Parental Styles and Hostility as Predictors of Suicidal Ideation among University Undergraduates

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Abstract

The study investigated the relationship between parenting styles, hostility and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates. Purposive sampling method was utilized in the selection of two hundred (200) undergraduates from four different departments; they included 140 female and 60 males. Their age ranged from 18 to 25 years with mean age of 22.50 years and standard deviation of 3.50. Three instruments, namely: Scale for Suicidal Ideation, the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) and Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) were used for data collection. Correlational design was used as the design for the study, while multiple regression analysis was adopted as statistical tools for analysis. The result revealed a positive and significant correlation between authoritarian parenting style and suicidal ideation at F (1,198) = 23.34, p<.001). However, no significant relationship was observed between permissive parenting style and suicidal ideation at F-value of 0.89, p = .067. Furthermore, a significant relationship was observed between hostility and suicidal ideation at F (1,198) = 15.96, p<.001). Based on the finding, the researcher recommended among others, that child and developmental psychologists should create programs that educate parents on best practices to nurture their children with warmth and control.

Keywords: Parental style, Hostility, Suicidal ideation

Introduction

Nigeria is a deeply religious nation with many citizens adhering to either the Christian, Muslim faith or other indigenous traditional religions. Such religious compliance could be the reason why death by one's hand is frowned upon in almost all parts of the country. In Nigeria, a sociocultural stigma exists to suicide; nonetheless, its prevalence in the country is still widespread. According to Oyetunji et al., (2021), the rate of suicide in Nigeria seems to

be on the rise during the last decade. Oyetunji et al., (2021) opined that the rising suicidal rates can be attributed to the lack of equitable access to mental healthcare and services to support young people's mental health. Globally, suicide is rated among the twenty leading causes of death and sits at number two on the cause of death among adolescents and young adults (World Health Organization, 2014); and a huge number of these deaths occurred in low and middle-income countries including sub-Saharan African countries.

It is believed that suicide in Nigeria is vastly under-reported and largely undocumented due to the Country's lack of a working database and the delicateness surrounding the act (Oyetunji et al., 2021). Such delicateness is founded on the stigma associated with the act which is in turn fuelled by religious and cultural sentiments. Such sentiments can also be said to be responsible for why most suicide victims veil their intents and motives thus making it herculean for individuals to reach out and help them (Okechukwu et al., 2022). Due to cultural and developmental differences across individuals, there are inconsistencies as to the exact age at which suicidal ideation occurs. However, some scholars (Adewuya et al., 2016; Olibamoyo et al., 2021) observed that the prevalence of suicide is within the age of 13-29 years.

Certain factors predispose individuals to suicide which include: family history of suicidal behaviour, childhood and family adversity, mental disorders (untreated depression, substance use and psychotic disorders), exposure to stressors and adverse circumstances, sexual or gender minority status, previous suicidal attempt and history of suicidal ideation. Usually, these factors precedes suicide; as such, could be refers to as the act of planning suicide or nursing thoughts about the acts (Begum, 2021). Suicidal ideation is an important index of mental health and it is suggestive of a maladaptation in an individual's psychological functioning. It can be a chosen means for an individuals to express their struggles and misery emanating from conflicts within and or caused by other disorders such as depression and anxiety as a result of inability to cope with changes in their lives as they occur.

In the extant literature, the role of suicidal ideation as an antecedent to suicide attempts has been well-researched and largely documented. Adewuya et al. (2016) reported that the

prevalence of suicidal behaviour among adult population in Lagos at 7.28%. While Mapayi et al. (2016) reported suicidal ideation rate among Nigerian youths at 17%. Looking at the high prevalence of suicidal ideation and several suicide attempt, and actual suicide among Nigerian youths, it becomes a matter of urgency to investigate some factors that are associated to suicidal ideation. Moreover, Choi et al. (2020) observed parenting as a silent factor that impacts the psychological well-being of young people, their attitudes towards suicide as well as suicidal behaviour; which could be because parenting exceeds the mere meeting of basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, it covers an array of expressive attitudes and behaviours that functions individually and collectively in shaping a child's behaviour; and is also an emotionally ingrained relationship where parents communicate their behaviours to their children. Thus, hostility as a form of negative emotion could be formed through unhealthy parent-child relationship. Based on the aforementioned prevalence on suicidal ideation, suicidal behaviour as well as the observations of Choi et al., (2020), it become important to examine the potential impacts of parental style as well as hostility on suicidal ideation among university undergraduates.

Parenting could be referred to as the process of aiding the growth and development of a child in facets such as physically, socio-psychologically, and emotionally (Singh & Behmani 2021). Implicit in the aforementioned is the ability of a parent to mould a child's response to the world. Thus, parenting involved the formation of an individual physical, social, psychological, and emotional outlook in life and this can affect an individual's experiences and relationship with life's expectations. Parenting style refers to the parental behaviours and approaches in controlling their children's behaviour as well as promoting their socialisation (Lightfoot et al., 2009); and was conceptualized by Baumrind (1967) style using three different approaches which includes: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parenting style.

The important of parenting style can never be over emphasized; hence, studies on parenting styles are based on the idea that parents differ in their patterns of parenting as such, these patterns could have significant impact on their children's development, well-being as well as behavioural pattern. Harris (2021) opined that when the parental control is too tight (overprotection), such parental style could be a risk factor for childhood and

could lead to adolescent anxiety. According to Harris (2021), children that perceived their parents as having interest in their life as well as assume a sustaining part of their childhood are more emotionally and socially enhanced. Prime et al., (2020) posited that parents' involvement in their children's is related to the level of either positive or negative intellectual, formative and socio-behavioural growth they enjoy as they grow. Also, kids who are children of discouraged parents may be at particular hazard for the deficits for depression. For instance, smoking, drinking, physical dysfunction, nervousness, psychiatric related issues and financial issue (Prime et al., 2020); hence, could develop some form of hostility towards others.

Hostility is seen as a multifaceted construct encompassing not only negative attitudes but also negative effect and expressive behaviour towards others (Barefoot, 1992). Typically, hostility has been linked to other-directed violence and aggression, however, hostility is also associated with self-directed aggression (i.e., suicidal behaviour). For example, Velting (1999) found a link between hostility and suicidal ideation. Also, research has shown that increased hostility is associated with suicide attempts as well as completed suicides (Rivlin et al., 2013). Moreover, such findings are consistent with early theories on suicide that conceptualize suicide as hostility directed inward (Shneidman, 1969). Hawkins et al., (2014) discussed how anger and related constructs, including hostility may increase the risk of suicide as they may increase the likelihood that one may feel as though they are a burden (i.e., perceived burdensomeness) or have a lack of connection with others (thwarted belongingness).

Research on the role of hostility and suicide has often examined hostility as a unified construct. However, Buss and Perry (1992) distinguished between hostility that is more behavioural and directed outwardly (overt hostility) and hostility that is more cognitive and more introspective (covert hostility). Although research studies on hostility and suicide have not always distinguished between the two, however, findings from few studies showed that covert hostility is more strongly associated with suicide than overt hostility (Zakhour et al., 2021). Nonetheless, knowledge of which type of hostility is more strongly associated with suicidal behaviours among those with comorbidities that increase the likelihood of

self-harm such as PTSD and alcohol use disorder would help to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between this construct and suicide.

This study was anchored theoretically on hostility theory by Horney (1994) which stated that hostility is an aggression which a child formed as a result of basic evil resulting from poor parenting style that is abusive and lacks warmth and affection. According to the theory, such situation of abuse and distress that a child cannot escaped from makes children to develop irritability; as such, could lead to psychopathology like anxiety as well as suicidal ideation, hoping to escape such abusive relationship.

There are some empirical evidence in respect to the study variables (parental styles and hostility, and suicidal ideations); such as: Uwaoma, et al., (2023), Nunes and Mota (2023), Choi et al., (2020), Alika et., al (2016) that observed an association between parenting styles and suicidal ideations; hostility on the other hand was investigated by Keefe et al., (2020); Zhang et al., (2012); Scocco et al., (2001) and they found a relationship between hostility and suicidal ideation.

Hypothesis

1. There will be a positive and significant relationship between authoritarian parenting style and suicidal ideation amongst university undergraduates.
2. There will be a positive and significant relationship between permissive parenting style and suicidal ideation amongst university undergraduates.
3. There will be a positive and significant relationship between hostility and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates.

Method

Participants

The participants for this study were 200 undergraduates drawn from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka Anambra State Nigeria. Their age ranged from 18 to 25 years with mean age of 22.50 years and standard deviation of 3.50. Among the 200 participants, 50 were from Law; 50 were from Political Science; 50 were from Accountancy; 50 were from

English. Among the respondents, 12 were married whereas 188 were single. 189 among them were Christians while 9 were Muslims. The other 2 participants did not disclose their religious affiliation.

Instruments

Three instruments were used in this study for data collection; they include: Scale for Suicidal Ideation by Beck et al., (1979), The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) by Buri (1991) and Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) by Buss–Perry (1992).

Scale for Suicidal Ideation

Suicidal ideation scale was developed by Beck et al .,(1979). It is a 19-items questionnaire which measures suicidal ideation and has been discovered to be appropriate for nonclinical population. Each item comprises of three choices reviewed by self-destructive thinking on a 3-point scale ranging from 0 to 2. The authors of BSS propose that the scale is best used to distinguish and measure the severity of self-destructive ideation, which is thought to be a sign of suicide hazard. The scale depends on five measurements via the intensity of self-destructive ideation, active self-destructive desire, suicide arranging, passive suicide desire, and covering. Beck et al. (1979) reported that the internal consistency (Cronbach coefficient alpha) of the SSI-C was 0.89 for 90 inpatient suicide ideators, and its interjudge reliability was 0.83. Moreover, from the analysis using the data from the pilot study, involving university undergraduates, a reliability alpha coefficient of .81 was observed.

The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ)

The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), developed by Baumrind (1991). Is developed to measure parenting principle styles which are perceived by children as approaches their parents use to take care of them. The instrument consists of 30 items with three sub-dimensions that include: permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative. It is scored using a four point likert scale which ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). According to Aroyewum et al., (2023) The Cronbach alpha value for each of the dimensions for Nigerian samples are, authoritative (0.71) authoritarian (0.70), permissive (0.79); the value for the total score however was 0.90. Moreover, from the analysis using the data from

the pilot study, a reliability alpha coefficient of .72 was found for authoritative, .76 for authoritarian, .75 for permissive and .87 for the total value.

Buss–Perry Aggression Questionnaire by Buss and Perry (1992)

The Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire is a 29 items self-administered questionnaire that measures aggression using four subscales which includes: Physical Aggression; items number 1-9, Verbal Aggression; items number 10-14, Anger; items number 15-21 and Hostility subscale; items number 22-29. It is scored on a 5 point likert scale ranging from (1, Extremely uncharacteristic to 5, Extremely characteristic). Items number 7 and 18 are reversed scored. Buss and Perry (1992) reported the internal consistency reliability of the subscales and total scale as followed: physical aggression subscale: .85; verbal aggression subscale: .72; anger subscale: .83; hostility subscale: .77; total scale: .89. However, hostility in this study was measured using hostility subscale of Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire. With sample item such as, I wonder why sometimes, I feel so bitter about things; and the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha value of .77. Aroyewum et al., (2023) revalidated Buss-Perry aggression questionnaire for Nigerian population and reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.86. Nonetheless, from the analysis using the data from the pilot study, a reliability alpha coefficient of hostility subscale was .79

Procedure

The researchers randomly selected 4 faculties from the 14 faculties in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka; they include: Social Sciences, Law, Education, and Management Sciences. The researchers obtained a letter of introduction from the Head of Department of Psychology of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka for a formal introduction of the researchers to the 4 Departments selected using for the study. After the researchers have gotten the introduction letter from the H.O.D of Psychology Department, the researcher went to each of the Departments for a formal introduction before going to the undergraduate students for data collection. Purposive sampling method which was based on the inclusion criteria was used in selecting 55 undergraduate students from each of the four selected departments that were administered the copies of the questionnaires with both oral and written instructions on how they may fill the items in

the questionnaire; they were also assured of confidentiality of their responses. From the 220 administered copies of the questionnaires, 200 properly filled copies (50 from each department were selected) and coded for analysis.

To be included in the study (inclusion criteria), the participant must be admitted as a student in any of the 4 selected departments and must be willing to participate in the study.

Design and Statistics

This study utilized a correlational design and multiple linear regression analysis was adopted as the statistical tools for analyses using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 to ascertain the relationship between parenting styles and hostility on suicidal ideation among undergraduates.

Result

Table:1

Multiple regression analysis predicting suicide ideation from authoritarian, permissive parenting, and hostility

	B	$S.E$ (t)	P	95%CI
Permissive Parenting	-.08	.012 (-0.67)	.067	[.04, -13]
Authoritarian Parenting	.38	.08 (4.83)	.000	[.22, .53]
Hostility	.24	.06 (3.99)	.000	[.125, .37]

Table: 1 above indicate that authoritarian parenting style significantly and positively affect suicidal ideation amongst undergraduates, *B*= .38, *t* (198) = 4.83, *p<.001*. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) test shows that the regression is statistically significant (F (1,198) = 23.34, *p<.001*) with an R^2 of .11. The *r* value of .33 suggests that the relationship between authoritarian parenting and suicide ideation was modest, positive and significant. The R^2

reveals that authoritarian parenting accounts for an 11% variance in suicide ideation and the B value of .38 indicates that for every unit increase in authoritarian parenting, a .38 change increase in suicide ideation is expected.

The second hypothesis which stated that there will be a positive and significant relationship between permissive parenting style and suicidal ideation amongst university undergraduates was also tested. From Table 1 above, the results indicate that the permissive parenting variable has a coefficient of -0.08, with a standard error of 0.12, and a t-value of -0.67. The ANOVA table shows a non-significant F-value of 0.89, $p = .067$. Hence, the second hypothesis was rejected which implied that the relationship between permissive parenting and suicide ideation is not statistically significant. Additionally, the R-squared value of 0.05 suggests that only 5% of the variation in suicide ideation can be explained by permissive parenting variable.

The third hypothesis which stated that there will be a positive and significant relationship between hostility and suicidal ideation amongst university undergraduates was also tested. From table 1 above, there is a significant regression equation ($F(1,198) = 15.96$, $p<.001$) with an R^2 of .08; indicating that hostility was a significant predictor of suicidal ideation amongst undergraduates, $B= .25$, $t(198) = 3.99$, $p< .001$. The r value of .27 suggests that the relationship between hostility and suicidal ideation was modest, positive and significant. The R^2 reveals that hostility accounts for an 8% variance in suicide ideation and the B value of .25 indicates that for every unit increase in hostility, a .25 change increase in suicide ideation is expected.

Discussion

The result of this study titled parenting styles and hostility as correlates of suicidal ideation among undergraduates has a significant result. The first hypothesis of the study was significant indicating that authoritarian parenting style has a significant relationship with suicidal ideation. This finding is in line with the finding of Uwaoma, et al., (2023). They conducted a study titled Parenting Style and Self Esteem as Predictors of Suicidal Ideation among Adolescents in Isi Ala Ngwa, Abia State Adolescent and observed that authoritarian parenting style significantly impacts suicidal ideation. Similarly, Nunes and Mota (2023)

investigated Parenting styles and suicidal ideation of adolescents: The moderating role of social skills. They found out that the mother's physical coercion was positively linked with suicidal ideation. Also, Choi et al., (2020) examined the association between perceived parenting style and adolescents' attitudes toward suicide. Their observation indicated that those in the authoritarian parenting group were more incline toward suicide compared to those in democratic and permissive parenting groups.

The second hypothesis of the study was not significant indicating that permissive parenting style is not correlated to suicidal ideation. This finding is in line with the observation of Uwaoma, et al., (2023) that investigated parenting style and self-esteem as predictors of suicidal ideation among adolescents in Isi Ala Ngwa, Abia State Adolescent. They observed that permissive parenting style does not significantly impact suicidal ideation. Also, Choi et al., (2020) investigated an association between perceived parenting style and adolescents' attitudes toward suicide and observed that Students in the authoritarian parenting group had a more permissive attitude toward suicide compared with the democratic and permissive parenting groups. Furthermore, Alika et., al (2016) examined parenting styles and family characteristics as correlates of psychological distress among Nigerian adolescents. Their findings showed that permissive parenting styles and family characteristics did not correlate with psychological distress.

The third hypothesis of the study was observed to be significant; indicating that hostility is among the factors that impact suicidal ideation. This finding is in agreement with the observation of Keefe et al., (2020). They investigated the Mediating Roles of Hostility and Dissociation in the Relationship between Sexual Assault and Suicidal Thinking in College Students. Their findings indicated that hostility mediated the relationship between sexual assault and suicidal thinking. Also, the result from this present study is in consonance with that observation of Zhang et al., (2012). Their study focused on Hostility, Physical Aggression and Trait Anger as Predictors for Suicidal Behavior in Chinese Adolescents. Their findings indicated that hostility, physical aggression and trait anger predict suicidal behavior among adolescents. Furthermore, Scocco et al., (2001) examined Hostility as a Feature of Elderly Suicidal Ideation. They observed that psychopathology (suicidal ideation, anxiety and depression) was associated with hostility.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study implies that authoritarian parenting styles impact on adolescents' mental health and is correlated to suicidal ideation. However, permissive parenting style was not related to suicidal ideation. Furthermore, hostility was not among the factors that impact suicidal ideation among undergraduates. Thus, the findings validated the theoretical framework of the present study which indicated that there is an association between hostility and parenting style. As such, could lead to psychopathology; suicidal ideation inclusive. The present study also added novel literature as well as empirical findings to the body of knowledge in respect to parenting style, hostility and suicidal ideation.

Since authoritarian parenting style and hostility was observed to be related to suicidal ideation, parents and caregivers should be mindful of their relationship with their children so as to avoid toxic form of relationship that will later become an impediment on their children's well-being.

School psychologist, counsellors as well as school teachers should be on the look-out so as to observe the root cause of children's aggressive and hostile behaviour; so as to advice their parents' appropriately.

Limitations of the Study

The study is a correlational study as such, the observation of the study will not have a cause-and-effect implication. Thus, the use of other research designs is recommended to enable causal inferences in respect to the study variables. Furthermore, the study relied on self-report mode of data collection; thus, could be prone to exaggeration as well as social desirability of the respondents which could impact the research outcome.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Parents should be made to be aware of the impact their styles of parenting have on their children. As such, efforts should be made to bring this knowledge to their

awareness to aid the promotion of the well-being of children rather than the treatment of mental health problems in young adults.

2. Child and developmental psychologists should create programme that educate parents on best practices to nurture their children.

3. Counsellors at higher institutions of learning should be proactive in addressing the mental health needs of students as well as suicide ideation so that those suicidal thought will not translate into actual suicidal behaviour.

Suggestion for Future Studies

Research findings often open up avenues for further research as the answer to a problem often sometimes begets another problem. In this regard, the following is suggested in this study:

1. Future studies should use design that supports causal inferences.

2. Future research should study the parenting style of the mother and father distinctively to better understand the one with most impact on an individual's behaviour.

Conclusion

The study examined the relationship between parenting styles and hostility as correlates of suicidal ideation among undergraduates. From the findings of the study, the researcher conveys the fact that how a child is trained could impact their suicidal ideation. It was also observed that hostility is among the factors that impacts suicidal ideation.

Based on the finding, it is relevant that parent should be careful on how they relate with their children; taking into account that how they relate with their children impacts their mental health as such, they should be intentional about having a positive and healthy relationship with their children.

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