

Depression, Economic Recession and Media Reporting as Correlates of Suicidal behaviour among Undergraduates

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Abstract

The study examined the risk factors (economic recession, media reporting and depression) predisposing undergraduates to suicidal behaviour. The descriptive survey design was employed in carrying out the study, and the respondents were 400 undergraduates selected from two universities in Nigeria.. Data were analysed using Pearson's correlation. For the result, three (3) null hypothesis were formulated and tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level. The result revealed is strongly affected by depression, F value is 89.82 when df 1.399 is greater than F- table at alpha level of 0.05. The study concluded that economic recession, media reporting and depression are significantly associated with suicidal behaviour among undergraduates. However only depression and media reporting are predictors. It was recommended that, there is need for school-based suicide prevention programme and school Social workers and counsellors should be equipped with training on suicide prevention and suicide bereavement services.

Keywords: Suicidal Behaviour, economic recession, media reporting, depression

Introduction

Suicidal behavior is a leading cause of death and disability worldwide (Klonsky, Alexis, May, and Saffer 2016). Every year 800 000 people die by suicide, and every 40 seconds one is committing suicide. It is also predicted that by 2020, one person will die every 20 seconds if urgent action is not taken (World Health Organization, 2012). Suicidality or suicidal behaviour ranges from suicidal ideation or thoughts, suicide related communications, suicide attempts and finally suicide (CDCP, 2008). Suicide is defined as the act that results in fatal outcomes, it is anticipated and carried out by a person who aims to obtain a desirable change (WHO, 2012). What then does this desirable change suggest? People desire suicide as a way of escape from a life they have found miserable or to escape what is to them an impending doom that they feel will overwhelm them and are of the opinion they cannot endure.

The desirable change can be summed up in the suicidal behavior definition by CDC (2015) and Crosby, Han, Ortega, Parks, & Gfroerer (2011), they defined suicide as, death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with an intent to die as a result of the behavior; while suicide attempt is defined as a nonfatal, self-directed, potentially injurious behavior with an intent to die as a result of the behavior even if the behavior does not result in injury. Though suicidal methods vary and some methods might not be as painful as others, the intent, expected and anticipated result by suicidal person is still death. In recent years the number of suicide cases have increased worldwide and Nigeria is not immune to this increase. However researches on suicide in Africa and Nigeria in particular are rare, Schlebusch, Burrows & Wada (2009), Palmier (2011), Fine, Alison, Vanderwesthuizen & Kruger (2012), and Norhayati & Suen (2014) reported that researches on suicidality in the developing world are sparse for a number of reasons such as socio-cultural taboos, political and economic instability, cultural and religious diversity and beliefs. Suicide is a taboo, so much so that families of those who commit suicide feel a disgrace has been brought upon them and do not openly come out to verify that a family member has committed suicide.

Suicide is a serious problem that is on a continual increase in many countries, and it was the third cause of deaths among adolescents between 15 and 24 years worldwide (Habil, 2013). Students, when entering into the level of university education, experience a broad range of changes that may affect every level of their lives, regardless of their cultural background (Arslan, Ayranci, Unsal, & Arslantas, 2009). This experience can also expose them to stressful situations that may have an emotional and academic impact (Tosevski, Milovancevic, & Gajic, 2010). The changes and challenges that students face can bring intense psychological suffering and, in the extreme, lead them to suicide. Looking more specifically at college students (ages 18-24), 8% had suicidal thoughts and 2.4% made suicide plans in 2013 (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services, 2014).

In like manner a study by Omigbodun, Dogra, Esan, & Adedokun (2008) asserts that Nigerian students have one of the highest rates of suicidal ideation and attempts. These rates and attempts are comparable to those of other developing countries and higher than developed countries. The reasons and process of suicide is complex, unfathomable, and reporting of suicide can be defective (De Leo 2015). It is critical first and foremost, to acknowledge that suicide is a very complex issue. Therefore, it is almost impossible to ever say that any suicide death is the result of a single causal factor. Depression is the most common mental health disease that is related to suicide (American journal of suicidology, 2014).

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines depression as “a common mental disorder, characterized by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, feelings of tiredness and poor concentration”. It can be long lasting or recurrent and thus hinders normal functioning of life, in the most severe cases potentially leading to suicide (WHO 2016). A study carried out in Nigeria by Oladele & Oladele, (2016), has shown that there is a relationship between depression and suicide ideation among college students. In essence depression is significantly related to suicidal behaviour continuum, from suicidal thought to suicide.

There has been an increase in the number of suicide since 2008, the most noticeable increase being in those countries most affected by the economic recession (WHO, 2013). An economic recession is a business cycle contraction when there is a general slowdown in economic activity (Akindeko, 2016). There is also a growing awareness of suicidal behavior that is prompted by the media reporting of suicide, known as copycat suicide or the Werther effect, (Niederlkrotenthder, 2010). The adverse effect of mass media attention on suicide cannot be ignored. From journalist's tendency to simplify the reasons behind a suicidal act to engaging in undue speculation about the surrounding circumstances can have a damaging impact on the bereaved family (Chapple, Ziebland, Simkin, Hawton, 2013).

Suicide is just one indicator of distress in communities. For every suicide there may be many more people suffering from depression, anxiety, and other feelings of entrapment, powerlessness, and despair. At the same time, every suicide has a wide impact affecting many people—family, loved ones, and peers who find echoes of their own predicament, and who sometimes may be prompted to consider suicide themselves in response to the event. The circle of loss, grief, and mourning after suicide spreads outward in the community. Hence the need for this study to identify factors predisposing undergraduates to suicidal behaviour. The study focused on the following factors, namely: depression, economic recession, and media reporting. Therefore three null hypotheses were generated.

Hypotheses

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between depression and suicidal behavior among undergraduates

HO₂: There is no significant relationship between economic recession and suicidal behavior among undergraduates

HO₃: There is no significant relationship between media reporting and suicidal behavior among undergraduates

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed the descriptive survey method for the research.

Area of Study

This study was conducted in Ogun state Nigeria, at Bells University of Technology Ota, and Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye. The first private university of technology established in Nigeria. The Bells University is a private university, while Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye is a state-owned University.

Population of the Study

The target population for the study were the undergraduates selected at the Bells University of Technology, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria and Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Sampling and Sampling Techniques

A total of 400 respondents was selected. The study employed a multistage sampling technique. Stratified random sampling to select two universities, one private university and one public university and the distribution of instrument with 200 copies of questionnaire distributed at each university. The respondents from the two universities were selected through simple random sampling technique.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire, divided into 3 sections ‘A’ ‘B’ and ‘C’. Section A contain questions meant to seek demographic information of the respondent e.g. Sex, Age, Religion. Section B is a four point likert rating scale, (ranging from 4 strongly agree, 3 agree, 2 disagree, 1 strongly disagree) with 3 sub-sections with questionnaire items on the independent variables, namely depression, economic recession amd media reporting of suicide. Questions on depression were adapted from Beck’s depression inventory (1989) and questions on economic recession and media reporting were structured by the researchers. While Section C was adapted from Suicidal Behaviour Questtionnaire-Revised (SBQ-R) by Osman, Bagge, Gutierrez, Konick, Kopper and Barrios (2001).

Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument

To ascertain the reliability of the research instrument a sample of 20 respondents who are not part of the study population was used for the pretest using the Cronbach Alpha at 0.05 and the result was 0.864.

Procedure for Data Collection

Permission was gotten from the universities. The researcher also explained to the participant the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality and their right to decline participation in the process. Therefore those that participated were not mandated.

Procedure for Data Analysis

The Section A was analyzed using simple percentage while Section B was analyzed using Pearson Moment Correlation Co-efficient at 0.05 Alpha level. Each hypothesis was analyzed by ANOVA.

Results

HO₁ There is no significant difference between Depression and Suicidal behavior among Undergraduate.

Table 1.1: Analysis of Variance of Depression and suicidal behavior

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
1 Regression	9293.76522	1	9293.76522	89.82	000b
Residual	41284.929	399	103.471		
Total	50578.694	400			

a. Dependent Variable

b. Predictor (constant) Depression

The above table shows the one-way Analysis of variance of Depression of Suicidal behavior of undergraduate students. It reveals that F value is 89.82 when df 1.399 is greater than F- table at alpha level of 0.05. Hence the hypothesis of one significant difference is here discarded and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. Thus, suicidal behavior is strongly affected by depression.

HO₂ There is no significant difference between Economic recession and Suicidal behavior among undergraduate.

Table 1.2: Analysis of Variance of Economic recession and Suicidal behavior among undergraduate students

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
1 Regression	123.877	1	123.877	12.448	000b
Residual	3970.848	399	9.952		
Total	4094.725	390			

The table above show the analysis of variance of economic recession and individual behavior. At df 1,399, the F is 12.448. The result is greater than the table ANOVA at a level of 0.005. Hence the hypothesis of no significant is hereby rejected. Hence the alternate hypothesis is accepted that is economic recession affects suicidal behavior.

HO₃: There is no significant relationship between Media Reporting Scale and suicidal behavior.

Table 1.3: Analysis of variance of Media Reporting Scale and Suicidal Behavior among Undergraduate's

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
1 Regression	17839.626	1	17839.626	1758.11	000b
Residual	40486.929	399	101.471		
Total	58326.555	400			

a. Dependent Variable suicidal behaviour

b. Predictor (constant) Media Reporting Scale

The Table 4.7 above shows the one-way Analysis of Variance of Media reporting scale and suicide behaviour. It reveals that F = 175.811, at a df 1,399 which is statistically significant at < 0.05. Than the table level. This stress that Media Reporting Scale affect the suicidal tendency behaviour. Hence hypothesis of no significant differences is hereby discarded and the alternate accepted.

Discussion

The result of hypothesis one revealed that there was a significant relationship between depression and suicidal behavior among undergraduate student, the result is consistent with the findings of Eisenberg (2007) who reported that the general prevalence of depression is 16% among undergraduate students and 13% among graduate students. A number of factors contribute to the initial presentation of depression during college. The transition itself from home to college places additional life stressors on young adults as they explore their identity, strive to master new skills, while away from established social support systems, and have increased time demands (Dyson & Renk, 2006). The result of hypothesis two revealed that there was a significant relationship between economic recession and suicidal behavior among undergraduate students of university.

The result corroborates the findings of López, Gasparrini, Artundo & McKee (2014) in examining the relationship between the current economic crisis and the suicide rates registered in Spain between 2005 and 2010, found that a rise of around 8% in the suicide rate could be associated with the financial crisis racking the country. Additionally, Economic crises may affect suicide attempts incidence in different ways, either strengthening risk factors, or weakening protective factors. In the first case, crises contribute to increasing unemployment, poverty, financial problems and social deprivation. In the second pathway, economic recessions frequently entail retrenchments in job security and cuts in welfare protection programs, such as unemployment benefits (WHO, 2016). The result of hypothesis three revealed that there was a significant relationship between media report of suicide and suicidal behavior among undergraduate student, the result is consistent with review of studies from 2001-2012, Pirkis (2001), Stack (2003; 2005), Yang, Tsai, Yang, Shia, Fuh, Wang, Peng & Huang (2012) investigated the association of suicide deaths with suicide news in longitudinal

and spatial dimensions, it was revealed that suicide deaths were influenced by media reporting of both major and minor suicide events.

The study established that:

1. There is a significant relationship between depression and suicidal behaviour among undergraduate students.
2. There is a significant relationship between economic recession and suicidal behaviour among undergraduate students of university.
3. Media reporting of suicide has a significant influence on suicidal behaviour of undergraduates.

Conclusion

The prevalence of suicide among undergraduate student is gradually increasing and significantly affecting their wellbeing. Suicidal behaviour has a large number of underlying causes. The factors that place individuals at risk for suicide are complex and interact with one another. Identifying these factors and understanding their roles in both fatal and non-fatal suicidal behaviour are central to preventing suicides. Finally it is established that depression, economic recession, and media reporting are inversely related to suicidal behaviour.

Recommendations

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

1. There is need for school-based suicide prevention tool kits for school social workers and school counsellors
2. The university management should create mental health awareness program targeting students towards prevention of suicide
3. The university should also provide free line service in the university premises towards prevention and treatment of suicide cases among the student.
4. Media reporting of suicide should be censored, and should project more reasons for living and tips on survival of suicidal thought, rather than glamourizing suicide.
5. The study further suggest the need for spiritual view and solution to suicide prevention.

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