

# Psychological Factors as Predictors of Suicide Actions among Undergraduates in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

The study examined the Psychological factors as predictors of suicide actions among undergraduates in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Two hundred (200) samples of engineering students of Federal University Oye-Ekiti were randomly selected. Data were collected from primary sources. The framing theory was applied by using different suicide reports on national dailies and questionnaire. The findings revealed that if newspaper framing could be positively affected, the rate of suicide attempt by university students will be reduced drastically by both genders. The study recommends that; Journalists should avoid dramatic reporting, the mode of suicide attempt should not be published in the media, there should be regulation guiding news reporting especially on suicide issues, the government, media and leaders should always report issues concerning suicide in a way that will not put the youths at disadvantage, suicidal individual should be referred to professionally trained counsellors for prompt psychological interventions, when reporting, especially on suicide, journalist should always ask themselves if they are framing correctly and counsellors, universities and parents have the obligation of educating the students on the dangers in suicide attempt.

Keywords: Psychological, Predictors, Suicide, Undergraduates, Nigeria

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## Introduction

Suicide is a significant issue for all ages worldwide. It is by and large portrayed as the purposeful demonstration of causing one's own passing. As per the World Health Organization (2018), suicide is the third driving reason for death among 15-29-year-olds, killing around 800,000 individuals each year, around the world. In the twentieth and 21st hundreds of years, suicide has been utilized on uncommon events as a type of dissent; kamikaze and suicide bombings have been utilized as a military or fear monger strategy.

When it comes to adults, let alone teenagers, committing suicide, it was extremely uncommon to read or hear tales about it a few decades ago. Today, however, the situation is the opposite (Essien & Agbakwuru, 2022). It is rare for a month to go by without a news story about a teenage suicide attempt or suicide from across the world owing to issues including a failed love relationship, getting dumped, unemployment, a failed university course, subpar grades in school, conflicts with siblings or parents, and more. Suicide is the most avoidable cause of mortality at any age, thus it demands special attention and in-depth information (Islam & Borak, 2012).

Suicide is the intentional taking of one's own life by many methods, including hanging, shooting, poisoning, drug overdose, etc. Millions of adolescents try to commit suicide each year, and thousands of them succeed. The definition of suicide according to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2020) is the intentional self-inflicted death. According to CDC, suicide is when a person intentionally causes a wound to themselves in order to cause their own death. One who overdoses on drugs, shoots oneself in the head with a pistol, or consumes poison, for example, wishes to end his life. Suicide is seen as a serious and growing public health concern since it is the tenth most prevalent cause of death in the US, accounting for more than 48,000 fatalities in 2018, or about one every 11 minutes. (CDC, 2020). Any acts or vocal clues that someone is considering suicide or has intentions to harm or kill themselves are considered suicidal conduct, in particular (Columba, 2007). This suggests that suicide behaviour includes any potentially lethal ideas or deeds a person does in an effort to harm or kill themselves. Suicidal conduct can

take many different forms, according to Ping (2013). When categorized as disorders depending on degree of severity, suicidal thoughts, suicidal attempts, suicidal communication, and suicide are four separate behaviours that frequently overlap. It's crucial to emphasize that not all young people who engage in suicide conduct do so in a sequential manner and that the risk of death rises as the intensity of suicidal activity increases (Ping, 2013).

Suicidal thoughts are another term for suicidal ideation, which is the act of contemplating, planning, or intending to commit suicide. Even though many people who consider or intend to commit suicide never do so, it is nevertheless regarded as a risk factor. According to statistics, youths made up the bulk of the 2.2 million Americans who plotted suicide in 2014. Suicidal thoughts were reported by 8.3 million Americans, or 3.7 percent of the adult population in the prior year, 2008–2009. (Wikipedia, 2020). A suicide attempt, on the other hand, is defined as "a self-inflicted, potentially damaging activity with a nonfatal consequence for which there is evidence of wish to die, either explicit or implicit" (Ping, 2013). A suicidal individual will attempt to terminate his or her life in a variety of methods, including consuming deadly chemicals, hanging from a bridge, or leaping out of it, with the evident goal and expectation of dying. However, for one reason or another, the individual will not be able to achieve this aim. It is critical to understand that those who attempt suicide are more likely to commit suicide. Self-harm is defined as any activity or injury inflicted by oneself. This is commonly used as a coping method for unpleasant feelings and concepts. Techniques for self-harm include slashing, burning, and non-lethal overdose. Self-harm includes any behaviour that causes damage, no matter how minor, as well as high-risk habits. (Essien and Agbakwuru, 2022).

### **Problem Statement**

The mass media has power to shape and sustain the image of an individual or organization. This the media does through the volume of coverage they give, choice of words they use in describing issues and people as well as the slant of the reports. They are sometimes influenced by owners, advertisers as well as government policies. The media's use of frames and

framing strategy is crucial in deciding how readers of online news sites respond to suicide and mental health-related concerns. Furthermore, how the public is informed and develops the capacity to lessen stigmatization of the phenomenon will also depend on the tone and substance of coverage of mental illness, including the use of videos and photos by season journalism (Carmichael et al., 2019). In recent years, communication experts throughout the world have become more interested in the media's portrayal of topics connected to suicide and mental health (Carmichael et al., 2019). When it comes to mental health concerns, the media in Nigeria tends to focus on suicide and attempted suicide rather than the reasons and potential prevention strategies. Youth suicide is a worldwide phenomenon and a pandemic that must be curtailed or decreased. Suicide may afflict everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status, colour, nationality, or religion. However, there are factors that may contribute to student suicide attempts. Due to these reasons and others that are not mentioned; is the reason why this researcher wants to know the psychological factors associated with suicide to the use of newspaper framing on the behaviour of students of Federal University, Oye-Ekiti.

### **Objective of the study**

The Objectives of this study are to:

- a. Analyse how frames has been used in some Nigerian Dailies addressing suicide among youths.
- b. Identify how prominent and frequent the students of Federal University, Oye-Ekiti involved themselves in the issues of suicide.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Mental illness commonly has an impact on suicide risk. In a study by Rogers et al. (2001), 71 percent of the 241 mental health counselors surveyed said they had dealt with a client who had attempted suicide. Granello and Granello also worked with mental health specialists (2007). They found that nearly one in four mental health professionals see a client commit suicide. Suicidal thoughts and depression have a strong positive relationship, say Astruc et al. (2004), Scocco, Marietta, Tonietto, Dello Buono and De Leo (2002), Howlin (2005), and Sultana et al. (2011).

Adolescence is the period of development between childhood and adulthood. During this period, adolescents experience a variety of changes, including ones that are physical, sexual, cognitive, social, and emotional. Early adolescence (years 10 to 13), middle adolescence (years 14 to 17), and later adolescence (years 18 to 21 and beyond) are the three phases of adolescence (Allen & Waterman, 2019). According to Johan (2020), the teenage stage is full of transformations and transitions from one state to another at the same time, making teenagers inherently sensitive and prone to mental health concerns. Young people must now make decisions on things like their buddy group and career route, Johan stated. They also have to face challenges including intimacy growth, self-esteem enhancement, identity development, and independence. Kids also have high expectations from their parents and other people, who make them, feel helpless, uneasy, and like they are losing control of the situation. Suicide behaviour, which includes suicidal thoughts, intentions, and attempts, typically starts in adolescence and is common among them, according to observations. Studies show that over 6,200 students died by suicide in 2017, making it the second most common cause of death for people between the ages of 15 and 24. In comparison to 2000, there were 47% more suicides among young people (15–19), (Gretchen and Gorena 2019). The surge in youth suicide and suicidal behaviour is particularly worrying in a country like Nigeria, where teens make up the majority of the population. Nigeria has one of the highest suicide rates, at 17.3/100,000, according to Olushola *et al.* (2021). In low- and middle-income nations, bullying, physical and sexual abuse, mental illnesses, drug use, depressed symptoms, and insufficient familial and social bonds are some of the factors that are linked to juvenile suicide behaviours, according to (Britt *et al.* (2016).

Oluwamayomikun's (2018) also worked on "Attitudes towards Depression and Suicide: An Analysis of News Coverage and Online Comments on Nigerian News Sites," which looked at how articles about suicide were framed, including suicide stereotypes, and how frequently comments reflected common beliefs and attitudes about suicide. Depression and Suicide among College Students in Nigeria With and Without Learning Disabilities is another illustration of a similar research study. It was written by Adetoun and Isaac (2016).

According to research by the WHO (2018) and Ogbolu *et al.* (2020), for instance, poor information can lead to depression and suicide without the cause being identified. According to a research conducted by Dabana and Gobir (2018) on Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria students, 58.2 percent of them had depression, which can range in severity from light to moderate to severe. Meaning that if vital knowledge is absent, people might quickly slide into a condition of sadness and eventually, commit suicide. If individuals are even partially uninformed that there is a connection between ignorance and the development of certain illnesses, this scenario might potentially grow worse.

In Nigeria, depression and suicide are covered and reported on with a clear disdain while WHO take the responsibility for suicide reporting and recommendations. This attitude of the media may encourage suicide among Nigerians (Lawal 2018). Channarong (2018) found two significant connections between social media and teen suicide. The two are the pro-youth suicide prevention connection and the anti-youth suicide link, which emphasizes how social media is used as a weapon to pressure and urge adolescents to commit suicide. Unlike professional journalism, citizen journalism by those with mental illnesses has the ability to lessen stigma and educate the public more (Carmichael *et al.*, 2019). The link between internet use and self-harm or suicide behavior must be emphasized, as it is linked to online addiction and exposure to suicide information (Marchant *et al.*, 2017). According to Kagunda and Nabushawo (2020), the prevalence of mental health concerns is underreported, and the "sick" are given more attention than mental health. a sign that mental health problems are not fully considered as risk factors for disease but rather on the effects of those problems. The goal of Brian's (2015) research was to examine the media's role in the stigma of mental illness and one of its main drivers, discrimination towards people with mental illnesses. The study's findings showed that stigma against mental illness is widely prevalent in the media, which frequently depicts people with mental illness as being dangerous, unpredictable, and socially undesirable.

### **The importance of framing theory in the study**

Framing Theory suggests that, how something is presented to the audience influences the choices they make about how to process that information (Mass Communication Theory, 2017). The theory is pertinent to this study because it clarifies how specific terms are used in the media, particularly when discussing suicide and concerns relating to mental health, to grab readers' attention. The media may utilize positive, negative, or neutral frame directions. Blame frames, conflict frames, responsibility frames, and health frames are among the frame types frequently used by the media. In Nigeria, it is anticipated that the usage of phrases like "jumps," "kills," and "hangs" by the media, especially online news sites, will have an impact on readers, especially students who may either be lured to suicide or discouraged from it. This theory will thus be useful for enhancing the research as well as for understanding what the students already know about how framing affects mental health-related problems and suicide.

**Methodology**

This study investigated psychological factors as predictors of suicide actions among undergraduates in Ekiti State as a case study. The research design adopted for this work is the descriptive survey method.

**Results**

This was analysed using descriptive statistics. For the demographic data, frequency counts and percentage were used while, t-test statistical tools were employed

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents based on age

Age	Frequency	Percentage %
16-19	83	37.0
20-23	117	63.0
Total	200	100%

The above table revealed that respondents with age 16-19 years has a frequency of 83 and 20-23years has a frequency of 117. This shows that student between this age bracket (20-23) participated more in the study.

All engineering students at Ikole campus constituted the total population for the study. However, 200 students were sampled from the population for the study. Random sampling method was used to select the sample for the study. The analysis of data was limited to percentage, t-test. The topic was also limited to psychological factors as predictors of suicide actions among undergraduates in Ekiti State, which means other topics about suicide, not relating with the aforementioned were not explored.

For the sake of this research work the questionnaire method of data collection was employed. This study has used the paper form of questionnaires. For the data collections on this research work the following rule were employed; instructions were provided, the respondents were told how the questionnaire should be answered, use of simple language, possible choices were limited, the questionnaire was arranged in a logical order, questionnaire was not ambiguous. Several national Newspapers were reviewed in order to find out the nature and incidence of suicide in Nigeria. Most circulated daily newspapers were selected for the review. An information intake form was used to collect data from the newspaper.

to analyse the formulated null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

**Demographic Data**

The results obtained from the respondents were presented in frequency and percentage.

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents based on Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage %
Female	93	45.0
Male	107	55.0
Total	200	100%

The above table reveals that 45% of the female respondents took part in the study while 55% represent male respondents that took part in the study. This means that male students participated more in the study.

Table 3: Distribution of the respondents based on religion

Religion	Frequency	Percentage %
Islam	85	42.0

Christianity	105	58.0
Total	200	100%

Looking through the table, one can see that Christianity has the largest number of respondents with 105(58%) while (85) 42% represent Islam.

Table 4: Mean and Rank order on behaviour of federal university students Oye-Ekiti on suicide attempt

Item No	Behaviour of students on suicide attempt:	Mean	Rank
12	Will there be difference in suicide rates among youths if news framing could be positively affected,	3.05	1 <sup>st</sup>
15	Does newspaper educate youth on the disadvantages of suicide?	3.03	2 <sup>nd</sup>
17	Does newspaper carries enough information on suicide attempt by youth,	3.01	3 <sup>rd</sup>
13	Youth may imitate suicide behaviour seen on television	2.90	4 <sup>th</sup>
16	The leading methods of suicide in Nigeria is poisoning	2.88	5 <sup>th</sup>
10	Does all youth engaged in suicide attempt mentally ill?	2.86	6 <sup>th</sup>
7	Suicide affects youths from all races	2.86	6 <sup>th</sup>
14	Most common methods of youth suicide death are substance abuse	2.83	8 <sup>th</sup>
8	Should attempt of suicide by female be taken seriously?	2.75	9 <sup>th</sup>
9	Does the youth who attempted suicide really want to die	2.71	10 <sup>th</sup>
4	Do youths who talk about suicide attempt always kill themselves?	2.70	11 <sup>th</sup>
11	Can counsellors and mental health professionals help youth to overcome suicide attempt?	2.64	12 <sup>th</sup>
1	Dose educating youth about suicide leads to suicide attempt?	2.60	13 <sup>th</sup>
2	Does talking about suicide in schools promote suicide ideas?	2.55	14 <sup>th</sup>
3	Does seminars on suicide provide youths on methods of committing suicide	2.55	15 <sup>th</sup>
5	Is parents/guidance aware of their child's suicide behaviour?	2.51	16 <sup>th</sup>
6	Is there a significant difference between female and male adolescents regarding suicide behaviour?	2.50	17 <sup>th</sup>

Above table shows the Mean and rank order of the behaviour of university students on suicide attempt.

Items 12, 15 and 17 have the highest Mean scores of 3.05, 3.03 and 3.01 respectively. This indicates that when newspapers are framed positively, it can have a positive impact on the student's behaviour in relation to suicide attempt. This is due to the fact that the items which states that: will there be difference in suicide rates among youths if newspaper framing could be positively affected; does newspaper educate the youth on the disadvantages of suicide attempt and dose newspaper carries enough news or information on suicide attempt by youth, has the highest Mean scores. This implies that the newspapers or the media are doing a great job in their method of reporting news on suicide. Whereas, items 3, 5 and 6 has the lowest Mean

score of 2.55; 2.51 and 2.50 respectively. These items state that: "does seminars on suicide provides youths on methods of killing themselves"; are parents / guidance aware of their child's suicide behaviour and is there a significant difference between female and male adolescents regarding suicide behaviour? These statements show that the university community does not show commitment in educating the youth on the dangers of suicide. Likewise, the parents too did not give proper attention to informing or guiding their wards on the dangers of suicide and is there a significant difference between female and male adolescents regarding suicide behaviour has the lowest Mean.

**Research Question:** *To what extent does the mass media (news paper) expose vulnerable youths by influencing them with their reports especially on the issue of suicide?*

**Table 1:** Mean and rank order of the extent to which media expose vulnerable youth to issue of suicide

S/N	Item no.	Items Statements	Mean	Rank
1	4	Reporting suicide of celebrities with photographs;	3.54	1 <sup>st</sup>
2	3	Oversimplifying causes of suicide in the media;	3.45	2 <sup>nd</sup>
3	1	Dramatic presentation of report with bold headlines;	3.42	3 <sup>rd</sup>
4	2	Not giving details of the causes, just single factor e.g. failed exams, broken homes, finance or mental problem.	3.40	4 <sup>th</sup>

Table 1 show the Mean and rank order of the extent to which media expose vulnerable youths to issue of suicide. Item no 4 which states that: reporting suicide of celebrities with their photographs ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, oversimplifying the causes of suicide in the media has a Mean of 3.45 and ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> while dramatic presentation of report with bold headlines ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>. Going by the above, one can deduce that the way media report issues concerning suicide can expose university youths to suicide attempt. This result

indicated that adolescents seem to be more vulnerable to the influence of the newspaper.

**Hypothesis testing:** Only one hypothesis was formulated and tested using t- test statistical procedure for the study.

Hypothesis one: *There is no significant difference in suicide rate*

*among university students based on gender if newspaper framing could be positively affected?*

**Table 6:**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>Cal. t. val</b>	<b>Critical t. val</b>
Female	107	29.29	7.147	1.9	1.38	1.96
Male	93	27.43	6.619	8		

The table above reveals that there is no significant difference in suicide rate among university students based on gender if newspaper framing could be positively affected. This is because the calculated t-value is 1.38 which is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level of significance. For this reason, the hypothesis is accepted,

This result shows that if newspaper framing could be positively affected, the rate of suicide attempt by university students will be reduced drastically by both genders.

### Discussion

The findings on the demographic data shows that respondents between the ages of 20-23 has the highest number of participants with 63%, results on gender revealed that 55% representing female respondents took part in the study and on religious affiliation Islam has the highest participants of 58%. On the behaviour of students on suicide attempt, item numbers 12,15 and 17 ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> respectively. These items stated that: will there be difference in suicide rates among youths if newspaper framing could be positively affected, does newspaper educate youths on the disadvantages of suicide and does newspaper carries enough information on suicide attempt by youths? While items 3,5 and 6 ranked 15<sup>th</sup>,16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> respectively and they stated that: does seminar on suicide provide youths information on methods of committing suicide; are parents/guidance aware of their child's suicide behaviour and was there a significant difference between female and male adolescents regarding suicide behaviour respectively.

Findings on the research question on the extent to which mass media expose vulnerable youths by influencing their reports on the issue of suicide among youths revealed items 4,3 and 1 has the highest Mean scores of 3.54,3.45 and 3.42 respectively. These items stated that: reporting suicide of celebrities with

their photographs, oversimplifying causes of suicide in the media and dramatic presentation of report with bold headlines often exposed vulnerable youths to suicide attempts. The hypothesis which stated that: there is no significant difference in suicide rate among undergraduates based on gender if newspaper framing could be positively affected was accepted because the calculated t-value of 1.38 was less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level of significance. This statement supports the assertion of Channarong (2018) who identified two major links between social media and youth suicide. They are; the positive link that deals with youth suicide prevention and the negative link, which focuses on how social media is used as a tool to encourage and pressure youth toward suicide.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings presented above and discussion arising there, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Respondents between the ages of 20-23 years forms the bulk of the respondents with a frequency of 117 and percentage 63%;
2. Male students participated more, with a percentage of 55%;
3. Distribution of respondents based on religious affiliation; it was discovered that Christianity has the highest number of participants with a frequency of 105;
4. On the behaviour of students on suicide attempt, it was discovered that there will be a significance difference in suicide rates among youths if newspaper framing could be positively affected;
5. Newspaper also expose vulnerable youths to suicide attempt by the way they frame news on suicide concerning celebrities, e.g. displaying their photographs and over simplifying causes of suicide in the media.
6. No significance difference was noticed on the rate of suicide attempt by federal university students, Oye-Ekiti based on gender if newspaper framing could be positively affected.

### Recommendations

1. Counsellors should organise seminars for university students on the negative consequences of suicide
2. Journalists should avoid dramatic reporting.

3. Counsellors should create awareness for students on the disadvantages of suicide in collaboration with the school authority and staff members.
4. The mode of suicide attempt should not be published in the media.
5. There should be regulation guiding news reporting especially on suicide issues.
6. The government, media and leaders should always report issues concerning suicide in a way that will not put the youths at disadvantage.
7. Suicidal individual should be referred to professionally trained counsellors and health practitioners for prompt psychological interventions.
8. When reporting, especially on suicide, journalist should always ask themselves if they are framing correctly.
9. Universities and parents have the obligation of educating the students on the dangers in suicide attempt

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