
THE ROLE OF COUNSELLORS IN CURBING SUICIDAL BEHAVIOURS AMONG POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study shows the roles of Counselors in Curbing Suicidal behaviours among Polytechnic students in Nigeria. Counselors create a safe space for students to express their thoughts and feelings to be able to assess their risk level and develop personalized Intervention plans. They also provide emotional support, crisis intervention and prevention strategies. Descriptive survey research design was utilized for the study. Three objectives with three corresponding research questions were formulated to give direction to the search for information. The population for the study consisted of 30 Counsellors and 205 Undergraduates of psychology and counselling department of the public Polytechnic in Nigeria. The result of the data analysis showed that counsellors have positive roles as regards to curbing suicidal behaviours among undergraduates of polytechnics in Nigeria. Counsellors contribute to creating a supportive and nurturing environment for Polytechnic students, helping them navigate challenges and promoting their overall mental health.

Keywords: Suicide prevention, Counselling services, Mental health awareness, Polytechnic students, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Suicidal behaviour is any deliberate action and inaction intended to end one's life in order to escape unbearable suffering or to help change adverse conditions of living (Kerkhof, 2004). It is the intentional act of taking one's own life or the destruction of one's own interests (Shaffer 2006). Maris (2002) described suicidal behaviours as problem-solving behaviour. The occurrence of suicidal behaviours across the world is the worst challenge confronting humanity. Apart from the many lives lost through suicide, a multitude of other lives are permanently destroyed in a suicide attempt. Unfortunately, a lot of time and energy are lost every year in negative thoughts about killing oneself. According to Holdwick (2015), one million persons commit suicide throughout the world. Holdwick projected that suicide death in the world would rise above 1.5 million. In the United States of America (USA) the number of suicide cases reported in the year 2007 alone was more than 34,000 (WHO, 2010). Wahlbeck and Makinem (2008) also disclosed that almost 59,000 Europeans died through suicide in 2006. Suicidal behaviours are problems not only in industrialized countries but also in developing countries like Nigeria. For instance, Ogunseye (2011) indicated that Ghana recorded 21,500 cases of suicide in 2007. However, Ogunseye in the same report warned against the increasing rate of suicide in Nigeria.

Many factors have been associated with suicidal and self-destructive behaviours. These factors include depression, substance abuse, possession of lethal weapons, and hopelessness among others. Depression refers to a situation of heavy sadness, low spirit and when accompanied by psychosis or anxiety could trigger off the feeling of suicidal behaviours. Series of attempted suicides which are sometimes caused by delusion, frustration and extreme depression. Nnaemeka (2006) revealed how a second-year male student in Ebonyi State University attempted killing himself because his girlfriend was snatched from him.

According to Agbaje (2014) intervention designed in the form of action. Effective suicide intervention in schools has to be well taught and carried out with the involvement of all relevant staff holders such as religious leaders, parents, teachers, school management and counselors. Counsellors provide emotional and supportive environment for students. They work closely with the students and develop personalized intervention plans. They collaborate with other professionals and implement campus – programs to promote mental health and wellbeing of students. Sometimes simply talking to a sympathetic, nonjudgmental listener is enough to prevent the person from attempting suicide. Adams (2018) postulated that in many cases, suicidal behaviours can be prevented. Matarasi and Rohrbach (2017), suggested that the best way of preventing suicidal behavior is to treat and prevent the onset of risk factors associated with suicidal behavior. How this experience can be curbed in developing nations like Nigeria using school counselors is the reason for this study.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem addressed here is the prevalence of suicidal behaviours among polytechnic students. It's a serious concern that requires attention and action. Many Nigerian polytechnic students face some excruciating and economic difficulties such as inability to purchase books, feed and clothe themselves or cope with school work. These needs among many may lead to suicidal behaviours. These suicidal behaviours such as completed and attempted suicides and indirect self-destructive behaviours (such as substance abuse, cultism, armed robbery and sexual assault) by students in our polytechnics are vital public health concerns.

The myths and superstitious beliefs surrounding suicide in Nigeria act as leverage to suicidal behaviours since they are all responsible for stigmatization and discrimination against people.

For example, recently (2024) a young girl at Ogwashiukwu Polytechnic committed suicide, after she was gang-raped and couldn't bear the shame and stigma.

It is crucial to create a safe and nurturing environment where students feel heard, understood and supported in their mental health Journey.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study was to examine and dig deeper into the Counsellor's major roles in suicidal behaviours among polytechnic students In Nigeria.

1. By Conducting research, analyzing data and exploring various aspects such as academic environment, social and mental health Support
2. The study aims to develop effective strategies and Interventions to prevent and address these behaviours.

Ultimately, the Objective is to improve the wellbeing and mental health of polytechnic students and create a supportive environment that promotes the students overall success and happiness, and also find solutions and make a positive impact.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the specific stressors and pressures faced by Polytechnic students that Contribute to Suicidal behaviours?
2. What is the prevalence of suicidal behaviours among polytechnic students in Nigeria?
3. What are the counsellor's roles in curbing the prevalence of suicidal behaviours and effectively promote mental health awareness among undergraduates of Polytechnics in Nigeria?

METHODOLOGY

This study used a survey research design to gather both qualitative and quantitative data for a Comprehensive Understanding of the study and was considered suitable because the sample of respondents was sought using a structured questionnaire and the findings were generalized on the entire population. The population for the study consisted of 30 counsellors and 205 undergraduates of Psychology and Counselling department of The Public Polytechnics in the area. Convenience sampling was used because of the number of the Population; Thereby, The entire population became the study sample.

The instrument used for this data collection was survey questionnaires and interview guides such as open structured interviews for quantitative data. These Instruments helped gather insights and Information from participants in a structured manner.

A cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.83 was obtained and the collected data was analyzed using mean and standard deviation for research questions. Any mean response of 2.50 and above was considered as agreed while any Item with mean response was considered disagreed below 2.50 was considered disagreed

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Research Question 1:

What are the specific Stressors and pressures faced by polytechnic students that contribute to Suicidal behaviours?

Data for answering research question 1 is presented on the table below.

Table 1:1 mean and standard deviation on the specific and pressure faced by polytechnic students that contribute to suicidal behaviours among undergraduates of polytechnics in Nigeria (n = 200)

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	\bar{X}	SD	REMARK
1.	Academy pressure	3.31	73	Agreed
2.	Social Isolation	2.82	78	Agreed
3.	High family & personal expectations	3.22	75	Agreed
4.	Relationship difficulties	3.22	75	Agreed
5.	Financial stress	2.91	73	Agreed
6.	Inferiority complex	3.19	79	Agreed
7.	Bullying	3.31	73	Agreed

Pooled mean: 3.08

Keys: \bar{X} = Mean of the respondents

SD = Standard deviation

N = Number of respondents

Data in table 1.1 revealed that all the 7 items had their mean ratings ranging from 2.82 to 3.31 and were above the Cutoff point of 2.50. This indicated that the respondents agreed that all the 7 items were the specific Stressors and Pressures faced by polytechnic students in Nigeria. The standard deviation of all 7 Items ranged from 73 to 79 which showed that the respondents were not too far from the mean and opinion of one another In their responses on the Stressors and pressures faced by polytechnic students that contribute to suicidal behavior.

Research Question 2

What is the prevalence of suicidal behaviours among Polytechnic students in Nigeria?

The data for answering question 2 are Presented In table 2.1

Table 2.1: Mean and standard deviation on the prevalence of suicidal behaviors among polytechnic students in Nigeria (n = 200)

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	\bar{X}	SD	REMARK
1.	I planned hanging myself whenever I thought of my parent's separation.	1.82	73	Agreed
2.	I contemplated killing myself when I was depressed and lonely.	2.91	73	Agreed
3.	I tried to end my life after I failed my examination.	1.82	78	Agreed
4.	I thought taking my life as one of the ways to end my problems/suffering.	1.40	49	Agreed
5.	I contemplated taking my life when I couldn't meet up with school fees deadline	1.80	73	Agreed

Pooled mean: 2.17

The data presented in table 2-1 Showed that the mean rating of the respondents on the 5 items ranged from 1.40- 2.91 and having a Pooled mean of 2.17. However, the pooled mean of 2.17 Showed that there was a low prevalence of Suicidal behaviours among Polytechnic students. The standard deviation of all 5 items ranged from 49 to 78 which showed that the respondents were not too far from the the mean and opinion of one another in their responses.

Research Question 3

What are the counsellors' roles in curbing the prevalence of suicidal behaviours and effectively promote mental health awareness among polytechnic students in Nigeria?

Data for answering research question 3 are presented in Table 3.1

Table 3: mean and standard deviation of the respondents on the counsellor's roles In Curbing the prevalence of suicidal behaviours and effectively promote mental health awareness among Polytechnic students (n = 200)

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	\bar{X}	SD	REMARK
1.	Organizing of seminars for students on dangers of drug abuse, sexual assault and bullying.	3.31	73	Agreed
2.	Treatment of symptoms of anxiety and depression among students.	2.91	73	Agreed
3.	Assist in implementing the ban of dangerous drugs and weapons among students.	3.39	73	Agreed
4.	Counselors conducting face to face screening evaluation of students to identify those at risk and plan preventive programs for them.	3.40	64	Agreed
5.	Providing public information and education about dangers of known risk factors of suicide.	2.82	78	Agreed

Pooled mean 3.11

Data in table 3 revealed that all 5 items had their mean ratings ranging from 2.91-3.40 and were above the cutoff point of 2.50. This indicated that the respondents agreed that all 5 Items are the roles of counsellors in curbing the prevalence of suicidal behaviours and effectively promote mental health awareness among polytechnic students in Nigeria.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

- a. The Counsellors have a very vital and positive role in curbing the prevalence of suicidal behaviours among polytechnic students in Nigeria.

- b. The study further identified the indirect self-destructive behaviours among undergraduates of Polytechnics in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Data presented in table 1.1 shows the mean rating of the respondents on all 7 Items had their Mean ratings from 2.82 - 3.31 and were above the Cutoff point of 2.50. This indicated that the respondents agreed that all the 7 items were the specific stressors and pressures faced by polytechnic students that contribute to suicidal behaviours among undergraduates of polytechnics in Nigeria.

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Data In table 3 revealed that all 5 items had their mean ratings ranging from 2.91 to 3.40 and were above the cutoff point of 2.50. This indicated that the respondents agreed that all 5 items are the roles of Counsellors in curbing the prevalence of suicidal behaviours and effectively Promote mental health awareness among polytechnic Students in Nigeria. This outcome was in line with knight (2019), who suggested that those found with dangerous weapons, bullying or selling hard drugs should be dismissed from the polytechnic to serve as deterrent to others and holding seminars for students.

CONCLUSION

Suicide is estimated to Contribute more than 2% to the global burden of disease by the year 2030 (Bertolote, 2009) significantly, this figure fails to take account of the huge Impact of suicide beyond the Individual and the effect it has on the lives and mental health of many families and communities. The management of such suicidal situations Includes Interventions such as taking various Important steps to care for the person, offering Psychosocial Support, maintaining regular contact and follow up (world health organization, 2010).

Services like counselling are scarce and mostly difficult to access and under-resourced. Hence, access to appropriate counselling services as well as improved help seeking are very crucial to curbing the prevalence of suicidal behaviours and promote effective mental health among students of polytechnics in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and data collected from the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Polytechnic authorities should ensure that possession of dangerous weapons by students must by students be drastically checked and students found with such weapons should be rusticated or dismissed to serve as a deterrent to others.
2. Seminars on dangers of drug abuse, sexual assault and bullying should be organized for the students.
3. A program or set of committee for coordinating effort on suicide prevention should be formed in the polytechnics.
4. Government should provide suicide counselling personnel who will always be available to offer assistance to those in need.

5. Polytechnic-based mental health services should be established in various polytechnics in Nigeria to prevent incidences of suicidal behaviours.

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