



POVERTY AND SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG STUDENTS IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN LAGOS STATE: NEED TO IMPROVE AND ENTRENCH MORAL/ETHICAL STANDARDS

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Abstract

This research examined the relationship between poverty and suicidal ideation (SI) among students in higher institutions in Lagos State. Suicidal thought is a wave among undergraduates transforming into suicidal attempts leading to suicide deeds in various campuses and the heifer society. The research adopted the descriptive correlational survey design. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The sample comprised 141 respondents who were randomly selected from Lagos State University, Ojo, Yaba College of Technology, Yaba, and Lagos State University of Education, Epe campus. Using the Poverty and Suicidal Ideation Scale (PSIS) as a research instrument to elicit information about poverty and SI among students of higher education, the PSIS reliability coefficient using Cronbach's Alpha test was 0.81. The instrument was administered individually in a group counselling setting. Data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, Pearson Product Moment correlational coefficient and ANOVA for stated hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. It was established that there was a significant relationship between poverty and suicidal ideation. Therefore, there is a need for an all-inclusive approach to alleviate the devastating effects of poverty on students' mental health; and cultivate moral/ethical standards.

Keywords:

Poverty, Suicidal
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Introduction

In recent years, the issue of poverty and its horrible results have become a growing trepidation the world over. Nigeria, as one of the most populous countries in Africa, wrestles with the polygonal challenges of poverty, often influencing its youth population particularly those pursuing higher education in a densely populated state like Lagos. This plethora of challenges daily has negative consequences on their moral lives, academics and total well-being of the students. These difficulties may include peer pressure unattainable goals, domestic concerns, financial trying, and preoccupying oneself with suicidal ideation. Suicidal ideation (SI) is a term used to depict a person with a strong destructive desire, inclination, or feeling towards unusual thought(s) or negative thinking about life or living (Ropaj, 2023; Nyorere et al., 2020), a domain of ideas, perceptions, and viewpoints that encouraging mental illness, absent-mindedness, and or attempts to end one's life (Hernandez-Torrano et al., 2020). It is like a pivot that swings both instinctual and conscious viewpoints in favour of taking or not taking human life (Breet et al., 2021; Granieri et al., 2022; Kukoyi et al., 2023). A way of fostering ideas about fleeing the human world (Safai & West, 2022); and demonstrating the success of withdrawing from the existence of life (Badejo & Tahir, 2022). Suicidal ideation is mainly the foundation that precipitates someone to engage in suicide (Harmer et al., 2022) and most of the time this thought is rendered unknown to the broad public (Harmer et al., 2023).

SI could be in two forms according to Purse (2020) distinguishes between two main types of suicidal ideation: dormant and acute. Nobile et al. (2022), dormant suicidal ideation is when a person wants to die without making any plans to do so, while acute suicidal ideation goes beyond death wishes but also includes a well-executed plot to commit suicide.

Thus, it is important to talk about the causes of suicidal ideation, it could strike at any time in a person's life and not based on their social standing (Raschke et al., 2022). Some of the causes of suicidal ideation are being unhappy (Wheaton et al., 2018), and unpredictable social support among students (Ashrafioun et al., 2016). Also, include loneliness, low self-esteem, learning difficulties, hardships and living below the poverty line (Okoye, 2019; Iceson et al., 2021) with the nation's economic stagnation making many students live in poverty (Mansi, 2020).

Some of the signs of suicidal ideation in students of higher institutions are hopelessness, emotional breakdown, abnormal preoccupation with violence cum mood swings between happiness and blue (Adeyemo et al., 2022), poverty and debt increment (Onyewa et al., 2020). An account of 20.4% of females higher in engaging in suicidal ideation to males 9.6%, but other studies revealed that male students are predominately involved in suicide action with a ratio of 4:1 times male to female involvement. Six per cent of males generally engage in suicidal ideation less frequently than females; the ratio of perpetrators is female (1) to male (3.2); and males have been predominant with the ratio of 3.6:1 in some states in Nigeria. (Ngbea et al., 2017). The result of the finding by Glenn et al. (2017) was a slight difference in females' and males' involvement in suicidal ideation but made no difference.

Poverty has been continually becoming an issue of national significance which needs urgent attention because of how it delimits Nigerian youths and students of higher

institutions. This resulted in many students' involvement in suicidal ideation and activities due to the deepening effects of students living in poverty in Nigeria and many other countries (Okoedion & Okolie, 2019; Graham & Ciciurkaite, 2022). It is also a known fact that the poverty condition of any individual disturbs the whole body system which affects well-being and builds worries in students' thoughts (Elias et al., 2022). It was noted that a hungry man can look for a solution by any means at his disposal, although many of them may have reasons to regret later with heart-troubling and negative thoughts resulting in suicidal ideation. These reasons combined to cause the students to look for a way to make up for their living below the poverty level and financial disability.

Additionally revealed that poverty become a serious concern the world over; its grave consequences on students' thoughts caused many of them to lose their lives, creating serious panic in the hearts of undergraduates owing to tough situations in Nigeria particularly a mega-state like Lagos. This equally threatens their welfare and well-being resulting in suicidal thinking that makes some of them continuously ask themselves *who is next to be a victim of suicide action*, this costly intent alone trauma suicidal ideation among them (Okolie et al., 2019).

Many young ones who living below the poverty line cum the economic recession in the country has been impending seriously to the students' live in higher institutions and making thing difficult for them to feed on Zero-One- Zero (0-1-0) formula daily, owing to students' dynamic in nature and struggle for survival, make some of them patronise and involve or getting attract in some doings not expected of an undergraduate student but felt it could serve as a means to meet an end financially by involving in sports betting and other related games even misdemeanour videos/videocassettes, rake in money with the hope of turning in money into their pockets to live out of poverty line but forgetting that it could swing either way; win or lose which endanger students' thoughts leading to various destructive ideations (Noah et al., 2021; Dosunmu et al., 2022).

Poverty and suicidal ideation impression cannot be completed without mentioning sex as a moderating factor in this research work. Sex presents a paradox when adolescent girls are more likely to have experienced suicidal ideation and suicidal attempts than boys, and adolescent boys are more likely to commit suicide, recent findings showed slight differences in females and males make no difference (Glenn et al., 2017). Similarly, sex has a considerable influence on the relationship between poverty and suicidal ideation, but the levels of males and females do not differ considerably (Stey, 2023). In addition, research carried out on the frequency of suicidal ideation and self-harm activities among boys and girls were comparable with little sharp difference (Campisi et al., 2020; Geoffroy et al., 2022) but Lu Lu et al. (2020) reviewed that girls are more likely to be involved in suicidal ideation and attempts than boys.

Statement of the Problem

Today's headlines overflowed (both at local and global levels) with WHO (2019) on World Suicide Prevention Day reporting that a soul is lost in less than one minute worldwide and the rate of involvement in SI keeps rising steeply (Black, 2023; Mckay et al., 2023).

Nigeria dailies are also not exempted from the news and reported cases of suicide as a result of the outcome of youths preoccupied with Suicidal ideation as a result of many of them living below the poverty line. Some instances included; a 500-level student of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho, Oyo state, and a 19-year-old student of Babcock University, Ogun state, who committed suicide in his parent's house in Lagos in 2017 (Vanguard Newspaper, 2019 April 6). All these and many suicide incidents cited above were cases involving students, The World Health Organisation (2020) stated that 11 students were among the 42 Nigerians who committed suicide in the half of 2019. It was asserted that the prevalence of suicidal ideation among higher institution students has turned out to be a common phenomenon and escalated more due to the halt of academic activities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and the disengagement of some students in pet jobs (Crispim et al., 2021; Okolie et al. (2020).

Purpose of the study

- i. To examine if there is any relationship between poverty and suicidal ideation among students in Higher Institutions in Lagos State.
- ii. To examine if there is any effect of gender on suicidal ideation among students in Higher Institutions in Lagos State.

Research Questions

- i. What are the levels of poverty among students in Higher Institutions in Lagos State?
- ii. How severe is suicidal ideation among students in Higher Institutions in Lagos State?

Research hypotheses

- i. There is no significant relationship between poverty and suicidal ideation among students in Higher Institutions in Lagos State.
- ii. There is no significant effect of gender on suicidal ideation among students in Higher Institutions in Lagos State

Methodology

The research adopted the descriptive correlational design to elicit information about poverty and suicidal ideation among students in all higher institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria. The sample used for the research comprised 141 participants who were randomly selected from Lagos State University, Ojo, Yaba College of Technology, Yaba, and Lagos State University of Education, Epe campus, all in Lagos State. The instrument designed by the researchers, known as the Poverty and Suicidal Ideation Scale (PSIS) was used for the data collection. The research instrument was validated by three experts in the field of psychometrics and its reliability was determined using Cronbach's Alpha and its reliability coefficient was 0.81. The research instrument comprised three sections: Section A sought information on respondents' socio-demographic data, Section B sought information on respondents' suicidal ideation with 21 items and Section C sought information on Poverty with 21 items. The instrument was personally administered to respondents and data collected were analysed using the percentages, Pearson Product Moment correlational coefficient (PPMCC) as well as t-test for stated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance and set at a p-value <0.05.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the levels of poverty among students in Higher Institutions in Lagos State?

Table 1

Levels of Poverty among Students in Higher Institutions

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High	82	58.2	58.2
	Average	25	17.7	75.9
	Low	34	24.1	100.0
	Total	141	100.0	

Table 1 shows that the level of poverty among 82 respondents (58.2%) is very high, poverty level of 25 respondents (17.7 %) is on the average while level of poverty among 34 respondents (24.1%) is low. This shows that poverty level among students more than three-quarter of respondents is more than average. It can therefore be deduced that majority of students in higher institutions in Lagos State have issues with poverty.

Research Question 2: How severe is suicidal ideation among students in Higher Institutions in Lagos State?

Table 2

Severity of Suicidal Ideation among Students in Higher Institutions

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Severe	72	51.1	51.1
	Mild	37	26.2	77.3
	Not Severe	32	22.7	100.0
	Total	141	100.0	

From Table 2, it was revealed that suicidal ideation is severe among 72 respondents (51.1%), mild among 37 respondents (26.2%) while suicidal ideation is not severe among 32 respondents (22.7%). This shows that suicidal ideation is not severe only among less than one-quarter respondents. This is a concern for all educational stakeholders.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between poverty and suicidal ideation among students in Higher Institutions in Lagos State.

Table 3

Mean and Standard Deviation of Relationship between Poverty and Suicidal Ideation of Students

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Suicidal Ideation	71.33	12.160	141
Poverty	70.47	12.064	141

Table 3 shows that the mean and standard deviation of respondents on the measure of their suicidal ideation was: mean = 71.33 & S D = 12.160 while their mean and standard deviation on the measure of their poverty was: mean = 70.47 & S D = 12.064. This shows that their means were very close.

Table 4
Correlations Between Poverty and Suicidal Ideation of Students in Higher Institutions

		SI	Poverty
SI	Pearson Correlation	1	.791**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	141	141
Poverty	Pearson Correlation	.791**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	141	141

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From Table 4, it was observed that the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) of the variables was 0.791, which means there is a strong positive correlation between the variables and that the correlation p-value = 0.00. Therefore, the correlation was significant at 0.05 level. Hence the null hypothesis was rejected. This then indicates that there is a significant relationship between poverty and suicidal ideation among students in higher institutions in Lagos State. In other words, students whose scores were high in poverty also had high scores in suicidal ideation and vice versa.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant effect of gender on suicidal ideation among students in Higher Institutions in Lagos State

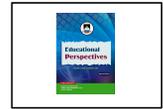
Table 5
Mean and Standard Deviation of Effect of Gender on Suicidal Ideation among Students in Higher Institutions in Lagos State

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SI	Male	75	70.20	11.364	1.312
	Female	66	72.61	12.974	1.597

Table 5 shows that the mean and standard deviation of male respondents on the measure of their suicidal ideation was: mean = 70.20 & S D = 11.364 while that of female was: mean = 72.61 & S D = 12.974. This shows that their means were very close.

Table 6
Independent Samples Test of the Effect of Gender on Suicidal Ideation among Students in Higher Institutions in Lagos State

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	Std. Error Diff
SI	Equal variances assumed	3.713	.056	-1.174	139	.242	-2.406	2.050
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.164	130.245	.247	-2.406	2.067



From Table 6, the independent t-test conducted revealed that $df = 139$, $F = 3.713$, and $p = 0.242$. This result showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the variables. Hence, the null hypothesis was not rejected. In other words, there was no significant effect of gender on suicidal ideation among students in higher institutions in Lagos State. That is, students' challenges with suicidal ideation are not gender specific.

Discussion

The findings of the study established that students in higher institutions in Lagos State have experienced a high level of poverty and a high level of suicidal ideation. The result recorded in the level of poverty and suicidal ideation among students in higher institutions in Lagos State is indeed in tandem with the numbers of students involved in suicidal ideation and activities due to the deepening effects of poverty condition on students in Nigeria (Elias et al., 2022; Graham & Ciciurkaite, 2022; Okoedion & Okolie, 2019).

The result obtained from hypothesis one indicated that there is a significant relationship between poverty and suicidal ideation among students in higher institutions in Lagos State. This implies that the higher the level of poverty, the higher the suicidal ideation level and vice versa because of the correlation. This finding could be associated with the fact that the resultant effect of poverty breeding suicidal ideation among students in tertiary institutions and threatens their welfare and well-being resulting in suicidal thinking that makes many of them live in fear, low self, psychological distress and making learning difficult (Iceson et al., 2021; Okolie et al., 2019).

The second hypothesis revealed that there was no significant effect of gender on suicidal ideation among students in higher institutions in Lagos State. Hence, the null hypothesis was not rejected and stated that there is no significant effect of gender on the suicidal ideation of students in higher institutions in Lagos State. This result agreed with the submission that showed little or no disparity effect between females and males (Glenn et al., 2017). Similarly, with a considerable influence on the relationship between poverty and suicidal ideation, but the levels of males and females do not differ considerably (Stey, 2023).

Conclusion

Without a doubt, if we are not swift in tackling poverty with the need to improve and as well as entrenching ethical standards there will be proliferation in our higher institutions of learning in Nigeria, in particular states like Lagos.

Need to improve and entrench moral/ethical standards

Based on the findings of the study the following could improve and entrench ethical standards:

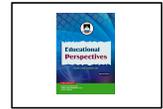
- a. Students should be encouraged to learn entrepreneurship.
- b. An all-inclusive approach to alleviating the devastating effects of poverty on students' mental health and cultivate moral and ethical standards.
- c. Entrenching moral/ethical standards that have a significant effect on students in higher



institutions in Lagos state.

- d. Support leaders among students who demonstrate strong moral and ethical principles on campus.
- e. Engaging the students in community service and projects that promote ethical behaviour and social duty.
- f. Engaging individuals to reflect on their own actions and choices in aiming for improvement.
- g. Promoting moral and ethical education in all higher institutions in Lagos State through emphasising the importance of values and virtues in their daily life.

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