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AWARENESS OF CAUSES AND STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTION OF SUICIDE AMONG TERTIARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study was on awareness of causes and strategies for prevention of suicide among tertiary school students from Anambra State Nigeria. Four research questions guided the study and descriptive survey design was used for the study. The population of the study was 84,610 students from the four Government owned tertiary schools in Anambra State. The sample size was made up of 3000 students drawn using simple random and purposive sampling technique. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach's alpha which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.69. Mean and standard deviation scores were used to answer the research questions. The findings revealed that tertiary students in Anambra State were aware of the causes and prevention of suicide. Among the recommendations of the study include advocacy for good governance, grass root awareness and creation of rehabilitation centers.

Keywords: awareness, causes, strategies, prevention, suicide, tertiary school students.

INTRODUCTION

Suicide is a self inflicted death with evidence of intention to die carried out in either an overt of covert manner. According to Ahmed Naguy et al (2020), suicide is the act of intentionally causing ones' own death. Ethnologically it is derived from the Latin root sui (self) and 'caedere' (to cut down) and it continues to be a complex public health problem of global caliber. Among the Igbos of Southern Nigeria, it is seen as a taboo and culturally detested.

The psychologist Maurice Fobber stated that the tendency to commit suicide is a function of the extent of the treat of acceptable life conditions experienced by the individual, the individuals' sense of competence and therefore the individuals' degree of hope.

Suicide can exist in different types. Durkhram (1997) and center for disease control (2017) proposed four types of suicides namely, egoistic, altruistic, anomic and fatalistic suicides. Suicidal acts could result from mental disorders (depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, personality disorder, anxiety disorder, substance usage and abuse, alcoholism etc.). According to Newman (2018) suicidal acts are also stress related, resulting from financial difficulties, bankruptcy, bullying and troublesome relations or previous attempts of suicide. Also, suicide rates are found to be high amongst vulnerable groups who experience discrimination such as refugees and migrants, indigenous peoples, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender intersex (LGBT) persons or prisoners.

Among adolescents and undergraduates, the prevalence of suicides could result from the following two major causes namely identity crises and role confusion, and risk factor. With respect to identity crises and role confusion among tertiary students, Portes et al (2020) noted that the phase of adolescence is a critical stage in the life of these young children. It is a time they undergo psychological, social, emotional, physical and sexual changes. While growing up, these children may experience strong feelings of confusion, self doubt, pressure to succeed, future uncertainty, stress and other factors. Portes et al argued that inability to resolve these properly could lead to self destructive behaviors.

Concerning risk factors, Guetzloe (2019) classified the risk factors as follows, namely, previous suicide attempts, mental disorders, co-occurring mental state, alcoholism, substance abuse disorder, family history of suicide, stressful life event, loss, easy access to lethal methods such as guns and explosives, exposure to suicidal behavior of others and biological conditions.

On previous suicide attempts, Nelson and Galas (2019) noted that students who had past history of suicide attempts are at a higher rate than others. They are more prone to attempt suicide again. Concerning mental disorders, co-occurring mental state, alcoholism and substance abuse, Lewis (2019) and Portes et al (2020) all noted that individuals experiencing the above mentioned difficulties are prone to suicide attempts or completed suicide. These are seen to exhibit disruptive, aggressive and impulse behaviors that could often lead to impaired judgment. They are further prone to protracted depression culminating in suicide.

Family history and family risk are other strong factors that may cause suicide. According to the center for disease control collaborated by Lewis (2019), family risk such as poor communication, poor parental relationship, parents suffering from addiction, high parental expectations and neglect could lead adolescents into suicidal acts. Equally family history of suicide can cause suicidal behaviors.

Studies have shown that a larger percentage of persons having family history of suicide completes or attempts suicide. This may be due to previous history of suicide behavior traced to the lineage and most often such acts are triggered by genetics or imitations. The center for disease control 2017 stated that suicides caused by genetic factors results from mental illness among which includes depression, schizophrenics, alcoholism and substance abuse.

Furthermore, Hahn (2018) noted that suicides may result from stressful life events or loss. Such stressful life events include getting into trouble at school with law enforcement agents, fighting, breaking of relationships, some psychological conditions such as parental loss, family disruption (divorce, separation) unwanted pregnancy, unemployment etc. increases suicide behaviors.

On the access to lethal methods, Eze (2002) noted that the most common location for occurrence of fire arm suicide is the home. The accessibility and availability of fire arm at home increases students suicide behavior.

Concerning exposure to suicidal behaviors of others Lewis (2019) stated that students may be stimulated to suicidal behaviors through exposures from media, Fictions and Films. Finally, certain biological conditions could also lead to suicidal behavior.

Having exhaustively discussed the causes of suicides, it becomes pertinent to look into strategies for prevention of suicides. According to Marcel (2017) suicide prevention is a collection of effort to reduce the risks of suicide. The prevention can occur in any of the following patterns namely; at individual levels, in relationship, community and society. Equally, suicide can be prevented by restricting access to means of suicide, by training primary care physicians and health workers to identify people at risk, as well as access and manage the crises, provide adequate follow up care and address the way it is portrayed in media. There is also a host of psychotherapeutic, pharmacological or neuromodulatory treatment etc.

Furthermore, suicide prevention could be achieved through effective school based counselling programs, form teacher intervention, parent involvement in children education, peer interaction and other external supports.

Concerning effective school based counselling programme, Guetzloe (2019) noted that school guidance counsellors have the capacity to recognize suicide warning signs and risk, thereby subjecting the individual to adequate therapy. In a similar manner, school personnel and teachers act as vital agents in suicide prevention. They should assist in recognizing students at risk and inform the school counsellor for adequate and appropriate measures. On this note Kings (2017) proffers referrals to therapists as indispensable based on the above and in the words of Portes et al (2016) the awareness of signs and symptoms of suicidal ideation should be priority to the community, family, peers, individuals and external supports.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The climate in Nigeria is so tensed that it is replete with frustrations. Only the yet to be conceived can claim ignorant of the statement above because even the unborn child in the womb perceives the hot social climate wind that pervades the society of today. It is a truism and in the words of the great laureate Chinua Achebe to state that there was a country. This is because of the very poor governance and high handiness of the present dispensation. These have led to corruption, collapse of administrative structures and systems, anarchy, apathy and lawlessness, enthronement and institutionalization of corruption etc. These have affected every facet of the society including our academic institution not devoid of the ugly ruptured and frustrating effects of the inglorious acts of our leaders. Among the recipients of the ailing

situation are our undergraduate students many among which are already tilting towards despair and a feeling of frustration which could lead to anxiety, depression and in extreme cases suicide behavior.

Therefore, it becomes pertinent to find out to what extent the tertiary students from Anambra State Nigeria and aware of the causes and prevention of suicide. Therefore, the problem of this study is to investigate tertiary students' awareness of the causes and prevention of suicide.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the students' awareness of the causes and prevention of suicide behavior amongst them. The study specifically sought to determine the following

1. Students awareness of the causes of suicide behaviors
2. Students awareness of strategies for individual prevention of suicide
3. Students awareness of the strategies for prevention of suicide in relationships
4. Students awareness of the strategies for prevention of suicide in the society

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

(1) What is the extent of students' awareness of the causes of suicide behavior?
(2) What is the extent of students' awareness of the strategies for individual prevention of suicide?
(3) What is the extent of students' awareness of the strategies for relationship prevention of suicide?
(4) What is the extent of students' awareness of the strategies for society prevention of suicide?

METHOD

The design was descriptive survey and the area of study was Anambra State. The population of the study was all the Government tertiary institutions in the state comprising of about 120,000 students. The schools include Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu Univeristy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe and Federal Polytechnic Oko (Ministry of Education). The sample size consists of 3000 students drawn across the schools using purposive sampling technique. The reliability of the instrument was established using split half method and the result analyzed using Cronbachs Alpha and which yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.76. A total of 3000 questionnaires were distributed and were all collected through eight research assistants. The questionnaires had four clusters and contains (49) items to measure students awareness of the causes and prevention of suicide among undergraduates. Four research questions guided the study. The research questions were answered using mean scores with the following rates to indicate the extent of awareness. Scores below the 1.5 mean mark were seen as very low extent, scores below 2.50 were seen as low extent from 2.50 to 3.49 as high extent while above 3.50 mean score were seen as very high extent. Also scores below the 2.50 mean mark were also rejected.

RESULTS

The data collected from the study were analyzed and the results presented in table form as follows:

Research question one: what is the extent of awareness of the causes of suicide behaviors among tertiary students in Anambra State Nigeria.

Table one: mean and standard deviation table on the extent of awareness of causes of suicide behaviors among the tertiary students in Anambra State.

S/N	Items on Extent of Awareness of Causes of Suicide	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1	Aware that depression can cause suicide	2.62	0.69	
2	Aware that anxiety can lead to suicide	2.89	0.74	
3	Substance usage and abuse can lead to suicide	2.92	0.85	
4	Addiction to alcohol results to suicide	2.87	0.72	
5	Inability to meet up school financial demand incites suicidal behaviors	2.79	0.68	
6	Bullying causes suicide behaviors	2.68	0.71	
7	Previous attempts of suicide	2.98	0.74	
8	High parental expectations and neglect	2.69	0.65	
9	Family disruption (divorce, separation)	2.79	0.71	
10	Poor grades and failures	2.82	0.69	
11	Parental loss	2.72	0.68	
12	Exposure to suicidal behaviors	2.87	0.71	
13	Unwanted pregnancy	2.92	0.69	
14	Grave medical conditions such as mutilation of vital organs	2.67	0.71	
15	Broken relationship	2.82	0.72	
16	Discrimination (colour, race, status)	2.97	0.69	
17	Disruptive behavior	2.39	0.72	

n = 3000

The table one above revealed that all the items rating students' awareness of causes of suicide were scored within the acceptable mean score range of 2.50 and 2.98 therefore indicating that the tertiary students from Anambra State to a high extent are aware of the causes of suicide.

Research question two: what is the extent of awareness of individual strategies of prevention of suicide among tertiary students in Anambra State?

Table two: mean and standard deviation table on the extent of awareness of individual strategies for preventing suicide.

S/N	Items on Awareness of Individual Strategies for Prevention of Suicide	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1	Learning warning signs	2.62	0.71	
2	Committed to social change	2.72	0.62	
3	Developing resilience	2.69	0.74	
4	Avoiding aggressive tendency	2.82	0.71	
5	Avoiding protracted depression	2.64	0.69	
6	Listening to media discussion on suicide	2.79	0.69	
7	Encouraging peer dialogue	2.89	0.72	
8	Confiding on your teacher	2.64	0.61	
9	Approaching counsellors	3.02	0.74	
10	Sharing your worries with friends	2.89	0.72	

n = 3000

Table two above indicated that all the items measuring students' awareness of the individual strategies for preventing suicide among tertiary students in Anambra State, Nigeria were rated above the acceptable mean mark hence indicating high extent of awareness.

Research question three: what is the extent of awareness of relationship strategies for prevention of suicide among tertiary students in Anambra State?

Table three: mean and standard deviation table on the extent of awareness of relationship strategy for preventing suicide.

S/N	Items on Awareness of Relationship Strategy for Prevention of Suicide	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1	Trust	2.90	0.71	
2	Openness	2.98	0.68	
3	Communication	2.68	0.64	
4	Dialogue	2.65	0.71	
5	Sharing your worries with your partner	2.72	0.78	
6	Discussing early signs	2.82	0.69	
7	Avoidance of family risk	2.79	0.73	
8	Managing crises properly	2.69	0.74	
9	Consulting school counselors	3.10	0.75	
10	Adequate follow up	2.72	0.69	

n = 3000

The table three above showed that all the items measuring the awareness of relationship strategy for preventing suicide were rated above the acceptable mean score of 2.50 and graded as high extent of awareness.

Research question four: what is the extent of awareness of society prevention strategy of suicide among tertiary school students in Anambra State?

Table four: mean and standard deviation table on the extent of awareness of society prevention strategy of suicide.

S/N	Items on Awareness of Society Prevention Strategy of Suicide among Tertiary Students	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1	Restricting access to means of suicide	2.69	0.74	
2	Training primary care officers	2.84	0.69	
3	Availability of physicians and health care workers	2.68	0.72	
4	Identify people at risk of suicide	2.90	0.74	
5	Provision of adequate follow up	2.89	0.69	
6	Checkmating the way media presents suicide	2.79	0.72	
7	Effective school based counselling programs	3.02	0.68	
8	Parent/teacher intervention	2.82	0.71	
9	Use of school personnel	2.92	0.76	
10	Use of referral services and therapist	2.72	0.75	
11	Awareness of early signs of suicide behavior	2.69	0.63	
12	Participation in conferences/workshops on suicide prevention	2.84	0.68	

n = 3000

The table above revealed that all the items rating the awareness of society strategy of suicide prevention were all scored above the mean mark and were rated high extent of awareness.

DISCUSSION

The discussion was carried out in line with the two major concepts in the study, namely awareness of cause of suicides and awareness of the strategies for prevention. Concerning the awareness of causes of suicide among tertiary school students of Anambra State Nigeria the result in table one indicated that the seventeen items used to appraise the extent tertiary school students of Anambra State had knowledge of the causes of suicide were all rated high extent. All the items were scored above the acceptable mean mark of 2.50. Such item includes; disruptive behavior, aggression, anxiety and protracted depression were rated high in extent. According to Lewis (2019) and Portes et al (2016) Individuals experiencing the above mentioned difficulties are prone to suicide. Equally Nelson and Galas (2019) underscored the following which were also scored high in extent by the students and they include: family history, mental disorder, alcoholism, substance usage etc.

Concerning the awareness of the strategies for prevention, the study indicated that three major strategies were adopted and they include the following, the individual, the relationship and society prevention strategies. On the awareness of the individual strategies for prevention of suicide, the result in table two revealed among others the student's ratings of the following items namely: approaching counsellors (3.02), learning of warning signs (2.63), positive usage of media discussion (2.79) etc. all the items were found to be above the average mean mark of 2.50 and consequently were rated high in extent. This is in line with the views of Guetzole (2019) who noted the school guidance programme as one of the major strong preventive factors. Similarly, Portes et al (2016) views the ability to recognize early warning signs as vital towards preventing suicide. With respect to table three and four which discussed the relationship and society awareness of suicide preventions, the scores were all found to be rated high by the students indicating that they were aware that items such as trust (2.90) openness (2..78), sharing worries (2.72), avoidance of family risk (2.72), managing crises (2.69),

parent teacher interaction (2.82), school personnel (2.92), conferences and workshops (2.84) are preventive in suicide. Kings (2017), Guetzole (2019) and Portes et al (2016) were emphatic on these measure as means of preventing suicide.

CONCLUSION

The hard times Nigeria is plunged into had warranted that measures be taken to curb natural behaviors that may result from despondency. One among such measures is to appraise the extent the tertiary students are aware of the causes and prevention of suicide. This is because in situations of despondency, many fall victims of suicide hence the need for the awareness on causes and prevention of suicide.

Suicide is willful termination of life and could be caused by bad economic situation and social climate as it is obtainable in Nigeria. The remedies to suicide involvement were classically presented anchoring the discussion on the individual, relationship and society strategies for prevention. In the overall, the study revealed that the tertiary students in Anambra State Nigeria appraised their level of awareness of causes and prevention of suicide to be high in extent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) Advocacy for good governance since it will help to reduce to the barest minimum incidences of suicides.
(2) More compelling advocacy and campaign on awareness should further be carried out to increase the level of awareness to very high extent.
(3) There is the need for grass root awareness creation.
(4) More researches are to be done to widen the scope of the causes and prevention of suicide.
(5) There is the need to open rehabilitation centers.

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