



Averting the growing rate of suicide incidence among tertiary institution students in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study focused on the growing incidence of suicide in Nigeria and how to curb it. Although suicide is not a strange phenomenon in Nigeria and indeed every part of the globe but it has recently become a subject of discussion in contemporary Nigeria. Indeed, the rate of occurrence has reached crisis level. Both insecticides and pesticides are now being used as suicide tool by students. These days students commit suicide as if it is normative. The media are now dominated by stories of suicide incidents. The reasons for committing suicide are basically mundane especially with regards to students. On the wider note, the trend has drawn the attention of both individual and corporate bodies notably the upper legislative chamber in Nigeria. It was however recommended among other things that there should be an adequate public enlightenment campaign on the disadvantages of committing suicide; counsellors should be employed for students to discuss their feelings, emotions etc.; parents should oversee what their children are doing. They should also be friendly with their children and give listening ears to their views.

Keywords: suicide incidence, growing rate of suicide, students, curb

Introduction

Suicide is the act or process by which an individual kill himself or herself. It is not limited to an individual alone. Sometimes, a group of persons may decide to take their own lives and as such they set themselves ablaze or kill themselves by whatever means. In most cases, that which involves two or more people is usually associated with an agreement referred to as suicide pact. Meanwhile, Hornby (2000:1494) ^[6] defines suicide as “the act of killing yourself deliberately”. Making the definition of suicide clearer, Dienne (2004) ^[5] posits that

it is concerned with death arising from deliberate act of self-destruction or from an action when it is known that action will have fatal consequences on one's life. Some students also commit suicide when they cannot stand the consequences of their misdeeds (p32).

It is however important to note that suicide is not a strange phenomenon in Nigeria. From time immemorial people have been committing suicide all over the world, Nigeria is not an exception. What is rather worrisome is the suicide rates and the ages of victims. The Durkheim's theory as cited in Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (2000:350) ^[1] postulates that “suicide rates and different types of social context are related, in particular that suicide is related to the level of social integration so that increased disintegration leads to increased numbers of suicides”. In the Nigerian context, the incidence of suicidal acts is on the increase. The assertion is given credence as Agunbiade (2019) ^[3] reveals thus

... but the rate it occurs, the ages of the victims and the use of pesticides as a suicide tool should make any nation uncomfortable. The incidence of suicidal

attempts and actual suicide cases in Nigeria has gone up as the Nigerian media is flooded with such stories. There may also be likely many unreported cases of the horrible incidents by the media. Mostly affected here are the youths ... (p14).

In spite of the excerpt above, many Nigerians are still expressing their worry over the common occurrence of suicide acts in the country. Notable among them is the upper legislative chamber in Nigeria. Writing in this regard, Salami (2019:7) ^[9] stated that “rising incidence of suicide among Nigerians, yesterday, caused anger among senators who expressed concern over the lack of political will to protect the lives and property of Nigerians by leaders as contains in the constitution”. Considering the above scenario, the thrust of this paper is to curb the growing rate of suicide incidence in Nigeria. However, in course of writing, an exposition would be made on the causes or reasons for suicide incidence, methods of committing suicide, the rate at which incidence of suicide occur among contemporary Nigeria students; and how to avert it.

Causes/Reasons for Committing Suicide

Students commit suicide due to a number of reasons though most of the reasons are mundane. Those reasons according to Agunbiade (2019:14) ^[3] “range from bad performance in their academic quest, sour romantic relationships and at times inexplicable reasons”. Indeed, some students on seeing that they have lost the affection of their romantic partner, think that the only option is to commit suicide. A typical example is a twenty-one-year old Christabel Buoro, a student of University of Benin, who allegedly committed suicide on Tuesday, 18th June, 2019 over a failed love affair. It was reported that Christabel mixed an insecticide, popularly called sniper, with a soft drink which she allegedly took. Further report stated that policemen who came to evacuate the corpse (body) were very angry after

reading out aloud the suicide note she dropped in which she stated that she was about to take her life because the guy she loved did not love her in return and had broken up with her' (Peter, 2019) [8].

In a similar vein, Sunday (2019:12) reported that "a student of the Department of Hospital Management at the Lagos State Polytechnic, Ikorodu committed suicide because of his girlfriend's decision to jilt him". The above incidence is obnoxious because it is in no way a pleasant news or story. Moreover, at such an age of just 21, life is just starting with regards to marriage or love affairs. Nature has enough packages for every human being. That a relationship became sour does not mean the end of life. A better and more caring person may come one's way.

Another cause of suicide is poverty. Poverty makes people to indulge in certain acts that they ordinarily would not have done. Poverty sometimes brings about emotional depression. According to Ayorinde (2014:163) [4], "an emotionally depressed person is very likely to engage in injurious acts". Furthermore, psychologists view emotional depression as a compressed painful feeling that needs to be exhaled (Horowitz and Boardens, 1995) [7].

Apart from the above, failure in school examinations or general poor performance in academic causes depression and can result in some students committing suicide. The fact that some students complete their programme at record time while some not only stay for extra year but also fail out at the end is a case in point. Invariably, such students that failed out have no option than to re-write Universal Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (UTME) again and if successful start year one all over again. This no doubt boggles the mind and could traumatize the student leading to committing suicide.

To cap it all on the causes of suicide, Senator Theodore Orji as reported by Salami (2019) [4] stated thus

when they (suicide victims) are not able to cope with the overwhelming situation of life which could be financial problems, death of loved ones, broken relationship which is very popular amongst the youths in Nigeria or serious illness, they choose suicide as an option (p7).

Rate of Occurrence of Suicide Acts in Nigeria

The growing rate of suicide cases is a global phenomenon and a source of worry. For instance, the World Health Organization (WHO) suicide data as cited in Uche (2019:28) [11] asserts that "close to 800,000 people die due to suicide every year, globally, this is one person every 40 seconds". Each country of course has its own data as well as the stories of such incidence reported in the media.

In recent times, especially within the year 2019, the media has been dominated by reports associated with suicidal acts among Nigerian students as well as non-students. Giving credence to the above, Sunday (2019) reported thus

Barely hours after it was reported that a student of the Department of Hospital Management at the Lagos State Polytechnic, Ikorodu, committed suicide because of his girlfriend's decision to jilt him, another suicide has been reported at Sedar College, Baruwa, in IpajaAyobo axis of Lagos (p12).

Apart from the above, on Tuesday, 18th June, 2019, a twenty-one-year-old petty trader has committed suicide after losing the N7,000 she realized from her trade. The trader named Kaivi Kayode is a Togolese woman who was said to have gulped a bottle of insecticide known as sniper. Mores o, a father of two and a devout Christian identified as Seun Adedutan also committed suicide after consuming two bottles of sniper at his Surulere home. Also, a man in Ikorodu had committed suicide after killing his wife and son. Another suicide was the case of a Lagos businessman who took his life because he could not get assistance or raise fund for his house rent (Sunday, 2019).

Expressing worry over the high rate of suiciding acts in Nigeria, Adiele (2019) stated thus

this week, I focus on suicide which has become a very disturbing trend in our country. Suicide is in the air. Every day, you read how a person has existed this life through suicide. The rate is quite alarming. Among all the anomalies that beset our country, insecurity, kidnapping, banditry, and prostitution, suicide stakes a claim and looms large in our social reality ... Indeed, Nigeria has never recorded so many instances of suicide as they have done in the last two years (16).

Methods/Ways Suicidal Act is Carried Out

Suicide is done in a number of ways. They include:

1. Drowning: People who are depressed so much that they can no longer cope with life decide to commit suicide by jumping into the river and drown.
2. Hanging: This was more common in the past. A person who is fed up with life or who has committed an atrocity that he cannot bear the consequence often commit suicide by hanging himself or herself.
3. Setting oneself ablaze: Sometimes people commit suicide by locking themselves up in a house, throw the key away through the window and set the house ablaze.
4. Jumping into a vehicle in motion: It is also a practice by certain persons who want to take their lives. Such a person may decide to jump into a vehicle on speed. This results in fatal accident though it is a suicidal act.
5. Jumping into a well: This is same as jumping into the river. It is often difficult to swim in the well because it is narrow hence it often led to death.
6. Jumping down from high elevation: Sometimes a person who wants to commit suicide climbs a tall tree or storey building and jumps down. Of course, the person would crash-land and die.
7. Drinking harmful substance: This is becoming common nowadays. Drinking insecticide, pesticide is now the common practice.
8. Drug Abuse (over dose): Some people who wants to commit suicide purposely take excess of a drug and this results in death.

Effects of Suicide on the Society

Acts of suicide have devastating effects on not only loved ones/close relations but also on the societal culture, the academia and national development. It is natural that if one commits suicide, the friends would be missing him/her. The

colleagues or peers that help the victim by taking him/her to hospital may become traumatized after seeing the groaning and gasping for air-before he gave up the ghost. The trauma on the colleagues/peers may be over-whelming that they might miss classes for some days. Invariably, the consequence of missing classes or lectures is poor academic performance. Without mincing words, this is of grave concern to any student. In the same vein, the victim's relatives such as brothers, sisters and parents would also have their feelings of emotion. Ordinarily, the victim's family would be expecting that at the end of his academic career, he would be of immense assistance to them. The expectation that he/she would be the light of the family would have been dashed. This means that the investment parents made on the suicide victim has been wasted.

Apart from the above, the academia is also affected. This is because people may feel and say that if those in the academia whom we look up to should commit suicide in such frequency, of what value then is the academia? This could lead to de-marketing the academia if not that the academia had over the years bequeathed worthwhileness. Giving credence to the above, Salami (2019:7) reported that the Senate urged the National Universities Commission, NUC, to review the school curriculum and come up with compulsory courses that will enable students place value on their lives and detest suicide.

Furthermore, national development is affected because every human being has a contribution to make in the development of his nation. The expectation is more on those that are educated. This is because the educated person is said to have acquired skills, hence, he should enhance structural and infrastructural development of the nation. To this end, if a student in tertiary institution commits suicide, national development is affected.

Lastly, rising suicide rate can affect the societal culture. If society does not condemn suicidal acts in strong terms, the younger generation may think it is normative and imbibe the practice. This in a way could truncate the culture of the society. People should be given the orientation that suicide is not an acceptable culture and as such should be abhorred.

How to Avert the Growing Rate of Suicide Incidence Among Tertiary Institution Students in Nigeria.

The growing rate of suicide incidence among students in Nigeria can be curbed or averted in various approaches such as the social, economic, government regulation, education, and the psychological approaches.

- **Social Approach:** If religious institutions prioritize preaching love, peace and that people should be sober, it would go a long way. Moreover, religious bodies should emphasize how to manage or relieve stress and depression to their adherents. Besides, parents ought to monitor their children's activities and behaviour to ensure that they are not derailing from what is right. In support of this view, a communiqué of the Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ) Lagos chapter as reported in Sunday (2019) advised parents to

be more watchful, approachable and give listening ears to their children to curb the menace. NAWOJ also advised parents to be cautious of using what they see on social media as standards for their children as no

two children were the same, urging them not to compare children development (p12).

- **Economic Approach:** It is expected of the government to create structures as well as enabling environment for investors to come and invest. This is a way of creating employment so that indigent students can work as part time and become comfortable. This can avert thoughts of committing suicide. Also, palliative schemes can be established by the government to cushion the effect of poverty on the citizenry. In line with the above, the Nigerian Senate as reported by Salami (2019:7) "stressed the need for government to expand the scope and content of the Special Intervention Programme, SIP, and to leverage on extant schemes like N-Power in creating economic opportunities for the vulnerable sections of the population".
- **Governmental Regulatory Approach:** The government has a duty of regulation to make if the rising rate of suicide would be curbed. In line with the above idea, Agunbiade (2019) ^[3] stated thus

one of the ways suicide through pesticide can be reversed is identification of marketers of pesticide by the regulatory permit or licence as pesticide is a poison that requires handlers to be issued a licence by the appropriate authorities. With the permit or licence, the marketers would not only form the database of the regulatory authorities for easy tracking but they will be conscious of the ethical and safety practices as well as consequences of flouting the provisions of the permit (p14).

- **Counselling Approach:** Problems of people are better known or understood when there is an interface between the person having problem and a counsellor. In the course of interaction, a lot of revelations are made just as truth is revealed in the court of law during cross-examination. Giving credence to this, Bebia as reported by Uche (2019) ^[11] posits that

a continuous engagement in therapeutic counselling and productive ventures by everyone no matter how meagre will go a long way, and we must let them know they can survive despite all odds. So, with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), we can track their problems (p28).

Furthermore, the issue of how to arrest abstractly someone who is contemplating suicide has an answer by psychologists. On this, Bebia as reported by Uche (2019:28) ^[11] explained, that "none is insurmountable. So, our Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyper-Reactive Disorder ADHD strategy helps us to counsel, educate, evaluate and treat accordingly". From this citation, it means that suicide is preventable if and only if those contemplating it speak out or discuss it with people who have the considerable expertise in counselling.

- **Education Approach:** The Nigerian Senate has already urged the National Universities Commission, NUC to review the school curriculum and come up with compulsory courses that will enable students place

value on their lives and detest suicide. Besides, the federal government has been urged to create awareness on how to control stress and depression and also establish trauma centres across the country (Salami, 2019).

Attention is drawn to the indispensability of knowledge in all human endeavour especially with regards to committing atrocities such as suicide. In line with this, Agunbiade (2019:14) [3] posits that “learning is a continuous process. Agricultural input dealers that mostly sell to the end-users (farmers) should be trained and retrained to handle and market the poisonous substance safely”.

Conclusion

The study concluded that due to mundane reasons, incidence of suicide has risen in Nigeria especially among students as victims easily have access to insecticides, pesticides and other harmful substances. The study further concludes that the alarming rate of the incidence can be curbed if religious bodies would teach depression management to their adherents; parents monitor their children’s activities; employment opportunities provided for indigent students so that they can work on part time basis; counsellors provided for students; and introduction of courses that would place value on students’ lives so that they would detest suicide.

Recommendations

1. Nigerian youths should face life courageously
2. National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) should use the same measure and vigour it used against the distribution of codeine, tramadol and other pharmaceutical products.
3. There should be an adequate public enlightenment campaign on the disadvantages of committing suicide.
4. Students should be provided with counsellors so that their feelings, emotions, frustrations can be discussed appropriately and solutions proffered.
5. Parents should be serious in overseeing what their children do especially with regards to use of internet and social media.
6. Parents should be friendly and give listening ears to their children to avert the occurrence of suicide.
7. Religious bodies should stress how to manage stress and depression to their adherents.
8. Palliative schemes should be provided by the government to cushion the effects of poverty.
9. Courses that would place value on students’ lives should be introduced in the education curriculum.

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