

Depression As A Cause of Suicide

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Abstract

Depression has been identified as a silent disease that affects all individual irrespective of his or her physical and biological health. The condition openly affects more than 40% of the society. Depression has become a worrying trend that does not only affect the psychological wellbeing of an individual but also the physical wellbeing of a person. It has often been idealized as a mental illness. Looking into questionnaires analysed, the data collected it is quite clear that there is need to look into the methods in which it can be prevented as well as treated within the university setup as well as the immediate society that is affected. The data was analysed using thematic analysis that helped establish the specific view of the respondents without the researchers point of view.

Introduction

Depression has been identified as a major factor leading to suicide. Suicides are considered as secondary deaths due to their nature. This is because an individual who commits suicide has often lost the will to live, which leads to the death of their inner strength and their ability to exist effectively in the society. Depression is a significant factor when it comes to the psychological well-being of an individual. It makes affects the mental, physical and emotional abilities of a person. When affected by depression an individual tends to have fatigue affecting their ability to carry out their day to day activities, mood swings affecting their association with others and absent mindedness that can lead to accidents.

Depression is considered to be one of the most common diseases in the world today. It is a disease that affects all people irrespective of their social status, educational background gender or race. Although depression has no bias it is clear that more women are treated for depression

than men. This does not mean it affects women more but due to their emotional nature women's depression is easily detected.

Depression is a mood disorder that affects an individual's feelings and adjustment to how they feel. It does not mean that they do not feel but depressive feelings are often time-based and can change without warning or thought process. This makes it impossible to pinpoint which specific emotion can be identified as an emotion of depression.

Depression has been identified as a major trend in the society. It affects 40% of society in Kenya (Brierly B., 2011). Although such a large number suffer from depression very few people have gone to hospital for treatment. This makes depression a major cause of concern. On the other hand individuals who receive treatment rely largely on medicine. There are two ways of treating depression with emphasis on the level on severity.

- i. Through medication
- ii. Through counselling or psychotherapy

Although both methods can be used it is not often that an individual dealing with depression will adopt both methods to achieve recovery. Therefore how does depression lead to suicidal tendency?

Suicide is the intentional will to die. This means an individual tries to kill him or herself and succeeds are considered as suicide victims. If the attempt is not successful it is identified as attempted suicide. Depression has been outlined as a mental disorder characterised by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-esteem, disturbed sleep or appetite, feelings of tiredness and poor concentration.

Beautrais (2000) emphasised that stressful life events that occur in an individual's life have a role in the development of depression. In addition, they may lead to an individual committing suicide. Stress associated events tend to make an individual unable to control emotions. When the stressful event become continuous and uncontrolled it becomes hard to associate effectively with others. Most victims of depression tend to become increasingly irritated, may drink alcohol excessively, loss appetite, or have an increased appetite or choose to seclude themselves from the society. This is because the stress affects the body and mind, thus causing distress in the body functions. The stress level on the body can cause illness. This may lead to wrongful medication

as well as further distress. Extreme distress that is not solved may lead to depression. The symptoms of depression are also linked to those of stress because they are interrelated. When stress affects the body it interferes with normal functions such as the physical and emotional functions. When the psychological functions are affected, both mind and body react irrationally. These forms of irrational behaviors are the result of depression. The behaviors include insomnia, bouts of anger, sadness, seclusion from others, unwillingness to eat or excessive eating, fighting, and mood swings.

Depression among university student may be a collection of different things. It is not easy to determine the specific causes of their depression although it is highly prevalent across the country. University students are a special group of individuals that are enduring a critical transitory period from adolescence to adult hood, one of the most stressing times in a person's life. Such students are prey to a number of concerns including: Adjusting in school

- i. Maintaining good academic grades
- ii. Homesickness
- iii. Financial challenge

Consequently, the students are under immense stress that may lead to depression in some. They feel they cannot control their own lives. This may lead to missing classes, crying a lot, or isolating themselves. The prevalence of depression is very high among university students due to adjustment into adulthood and the new expected responsibilities in the new stage of their lives.

Literature review

Literature review section is used to outline existing literature concerning the study area. The literature review is based on different section. These are:

- i. What is depression?

Depression is a common mental disorder that presents with depressive mood, loss of appetite loss of interest or pleasure, decreased energy, feelings of guilt or low self worth, disturbed sleep, and poor concentration. More over depression often comes with symptoms of anxiety. These problems can become chronic leading to substantial impairment of an individual's ability to effectively function in the society. At its worst, depression has been known to lead to suicide and suicidal behavior.

The World Health organization 2012,outlines that “almost 1 million lives are lost to society yearly , these translates to 3000 suicide deaths daily. For each individual who commits suicide, 20 or more individuals attempt to end their lives.” Looking at the above statistics it is quite clear that depression is a factor that needs to be highlighted so as to help reduce the incidences of suicide and suicide behavior.

ii. Cognitive theory of depression

Aaron Beck (1960) developed the cognitive theory of depression that outlined that mans negativity develops a dysfunctional beliefs are mainly the cause of depression. There is a direct relationship between the level of depression and the severity of the negative thoughts. If an individual keeps having negative thoughts the level of depression will therefore grow.

Beck establishes three main dysfunctional beliefs themes that dominate depressed people’s thinking. These are:-

- i. I am inadequate
- ii. All of my experiences results in defeats or failures,
- iii. The future is hopeless

These three themes constitute the cognitive triad. Aaron Beck believed that the cognitive triad could illustrate the manner in which depression developed. He noted that depressed individuals tend to pay only selective emphasis some areas. These may lead to depression. On the other hand, it is noted that the thought process can only develop as a result of social expectations and systems of belief. For instance, the cognitive triad establishes that a depressed individual tends to believe that they are inadequate, failures as well having a hopeless future. An individual may harbour these feelings as a result of activities that they involve themselves in. if these activities are not effectively carried out an individual will in turn have feelings of failure and inability.

iv. Sociological theory of suicide

The second theory we will look at is the sociological theory of suicide. The sociological theory of suicide was developed by Emile Durkheim in 1867. Durkheim believed that the social forces around an individual affect the overall suicide rate. The sociological theory outlines that areas with high social forces have higher possibility of an individual committing suicide. Therefore

the sociological theory simply establishes that the main causes of suicide in the society were a result of social pressure.

According to Durkheim (1951), “the risks of suicide are higher when society’s influence over the individual is either excessive or insufficient. This means that when an individual is highly integrated and an expected outcome is not produced the individual may either feel alienated.

These feelings of extreme need to perform are often displayed along with the fear of failure. Clarke (2003) believed that urban dwellers tend to be less religious compared to their rural counterparts. This same ideology claims that there are more suicide cases in urban areas compared to rural areas.

The belief is mainly based on the societal concept of communities that we live in. for instance urban societies tend to isolate individuals in their own space. This results from new environments that are created as well as the different individuals that come from different cultures. It therefore becomes hard for individuals to associate easily, and most university students belong to this group of urban dwellers. These students leave their homes to join a new community that have set rules and expectations. The adjustment from their previous lives is not an easy journey and it is often hindered by various factors such as culture shock, shyness, introvert personalities and fear. These may lead to segregation as well as loneliness and eventually depression.

Some of the factors that have been noted to help individuals associate with others are religion and social events. To this end, universities tend to have orientation weeks to try and help the students learn the university environment as well as meet with other students.

Holmes and Holmes (2004), suggest that people who attend religious ceremonies regularly are six times less likely to commit suicide than those who do not.

v. Symptoms of depression and suicide

Symptoms of depression

According to the black dog institute 2012, the symptoms of depression are:-

i. Feeling bad about yourself

- ii. Change in sleeping patterns
- iii. Change in appetite
- iv. Feeling overwhelmed by pessimism, anger, guilt, irritability and anxiety
- v. Varying emotions throughout the day, for example, feeling worse in the morning and happy as the day progresses
- vi. Poor concentration
- vii. Feeling exhausted
- viii. Reduced performance in school

Symptoms of suicide according to Nganga (2012) include:

- i. Talking about suicide and death
- ii. Alcohol and drug abuse
- iii. Quitting activities that were previously important
- iv. Adopting an 'I no longer care attitude' and engaging in self destructive behavior such as reckless driving, promiscuity, violence and breaking the law.
- v. Physically causing themselves harm
- vi. Sitting around with objects which they intend to use to kill themselves the most common is to keep counting the stock of pills or playing with knives or ropes
- vii. Making final arrangements or putting affairs in order- giving away prized possessions and allotting all their earthly belongings to other persons;
- viii. Elderly and sick persons may begin to buy large amounts of medicine and store them in preparation for the suicide.
- ix. Some people begin to refuse to take prescription medicine and turn to taking drugs not prescribed to them
- x. Writing suicide note/letters, goodbye letter or poems.
- xi. Talking about how pointless life is.
- xii. Talking about how they have feelings of hopelessness, anger guilt, sadness, shame, desperation, worthlessness and self-hatred.
- xiii. Tendency to isolate themselves
- xiv. Adopting a self hatred attitude and saying things like everyone would be better of without me

- xv. Drastic neglect of duties at work, home or school
- xvi. May begin not caring about physical appearance

Looking at the above symptoms it is clear that depression and suicide are closely interrelated. This does not mean that all depressed individuals commit or attempt suicide. However, it shows that depression, if not treated, could lead to suicidal behavior.

Material and Methods

The research was conducted via questionnaires. The questionnaires were used to collect students' opinions and observations in regard to suicidal behavior or ideation. The questions sought to capture causes of suicide. The study was made up of both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Due to the sensitivity of the topic it was important for the study to capture and provide an in-depth understanding of depression.

Subjects

The target population for the study was drawn from Kenyan universities and mental health practitioners around the universities. The students were approached on random patterns. The random sampling technique was adopted in selecting 35 university students from 6 Universities and 30 mental health practitioners. The respondents were both male and female.

Instruments

A 60-item questionnaire and 12 structured interview schedules were used to gather data regarding the perspectives of students in the university concerning suicide. The questionnaires were composed of two sections. The first involved a tick box question concerning behaviors that have been noted. The second section involved questions that were open-ended. They asked for the student opinion concerning suicide.

Procedure

210 copies of the questionnaire were administered to university students and 40 to mental health practitioners. A total of 210 questionnaires were returned by the students and 30 from mental health practitioners.

Methods of data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected.

Research question

What are the causes of suicide among university students in Kenya?

Table 1, 2 have outlined the causes of suicide among university students in Kenya. It has outlined variables that lead to suicide and how they interrelate with suicidal behavior.

Depression has been outlined as one of the major factor leading to suicide taking up 39% of the student's opinion.

Results

The results are outlined using tables, graphs, and pie charts. Depression has been outlined as one of the causes of suicide. It has been outlined using tables that depict the theme of depression with the specific outline of statements leading to depression as a theme.

Discussion

Depression has been identified as a major factor leading to suicide among university students in Kenya. It has been outlined as a mental disorder that affects women more than men. Further, it is a phenomenon that affects all people irrespective of their social class, education level, age, race or religion. It is believed to affect more women than men due to the fact that women are more emotional.

One of the major challenges of treating depression is the fact that it is not considered an illness. It mainly affects the youth due to their high expectations of themselves and the society. Due to the lack of recognition, depression is categorised as a mental disorder or illness rather than a disease. This has therefore led to a great deal of mis-diagnosis of suicide cases. Many blame suicide to mental illness since depression has been classified as a mental health case.

Depression has also been identified as common among youth who have family history of depression, are anxious and those unable to establish positive social relationships, have conduct

disorder, misuse drugs and alcohol, have concerns about their sexuality, or who suffer negative life experience such as bullying, domestic disharmony, or physical, sexual, or and emotional abuse. Traumatic life events are factors that have been identified as leading factors of major depression as well as suicidal tendencies.

The causes of depression in universities have been identified as

i. Academic performance

Academic performance is an integral part of the University attendance and when the performance at the university level is not adhered to it may lead to depression. One of the major expectations of joining university is the academic capability and this capability is also needed for continuation of the university study. When the academic performance goes down the student feels pressured. This pressure may lead to depression if not dealt with.

Often college freshmen face academic pressures and expectations that are considered greater than what they had experienced in high school (Rayle & Chung, 2007).

ii. Fitting in

Universities are new environments to most students. It is a new place where students go to gain higher education. The need to fit in and make friends leads to anxiety and stress. When an individual joins the university and feels left out and lonely it may become a problem due to lack of company and confidants. This means that the student may become stressed and unable to associate well. It may lead to peer conflict, bullying, alcohol abuse, fighting,

Separation from their well established social networks has been identified as a stressor for college freshmen. When students leave home to begin college, they leave behind the people with whom they are familiar (Alfeld-Liro & Sigelman, 1998)

iii. Home sickness

Homesickness is the distress or impairment caused by an actual or anticipated separation from home. Its cognitive hallmark is preoccupying thoughts of home and attachment objects. (Thurber 1999)

Home-sickness is a factor that arises along all age groups. Although it is common it tends to affect the youth more due to the change in responsibility. The responsibilities arise as a result of

age change from childhood to adulthood. Home-sickness results from the need to have familiarity that tends to lack when an individual moves to a new environment. This feeling of home sickness can lead to depression if the individual does not feel wanted or is unable to fit in the existing society.

iv. Finances

Financial issues may also be a significant stressor for students. In the university set up the students are expected to support themselves and establish an existing budget. The budget is based on what the student may have. But it has been noted that often the students tend to have bigger costs than what they can afford due to the need to fit in with others. “Major financial crisis requiring a student to go without food or other essential items due to lack of money. The results demonstrated that financial difficulties had a significant effect on the development of symptoms of both depression and anxiety in the students.” (Brandy J., 2011)

Looking at depression it is quite clear that the students are at a high risk of suffering depression. It is therefore necessary that both the students and the institution find ways to deal with it. Depression affects all students. Therefore there is need for the university to provide support to the students from the time they are enrolled to the time they graduate. By providing adequate support the universities will be able to help prevent suicide cases among the students.

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