

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract: *The study determined the factors that contribute to Suicidal ideation among undergraduate Students in Tertiary Institutions in Enugu State. Three research questions guided the study. The population comprised 319 students of two public universities in Enugu State. A total of 177 students from both schools were sampled using the proportionate stratified sampling technique. The instrument was validated by two experts in Measurement and Evaluation. All the 177 copies of the questionnaire distributed were properly filled and returned. The information on school attended by the students were analyzed using frequency and percentage, while the data generated in research questions were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that the undergraduate students agreed that family related factors contribute to suicidal ideation among students in Tertiary Institutions. They also agreed that school related factors contribute to suicidal ideation among students in Tertiary Institutions and finally that peer influence related factors contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions. Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that family, school and peer influence related factors contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions. The study recommended among others that the government should provide suicidal counselling personnel who will always be available to offer assistance to those in need in various tertiary institutions in Nigeria.*

INTRODUCTION

Suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's own death. According to Amazeen, (2015) suicides are impulsive acts due to stress, such as

from financial or academic difficulties, relationship problems such as breakups or deaths of close ones, or harassment/bullying. The risk factors of suicide could be linked to

**Obi, Joy Sylvia Chisara (PhD), Nwadinobi Veronica Nkiru (PhD), Nnadi Grace Chinyere
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mental disorders like depression, bipolar disorder, autism spectrum disorders, schizophrenia, personality disorders, and anxiety disorders, while physical disorders such as chronic fatigue syndrome and substance use disorders including alcohol use disorder and the use of and withdrawal from benzodiazepines could be attributed to it. That is to say that suicide is the act of taking one's own life intentionally. Those who have previously attempted suicide are at a higher risk for future attempts. This is in contrast to euthanasia, where another person takes a more active role in bringing about a person's death. Recent evidence suggests that, globally, about 3.8 per 100,000 persons aged 10–19 die by suicide annually (Glenn, 2020). In sub-Saharan Africa, suicide remains in the 12 leading causes of death among young people aged 10–24 (Naghavi & Global Burden of Disease Self-Harm Collaborators, 2019). Thus, suicide is an intentional or self-inflicted death in which one makes direct intention and deliberate effort to end one's life. Suicide is the conscious act of taking one's own life. That is to say that suicide is a conscious act of self-induced extinction, best understood as a multidimensional malaise in a needful individual who defines an issue for which suicide is perceived as the best solution. Suicide is defined as the act of killing oneself deliberately and performed by the person concerned in the full knowledge or expectation of its fatal outcome (WHO 2014). Worldwide, suicide is the fifteenth leading cause of death, accounting for 1.4% of all deaths (WHO 2014). In total, more than 800,000 people die by suicide each year. The annual global age-

standardized death rate for 2012 is estimated to be 11.4 per 100,000, and the World Health Organization WHO (2014) projects this rate to remain steady through 2030.

Globally, suicide is among the top ten causes of mortality in every country and one of the three top killers of youths (WHO 2014). The incidence of attempted suicide is 20 times as common as completed suicide (WHO 2014) and it has been predicted that much more people will die of suicide as the year passes by (Uchendu, Ijomone & Nwachokor, 2019). The recorded cases of suicide in Nigeria increases as the year passes by, for instance, according to the suicide reports by Obinna and Olawale (2019), on 19th April, 2019, a 100-level student of the state Universities in the North Central, of Nigeria died by suicide after she was reported jilted by her boyfriend. In the same month, another 100-level student of Chemical Engineering at another University in the South South of Nigeria ended his life after drinking poisonous substance. In May 13th, 2019, another student in one the Universities in the South Eastern Nigeria, also attempted suicide, also on 16th May, 2019, a third year Physics and Astronomy undergraduate of same university was found dead in an uncompleted building in the University. The lifeless body was found dangling on a rope suspended from a height. In the same vein, on 5th May, 2019, a student of universities, in the South West Nigeria committed suicide due to poor academic performance (Bamigbola, 2019). Earlier, April 14, 2018, a final year, Pharmacy student of a University in the South South of Nigeria, committed suicide due to poor academic

performance. He was alleged to have ingested two containers of insecticide, when he discovered that he would be spending another session in the school (Onojeghen, 2018). Suicidal tendency could be fatal (completed), non-fatal (attempted), ideation (thinking about), or self-destructive behaviours (Canetto, 2011). Robert, (2018) typically call those suicidal actions in which the person dies completed suicide (fatal), and those in which the person survives attempted suicide (non-fatal). Suicidal and self-destructive behaviours represent distinct, although somewhat overlapping phenomena (Seiden and Gleiser, 2010).

In other words, Suicidal ideation is the thought of ending one's life, it may or may not involve exact planning or intent. Besides suicidal planning and suicidal attempt, evidence by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2014) and the recent growing body of literature have identified suicidal ideation to be associated with elevated risk of suicide; across all age groups and gender and persons with a history of suicidal ideation are at an increased likelihood of death by suicide (Klonsky, May, & Saffer, 2016). Suicidal ideation, thus refers to the thoughts, ideas, intentions, plans and attempts to end one's life immediately.

Furthermore suicidal ideation has been defined as thinking about engaging in a suicide-related behaviour. Stillion (2015) described Suicidal ideation as an intra-psychic conflict and suggested that much of the pain experienced by suicidal people was from unresolved struggles among the id, ego, and superego. He opined that suicidal behaviour might also result from anger

or aggression turned inward. This view was supported by Amazeen, (2015) who stated that Suicidal ideation might result from intra-psychic and unresolved struggles among the id, ego, and superego. They maintained that Suicidal ideation might result from anger or aggression turned inward and the desire to end ones live. Lee, Wong, Chow & McBride-Chang (2006) pointed out that family burden and responsibilities as well as stigmatization by parents or other members of the family contribute to suicidal ideation. According to Bell (2021) Suicidal ideation refers to a deliberate act intended to end one's life in order to escape unbearable suffering or to help change adverse conditions of living (Bell. 2021). Thus, it is the intentional thoughts of taking one's own life or the destruction of one's own interest or prospects. This Maris (2012) asserted earlier that Suicidal ideation is any willful thought which is designed to end one's own life. For many, according to him, it is a crime against oneself, nature, humanity and God.

Suicide as pointed out earlier, has significantly increased in the recent time leading to death among Nigerian undergraduates because of its social and psychological impact. This has created a lot of psychological and health concerns to people of diverse backgrounds around the globe with Nigeria having its own share. As observed earlier Nigeria has recently recorded very high number of suicide deaths and the number increases daily, this therefore, necessitates counselling interventions to remediate the situation. Hence, there is an urgent need to intervene in suicide cases in the society by creating effective counselling

strategies by guidance counsellors for its prevention. Research has shown that factors associated with suicidal ideation vary widely, they include personal histories, lifestyle and health circumstances, social and cultural factors, and policy factors (Pfledderer, 2019). In other words, suicidal ideation results from the interplay among many factors at multiple layers of an individual's proximal and distal environment (WHO, 2016). Specifically, available evidence from sub-Saharan Africa suggests, psychological problems (including worry, loneliness, depression, and anxiety), bullying, victimization, alcohol use, exposure to violence, exposure to war trauma, being a younger adolescent, being an orphan, financial problems, sexual abuse, and intimate partner violence as factors associated with increased odds of suicidal ideation among students (Nyundo, 2020).

Suicidal ideation seem to be a fundamental element in the suicidal process, known as a continuous and hierarchical succession of suicidal behaviors that gradually increase in severity in consequence of the interaction between internal and external factors and are major cause for suicide completion (Thompson, Dewa, & Phare, 2012). This is worrisome, as this kind of ideals tend to be common in university populations. For instance, some researches show that during university years, 12% of students' experienced suicidal thoughts, with 2.6% of them expressing persistent suicidal ideation (Wilcox et al., 2010). In Nigeria, Suicidal ideation are regarded as taboos. In South Eastern States of Nigeria, suicide is described as bad death and an abhorred act. It is

also labeled as an immoral and abhorred act in many other cultures of other parts of Nigeria. For example, the Ibibio of Akwa Ibom State describe suicide as "Uyire Ekpan" that is bad death and abhorred act (Arria, O'Grady, Caldeira, Vincent, Wilcox & Wish (2016). Such actions are sometimes concealed and shrouded with secrecy by the family members of the victims or the attempters. This is to avoid stigmatization of the family members by the entire community. However, for the purposes of this study, Suicidal ideation refers to the act, the intention, tendency, an attempt or instance of taking one's own life and indirect self-destructive behaviours, especially by a person of years of discretion and sound mind. In another Angle, Wilson, Dunlavy, Viswanathan, and Bovet, (2012) posited that poor academic achievement, cult activities in the school environment, unable to meet the financial need in the school all contribute to suicidal tendency among students.

It is therefore necessary to embark on a study to determine the factors that contribute to suicidal ideation among undergraduate students. The geographical scope of the study is Enugu State, Nigeria. It is limited to students in Guidance and Counselling Departments of the two public universities in Enugu State, who are presumed to be studying courses on psychology and its application on human behaviours. The content scope deals on factors that contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions. The study is anchored on Lester's theory of social process propounded by Lester in 1990. He postulated that those who have close relationships with parents, friends and teachers

are more likely to have a positive self-image and to be able to resist the temptation of crime. Those who feel detached from conventional society are unaffected by its social functions. He called these theories, “social control theories”. Suicidal ideation demonstrates that something is fundamentally wrong, either with an individual or with the situation in which the individual exists, or with both the individual and the situation. It does not show up without any reason. It involves not only pain, but the individual’s unwillingness to tolerate that pain, the decision not to endure it, and the active will to stop it (WHO, 2018).

However, Suicide could be seen as a leading cause of student death especially in the tertiary institutions. Moreover, information on suicidal behaviour, including ideation, attempts and completed suicides in Nigeria is lacking and Enugu State is not left out. Despite the huge burden that mental health exacts on global burden of disease, it still remains a neglected area of research especially in Nigeria, where greater emphasis and effort is directed towards infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, Covid -19 and HIV/AIDS. Although not all suicidal ideation materialize into suicide attempts or suicide, it is the first step on the path to suicide. Often times students’ mental health are neglected especially students at tertiary institution level. It is not ruled out that suicide is responsible for about one million deaths annually in the world. While there have been reports on the prevalence and correlates of suicidal ideation in the developed world, data from the developing world are limited. It is therefore necessary to carry out this study to

investigate the factors that contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to determine the factors that contribute to Suicidal Ideation among Students in Tertiary Institutions. Specifically, the study determined:

1. Family related factors that contribute to Suicidal Ideation among Students in Tertiary Institutions.
2. School related factors associated with Suicidal Ideation among Students in Tertiary Institutions.
3. Peer influence related factors associated with Suicidal Ideation among Students in Tertiary Institutions

Research Questions

- What are the Family related factors that contribute to Suicidal Ideation among Students in Tertiary Institutions?
- What are the School related factors that contribute to Suicidal Ideation among Students in Tertiary Institutions?
- What are the Peer influence related factors that contribute to Suicidal Ideation among Students in Tertiary Institutions?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. This design is considered appropriate for this study since the study sought to explore the students on factors that contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions. The study was conducted in the two tertiary institutions in Enugu state, one federal and the other state.

The research on suicidal ideation among students in these two universities was deemed necessary to know if there are cases of suicide

and the contributing factors, considering that there have been incidences of suicide among students in the area as often observed in the social media.

The population of the study is 319 regular students of the Department of Guidance and Counselling of the two universities, 126 and 193 respectively. A size of 177 students from the two universities was used for the study. The sample size was gotten using the proportionate stratified sampling technique. The proportion was based on the population size in each stratum. This sampling technique ensured representativeness of the sample relative to the population and guaranteed that all the constituents of the population are represented in the sample. The instrument for data collection for this study was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers based on the review of related literature and in relation to the research questions guiding the study. The questionnaire has two sections; sections A and B. Section A contains items on school information of respondents while Section B contains items on factors contributing to suicidal ideation. All the items were structured on a four point scale response options of strongly agreed (SA) = 4points, Agreed (A) = 3points, Disagreed (D) = 2points, strongly

disagreed (SD) = 1point. The instrument was subjected to face validity by using two experts. Their inputs were used in modifying the items to the standard which was finally used for data collection. The researchers with the help of three research assistants administered copies of the questionnaire directly to the respondents in their various schools. The data collected were analyzed using the arithmetic mean. The level of agreement or disagreement to the questionnaire items was determined based on mean rating of items and the cluster mean interpreted relative to real limits of numbers using standard deviation. The Decision rule is calculated as follows = 2.5, This means that any mean score from 2.5 and above is taken to be agreed while any mean score below 2.5 is taken to be disagreed. The distribution of the respondents according to their schools indicated that 107 students and 70 students representing 60.5% and 39.5% respectively, were involved in the study.

Research Question 1

What are the family related factors that contribute to suicidal ideation among students in Tertiary Institutions?

Data relating to this research question are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Ratings of family related factors that contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions

S/N	Family related factors and suicidal ideation	X	SD	REMARKS
1	Being abused by parents or other adults in the house hold.	3.40	0.71	Agreed
2	History of mental disorder in the family genetics	3.29	0.79	Agreed
3	Loss of loved one in the household.	3.36	0.75	Agreed
4	Family burden and responsibilities.	3.39	0.71	Agreed
5	Stigmatization by parents or other members of the family	3.28	0.78	Agreed
6	Frequent Interpersonal conflict between parents and siblings	3.32	0.82	Agreed
7	Pre-existing family psychiatric conditions and suicidal behavior	3.31	0.73	Agreed
Cluster mean		3.34	0.76	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Obi, Joy Sylvia Chisara (PhD), Nwadinobi Veronica Nkiru (PhD), Nnadi Grace Chinyere (PhD), Lucky Onyeisi Ogben

Data in Table 1 reveals that out of 7 items listed on family related factors and suicidal ideation, the respondents rated all the items agreed with mean score ranged from 3.28 to 3.40. The cluster means score of 3.34 indicates that the respondents agreed that family related factors contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions. The standard deviations ranged from 0.71 to 0.82. This shows that the respondents are not wide apart in their mean ratings.

Research Question 2:**What are school related factors that contribute to suicidal ideation among students in Tertiary Institutions?**

Data relating to this research question are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: School related factors contributing to suicidal ideation

S/N	School related factors contributing to suicidal ideation	X	SD	REMARKS
1	Serious quarrel with lecturers or other staff at the institution.	3.20	0.51	Agreed
2	Poor academic achievement.	2.89	0.65	Agreed
3	Pressure from cult activities in the school environment.	2.66	0.78	Agreed
4	Unable to meet the financial aid in the school.	3.38	0.81	Agreed
5	Sexual advances by lecturers.	2.88	0.68	Agreed
6	Rape and other related abuse in the school.	3.31	0.67	Agreed
7	Failed relationship in school.	2.84	0.65	Agreed
Cluster mean		3.00	0.68	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Data in Table 2 reveals that out of 7 items listed on school related factors contributing to suicidal tendency, the respondents rated all the items agreed with mean score ranged from 2.66 to 3.38. The cluster means score of 3.00 indicates that school related factors contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions. The standard deviations ranged from 0.51 to 0.81. This shows that the respondents are not wide apart in their mean ratings.

Research Question 3:**What are peer influence related factors that contribute to suicidal ideation among students in Tertiary Institutions?**

Data relating to this research question are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Peer influence related factors contributing to suicidal ideation

S/N	Peer influence related factors and suicidal ideation	X	SD	REMARKS
1	Psychoactive substance use as a result of negative thoughts.	3.47	0.71	Agreed
2	Trauma such as physical and sexual abuse.	2.58	0.85	Agreed
3	Public embarrassment by the fellow peer.	2.62	0.78	Agreed
4	Betrayal by the fellow peer.	2.98	0.71	Agreed
5	Guilt as a result of past actions relating to family peer relationship.	3.48	0.75	Agreed
6	Interpersonal conflict between peers.	3.29	0.76	Agreed
7	Negative attitude from peers.	3.17	0.61	Agreed
Cluster mean		3.08	0.74	Agreed

Obi, Joy Sylvia Chisara (PhD), Nwadinobi Veronica Nkiru (PhD), Nnadi Grace Chinyere (PhD), Lucky Onyeisi Ogben

Data in Table 3 reveals that out of 7 items listed on peer influence related factors and suicidal ideation, the respondents rated all the items agreed with mean score ranging from 2.58 to 3.48. The cluster mean score of 3.08 indicated that peer influence related factors contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions. The standard deviations ranged from 0.71 to 0.85.

Discussion of Findings

Family related factors that contribute to suicidal Ideation among Students in Tertiary Institutions.

The finding in Table 1 reveals that respondents agreed that family related factors contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions. In other words, they agreed that being abused by parents or other adults in the household, having serious quarrel with the parents or other adults in the household, loss of loved one in the household, family burden and responsibilities, stigmatization by parents or other members of the family, interpersonal conflict between parents and siblings and pre-existing family psychiatric conditions and suicidal behaviour contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions. This finding is in line with Lee, Wong, Chow & McBride-Chang (2006) pointed out that family burden and responsibilities as well as stigmatization by parents or other members of the family contribute to suicidal ideation. Thus it can be deduced that the family has a role to play in reducing or enhancing suicidal thoughts. The type of family one is coming, what revolves in the family the type of interpersonal relationships

existing and even the parental styles adopted in the family.

The School related factors associated with suicidal Ideation among Students in Tertiary Institutions

Findings of the study in Table 2 showed that students in tertiary institutions agreed that school related factors contribute to suicidal tendency among students in tertiary institutions. In other words they agreed that serious quarrel with lecturers or other staff in the Institution, poor academic achievement, cult activities in the school environment, unable to meet the financial need in the school, sexual advances by lecturers, rape and other related abuse in the school and failed relationship in school contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions.

The finding of this study is in agreement with the view of Wilson, Dunlavy, Viswanathan, and Bovet, (2012). Who in their assertion posited that poor academic achievement, cult activities in the school environment, unable to meet the financial need in the school all contribute to suicidal tendency among students. This now draws ones attention to the fact that the environment where the students are going through teaching and learning could contribute to suicidal ideation

The Peer influence related factors associated with Suicidal ideation among Students in Tertiary Institutions

Findings of the study in Table 3 showed that students from the tertiary institutions agreed that peer influence related factors contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions. In other words they agreed that

psychoactive substance use as a result of peer influence, trauma such as physical and sexual abuse by peers and friends in school, public embarrassment by the fellow peer, betrayal by the fellow peer, guilt as a result of past actions relating to peer relationship, interpersonal conflict between peers and negative attitude from peers contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions.

The finding of this study is in agreement with the view of Walter *et al.* (2015) who investigated the rate of suicidal behaviours in 4 middle schools in New York City. They revealed that 14 per cent of Latinos reported suicidal behaviours. They found out that betrayal by the fellow peer, guilt as a result of past actions relating to peer relationship, interpersonal conflict between peers and negative attitude from peers contribute to suicidal ideation.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the undergraduate students agreed that family related factors contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions. They also agreed school related factors contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions and finally that peer influence related factors contribute to suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions. It can be established from the study that suicide cases are likely among university students and therefore there is need for exploration and researches in development of suicide prevention methods.

Recommendations

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

- ❖ There should be the teaching of suicide education and prevention in schools and colleges. For this to be meaningful, suicide education should be capable of loading its contents with topics such as signs, myths and facts about suicide, factors associated with suicide and the possible ways of helping the suicidal persons.
- ❖ Government should provide suicide counselling personnel who will always be available to offer assistance to those in need in the counselling units of various tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
- ❖ Specific university-based mental health services should be established in various universities in Nigeria. These services should aim at finding out and taking care of depressed and at risk students in order to prevent incidences of suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

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