

Stress And Sex As Predictors Of Suicidal Ideation Among Youths In Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated stress sex as predictors of suicidal ideation among youths in Makurdi metropolis in Benue State, Nigeria. The study employed an expo facto research design where 313 participants were randomly drawn from Makurdi metropolis in Benue State through stratified smpling and convenience sampling methods. Standard stress scale and suicidal ideation scale were used for data collection. Three hypotheses were tested using simple linear regression and t-test. Findings showed that stress has significant influences on suicide intentions among the youths ($R = .152 = R^2 = .023$ ($F(1,331) = 7.824$, $t = 10.210$, $p < .05$), there was a significant difference between male and female on suicidal ideation among the youths ($t(214) = 5.564$, $p < .01$). Based on these findings, it was concluded that stress and sex are predictors of suicidal ideation among the youths in Makurdi metropolis in Benue State, Nigeria. It is recommended that stress management skills should be encourage by therapist to encourage youths on how to manage their life in the presence of stress. Parents and organizations should also consider female youths for they are more prone to suicidal ideation and should work with them closely to identify suicidal ideation case for early intervention.

Date of Submission: 17-10-2023

Date of Acceptance: 27-10-2023

I. INTRODUCTION

People react differently to life event, with some individuals deliberately putting an end to their lives in the face of adversity others endeavoring to proceed. The key to this difference has given rise to suicidal study. Over the last few decades, research has focused on the relationship between various risk factors (in particular negative cognitive factors) and suicide (Dieserud, Roysamb & Ekeberg, Kraft, 2001). Although the presences of these psychopathological constructs are strong predictors of suicide, it should not be overlooked that some individuals deal with their hardship in a positive way.

The hardship as a result of Nigeria economy has pushed many youths into stressful life.

The rate in which people commit suicide and the numbers who attempt suicide in the country increase every day. Suicide has negative effects on families, communities and entire countries and has long-lasting effects on the people left behind. The major trauma of suicide is not the victim but the people left behind. Taking ones' life is not a solution to problems but many chose to end their life believing is the solution to their problem (DeJong, Overholser & Stockmeier 2010). Suicidal thoughts may have many causes. Most often, suicidal thoughts are the result of feeling like one cannot cope when they are faced with what seems to be an overwhelming life situation. If they do not have hope for the future, they may mistakenly think suicide is a solution. They may experience a sort of tunnel vision, where in the middle of a crisis they believe suicide is the only way out.

Suicide is a significant and preventable worldwide public health problem, which is often neglected by researchers, policymakers, gatekeepers, and clinicians (May & Klonsky, 2013), especially in lower-income countries like Nigeria. Globally about one million people kill themselves every year, which represents a mortality rate of 16 per 100,000; and worldwide one death occurs in every forty seconds from suicide (Khan, Arendse, & Ratele, 2021). Suicidal ideation is defined as a thought of self-injurious act with some evidence of intent to die. Suicidal thoughts are thinking about, considering, or planning suicide. The range of suicidal ideation varies from fleeting thoughts, to extensive thoughts, to detailed planning. Most people who have suicidal thoughts do not go on to make suicide attempts, but suicidal thoughts are considered a risk factor.

Suicidal ideation did not just occur, but comes as a result of some factors; life events and family events, all of which may increase the risk (Crosby, Alex; Beth & Han 2011).

Suicidal ideation has related signs and symptoms. Some symptoms or co-morbid conditions may include unintentional weight loss, feeling helpless, feeling alone, excessive fatigue, low self-esteem, presence of consistent mania, excessively talkative, intent on previously dormant goals, feel like one's mind is racing (Khan et al., 2021). The onset of symptoms like these with an inability to get rid of or cope with their effects, a possible form of psychological inflexibility, is one possible trait associated with suicidal ideation (American Association of Suicidology, 2013) They may also cause psychological distress, which is another symptom associated with suicidal ideation. Symptoms like these related with psychological inflexibility, recurring patterns, or psychological distress may in some cases lead to the onset of suicidal ideation. Suicidal thought has many causes which are unknown making the researchers to look at stress and sex as predicting factors.

Stress has always been correlated with many psychological disorders leading therapists to focus on stress as an explanation of many problems. Stress according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) is a cognitive appraisal, a process through which the person evaluates whether a particular encounter with the environment is relevant to his or her well-being. Stress leads to the disruption of homeostasis and is followed by psychological, behavioral and physiological changes, (McKay, Buen, Bohan, & Maye, 2010).

Stress which may be one of the causes of suicide is a psychological and physiological response to events that upset personal balance, (Schneiderman, Ironson & Siegel, 2009). The potential causes of stress are numerous. It may be linked to the outside factors such as environment in which one lives or works or the family, (Glenn & Nock, 2014). It may come from one's own irresponsible behaviour, negative attitudes or feelings or unrealistic expectation such as trying to be responsible at the youthful stage (Ogden, 2010). The causes of stress depend on individual personality general outlook on life, problem solving abilities and social support system. There are many causes of stress; physical to emotional (Chao & Chu-Lien, 2012).

Physiological or biological stress is an organism's response to a stressor such as an environmental condition (Kang & Park, 2008). Stress is a body's method of reacting to challenges (Park & Kang, 2008). According to the stressful event, the body's way to respond to stress is by sympathetic nervous system activation which results in the fight-or-flight response. The body cannot keep this state for long periods of time; the parasympathetic system returns the body's physiological conditions to normal (homeostasis) (Park *et al.*, 2008). In humans, stress typically describes a negative condition or a positive condition that can affect a person's mental and physical well-being (Gorban, Pokidysheva, Smirnova & Tyukina, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

People chose to take their own life thinking that it will solve their problem, rather creating problem for others. The impact of suicide among youths is mostly on the country's economy because youths are the workforce of every nation. Suicidal ideation among youths can lead to suicide itself. Experiencing suicide of youths can have a significant impact on the family members' emotional health. Youths' suicide may have negative implication on the country and physical health of the family members. This avoidance of grief-related emotions may prevent relatives from engaging in meaning-making, whereby they assimilate the death of their loved one into their new reality. The huge gap yet to be covered by other research is that other research failed to look into stress and sex on suicidal cases in this region of the country full of youths which are the leaders of tomorrow making the researchers to embark on this research to add to knowledge and to fill a gap in the literature.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to determine the role of stress and sex as predictors of suicidal ideation among youths in Makurdi metropolis, Benue State. The specific objectives of the study are to;

- i. Investigate the relationship between stress and suicidal ideation among youths in Makurdi metropolis, Benue State.
- ii. Assess the role of sex on suicidal ideation among youths in Makurdi metropolis, Benue State.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Interpersonal Theory of Suicide

The interpersonal theory of suicide was developed by Joiner (2005) and focuses on why people die by suicide and attempts to explain why individuals engage in suicidal behavior and to identify individuals who are at risk. The theory consists of three components that together lead to suicide attempts. According to this theory, the simultaneous presence of thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness produce suicidal ideation. While the desire for suicide is necessary, thwarted belongingness cannot result to suicide alone, rather, Joiner (2005) asserts that one must also have acquired ability to overcome one's natural fear of death. They must have

wiped away all possible fear and consequences attach to death. According to this theory, there are many factors that when people failed to accomplish lead to suicide and suicidal ideation. Some of these factors are: belongingness, perceived burdensomeness and acquired capability.

Belongingness which is the feeling of acceptance is believed to be a fundamental need in the life of every youth, something that is essential for youths' psychological health and well-being. Increased youths' social connectedness is a construct related to belongingness that has been shown to lower their risk for suicide. From this explanation, it means that stress is a risk factor that can aggravates suicide and suicidal ideation. More specifically, being low stressed or having stress coping strategies is associated with a lower risk of suicidal behaviour. Additionally, working together with others where one will not feel the impact of the stress has been shown to have a preventive effect (Joiner, Hollar & Van Orden, 2007). In contrast, hopelessness is frequently reported by those who die by suicide prior to death. According to this theory, hopelessness may also contribute to this phenomenal due to an unending stressful life. This is because such person has no belief of their own life and nothing else as a result of life event. Such individuals do not bother about others and are seldom interested in what is happening around them. They prefer staying back at home rather than going out and spending time with friends due to stressful day. Such individuals speak less and enjoy their own company. Such person would never be fine in meetings, clubs, parties or social get-togethers. They generally do not have many friends and tend not to rely on or trusted any one (Marshall & Georgiades, 2005).

Interpersonal theory of suicide also tries to explain the importance of perceived burdensomeness. Perceived burdensomeness is the belief that one is a burden to others or society. Joiner (2005) describes perceived burdensomeness as the belief that "my death is worth more than my life". Unemployment, medical or health problems and incarceration are examples of situations in which a person may feel like they are a burden to others (Joiner, 2005). It is important to note that the burdensomeness is "perceived", and is often a false belief, making such individual to become isolated physically and emotionally. According to the theory, thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness together constitute the desire for suicide. Sometimes, these people may decide to use drugs to cope with stress as the way out of their problems, which may in turn open ways of taking their own lives since they will feel little fear about death due to drugs influence.

Interpersonal theory of suicide tries to explain the importance of acquired capability in suicidal ideation. Joiner (2005) terms this "acquired" capability because it is not an ability with which humans are born with. Rather, this ability to engage in suicidal behaviours is only acquired through life experiences. When one's life is full of stress and the hope of reducing it is not available, fear of death becomes minimal. Fear of death is a natural and powerful instinct. According to the theory, one's fear of death is weakened when one is exposed to physical pain or provocative life experiences as these experiences often lead to fearlessness and pain insensitivity. These experiences could include stressful life, childhood trauma, witnessing a traumatic event, suffering from a severe illness, or engaging in self-harm behaviors such as drugs.

These behaviours are thought to result in the desensitization to painful stimuli and to increase one's ability to engage in suicidal behaviors. This component is important in identifying individuals who are likely to attempt or die by suicide. For example, people are exposed to physical pain or provocative experiences due to stress in the process of making it in life. More specifically, youths with history of unemployment have likely been exposed to grave poverty, witnessing the death of others trying to make it in life, and are habituated to fear of painful experiences (Joiner, 2010). This is consistent with data indicating an increased rate of suicide in youths.

Empirical Review

Stress and Suicidal Ideation

Anna, Aleksandra, Lukasz, and Krzysztof, (2016) investigate the relationship between stress and suicidal ideation. The aim of the study was to analyze stress and anxiety and their influence on suicidal thinking among medical students. The study was conducted in the years 2014 to 2015 in Poland, at the Medical University—Nicolaus Copernicus University, Collegium Medicum. The objective of the study was to assess chronic stress and suicidal thinking among students and how students cope with this huge problem. Descriptive statistics and chi-square analyses were conducted to detect differences. The results of the study confirmed that chronic stress and anxiety have a negative influence on mental health and also confirm a relation to suicidal thinking in medical students.

Feskanich, Hastrup, Marshall, Colditz, Stampfer, Willett, and Kawachi (2019) study examined prospectively the associations between self-perceived stress, diazepam use, and death from suicide among adult women. A cohort study was conducted with 14 years of follow up. Stress at home and at work were assessed by questionnaire and scored on a four point scale: minimal, light, moderate, or severe. Eleven states within the United States. Female nurses (n=94 110) who were 36 to 61 years of age when they answered questions on stress and diazepam use in 1982. During 1 272 000 person years of observation 73 suicides were identified. After adjustment for age, smoking, coffee consumption, alcohol intake, and marital status, the relation between

self-reported stress and suicide remained U shaped. Compared with the light home and work stress categories, which had the lowest incidences of suicide, risks were increased among women reporting either severe (relative risk (RR) = 3.7, 95% confidence intervals (CI) 1.7 to 8.3) or minimal (RR=2.1, 95% CI 1.0 to 4.5) home stress and either severe (RR=1.9, 95% CI 0.8 to 4.7) or minimal (RR=2.4, 95% CI 0.9 to 6.1) work stress. When responses to home and work stress were combined, there was an almost fivefold increase in risk of suicide among women in the high stress category. Risk of suicide was over eightfold among women reporting high stress or diazepam use compared with those reporting low stress and no diazepam use. The relation between self-reported stress and suicide seems to be U shaped among adult women. The excess risk for those reporting minimal stress may reflect denial or undiagnosed depression or an association with some other unmeasured risk factor for suicide.

Priti, Rohit and Bir, (2017) investigated Stress and suicidal ideation among adolescents having academic difficulty. In a cross-sectional study, 75 academically typically achieving adolescents were compared with 105 students with academic difficulty and 52 students with specific learning disability (SLD). Academic functioning was assessed using teacher's screening instrument, intelligence quotient, and National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences index for SLD. Stress and suicidal ideas were assessed using general health questionnaire, suicide risk-11, and Mooney Problem Checklist (MPC). Appropriate statistical methods were applied. In a cross-sectional study, 75 academically typically achieving adolescents were compared with 105 students with academic difficulty and 52 students with specific learning disability (SLD). Academic functioning was assessed using teacher's screening instrument, intelligence quotient, and National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences index for SLD. Stress and suicidal ideas were assessed using general health questionnaire, suicide risk-11, and Mooney Problem Checklist (MPC). Appropriate statistical methods were applied

Sex and Suicidal Intention

Zhang, Lei, Song, Duan and Prochaska, (2019) investigated gender differences in suicidal ideation and health-risk behaviours among high school students in Beijing, China. They used a total of 33 635 students in grades 7-12 in Beijing participated in the 2014 Chinese Youth Risk Behaviour Surveillance. Data were stratified by gender and associations with suicidal ideation were analyzed using χ^2 test and multivariate regression analyses. The interaction effects on suicidal ideation between gender and the related behaviors were also analyzed. The prevalence of suicidal ideation was significantly higher for girls (13.3%) than boys (10.7%). Girls showed more vulnerability to suicidal ideation than boys particularly among girls in junior school, reporting high academic pressure, smoking, binge drinking and fighting.

III. METHOD

Design

An expo facto research design was used for the study. This design enabled the researchers not to manipulate any of the variables but only make use of the variables as they have existed to find the relationship between them among youths in Makurdi metropolis in Benue state. This is a design used survey study that tried to seek the opinion of participants with the use of questionnaires on suicidal ideation.

Participants

The populations for this study were strictly youths from Makurdi Metropolis in Benue State, Nigeria. The study involved 313 participants, O'Level 51 (15.3%), ND/NCE 31 (9.3), HND 26 (7.8), Degree 173 (52), M.Sc 28 (8.4) and PhD 4 (1.2), male which is 146 and female 167 which is. The participants were asked to fill their bio-data and to respond to the option that best fit them.

Instruments

Two set of instruments were used for the study. The instruments are (1) standard stress scale (2) and (2) suicidal ideation scale.

The standard Stress Scale (SSS) by Gross (2014) is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring general stress. It is a measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. Items were designed to tap how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find their lives. The scale also includes a number of direct queries about current levels of experienced stress. The items are easy to understand, and the response alternatives are simple to grasp. Moreover, the questions are of a general nature and hence are relatively free of content specific to any subpopulation group.

Standard Stress Scale (SSS) by Gross (2014) is a new scale which has been specially developed to meet the requirements of multicohort panel studies. Accordingly, the SSS is consistently applicable for different age groups from 14 years old onwards and is also suitable for a wide range of people irrespective of their stage in life and employment situation; the items are applicable for old-age pensioners, unemployed, employed and self-employed, the 11 items of the SSS show good reliability values. Standard stress scale has a Cronbach's alpha of

0.65 and total variance of 66.406 indicating that the test items are highly reliable and validly are reliable and valid measuring 66.4% the variable of interest.

Standard stress scale is an 11 items scale with each item rated on a 5-point scale ranging from always=1, often=2, sometime=3, often =4, never=5. Positively worded items are reverse scored, and the ratings are summed, with higher scores indicating more stress. SSS-11 scores are obtained by reversing the scores on items 2, 4, 8, 9, 10 items: For example, always=5, often=4, sometime=3, often=2, never=1 etc. and then summing across all 11 items. Items 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 11 are the positively stated items.

Suicide ideation was assessed with the Geriatric suicide ideation scale (GSIS), a 31-item measure of suicide ideation designed for use with adults. This multidimensional measure assesses Suicide Ideation (e.g., “I want to end my life”), Death Ideation (e.g., “I long for the peaceful slumber of death”), Loss of Personal and Social Worth (e.g., “I generally feel pretty worthless”), and Perceived Meaning in Life (e.g., “I feel that my life is meaningful”; reverse-scored). GSIS items are rated on a 5-point Likert format scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) and yield total scores ranging from 31 to 155, with higher scores indicating greater intensity of suicide ideation. Acceptable internal consistency has been demonstrated for GSIS total scores (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.90$) and the four subscales (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.74 - 0.86$).

Sampling Technique

Stratified and convenient sampling methods were used for the study. These methods were adopted in order to involve all the locations of the metropolis without being bias. The metropolis was divided into seven strata (Wurukum, Wadata, High-level, North-bank, Owner’s occupiers, Api and Gyado-villa). It was only wurukum, North bank, high level and Gyado villa that were used. It was only the youths that were met on their convenient time at different places and organization that were used for the study. These methods gave the participants that were available the opportunity and chance of participating in the study.

Procedures

The procedure for the study involved moving from street to street and institutions from institutions engaging the targeted participants (youths). The participants were asked to fill the bio-data and to respond to the option that best fit them. 350 questionnaires were distributed. It was only the 313 questionnaires that were filled completely that were used for the study. The researchers waited and collected the questionnaires after they were filled. Some of the illiterate participants that may find it difficult to read were assisted by the researchers and assistant that helped to read and interpret for the illiterate participants.

Method of Data Analysis

The statistical methods for this study were simple linear egressions and t-test. The simple linear regression was tested the relationship stress and suicidal ideation to find the relationship and percentage contribution of stress on suicidal ideation, while the t-test tested mean difference n sex on suicidal ideation.

IV. RESULTS

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis one was tested using simple linear regression analysis and the results are tabulated and interpreted as shown below.

Table 1: regression analysis showing the influence of stress on suicide ideations

Variables	R	R ²	F	β	t	Sig
Constant	.152	.023	7.824		10.210	.000
Stress				.152	2.797	.005

Criterion variable: Suicide Ideations

The results presented in Table 1 showed that there was a significant positive influence of stress on suicide intentions among youths ($R = .152 = R^2 = .231$ ($F(1,331) = 7.824, t = 10.210, p < .05$). This means that generally, stress is likely to predict 2.3% of suicide ideations among the youths. However, when other likely factors are controlled, stress is likely to contribute 15.2% to chances of suicide ideations among the youths. This finding implies that higher level of stress leads to higher tendencies for suicide. Therefore, this hypothesis has been accepted.

Hypothesis two was tested using t-test analysis and the results are tabulated and interpreted as shown below.

Table 2: Independent t-test showing difference between male and female on suicidal ideation

	Sex	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	P(sig)
Suicidal ideation	Male	146	19.46	8.99	214	5.791	.000
	Female	167	26.00	7.45			

The results presented in Table 2 showed that there is significant difference between male and female on suicidal ideation among youths ($t(214) = 5.791, p < .01$). This means that female youths have suicidal thought than the male youths. The result indicated that sex is a likely determinant of suicidal thought among youths in Makurdi metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. Thus, the research hypothesis has been accepted.

V. Discussion of Findings

The findings were discussed according to the tested hypotheses. Hypothesis one stated that stress will predict suicidal ideation among youths in Makurdi metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. The finding showed that there was a significant positive relationship between stress and suicide intentions among youths in Makurdi metropolis, Nigeria. This means that generally, stress is likely to predict suicide ideations among youths. This could be as a result of hardship in the country due to high rate of unemployment. The high rate of unemployment exposed many youths to hardship which sometimes resulted into stress which they have little coping or support from the government. The needs could be physical or emotional and not meeting them exposed them to stressful life which could result to suicidal ideation.

This study is in line with Anna, Aleksandra, Łukasz and Krzysztof (2016) that investigated the relationship between stress and suicidal ideation. The objective of their study was confirmed where chronic stress and suicidal thinking among students have positive relationship.

This study is also in line with Feskanich et-al. (2019) study that examined the association between self perceived stress and suicide among adult women. When responses to home and work stress were combined, there was an almost fivefold increase in risk of suicide among women in the high stress category. Their result found a positive relationship between stress and suicidal ideation.

The second hypothesis was confirmed as there is sex difference on suicidal ideation among youths in Makurdi metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. The difference in the mean between male and female on suicidal ideation could be that female youths are finding it hard to cope with this hardship due to the economy as they are more prone to abuse of all kind. The society seems to favor male more than the female on the other since male are more preference than female in African societies. All these could pushed the female to psychological disorders like suicidal ideation.

This study is in line with Zhang, Lei, Song, Duan and Prochaska, (2019) study that investigated gender differences in suicidal ideation and health-risk behaviours among high school students in Beijing, The interaction effects on suicidal ideation between gender and the related behaviors were also analyzed. The prevalence of suicidal ideation was significantly higher for girls (13.3%) than boys (10.7%). Girls showed more vulnerability to suicidal ideation than boys particularly among girls in junior school, reporting high academic pressure, smoking, binge drinking and fighting.

VI. Conclusion

In a bid to assess the relationship between stress and suicidal ideation, sex difference on suicidal ideation among single parents in Makurdi metropolis in Benue State, Nigeria, theories were reviewed, data were collected and the hypotheses were tested. Based on the result, it was concluded that:

1. Stress has a positive influence on suicidal ideation among single parents in Makurdi Metropolis in Benue State, Nigeria.
2. There was a significant difference between male and female on suicidal ideation among youths in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeira.

VII. Recommendations

This study calls attention for both Governmental and NGOs on the important of stress management program and the issue of giving palliatives to the youths in order to reduce suicidal ideation among them in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria..

This study has the following recommendation for suicidal ideation among youths in Makurdi Metropolis in Benue State since hopelessness is considered to increase it.

1. Parents, government and NGOs should support youths both psychologically and emotionally in order to eliminate stress to as well eliminate suicidal ideation among youths in Makurdi Metropolis in Benue State, Nigeria.
2. Government should also focus on the male youth for they have more suicidal ideation by giving the employment since they end up marrying the female counterpart.

Suggestion for Further Studies

It was suggested that further studies should combine other variables that may lead to suicidal ideation. Further studies should also examine these factors using experimental approach which has the capacity to strengthen the weakness of this regression method.

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