as selling of kerosene, unprofessional construction of electrical sockets in the hostel.

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