
THE IMPACT OF SELF-ESTEEM ON SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN DELTA STATE: A MODERATING ROLE OF ACADEMIC STRESS AND SEX

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Delta State. The design that was used for this study is an ex-facto research design. The population of this study comprises 60,790 in four public universities in Delta State. This study's sample consists of 1000 students drawn from the entire population. Multi-stage sampling procedures comprising purposive and simple random sampling techniques were employed in selecting the sample for the study. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled the self-esteem, academic stress, and suicidal ideation questionnaire (SEASSIQ). The Cronbach alpha was applied for the computation of the reliability coefficient of the subscales of the instrument. The reliability coefficient values for the self-esteem rating scale are 0.52, the academic stress rating scale is 0.74, and the suicidal ideation rating scale is 0.69. The instruments were administered by the researcher and two research assistants to respondents in the selected tertiary institutions, as stated in the sampling procedures for the study. The research questions were answered using the Pearson correlation and coefficient of determination for the research question. The hypotheses were tested using linear and multiple linear regressions at a 0.05 level of significance. The study's findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State; academic stress has a significant moderating impact on self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State; and sex has no significant moderating impact on the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that self-esteem plays a crucial role in influencing suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State. It is recommended, among others, that universities implement programmes such as workshops, counselling services, and peer support groups with the aim of fostering a positive self-image and resilience among undergraduates.

Keywords: Self-Esteem, Suicidal Ideation, Academic Stress, Sex

INTRODUCTION

The world is such a beautiful place where people learn to love and care for each other with expectations from society, families, and friends, but in all its beauty and glory, some start having the thought to end it all without holding back. There is nothing more saddening than a broken mind which has refused to rise that is hung up on the pessimism of life and not feeling any positive vibe, a mind engulfed in darkness and not daring to see the light, a mind that has succumbed to defeat without the zeal to fight and most of all a mind that has no hope to heal this lead to suicide. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2020) viewed Suicide as an intentional self-inflicted death. It is a serious cause of mortality worldwide. Suicide is considered a psychiatric emergency and the awareness of the seriousness of suicide in our society should not be overlooked. It is a significant cause of death worldwide. It accounts for about 30,000 deaths annually in the USA and more than 5,000 deaths annually in Nigeria and the prevalence of suicide in our society is on the increase (Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2020).

In essence, Kumar & Updesh (2017) viewed suicide as a complete process of a continuum that began with suicidal thoughts, followed by an attempt at suicide, and finally completed suicide. This means that every suicide attempt or completed suicide often starts with suicidal thoughts (Roberts, 2008), and this is captured in the concept of suicidal ideation. Consequently, Suicide ideation is seen as thoughts, ideas, wishes, considerations, contemplations, or preoccupations relating to death and suicide. (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2020). Furthermore, Shittu, et al (2014) see suicidal ideation as the thought about or an unusual preoccupation with suicide.

Given its close relationship with suicide, suicidal ideation is of intense interest to suicide researchers. Suicidal ideation, which is defined as thoughts ranging from vague ideas of committing suicide to plans of behaviors intended to end one's life, is known to be a crucial precursor to suicide (Ramirez Arango et al., 2020; Timpka et al., 2021). Some researchers hold that suicidal ideation is a major phase preceding attempted and completed suicide (Park et al., 2010), and is closely related to subsequent suicide attempts and completed suicide (Coentre & Gois, 2018; Wei et al. 2018)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016), defines suicidal ideation "as thinking about, considering, or planning suicide. They believed that it is not a diagnosis but is a symptom of some mental disorders and can also occur in response to adverse events without the presence of a mental disorder. A closer look at suicide risk scales, the range of suicidal ideation varies from fleeting thoughts to detailed planning which can either be passive or active. Passive suicidal ideation is thinking about not wanting to live or imagining being dead. Active suicidal ideation involves preparation to commit suicide or forming a plan to do so. (Falcone, Tatiana; Timmons-Mitchell & Jane 2018)

McDermott, Elizabeth, Hughes, Rawlings & Victoria (2018) explain that Suicidal ideations (SI), often called suicidal thoughts or ideas, are a broad term used to describe a range of contemplations, wishes, and preoccupations with death and suicide. Most people who have suicidal thoughts do not go on to make suicide attempts, but suicidal thoughts are considered a risk factor. Considering what other authors have said about suicidal ideation, the researcher's notion of suicidal ideation is the contemplation of committing suicide, distinguished from the actual act of suicide. These thoughts can be triggered by cognitive distortions, negative schemas, and irrational beliefs as potential factors contributing to faulty thinking. Although suicide attempts and their thoughts are considered taboo in Nigeria, there have been reported cases of suicide in the newspapers and social media. For example, a 500-level urban and Regional Planning student of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology,

Ogbomosho hung himself from his ceiling fan while his roommate was out. Another student at Babcock University, Ogun State, who was just 19 years old at the time of his death, committed suicide in his parents' home in Lagos (Ezeobi, 2017).

The prevalence of Suicidal ideation is on the rise, and it is a significant public health concern in young people. Suicide is now the second leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults aged 15 to 24 in the world and suicide attempts are significantly higher among youth than adults. Suicidal ideation is more common than suicide death in young people. It is associated with several other negative consequences, such as co-morbid mental disorders, poor educational and vocational outcomes, and premature death due to other causes (Stone 2015).

Another distressing incident involved a 100-level student at Kogi State University, who reportedly took her own life following a breakup with her boyfriend. This tragic case adds to a growing number of suicide reports, which surged in Nigeria's media in 2019. According to Ogbolu (2019), suicide accounts for 1.5 percent of global deaths and ranks among the top 20 leading causes of mortality worldwide. Alarming, 78 percent of suicides occur in low- and middle-income nations, including Nigeria, underscoring a critical mental health crisis in these regions.

Furthermore, Purse (2019) highlighted that globally, suicide is more frequent among women, with 5.1 percent of reported cases, compared to 3.6 percent among men. Although women are statistically more likely to attempt suicide, men tend to complete the act three to four times more often, revealing a significant gender disparity in outcomes. Sadly, these instances are not isolated. In March 2017 alone, national newspapers reported more than five cases of either attempted or completed suicide, indicating an urgent and persistent issue.

Recently, in January 2023, Vanguard reported another tragic incident involving a 300-level student from the Federal University of Technology, Akure (FUTA), who was found dead in his off-campus residence in Aule, Ondo State. Allegedly, financial hardship and severe depression contributed to his decision. These cases reveal the harsh realities individuals face, each grappling with unique and overwhelming personal challenges. While many people persevere, others find the weight of their struggles too great, seeing suicide as their only option for relief. The question therefore is what makes individuals including students consider or contemplate suicide? Within the context of university students, challenges often manifest in the forms of conflicts with girlfriends' friends/boyfriends, self-destructive peer acceptance, bullying, victimization, disappointment with school results and failure in studies, and high demands at school during examination periods among others, which pose a lot of stress to students to the extent that the thought of suicide is often considered. One major concern among academic scholars about suicidal ideation has been to identify the prevailing factors that are associated with suicidal ideation. Thus, the ambit of extant academic literature, reveals that certain variables such as hopelessness, academic failure, depression, poor social support system, death of a loved one, trauma, serious physical illness, aging, unemployment, financial problems, guilt, and re-associated with suicidal ideation (Hudgens, 2003), With contribution of self-esteem under explored.

Self-esteem is a subjective sense of overall personal worth or value. Like self-respect, it describes the level of confidence in one's abilities and attributes. Having healthy self-esteem can influence one's motivation, mental well-being, and overall quality of life. A better understanding of what one's unique level of self-esteem is can help strike a balance that is just right for an individual (Gabriel, Erickson, Diefendorff & Krantz 2020). Self-esteem

significantly impacts various aspects of an individual's life, including decision-making, relationships, emotional well-being, and overall quality of life. People with healthy self-esteem are motivated to take on challenges and have confidence in their abilities. In contrast, those with low self-esteem may doubt themselves, lack motivation to pursue goals, struggle in relationships, and experience feelings of unworthiness.

According to Nguyen, et al (2019), excessively high self-esteem can lead to overconfidence and entitlement, potentially hindering personal growth. Conversely, low self-esteem is linked to mental health disorders like anxiety and depression, making it difficult to achieve goals, and maintain healthy relationships, and increasing the risk of suicidal thoughts (Johnson, 2020). Self-esteem involves beliefs about oneself and emotional states like pride and shame, with psychologists viewing it as a lasting personality trait, though it can vary in the short term (Orth & Robins, 2014). Self-esteem predicts outcomes such as academic achievement, happiness, relationship satisfaction, and criminal behavior. Synonyms for self-esteem include self-worth, self-regard, self-respect, and self-integrity. Individuals with high self-esteem generally hold positive attitudes about themselves and are content with their lives, while those with low self-esteem harbor negative views, leading to feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness (Brummelman, Thomaes & Sedikides, 2016). It's important to recognize that individuals with negative self-perceptions are at higher risk for suicide.

The impact of academic stress on suicidal ideation will be examined, which is related to the anxiety and stress that comes with education. The pursuit of a degree often includes a lot of pressure, such as studying, homework, tests, labs, reading, and quizzes. Students face a lot of challenges in school that contribute to stress, such as relationship issues, academic workload, inadequate facilities, and fear of low grades, which can negatively affect their psychological well-being, and in extreme cases, lead to suicidal thoughts. Academic difficulties can lead to depression, and if not properly managed, can result in suicide attempts. This is particularly challenging for undergraduate students who are experiencing living away from home for the first time (Shaheen & Jahan, 2017; Gvion & Apter, 2017).

The impact of sex on suicidal ideation rates will be taken into consideration. According to Delfabbro, et al (2013), previous studies have consistently shown that women report higher levels of suicidal thoughts and attempts than men, while men are more likely to die by suicide due to their higher use of lethal means. It is important to understand the factors contributing to suicidal ideation and how they may differ based on gender. Additionally, sex can affect help-seeking behaviors and access to mental health resources, which can further impact the severity of suicidal ideation. Societal attitudes and stigma surrounding mental health may discourage males from seeking help, while females may encounter gender bias or face difficulties accessing appropriate care in the healthcare system.

Statement of the problem

Suicidal ideation is an important concept in clinical, social, and educational psychology because there has been an attempt of suicide among undergraduates which has resulted in poor academic performance, school dropout, family expectations not being met, and loss of potential future leaders. Undergraduate years are a critical period in someone's existence, characterized by the aid of social comparison, substance abuse, and self-esteem. The presence of suicidal ideation among this populace is a matter of remarkable challenge due to its doubtlessly devastating consequences.

Furthermore, suicidal ideation among undergraduate students not only poses on-the-spot risks to the character's life but also suggests underlying intellectual fitness challenges. Factors consisting of educational strain, performance strain, monetary burdens, social isolation, courting difficulties, and pre-current mental fitness situations can make contributions to the development or exacerbation of suicidal ideation. Additionally, the competitive nature of better education environments and the stigma surrounding mental fitness can further contribute to a feeling of hopelessness and a shortage of support. Therefore, the researcher intends to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among undergraduate Students in Delta State.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. What is the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Delta State?
2. What is the moderating impact of academic stress in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Delta State?
3. What is the moderating impact of sex in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Delta State?

Hypotheses

These null hypotheses were formulated for the study and will be tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between Self-esteem and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Delta State.
2. There is no significant moderating impact of academic stress on self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State.
3. There is no significant moderating impact of sex in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Delta State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine peer social comparison, substance misuse, and family expectation as predictors of suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Delta State.

Specifically, the study determined.

1. To examine whether self-esteem will predict suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Delta State.
2. To examine the moderating impact of academic stress in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Delta State.
3. . To examine the moderating impact of sex in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Delta State.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will benefit a wide range of individuals including counselors, students, educational psychologists, researchers, government/policy makers, undergraduates, parents, guidance counselors, and society. The study indicates that peer social comparison, substance use, and self-esteem are predictors of suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State.

Social and educational counselors will find this study particularly useful as it provides insight into the behaviors or factors that can encourage suicidal ideation among

undergraduates. This will enable them to easily identify such behaviors and help students to overcome negative thoughts.

The results of this study will enrich the existing body of knowledge on factors that influence suicidal ideation and will be shared through various channels including workshops, academic journals, conferences, and online platforms.

Furthermore, the study's findings will contribute valuable empirical insights into the role of peer social comparison, substance use, and self-esteem as predictors of suicidal ideation among undergraduate students in Delta State. This will be significant for the research community.

The implications of this study also extend to governmental and policymaking spheres. The outcomes of the study could motivate policymakers to organize workshops, conferences, and seminars tailored for counselors and teacher counselors to equip them with the necessary knowledge to effectively address and guide undergraduates dealing with the predictors of suicidal ideation explored in this study.

Parents will also find the study's findings significant, as seminars will be organized to educate them on some of the predictors of suicidal ideation. Emphasis will be placed on parenting style, and parents will be encouraged to participate in the seminars to develop closer relationships with their children and identify potential symptoms.

Finally, the study's results will be incredibly valuable to society. It is crucial for undergraduates, as the next generation of leaders, to comprehend and recognize the factors that lead to suicidal thoughts. This knowledge will help them cope with life's challenges and prevent such thoughts from taking a toll on their mental health.

Methodology

Design of the Study

The design that was used for this study is *expo-facto* research design. It is Correlational. It examines the relationship between self-esteem, and suicidal ideation of undergraduate students.

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprises 60,790 in four public Universities in Delta State. The population will be drawn from only government-owned Universities in the state as obtained from various University's academic planning units, in 2022.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of this study consists of 1000 students drawn from the entire population. The rule of thumb was adopted to get the sample for the study. The rule of thumb states that 10% of a population is adequate. Multi-stage sampling procedures comprising purposive and simple random sampling techniques were employed in selecting the sample for the study. In the first stage, two universities were selected using a purposive sampling technique. In the second stage, five faculties will be selected from each of the selected universities in Delta State using the simple random sampling technique by ballot method. In the third stage, a simple random sampling technique by ballot method was used to select students from the chosen faculties.

Research Instrument

The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was titled self-esteem, academic stress, and suicidal ideation questionnaire (SEASSIQ). The questionnaire was subdivided into two sections; Section A was designed to collect respondents' personal data such as, gender (male or female), while section B was subdivided into three subscales which are self-esteem scale (SES), academic stress scale (ASS), and suicidal ideation scale(SIS). The instrument consists of 30 items. 10 items in each scale. The respondents were asked to indicate their opinion on four points scale with close ended items as Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1) points.

Validity of the Research Instrument

The validity of the instrument established by the researcher supervisor and two other lecturers who are experts in the Department of Guidance and Counselling. The experts validated the instrument for appropriateness and suitability to the study, and their suggestions were effected for correction(s). The content and construct validation of the instrument was done using factor analysis.

The content and construct validity of the instrument- self-esteem, academic stress, and suicidal ideation questionnaire (SEASSIQ) were estimated using factor analysis. The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was used to estimate the content validity. The Varimax Kaiser Normalization extraction method was utilized in estimating the content and construct validity. The content validity for each scale in the instrument was established by the total Cumulative variance of all the items in each scale.

The factors (components) were extracted using Principal Component Analysis, and factors whose eigenvalue is greater than 1.0 was retained while those whose eigenvalue were less than 1.0 were discarded. The factor was thereafter rotated to determine the loading of each item in the various components. This was done using orthogonal solution with Varimax method. Each of the subscales demonstrated good content validity of all items as the total percentage of all items in the scale had 66.2%, 77.3%, and 78.7% respectively with unexplained variances of 33.8%, 22.7% and 21.3%. these unexplained variances were altogether very minimal. Hence the instruments used in this study were valid and appropriate for the study.

Reliability of the Research Instrument

A pilot test of the instrument was administered to 100 undergraduate students in UNIBEN Edo State a State which was part of the study population. The result of the test was used to compute the reliability of the instrument. The Cronbach Alpha was applied for the computation of the reliability coefficient of the subscales of the instrument. The reliability coefficient values obtained for the Self-Esteem Rating Scale is 0.52, the Academic Stress Rating Scale is 0.74 and the Suicidal Ideation Rating Scale is 0.69. The reliability was carried out to establish the internal consistency of the instrument.

Methods of Data Collection

The instruments were administered by the researcher and two research assistants to respondents in the selected tertiary institutions as stated in the sampling procedures for the study.

Methods of Data Analysis

The research questions were answered using the Pearson Correlation and coefficient of determination for research question. the hypotheses were tested using Linear and Multiple

linear regressions at a 0.05 level of significance. The benchmark for High and low self-esteem is 0-31 = low self-esteem, 32 – 51 = high self-esteem.

Result and Discussions

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State?

Table 1: Correlation and coefficient of determination of the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	r ²	r ² %	Decision
Self-esteem	1000	37.12	5.719	0.361	0.131	13.1	Positive Relationship
Suicidal ideation		79.63	10.42				

Table 1 presents the findings of an analysis that utilized Pearson's correlation and the coefficient of determination to explore the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State. The result revealed a positive relationship, with a correlation coefficient (*r*) of 0.361, a coefficient of determination (*r*²) of 0.131, and a percentage representation (*r*%) of 13.1%. These results indicate that self-esteem accounts for only 13.1% of the variability in the ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State.

Research Question 2: What is the moderating impact of academic stress in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State?

Table 2: Partial correlation of the moderating impact of academic stress in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State

Variable	N	Mean	SD	R	R ²	R ² %	Decision
academic stress	1000	44.35	6.23	0.848	0.720	72.00	Positive Relationship
Self-esteem		37.13	5.72				
Suicidal ideation		79.63	10.42				

Table 2 shows multiple Correlations of the moderating impact of academic stress in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State was *R* = 0.848. This value indicates that academic stress, self-esteem, and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates are positive. The coefficient of determination (*r*²) value of 0.720 indicated that academic stress, self-esteem, and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates jointly contributed 72% to the variation in suicidal ideation among university undergraduates. Thus, it was concluded that the moderating impact of academic stress in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State is positive.

Research Question 3: What is the moderating impact of sex in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State?

Table 3: Partial correlation of the moderating impact of sex in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State

Variable	N	Mean	SD	R	R ²	R ² %	Decision
Sex		1.43	.43				
Self-esteem	1000	37.13	5.72	0.024	0.001	1.00	Positive Relationship
Suicidal ideation		79.63	10.42				

Table 3 shows multiple Correlations of the moderating impact of academic stress in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State was $R = 0.024$. This value indicates that sex, self-esteem, and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates are positive. The coefficient of determination (r^2) value of 0.001 indicated that sex, self-esteem, and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates jointly contributed 1.00% to the variation in suicidal ideation among university undergraduates. Thus, it was concluded that the moderating impact of sex in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State is positive.

Analysis of Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between Self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State.

Table 4: Regression analysis of the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State

Model	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	14144.557	1	14144.557	2.822	.000
Residual	94220.019	998	94.409		
Total	108364.576	999			

Table 4 presents the result of a regression analysis examining the relationship between Self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State. The model's regression analysis shows that there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and Suicidal Ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State. This is indicated by a significant F-statistic ($F = 2.822$) with a p-value of .000, which is less than the conventional alpha level of 0.05, suggesting that the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation is statistically significant.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant moderating impact of academic stress on self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State.

Table 5: MultipleRegression analysis of the moderating impact of academic stress on self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State

Model	B	SeB	Beta	t	Sig
Self-esteem	.214	.032	.118	6.789	.000
Academic stress	1.355	.029	.810	46.745	.000

Table 5 shows the result of regression statistics which was used to estimate the moderating impact of academic stress on the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State. From the result, self-esteem had a beta weight of 0.118, $t = 6.789$, while academic stress had a beta weight of 0.810, $t = 46.745$. the result showed that self-esteem and academic stress is significant at an alpha level of 0.05. therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected which implies that academic stress significantly moderates the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant moderating impact of sex in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State.

Table 6: Multiple Regression analysis of the moderating impact of sex in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State

Model	B	SeB	Beta	t	Sig
Self-esteem	.659	.054	.362	12.244	.000
Sex	-.286	.621	-.014	-.461	.645

Table 6 shows the result of regression statistics which was used to estimate the moderating impact of sex in the relationship between Self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State. From the result, substance abuse had a beta weight of 0.362, $t = 12.244$, while sex had a beta weight of -0.014, $t = -0.461$. The result showed that self-esteem is significant at an alpha level of 0.05, while sex is not. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted which implies that sex does not significantly moderate the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State.

Discussion of findings

Relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Delta State

The first research question and hypotheses highlight a strong link between self-esteem and suicide thoughts among university undergraduates in Delta State. This discovery begs discussion of numerous probable reasons for this outcome. Firstly, individuals with low self-esteem may have negative beliefs about themselves, feeling inadequate, unworthy, or incompetent, which can add to emotions of hopelessness and despair, ultimately raising the likelihood of suicide ideation. Moreover, low self-esteem may affect individuals' capacity to cope successfully with stresses often faced during the university years, such as academic obstacles, social demands, and personal disappointments, further worsening their sensitivity to suicidal ideation. Additionally, the socio-cultural setting within Delta State, including societal expectations, family dynamics, and community influences, may impact individuals' self-perceptions and contribute to the development of poor self-esteem among university students. Furthermore, the stigma surrounding mental health difficulties in particular cultural contexts may hinder students from seeking help or sharing their struggles openly, aggravating feelings of isolation and exacerbating suicide ideation. Addressing this issue demands a multidimensional approach that encompasses initiatives to promote positive self-esteem, develop supportive environments within the university community, and expand access to mental health resources targeted to the needs of students in Delta State. Self-esteem levels can be a major concern during the first year of a college student's life. People with low self-esteem develop a feeling of harming themselves because they are not living up to their expectations that may be developed internally by the students and externally by others

according to (Kaur, & Rani, (2012), Sisask & Värnik, (2012), Stark, Riordan & O'Connor (2011) and Chehil and Kutcher (2012).

Moderating impact of academic stress in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Delta State.

The exploration of the relationship between the moderating influence of academic stress on the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State exposes a complex interplay of factors that significantly impact students' mental health outcomes within the academic context. This conclusion implies that academic stress not only directly impacts students' self-esteem but also interacts with it to raise the probability of suicide thoughts. One likely cause for this outcome is the severe pressure and high expectations connected with academic excellence in Delta State's university setting. Students can encounter a plethora of stresses, including academic deadlines, hard courses, and the desire to reach or surpass academic standards. During such pressure, students may suffer heightened levels of stress and anxiety, which can significantly damage their self-esteem. Academic pressures may induce students to doubt their talents, question their competency, or feel inadequate relative to their colleagues, particularly if they regard themselves as unable to satisfy academic expectations. Moreover, academic stress might increase pre-existing vulnerabilities in self-esteem. Students who already battle with poor self-esteem may be more sensitive to the negative impacts of academic pressures, as they may take setbacks or problems as further evidence of their inadequacy or failure. The persistent pressure to achieve academically may prolong a cycle of poor self-perception and self-criticism, further undermining students' self-esteem and increasing their sensitivity to suicidal ideation. Furthermore, the socio-cultural setting inside Delta State may influence the association between academic stress, self-esteem, and suicidal ideation among university students. Cultural views regarding success, achievement, and failure may alter students' ideas of themselves and their worthiness, impacting their self-esteem and susceptibility to suicide thoughts in times of academic stress. Additionally, societal expectations around academic performance and career success may intensify feelings of pressure and inadequacy among students, further hurting their self-esteem and mental well-being. This finding coincides with Khan et al (2016), Arun et al (2017), Okechukwu et al (2022), and Ang & Huan (2006)

Moderating impact of sex in the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in Delta State

The third findings illuminate a significant relationship between the moderating effect of sex, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates, indicating that gender plays a pivotal role in shaping the association between substance use and mental health outcomes. Several potential reasons may contribute to this outcome. Firstly, societal norms and gender expectations often dictate different attitudes and behaviors regarding substance use among men and women. For instance, men may face greater pressure to conform to traditional masculine norms, which may include engaging in risky behaviors like excessive alcohol consumption or drug abuse as a means of asserting dominance or coping with stress. On the other hand, women may experience different social pressures related to substance use, such as stigma or perceptions of deviance, which could influence their likelihood of engaging in substance abuse and their susceptibility to its negative consequences on mental health. Biological differences between men and women may also contribute to the observed moderation effect. For example, studies have shown that men and women metabolize alcohol and drugs differently, leading to variations in the physiological effects and susceptibility to addiction. Additionally, hormonal fluctuations and neurobiological factors associated with gender differences in stress response and emotion

regulation may influence individuals' vulnerability to suicidal ideation in the context of substance abuse. Furthermore, social, and environmental factors, such as peer influence, family dynamics, and access to resources, may interact with gender to shape patterns of substance use and mental health outcomes among university students. For instance, peer groups and social networks may play a crucial role in shaping individuals' attitudes toward substance use and providing social support or encouragement for engaging in or abstaining from such behaviors. The finding is in line with Nicholas et al (2012), Alexander (1992), Pack et al (2005), and Kim et al (2014).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that self-esteem plays a crucial role in influencing suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Delta State. The study established a significant relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation, indicating that students with lower self-esteem are more susceptible to suicidal thoughts. Furthermore, academic stress was found to significantly moderate this relationship, exacerbating the negative effects of low self-esteem on suicidal ideation. This suggests that students experiencing higher levels of academic stress are at an increased risk of developing suicidal thoughts, particularly if their self-esteem is already compromised. On the other hand, the study found no significant moderating impact of sex on the relationship between self-esteem and suicidal ideation. This indicates that the influence of self-esteem on suicidal ideation is consistent across both male and female students, suggesting that interventions aimed at enhancing self-esteem and reducing academic stress could be equally effective for all students, regardless of their sex.

Recommendations

1. Universities should implement and promote programs designed to improve students' self-esteem. These programs could include workshops, counseling services, and peer support groups aimed at fostering a positive self-image and resilience among undergraduates.
2. Institutions should develop and integrate stress management programs into the academic curriculum. This could involve providing resources for time management, academic skills workshops, and stress-relief activities such as mindfulness and relaxation techniques to help students better cope with academic pressures.
3. Universities should conduct awareness campaigns to educate students about the importance of mental health and the impact of self-esteem and academic stress on their well-being. These campaigns could include seminars, informational materials, and support services available on campus.
4. Strengthening on-campus counseling and psychological support services is crucial. These services should be readily accessible to students and provide tailored support for those experiencing low self-esteem or high levels of academic stress.
5. Faculty members should be trained to recognize signs of academic stress and mental health issues among students. Training should include strategies for providing support and referring students to appropriate counseling services when needed.
6. Universities should regularly assess the effectiveness of self-esteem and stress management programs through feedback from students and evaluation of program outcomes. Continuous improvement based on this feedback will help ensure that interventions remain relevant and effective.

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