

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS AS DETERMINANTS PREDISPOSING TO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS SUICIDAL IDEATIONS IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The rate of suicide attempts among undergraduate students has increased drastically in Nigeria. Thus, this study assessed the psychological factors (depression, stress, anxiety and hopelessness) as determinants of suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was adopted. A sample size of 396 respondents from the University of Lagos was randomly selected for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a self-developed questionnaire with a reliability co-efficiency of 0.753. Frequency distribution and percentage were used to analyze the data obtained from the respondents. A correlation analysis was conducted between variables of interest to determine the significant relationship that existed between the psychological factors and suicidal ideations using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), version 25.0. The set null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The set null hypotheses for depression ($r = .542$), stress ($r = .682$), hopelessness ($r = .479$), and anxiety ($r = .672$). The findings revealed that depression and hopelessness are factors predisposing to suicidal tendencies among undergraduate students. The study recommended that university administration should work with mental health professionals, to develop policies, procedures and programmes to identify and assist students who are not making an effective adjustment to the university milieu.

Keywords: Depression, Stress, Hopelessness, Anxiety, Suicidal ideations

Introduction

The issue of students' mental health is a global problem that covers all developed and non-developed societies, both modern and traditional (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008). In the United States, over 90 percent of suicides are

associated with mental illness, alcohol and/or substance use disorders (Reed, 2013). Twice as many young men, ages 20-24, commit suicide, compared with young women. In teens, ages 17-19, the ratio is

even more skewed, with suicide claiming nearly five times the number of young men (Burrell, 2018). Every year, close to 800,000 people take their own life and there are many more people who attempt suicide.

Suicide occurs throughout the lifespan and was the second leading cause of death among 15-29 year-olds globally as at 2015. Suicide does not just occur in high-income countries but it is a global phenomenon in all regions of the world. In fact, over 78% of global suicides occurred in low and middle-income countries as at 2015 (WHO Factsheet on Suicide, 2018). Suicide is identified as the second leading cause of death among university students, second only to self-inflicted injuries (Taliaferro et al 2010). Previous studies have found that psychological morbidity, particularly depression, is a common disorder among students (Adewuya, Ola, Olutayo, Mapayi & Oginni, 2006).

Among university students, the different possible factors associated with suicidal ideations may be present at an unusual time in life when many changes are taking place, which include challenges of the personal, social and academic development process that require maturity and autonomy to take decisions, considering the strict determinations of the academic environment. Identification of the factors that are associated with suicidal ideations in university students is an important tool for the planning, the prevention and protection activities, both by university managers, as well as the health teams who assist these students on and off campus (Santos, Marcon, Espinosa, Baptista & Paulo, 2017).

Some of the main causative factors of suicide among university students are academic stress, depression, hopelessness, anxiety, sexual abuse, failure in examination, broken families, anger, financial problems,

ineffective problem-solving skills, feeling of loneliness, isolation, love breakups and so on (Wani, Sankar, Binshad, Nagrees & Anicham, 2016). In this study, the psychological factors examined were depression, stress, hopelessness and anxiety. Depression among university students is an extremely prevalent and widespread problem across the country. University students, especially undergraduate students, are a group of people that are trying to survive a critical transitory period in which they are going from adolescence to adulthood (Sarokhani, et al., 2013). This can be said to be one of the most stressful times in a person's life.

Trying to fit into the university environment, maintain good grades, plan towards their future, and be away from home often cause anxiety for a lot of students. As a reaction to this stress, some students fall into depression. The feeling of hopelessness in adolescents has been regarded as one of the factors leading to suicide and suicidal ideation (Lai Kwok & Shek, 2010). In their study, Handley et al., (2013), identified a significant correlation between hopelessness and suicidal ideation.

Anxiety is an internalized fear, arousal by an impulse to commit suicide. Anxiety is a danger signal to the ego that dangerous impulse is about to break. University students suffer to some levels of study anxiety, such as; new experiences, environment and situation (Vitasari, Wahab, Othman, & Awang, 2010). When students head off to college, the familiar people are no longer there to reinforce the identity these students have created for themselves. This can make students disoriented and feel a loss of their sense of self, contributing to symptoms of depression and anxiety (Tartakovsky, 2018).

Baum (1990), defined stress as a negative emotional experience accompanied by predictable biochemical, physiological, cognitive and behavioral changes that are directed either toward altering the stressful event or accommodating its effects. From available literature, it is possible to identify a few consistently reported stressors that contribute to the stress experienced by students. They include study stressors, examination stressors, stressors related to university transition and financial stressors. Individuals experiencing high levels of stress are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviours (Hudd et al. 2000). The knowledge base regarding how students' development changes during a course of study, and the effect on their experience and ability to deal with stress, is limited (Robotham, 2008). Due to religious and ethnic beliefs, suicide is considered a taboo in Nigeria. It is also labeled as an immoral and abhorred act in many other cultures apart from Nigeria. Such actions are sometimes concealed and shrouded with secrecy by the family members of the victims or the attempters. This accounts for the dearth of data on suicidal behaviours in Nigeria. Although of recent, the rate of suicide attempts among undergraduate students has reached an alarming height, the availability and quality of data on suicide and suicidal attempts in Nigeria is very poor.

There is almost no quality data that can be used to directly estimate suicide rates in the country and amongst undergraduate students. This is due to the sensitivity of suicide and the stigmatization that comes with it. For the past few years, the reports of undergraduate students who have committed or attempted suicide in Universities in Nigeria have increased. According to WHO Suicide Database, (2018), Nigeria has a suicide ranking, with 15.1 suicides per 100,000

populations in a year. In 2018, Nigeria ranked fifth in a WHO research that ranked suicide per 100,000, per country published by Spectator Index (Okon, 2019). Nigeria was placed fifth with 15,000 suicides in every 100,000 suicides (Okon, 2019). According to experts, depression is the most common reason why people commit suicide. 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. Unconfirmed reports by the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) showed seven Nigerian states with high suicide rates, which include Ogun, with the highest rate, followed by Lagos, Ebonyi, Delta, Oyo, Ondo and Kano (Muanya & Ezea, 2017). Suicidal ideation is a key element in a process called suicidal behaviour, and emerges as a trigger for other components, i.e. the suicide attempt, and committing suicide (Pereira & Cardoso, 2015). Suicidal ideation is the early symptom of suicidal actions. Children and teenagers are the most vulnerable and easily influenced by cases of suicide and suicidal ideations (Juhnke et al. 2011).

The rate of suicide amongst undergraduate students in Nigeria has sky rocketed and this has caused an increase in the mortality rate of Nigerian youths. Between January and June 2019 alone, there were 42 reported cases of suicide that occurred in different parts of the country. Eleven out of the victims were students of various higher institutions of learning in the country (Okon, 2019). There are no actual records of how many university students suffer from depression and eventually die from suicide (Okon, 2019). Thus, this study seeks to decipher and identify the psychological factors giving rise to suicide in the university environment. Suicidal ideations are a fleeting consideration or detailed plan set out

to end a person's life. In few cases, suicidal ideations do not result in suicide. Another purpose of this study is to investigate the suicidal trends amongst undergraduate students in Nigeria. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to evaluate and investigate the psychological factors predisposing to suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between depression and suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between stress and suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria.
3. There is no significant relationship between hopelessness and suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria.
4. There is no significant relationship between anxiety and suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive cross sectional survey design to carefully assess depression, stress, hopelessness and anxiety as causes of suicidal tendencies among undergraduate students. University of Lagos was purposely selected from other higher institutions in Lagos State. The total population of this study consisted the total number of undergraduate students, which was forty-four thousand, six hundred and two (44, 602) in 2019. The sample size was determined from this figure using the Yaro Yamani formula (1967). Therefore, the minimum sample size was calculated to be 396. A stratified random sampling technique

was used on various faculties to engage the entire population of UNILAG Undergraduate students. The population was extracted from randomly selected faculties where each sample was chosen with equal opportunity in the probability of being selected. The research instrument used for this study was a well-structured questionnaire "Psychological factors predisposing to students' suicidal ideations questionnaire" (PFPSSI) designed by the researchers to elicit responses from the participants concerning psychological factors predisposing to suicidal ideations among undergraduate students, using a five-point Likert scale.

To establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted using twenty respondents from Babcock University. This yielded reliability co-efficiency of 0.753. The instrument was, therefore, deemed highly reliable and good enough for use for the present study. The instrument employed for the study was a well-structured questionnaire. The primary sources of data were basically through administration of the questionnaire. A total of 410 questionnaires were administered instead of 396 questionnaires so as to check for losses due to attrition. Finally 396 questionnaires were valid for analysis after checking for poor responses.

It should be noted that not all the categories of responses was up to 100 percent due to none responses (NA) of some respondents. The data resulting from the demographic section were summarized and analyzed by using frequency distribution tables and percentages. Regression analysis was conducted between variables of interest to determine the significant relationship that existed.

Results

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between Depression and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Table 1: Relationship between Depression and suicidal ideations among undergraduate students

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Depression	18.2955	5.13031	396	.542**	.000	Sig.
Suicidal ideations	60.4596	11.28462				

Sig. at .05

Table 1 above showed that there was a positive significant relationship between Depression and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria ($r = .542$, $N = 396$, $p < 0.05$). The result rejected the null hypothesis while the alternate hypothesis was accepted which states that there is a significant relationship between Depression and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria. This result postulates that depression can lead to suicidal ideations.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between Stress and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Relationship between Stress and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Stress	13.8788	5.53383	396	.682**	.000	Sig.
Suicidal ideations	60.4596	11.28462				

Sig. at .05

Table 2 above showed that there was no significant relationship between Stress and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria ($r = .682$, $N = 396$, $p < 0.05$). The result accepted the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between Stress and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria. This result shows that stress is not likely to lead to suicidal ideations.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between Hopelessness and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Table 3: Relationship between Hopelessness and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Hopelessness	14.0025	3.74673	396	.479**	.000	Sig.
Suicidal ideations	60.4596	11.28462				

Sig. at .05

Table 3 above showed that there was a significant relationship between Hopelessness and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria ($r = .479$, $N = 396$, $p < 0.05$). The result rejected the null hypothesis which states that there was no significant relationship between Hopelessness and

Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria. The alternative hypothesis was accepted which states that there is a significant relationship between hopelessness and suicidal ideations. This postulates that hopelessness can lead to suicidal ideations.

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant relationship between Anxiety and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Table 4: Relationship between Anxiety and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Anxiety	14.2828	4.37378	396	.672**	.000	Sig.
Suicidal ideations	60.4596	11.28462				

Sig. at .05

Table 4 above showed that there was no significant relationship between Anxiety and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria ($r = .672$, $N = 396$, $p < 0.05$). The result accepted the null hypothesis which states that there was no significant relationship between Anxiety and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria. This shows that anxiety is not likely to lead to suicidal ideations.

Discussion

The results of hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant relationship between Depression and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria. This result collaborates with the findings of Oladele & Oladele, (2016) that a significant relationship exists between depression and suicidal ideations in students with learning disabilities, while a less significant relationship exists between depression and suicidal ideations in students without learning disabilities. From

hypothesis one of this study, it was found that depression can lead to suicidal ideations. This collaborates with the findings of Mustaffa, Aziz, Nasir & Shuib, (2014), that depression has a significant relationship with suicidal ideation among university students. Therefore, depression should be given appropriate attention and should be prevented before it gets worse and eventually translated into suicidal actions. The study also agreed with the findings of Izadinia, Amiri, Jahromia, & Hamidi, (2010), stating that depression and thoughts of suicide positively and significantly correlate with each other.

The result of hypothesis two showed that there was no significant relationship between Stress and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria. This result is in contradiction with the findings of Rosiek, Rosiek-Kryszewska, Leksowski, & Leksowski (2016) that students perceive that stress negatively influences their lives and can lead to serious problems

such as depression and suicidal thinking. The result corroborates the findings of Ang & Huan, (2006), which says that the previously significant relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideations was significantly reduced in magnitude when depression was included in the model. The results suggested that suicidal ideation increases with depressed mood for adolescents in this sample, while contradicting the findings of Zhang, Li, Tu, Xiao, & Jia, (2011), which states that the other results of the study suggest that anxiety, daily stress and mental health have positive and significant correlation with the thoughts of suicide which corresponds to the result of previous researches. It can be assumed that the existence of stressor factors can affect individual's mental health and anxiety and apply its effects on thoughts and action of suicide.

The result of hypothesis three reported that there was a significant relationship between Hopelessness and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria. This result is in contradiction with Klonsky, Kotov, Bakst, Rabinowitz, & Bromet (2012). They discovered that hopelessness best predicted attempted suicide over shorter follow-up intervals.

The result of hypothesis four reported that there was no significant relationship between Anxiety and Suicidal ideations among undergraduate students in Lagos State, Nigeria. This result contradicts the findings of Rosiek, Rosiek-Kryszewska, Leksowski & Leksowski (2016), that feeling of anxiety in students' lives and depression can lead to extremely high rates of suicidal ideations. It also contradicts the findings of Wani, (2016), that students always think about their future which usually would cause anxiety, later stress, then depression even suicidal ideations among them.

Conclusion

The rate of suicide amongst undergraduate students in Nigeria has sky rocket and this has caused an increase in the mortality rate of Nigerian youths. Although there are no actual records of how many university students suffer from depression and eventually die from suicide, this research has proved that depression and hopelessness are some of the psychological factors that can lead to suicidal ideations among undergraduate students.

Recommendations

Based on the outcomes of this study, it is recommended that:

- students should be trained on stress management or relationship improvement. These may benefit a broad range of students, including those who are potentially suicidal;

- multidisciplinary behavioral intervention teams should meet regularly to systematically review students of concern;

- government should enforce the school administration to make the academic calendar more, flexible and stress free for students;

- university administration should work with mental health professionals, to develop policies, procedures, and programmes to identify and assist students who are not making an effective adjustment to the university milieu.

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