

ACADEMIC STRESS AND SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: The study examined the relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive correlational survey design. Three hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Correlation Matrix. A simple random sampling technique was employed to select 420 participants from three universities in Oyo State. Data were collected using the Academic Stress and Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (ASSIQ). The findings revealed that undergraduates in Oyo State experienced high levels of academic stress and suicidal ideation. A significant relationship was found between academic stress and suicidal ideation ($r = 0.199$, $p < 0.05$). Further findings indicated that gender, age, class level, place of residence, and course of study significantly predict academic stress among undergraduates in Oyo State. Also, gender, class level, and place of residence significantly predict suicidal ideation, while no significant predictions were found for age and course of study. The study recommended that undergraduates experiencing academic stress in tertiary institutions should seek mental health counselling from professionals to prevent situations that could lead to suicidal ideation in Oyo State. Universities should collaborate with lecturers, level advisors, health practitioners, and school counsellors to launch awareness campaigns in a way to educate undergraduates on coping strategies and resilience-building techniques to manage academic stress and suicidal ideation, considering their gender, age, place of residence, course of study and class level.

Keywords: Academic stress, Suicidal ideation, Undergraduates, Oyo State

INTRODUCTION

Suicidal ideation is a social and public health issue, posing serious psychological challenges for many undergraduates in Nigeria. This behaviour emerges when students feel that life has lost its meaning, prompting them to consider or desire to end their lives. It is widespread among students across different age groups, living conditions, religious affiliations, gender, ethnicities, academic levels, and socioeconomic backgrounds. National Crime Records Bureau (2024) reported that a large number of suicide attempts or completed suicides among undergraduates below the age of 30 in Nigeria. These incidents are frequently linked to academic difficulties and mental health challenges.

The prevalence of suicidal ideation not only disrupts their academic success but can also lead to devastating outcomes, including fatalities. Between 2019 and 2023, reports revealed a significant increase in suicidal ideation cases, indicating that 7,821 tertiary institution students from Oyo State

were hospitalised and 2,373 attempted suicides due to academic failures or underachievement (Adesola, 2024). Students who struggle to meet academic expectations or achieve good grades often experience mental health challenges including intense anxiety, low self-esteem, and feelings of hopelessness, which may drive them toward unhealthy coping mechanisms like substance abuse. Additionally, these students may display aggressive or impulsive behaviours, endure physical or sexual abuse, encounter complex life events, struggle with inadequate coping skills, experience family conflicts, or contend with personality issues. These factors collectively contribute to depression, strained peer relationships, and increased academic stress (Pienaar, Rothman & Vijver, 2022).

According to Adediran (2024), undergraduates often find education highly stressful, demanding significant mental and physical effort. Pienaar, Rothman, and Vijver (2022) identified key stressors, including poor academic performance, reduced cognitive abilities, and a lack of focus and mindfulness. Krishan (2024) noted that excessive stress can lead to suicidal ideation, stemming from emotional exhaustion and the overwhelming pressure to meet academic expectations. Omoniyi and Ogunsanmi (2023) further emphasised that students experience increased stress when confronted with rigorous academic demands, lack of social support and insufficient resources. This stress often leads to adverse effects such as disrupted sleep, loss of appetite, emotional distress, severe stress, and depression.

Adegoke (2023) emphasised that academic stress adversely affects students' interpersonal relationships, physical health, and psychological well-being. Prolonged exposure to academic stress can lead to physical ailments like heart disease and mental health issues such as anxiety disorders. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explained that Nigerian students perceive academic challenges as overwhelming due to high parental expectations and financial constraints. Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory highlighted how prolonged stress depletes psychological and physical resources, increasing vulnerability to health issues. Since individuals respond to stress differently, effective stress management is crucial in preventing severe outcomes. These perspectives underscore the need for culturally sensitive interventions to promote resilience and effective coping strategies.

Gafar, Oladipo and Adeyemi (2022) stressed that while academic stress itself is not inherently harmful, well-managed stress (eustress) can be beneficial. In contrast, poorly managed stress (distress) can have harmful effects. Radcliff and Lester (2021) examined anticipated stress among final-year students, noting that difficult assignments, heavy workloads, project deadlines, financial challenges, lack of guidance, social pressures, and the desire to graduate with good grades are key contributors to academic stress. Similarly, Harris and Barraclough (2022) carried out a study on prevalence of suicidal ideation among university students in Namakkal district, Tamil Nadu, India, found significant levels of stress, with male students reporting higher stress than females, and urban students experiencing more stress than their rural counterparts. In Nigeria, Ajedara (2024) revealed that female students experience more academic stress than their male counterparts, often due to balancing societal expectations with academic demands and limited access to gender-specific support services.

Research has consistently showed a positive relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduates. Krishan (2024) and Gvion and Apter (2024) discovered that increased academic stress significantly raised the likelihood of students developing suicidal thoughts. Likewise, Sylvester (2022) identified academic stress as a primary predictor of suicidal ideation among university students. Radcliff and Lester (2021) observed that increased academic stress had severe adverse effects on mental health, heightening the risk of suicidal ideation among undergraduates. Paladino and Minton (2023) similarly noted that persistent stress and anxiety were major contributors to poor mental health and suicidal tendencies in students. Furthermore, studies by Ifeagwasi (2021) and Ajedara (2024) found no significant relationship between academic stress and variables such as age, class level, or place of residence among undergraduates in Nigeria. This lack of association may stem from the complex interplay of individual resilience, institutional support, and socio-cultural factors that moderate the impact of stress on mental health, underscoring the need for further research to identify specific risk factors and protective mechanisms across different contexts.

Shaheen and Jahan (2024) emphasised a notable relationship between academic achievement pressure and suicidal ideation among undergraduate students. Nkwuda et al. (2020) observed that the rate of suicidal ideation tends to increase during examination periods, a time when students face heightened academic stress. Ajidahun (2022) investigated depression and suicidal attitude among adolescents in some selected secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria and found that students experiencing significant academic stress related to their performance and higher education were more likely to have serious suicidal thoughts compared to their peers with lower stress levels. However, Gvion and Apter (2024) reported no direct connection between academic stress and suicidal ideation, suggesting that factors like resilience and social support may moderate its effects. The transactional model of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) supported this by emphasising the importance of individual appraisal and coping resources in determining the impact of stress. These findings underscore the need for interventions that not only reduce academic stress but also enhance coping mechanisms and social support. Therefore, while academic stress contributes to suicidal ideation, its effects are influenced by individual and contextual factors, requiring tailored support strategies.

Misra and Castillo (2024) explored the relationship between academic stress and suicidal thoughts among secondary school students in America. The study found a strong positive correlation between academic stress and suicidal thoughts among secondary school students in America, while Sylvester (2022) observed that students with lower academic stress and healthier self-perceptions experienced fewer suicidal thoughts. Gvion and Apter (2024) reported high levels of academic stress among students in Punjab, with no significant difference based on gender, residence, age, or class level. In contrast, Nigerian studies such as Adegoke (2023) and Adesola (2024) identified that academic stress among students is influenced by gender, age, and place of residence, with females and younger students often experiencing higher stress levels. However, these studies also suggested that social support and coping mechanisms played a significant role in mitigating the negative effects of academic stress on mental health. While global research focuses on stress and perfectionism as key stressors, Nigerian findings highlight the importance of contextual factors like family support in buffering the effects of academic stress. This comparative analysis

underscores the need for tailored interventions considering both universal and culturally specific stressors.

Academic stress and suicidal ideation among university students are shaped by several factors, including gender, class level, academic discipline, and living arrangements. Research indicates that male students often report higher levels of academic stress and suicidal ideation than female students, although the underlying causes may be similar for both genders (Adesola, 2022; Adegoke, 2023). Final-year students are particularly vulnerable due to worries about graduation and future career prospects, while first-year students frequently struggle with adjusting to university life. The nature of academic programmes also influences mental health, as students in rigorous fields like medicine, law, and engineering tend to experience higher levels of stress. In contrast, those studying humanities and social sciences face different challenges, particularly related to career uncertainty (Bhosale, 2024; Shaheen & Jahan, 2024). Also, students living off-campus are at greater risk for academic stress and suicidal ideation due to feelings of isolation and limited access to support networks, whereas on-campus students benefit from stronger social connections and better access to mental health services. These findings highlight the necessity for targeted mental health support that addresses the specific needs of diverse student populations (Ifeagwasi, 2021; Adeyemi, 2024).

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in and outside Nigeria. For instance, Ajidahun (2022) examined depression and suicidal attitude among adolescents in some selected secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria. Gafar, Oladipo, and Adeyemi (2022) explored academic challenges and psychological well-being among Nigerian students. Okechukwu, et al. (2022) studied academic stress, suicidal ideation and moderating roles of coping style and resilience. Misra and Castillo (2024) investigated academic stress and suicidal ideation among college students in America. However, to the researchers' knowledge, there has not been a specific study investigating the relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State, Nigeria. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State, addressing a gap in region-specific research.

Aim and Objectives

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State. Specifically, the objectives of this study were to:

1. determine the levels of academic stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State.
2. determine the extent to which gender, age, class level, place of residence and course of study significantly predict academic stress among undergraduates in Oyo State.
3. determine the extent to which gender, age, class level, place of residence and course of study significantly predict suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of academic stress among undergraduates in Oyo State?
2. What is the level of suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State.
2. Gender, age, class level, place of residence and course of study will not significantly predict academic stress among undergraduates in Oyo State.
3. Gender, age, class level, place of residence and course of study will not significantly predict suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Adeyemi (2024) described a research design as a detailed plan or strategy that researchers develop to address their research questions or objectives, guiding all stages from data collection to analysis and interpretation. In this study, a correlational research design was employed to examine the relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State.

Population, sample and sampling procedure

The study's population comprised 102,660 undergraduates from tertiary institutions in Oyo State, Nigeria. To ensure a representative sample, the researcher employed a multi-stage sampling method. The selected institutions had a combined total of 60,044 students. Following the guidelines provided by Research Advisor (2006), a sample size of 383 respondents was recommended and 10% were added in order to cater for attrition rate, therefore resulting in a final sample size of 420 respondents.

In the first stage, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select one university from each senatorial district in Oyo State, taking their respective populations into consideration. The universities chosen for this study included Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, representing the Oyo Central Senatorial District; Ladoke Akintola University of Technology from the Oyo North Senatorial District; and the University of Ibadan from the Oyo South Senatorial District. In the second stage, a proportional sampling technique was used to select respondents from each of the institutions involved in the study.

Table 1: Proportional Sample of Undergraduates in the Selected Institutions in Oyo State

S/N	Institution	Type	Targeted Population	Sample
1	University of Ibadan	Federal	24, 576	172
2	Ladoke Akintola University of Technology	State	30, 206	211
3	Ajayi Crowther University	Private	5, 262	37
	Total		60, 044	420

In the third stage, the researchers employed a simple random sampling technique, specifically using the dip-hat method, to select 420 undergraduates. This method guaranteed that all respondents had an equal chance to participate in the study, thereby removing any potential bias. Simple random sampling ensures that each individual or sampling unit within the population has the same probability of being included in the sample.

Instrumentation

The instruments were adapted and modified because of their relevance to the purpose of the study. The questionnaire was based on the Students' Academic Stress Scale, developed by Sun, Dunne, Hou, X, and Xu in 2011, and the Suicidal Ideation Scale developed by Rudd in 1989. The development of 20 items on the students' academic stress scale focused on analysing students' everyday stressors in the school. The items were related to potentially stress-producing situations in the school, and special care was taken to ensure that their wordings were simple and accessible to students. The instrument has 20 items in total with five Point Likert-type response formats ranging from 5 to 1. In its original form, the instrument had internal consistency (Cronbach alpha) of 0.80. The researcher decided to adapt Academic Stress Scale for use since it corresponds with the desired measure of the study.

The Suicidal Ideation Scale is a self-report scale designed to assess the severity or level of suicidal ideation among undergraduates. All the 20 items in the instrument were negatively structured. The instrument has 20 items in total with five Point Likert-type response formats ranging from 5 to 1. In its original form, the instrument had internal consistency (Cronbach alpha) of 0.90. The researcher decided to adapt Suicidal Ideation Scale for use since it corresponds with the desired measure of the study.

Therefore, the instrument was titled the "Academic Stress and Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (ASSIQ)." It was structured into three sections: Section A gathered demographic information from the respondents. Section B had twenty items designed to assess students' level of academic stress, and Section C comprised twenty items aimed at assessing suicidal ideation level among undergraduates. Both Sections B and C employed a four-point Likert scale, which included options for Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (1 point).

Psychometric Properties of the instrument

Validity: To assess the instrument's validity, the researchers gave it to two experts from the Department of Psychology, one lecturer from the Department of Sociology, and two lecturers from the Department of Educational Guidance and Counselling at the University of Ilorin for content validity assessment. The feedback and suggestions provided by these experts were used to refine and modify certain items in the instrument.

Reliability: To determine the instrument's reliability, the researchers used the test-retest method with a sample of 20 students from the Department of Psychology at the University of Ilorin. This procedure entailed administering the questionnaire on two separate occasions, with a two-week gap between the two sessions. The scores obtained from both administrations were then analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The resulting correlation coefficient for the Academic Stress Scale was 0.88, while the Suicidal Ideation Scale yielded a coefficient of 0.89, both of which were statistically significant at the 0.05 alpha level.

Procedure for Scoring

The scale used in this study consisted of a total of 80 items, with each section addressing academic stress and suicidal ideation containing 20 items each (20 items x 4 points = 80). The minimum possible score for Sections B and C was 20 (20 items x 1 point = 20). The scores ranged from a maximum of 80 to a minimum of 20, creating a span of 60 points. The midpoint of this range was calculated to be 30 (60 divided by 2). This midpoint was subtracted from the highest possible score to determine the cutoff point, resulting in a cutoff score of 50 (80 minus 30). Thus, fifty percent (50%) served as the benchmark to determine the level of academic stress and suicidal ideation among respondents. Scores above 50% indicated high levels of academic stress and suicidal ideation, while scores below 50% indicated low levels among undergraduates in Oyo State.

Method of Data Analysis

The gathered data was analysed statistically, using percentages to determine the levels of academic stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State. The first hypothesis was tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation, while the second and third hypotheses were tested with a Correlation Matrix. All statistical tests were analysed at a significance level of 0.05.

Ethical Consideration

Guided by ethical considerations, two researchers, supported by three trained research assistants who were informed about the study's purpose, carried out the face-to-face distribution of questionnaires to the respondents. The study's objectives were thoroughly explained to the respondents, and their informed consent was obtained prior to participation. Those who declined to participate were excluded and did not receive the questionnaire. In addition, participants were assured of confidentiality before completing the questionnaires.

RESULTS

Out of the 420 questionnaires distributed to participants, 414 were filled out correctly and included in the dataset for this research. The following section presented the findings based on the respondents' data, highlighting the frequency and percentages of the collected information.

Research Question 1: What is the level of academic stress among undergraduates in Oyo State?

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Level of Academic Stress

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low	30	7.2
High	384	92.8
Total	414	100.0

Table 2 shows that respondents experienced high level of academic stress. Thirty respondents (7.2%) reported low academic stress, while 384 respondents (92.8%) reported high academic stress. These implied that the majority of respondents were experiencing severe academic stress, which had a profound impact on their emotional and psychological well-being. Respondents' emotional and psychological wellbeing suffered significantly, making it challenging for them to cope with the demands of academic life.

Research Question 2: What is the level of suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State?

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Level of Suicidal Ideation

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low	151	36.5
High	263	63.5
Total	414	100.0

Table 3 reveals high level of suicidal ideation among respondents. Specifically, 151 respondents (36.5%) reported low level of suicidal ideation, while 263 respondents (63.5%) reported high level. This indicated that a majority of the respondents experienced significant suicidal ideation, which profoundly affecting their academic studies and state of mental health and well-being. The emotional pain and distress associated with suicidal ideation hindered respondents' ability to cope with academic pressures, creating a vicious cycle of suffering.

Hypotheses Testing

In this study, three null hypotheses were formulated and analysed. These hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Correlation Matrix statistical methods, with a significance level set at 0.05.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State

Table 4: Pearson’s “r” Showing the Relationship between the Academic Stress and Suicidal Ideation of the Respondents

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. r-value	p. value
Academic stress	414	69.55	12.86			
Suicidal Ideation	414	63.72	10.94	412	.199*	.000

*Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 4 reveals that the calculated p-value of 0.00 was less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value was less than the alpha level of significance, the hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, academic stress had a significant relationship with suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State. This implied that as academic stress increases, suicidal ideation also tends to increase as well.

Hypothesis Two: Gender, age, class level, place of residence and course of study will not significantly predict academic stress among undergraduates in Oyo State.

Table 5: Summary of Correlation Matrix Showing the Relationship Between the Independent and Moderating Variables of the Respondents

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Academic Stress	1.000					
Gender	.328*	1.000				
Age	.298*	-.207*	1.000			
Class Level	.228*	-.004	.004	1.000		
Place of residence	.210*	.122*	-.069*	-.303*	1.000	
Course of study	.301*	.202*	-.078*	-.424*	.208*	1.000

Table 5 reveals a significant relationship between academic stress and respondents' gender ($r = 0.328$, $P < 0.05$), age ($r = 0.298$, $P < 0.05$), class level ($r = 0.228$, $P < 0.05$), place of residence ($r = 0.210$, $P < 0.05$), and course of study ($r = 0.301$, $P < 0.05$). This implied that gender, age, class level, place of residence, and course of study indeed have predictive power concerning academic stress among undergraduates at Oyo State. The hypothesis was rejected. Hence, this has significant implications in schools, which requires the need for interventions, diversified support services, and inclusive policies to promote students' wellbeing.

Hypothesis Three: Gender, age, class level, place of residence and course of study will not significantly predict suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State.

Table 6: Summary of Correlation Matrix Showing the Relationship Between the Independent and Moderating Variables of the Respondents

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Suicidal Ideation	1.000					
Gender	.177*	1.000				
Age	.017	-.207*	1.000			
Class Level	.163*	-.004	.004	1.000		
Place of residence	.176*	.122*	-.069*	-.303*	1.000	
Course of study	.047	.202*	-.078*	-.424*	.208*	1.000

Table 6 indicates a significant relationship between suicidal ideation and respondents' gender ($r = 0.177$, $P < 0.05$), class level ($r = 0.163$, $P < 0.05$), and place of residence ($r = 0.176$, $P < 0.05$). However, no significant relationships were observed based on age ($r = 0.017$, $P > 0.05$) and course of study ($r = 0.047$, $P > 0.05$). This implied that the gender, class level, and place of residence of the respondents have significant relationships with suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State, Nigeria. The hypothesis was rejected. Hence, this has implications for targeted interventions, support services, and inclusive policies in schools, as well as tailored mental health services and early identification of students at risk of suicidal ideation.

DISCUSSION

The results indicated that a majority of respondents experienced high levels of academic stress in their educational institutions. This implied that undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Oyo State are grappling with academic stress. These findings align with the research of Mac George, Saner, and Gillihan (2023), who observed that undergraduates often encounter substantial academic stress while trying to meet teacher expectations, compete with classmates, manage multiple assignments, feel overwhelmed by course content, lack sufficient parental support, and face various academic challenges. In contrast, Nkwuda et al. (2022) found low levels of academic stress among undergraduates in Enugu State University. Hence, one possible reason for this finding is the highly competitive academic environment, which leads students to feel the need to outperform their peers, thereby increasing their stress and anxiety levels. Also, there might be increased expectations from parents, teachers, and peers regarding academic success, which adds to the stress related to grades and performance. The implications of these findings suggest that societal expectations and cultural norms play a crucial role in shaping academic stress. In Oyo State, the societal emphasis on educational success as a pathway to academic stress intensifies the pressure on students, contrasting with global contexts where support systems and alternative career pathways may help mitigate such stress. Furthermore, cultural and societal values in Nigeria, emphasising education as a path to socioeconomic mobility, could intensify stress among undergraduates. These findings contrast with global contexts where diverse support systems and career pathways may reduce academic pressure.

The findings also revealed that a majority of respondents reported high levels of suicidal ideation within their educational institutions. This indicated that undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Oyo State were struggling with suicidal thoughts. The high rates of suicidal ideation among undergraduates represent a serious psychological concern, adversely affecting their emotional and physical well-being. These results align with the research of Pienaar, Rothman, and Vijver (2022), who found that undergraduates often experience increased levels of suicidal thoughts during periods of considerable stress and depression related to their studies. However, Misra, and Castillo (2024) study revealed low levels of suicidal ideation among college students in America. Similarly, Ajedara (2024) research showed low prevalence rate of suicidal ideation among university students in Ogun State due to strong social support and effective coping mechanisms. Therefore, the present findings might be associated with the intense academic pressure and expectations to perform well on examinations, which can lead to feelings of failure and hopelessness among these students. Additionally, persistent academic challenges or failures might worsen feelings of inadequacy and despair, heightening the risk of suicidal ideation. Thus, these findings highlight the interplay between societal norms, mental health infrastructure, and coping mechanisms in shaping students' psychological well-being. The high rates of suicidal ideation in Oyo State underline the urgent need for culturally tailored mental health interventions that address the intense societal pressure faced by Nigerian students. In Nigeria, societal expectations often prioritise academic success as a gateway to future opportunities, which may intensify stress and psychological distress when students perceive themselves as failing. By contrast, in global contexts like the U.S., diverse career pathways and the availability of professional mental health services may buffer against such outcomes.

Another finding showed a significant relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State. The finding contradicts Pienaar, Rothman, and Vijver (2022) whose study revealed no significant relationship between academic stress and suicidal ideation among university students in Ogun State. However, the finding is consistent with the research conducted by Adegoke (2023) and Adediran (2024), which identified a strong association between the pressure to succeed in university and suicidal ideation among undergraduates. Likewise, Ajidahun (2022) found a significant relationship between academic stress and suicidal thoughts among university students, suggesting that those experiencing high levels of academic stress may be more vulnerable to suicidal ideation. This connection may arise from the highly competitive academic environment, which often fosters constant comparisons and a fear of failure, consequently heightening stress levels and increasing the likelihood of suicidal thoughts among students. Additionally, unrealistic academic expectations from parents, teachers, or society can create overwhelming pressure and instil feelings of worthlessness. The implications of these findings suggest that the interplay between academic stress and suicidal ideation is influenced by cultural and environmental factors. The stress-diathesis model can help explain how external pressures interact with individual vulnerabilities, such as a lack of coping mechanisms, to heighten the risk of suicidal ideation. Additionally, the findings highlight the need for institutions to shift from competitive academic cultures to more supportive and inclusive environments.

The findings indicated that gender, age, class level, place of residence, and course of study significantly predict academic stress among undergraduates in Oyo State. This finding is supported by the research of Misra and Castillo (2024), which identified significant predictors of academic

stress, including gender, class level, and place of residence. Furthermore, Harris and Barraclough (2022) found positive correlations between age and course of study with suicidal ideation among undergraduates, suggesting that these moderating variables may also be associated with academic stress. However, the findings of Ajenipa (2021) revealed that there was no significant relationship between academic stress and age, gender, place of residence, and field of study among undergraduates in Ilorin metropolis. Hence, these variables were found to affect the level of academic stress that students experienced. This relationship might be attributed to societal expectations, varied academic demands, increased responsibilities, and environmental factors that create heightened pressure to succeed academically, resulting in increased stress levels. Furthermore, the implications highlight the interplay between environmental pressures and individual variables in shaping stress experiences. For instance, the transactional model of stress could provide insights into how students perceive and respond to academic demands based on their demographic characteristics and circumstances. The findings underscore the importance of culturally sensitive interventions that address the unique predictors of academic stress within Nigerian contexts.

The findings indicated that gender, class level, and place of residence were significant predictors of suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State. At the same time, age and course of study did not demonstrate a notable relationship. The positive correlation of gender, class level, and place of residence with suicidal ideation is likely due to heightened stressors such as societal expectations, academic demands, and personal difficulties. On the other hand, age and course of study showed a negative relationship with suicidal ideation, possibly because of greater resilience and coping skills that come with age, as well as reduced academic pressure or stronger social support in certain fields of study. This aligns with Krishan's (2024) findings, which also identified gender, class level, and place of residence as significant factors influencing suicidal ideation, while age and field of study were not. Furthermore, Paladino and Minton (2023) found that undergraduates dissatisfied with their course of study or living conditions were more prone to suicidal thoughts than those who were content. Feelings of frustration with academic programmes and living situations appear to increase the risk of suicidal ideation among students. Furthermore, the implications suggest the need to consider the intersection of environmental and individual factors in addressing suicidal ideation. Models such as the diathesis-stress framework provide a lens to understand how stress interacts with individual vulnerabilities, such as inadequate coping strategies or external pressures, to increase suicidal risk. Interventions should focus on addressing environmental stressors, such as improving living conditions and offering academic flexibility, while also equipping students with resilience-building tools.

Implications for School Counselling

These findings have significant implications for the prevention and identification of suicidal ideation among undergraduates, as well as for addressing academic stress in educational institutions across Oyo State, Nigeria. They highlight the importance of establishing effective counselling services within universities, ensuring students have access to the support and guidance necessary to navigate their challenges. Tertiary institutions in Oyo State should implement early identification and intervention programmes designed to detect and address academic stress and suicidal ideation among students. Additionally, increasing awareness about academic stress and

equipping students with coping strategies can help mitigate the risk of suicidal thoughts and reduce suicide rates among university students. This study provides valuable insights for developing intervention programmes aimed at alleviating the detrimental effects of academic stress that lead to suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State universities. Furthermore, the findings offer guidance for school administrations in implementing screening measures during admissions and recruitment to identify at-risk students and provide early counselling interventions when necessary.

Integrating mental health services into various institutions can provide students with easy access to counselling and psychological support through collaboration between academic advisors and mental health professionals. Implementing psycho-educational programmes can raise awareness among students about the impact of academic stress on mental health and help them recognise the signs of suicidal ideation, empowering them to seek help. Establishing crisis intervention protocols enables counsellors to effectively address acute cases of suicidal thoughts and provide immediate support. Creating a supportive and non-judgmental environment in schools through peer support groups and mentorship programs encourages students to seek assistance. Preventive programmes aimed at reducing academic stress and promoting mental well-being, such as workshops on time management and resilience, are essential. Engaging parents and other stakeholders, including teachers and school administrators, in the student support system enhances the effectiveness of counselling interventions.

The results revealed significant relationships between gender, age, class level, place of residence, and course of study with academic stress among undergraduates in Oyo State. Specifically, gender, class level, and students' living arrangements (on-campus or off-campus) were notably linked to suicidal ideation. In contrast, age and course of study showed no significant association with suicidal thoughts. In light of these findings, the counselling implications for schools highlight the importance of offering gender-specific counselling services to address the unique stressors experienced by male and female students. Additionally, interventions should be tailored to different class levels to address their distinct academic pressures and mental health needs. Support should also be adjusted based on students' living situations, recognising the different stressors encountered by those residing on-campus versus off-campus. Furthermore, counselling strategies need to be adapted for different age groups, and a comprehensive counselling approach should be adopted to fully understand the relationship between academic stress and these influencing variables.

Conclusion

The study's findings indicated that undergraduates in Oyo State experienced increased levels of academic stress and suicidal ideation. A significant relationship was found between academic stress and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Oyo State. Furthermore, factors such as gender, age, class level, place of residence, and course of study significantly predict academic stress. Gender, class level, and place of residence were significantly associated with suicidal ideation, while age and course of study did not demonstrate a significant relationship with suicidal ideation. Therefore, addressing these issues requires comprehensive mental health support systems and counselling interventions to reduce the risk of academic stress, suicidal ideation, and other

negative outcomes. Education stakeholders must adopt inclusive policies and provide adaptable academic support to enhance student well-being and resilience.

Recommendations

Sequel to the findings and discussions from the study; the following recommendations were made:

1. Undergraduates overwhelmed by academic stress should be exposed to stress reduction programmes, including deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness, relaxation techniques, time management skills, and group counselling. These programmes will help school counsellors address underlying factors contributing to stress, enabling students to manage their stress effectively and enhance their academic success.
2. Undergraduates struggling with suicidal ideation should be provided with psychological assessments and school support services, including mental health services, in tertiary institutions in Oyo State.
3. Undergraduates experiencing academic stress in tertiary institutions should seek mental health counselling from professionals to prevent situations that can lead to suicidal ideation in Oyo State.
4. Universities should train lecturers to recognise signs of academic stress and suicidal ideation, enabling them to provide effective support and refer undergraduates to appropriate quarters for further assistance when needed.
5. Lecturers, level advisors and faculty members should assist undergraduates, taking into consideration their individual differences in age, gender, class level, place of residence and course of study, in developing effective coping strategies to manage academic stress, so as to promote their mental and psychological wellbeing.
6. School health professionals should provide undergraduates with comprehensive suicide prevention programmes that foster resilience, enhance coping skills, and encourage help-seeking behaviour. These programmes must be tailored to address the needs of students across different class levels, gender, and place of residence, while being inclusive of all ages and course of study.

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