

SOCIAL FACTORS AND STUDENT SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG UNDERGRADUATE IN TERTIARY INSTITUTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The rate of suicide among Nigerian student is alarming, the study sought to ascertain the influence of social factors on student's suicidal ideation among undergraduate in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, aiming to inform intervention of guidance counsellors, government, families and friends to curb the menace. The social factors that predisposed suicidal ideation discussed one family structure, family disruption, breakup of intimate relationship and death of love one's. Drugs abuse or substance abuse, academic stress, frustrations from lecturers and social media. It was discussed that all these social factors are closely associated with suicide Tendencies among undergraduate students. Durkheim's theory of suicide analyses Hence, it was recommended among others that, all functioning counselling centres, also government should organize enlightenment campaign workshop, and seminars to inculcate in the people social, economic and psychological effect of suicide.

Keyword: Social factors, suicidal ideation, tertiary institution, undergraduate

Introduction

Suicidal ideation is a thought process in which an individual think about suicide. It is also the thought, intent, plan, and imagination of individual concerning their wish to commit suicide (Conner et al 2001) in Francisca et al 2020. From Banerejee's report (2001) that every year about 25,000 students in a large group of 18 to 20 years commit suicide during the examination period. Also centres for disease control and prevention (2007) reported that suicidal ideation is the predisposition factor to suicide which is the second leading cause of death among 15 to 24 year old and accounts for 12.2% in most countries. No completed suicide or attempted suicide will be carried out with thinking about it, planning it, and sometimes writing death threats.

Consequently, in recent time, the advent of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) is to ensure the adequate healthy living and well-being of all individual irrespective of race and age. Therefore, this has

not been achieved in many countries of the world with respect to suicidal behaviours and its attended perils including threats. Suicide has cause great disaster in human life and is responsible for psychological pain not only to the relative but the friends of the victims. Suicide can also be responsible for the economic drain on many societies. It is also responsible for about 1.4% of all deaths and remains the 15th leading cause of death across the globe (World Health Organization (WHO), 2018;2014).

As one of the public health issues prevalent in both developed and developing countries, suicide causes over 800,000 deaths each year (WHO, 2019,2018). In 2012, about 804,000 suicide deaths were recorded, accounting for 1.4% deaths globally (WHO, 2012). In 2015, the rate of suicide death was 10.7 per 100.000, implying that, for every 20 deaths across the globe, one must be by suicide (Bilsen, 2018). Among individuals who are within the ages of 15 and 44 years, suicide was

found to be the third leading cause of their death (Alabi et al., 2015) and equally ranks second for the death of people between the ages of 15 and 29 years old across the globe (WHO 2014; 2018). The report of the WHO (2017) shows that in south-East Asia, about 15.6 per 100,000 deaths were by suicide while 5.6 per 100,000 in the eastern Mediterranean region and 14.1 per 100,000 in Europe. Each year about 15,000 deaths are attributed to suicide in Ghana (World population review, 2019). In south Africa, suicide accounts for 9% of all deaths involving teenagers and the case of suicidal death is still on increase (Western Cape Government, 2020). Also, the report of the south African depression and anxiety group (2014) shows that in south Africa, about 23 cases of suicide were recorded despite being under-reported as a result of attached stigma.

Consequently, in Nigeria, the WHO report shows that in 2010, about 17,710 (8,410 were females and males 9,300). These figures make Nigeria one of the countries with the highest cases of suicide in Africa. About 20% of all suicide cases in Nigeria which usually take the form of self-poisoning occur among people who are between the ages of 13-1 years as revealed by the suicide research and prevention initiative (SURPIN) (Muanya et al., 2019). Between the year 2009 and 2018, the largest hospitals in Edo State, Nigeria experienced a drastic increase in an attempted suicide by individuals below 30 years (Okoedion et al., 2019). As a result of the increase in the rate of suicidal activities, the Nigerian senate considered it an important topic of discussion following the published report of the country's ranking of 95th happiest nation among 155 countries (Agency Report, 2017).

Some may at one point or the other conceive suicide as permanent solution to problems (Collins 2007). Denga (2015) observed that suicidal attempt has increasingly become common phenomenon in Nigeria and other African countries because of the rising distress caused by unemployment, poverty and other form of frustration in life. After reviewing critically many suicidal literature, this paper Kutie (2006) observed that girls attempt at suicide is higher than those of boy. Gay and lesbian youth are more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual peers. It was reported on Nigeria that between January and August, 2019, there were 13 suicide cases of students in

tertiary institutions across the country (Olufemi, 2019). The report also added that in one particular university about 13 cases of suicide were recorded that year. Consequently, students in tertiary institutions topped the list of 42 Nigerians youths reported to have committed suicide within a period of 6 months. The method they used in committing suicide ranged from using snipers, hanging, cutting of self, jumping into lagoon, river and setting oneself on fire.

Several cases of suicide among Nigerian students have been reported elsewhere (Temi, 2014, Aruya, 2017; Atueyi, 2018, Chux, 2018, Dayo, 2018, Akinloye, 2018). These reported cases of suicide are just few in the public domain, as there are several cases of suicide across Nigeria that were either concealed by the affected families for fear of stigmatization or not reported to the police or by the media. In spite of the increasing rate of suicide among Nigerian undergraduate students the issues of suicidal ideation is not yet getting the necessary attention it deserves these gave the researchers serious concerns and reasons for the present student of social factors and students suicidal ideation among undergraduate in tertiary institutions. Efforts to ensure the prevention of suicidal behaviour, despite these effort and suggestion, suicide behaviour seen to be on the high side in Nigeria society.

Certain social factors are believed to precipitate the contemplation of suicide, predispositions are variables that increase the chances of occurrence of certain negative phenomena or situations. Some of these social factors include family structure, family disruptions, breakup of intimate relationship or death of loved ones, substance abuse, academic stress and internet exposure.

Durkheim's theory of suicide

Why do people commit suicide? It has become a matter of concern to ask this question. One traditional commonsense answer is that, people inherit the desire to kill themselves. In the same way, another view is that sunspots drive people to take their own lives (metaphysics). These explanations may not seem convincing to contemporary researchers, but they represent beliefs widely held as recently as 1900.

Consequently, sociologists are not particularly interested in why any one individual commits suicide they are more concerned with identifying the social forces that systematically

causes some people to take their own lives. In order to undertake this research, sociologists develop a theory that offers a general explanation of suicidal behaviour. An effect theory may have both explanatory and predictive power. That is, it can help us see the relationships among seemingly isolated phenomena as well as understand how one type of change in an environment leads to other changes.

Moreso, the world health organization (2002) estimated that 815,000 people committed suicide in the world in 2000. More than a hundred years earlier a sociologist tried to look at suicide data scientifically. Emile Durkheim (1897, 1951) developed a highly original theory about the relationship between suicide and social factors. He was primarily concerned not with the personalities and how they varied from country to country. As a matter of fact, when he looked at the number of reported suicide in France, England and Denmark in 1896, he also noted the total population of each country in order to determine the rate of suicide in each nation. He found that whereas England had only 67 reported suicides per million inhabitants. France has 135 per million and Denmark had 277 per million. The question then became "why did Denmark have a comparatively high rate of reported suicide.

Durkheim went much deeper in his investigation of suicide rate, and the result was his landmark work *suicide*, published in 1897. Emile Durkheim refused to automatically accept unproved explanations regarding suicide, including the belief that cosmic forces or inherited tendencies caused such deaths. Instead, he focused on social factors, such as the cohesiveness or lack of cohesiveness of religious, social and occupational groups. Emile Durkheim research suggested that suicide while a solitary act, is related to group life, protestants had much higher suicide rates than Catholics did, the unmarried had much higher rates than married people did, soldiers were more likely to take their lives than civilians were. In addition, there seemed to be higher rates of suicide in times of peace than in times of war and revolution and in times of economic instability and recession rather than in times of prosperity. Emile Durkheim concluded that the suicide rates of a society reflected the extent to which people were or were not integrated into the group life of the society.

As a matter of fact, Emile Durkheim, like many other social scientists, developed a theory explain how individual behaviour can be understood within a social context. He pointed out the influence of groups and societal forces on what had always been viewed as a highly personal act. Obviously, Emile Durkheim offered a more scientific explanation for the causes of suicide than of sunspots or inherited tendencies. His theory has predictive power, since it suggests that suicide rates will rise or fall in conjunction with certain social and economic changes. No wonder Emile Durkheim is called the father of sociology of education.

In conclusion, of course, a theory, even the best of theories is not a final statement about human behaviour. Emile Durkheim's theory of suicide is no exception. Sociologists continue to examine factors that contribute to differences in suicide rates around the world and to a particular society's rate of suicide. For instance, the overall rate of suicide in Zealand is only marginally higher than in United States, the suicide rate among young people is 41 percent higher in New Zealand. Sociologists and psychiatrists from that country suggest that their, sparsely populated society maintains exaggerated standards of masculinity that are especially difficult for young males. Gay adolescents who fail to conform to their peer's preferences of sport are particularly vulnerable to suicide (Collins, 2007).

Social Factors and Student's Suicidal Tendencies

Family structure: A family may influence a person's behaviour either negatively or positively both in childhood and adulthood. An intact family can be said to be a functioning union between a mother and a father, so when a breakup exists, the turmoil may affect a child to a greater extent than a great number of youths suicidal cases are traceable. A functioning family is more beneficial to a child than a dysfunctional one, family separation was a great contributor to child neglect which generally leads to child deviant behaviour for instance, students leaving home and addiction to vices and the like from parental and family neglect, lack of supervision and guidance. Many family characteristic and family environments influence juvenile deviant behaviour such as the number of people in a family, inconsistent

parenting, family problems, child neglect and children's attachment to Parent (Onah, 2016).

Family disruptions: Family disruptions involves interference in the course of youth everyday life. These may include financial difficulties, losses, loss of job, conflict and violent in the family, separation, divorce, protracted illness, and death of a parents, and changing moral climate in the society. This type of situations have potentials to induce stress, depression and sense of emptiness and despair in youth. Collins (2007) asserted that children deprived of warmth, positive interaction with adult and experience parental rejection, have tendencies to manifest apathy, poor healthy, sadness, depression and contemplation of suicide. Denga (2015) indicated that, direct conflict with parents often produce negative impact on youths and that a great number of youths suicidal cases are also traceable to violent home background. Thus, adolescent and youths who are lacking in family and social support, who experience low self-esteem, trauma, siblings rivalry, step parent issues, emotional neglect, physical and sexual abuse and domestic violence have tendencies towards suicide, such events have the potentials to form the trigger for suicide attempts among students.

Breakup of intimate relationship and death of loved ones lead to suicidal behaviour: Intimate relationship, romantic relationship risk markers for suicide have been examined with individual still involved in the romantic relationship. For instance, relationship or marital problems are reported as a prominent catalyst for suicide attempts (Bagge, Glenn, & Less 2013; Chia, Chia & Tai 2008 & Yen et al., 2005). Low-quality relationship or those characterized by intense conflict, violence, problems and arguments, are associated with suicidality. While the individual is still in the relationship (Bagge et al., 2013) separation or divorce from a romantic partner is also a frequently cited cause of suicidal behaviour (Hyman et al., 2012).

Some Youths are hurt as a result of loss and disappointment in relationships, divorces and death of loved ones have capacity to deal shattering blow on youths. Their emotions become numbed, their perception disturbed and lead to despair and suicide. According to Collin (2007) significant losses such as death of parents

or loved ones seems to be painful to bear. As such a time of grief, young people will entertain in the thought of suicide, an attempt to end the seemingly unbearable sorrow or grief.

Drugs abuse: Onah et al., (2003) observed that many young Nigerians are fast developing a passion for psychoactive substance. Substance abuse refers to a pattern of harmful use of psychoactive such substance such as alcohol, legal and illegal drugs and other substances that are not drugs at all for mood-altering purpose. For instance, the researcher witnesses a scenario in his environment where a young man/undergraduate get himself drunk to stupor went to his house and still needed some things to drink, and took sniper and die instantly. Poverty unemployment, underemployment, security economic down turn, cultism, societal pressure, frustrations and challenges of modern day economy often push young people to find solace in narcotics and other hard substances (Miller and Taylor, 2005). To them, is a bit to escape from the depression occasioned by their harsh reality. Unfortunately, the high stimulation they receive from the drugs also give them the boldness to end the misery through suicide. Elisha et al., (2019) opined that alcohol use remains extremely widespread among today's adolescents which is related to depression and suicide.

Moreso, Drugs abuse and substance abuse more specifically alcohol misuse, drugs abuse are strongly associated with suicide Bridge et al., (2006).

Academic stress: Often times, young people go into higher institution with the notion that these are places of fun and freedom, only to realize that they are fraught with frustration and enormous challenges that occasionally send some spiraling into the deep end. It is asserted by Onyedika (2019) that Nigerian youths typically have lofty dreams and great expectations of the future and life in general. Kyunghie et al., 2006 observed that young people are often prone to mental distress regarding anticipated academic challenges and the fear of the possibility of academic failure and the consequent, disappointment of parents significant others and even self. Similarly, Arun and Chavan (2009) opine that youths experience stress regarding workload examinations deadlines, parental expectations, poor time

management and difficulty in organizing work. The academic frustration of the Nigeria youth is further compounded by the processes of admission in to the higher institutions/registration and integration upon admission combines with course work and project supervision. Such frustrations are capable of pushing youth to their emotional limits, towards suicide.

Consequently, frustration from lecturer and stress” others were of the view that “poor academic performance and depression” propelled students into committing suicide. A male participant (Ifeanyi, 300-level, FA) reflected that a final-year student in one of the department that committed suicide immediately after his project. What was the cause?... they said that his supervisor gave him a “D grade” in his 6 unit load course, meanwhile, he had been performing poorly previously. So he can’t bear adding and extra year to his stay.

Social media: Excessive contact with social media is another reason behind suicide by undergraduate students. Most scholars thought that students excessive engagement in social media encourage suicidal acts. Children are glued to phones and social media leaving them isolated and individualized. These are some of the reasons suicide is on the increase among youths (Adejoh, 2019). The internet represents one of the greatest modern day technological advancements that have both its positive and negative sides. On a positive, it provides a highway of information on every subject under the surface of the earth, shrinks the vast world into a global village and create a network of connections among the humans race. In the same vein, it provides a platform for the young and the vulnerable to be prayed upon and victimized, causes the young minds to be fixated on a virtual world to the exclusion of meaningful relationship with significant other. Ogodo et., (2023) aptly put, social media has changed the way youths socialized make and maintain friendship. Young minds are impressionable and so they tend to absorb material on the internet hook, line and sinker. WHO (2000) that the glorification of violence in social media and exposure to internet sites have a significant impact on students. They get lost in a world of unrealistic comparison, cyberbullying and other negative activities. There is also evidence of online availability to suicide methods and online

suicide communities. According to Denwigwe et al., (2020) media report on suicide cases can result to in more suicides, the internet poses a risk of some vulnerable student an youth, there are pro-suicide websites that encourage suicides explicitly by promoting the decision of suicide as an individual right.

Youths, by their nature are impulsive and reckless with a high sense of invincibility and when that is combined with exposure to videos depicting violence and risky behaviour on the internet the necklessness escalates to suicidal behaviour. It is the position of van Herringen (2001). That youths of ten display casual disregard for their safety and their lives and demonstrate a fascination with the unknown, including death. The volatile blend of curiosity, impulsiveness and feeling of invincibility in the youth’s heart and mind sometimes create dangerous propensity for suicidal act.

Conclusion

This study explained the reasons for suicidal behaviour among undergraduate in Nigerian tertiary institutions, the study revealed social factors such as family structure, family disruption, breakup of intimate relationship and death of love one’s drug abuse or substance abuse, frustration from lecturers and social media was discussed to be a contributing factor to suicidal behaviour. This paper therefore, suggests that undergraduate students should be encourage to share their problems with peers, lecturer and family or seek one or one professional assistance that is guidance counsellors. And as a matter of urgency, the government should carry out an enlightenment campaign, workshops and seminars to inculcate in people the social and economic effect of suicide. Through newspapers, magazines, televisions and radio show and jingles, they should educate the public about the perils of committing suicide.

In summary, all tertiary institution should set up a policy on how to reduce frustration by the lecturer to overcome suicidal act. Families also should ensure that, they have one on ones conversation with their children to know their frustrating moments.

Recommendations

Accomplishing the vision of this paper, it was recommended that functional counseling

centres with well trained professional should be established in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria. also the Nigeria government should carry out an enlightenment campaign, organize workshop and seminars to inculcate in people or the masses the social, economic and psychological effect of suicide. In addition, all tertiary institutions in Nigeria should set up a policy on how to reduce frustration by the lecturer to overcome suicidal act by students. Finally, families should learn how to interact with their children frequently and encourage them, and intact home should be encourage while breaking home, separation and divorce should be discourage.

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