Original Article

SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG OUT-OF-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH REFORMS

Animba Ijeoma Evelyn (Ph.D.), Osim Happiness Ukamaka and Ezema Edith Obianuju (Ph.D.)

Department of Educational Foundations, Enugu State University of Science and Technology
Email:
animba.evelyn@esut.edu.ng/
Happiness.osim@esut.edu.ng/
Ezema.edith@esut.edu.ng

| **Abstract** | This paper investigated relationship between personality traits and suicidal ideation among out-of-school adolescents in Nigeria. Data from different scholars and researchers in Nigeria and outside Nigeria was used in critical dissection of the problem under study. Education is the foundation and instrument for social change in any society. No nation develops educationally, economically and mentally when her young adolescents battle with suicidal ideation and suicide. According to UNICEF, one in four young Nigerian adolescents is prone to suicide, hence; need for total overhaul in the nation's education and mental health care in order to arrest the problem. The menace of out-of- school is becoming worrisome as Nigerian policy is not yet ready to address it. This explains the reasons her educational policy is still a national discourse with undoubtedly a number of significant impediments in the last decade as it continues to struggle with implementation and assurance of quality educational policy. This paper therefore; x-rayed suicidal ideation among out-of-school adolescents in Nigeria. It also investigated the need to use education in dealing with suicidal issues from cradle of adolescence, given to the fact that suicide and suicidal ideation is common among young people especially out-of-school adolescents. Using secondary sources of data and different research views across the world, highlight was given on suicidal ideation amongst out-of- school adolescents can be tackled through comprehensive education and mental health reforms. It was recommended among others for a total overhaul of the educational policy embedded in critical thinking in order to handle suicidal ideation among adolescents. |

Keyword: Utilization, digital tools, biology, teaching and learning

Introduction

Education is the building block of every society. It is a fundamental human right and one of the targets of the UN Sustainable Development Goals to ensure inclusive, equitable and qualitative education while promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

According to Universal Basic Education Act (2004) and associated state UBE Laws, every Nigerian child is entitled to free and compulsory education while Nigerian Policy on Education (2014), section 4 states that the government will provide functional basic education for adults and youths who have never had

the opportunity of formal education. However, according to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2024), Nigeria has the highest number of out of school children in the world (18.3 million). This means that one in every five of the world's out of school children is in Nigeria. Out of school children refer to children who are yet to be enrolled in any formal education excluding primary education. They are children who are supposed to be in school but they are not due to parental and governmental failure to provide accessible quality education for them (UNICEF, 2024). Out of school children are young children in the age group of 1 to 16 that are roaming the street without access to a functional educational system (Ojelade, Aiyedun and Aregebesola, 2019). At a glance, out of school situation of Nigeria is as follows; 1 in 3 children are out of school (10.2 million at primary and 8.1 million at junior secondary), 12.4 million children never attended school and 5.9 million left school early. Only 1 in 3 adolescents eligible for senior secondary are attending. More than 50% of girls are not attending school at basic education level. 66% of all out of school children are in the Northeast and Northwest of Nigeria, 86% are in rural areas while 65% are from poor families. Though primary education is officially free and compulsory, only 61% of 6–11-year-olds attend school regularly and 35.6% of 36-59 months receive early childhood education. In the north, the picture is bleaker with a net attendance of 53% and girl child attendance of 47.7% (UNICEF, 2024)

One of the major public health issues that has become rampant throughout the world is suicidal ideation among young people. Approximately, one million people commit suicides every year and adolescents constitute the most vulnerable group (WHO, 2014). Suicidal tendency has been declared a case of emergency as a health problem all over the world. In Nigeria, more than one million young people commit suicide yearly (APA, 2022). Suicidal ideation has

received increased attention worldwide as it is believed to be a prior step to a suicide attempt and completed suicide. Many young people have shown increased signs of suicidal ideation and attempts. Among 15-24 years old, suicide has become the third most common reason for death (Sailo and Sawmzeli, 2024). There may be number of reasons behind it however, psychopathological, problems like depression may be the strongest predictor to suicidal ideation. Other factors include, insecurity, poverty and family related issues. Sexual abuse also play important role. As a relatively common phenomenon among young people, suicide is a waste of human life and resources and those who consider it as a way to deal with problem, formulate a plan of self-harm (Nock, Kessler and Franklin, 2016). Moreover, suicide is a tragedy that has a lasting impact on families, communities and nations. In Nigeria, Ayoko (2022), reported a prevalence rate of 20% for suicide ideation and 12% of self-harm among young people. Meanwhile, death by suicide have received little or no recognition with most cases mistakenly labeled as an accident. Also, due to its sensitive nature and associated stigma, suicide is occasionally not acknowledged or reported. In Nigeria, few studies have been carried out on suicidal ideation. This could be attributed to poor surveillance and socio-economic factors associated with suicide as well as the stigma it carries. Moreover, suicide attempts are criminalized rather than seen as mental health problem.

Mental health of out of school young people has become a topic of increasing concern in recent years primarily due to series of evidence pointing to their higher vulnerability to mental distress when compared to in-school young people (Kogien, Marcon, Modena, Bittencout, Reio and Faria, 2023). This is because suicide is a public health problem and one of the leading causes of mortality among young populations (UNICEF, 2014). Thus, suicidal ideation holds significant clinical and epidemiological

relevance because it is a key precursor to suicide attempts and deaths due to suicide as well as a marker for other mental health problems. According to International Classification of Diseases (2023), suicidal ideation are thoughts, ideas or ruminations about the possibility of ending ones' life ranging from thinking that one would be better off dead to formulation of elaborate plans. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders fifth Edition (DSM-5), defined suicidal ideation as thoughts about self-harm with deliberate consideration or planning of possible technique of causing one's own death (2022).

Furthermore, adolescents represents a social group where suicidal ideation is more widespread because of its association with high level of psychological stress and low self-esteem (WHO, 2014).The presence and frequency of suicidal ideation during this delicate phase of life has been associated also with family pressure, family role reversal, economic difficulty, lack of family support, negative environment, insecurity, bully, drug abuse and alcohol abuse. This is because adolescence is a phase of life between childhood and adulthood. It is a unique stage of human development and an important time for laying good health foundation because adolescents experience physical, cognitive and psychosocial growth. This often affects how they feel, think, make decisions and interact with the world around them. Adolescence is also a stressful time filled with body changes, changes in feelings, confusion, fear, and doubt. For some adolescents, this period is easily navigable, while for others it is very unsettling. Therefore, adolescent personality becomes a determinant on how well the issues are handled. Together with the training of the mind through education, adolescents are better equipped for life (UNICEF, 2014).

Warning Signs of Suicidal Ideation

According to World Health Organization (2014), the following are the warning signs of suicidal ideation. The symptoms of suicidal ideation range from isolation from loved ones, self-loathing or self-hatred,

feelings of hopelessness or trapped, talking about death, giving away possessions increase in substance abuse, increased mood swings, anger, rage, engaging in risky behaviour such as drug use/abuse, unprotected sex and assessing means of suicide Understanding the phenomenology and etiology of suicidal thought is very important for advancing strategies to assess risk for and to prevent suicidal behaviour. This is because suicidal ideation ranges from passive ideation (desire to die) to active ideation (desire to kill oneself) (WHO, 2014).

Symptoms of Suicidal Ideation

According to World Health Organization (2014) and Suicide Prevention Resource Center (2018), symptoms of suicidal ideation are classified into three categories: behavioural, cognitive and emotional

i. Behavioural symptoms. These include talking about death, giving away prized possession, decreased social contact, increased drug use/abuse, withdrawal from pleasurable activities, threat to commit suicide and other unsafe behavioural practices.

ii. Cognitive symptoms. Prevalent symptoms here are preoccupation with death and the belief that dying by suicide is the best escape from unbearable physical and emotional pains or suffering. Here, individuals may progress from suicidal thoughts to ideation.

iii. Emotional symptoms. These are evident in feeling of helplessness, emotional agony, psychosis, self-despising, hopelessness, paranoia, emotional irritability, mood swings, changes in personality, severe nervousness and emotional disturbance.

Types of suicidal ideation

a. Passive suicidal ideation: This describes when someone has thought about death or a desire for death, but they are not making plans to harm themselves (Skeldel, 2022). While passive, these thoughts are still dangerous and difficult in coping with suicidal thoughts. Although these are no active plans to

commit suicide; it may lead to situations in which individuals may engage in riskier behaviour as a result of these thought. Perceived as less of a risk compared to active suicidal ideations, these thoughts can be still be dangerous. When accompanied by high level of depression and suicide, passive suicidal ideation can influence ones' desire to die and thoughts of self-harm.

b.   Active suicidal ideation: This is characterized by having a specific plan or intent to take one's own life. It goes beyond mere thought and involves a clear intention to carry out self-harm. Active suicidal ideation is considered a higher risk situation because there is a greater likelihood that the individual may take immediate action to harm themselves (Liu, 2021).

Causes of suicidal ideation

According to Fadipe, Ajokpa and Uwadia (2018), the following are causes of suicidal ideation among adolescents:

a.   Hereditary. Adolescents from families with a history of mental illness have higher risk of developing suicidal thoughts and emotional sickness.

b.   Loss of identity. Due to hardship, poverty and inability to develop life skills through education, young people may become traumatized by how bleak the future is for them thus resort to suicidal ideation and suicide as a way of escape.

c.   Financial problem. Overwhelming debt, gambling issues and drug abuse can be stressful leading to suicidal thoughts.

d.   Sexual abuse. According to Kavalidou, 2017, this is an important precursor to suicidal ideation. Ciesielski, (2013), further pointed to physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, drug abuse and alcohol as the major causes of suicidal ideation.

e.   Loneliness. Many adolescents feel lonely regardless of social contact. This feeling grows when an individual is an introvert compared to an extrovert.

Causes of out of school Syndrome in Nigeria

According to Niyi, Chinweuba and Victor, (2022), the following are causes of out of school syndrome in Nigeria:

i.   Poor funding for Education. All levels of education in Nigeria experience poor funding hence is a major contributor to-out-of school syndrome. Nigeria budgetary allocation for education is far below the UNESCO-recommended 26%, while the little allocated for basic education is either diverted or misappropriated by politicians, officials and school administrators (Ogunode and Stephen, 2021). This position is supported by Raliyat, Umma and Aisha (2022), who observed that 26 out of 36 state governors in Nigeria has failed to provide the recommended funds needed to access 33.6-billion-naira grant provided to Universal Basic Education Fund by World Band since 2015-2022. The authors further opined that; Nigeria's current situation is a result of insufficient investment in education. Since inception of democracy in Nigeria, the highest budgetary allocation for education has been 3%, they stressed.

ii.   Corruption. Ogonode and Stephen (2021), posited that administration of basic education in Nigeria is infected with different levels of corrupt practices. Nigeria over the years has been indicted by transparency international for cases of fund misappropriations of stealing funds allocated to education (Adegboyega, 2019). According to some of the reports, corruption is a common practice in the education sector of the country. These corrupt practices affect accessibility to education, quality of education, inclusion and learning outcomes with devastating consequences on the national economic growth, life chances of children, families and society at large. Adegboyega further highlighted resource misallocation, corrupt procurement, fake qualifications and corrupt recruitment as some of the various challenges facing education as a result of corruption. The indication according to Ogonodo and Stephen (2021), noted that Nigeria is one of the 37 countries globally losing significant education

investments-approximately 129 billion USD-annually-because children are not learning.

iii. Poor implementation of Child Rights Act. According to Child Rights Act of 2003, education is compulsory for every Nigerian child. However, it is the obligation of the government to foster implementation of the child rights act and national policy on education. It is rather unfortunate that some state and local governments in Nigeria; are yet to begin the implementations to a greater degree especially in the northern part of Nigeria which accounts for the largest number of out of school children (Raliyat, Umma and Aisha, 2022). Though these programmes are present however, the level of implementation is very poor. The United Nations International Children's Education Fund further attested that 31 out of 36 states in Nigeria have enacted equivalents of Child Right Act while 5 states are yet to domesticate the law (Ahmed-Gassau, 2022).

iv. Insecurity. One of the issues affecting education as well as causing out of school syndrome in Nigeria is widespread attacks on educational institutions. Raliyat, Umma and Aisha, (2022) and Ogonode (2020) observed that attacks on schools and abductions of teachers and students in different part of Nigeria have contributed hugely to increasing numbers of children not going to school. The issue has been degenerating as a result of the country's worsening security situation. Kano state leads the pack while AkwaIbom has the least number of out of school children of the 20 million (Niyi, Chinweuba and Victor, 2022). For example, authorities in North West Nigeria had shut down 4,000 public primary schools and four thousand public secondary schools across the region. According to Sabiu, 2021, the Chibok kidnapping affected 300,000 to 400,000 students who dropped out of school. According to Amnesty International, the closures signal severe threats to education in Nigeria education in Nigeria.

v. High rate of poverty. Nigeria being one of the poorest nations in the world fosters out of school syndrome. This level of poverty forces parents to put children in the labour market as well as street hawking. This issue is further aggravated by dysfunctional family structure thereby causing high rate of out of school syndrome (Musa, 2019). When resources are low, families may prioritize sending one child to school, while others remain at home. Ogonode, (2020), affirmed that in such scenarios, older children, orphans and girls are forced to work to make money or care for younger siblings while others work. According to Ayoke, 2022, poverty and parental decision-making supported by cultural practices remain two major denominators for unequal access to education for the girl child. The present economic situation in Nigeria is also creating an increase in the number of out of school children in Nigeria. The other determinants include parental education status and child labour (Smits and Huisman, 2023).

Preventive Measures to Suicidal Ideation among Out-of-School Adolescents

Preventive measures for suicidal ideation emphasize on increased awareness, positive parenting, access to mental health facilities increased coping strategies and government interventions. According to Fadipe et al, (2018), they include:

i. **Awareness**. Use of media like television, radio, newspapers and mobile phone companies can help increase awareness of suicidal ideation to citizens. Mobile companies can use free campaigns and adverts on suicidal ideation as part of community services to their host country. This is because the more awareness there is on suicidal ideation, the more knowledge young people will have on signs and preventive measures of suicidal ideation. Mobile companies can use free campaigns and adverts on suicidal ideation as part of community services to host country.

ii. **Making education free and compulsory for every citizen**. Education is the bedrock of every society including Nigeria. When 70% of young people are out of school, it becomes a ticking time bomb. This is because, through education young people are taught life skills which help them become independent and self-reliant. In the absence of these, young people become easy prey to terrorism, kidnapping, drug abuse and other criminal activities. Moreover, without the right mindset, they are always under pressure to identify who they are hence prone to suicide and depression. Therefore, education must be made free and compulsory for every citizen. Issues bordering on mental health should be included as compulsory topics in all levels of education. Educational institutions should also be strengthened in order to detect early signs of suicide.

iii. **Encouragement of positive parenting**. Strong family bonds enhance support and sharing among family members. This is because good parenting is essential for the development of physically, psychologically and emotionally healthy children who are less vulnerable to suicidal ideation.

iv. **Establishment of mental health facilities**. Mental health facilities should be made available to all by government and non-governmental organizations. Accessibility should also be encouraged through adequate campaign and orientation. This will help to reduce to stigma and misconceptions associated with suicidal ideation. Proper treatment and care should also be given to people living with mental disorders, substance abuse and emotional distress. Sustainable documentation should be promoted as well as follow up and community support.

v. **Inclusion of religious body**. Religious body should be proactive in the fight against suicidal ideation. Programmes on menace of suicidal ideation should be organized periodically in order to create awareness on suicidal ideation. Religious personnel should be trained on how to handle suicidal issues as well as working in partnership with mental health facilities. Suicide should not be seen as devils' handiwork but as a mental illness it is. Religious body should increase capacity building through the training of non-specialized health workers to lend a hand in the evaluation as well as management of suicidal ideation.

vi. **Role of government**. Government should be proactive in its policies on out-of-school children by providing fund, infrastructure, tackle insecurity, poverty eradication as well as provision of modality for making sure children stay in school. Proper supervision should be enforced by government too. Periodical mandatory psychological assessment should be provided by the government in order to monitor onset and prevalence of suicide amongst its populace.

vii. **Working curriculum**. The present Nigerian curriculum is not enough to tackle present economic and social issues in Nigeria. Therefore, there should a total overhaul of the present 9-3-3-4 curriculum. Qualitative education should be provided by government so that in instances where students drop out of school, the little education acquired will help them become self-reliant.

Conclusion
The rate of suicidal ideation among out of school children in Nigeria is increasing at an alarming rate. Out of school children are vulnerable to suicidal ideation because of the challenges they encounter both at home and outside the home. Some of the preventive measures that can help to ameliorate the menace of suicidal ideation include making education free and compulsory, creating awareness on suicidal ideation, making the environment free from insecurity and other vices as well as having conducive environment for learning. Other preventive measures are development of mental health facilities, suicide-

based on prevention programme and mandatory assessment for all.

Recommendation

Based on the discussion, the following recommendations were provided

i.   Suicidal ideation intervention programmes, orientations and campaign should be provided by government and non-government-based organization.

ii.   Periodic assessment should be encouraged for every child both in-school and out-of-school children

iii.   Mental health facilities should be provided and readily assessed

iv.   Government should tackle insecurity and other societal ills

v.   Neuroticism should be given adequate attention as it is one of the precursors to suicidal ideation.

References

Animba, I. E. (2021). National mental health crisis: The urgent need for mental health education in secondary schools. Journal of Counselling, 3(1)

Afegboyega, A. (2019). More than half of Nigeria education budget lost to corruption. *Premium Times.*https;//www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/330104-more-than-half-of-nigerias-education-budget-lost-to-corruption-transparency-international.html.

Ahmed-Gusau (2022). Five states yet to domesticate child right act in Nigeria. *Tribune.* https://tribuneonlineng.com/five-states-yet-to-domesticate-child-rights-act-in-nigeria-%E2%80%95-unicef

Ayoko, V. O. (2022). Understanding the falling out factors that contribute to school dropout and the ways forward: analysis of government failure, cultural believes, disasters, pandemic and forced migration. *Proceedings of International Conferences on Modern Education Studies,* Konya-Turkey, 56 (3), 46-56.

Boot, K., Wiebenga, J. X. M., & Eikelenboom, M. (2022). Associations between personality traits and suicidal ideation and suicide attempts in patients with personality disorders. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*. 113(2) 152-164.

Costa, P. T., Jr., & McCrae, R. R (1992). Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) and NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), *Professional Manual.* Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources. 778-940

Cpreg, S. E., Fisher, B. S., McDonald, M. J., McDaniel, H. M., Williamson, L., & William, C. M. (2021). Adverse childhood experiences and interpersonal violence among college students: does a relationship exist? *Am Coll Health*. 69 (8): 913-20. https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2020.1715413

Daniel, L. S., Meghan, A. M., & Fredrick, L. C. (2012). Personality, suicidal ideation and reasons for living among older adults. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B*: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences, 67(2). 159-166.

Faro, A., Silva, L. S., Santos, D. N., & Feitosa, A. L. B. (2022). The fear of COVID-19 Scale adaptation and validation. *Estud Psicol.* 20(4), 22-39. https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-0275202239e200121

Hamilton, H. A., & Sampasa-Kanyinga, H. (2016). Does socioeconomic status moderate the relationships between school connectedness with psychological distress, suicidal ideation and attempts in adolescents? *Preventive and Medicine*, 87(3), 11-17.

Harris, K., Haddock, G., Peters, S., & Gooding, P. (2021). Psychometric properties of the suicidal ideation attributes scale (SIDAS) in a longitudinal sample of people experiencing non-affective psychosis. *BMC Psychiatry*. 21(1) 628-633. https://doi.org/10.1186/s128888-021-03639-8

Ifeanyichikwu, E. M., & Chico, A. B. (2021). Big Five Personality, Emotional Instability, and Frienship quality as predictors of suicidality. *IFE PsychologIA*, 29(2).1117-1126.

Kogien. M., Marcon, S. R., Modena, C.F., Bittencourt, M. N., Rezio, L. A., & Faria, J. S. (2023). Prevalence ans correlates of passive and active suicidal ideation among students entering graduate courses. Rev. Latino-Am. *Enfermagem*. 87 (4), 31-39.

Liu, R. T., Lawrence, H. R., Burke, T. A., Sanzari, C. M., Levin, R. Y., Maitlin, C., Paszek, C., & Zhu, X. (2021). Passive and active suicidal ideation among left-behind children in rural China: An evaluation of intrapersonal and interpersonal vulnerability and resilience. *Suicide and Life-threatening behaviour,* 51(6), 1213-1223.

National Policy on Education (2014). Federal Republic of Nigeria. *National Education Research and Development Council.* 6th Edition.

Niyi, J. O., Chinwuba, M. A., & Victor, O. A. (2022). *International Journal on Integrated Education.* 5 (2), 82-91.

Nock, M., Kessler., & Franklin. (2016). *Clinical Psychology Science and Practice*. 23 (1), 779-795. Doi:10.1111/cpsp.12133.

Ogunode, N. J & Ahaotu, G. N. (2021). Effects of incessant closure of schools on school administration in Northern Nigeria. *International Journal of Innovation Analyses and Emerging Technology,* 1, (4), 98-103.

Ojelade, I. A., Aiyedun, T. G., & Aregbebesola, B. G. (2019). Environmental education as an instrument for awareness creation on the health effects of water contamination in Saburi community of Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. The Researcher: *A journal of Contemporary Educational Research,* 2, (1), 1-16.

Raliyat, H., Umma, A., & Aisha, A. (2022). As Out-of-School Children scourge worsens: Nigeria risks losing out on literate, skilled workforce. *Leadership.* https://leadership.ng/as-out-of-school-scourge-worsens-nigeria-risks-losing-out-litrate-skilled-workforce.

Reeves, K. W., Vasconez, G., & Weiss, S. J. (2022). Characteristics of suicidal ideation: *A systematic review*. 13(2), 668-673 https://doi.org/10.1080/13811118.2021.2022551.

Sabiu, M. (2021). Education in disarray: more than 10, 000 schools in the north closed, 400,000 students affected. *Nigerian Tribune*. https;//tribuneonlineng.com/education/educat

ion-in-disarray-more-than-10000-schools-in-the-north-closed-400000-students-affected.

Sailo, S., & Sawmzeli, V. L (2024). A study on the relationship between personality and suicidal ideation. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*. 12(1). 70-84

Smits, J. & Huisman, J. (2013). Determinants of Educational participations and gender differences in education in six Arab countries. *Acta Sociologica*, 56, (4), 325-346.

Soltaninejad, A., Fathi-Ashtiani, A., & Pilevazzadeh, M. (2014). *Iranian Red Crescent Medical Journal,* Kowsar Medical Institute. 67 (1), 112-130.

Suicide prevention resource center (2018). Resources and programs. Waltham, MA: *Suicide Prevention Resource center.* Retrieved from https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs.

UNICEF (2014). All Children in School by 2015. *Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children*: regional report; West and Central Africa. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf000 0228081.

World Health Organization (2014). Preventing suicide: *A global Imperative*. Geneva: WHO.

World Health Organization (2019). Suicide worldwide. *Global health Estimations* (internet).

Zokaitluangi, (2014). Personality correlates to suicidal ideation among high school students. SUICIDE-*A Multidisciplinary approach*: 5(3), 21-33