



MEDIA REPORTING, PUBLIC ENLIGHTENMENT CAMPAIGNS AND SUICIDAL TENDENCIES AMONG OSHODI YOUTHS, LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA: COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of media reporting and public enlightenment campaigns on suicidal behaviour among Oshodi youths in Lagos State, Nigeria. The survey research design was adopted. From a population consisting of all the Oshodi youths, the Snowball sampling technique proposed by Jones (1997) was used to select 150 respondents. Three hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance were formulated to guide the study. A researcher-made questionnaire 'Media Reporting and Public Enlightenment Campaign Questionnaire (MRAPECQ)' was used for data collection. The population t-test and independent t-test were used for data analysis. Findings revealed that suicidal tendency among Oshodi youths was not significantly high and media reporting and public enlightenment campaigns did not significantly influence suicidal tendency. Counselling implications and recommendations were proffered such as, Counsellors are to ensure that a more restrained reporting of suicidal cases is used as a way of decreasing the imitation or copycat effect, and the need to counsel those embarking on public enlightenment campaigns to make them youth-friendly.

Keywords: Media reporting, public enlightenment, campaign, suicidal tendencies, youths.

INTRODUCTION

Stories about people especially youths engaging in suicidal behaviours these days are becoming very common. The rate of engagement in suicidal behaviours is happening at a very alarming rate. Hardly will a day pass without one hearing of a youth who has either committed suicide and died or has the intention to commit suicide. This turn of events places a nation in a bad light because the general assumption is that the prevalence of suicidal behaviour is a pointer to the fact that the things that make life worth living are not in place.

It is obvious that amenities like health facilities, good schools, good roads, constant electricity, portable water coupled with security, employment opportunities and easy means of livelihood immensely contribute to meaningfulness in life. Where these are not in place, the tendency is for people especially the youth to start engaging in antisocial behaviours, especially suicidal behaviours. People who engage in suicidal behaviours often feel helpless, hopeless, and depressed.

Kerkhof (2004) revealed that suicidal behaviour is more among young women, people with low

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socio-economic status such as low educational levels, the unemployed, the disabled, divorced, separated and those with a terminal illness. It has been observed, therefore, that economic hardships such as poor funding from parents or guardians, hunger, unemployment, and sickness may predispose students and others to suicidal behaviour.

Suicidal behaviour is the third leading cause of death globally (World Health Organization, 2012) and the incidence of youths' suicide in Western countries is estimated to be as high as 9.9 per 100,000 (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). According to Jaffe (2014), citing the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (2010), there are about 38,000 successful suicides per year, with at least 380,000 attempts. Robert (2008) noted that in technically advanced countries of the world, it has been reported that suicidal behaviour is a leading cause of psychiatric emergencies among children and adolescents; he also noted that it is one of the strongest predictors of psychiatric admissions. These, all reveal a prevalence of suicidal tendencies. In the United States of America for instance, suicidal ideation and attempts among adolescents have been reported as being increasingly recognised as important public health problems. In Nigeria too, suicides among youths have been on the increase in recent times. No wonder one often hears such news headlines as 'man jumps into the lagoon and dies', 'student commits suicide because of poor grades', 'man's body found hanging on the ceiling fan in his room', 'man dies after intentionally drinking poisonous liquid', and so on. Suicidal behaviour is a behaviour that makes a person intentionally want to kill him or herself. Lahti (2014) defined suicide as the act of killing oneself, deliberately initiated and performed by the person concerned in the full knowledge or expectation of its fatal outcome. Turecki and Brent (2016) defined suicide as a fatal self-injurious act with some evidence of intent to die. This can also be referred to as intentionally desiring to take one's own life or destroying one's own interests or prospects. Castle and Kreipe (2007) explained suicidal behaviour to include suicidal ideation (frequent thoughts of ending one's life), suicide attempts (the actual event of trying to kill oneself) and completed suicide (which involves death). Kerkhof (2004) asserted that suicidal behaviour is any deliberate action and inaction intended to end one's life for the purpose of escaping unbearable sufferings or to help change adverse conditions of living. Suicidal

behaviour is according to Robert (2008), any deliberate action that has potential life-threatening consequences such as having an overdose of a drug or crashing a car deliberately. Castle and Kreipe (2007) also added that suicidal behaviour comprises a complex set of behaviours that involve multiple exacerbating risk factors which include social, environmental, cognitive, and psychological causes. According to Maris (2002), suicidal behaviour is a problem-solving behaviour and people who have it often believe that the real lasting solution to their problems is to die. This is to say that people whose minds are bent on suicide see it as a way out, but one begins to wonder how something that leaves one dead is an acceptable solution to his own challenges. Is there no better option than to commit suicide?

Canetto (2001) categorised suicidal behaviour into two namely suicidal action or inaction or behaviour in which the person dies, that is complete (fatal) suicide, and that in which the person survives that is, attempted (non-fatal) suicide. Robert (2008) however, categorised suicidal behaviour into four namely: completed suicide, suicidal attempts, suicidal ideation, and self-destructive actions. In completed suicide, the victim dies completely while in the suicidal attempt, the person attempting suicide survives. Suicidal ideation includes overt suicidal behaviours and communications such as suicide threats and expressions of wish to die. Self-destructive actions include behaviours that do not cause immediate death but gradually lead to death after a long time such as alcoholism, sexual abuse, and drug abuse.

The issue of suicidal behaviour is seen as a public health concern, especially by counsellors, media practitioners, government, public healthcare professionals, teachers, and parents. This group of people have made various efforts to ensure the prevention of suicidal behaviours such as treating mental illness, improving coping strategies of at-risk people, and reducing risk factors such as poverty and unemployment rate. Added to these is the suggestion of the use of self-esteem enhancement programmes to beef up self-esteem by Denwigwe and Akpama (2013) as they cited Woo Bae and Brekke (2003) who claimed that self-esteem is the experience of being confident to cope with the basic challenges of life and of being worthy of happiness. Denwigwe and Uche (2020) asserted that adolescents should be helped to develop the right self-esteem for better adjustment in life and listed such programmes as self-esteem

enhancement programmes, leadership training programmes, assertiveness training, and value re-orientation programmes to be very relevant.

Despite these efforts and suggestions, suicide behaviour seems to be on the high side in Nigeria, especially among youths. For instance, Olufemi (2019), reported the case of a student of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife, Nigeria, who committed suicide over poor academic performance. Sahara Reporters (2019) reported the case of a 400-level student at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka who committed suicide by drinking two bottles of Snipper (an insecticide) while a student of Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria committed suicide after lamenting of a brush with the Special Anti-Robbery Squad officials (Olatunji, 2020). Different sections of the media are agog with news of rampant suicidal cases, even with ongoing public enlightenment campaigns against suicides, so much that the researchers were perturbed as to whether media reporting and public enlightenment campaigns can influence suicidal tendencies. The incessant suicidal cases by the youth have, therefore, motivated the researchers to investigate the influence of media reporting and information dissemination through public enlightenment on suicidal tendencies among Oshodi youths in Lagos State, Nigeria. There is a paucity of literature in Nigeria on the influence of media reporting and public enlightenment campaigns on suicidal tendencies among youths which is a gap that this study would fill.

Mba (2010) studied the prevalence and prevention of suicidal behaviours among undergraduates of universities in south-eastern states of Nigeria: 1999-2008, using the descriptive survey research design and a sample of 891 undergraduates selected through multi-stage procedures from the universities in the study area. Using means, percentages, t-test and one way analysis of variance, as statistical tools, the findings of the study were summarized as follows: there was very low prevalence of completed suicide in 1999-2000 (27.47%); in 2001-2002 (23.07%); in 2003-2004 (19.80%); in 2005-2006 (15.48%); and in 2007-2008 (13.18%); there was very low prevalence of suicidal attempts in 1999-2000 (27.21%); in 2001-2002 (23.53%); in 2003-2004 (18.38%); in 2005-2006 (16.91%); and in 2007-2008 (13.97%); there was a low prevalence of suicidal ideation among the students studied ($x = 1.47; SD = 0.62$); and there was also a low prevalence of indirect self-destructive behaviours

among the undergraduates studied ($x = 1.47; SD = 0.59$).

Media reporting involves the use of media such as television, newspaper, internet, radio and so on, to pass the information on certain issues to a large group of people. Media reporting is a veritable instrument for educating the masses on certain salient issues in society. Media strongly influence community attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours and play a vital role in politics, economics, and social practices and in influencing suicidal behaviour (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2000). WHO (2000) further stated that one of the many ways that may lead a vulnerable person to commit suicide could be publicity about suicides in the media. In other words, media reports on suicide cases can result in more suicides. Thus, following the media report of suicide either on the television, radio or print media, youths may copy the same methods used in that case to commit suicide. This according to Cheng, Hawton, Lee and Chen (2008), is known as the modelling effect (*Werther effect or copycat suicide*). For instance, barely two weeks after a young man dived into the lagoon from the Third Mainland Bridge in Lagos, Nigeria and died, a 28-year-old UBER passenger also dived into the same lagoon from the same third Mainland bridge because his girlfriend jilted him, although he was lucky to survive (Olatunji, 2020). These two cases of jumping into the lagoon probably took a cue from the case of the medical doctor who was reported by Hanafi (2017) to have jumped into the same lagoon through the third mainland bridge. Luxten, June and Fairall (2012) in their study revealed that there is increasing evidence that the internet and social media can influence suicide-related behaviour (based on how suicide cases are reported). It is pertinent to state that the way and manner the suicide case is reported matter a lot. Therefore, care should be taken to remove from the report things that will stimulate others to commit suicide such as the implements and strategies used in committing suicide.

Stack (2003) who investigated the association of suicide deaths with suicide news in longitudinal and spatial dimensions, revealed that suicidal deaths were influenced by media reporting of both major and minor suicidal events. Cheng et al (2008) investigated the impact of the media reporting of the suicide of a male television celebrity by including all the suicides that occurred between 2003 and 2005 in Taiwan ($n=10,945$) in the study. To examine whether there was an increase in suicides during the four-

week period after extensive media reports of the celebrity suicide, they conducted a Poisson time-series autoregression analysis. Cheng et al (2008) revealed that there was a marked increase in the number of suicides, with the age groups in which the increase occurred, being younger than the age of the celebrity. This showed that media reporting could promote suicidal behaviours.

A variety of public enlightenment programmes have been on such as dissemination of information against suicidal tendencies through conferences, workshops, youth development programmes, life skill training, town hall meetings and so on. John, Alan et al (2005) cited by Jaffe (2014) reported that despite the popularity of public awareness and education campaigns as health interventions, their effectiveness in reducing suicidal behaviour has seldom been systematically evaluated. Studies revealed that public enlightenment campaigns at best improve the knowledge and attitude of people towards suicidal behaviour but did not decrease suicidal behaviour. Hor and Taylor (2010) asserted that the only consistent protective factor for suicide was delivery of and adherence to effective treatment.

A mental health awareness programme for youths targeted at suicide prevention by Wasserman, Hoven, and Wasserman, et al, (2012) revealed that there was help in improving the knowledge of and attitudes toward suicide but did not show a decrease on suicidal behaviour. Jaffe (2014), referred to a study by Dumesnil and Verger (2009) which looked at 200 publications between 1987 and 2007 describing depression and suicide awareness programs targeted to the public and found that the programs contributed to modest improvement in public knowledge of and attitudes toward depression or suicide, but could not find that the programs actually helped increase care-seeking or decrease suicidal behaviour. Sanburn (2010) in a study revealed that billboard advertisements had negative effects on adolescents, making them less likely to endorse help-seeking strategies. A study by Matsubayashi, Ueda, and Sawada (2014) on the effect of public awareness campaigns on suicides: evidence from Nagoya, Japan, however, investigated the relationship between suicide rates and a campaign meant to increase public awareness of depression and encourage people to seek help and revealed that wards of the city that had more frequent distributions of the promotional pamphlets about depression symptoms and mental health resources saw

decreases in the number of suicides in the following months. They also concluded that suicide rates among men decreased following the public awareness campaign.

The aim of this research, therefore, was to investigate the influence of media reporting and public enlightenment campaigns on suicidal tendencies. Media reporting and public enlightenment were the independent variables while the dependent variable was suicidal tendency. For this research, print media reporting and broadcast media reporting were considered as sub-variables of media reporting, while youth development programmes and town hall meetings were chosen as sub-variables for public enlightenment campaigns.

Hypotheses

1. Suicidal tendency among Oshodi youths is not significantly high.
2. There is no significant influence of media reporting on suicidal tendencies among Oshodi youths.
3. There is no significant influence of public enlightenment campaigns on suicidal tendencies among Oshodi youths.

METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive survey research to ascertain the influence of media reporting and public enlightenment campaigns on suicidal tendencies among Oshodi youths in Lagos State Nigeria. The youths in Oshodi, Lagos State, Nigeria made up the study population. The snowball sampling technique proposed by Jones (1997) was used to select a sample of 150 youths. This involved using some youths who showed interest in the study to inform other youths who were also ready to be chosen as study participants. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-made, four-point Likert-like questionnaire called 'Media reporting and public enlightenment campaigns questionnaire (MRAPECQ)'. Section A provided information on personal data of the respondents such as sex, age, occupation, preference for print media reporting or broadcast media and preference for youth development programmes or town hall meetings. Section B comprised 20 statements arranged in three clusters according to the study variables, namely media reporting (6 statements), public enlightenment campaigns (6 statements) and suicidal tendencies (8 statements). The categories of responses were Strongly agreed (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D), weighing

4,3,2,1 respectively. Experts on Media Communication, Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation helped to establish the face validity of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was established through a test-retest method using thirty (30) youths who had similar characteristics with the study participants but were not involved in the study. A Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.65 was obtained and was deemed fit for the study. The instruments for data analysis were the population t-test and the independent t-test. The researchers

administered the instruments on the respondents and ensured a 100 per cent retrieval rate.

RESULTS

The data collected for this study was analysed based on the three hypotheses of the study which were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 1

Suicidal tendency among Oshodi youths is not significantly high. The summary of the population t-test analysis of the Suicidal tendency among Oshodi youths is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Population t-test analysis of the Suicidal tendency among Oshodi youths.

Variable	N	\bar{X}	SD	t-cal.
Youths' suicidal tendency	150	43.8	253.8	.668
Reference mean		30		

Significant at .05 level, df = 149, critical t-value = 1.96

The calculated t- value from table 1 was .668 while the critical t-value was 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 149 degrees of freedom. With the calculated t being less than the critical t, research hypothesis 1 which stated that suicidal tendency among Calabar South youths is not significantly high was retained, and the alternative was rejected. It follows that suicidal tendency among Oshodi youths is not high.

Hypothesis 2.

There is no significant influence of media reporting on suicidal tendencies among Oshodi youths. The summary of the independent t-test analysis of the influence of media reporting on the suicidal tendencies of Oshodi youths is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of media reporting on Suicidal tendencies among Oshodi youths.

Media reporting	N	\bar{X}	SD	T-value
Youths who prefer Print media reporting	70	18.3714	5.20638	.97
Youths who prefer Broadcast media reporting	80	19.1025	4.77717	

Significant at .05 level, df = 148, critical t-value = 1.96

The result in Table 2 revealed that the calculated t- value of .97 was less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 148 degrees of freedom. Based on this, hypothesis 2 which states that there is no significant influence of media reporting on the suicidal tendencies among Oshodi youths was retained. This means that media reporting has no significant influence on suicidal tendencies among Oshodi youths.

Hypothesis 3.

There is no significant influence of public enlightenment campaigns on suicidal tendencies among Oshodi youths. The summary of the independent t-test analysis of the influence of public enlightenment campaigns on suicidal tendencies among Oshodi youths is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of public enlightenment campaigns on suicidal tendencies among Oshodi youths.

Public enlightenment Campaigns	N	\bar{X}	SD	T-value
Youths who prefer Youth development programmes	90	18.0667	4.6345	1.825
Youths who prefer Town hall meetings.	60	19.3833	3.8183	

Significant at .05 level, df = 148, critical t-value = 1.96

The result in Table 3 revealed that the calculated t- value of 1.825 was less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 148 degrees of freedom. Based on this, hypothesis 3 which states that there is no significant influence of public enlightenment campaigns on suicidal tendencies among Oshodi youths was retained. It follows that the public enlightenment campaign does not influence suicidal tendencies among Oshodi youths.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of hypothesis one showed that the suicidal tendency among Oshodi youths was not significantly high. This is supported by Mba (2010) who studied the prevalence and prevention of suicidal behaviours among undergraduates of universities in south-Eastern states of Nigeria: 1999-2008 and revealed that there was a very low prevalence of completed suicide in the universities studied, there was a low prevalence of suicidal attempts among undergraduates of universities in the South-Eastern States of Nigeria, and a low prevalence of suicidal ideation.

The result of hypothesis two revealed that there was no significant influence of media reporting of suicide on suicidal tendency or behaviour among Oshodi youths. The result is not consistent with a review of studies by Stack (2003) who investigated the association of suicide deaths with suicide news in longitudinal and spatial dimensions and revealed that suicidal deaths were influenced by media reporting of both major and minor suicidal events. The finding was not also in line with the finding by Cheng et al (2008) that there was a marked increase in the number of suicides after the media reporting of the suicide committed by a male celebrity, with the age groups in which the increase occurred, being younger than the age of the celebrity.

Hypothesis three revealed that the public enlightenment campaign did not significantly influence the suicidal tendencies among Oshodi youths. This finding aligns with a study by Dumesnil and Verger (2009) cited by Jaffe (2014)

which revealed no evidence that the public awareness campaigns helped increase care-seeking or decrease suicidal behaviour. This is not in line with the findings of the study by Matsubayashi, Ueda, and Sawada (2014) which revealed that wards of the city who received more frequent distributions of the promotional pamphlet on depression symptoms and mental health resources saw decreases in the number of suicides in the following months, and that suicide rates among men decreased following the public awareness campaign.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the influence of media reporting and public enlightenment campaigns on suicidal tendencies among Oshodi youths in Cross River State Nigeria. It emphasized that suicidal tendency is an issue of public health importance and revealed the need to curtail it. It was noted that the youths who are the future leaders of Nigeria are not spared from engaging in suicidal behaviours, therefore, all hands must be on deck to ensure that suicidal tendencies among the youths are reduced to the barest minimum. Improving the welfare of young people especially their mental health care is very paramount.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, the study recommends the need for government, non-governmental organisations, parents, school administration, teaching staff and school-based mental health professionals to collaborate with respect to implementing a proactive suicide prevention regime. Activities that gainfully engage the minds of youths and which divert their attention from suicide and other deadly ventures should be promoted by the government, teachers, parents, and significant others. Efforts should be consciously made by all to reveal any behaviour or talks by anybody that point towards an intention to commit suicide.

COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

Counsellors have a big role in ensuring that programmes for the prevention of suicidal behaviour are appropriately implemented. They should encourage the government, non-governmental organisations, parents, school administration, teaching staff and school-based mental health professionals to collaborate with respect to implementing a proactive suicide prevention regime. The youths are very energetic and adventurous; hence, counsellors should ensure that their minds are gainfully engaged in things that will divert their attention from negative ventures like suicides. A more restrained reporting of suicides should be used as a way of decreasing the imitation or copycat effect. Those embarking on public enlightenment campaigns are to include youth friendliness in their campaign measures. There is a need to embark on further studies using youths from other sections of the country as study participants.

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