

PSYCHOSOCIAL RISK FACTORS FOR SUICIDAL IDEATION AS EXPRESSED BY UNDERGRAGUATES AT UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

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Abstract

This study was designed to find out the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin. Descriptive survey design was used to select 400 respondents using accidental sampling technique. The instrument was a researchers-designed questionnaire, titled: "Psychosocial Risk Factors for Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (PRFSIQ)". The reliability was ascertained by test-retest method with coefficient of 0.88. Mean and rank order was used to answer the research question while t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to answer the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that low academic performance, low social support from friends, academic stress, cyber bullying, examination anxiety, rejection, death of loved ones, emotional distress among others were psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation. The findings of this study also showed that there were no significant differences in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on gender, religion, and age. Further findings revealed that there was a significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on place of residence. It was recommended based on the findings of the study that undergraduates should be encouraged to seek counselling and other support services in school in order to prevent suicidal ideation and its consequences.

Keywords: *Psychosocial, Risk factors, Suicidal ideation, Undergraduates, University of Ilorin*

Introduction

Suicide is a serious social, psychological and public health problem among undergraduates in Nigeria. It is the act of killing oneself often as a result of depression or other mental illnesses. It is a problem which is very common among undergraduates and cases of suicide in Nigeria are so frightening in nature regardless of age, gender, class level, ethnicity, place of residence or even socio-economic status; for instance, in the year 2022, a 300-level student of the Department of Industrial Design at the Federal University of Technology, Akure committed suicide due to academic frustration; another 300-level student of Business Administration at Nnamdi Azikiwe University

also committed suicide by ingesting poison. In the 2023, another 100 level female student of the Nasarawa State University committed suicide by consuming a poisonous substance. A student of the University of Ilorin also committed suicide due to unpaid loan from an online loan platform. Despite the World Health Organisation vigorous campaign to curb the menace of suicide, the situation seems to be on the increase among undergraduates in Nigeria.

Suicide occurs when a person feels that he or she is no longer able to cope with an overwhelming situation, but suicidal ideation is a known risk factor for suicidal attempt or complete suicide. Akinade (2021) and Charles (2023)

explained further that suicidal ideation is a covert behaviour, which, in many cases, can lead to suicidal attempt or actual suicide. It refers to the thoughts and ideas about committing suicide or a desire to terminate one's life without the suicidal act. There are two types of suicidal ideation which include passive and active suicidal ideation. Passive suicidal ideation occurs when one wishes death for oneself but actually does not have any plans to commit suicide. The second type is active suicidal ideation, which is not only thinking about it but having the actual intention of committing suicide (Uche, Ngwu & Odey, 2020). Whether active or passive, the thoughts of hopelessness, helplessness, and worthlessness are common thought distortions associated with suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Nigeria.

Isogon, Anthony and Bekomson (2023) stated that university students have high rates of suicidal ideation associated with psycho-social factors; they are relationship problems, academic problems, and family problems. Undergraduates who were disappointed in their academic results are more susceptible to suicidal ideation than their peers who were not (Violet & Pamela, 2021). Stressful life events and lifetime traumas contribute immensely to the prediction of suicidal ideation leading to an attempt to commit suicide (Aloba, Ojeleye & Aloba, 2017). Exposure to various forms of abuse contributes to suicidal ideation; there is a connection between adverse childhood experiences and suicidal ideation which is mediated by depression, and anxiety. These exposures predict suicidal ideation in adolescent stage and adulthood and accumulation of experience of stressful events over a long period of time triggers suicidal ideation (Dalglish, Melchior, Younes & Surkan, 2015; Chukwuemeka, 2023).

According to Durosaro (2021), undergraduates who has experienced frequent academic failure, the loss of a loved one or significant social relationship may exhibit severe emotional distress, depression, feelings of hopelessness and be impulsive, which may predispose or place him or her at risk of suicidal ideation. There are other

psychosocial factors that may precipitate to suicidal ideation including terminal disease such as Human Immune Deficiency virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS), cancer, tuberculosis (TB) and other debilitating illness; low school achievement; low self-esteem; aggressive tendencies; isolation and lack of social support; cultural and religious beliefs glorifying suicide as a noble outlet in the face of personal difficulties; social change; impulsivity and impulsive violent aggressively; self-consciousness and eating disorders (Andrews & Lewinsohn, 2012; Fadipe & Okesina, 2022).

Essentially, a number of works had been conducted on nature of suicidal ideation among undergraduates in and outside Nigeria. For instance, Andrews and Lewinsohn (2012) worked on prevalence and co-occurrence of suicidal attempts among older adolescents with psychiatric disorders; Adewuya, Ola, Coker, Atilola, Zachariah, Olugbile and Idris (2016) examined the prevalence and associated factors for suicidal ideation in the Lagos State Mental Health Survey, Nigeria; Animasahun and Animasahun (2016) carried out a study on psychosocial predictors of suicide mission among Nigerian youths; Uche, Ngwu and Odey (2020) examined risk factors and youths suicidal tendencies in tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria; Violet and Pamela (2021) investigated determinants of suicidal intention among undergraduate students in Bayelsa State.

Despite the efforts of earlier researchers on suicidal ideation, to the best knowledge of the researchers', none of the previous researchers had worked on psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study was to advance knowledge and fill the gap identified in the literature. Therefore, the study investigated psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria. The study considered the influence of moderating variables of gender, age, religion and place of residence on psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation.

Research Question

The following research question was raised and answered in this study:

1. What are the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated and tested in this study:

1. There is no significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on age.
3. There is no significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on religion.
4. There is no significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on place of residence.

Methodology

Descriptive survey approach was adopted for this study because the researchers examined the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin. The samples of the population of this study were undergraduates at the University of Ilorin. According to the Academic Planning Unit (2023), there were 55, 242 undergraduates at the University of Ilorin. Based on the Research Advisor Sample Size Determination Table (2006), a sample size of

382 was recommended for the population of this magnitude at 95% and 5.0% margin of error. In order to cater for attrition, 10% (38) was added to make a total of 420 respondents. Accidental sampling technique was used to select the respondents that were available and accessible during the time of the research at the University of Ilorin. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity which was done by the experts in the Department of Counsellor Education, University of Ilorin. Reliability was done through a test re-test method in the process of research, and the instrument was administered twice on a group of students at University of Ibadan, Department of Psychology at an interval of two weeks. The correlation of the two sets of scores, using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was considered and the reliability coefficient was 0.88. Therefore, the instrument for data collection was designed by the researchers adopting it from the literature review. The instrument was tagged: "Psychosocial Risk Factors for Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (PRFSIQ)". The instrument has two parts i.e. sections A and B. Section A dealt with demographic data, and section B sought for psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation. Section B was patterned in line with four (4) point Likert type rating scale format of: Strongly Agree; Agree; Disagree; and Strongly Disagree. Mean scores up to 2.5 and above were accepted as the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation while mean scores below 2.50 were regarded as not. The null hypotheses were tested with t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

A total of 420 questionnaire forms were distributed to the respondents but only 400 were properly filled and accounted for and then used for this study. The respondents were selected through accidental sampling technique during the process of the research. Also, the study revealed psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin, and moderating variables considered in the study were gender, age, religion and place of residence. The hypotheses were tested using

t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance

Research Question 1: What are the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin?

Table 1: Mean and Rank Order of Psychosocial Risk Factors for Suicidal Ideation as Expressed by Undergraduates at University of Ilorin

S/N	Items	Mean	Rank
1	Low academic performance	3.88	1 st
10	Low social support from friends	3.85	2 nd
9	Academic stress	3.82	3 rd
13	Cyberbullying	3.80	4 th
9	Low self-esteem	3.79	5 th
6	Aggression	3.77	6 th
20	Depression	3.75	7 th
8	Rejection from family members	3.73	8 th
19	Examination anxiety	3.71	9 th
2	Substance abuse	3.69	10 th
10	Financial difficulties	3.64	11 th
12	Hopelessness	3.61	12 th
3	Chronic pain or illness	3.59	13 th
16	Relationship problems	3.57	14 th
15	Childhood adversity	3.55	15 th
1	School violence	3.51	16 th
7	Gender discrimination	3.49	17 th
2	Death of loved ones	3.47	18 th
6	Emotional distress	3.33	19 th
3	Loss in betting or gambling	3.29	20 th

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2023

Table 1 presents the mean and rank order of psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin. The table shows that all items were expressed as the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation, because all the items were ranked above the mid-mean score of 2.50, then it can be said that undergraduates agreed with the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation listed on the table. Therefore, items with mean values of 3.88, 3.85 and 3.82 respectively preceded others and were ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. The items indicated low academic performance, low social support from friends, and academic stress. In addition, items 2, 6 and 3 with mean values of 3.47, 3.33 and 3.29 were the least ranked items, that is, 18th, 19th and 20th. They indicated death of loved ones, emotional distress and loss in betting or gambling.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One: *There is no significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on gender*

Table 2: Showing t- test result on the Psychosocial risk factors for Suicidal ideation as expressed by Undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
Male	280	50.54	5.51	398	1.43	1.96
Female	120	49.59	3.81			

*Not Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 1.43 was less than the critical t-value of 1.96. This means that there was no significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on gender thus, the hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis Two: *There is no significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on age*

Table 3: ANOVA showing the Psychosocial risk factors for Suicidal ideation as expressed by Undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on Age

Source	df	SS	Mean Squares	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio
Between Group	2	26.844	13.422	1.26	3.00
Within Group	397	4232.151	10.660		
Total	399	4258.995			

*Not Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows that the calculated f-ratio of 1.26 was less than the critical f-ratio of 3.00. This means that there was no significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on age thus, the hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis Three: *There is no significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on religion*

Table 4: Showing t- test result on the Psychosocial risk factors for Suicidal ideation as expressed by Undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on Religion

Religion	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
Muslim	260	53.65	6.96	398	1.21	1.96
Christian	140	52.69	6.84			

* Not Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 4 shows that the calculated t-value of 1.21 was less than the critical t-value of 1.96. This means that there was no significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on religion thus, the hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis Four: *There is no significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on place of residence*

Table 5: Showing t- test result on the Psychosocial risk factors for Suicidal ideation as expressed by Undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on Place of residence

Residence	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
On-campus	290	54.5	5.39		398	3.20
Off-campus	110	45.5	3.52			1.96

* Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 5 shows that the calculated t-value of 3.20 was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. This means that there was a significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on place of residence thus, the hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion of the Findings

The results obtained from this study showed that low academic performance, low social support from friends, academic stress and cyberbullying were expressed as parts of the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation among undergraduates at the University of Ilorin. This is in support of Isogon, Anthony and Bekomson (2023) findings which showed that poor academic performance, lack of social connections, academic frustration, cyberbullying and emotional distress were risk factors contributing to suicidal ideation among students in Cross Rivers State. Similarly, the finding is in line with that of Onyowo, Nwokocha and Martha (2022) who revealed that low self-esteem, abuse of substances, hopelessness, death of loved ones, rejection, guilt, shame, anger, aggressive tendencies, isolation and lack of social support were risk factors associated with suicidal ideation among University of Jos Students in Plateau State, Nigeria. The findings in the study revealed that financial distress was also a determinant factor contributing to suicidal ideation; this is similar to the findings of Ogbaji and Anyalewa (2023) which found out that financial problem was a determinant factor that contributed to suicidal ideation among students. Therefore, undergraduates expressed psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation due to various stressors like academic pressure, social isolation, financial difficulties, relationship issues, substance abuse, or a combination of

these factors. The transition of school life, high expectations, and the challenges of newfound independence could also contribute to feelings of distress and vulnerability, increasing the risk of suicidal thoughts among undergraduates.

Hypothesis one revealed that there was no significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on gender. This implied that male and female undergraduates' expression on psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation did not differ. This finding agreed with that of Ajenipa (2021) who found that gender had no significant difference on the risk factors for suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Ilorin metropolis. The reason for this finding might be that both male and female undergraduates often face similar academic pressures, such as the need to excel in their studies, which could contribute to stress and feeling of inadequacy, potentially increasing the risk of suicidal ideation.

Hypothesis two revealed that there was no significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on age. This implied that the expression of undergraduates were not different on psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation based on age. The finding is in

conformity with that of Violet and Pamela (2021) which revealed that age of undergraduates had no significant influence on the risk factors for suicidal ideation in Bayelsa State. The reason for this finding might be that undergraduates, regardless of age differences, all face similar stressors and social influences on campus such as examination anxiety, academic pressure, emotional distress, or social isolation, which could contribute to psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation. Also, stigma surrounding mental health issues could affect undergraduates of all ages, potentially hindering help-seeking behaviours or support seeking.

Hypothesis three revealed that there was no significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on religion. This implied that the expression of undergraduates were not different on psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation based on religion. Carballo, Llorente, Kehrmann, Flamarique, Zuddas, Purper-Ouakil and Arango (2020) also revealed that religion had no significant difference on the causes of suicidal ideation among students. The similarity in psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation among Muslims and Christians might be attributed to that fact that a stigma surrounding mental health challenge is prevalent in many societies, regardless of religious backgrounds. This stigma could deter undergraduates from seeking help, leading to an increased risk of suicidal ideation. Also, Muslim and Christian students might encounter similar psychosocial stressors such as academic stress, relationship issues, family conflicts, or mental health challenges, regardless of their religious backgrounds.

Hypothesis four revealed that there was a significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on place of residence. This implied that the expression of undergraduates were different on psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation based on place of residence. However, this finding did not corroborate that of Ajenipa (2021) who found no

significant difference in the risk factors for suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Ilorin based on place of residence. Students staying on campus and off campus may experience different psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation. The reason could be that off-campus students might experience greater social isolation, especially if they live alone or in environments with limited social interaction. This isolation could exacerbate feelings of loneliness and hopelessness, increasing the risk of suicidal ideation. Also, on-campus students might have easier access to campus resources, including counselling services and support groups, whereas off-campus students might face barriers in accessing these resources due to distance or time constraints.

Implications for Counselling

The findings of the study have many implications for guidance counsellors at the University of Ilorin and Nigeria as a whole. The current study revealed that low academic performance, low social support from friends, academic stress, cyberbullying, low self-esteem, depression, substance abuse, examination anxiety, childhood adversity, relationship problems, aggression, chronic pain or illness, school violence, financial difficulties, hopelessness, rejection, death of loved ones, emotional distress, and loss in betting or gambling were psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates. School counsellors should make public awareness and information available on the factors that could predispose students to suicidal ideation.

Counsellors should be able to identify psychosocial risk factors in their clients and be able to provide the appropriate help or referral services where necessary. Counsellors should focus on these psychosocial risk factors associated with suicidal ideation among undergraduates by providing intervention programmes and use of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy to help undergraduates learn how to identify and change destructive or disturbing thought patterns that have a negative influence on behaviour and emotions. Also, counsellors are in the best position to help undergraduates

build healthy interpersonal relationships, self-esteem and improve problem-solving and coping skills; in turn, this can help them deal with negative life stressors and reduce the occurrence of intrusive intentions about suicide.

The counsellors should organise orientation programmes on suicidal ideation and its psychosocial risk factors to undergraduates, parents, lecturers, and public at large. The counsellors should also assist lecturers in learning about identifying potentially suicidal students and train students to be aware of how they can be of help to their troubled peers. The counsellors should establish a crisis center and select and train the crisis team members on what to do and how to identify a suicidal client. The counsellors should also continually update his knowledge on psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation in order to be able to identify and pre-empt it quickly with a preventive solution in a client.

The finding of this study also showed that there were no significant differences in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on gender, religion, and age. This implied that school counsellors should provide counselling and support services to undergraduates at risk of suicidal ideation irrespective of age, gender, and religion. Also, the study showed a significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors for suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on place of residence; the implication of this is that counsellors should consider the unique challenges and advantages of each living situation and work with undergraduates to develop coping strategies, stress management, and support systems that are relevant to their circumstances. Additionally, promoting awareness and reducing stigma around seeking help for mental health issues is essential, regardless of where students resides.

Conclusion

The study concluded that low academic performance, low social support from friends, academic stress, cyberbullying, low self-esteem, depression, substance abuse, examination anxiety, aggression, financial

difficulties, gender discrimination, chronic pain or illness, school violence, relationship problems, childhood adversity, hopelessness, rejection from family members, death of loved ones, emotional distress, and loss in betting or gambling were psychosocial risk factors contributing to suicidal ideation as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin. Findings of the study showed that there were no significant differences in the psychosocial risk factors as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on age, gender and religion. It also revealed that there was a significant difference in the psychosocial risk factors as expressed by undergraduates at University of Ilorin based on place of residence.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that:

1. There is need for counsellors in school to identify undergraduates with low academic performance and expose them to good study habits in order to eliminate the thought of suicide as a result of low academic performance.
- 2 School counsellors should assist in encouraging healthy peer relationships and improve undergraduates' self-esteem. This is because social cohesiveness and positive self-esteem serve as protective factors and help to improve the mental well-being of undergraduates.
3. School management should make policies and intervention programmes for academic stress and regular psychological and counselling assessment for undergraduates in order to curtail the menace of suicidal ideation.
4. School management should develop anti-bullying programmes in schools and address cyberbullying, as both contributed to psychosocial stressors among undergraduates.
5. School counsellors should launch suicidal prevention programmes for undergraduates that address psychosocial risk factors such as hopelessness, depression, emotional distress, death of loved ones, aggression, rejection, substance abuse, and examination anxiety in school.

6. Suicide prevention education programme should be developed and integrated into educational curriculum in order to save undergraduates from the problems of suicidal ideation in school.

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