

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE PREVENTION OF SUICIDE AMONG THE YOUTH IN LOKOJA METROPOLIS

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Abstract

The association of religion and suicide has long been of interest in the field of psychology. Suicide is a painful event that has an impact on institutions, societies, and families. It cuts across all age strata and gender. This has constituted a major threat to the survival and effective functioning of human societies. This study examines the role of religion in prevention of Suicide among youth in Lokoja Metropolis Kogi State, Nigeria. The paper used primary and secondary data and relied on the Emile Durkheim's theory and Zhang Jie's Strain theory. Their views, however, stem from the sociological and psychological dynamics of suicide. The study discussed some common methods employed in committing suicide and also identified some factors necessitating the prevalence of suicide in the society. The effects of suicide behaviour were also explored. It was discovered during the course of the research that there is prevalence of suicide among the youth of Lokoja Metropolis in Kogi State. While this is a very difficult position in which to find oneself, it is possible to heal and move forward. In conclusion, the study recommends that religious organization should embrace holistic counselling, encourage relatives of those who committed suicide (suicide victims), watch out for risk factors of suicide and also to partner and cooperate with the non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to mount an aggressive advocacy with regards to suicide

Keywords: Religion, Suicide, Youth, Lokoja.

Introduction

Suicide is a painful event that has an impact on institutions, society, and families. In recent times, suicide among youths and young adults has been on the increase. Suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's death. Suicide refers to a self-inflicted death in which one makes an intentional, direct, and conscious effort to end

the life of a person (Comer 6). The World Health Organization reports that about a million people die of suicide annually (World Health Organization 7). The prevalence of suicide among the youth is fast becoming a grave concern in Lokoja Metropolis Kogi State and the nation in general. This is due, in part to the fact that the youths, who in their prime ought to contribute to the development of the society, are terminating their lives voluntarily. It is important to state unequivocally, that the prevalence of suicide among the youth in Lokoja Metropolis Kogi State, demands investigation. To this, this paper seeks to know what are some of preventive measures religion can put in place to ameliorate the prevalence of suicide in Lokoja Metropolis Kogi State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is Emile Durkheim's theory. His view, however, stem from the sociological and psychological dynamics of suicide. The challenge of suicide was exposed to empirical consideration due to the study carried out by Emile Durkheim. He documented his findings and position in the book. *Le Suicide* published in 1897 (Crossman 8). In the words of Anderson and Taylor, Durkheim was the first to "argue that the causes of suicide were to be found in social factors and not individual personalities". Durkheim observed that the rate of suicide varied with time and place, thus attempted to look for causes which are linked to these factors apart from emotional stress. Durkheim postulated the following findings. First, that suicide rates are higher for those widowed, single and divorced than married. Second, that suicide rates are higher for people without children than with children. Lastly, that suicide rates are higher among Protestants than Catholics and Jews.

It is important to state that there has been some level of disagreement among some scholars about some of the findings highlighted by Durkheim in his work. The position of Pope and Danigelis argued that the Protestant-Catholic differences in suicide identified by Durkheim appears to be limited to German speaking Europe, therefore may be the spurious reflection of other factors (506). In spite of the seeming limitations of Durkheim's work on suicide, it could be concluded that the work have pioneered modern social research and played a major role in distinguishing social science from psychology and political philosophy Gianfranco, (2000). It may not be easy identifying what exactly causes suicide this is the position of Breault and Barkley (322).

Literature Review

Youthful age is a very sensitive phase of human life. It is a period of purposeful discovery, defining career and fixing stern focus. It is a critical period in terms of physical and mental development, and a time for learning important qualities and values in order to become a responsible citizen or future leader. It is widely believed that the future and strength of any purposeful nation is her youths. The

youths of Nigeria are confronted with varieties of social challenges ranging from the high rate of unemployment, hopelessness, to marital or family problems. In recent times, suicide among youths and young adults has been on the increase. Suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's death. Suicide refers to a self-inflicted death in which one makes an intentional, direct, and conscious effort to end the life of a person (Comer 9).

The World Health Organization reports that about a million people die of suicide annually. Suicide is now among the three leading causes of death among those aged 15 to 44 years and the second leading cause of death in the 10 to 24 years age group; these figures do not include suicide attempts which are up to 20 times more frequent than completed suicide. Basic data on the prevalence and risk factors for suicide and its immediate precursors –suicidal ideation, plans, and attempts –are unavailable in many countries around the world, particularly those that are less developed (World Health Organization 2).

Describing the common methods employed in committing suicide in Nigeria. Sawyer submitted that males often opt for the hard way, which includes shooting themselves with gun, hanging or drowning. While females opt for drug over-dose, slashing their wrist or ingesting harmful substances or drugs (12). The challenges posed by the increased incidence of suicide should generate great concern. This is due, in part to the fact that the youths, who in their prime ought to contribute to the development of the society, are terminating their lives voluntarily. Suicide is a painful event that has an impact on institutions, society, and families. Numerous factors have found its' foot in the causative explanation of attitude towards suicide and that ultimately each suicide is caused by a highly unique, dynamic and complex interplay of genetic, biological, psychological and social factors (Van Heeringen, 136). Nevertheless, it is possible to identify different types of factors that are clearly associated with an increased risk of youth suicide. It is difficult to comprehend why anyone would desire to end his or her life voluntarily. This, however, has not in any way constrained some people from voluntarily terminating their lives.

The effect of suicidal behaviour may differ depending on whether the attempt made resulted in death or not. In broad terms, the consequences of attempted suicide appear to be more concentrated on the surviving victim. The consequences of successful attempts, or completed suicides, on the other hand, affected survivors the most. This rage from Financial Cost and Inconvenience, Social Relationships (Stigmatization and Shame), Mental Health of Family, Friends and Survival. While this is a very difficult position in which to find oneself, it is possible to heal and move forward. Also, those left behind by suicide are often known as suicide survivors and while this is a very difficult position in which to find oneself, it is possible to heal and move forward. (Peterson 7)

From the foregoing, it is pertinent to submit that the prevalence of suicide should attract the attention of the entire society which religion should be in the fore-

front. Throughout history, and in societies across the world, leaders have used religion narratives, symbols, and traditions in an attempt to give more meaning to life and understand the universe. It has been said that religion can serve a wide range of purposes. Religion can be a source of comfort and guidance. It can provide a basis for moral beliefs and behaviours. It can also provide a sense of community and connection to tradition. Religion can contribute to a sense of community, provide support, and offer guidance. It has also been shown to impact both physical and mental health (Stibich 7).

A person's level of religiosity has been severally implicated among other factors. The association of religion and suicide has long been of interest in the field of psychology. Religion in Nigeria plays a significant role in the life of the people, to some it is their candlelight, it gives them insight, and wisdom, knowledge, and faith are increased through the study of scripture, books, and prayers. Religion helps to remain in line and stay focused. Religion can influence youths' actual need, perceived need and/or benefit, access, availability, and motivation to seek mental health services (Koenig et al. 23). Religion has been found to be a gateway to healing (Ellis et al., 789), and religious leaders act as a bridge, provider, or "barrier" to mental health care (Neighbors, et al. 35). Religiosity has been shown to be associated with lower levels of aggression and hostility, drug use, and risky sexual activity, which are related to suicidal behaviour (Gearing & Lizardi 12). It is in this regard, the role of religion in the aftermath of a suicide attempt cannot be underestimated.

Methodology

This study examines the role of religion in prevention of Suicide among youth in Lokoja Metropolis Kogi State, Nigeria. The research design adopted for this work is the qualitative and historical research design, using primary and secondary source. This will help to bring out the purpose and objective of study.

Prevalence of Suicide in Lokoja Metropolis Kogi State, Nigeria

Suicide is a global phenomenon having a deep consequence not just to the dying person but also towards the bereaved, the community and society. Nigeria with a population of over 200 million is one of the epicentres of suicide in the world (World Health Organization 12).

Some Cases of Suicide in Lokoja Metropolis Kogi State

S/N	NAME	AGE	SEX	SUI-CIDE	DATE AND SOURCE	ADDRESS	REASON FOR SUICIDE
1.	Aisha Habib Ibn Usman	Not known	F	Hanging	Feb 13, 2023. Kogi Report	Lokoja	Marital Crisis
2.	Rebecca Michael.	20years	F	Drank Sniper	April 18, 2019. Daily Post	Lokoja	Boyfriend broke up with her.

	100-level Student						
3.	Edward Soje	54years	M	Hanging	October 21, 2017 Punch Newspaper	Mammy market at the Maimugumeri barracks, Lokoja	Non-payment of his salaries for about 11 months.
4.	Usman,	24years	M	Hanging	September 14, 2009. Vanguard.	Seriki-Noma community in Lokoja	Unknown
5.	Abdullahi Uye Zhiya	47years	M	Drank poisonous chemical.	30 November, 2017 The Guardian	Oguma in Bassa Local Council	Non-payment of his salaries for about 12 months.
6.	Bayo	23years	M	Drank snippers	April 7, 2020 The Nation	Angwa Tiv, Lokoja.	Failed efforts to secure paid employment.
7.	Mrs Yusuf Bosede Khadija	Not known	F	Jumped into a well	October 6, 2021. Nigeria xpress	Okuhapa in Obangede, Okehi Local Government Area	Depression.
8.	Agada Okpanachi	Not known	M	Attempt suicide by hanging	May 10, 2018 Naija Gist	Idah Area	Over unpaid salaries
10.	Alikali Peace	23years	F	Attempt suicide Knife and Blade	December 12, 2022 Researcher	Lokoja	Depression
11.	Aboh Precious	34years	F	Attempt suicide by rat poison	June 10, 2022. Researcher	Lokoja	Health challenges, frustration.

The catalogue of suicides case highlighted is quite instructive. There are some cases of attempted suicide and complete suicide as stated in the chart above. The suicide cases mentioned above include males and females. Their ages fall between twenty years and about fifty-four years. They are said to have applied different methods of suicide, ranging from hanging to taking of poisonous substances and jumping into well and river. There are two attempted suicide case the researcher

attended as a pastor. The first case was Alikali Peace (23years) female, she was depressed, she told the researcher in her word:

So, my feeling was like this, I just felt at some point what am I living for, there was no reason for the feeling, I just sit down and feel it was better off out of this world. I really don't know why I felt that way but the thought just comes.

The second attempted of suicide cases the researcher attended to was Aboh Precious (34years) female, who attempted suicide many times. In her word she said that:

Am asthmatic patient because of that I was sack from my work as a classroom teacher, no money to take care of myself or buy inhaler...am a gospel music minister, I stop going to church for 5years because a pastor I trusted so much want to take advantage of me. I am 34years still trusting God for a life partner, I have parents but nobody is concern about my welfare, I want to commit suicide out of frustration and depression so I bought rat poison.

Role of Religion in Prevention of Suicide

The rising cases of suicide in the society is becoming alarming especially among the youth and to curb this menace religion itself has an important role in implementing preventive measures to counter suicide ideation and suicide attempts. Religious organization has been stepping in at this time of crisis, and there is need even more of that by Identifying and Addressing the problem by Religious Organizations. The following includes the role religion in implementing preventive measures to counter suicide.

Thorough Counselling, Preaching and Teach against it

The high level of moral decadence in the society today cannot be denied. Positive values (for examples hard work, perseverance, piety and commitment) all seem to have taken the back seat in the country. To these religious leaders should use their religious institutions to preach, teach good values and enlighten their members against suicide, suicidal attempt and its dangers. In addition, religious organization also runs several schools, hospitals and some social centres and development projects. The religious body should use them to create suicide-based suicide prevention programmes which should include provision for suicidal attempt victims e.g. scholarship program, free health care. In addition, religious organization should implement Healing/Deliverance/Recovery/Accountability programs to address sexual brokenness, drug/substance abuse, severe alcoholism addiction and bondage, this are thing that contributes to the causes of suicidal ideation and attempt. (Herman 13)

Compassion and Empathy by Religious Leaders

The role of religious organization is one of the missing links in the prevention of suicide, especially intergenerational suicide. The religious organization should, to a great extent eschew hard and punitive measures, for example denial of funeral rites or payment of visits by religious leaders. There are some of the punishments imposed on families of suicide. Religious organization should awaken participation in community-directed effort towards addressing the needs of those at risk and their families. In addition, it should be appreciated that family survivors of suicide would often feel guilty if the religious organization or religious leaders make negative comments regarding the suiciding. (Collins 4)

Partnership with Civil Societies and Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs)

Religious organization should partner with Civil Societies and NGOs in order to initiate elaborate enlightenment campaigns against suicidal behaviours, educating and sensitizing the public on the dangers of suicide in the society. They should exhibit zero-tolerance to suicide by educating and sensitizing using the media. Furthermore, Religious organization, Activism, Advocacy, and non-government agency walking together to fight the scourge, hard fight for change is what is needed now. The Religious organization, non-governmental organizations, parents, teachers, community's leaders, the media etc. must take action now by working together to fight against this evil that is penetrate the society today. All Nigerians must rise up in condemnation of this social epidemic. (Collins 6)

Frequent Call on the Governments to Step up Efforts in Tackling Suicide in the Society

One of the major area religious body can prevent suicide in the societies is to always sensitizing the public on the dangers of suicide attempt and frequent call on the governments to step up efforts in tackling the problem. They should always call on the Federal Government to establish a special agency to co-ordinate efforts in rehabilitating suicidal attempt victim. They call on the government to put in place some measure that will help in preventing this menace in the society. Some of the measures that can be utilized include: creating counselling in the communities, community's health care services and suicide-based suicide prevention programmes. In implementation of the above measures, it is necessary that consultation is done with primary health care givers who include: counsellors, psychiatrists, nurses, sociologists, psychologists, religious leaders and the whole range of mental health practitioners. These efforts are the right steps in the right direction as they will help to reduce the incidences of suicide in the society. Furthermore, strict laws need to be enacted to guide against any form of abuse, discrimination and stigmatization in our society. (Hirono 45)

Recommendations

The following recommendations drawn from the study would serve as relevant panaceas to the challenge of suicide in Lokoja Metropolis, Kogi State and Nigeria at large.

1. Religious organization should acknowledge the fact that suicide is prevalent in Lokoja Metropolis Kogi State and Nigeria at large in spite of the seeming paucity of information. This level of awareness should motivate the religious organization and its leaders towards mounting a formidable advocacy concerning suicide prevention.
2. Religious organizations should intensify their efforts in counselling. This would assist both those who are contemplating suicide and those who have attempted suicide. The counselling efforts of the religious leaders would also encourage those whose relatives committed suicide.
3. It is also recommended from the study that the religious body should identify common risk factors of suicide, like depression, economic bankruptcy, drugs and drug addiction, terminal illness and others. The right education concerning these risk factors would assist the religious organization in identifying and attending promptly to those going through such challenges.
4. The common causes of suicide should be identified by the religious organization. Adequate knowledge of this would enable the religious organizations check suicide ideation, attempted suicide and even complete suicide.
5. Religious organization should organize activities that would support the people with respect to social integration. They should show the family love
6. Religious organization should apply necessary preventive measures in checking the prevalence of suicide among the different ages since it would have been promptly checked before its occurrence.

Conclusion

The study on suicide has no doubt led to some interesting findings. From the findings, suicide is becoming a public health problem in Nigeria especially among youth. Health educators, families, schools, civil society, religious organizations and the community should be concerned and worried about the prevalent of suicide. This is due, in part to the fact that the youths, who in their prime ought to contribute to the development of the society, are terminating their lives voluntarily. Nigeria cannot afford to gloss over this recurring decimal among the people. Preventing this unwholesome situation can be achieved through, intervention strategy, advocacy and awareness of the adverse effect of suicide to the health and life. All social institutions, parents, Civil Societies, NGOs, and government agencies should as a matter of necessity and urgency stand up and fight this menace.

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Oral Interviews

S/N	Name	Age	Address	Occupation	Date
1	Alikali Peace	23	Behind, Government House Lokoja	Student/ Nurse	27/08/23
2	Aboh Precious	34	Lokogoma, Lokoja	Teacher	08/09/23
3	Hope Olorunfemi	27	Adankolo, Lokoja	Editor	09/16/23
4.	Nike Obafemi	48	High Court, Lokoja	Civil Serv- ant	09/16/23
5.	David Ayo	27	Ganaja Junction, Lokoja	Business- man	09/10/23