

PREVALENCE AND CAUSES OF SUICIDE AND SUICIDAL BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES OF UNIVERSITIES IN EDO STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated the prevalence and causes of suicide and suicidal behaviours among university students in Edo State. Four (4) research questions guided the study. The descriptive research design was employed in the study. The population of the study was made up of all the 79,813 full-time undergraduates in public and privately owned universities in Edo State. The sample size was 720 drawn using the multi-stage sampling procedure. Two research instruments were used to obtain data used for the study. The first was a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher titled: Questionnaire (SBQ), and Checklist (DESSAC). The questionnaire and interview schedule items were validated by three experts from Faculty of Education, University of Benin. The reliability of the instrument was established through Cronbach's Alpha statistics. Thus, Cronbach's Alpha values of .81, .72, and .81 were respectively obtained as the reliability values of the instrument. The findings revealed among others that substance abuse was the most prevalent suicidal behaviour among university students; Poor relationship with family members was seen as a very high cause of suicidal behaviour among university students in Edo State, and there was a low level of prevalence of suicide among university students in Edo State. It was concluded that suicide and suicidal behaviours among university students in Edo State is predicated on poor relationship with family members. It was therefore recommended among others that parent should be more responsible, bearing in mind that parenting goes beyond providing food, money, shelter, clothing and other needed school materials as such parents should show more cares and apt attention to their children.

Keyword: Prevalence, Suicide, Suicidal Behaviours, University Students

Introduction

Suicide appears to have unique epidemiological characteristics that make it an important public concern. This is why stakeholders in the education system which include government, parents, guardians, teachers, counselors, sociologists, are so much concerned about the perceived prevalence of suicide and suicidal behaviour among university students in Nigeria (Ebohon,2023). Among the concerns that higher institutions

in Nigeria have to deal with is suicidal behaviour. It has been observed that there has been an increase in suicide cases in Nigeria especially in universities.

Death by suicide is an extremely complex issue that causes pain to hundreds of thousands of people every year around the world. Suicide is a complex behavioural phenomenon that involves taking one's life by oneself (Durkheim in Haralambos, Holborn, Chapman & Moore, 2013). It is fundamentally a general social and public health concern worldwide. The social, economic and psychological effects of suicide are unbearable in most societies of the world. Families, organisations, educational institutions and the general society are often thrown into mourning when there is an incident of suicide – such depressive mood often impacts productivity, creates fear and anxiety, reduces value for human life and causes social unrest among others. The prevalence of suicide and suicidal behaviour among young people is indeed worrisome.

Prevalence refers to the degree of common occurrence, widespread or practice of a thing. It is the total number of cases of a disease or condition in a given population at a specific time. Prevalence in the present context is the total number of persons who have had completed suicide, suicidal ideation or attempted suicide at a given time. The prevalence, characteristics and methods of suicidal behaviour vary widely between different communities, in different demographic groups and over time (WHO, 2014). Across the globe, different patterns dominate depending on what is culturally acceptable or what is readily available to the perpetrator. In Nigeria, the use of poisoning such as pesticides, herbicides appeared to be the most common method. However, in South Africa, Cuba, Chile, Estonia, and the United Kingdom, hanging is the most common method, while in the United States of America and Uruguay firearm is the leading method. Pesticide use is the dominant pattern in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Peru while fall from a height is the most common method used in Hong Kong (Ajdacil-Gross, Weiss, Ring, Hepp, Bopp, Gutzwiller, et al, 2008). The relatively high rate of suicide by hanging and poisoning in our universities may be attributed to the readily available materials for hanging such as rope, twine, belt, cloth, and poisoning such as pesticides, herbicides, etc.

The prevalence of suicide and suicidal behaviour tends to point to the youths – the age bracket of university students in Nigeria. In Nigeria, there appears to be paucity of data on the suicidal behaviour of youths, especially students of universities, and this may affect available information on the prevalence of suicidal behaviours. However, a considerable amount of research has been conducted on suicide in Nigeria but studies on suicidal behaviour among university students in Edo State has not been given attention. Thus, more research in this area should yield further insights into the growing body of knowledge about suicide and suicidal behaviours in Nigeria. It is against this background that this study investigated the rate and causes of suicide and suicidal behaviours among university students in Edo State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the prevalence, and causes of suicide and suicidal behaviour among university students in Edo State. Specifically, the study:

1. established the suicidal behaviour prevalent among university students in Edo State
2. established the causes of suicidal behaviours among university students in Edo State
3. ascertained the prevalence rate of suicide among university students in Edo State
4. determined the predominant method used by university students to commit suicide in Edo State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the suicidal behaviour prevalent among university students in Edo State?
2. What are the causes of suicidal behaviours among university students in Edo State?
3. What is the rate of suicide among university students in Edo State?
4. What is the predominant method used by university students to commit suicide in Edo State?

Methodology

Research Design: The study was descriptive research of the survey. The design was considered appropriate for the study because it enabled the researcher to gather information about the variables under investigation.

Population of the Study: The population of the study comprises all the 79,813 full-time undergraduates in public and privately owned universities in Edo State. The universities include University of Benin, Benin City; Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma; Edo State University, Uzairue; Igbinedion University, Okada; Benson Idahosa University, Benin City; Wellspring University, Benin City, and Samuel Adegboyega University, Ogwa.

Sample and Sampling Technique: The sample for the study was 720 out of the 79,813 full-time undergraduate students from universities in Edo State. The study employed a multi-stage sampling procedure. Therefore, a total of 720 students from three universities formed the sample for the study which is made up of a total of 240 students from each university.

Instrumentation: Three research instruments were used for the study. The first was a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher titled: Suicidal Behaviour Questionnaire (SBQ), while the second instrument was a checklist titled: Documented Evidence of Suicide and Suicidal Attempts Checklist (DESSAC). The questionnaire

(SBQ) was made up of four sections (A, B, C and D). Section A was used to collect information on the demography of the respondents; Section B comprised a 4-point Likert scale to each of eight (8) behavioural statements regarding suicide and suicidal behaviours. The categories of responses were: Most often (MOF), Often (OFT), Sometimes (SOT), and Never (NEV), with weights 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively; Section C elicits information on statements and items that are raised as regarding the perceived causes of suicide and methods used by university students to commit suicide, as it relates to measuring respondents' beliefs about the extent to which they feel connected to others, that is belongingness.

The respondents were expected to rank the terms carefully by writing VHC - Very High Cause, HC – High Cause, MC – Moderate Cause, LC – Low Cause, VLC – Very Low Cause and VCM –Very Common Method, CM - Common Method, MM –Moderate Method, UM – Uncommon Method, VUM – Very Uncommon Method as it respectively relates to causes and methods of suicide; while Section D items were structured on a modified four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree =1 which further helped to elicit information on the perceived influence of parenting styles on the prevalence of suicide and suicidal behaviours among university students. The checklist was used mainly to assess the prevalence/rate of suicide and suicidal attempts by students in each sampled university from the 2011/2012 to 2020/2021 academic sessions. Thus, it was used to collect data on documentary evidence from the medical records of the medical units, students' affairs department, and the security departments of the various universities used for the study. The essence of using three units/departments independently from each university to collect such information was to ensure a high level of accuracy. However, the average was used for the analysis.

The face and content validity of the instruments (questionnaire and interview schedule items) were done by experts from University of Benin. Their inputs and suggestions were incorporated before the final drafts of the instruments were produced. The reliability of the instrument (questionnaire) was established through Cronbach's Alpha statistics using thirty (30) students from a faculty and department that was not part of the sampled respondents. Cronbach's Alpha was considered most appropriate because it helped to establish the co-efficient of homogeneity of the instrument. Thus, for suicide and suicidal behaviour scale, causes of suicide, and methods of suicide scale had Cronbach's Alpha values of .81, .72, and respectively obtained as the reliability values of the instrument.

Method of Data Collection: The research instruments were administered by the researchers to the respondents.

Method of Data Analysis: The responses from the documentary evidence that were collected from the student affairs, security departments, and medical records of the

medical units of the universities were analyzed using frequency tables and percentages. Therefore, frequency and percentage were used to answer the research questions.

Presentation of Results

The following results emerged from the analysis of data.

Research Question 1: What is the suicidal behaviour prevalent among university students in Edo State?

Table 1: Rate of suicidal behaviour among university students in Edo State

S/N	Items	MOF	OFT	SOT	NEV
1	I have seriously contemplated killing myself when I was distressed	48 (6.7%)	102(14.2%)	163(22.6%)	407(56.5%)
2	I have attempted killing myself when I felt life was hopeless	80(8.3%)	143(19.9%)	165(22.9%)	352(48.9%)
3	I once tried to kill myself when I failed my examination	54(7.5%)	113(15.7%)	72(10.0%)	481(66.8%)
4	I tried putting an end to my life when I met a major disappointment	96(13.3%)	71(9.9%)	114(15.8%)	439(61.0%)
5	I thought of killing myself as one of the ways of solving my problems	90(12.5%)	137(19.0%)	82(11.4%)	411(57.1%)
6	I considered hanging myself whenever I was overwhelmed by some situations	60(8.3%)	185(25.7%)	60(8.3%)	415(57.6%)
7	I have been involved in reckless driving deliberately under alcohol influence	111(15.4%)	71(9.9%)	102(14.2%)	436(60.6%)
8	I abuse substance (drugs) some time	433(60.1%)	64(8.9%)	175(24.3%)	48(6.7%)

Source: Field work, 2023

Table 1 reveals the prevalence of suicidal behaviour among university students in Edo State. It shows that 56.5% of the respondents indicated that they never seriously contemplated killing themselves when they were stressed. 48.9% of the respondents stated that they never attempted killing themselves when they felt life was hopeless and 66.8% also stated that they never tried to kill themselves when they failed their examination. In the same vein, a majority of the respondents (61.0%) also indicated that they never attempted putting an end to their lives when they experienced some major disappointment. However, 57.1% contemplated suicide as one of the ways of solving their problems, while 57.6%, considered hanging themselves whenever they experienced overwhelming situations. Also, 60.6% and 60.1% of the respondents have been involved in reckless driving deliberately and abused substances (drugs) most times respectively. Thus, it can be deduced that a majority of the respondents indicated that they never engage in suicidal behaviours.

Research Question 2: What are the causes of suicidal behaviours among university students in Edo State?

Table 2: Causes of suicidal behaviours among university students in Edo State

S/N	Items	VHC	HC	MC	LC	VLC
1	Poor relationship with family members	268(37.2%)	109(15.1%)	123(17.1%)	53(7.4%)	167(23.2%)
2	Poor academic performance	112(15.6%)	184(25.6%)	182(25.3%)	111(15.4%)	131(18.2%)
3	Substance abuse	175(24.3%)	114(15.8%)	130(18.1%)	89(12.4%)	212(29.4%)
4	Pain and hopelessness	116(16.1%)	143(19.9%)	119(16.5%)	214(29.7%)	128(17.8%)
5	Relationship problem such as being jilted by lover	171(23.8%)	117(16.3%)	187(26.0%)	125(17.4%)	120(16.7%)
6	Burdensomeness	99(13.8%)	147(20.4%)	172(23.9%)	158(21.9%)	144(20.0%)
7	Low belongingness	118(16.4%)	136(18.9%)	193(26.8%)	116(16.1%)	157(21.8%)
8	Issues with course adviser	70(9.7%)	35(4.9%)	123(17.1%)	188(26.1%)	304(42.2%)

Source: Field Work, 2023

Table 2 shows the causes of suicidal behaviours among university students in Edo State. It shows that 37.2% of the respondents indicated that poor relationships with family members is a very high cause of suicide behaviour. Then 25.6% of the respondents stated that poor academic performance is a high cause of suicide behaviour. Meanwhile, 29.4% and 42.2% of the respondents indicated that substance abuse and issues with course advisers are very low causes of suicide behaviour respectively. But 29.7% suggested that pain and hopelessness are low causes of suicide behaviour. Similarly, 26.0%, 23.9% and 26.8% of the respondents stated that relationship problems such as being jilted by a lover; burdensomeness and low belongingness respectively are moderate causes of suicide behaviours among undergraduates in Edo State.

Research Question 3: What is the rate of suicide among university students in Edo State?

Table 3: Rate of suicide among university students in Edo State

Population of the study	No of suicide Cases	Prevalence rate
79,813	08	0.01%

It can be seen from the table that the rate of suicide among University students in Edo State is 0.01% from 2011/2012 session to 2020/2021 session.

Research Question 4: What is the predominant method used by university students to commit suicide in Edo State?

Table 4: Predominant method used by university students to commit suicide in Edo State

SN	Items	VCM	CM	MM	UM	VUM
1	Use of poison such as pesticides/insecticides	347(45.2%)	87(12.1%)	98(13.6%)	70(9.7%)	118(16.4%)
2	Hanging	173(24.0%)	119(16.5%)	174(24.2%)	149(24.7%)	105(14.6%)
3	Jumping/falling from height	151(21.0%)	114(15.6%)	220(30.6%)	84(11.7%)	151(21.0%)
4	Firearm	41(5.7%)	89(12.4%)	160(22.2%)	211(29.3%)	219(30.4%)
5	Drowning	119(16.5%)	63(8.8%)	161(22.4%)	232(32.2%)	145(20.1)
6	Wrist cutting with sharp instrument	105(14.6%)	24(3.3%)	216(30.0%)	163(22.6%)	212(29.4%)
7	Running into a moving car	77(10.7%)	98(13.6%)	155(21.5%)	156(21.7%)	234(32.5%)
8	Fire/burning	83(11.5%)	98(13.6%)	141(19.6%)	163(22.6%)	235(32.6%)

Source: Field Work, 2023

Table 4 reveals the predominant methods used by university students to commit suicide in Edo State. 48.2% of the respondents indicated that the use of poison such as pesticides/ insecticides is a very common method and 24.2%, 30.6% and 30.0% stated that hanging, jumping/falling from a height and wrists cutting with sharp instruments respectively are moderate methods used. Meanwhile, 30.4%, 32.5% and 32.6% of the respondents stated that firearms, running into a moving car and fire/burning respectively are very uncommon methods used. Also 32.2% stated that drowning is an uncommon

method used. Thus, it can be deduced that a majority of the respondents suggested that use of poison such as pesticides/ insecticides is a very common method.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of research question one indicates that a majority of the respondents never engage in most of the suicidal behaviours. However, 433 respondents representing 60.1% indicated that they abuse substance (drugs) most time. This finding agrees with some earlier studies of Mba (2010), Robert (2008), Evans, Hawton, Rodham and Deeks (2005) and Mocellin (2002) who stated that self-destructive behaviours such as alcoholism, substance abuse, sex abuse, cultism, possession of lethal weapons have been identified as suicidal behaviours found among university students. Robert (2008) further maintained that alcoholism is linked to hopelessness for inducing suicidal behaviour. Substance abuse which may involve over-dose of drugs, swallowing of poisons, pesticides use and the use of other chemicals to end one's life is a major form of suicidal behaviour found among university students in this study. This could be explained by the fact that there is easy access to these chemicals or substances. This finding is also in agreement with other studies by Bae, Ye, Chan, Rivers and Singh (2005) and Shaffer (2001) who opined and demonstrated that suicidal behaviours are more likely to occur among adolescents who abuse alcohol and substances. Thus, numerous studies report a significant correlation between substance use and suicidal behaviours in adolescents and youths.

Research question two is on the perceived causes of suicide and suicidal behaviours among university students under study, with the view of finding out which of them is a Very High Cause (VHC); High Cause (HC); Moderate Cause (MC); Low Cause (LC); and Very Low Cause (VLC). Findings from the study revealed poor relationships with family members as a very high cause of suicidal behaviour. This finding is in agreement with the earlier findings from studies of Porpili *et al* (2015) and Zhao, *et al* (2014) who concluded that conflict in families have an increased risk of suicidal behaviour among university students.

Statistically the findings with respect to the rate of suicide among university students in Edo State revealed a low rate (0.01%) for the period of 2011/2012 to 2020/2021 academic sessions, but sociologically, the rate is high because every suicide is a tragedy as deaths by suicide causes pain to hundreds of thousands of people every year around the world. The findings of this study agree with an earlier study of Mba (2010) who reported a very low prevalence of completed suicide among the university undergraduates in South-Eastern States of Nigeria. However, this finding negates other earlier studies by Jacobson, Cook, Moser and Aldana (1999) who reported higher rates of suicides among the lower and higher grades of students in their studies in Brigham Young University, Provo, USA.

The low rate of suicide found among university students in Edo State as revealed in this study could be explained by the fact that suicidal actions are most time regarded as

taboos in Nigeria and a bad omen with very calamitous repercussions. It is also labeled as immoral and abhorred acts in many cultures in different parts of Nigeria. Such actions are sometimes concealed in secrecy by the family members of the victims just as in rape incidents. Thus, the finding was not surprising because of the secrecy in which cases of suicide are shrouded in Nigeria. Even when a person died through suicide in Nigeria, it is usually reported in the media that such a person died after a brief illness or as a result of an accident because of the perceived stigma that would be attached to the families of the victims of suicide.

The fourth research question is on the predominant method used by university students to commit suicide in Edo State. The finding revealed that the use of poison such as pesticides/insecticides is a very common method used by university students to commit suicide. The finding of this study aligns with the studies of Uchedu *et al* (2019), Olai (2018), Alabi, *et al* (2015) who reported that poisoning or pesticides use as the leading methods of suicide among undergraduates in Nigerian universities. The finding also agrees with the estimation of the World Health Organisation (2018) that around 20 percent of global suicides are due to pesticide self-poisoning, most of which occurred in rural agricultural areas in low and middle-income countries.

The finding is also in consonance with the assertions of Gunnell and Eddleston (2007) that in developing countries, especially African countries, poisoning is the most commonly used means for people to end their lives in rural areas. The reasons given were that many used pesticides to commit suicide because they knew it is very poisonous and an easy means to die.

Conversely, the use of poisoning as a method of suicide as revealed in the study may be attributed to the readily available material for poison such as pesticides, and herbicides in our environment.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that Substance abuse was the most prevalent suicidal behaviour among university students. Poor family relationship was also seen as a very high cause of suicidal behaviour among university students and there was a low level of suicide among university students in Edo State, while Poison such as pesticides/insecticides was the very most common method used by university students to commit suicide in Edo State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations were made.

1. The Government and relevant authorities should make relevant policies to control substance abuse among youths and university students in Nigeria.
2. There is a need for parents and guardians to take active measures that will ensure the sustenance of a favourable home climate for children/wards (Students) as well as good relationships among family members

3. The low level of the prevalence of suicide among university students in Edo State should further be reduced, if possible prevented by all stakeholders (parents, students, guardians, counselors, administrators) in the educational system.
4. Access to the means for suicide especially the sales of pesticides/insecticides (Sniper) should be strictly controlled. This means that such substance (s) should be sold based only on prescriptions and authorization by relevant regulating bodies.

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