

SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG IN-SCHOOL ADOLESCENT IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study determined suicidal ideation among in-school adolescent in Enugu state, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was used to execute the study. One research question was posed while two hypotheses that were postulated to guide the study were tested at .05 level of significance. The population for the study was 148,028 in-school adolescents in public secondary schools owned by Enugu State Government. The sample for the study was 2112 in-school adolescents selected through multistage sampling procedure. An 18-item structured In-School Adolescents' Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (I-SASIQ) was utilized to generate data for the study. The I-SASIQ was validated by experts and its reliability index of .80 was determined using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and its internal consistency of .70 was established using Cronbach's Alpha. Mean and standard deviation were utilized to answer the research question whereas z-Test was used to test the hypotheses. Findings showed that suicidal ideation was low ($x=1.17$; $SD=.54$) among in-school adolescents in Enugu state. z-Test indicated that location (z -Test cal.=11.78; $df=1798$; p -value=.04) and gender (z -Test cal.=14.17; $df=1798$; p -val= .04) made statistically significant difference on suicidal ideation among the respondents. Based on the results, it was recommended among other things that suicide education should be introduced in the schools to reduce further the extent of suicidal ideation among the in-school adolescents in Enugu state.

Key words: suicidal ideation, adolescents, in-school adolescents

Introduction

Suicidal ideation is the foundation of a wider suicidal behaviours continuum. It is also described as suicide thought. World Health Organization-WHO (2002) reported that suicidal ideation included behaviours that move in the direction of possible threat to the person's life. Robert (2008) called thoughts and plans about killing oneself suicidal ideation. Suicidal ideation also includes verbalization of thoughts or threats of suicidal behaviour without an actual act (Sema, 2011). Therefore, suicidal ideation as used in the present study means an individual's obsession with the thoughts of how to kill him or herself.

Suicidal ideation is a product of hopelessness or frustration in life. Most people have suicide thought at some point in their lives (Gross, 2005). One tragic thing about suicide thought in the location of the present study is that nobody takes its threats seriously. Okafor and Okafor (1998) pointed out that the rejection of the suicidal persons' communication usually acted as the last straw.

Suicidal ideation is currently a serious public health challenge in Nigeria and many other parts of the world as shown in literature. For example, Lafromboise and Howard-Pitney (1998) reported that 64-83 per cent of the in-school adolescents who studied in United States of America (USA) reported moderate to severe suicide thought. Center for Mental Health Services CMHS-USA (2001) confirmed that half of high school students in USA had entertained the thought of suicide. Ene (2000) in a study in Enugu urban, Nigeria showed that the same percentage of males (21.7%) and female (21.7%) students in secondary schools who studied in the state seriously considered suicide in the previous 12 months. The report showed that gender did not significantly influence the students' consideration of suicide. The author attributed the no significant influence to increase in day students in Nigeria. The students attended school from their homes; therefore, there were reduced levels of depression and loneliness which were well known for inducing suicidal ideation

Makanjuola (2002) observed that all the suicide victims (100%) in a study in Ilorin expressed suicidal ideation prior to their death. Lee Fung, Tsang, Liu, Huang, He, Zhang, Shen, Nock, and Kessler (2007) also showed that 3.1 per cent of the study sample in Metropolitan China had thought of suicide. From the findings, more females had significantly higher odds than males for suicidal

ideation. The authors attributed the higher prevalence of suicide thought among the females to their higher rate of depression, social disadvantage and tendency to communicate distress through non-fatal suicidal behaviour. The authors ascribed the low prevalence rate to the shame, stigma and secrecy associated with reporting of suicidal behaviours in China. Procope-Beckles (2007) revealed that 21.7 per cent females and 14.2 per cent males aged 13-15 in Trinidad seriously considered suicide. Nock, Holmberg, Photos and Michel (2007) indicated that respondents' likelihood of engaging in suicide thought in the future was 1.3 per cent.

Since suicidal ideation can progress from thought to suicide attempt and even to completion if the idea is not nipped in the bud such idea should not be dismissed as trivial. This is of utmost importance in Nigeria where suicidal ideation is expected to increase. This is because of increasing stressful conditions in the environment (Achalu, 2015). The scarcity of basic infrastructure, hunger, insecurity and pressure to succeed at all cost are likely to task the in-school adolescent's coping abilities beyond measure. Additionally, many of the in-school adolescents in Nigeria worry because of high school fees, feeding, accommodation, examinations and admission into higher institutions.

In-school adolescents are those undergoing one form of educational programme or another in schools. Those in secondary schools were the focus of the present study. Secondary education, according to Ani (2007), is all about preparing the students for life challenges in the society. The challenges include academic pressures or difficulties, increased decision-making, strange classroom or dormitory rules. Asogwa (2015) reported that the regimented life of school environment especially for those who are very far away from their parental home makes it suicide evoking. Moreover, the transition to high school for boys and girls who are at the same time transiting from puberty to adulthood can create peculiar adjustment problems (Santrock, 2005). This is because puberty is occurring when the adolescent is confronted with the unfamiliar school environment where competition characterizes almost every activity. Under that situation, the students' performance might drop sharply leading to poor self-esteem and poor motivation (Berk, 2004). Those of them living in boarding school or in rented apartment in cities could as well be under the threat of insecurity.

There is heightening insecurity in schools worldwide. Ene (2004) indicated that students in Nigeria were increasingly becoming afraid of going to school due to rising violence in schools. The case of the abduction of Chibok girls is a typical manifestation of that fear. The in-school teenage girls even have the unique problem of teenage pregnancy (Samuel, 2006). Extreme poverty among these girls as indicated by National Population Commission-NPC (2000) coupled with teenage pregnancy could not only terminate the girl's education permanently but can trigger off suicidal ideation. Therefore, studying suicidal ideation of in-school adolescents is critical as it can point to its extent in the present area and ways of curbing it can be strategized.

Research Question

The following research question was posed to guide the study.

What is the extent of suicidal ideation among in-school adolescents in Enugu state?

Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were postulated to guide the study and each of them was tested at .05 level of significance.

H₀₁ There is no significant difference between the mean response ratings of rural and urban in-school adolescents in Enugu state on extent of suicidal ideation.

H₀₂ There is no significant difference between the mean response ratings of male and female in-school adolescents in Enugu state on extent of suicidal ideation.

Method

The descriptive survey design was used for the study since McMurtry (2005) showed that it could be used to determine the presence and extent of a particular problem. The study was conducted in Enugu state of South-East Geopolitical Zone. It has 17 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and six Education Zones. Apart from Enugu capital territory, Nsukka and Oji-River LGAs that were designated urban, the state is predominantly rural in nature. The people were experiencing sociocultural disruptions that could be suicidogenic (Njoku, 2000). This is typified by the disintegration of the extended family system that checked suicidal tendencies in the past. Possibly,

that made some adolescents in parts of Enugu state resort to the use of alcohol and drugs (Igbokwe, 2011). As it has been shown, substance use is suicide inviting.

The state is also characterized by teeming populations of adolescents in both public and private secondary schools (Ministry of Education, Enugu, 2012). The state had tertiary institutions that attracted adolescent students from different parts of the world. There were many out-of-school adolescents in the state who lived rough in the streets, especially in urban areas. This is not amazing since Schafear (2007) showed that urban centers are the destination of immigrants from around the world.

The population for the study was 149,028 in 291 secondary schools owned by Enugu State Government. (Post Primary Schools' Management Board-PPSMB Enugu, 2014). A multi stage sampling procedure using appropriate sampling technique was employed to draw the sample of 2112 from all the 17 LGAs in Enugu state. The sample size was sufficiently representative of the population (Schutt, 2005)

A structured instrument called 'In-School Adolescents' Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire' (I-SASIQ) which consisted of sections A and B was used for data collection. Section A, which was descriptive in nature generated data on demographic variables while Section B which had fifteen items elicited data for answering the research question. The structured questions had 4 response options. The face validity of the instrument was obtained through the judgment of five experts in human kinetics and health education, psychology, sociology/anthropology, and science education.

In order to establish the reliability of the I-SASIQ, it was administered on 30 in-school adolescents in a co-educational institution which was different from the sampled schools. The resultant data from the split-half method were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and it yielded a correlation coefficient of .80. In accordance with Odoziobodo and Amam (2007), the instrument was deemed suitable to be used for data collection. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was determined using Cronbach's Alpha since Okwo (2001) showed that it is used for the establishment of internal consistency of questionnaire with items scaled in line with Likert's. The mean reliability coefficient for the I-SASIQ was .70. Hence, the instrument was utilized to obtain data as recommended by Munro (2001).

In order to gain access to the schools, the researcher got approval from the Commissioner for Education, Enugu state. The approval helped the researcher a lot in gaining access to the classes' registers and helped to reduce inhibitions associated with suicide studies (Tousignant, Seshadri & Raj, 1998). The researcher engaged three research assistants, who were health and physical education teachers in secondary schools in the state. This was in line with Mindel's (2005) recommendation. The research assistants, who had appropriate communication skills, were briefed to desensitize them regarding suicide. They distributed copies of the questionnaire in the sampled schools and collected them on the spot. The respondents who could not complete the I-SASIQ had theirs read out for them and the options of their choice were filled in by any of the members of the research team. Collecting the copies of the questionnaire on the spot was to guard against the resistance associated with suicide studies and to prevent the respondents from giving the copies of the questionnaire to other persons to fill in.

Out of the 2,112 copies of the questionnaire distributed 1,971 copies were returned, giving a return rate of 93 per cent. The in-school adolescents' participation in the study was purely voluntary. Since the return rate was above 70 per cent which Schutt (2005) showed to be the least acceptable response rate upon which randomly selected sample will be generalizable to the population, the resultant data were used for data analysis.

The data were analyzed using the International Business Machine Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 21. The 1,971 returned copies of the questionnaire were checked for completeness and 1,800 copies that were properly completed were used for data analysis. The data were analyzed to indicate the mean (\bar{x}) responses and standard deviations (SDs). The response options were weighted thus: Three times or more = 3 points, Twice = 2 points, Once = 1 point and Never = 0 point. Based on this, the limits of real numbers were used to interpret the mean ratings as follows: 0.00-0.49 = very low extent (VLE), 0.50-1.49 = low extent (LE), 1.50-2.49 = high extent (HE) and 2.50-3.00 = very high extent (VHE) of suicidal ideation. The mean ratings and standard deviations were presented in table and used for description as well as to answer the research question. The z-Test (Critical Ratio) statistic was used to test null hypotheses postulated to guide the study at .05 level of

significance. Uzoagulu (2011) showed that z-Test is appropriate for data where two independent groups' mean ratings are compared.

Results

Table I:

Mean Ratings of Suicidal Ideation among In-school Adolescents in Enugu State (n=1800)

Suicidal Ideation	Responses		
	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
3. Cutting of oneself	1.37	.85	LE
4. Overdosing on drugs	1.18	.61	LE
5. Lying down before a moving vehicle	1.24	.66	LE
6. Swallowing poisonous substance	1.14	.47	LE
7. Drowning	1.31	.68	LE
8. Stabbing/puncturing	1.19	.56	LE
9. Jumping from a high place	1.13	.45	LE
10. Strangling/hanging	1.14	.49	LE
11. Shooting with a gun	1.05	.30	LE
12. Crashing vehicle	1.12	.44	LE
13. Covering face so as to stop breathing	1.18	.54	LE
14. Provoking a person in possession of arms	1.10	.47	LE
15. Telling someone about the intent to kill oneself	1.16	.51	LE
16. Making a plan about how to kill oneself	1.18	.55	LE
17. Burning of oneself	1.11	.47	LE
Grand mean and standard deviation	1.17	.54	LE

Table 1 shows that in-school adolescents had a grand mean rating of 1.17 with standard deviation of .54 which fell within the limit of .50-1.49 indicating low extent of suicidal ideation. The Table also indicates low extent of suicidal ideation on all the listed methods with thinking about killing oneself by cutting having the highest mean rating (\bar{x} =1.37; SD=.85). Considering killing oneself by shooting, on the other hand, had the least mean rating (\bar{x} =1.05; SD=.30). The in-school adolescents were evenly affected by suicidal ideation since the grand standard deviation of .54 was negligible.

Table 2:

Summary of z-Test testing the null Hypothesis of no Significant Difference in the Extent of n Suicidal Ideation Among in-school Adolescents according to Location

Location	\bar{x}	SD	P-value	df	cal.z	Decision
Rural	1.10	.03	.04	1798	11.78	
Urban	1.13	.06				

Table 2 shows that the calculated z-Test value of 11.78 with p-value of .04. Since the p-value of .04 was less than .05 level of significance at 1798 degree of freedom, null hypothesis of no significant difference between the mean ratings of rural and urban in-school adolescents in Enugu state on extent of suicidal ideation was rejected. This implies that extent of suicidal ideation of urban and rural in-school adolescent is not the same.

Table 3:
Summary of z-Test Testing the null Hypothesis of no Significant Difference in the Extent of Suicidal Ideation Among in-school Adolescents according to Gender

Gender	\bar{x}	SD	P-value	df	cal.z
Decision					
Male	1.20	.08	.04	1798	14.17
Rejected					
Female	1.14	.09			

Table 3 shows that the calculated z-Test was 14.17 with a p-value of .04. Since the p-value was less than .05 alpha level at 1798 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis of no significant difference the extent of suicidal ideation of male and female in-school adolescents in Enugu state was rejected.

Discussion

The finding showed that there was low extent of suicidal ideation among in-school adolescents in Enugu state. This finding is surprising since factors that precipitate suicidal behaviours abound in the location of the study. The low extent of suicide thinking reported by the respondents could be mere expression of socially acceptable opinion. This finding was at variance with that of Lafromboise and Howard-Pitney (1998) and CMHS-USA (2001), who found that up to half of high school students in USA had entertained the thought of suicide. The discrepancy between this finding and the finding in USA is possibly as a result of socio-cultural differences between America and Enugu State. While Americans are acclaimed for their free expression of thought and feelings even on very sensitive issues like suicidal ideation, Nigerians, especially children, are reserved in such topics. Therefore, the finding in the present study could be a matter of disclosure rather than the actuality of the in-school adolescents' thoughts alone.

This finding, however, agreed with that of Ene (2000), who found low level of suicide thought among senior secondary school students in one urban part of Enugu. According to the author, the low level of suicidal ideation was partly due to reduced level of loneliness among the students. Therefore, it can undoubtedly be argued that in-school adolescents in Enugu state were still protected by family and community social networks.

The z-Test showed that null hypothesis one, which stated that there was no significant difference between rural and urban in-school adolescents on suicidal ideation was rejected. Therefore, the finding was statistically significant. This could be due to the wide gap between the rural and urban areas of Enugu state in terms of availability of social amenities. Moreover, the frustrating nature of these social services in the urban settings of Enugu state might have contributed to the result. The finding disagreed with Atitah (2007), who showed that location had no significant influence on suicide in Akwa Ibom state. The disagreement with Atitah's could be due to the even development in Akwa Ibom state which Enugu state lacked. The even development in Akwa Ibom might have neutralized the influence of location on the suicides.

The z-Test showed that gender made statistically significant difference on suicidal ideation of in-school adolescents in Enugu state. This was anticipated because in Enugu state, males are socialized to be tough, unemotional and aggressive. Suicide thought is a contemplation of aggressive action against oneself. The preponderance of male in-school adolescents in substance abuse and suicidal behaviours in Enugu State which was identified by Igbokwe (2011) may thus be problem of wrong male orientation. Therefore, one can with some degree of confidence conclude that the difference between male and female in-school adolescents on suicidal ideation in Enugu state was as a result of the demonstration of masculinity which was accentuated by their abuse of drugs.

The result from the present study was inconsistent with Ene's (2000) finding of no significant difference between male and female students on suicidal ideation. He ascribed that finding to absence of depression and loneliness among both genders. Since depression is characterized by thoughts of unworthiness, self-blame and hopelessness; more females than males were often affected. However, female in-school adolescents in Enugu state who were denied the opportunity of secondary education in the past were likely to be currently, imbued with feeling of greater self-worth and hope for life

challenges ahead. In contrast, the boys could have been disillusioned by the prevailing type of secondary education in the area which did not meet their societal needs. The intimidating presence of boys was no longer there since more females than males were enrolled in secondary schools in the state (PPSMB, 2014). Therefore, attributing the significant difference in suicidal ideation in the present study to female students' growing feeling of self-worth against the male students' disillusionment with the status quo is reasonable. Furthermore, female in-school adolescents who might have nursed the idea of killing themselves probably, dropped out of school before expressing that wish. This is because NPC (2000) indicated that many female in-school adolescents in Nigeria did not complete secondary education due to poverty.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were reached based on the findings of the study:

1. There was low extent of suicidal ideation among in-school adolescents Enugu State;
2. There was significant difference between rural and urban in-school adolescents in Enugu state on extent of suicidal ideation.
3. There was significant difference between male and female in-school adolescents in Enugu state on extent of suicidal ideation.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the researcher recommended that health educators should start in earnest to teach suicide education to in-school adolescents in Enugu State. This could be done using teachable moments so as to reduce the extent of suicidal ideation to lower level. Since there is significant difference between rural and urban in-school adolescents on suicidal ideation, school health educators in urban schools could form suicide education clubs that will look out for persons who nurture such idea. Similarly, health educators in schools could fashion out specific programmes for male students to divert their thought from suicide. Sports and dramas are examples of such programmes.

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