



Correlates of Suicidal Behaviours among University Students in Nigeria

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Abstract. The study examined the correlates of suicide and suicidal behaviours among university students in Edo State. Four research questions and two null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study. The descriptive explanatory mixed research design which respectively involves quantitative and qualitative phases was adopted for the study. The sample of 720 students were drawn from the population of 79,813 using the multi-stage sampling procedure. Three research instruments were used to obtain data used for the study. The self-designed questionnaire and interview schedule items were validated by three experts from Faculty of Education, University of Benin. The reliability of the instrument was established through a Cronbach's Alpha statistics. Thus, Cronbach's Alpha values of .81 and .68 were respectively obtained as the reliability values of the instrument (questionnaire). However, the checklist and the interview schedule theme and items were not subjected to reliability test. Data were analyzed using percentage, Chi-Square and Multiple Regression statistics. The findings revealed that substance abuse was the most prevalent suicidal behaviour among university students; there was a low level of suicide attempts among university students. However, there was a significant influence of family type, and permissive parenting style (the strongest predictor) on the causes of suicide and suicidal behaviour among university students in Edo State. It was concluded that suicide and suicidal behaviours among university students in Edo State is predicated on poor relationship with family members. It was therefore recommended among others that parent should be more responsible, bearing in mind that parenting is beyond providing food, money, shelter, clothing and other needed school materials as such parents should show more cares and apt attention to their children

Keyword: Family Types, Parenting Styles, Suicide, Suicidal Behaviours, University Students

1. Introduction

Every human being aspires to live a good, happy and enjoyable life. While some appear to be living an honest life, full of integrity, joy and happiness, others seek wealth, social status and fame, as they hope these aspects will help them to live the good life. However, societal conditions such as peer pressure, the general moral and psychological climate of a society could increase or decrease the propensity for individuals to react to problems and pains by committing suicide or at least exhibiting suicidal behaviours.

Suicidal behaviour is any deliberate action and inaction intended to end one's life in order to escape unbearable suffering or to help change adverse conditions of living. It is the intentional act of taking one's own life or the destruction of one's own interest or prospects. Suicidal behaviour demonstrates that something seem to be fundamentally wrong either with the individual or with the situation in which the individual exists or with both the individual and the situation.

Suicidal behaviour is any deliberate action with potentially life – threatening consequences such as taking a drug overdose, substance abuse, possession of lethal weapons. It often occurs in response to a situation that the person considers overwhelming, such as social isolation, death of a loved one, emotional trauma, serious physical illness, aging, unemployment or financial problems, guilt feelings or dependence on alcohol or other drugs, which could lead to suicide.

Every suicide is a tragedy as deaths by suicide seem to be an extremely complex issue that causes pain to hundreds of thousands of people every year around the world. Suicide is a complex behavioural

phenomenon that involves taking one's life by oneself. It is fundamentally a general social and public health concern worldwide. The social, economic and psychological effects of suicide are unbearable in most societies of the world. Families, organisations, educational institutions and the general society are often thrown into mourning when there is an incident of suicide – such depressive mood often impacts on productivity, creates fear and anxiety, reduces value for human life and causes social unrest among others.

For Nigerian students, the relatively high levels of stress that often accompany this developmental stage are further exacerbated by the rapid socio-political, economic and socio-cultural transitions underway in Nigeria. Thus societal pressures and influences, such as rapid socio-political economic and socio-cultural change, the desire to pass examinations at all cost through any means; the pressure from parents; peer pressure, etc seem to play a pivotal role in the individual's engagement in suicidal behaviour (Ebohon, 2023). It follows therefore that a poor or an underachieved academic performance may serve as a precursor to stress, subsequent depression, and suicidality. Students who have consistently exhibited a pattern of academic failure may simply engage in risk – taking behaviour such as criminal acts, risky sexual activity that may predispose them to suicidality. Such are likely to be characterized by high rate of loneliness, poor social support and lack of a close and confiding relationship with friends and family members.

The breakdown in traditional family structure appeared to remain one of the major factors for the increase in suicide and suicidal behaviours among university students. Interpersonal relationships between students, their family members (parents and siblings) and friends may be a major reason for student's suicidal behaviour, but can also serve as major stressors, especially if conflict occurs within these relationships. This is why Ebohon, Osagiobare and Musa (2017) posit that the family is an essential part of the students' support system. The family provides emotional support both in the family context, as well as the broader community. However, environmental stressors such as parental divorce, death of a parent, interpersonal conflict between parents and siblings, pre-existing family psychiatric conditions and suicidal behaviour in the family context may lead to an increased source of insecurity and a risk for suicidal behaviour.

The home is of great importance to the child and it is expected to inculcate the right attitudes and values in the child. A good home ought to provide love, support, encouragement and security for its members. Family background is the foundation for

children's development, as such, family background in terms of family type and parenting styles, as well as issues in the family and complexity could play important role in children's upbringing, social integration and consequently suicidal behaviour. The family is a social life community of relatives established by marital, blood and adoptive relationship. It is the most intimate group and has a profound effect on its members. Family characteristics vary across cultures and nation. Nigeria has a unique marriage system, and parenting style and these specific characteristics may affect family members. Indeed, parental involvement and individuals' experiences at home play tremendous roles in building the personality of the child and making the child what he is Omoregbe and Ebohon (2016). However, a considerable amount of research has been conducted on suicide in Nigeria but studies on the perceived influence of family types and parenting styles on suicide and suicidal behaviour among university students in Edo State has not been given attention. It is against this background that this study examined the correlates of suicide and suicidal behaviours among university students in Edo State, Nigeria.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In recent times, there seem to be a high incidence of suicide attempt and suicidal behaviour among university students in Nigeria as Nigeria news media are often awash with cases of suicide and suicidal behaviours among university students. This perceived prevalence of university students' involvement in suicide and suicidal behaviour are indeed worrisome as the effect on families, friends and societies seems to be devastating and far-reaching. This is why school administrators, sociologists, psychologists and governments are worried about the ugly trend of university students' involvement in suicide and suicidal behaviour. Despite several efforts made by the Government, Universities authorities and the university guidance counselors, suicide cases and suicidal behaviours among university students especially undergraduates seems to be on the increase. The problem of the study therefore was to find out the correlates of suicide and suicidal behaviours among university students in Edo State, Nigeria.

1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- What is the suicidal behaviour prevalent among university students in Edo State?
- What is the rate of suicidal attempts among university students in Edo State?

- Is there an influence of family type on suicidal behaviours among university?
- Does parenting styles predict suicidal behaviours among university students in Edo State?

1.3 Hypotheses

HO₁. There is no significant influence of family type on suicidal behaviours among university students

HO₂. Parenting styles will not significantly predict suicidal behaviours among university students

2. Research Methodology

Research Design: The descriptive explanatory mixed research design was employed in the study. The design was considered suitable for the study because the study was conducted in two phases; the quantitative and qualitative phases. In specific terms, the descriptive survey design was used in the quantitative phase, because it enabled the researchers to gather information about the variables under investigation. In the qualitative phase, a one on one interview, which was conversational in nature, with one respondent at a time, was used in the study. This afforded the researchers the opportunity to get in-depth details from the respondents and also get data that enriched the answers provided in the quantitative phase to the research questions raised.

Population of the Study: The population of the study comprises all the seventy nine thousand, eight hundred and thirteen (79,813) full-time undergraduates in public and privately owned universities in Edo State. The universities include: University of Benin, Benin City; Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma; Edo State University, Uzairue; Igbinedion University, Okada; Benson Idahosa University, Benin City; Wellspring University, Benin City, and Samuel Adegboyega University, Ogwa.

Sample and Sampling Procedure: The sample for the study was seven hundred and twenty (720) out of the seventy nine thousand, eight hundred and thirteen (79,813) full-time undergraduate students from universities in Edo State.

The study employed a multi-stage sampling procedure:

Stage One: This stage consists of selection of universities. The universities in Edo State were stratified randomly into three strata (groups): Federal, State and Private. Thereafter, one university was randomly selected from each

stratum; that is one federal, one state and one private university.

Stage Two: This stage involved the selection of faculties from each of the university. Thus, the faculties that cut across the three universities were stratified randomly into three groups as follows:

Group 1: Humanities and the Social Sciences

Group 2: Pure Sciences

Group 3: Applied Sciences

Thereafter two faculties were randomly selected from each group which gives a total of six faculties in each university.

Stage Three: This stage comprises the selection of respondents. The respondents were stratified into four levels: 100 level; 200level; 300level and 400level and above. However, due to the relatively large population of students, the researcher adopts the simple sampling techniques in selecting ten (10) students each from 100level, 200level, 300level and 400level from each sampled faculty and university. Thus, a total of two hundred and forty (240) students were sampled from each university.

Therefore, a total of Seven Hundred and twenty (720) students from three universities formed the sample for the study which is made up of a total of two hundred and forty (240) students from each university (That is, 40 students x 6 faculties = 240 x 3 universities = 720).

Research Instruments: Three research instruments were used for the study. The first was a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers titled: Correlates of Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour Questionnaire (CSSBQ). The second instrument was a checklist titled: Documented Evidence of Suicide and Suicidal Attempts Checklist (DESSAC). The third instrument was a structured interview constructed for suicide survivors/or those who have attempted suicide.

The questionnaire (SBQ) was made up of four sections (A, B and C). Section A was used to collect information on the demography of the respondents; Section B comprised a 4-point Likert scale to each of eight (8) behavioural statements regarding suicide and suicidal behaviours. The categories of responses were: Most often (MOF), Often (OFT), Sometimes (SOT), and Never (NEV), with weights 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively; while Section C items were structured on a modified four point Likert scale of Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree =1 which further helped to elicit information on the perceived influence of parenting styles on the prevalence of

suicide and suicidal behaviours among university students.

The checklist was used mainly to access the prevalence/rate of suicide and suicidal attempts by students in each sampled university from the 2011/2012 to 2020/2021 academic sessions. Thus, it was used to collect data on documentary evidence from the medical records of the medical units, students' affairs department, and the security departments of the various universities used for the study. The essence of using three units/departments independently from each university to collect such information was to ensure high level of accuracy. However, the average was used for the analysis.

The interview schedule theme and items were constructed for suicide survivors/or those who have attempted suicide. This section aimed to complement quantitative self - report data with in – depth interview concerning individual's experience of self-harm and suicidality.

Validity of the Instruments: The face and content validity of the instruments (questionnaire and interview schedule items) were validated by three experts, one each in department of Educational Foundations, Department of Sociology and Anthropology and Department of Educational Evaluation and Counseling Psychology Faculty of Education, University of Benin. Their inputs and suggestions were incorporated before the final drafts of the instruments were produced.

Reliability of the Instruments: The reliability of the instrument (questionnaire) was established through a Cronbach's Alpha statistics using thirty

(30) students from a faculty and department that were not part of the sampled respondents. Cronbach's Alpha was considered most appropriate because it helped to establish the co-efficient of homogeneity of the instrument. Thus, for suicide and suicidal behaviour scale, and parenting style scale had a Cronbach's Alpha values of .81 and .68 respectively obtained as the reliability values of the instrument. However, the checklist and the interview schedule theme and items were not subjected to reliability test.

Method of Data Collection: The research instruments were administered by the researchers in two phases, which were quantitative phase and qualitative phase respectively. At the qualitative phase, some of the respondents from the sample drawn were thereafter interviewed with the aid of an interview guide. The interview was carried out with the aid of a mobile recorder. After each interview, participant responses were transcribed, and major themes were identified based on the content of the discussions held by each participant during the interview in the original study after the content was coded. Themes were manually generated from data obtained from the interview questions on participants who are suicide victims, attempters or survivors.

Method of Data Analysis: The responses from the documentary evidences that were collected were analyzed using frequency tables and percentages, while the hypotheses were tested with Chi-square statistic and Multiple Regression statistics. All statistical decisions were taken at 0.05 level of significance.

3. Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: What is the suicidal behaviour prevalent among university students in Edo State?

Table 1: Rate of suicidal behaviour among university students in Edo State

S/N	Items	MOF	OFT	SOT	NEV
1	I have seriously contemplated killing myself when I was distressed	48 (6.7%)	102(14.2%)	163(22.6%)	407(56.5%)
2	I have attempted killing myself when I felt life was hopeless	80(8.3%)	143(19.9%)	165(22.9%)	352(48.9%)
3	I once tried to kill myself when I failed my examination	54(7.5%)	113(15.7%)	72(10.0%)	481(66.8%)
4	I tried putting an end to my life when I met a major disappointment	96(13.3%)	71(9.9%)	114(15.8%)	439(61.0%)
5	I thought of killing myself as one of the ways of solving my problems	90(12.5%)	137(19.0%)	82(11.4%)	411(57.1%)
6	I considered hanging myself whenever I was overwhelmed by some situations	60(8.3%)	185(25.7%)	60(8.3%)	415(57.6%)
7	I have been involved in reckless driving deliberately under alcohol influence	111(15.4%)	71(9.9%)	102(14.2%)	436(60.6%)
8	I abuse substance (drugs) some time	433(60.1%)	64(8.9%)	175(24.3%)	48(6.7%)

Source: Field work, 2022

Table 1 reveals the prevalence of suicidal behaviour among university students in Edo State. It shows that 56.5% of the respondents indicated that they never seriously contemplated killing themselves when they were stressed. 48.9% of the respondents stated that they never attempted killing themselves when they felt life was

hopeless and 66.8% also stated that they never tried to kill themselves when they failed their examination. In the same vein, a majority of the respondents (61.0%) also indicated that they never attempted putting an end to their lives when they experienced some major disappointment. However 57.1%, contemplated suicide as one of the ways of solving their problems, while 57.6%, considered hanging themselves whenever they experienced overwhelming situations. Also, 60.6% and 60.1% of the respondents have been involved in reckless driving deliberately and abused substance (drugs) most times respectively. Thus it can be deduced that a majority of the respondents indicated that they never engage in suicidal behaviours.

A participant interviewed in the study stated that unending quarrels in the family accentuated by personal issues made him decide to end it all by taking his life, while the other participant stated that the main trigger of suicide thought is toxic environment especially when people around you do not see someone as a human being, that is, he or she is not valued as a being. He went on to emphasize that neglect and rejections are products of toxic environment which leads to suicide thoughts.

Research Question 3: What is the rate of suicidal attempts among university students in Edo State?

Table 2: Rate of suicidal attempts among university students in Edo State

Population of the study	No of suicide Attempts	Rate
79, 813	12	0.02%

It can be seen from the table that the prevalence rate of suicidal attempts among University students in Edo State is 0.02% from 2009/2010 session to 2018/2019 session.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant influence of family type on suicidal behaviours among university students in Edo State.

Table 3: Influence of family type on suicidal behaviours among university students

Family type		Suicidal behaviours		Df	χ^2	Sig.	Remark
		High	Low				
Mono		194	290	2	29.22	0.00	Ho Rejected
	Poly	97	92				
	single-parent	37	10				
Total		328	392				

Table 3 shows the influence of family type on suicidal behaviour. It can be seen that the chi-square value is 29.22, degree of freedom is 2, and p-value is 0.00 which is less than the *set alpha* level of 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant influence of family type on suicidal behaviour is rejected. This shows that there is significant influence of family type on suicidal behaviour. 194 out of the 484 students who are from monogamous families have high suicidal behaviour, 97 out of the 189 students who are from polygamous families have high suicidal behaviour while 37 out of the 47 students from single-parent families had high suicidal behaviour.

Hypothesis 2: Parenting styles will not significantly predict suicidal behaviours among university student in Edo State

Table 4a: Model Summary of prediction of the various parenting styles on university students' suicidal behaviour in Edo State

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig. F change
1	.399 ^a	.159	.154	5.22603	0.000

Table 4a shows the model summary on the prediction of the various parental styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglect) on suicidal behaviours. It can be seen that the r-value is 0.39, r^2 is 0.159 (15.9%) and level of significance is less than the *set alpha* level of 0.05. The r-value shows that parental styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful) significantly relate to suicidal behaviours, while the r^2 value shows that parental styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful) explain 15.9% of the variance of suicidal behaviours.

Table 4b: Multiple regression on the prediction of the various parenting styles on university students' suicidal behaviour in Edo State

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3697.418	4	924.354	33.845	.000 ^b
	Residual	19527.681	715	27.311		
	Total	23225.099	719			

a. Dependent Variable: Suicidal Behaviour

b. Predictors: (Constant), neglectful, authoritative, authoritarian, permissive

It can be seen from table 4b (ANOVA table) that the F-value is 33.84, degree of freedoms are 4 and 715, while the level of significance is 0.00 which is less than the *set alpha* level of 0.05. It can be seen that all the parental styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful) significantly predict suicidal behaviours in the study.

Table 4c: Coefficients/ magnitude of prediction of the various parenting styles on university students' suicidal behaviour

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	12.778	1.132		11.292	.000
	Authoritative	-.374	.087	-.170	-4.304	.000
	Authoritarian	-.378	.084	-.175	-4.480	.000
	permissive	.630	.083	.298	7.592	.000
	Neglectful	.354	.077	.170	4.592	.000

a. Dependent Variable: suicidal behaviour

Table 4c shows the magnitude of prediction of each independent variable on the dependent variable. It can be seen from the table that the standardized Beta value for authoritative parenting style is -0.170 ($p < 0.05$), this shows that authoritative parenting style had a significant negative prediction of suicidal behaviour. Thus as authoritative parenting increases, it decreases suicidal behaviour. For the authoritarian parenting style, the Beta value is -0.175 ($p < 0.05$), this shows that authoritarian parenting style had a significant negative prediction of suicidal behaviour. Thus as authoritarian parenting increases, it decreases suicidal behaviour. Meanwhile a beta value of 0.298 ($p < 0.05$) for permissive parenting style reveals permissive parenting style had a significant positive prediction of suicidal behaviour. Thus as permissive parenting increases, it increases suicidal behaviour. In same vein, the beta value of 0.170 ($p < 0.05$) for neglectful parenting style reveals neglectful parenting style had a significant positive prediction of suicidal behaviour. Thus, as neglectful parenting increases, it increases suicidal behaviour. It can therefore be deduced that permissive parenting style is the strongest predictor of suicidal behaviour in the study.

4. Discussion of Results

The findings of research question one indicate that a majority of the respondents never engage in most of the suicidal behaviours. However, 433 respondents representing 60.1% indicated that they abuse substance (drugs) most time. This finding agrees with some earlier studies of Mba (2010), Evans, Hawton, Rodham and Deeks (2005) and Mocellin (2002) who stated that self-destructive behaviours such as alcoholism, substance abuse, sex abuse, cultism, possession of lethal weapons have been identified as suicidal behaviours found among university students. Substance abuse which may involve over-dose of drugs, swallowing of poisons, pesticides use and the use of other chemicals to end one's life is a major form of suicidal behaviour found among university students in this study. This could be explained by the fact that there is easy access to these chemicals or substances. This finding is also in agreement with other studies by Bae, Ye, Chan, Rivers and Singh (2005) and Shaffer (2001) who opined and demonstrated that suicidal behaviours are more likely to occur among adolescents who abuse alcohol and substances. Thus numerous studies report a significant correlation between substance use and suicidal behaviours in adolescents and youths.

Mathematically, the findings with respect to the rate of suicide attempts among university students in Edo State revealed a low rate with 0.02% of the 720 sample of undergraduates from the 2011/2012 session to 2020/2021 session. However, medically and sociologically, the 0.02% rate of suicide attempts revealed in this study is high as nobody has the right to take his or her life. The findings of this study disagree with the earlier studies of the World Health Organisation (2014), Ogunseye (2013), Kawashina, Ita, Harishuge, Saito and Okubo (2012), Douglas (2010), and Fergusson, Woodward and Horwood (2000), who reported that there is increase and high rate of suicidal ideation, suicide planning and suicide attempts by young adults aged 18-29 years in their respective studies. The findings of this study however agree with the views of Singh and Behmani (2018), who suggested that the number of attempted suicide, many of which go unreported, is likely to be much higher.

However, the lower rates of suicide attempts among university students reported in this study could be attributed to the availability of a good number of counseling services on campus; a more supportive peer and mentor environment that is found in the general university community; campus prohibitions on possession of firearms; effective campus monitoring of alcohol use and substance abuse; a clearer sense of purpose among university students and the relative freedom which students enjoy on campus as opposed to the daily hassles of living that occur in nonacademic settings.

The first hypothesis sought to find out if family background (family types) has any significant influence on Students' suicidal behaviour. The finding shows that there is a significant influence of family type on suicidal behaviour. It was revealed that monogamous family type has a high influence on suicidal behaviours among university students. This finding negates earlier studies of Bifulco, *et al* (2014) which revealed that deliberate self-harm correlates significantly with single mother upbringing and family discord. Also this finding is not in agreement with the views of Consoli, Reyre, Speranza, Hassler, Falissarel, Touchette, Coxa, Noro, & Reva-Lavy (2013) and Sheftall, Mathias, Furr & Dougherty (2013) who posit that suicidal behaviours are more prevalent in single parent families than monogamous families but most prevalent in polygamous families as there is more conflict in family relationship in the latter. The reasons given by these researchers are that this type of family (single-parents) context promotes feelings of loneliness and abandonment in adolescents, increasing mood disturbances and have suicidal behaviours. However, the present study negates all these assertions as the findings revealed that monogamous families have the

highest form of influence on suicidal behaviours among university students in Edo State.

The findings of this study could be explained by the fact that there could be poor family communication and low parental monitoring in the monogamous families in this study. Hence from such homes many end up helpless, hopeless and lonely, all of which constitute suicidal behaviours.

The last hypothesis sought to find out which parenting style would most likely predict suicidal behaviour among university students. The findings of the study revealed that authoritative parenting style, authoritarian parenting style, permissive parenting style and neglectful parenting style correlate students' suicidal behaviour. However, permissive (*laissez – faire*) parenting style was the strongest predictor of suicidal behaviour in the study. The findings of this study confirmed the findings of Milevsky, Schlechter, Nelter, & Kechn (2007) who found that permissive parenting contributes to depression among students because when parents are too lenient and allowed or tolerate whatever the children wish to do, the children have no focus and might do something dangerously inappropriate such as involving in suicidal behaviours.

Furthermore, the finding also agrees with views of Noor (2014), Joshi, Sharma, & Mehra (2009) and Baumrind (1996) who respectively maintained that permissive parenting style can cause problematic behaviours among children as well as contributing to depression and antisocial behaviours among children. However, the findings of this study negate earlier studies of Susheela (2018), Patock-Peckham *et al* (2009) and Hoeve, Blokland, Dubas, Loeber, Gerris, & Laan (2008) who had linked authoritarian parenting style to serious persistent delinquency such as murder, rape, robbery and selling of hard drugs, which are social and deviant behaviours.

Lastly, this finding is not surprising as permissive parents show less care and attention to their children, have no discipline, are too *laissez- faire* and allow their children to do whatever the children want.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that family types significantly influences suicidal behaviour among university students and that permissive parenting style strongly predict suicidal behaviour among university students in Edo State. It follows therefore that family types and parenting styles are correlates of suicide and suicidal behaviours among university students in Nigeria.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

- The Government and relevant authorities should make relevant policies to control substance abuse among youths and university students in Nigeria.
- The low level of suicide attempts among university students in Edo State should further be reduced, if possible prevented by all stakeholders (parents, students, guardians, counselors, administrators) in the educational system.
- Parents should be more responsible, bearing in mind that parenting is much more than just providing food, money, shelter, clothing and other needed school materials, as such; parents should show more cares and attention to their children.

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