

ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNSELLORS IN CURBING THE MENACE OF SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The incidence of suicidal ideation among university students has pose a great concern to school counsellors in various universities in Nigeria. School counsellors are in good position to curb the menace of suicidal ideation among students in school. However, students are vulnerable to the problem of suicidal ideation due to frequent occurrence of academic conflicts, low academic performance, anxiety, sexual harassment, substance abuse, financial problems, hostility, anger and others. Therefore, the paper intends to examine the role of school counsellors in curbing the menace of suicidal ideation among university students in Nigeria. The paper also highlights the concept of suicidal ideation, types of suicidal ideation, warning signs of suicidal ideation, prevalence of suicidal ideation, and strategies for reducing the menace of suicidal ideation. Based on the suggestions made in this paper; government and education stakeholders should help in the training and retraining of school counsellors in tackling the menace of suicidal ideation among university students; University based-mental health services should be established in various universities in Nigeria and these services should aim at finding out and taking care of those with mental health illness and prevent the incidents of suicidal ideation.

Keywords: suicidal ideation, university students, schools, school counsellors, Nigeria.

Introduction

The function of guidance and counselling services among university students cannot be overemphasized. Guidance and counselling is encompassed by activities of relevant services and process of helping students within and outside the school, to achieve full potentialities in their emotional, moral, social, academic and vocational developments. Guidance and counselling is aimed at primarily assisting students to discover hidden strengths and ultimately grow in independence and ability to make wise choices and decisions and adjustment unaided. Therefore, counselling helps in promoting well-being of students in schools. Schools have a major role to play in transforming students' lives into positive, but there are several problems that students always experience in schools which may affect their mental and psychological well-being, most especially suicidal ideation.

Suicidal ideation is a serious psychological and mental health problem to students of diverse backgrounds across the world. It has a far-reaching consequence on university students. Over 1.2 million university students in Nigeria between the ages of 18 and 25 years are extremely at high risk of suicidal ideation due to mental illness, sexual abuse, bullying, poor academic performance and drug abuse disorders; about 24, 000 students each year make suicide attempt and 12, 700 die by suicide (Fadipe, 2021). Therefore, self – defenestrating, stepping in front of a moving train, or car collusion, intentional drowning, self-immolation, electrocution, intentional radiation poisoning and intentional starvation, ingestion of pesticide, jumping down a height, hanging and firearms are common methods of suicide among university students in Nigeria. It was commonly observed that university students who are diagnosed of anxiety, stress, depression and personality problems are prone to suicidal ideation.

Table 1: Statistics of university students on unnatural death from 2012 to 2020

Year	Electrocution	Hanging	Firearms	Drowning	Other methods	Total Unnatural Death
2012	7555	657	8764	13500	12300	42776
2013	4790	1300	9876	10976	15970	42912
2014	5790	6500	2500	12789	16790	44369
2015	6700	5670	5613	9870	12900	40753
2016	3789	7800	1289	11987	9876	34741
2017	9001	6453	7000	9023	9000	40477
2018	7896	4123	7890	14378	11900	46187
2019	8000	2369	8745	15443	17700	52257
2020	6901	4003	6789	2790	10400	30883
Total	60422	38875	58466	100756	116836	375355

Source: Fadipe, 2021

Suicidal ideation is the first stage on the pathway to suicidal attempt and known risk factor for death. It is a common phenomenon among students irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, race, academic attainment or even socio-economic status. Suicidal ideation cases are reported on weekly basis, and several reports of suicide make headlines across six geo-political zones in Nigeria. Ihoya, Ulo and Okocha (2020) noted that suicidal ideation increases day by day among university students, and recently, it has been the most regular incidents of death among students whose ages range between 18 and 25 years. Students who were disappointed in their academic results or relationship breakdowns are susceptible to suicidal ideation than their peers or other students who do not experience any of these problems (Brausch, 2008). However, there are many factors that contribute to the menace of suicidal ideation, which have been identified as school problems, depression, poverty, marital breakdowns, academic failures, loneliness, aggressiveness, substance abuse, mental difficulties, violence, peer victimization, stigmatization, emotional and mental stress (Becky, 2015).

Suicidal ideation is a severe problem and prevalent among university students in Nigeria. Several suicide cases have been recorded in 2021 more than the previous years, for instance, In August

2021, University of Ilorin student of the Department of English language committed suicide due to abuse of substances and lack of parental care and inability to cope with his academic failures in school. In October 2021, another final year student of Lagos state university committed suicide due to her inability to pay school fees. A final year student at the Olabisi Onabanjo University, reportedly committed suicide by drinking pesticide due to relationship breakdown on Christmas day. Also, 200-level student of the Obafemi Awolowo University attempted suicide two times but later resulted to suicide in April 19, 2021. Another similar event occurred, a 300 level student of the Department of Physics University of Lagos, reportedly committed suicide by taking in insecticide. These cases cause for lamentation and worries among counsellors and the increasing rates of suicide and suicidal ideation cases continue to pose problem to school authorities as well as international bodies (Fadipe, 2021).

School counsellors have roles to play in order for them to successfully assist students when they are faced with life's challenges in schools. Prevention they say, is better than cure. Many incidents of suicidal ideation, or suicide attempts, take place in schools. University students who are at risk of suicidal ideation attend school and exhibit warning signs that, if recognized and acted on, could prevent death or injury and reduce emotional distress. School counsellors have day-to-day contact with many students, some of whom have problems that could result in serious injury or suicide in school. Counsellors are therefore well-positioned to observe students' behaviour and to act when they suspect that a student may be at risk of self-harm. There are specific steps counsellors can take in identifying and managing students in school who are at risk of suicidal ideation, especially if the school has a good structure that can support counsellors' personal efforts to safeguard the health and safety of its students (Keyes, 2012).

There are different methods school counsellors can utilize in curbing the menace of suicidal ideation in schools. They are: counselling and public education, media strategies, screening and assessment, restricting access to lethal weapons, treatment, and internet or hotline support. Gbadeyan (2015) also enumerated different ways school counsellors can help in curbing suicidal ideation in schools and these consist of implementation of regular screening programs for depression, early identification or detection of suicide symptoms; provision of educational programs and materials to parents and to families of incoming and continuing students; taking a school-wide approach to address both individual and environmental factors associated with suicidal ideation; establishment of prevention programs to help the students cope with suicidal ideation in schools; developing comprehensive medical leave policies, which include mental illness; participation in statewide surveillance system for reporting serious suicidal ideation and other suicidal related behaviors in schools.

A lot of scholars have indicated that school counsellors are in a good position to play a strategic role in the early identification and management of students having suicidal thoughts in school

(Ebong, 2016; Moore, 2000) Indeed, important indicators of mood such as behaviour, interpersonal relationships, academic performance and the ability to cope, are all subject to continual observation in the school settings (Ihoya, Ulo & Okocha, 2020). Moore (2000) argued that early recognition of suspected high-risk students could greatly facilitate appropriate treatment and subsequent prevention of suicidal ideation. Obviously, a major factor of the counsellors' role in assisting high-risk students depends on their ability to recognize and respond appropriately to verbal, behavioural and situational signs of suicidal ideation in their students.

Concept of Suicidal Ideation

The idea of taking one's life is a complex process and not a singular event. The process occurs within a given context and time. A crucial part of the process is the thought or the idea of committing suicide. Two main terminologies are essential in this distinct process; these are ideas and thoughts. Therefore, suicidal ideation is regarded as the thoughts and ideas about committing suicide. Suicidal ideation is a thought process in which an individual thinks about suicide but does not intend or plan to commit suicide (Peterson, 2018). It is also defined as the thought, intent, plan and imagination of an individual concerning suicide. Suicidal ideation refers to thinking about ending one's life, it ranges from infrequent feelings and wishes to be dead or thought that life is not worth living (Fadipe, 2021; Klonsky, 2016).

Types of Suicidal Ideation

The thought of engaging in suicide has been classified into active and passive forms. Active suicidal thought involves an existing wish to die along with a plan on how to carry out the death (Fadipe, 2021). It also includes a specific plan that is likely to be taken, how an individual intends to kill him/herself and the intention to act on such thoughts. In contrast, passive ideation encompasses the desire to die but without a specific plan on how to carry out the act. Whether active or passive, the thoughts of hopelessness, helplessness, and worthlessness are common thought distortions associated with suicidal ideation, while impulsivity facilitates the transition of suicidal ideation to attempt (Okafor & Okafor, 2021).

Prevalence of Suicidal Ideation

In Nigeria, suicidal ideation is the leading cause of mental illness and deaths among university students. The university students tend to have a high prevalence of suicidal ideation and in relation to other risk factors, such as violence, physical illness, academic stress, loss of social roles and relationships, and untreated depression (Garand, Mitchell, Dietrick, Hijjawi & Pan, 2006). Several studies have revealed that suicidal ideations are prevalent among university students, up to 80% of university students developed suicidal thoughts due to low self-esteem, academic stress and substance use disorders. Between 2010 and 2019, the annual number of deaths from electrocution increase by 62% while the number from drowning increase by 48%. Depression rates increase due

to physical illness by 66%. The rate of non-fatal self-poisoning increase by 52%. Depression is the most common disorder associated with suicidal ideation and often overlaps with other diagnosed disorders (Ihoya, Ulo & Okocha, 2020). In 2020, approximately 70, 800 university students visited hospitals for injuries due to depression and suicidal attempts. Studies have revealed that the suicidal ideation rate varied by age groups. Of all age groups they reported, the university students have the highest suicidal ideation rates, particularly male students when compared with female counterparts (Fadipe, 2021).

Identified Warning Signs

Students who are in danger of harming themselves may reach out to school counsellors, psychologists, and primary care providers. Particularly, school counsellors need to familiarize with the warning signs of suicidal ideation in schools. Warning signs include: threatening to hurt or kill him/herself, or talking of wanting to hurt or kill him/herself; looking for ways to kill him/herself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means; ideas of guilt and unworthiness; overreaction to criticism; sudden neglect of appearance and hygiene; talking about feeling of hopelessness or having no reason to live; anxiety; agitation; aggression; acting recklessly; insomnia or sleep disturbance; increased alcohol or drug use; indecisiveness; low self-esteem; bleak and pessimistic views of the future; unprovoked episodes of crying; physical complaints; diminished appetite; reduced libido; bullying; withdrawing or feeling isolated; talking about being a burden to others; rage or seeking revenge; dramatic mood swings; feeling trapped – like there's no way out; talking about being in unbearable pain; prior suicide attempt(s); history of depression or other mental illness; sexual abuse; family history of suicide or violence; and physical illness or recent serious diagnosis.

Causes of Suicidal Ideation

There is need to look into the causes of suicidal ideation among university students. These causes would prompt the action of school counsellors to play a vital role and provide preventive measures in school.

❖ *Mental disorders*

Strukcinskiene, Andersson and Janson (2011) stated that there is a close relationship between suicidal ideation and mental disorders among students. About 90% of students who develop suicidal thoughts have suffered from at least one mental disorder (Muehlenkamp, Marrone, Gray & Brown, 2009). Mental disorders as a result of substance abuse, depression, insomnia, enuresis, acute anxiety, affective disorder, low self-esteem and academic stress are found to contribute to the problem of suicidal ideation among new intake students. All these problems create emotional disturbance which is part of mental disorders that leads to the cause of suicidal ideation among university students.

❖ *Depression*

The word “depression” refers to a feeling of unhappiness, sadness and frustration. Depression is a mental health problem and has been identified as a major cause of suicidal ideation among students. Depression can be a severe and, sometimes, a life-threatening condition, which can impair quality of life in a more fundamental way than chronic physical conditions such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes mellitus, or musculoskeletal problems. Furthermore, depression is associated with a high risk of suicide and suicide attempts. About 35% of students with severe depression develop suicidal thoughts, while 56% attempt suicide. Depression is a mood disorder that affects an individual’s feelings and adjustment to how they feel (Muoti, 2014). Wanyoike (2014) noted that suicidal ideation among university students is highly influenced by depression as it hinders proper functioning and causes psychological distress. Depression is strongly related to both psychological distress and it is a cause of death among students with low self-esteem and aggression (Gunnell Fernando Hewagama, Priyangika, Konradsen & Eddleston, 2007).

❖ ***Loneliness***

At entry into university, many students always experience solitude. This is a feeling of being alone. In fact, most of them feel they are alone when in the university. It is a feeling that is made worse when a student is an introvert. The feeling of loneliness may grow further since the students lack knowledge concerning the university set up. The feeling is made worse if they lack friends due to poor socialization. Mathew (2018) and Wanyoike (2014) attests to the fact that loneliness was identified as a cause of suicidal ideation and increased by 60% among university students. This 60% makes it to be identified as a leading cause of suicidal ideation by university students and mental health practitioners.

❖ ***Conflict***

Suicidal ideation among students in university can be caused by conflict. A conflict is identified as differences between individuals due to their opinion, or beliefs. Conflicts in their extreme differences can result into arguments as well as physical fights among students. In universities students get involved in peer conflict and is a disagreement between students of the same age group. Any form of ideological differences between university students can lead to uneasy relationships such as bullying and aggression. Students who are at a higher risk of being affected by peer pressure are mostly introverts. Conflict among university students is not restricted to their schools rather extends to their homes. Therefore, there are other forms of conflict between siblings or between children and their parents. Students faced with conflicts can get into depression and if the conflicts are extreme can lead to suicidal tendencies.

The most common type of conflict that leads to suicidal ideation among students is relationship conflict. In a research by Wolford-Clevenger, Caitlin, Vann, Noelle, Smith, Philip (2016) regarding the relationship between intimate partner violence and the likelihood of suicidal thoughts; the research examined specific categories of intimate partner abuse which included: physical, emotional and harassment in relation to gender. Findings revealed that female students

experience less physical abuse than male counterparts and female students are likely to report less physical abuse than male counterparts (Wolford-Clevenger, Caitlin, Vann, Noelle, Smith, Philip, 2016). The study established that suicidal ideation and depression symptoms are likely to increase with more frequent harassment, physical abuse, and emotional abuse between partners. Precisely, men who experienced more physical and less emotional abuse were at a higher risk of suicidal tendencies. On the contrary, emotional abuse was a significant predictor of suicidal tendencies in female students (De Leo and Heller, 2008; Crossman, 2017)

❖ ***Academic Pressure***

The aim of attending university is to attain a diploma or degree or any other form of certifications. There are several factors that contribute to qualification but it is quite important to note that students must perform so as to achieve the qualification. As a social burden on them, the pressure to perform has been noted as one of the main stressors experienced by university students. Whenever students' performance is not adhered to students tend to find different means to overcome the academic burden placed on them (Wallack, 2007). Among the ways through which students in universities deal with academic pressure is to develop suicidal thoughts and later result to a complete suicide. Apparently, students who have been academically excellent can become highly disappointed when there is a change in their academic performance (Crossman, 2017). Such students end up overworking themselves, and its consequences may lead to depression, low self-esteem and indulgence in risky behaviors such as substance abuse; when the burden becomes too heavy to bear, there is a likelihood of students developing suicidal thoughts. This is the reason many universities are losing students to suicide across the globe.

❖ ***Alcohol and Substance Abuse***

In universities, alcohol and substance abuse is among the greatest vices that university students engage in. The manner in which the students consume alcohol is worrying to parents, school authorities, administrators and individuals in the society (Fadipe, 2021). Drug abuse on the other hand, is the use of substances that alter the mood, emotion, or state of consciousness of an individual. Unlike alcohol, illicit drugs are illegal. Students that abuse alcohol and drugs are characterized as individuals who are facing hopelessness and helplessness. Wanyoike (2014) in a study on suicide among students in Kenya identified that hopelessness affected 30% of the student population. The study established the fact that alcohol and drug abuse greatly affected academic performance of university students.

Besides, Wanyoike found out that alcohol and drug abuse were the risk factors contributing to poor academic grades as well as encouraging suicide among university students. De Leo and Heller (2008) noted that alcoholics and suicidal ideation are characterized by depression, stressful life events, particularly interpersonal difficulties, poor social support, loneliness, high aggression/impulsivity, hopelessness, severe alcoholism, serious medical illness, suicidal communication, and prior suicidal behavior. In universities, the use of alcohol and drugs is

considered as a major cause of suicidal ideation. Students tend to use alcohol and abuse drugs to deal with the social burdens they are facing. Alcohol and drug abuse is not only a cause of suicide but has been identified as a symptom of suicidal ideation (Fadipe & Olakojo, 2019).

❖ **Trauma**

One of the causes of suicidal ideation among university students is trauma (Wallack, 2007). Traumatic experiences are associated with suicidal ideation. Mortier (2017) established five main categories of traumatic experiences that can lead to suicidal ideation. These included: depression, anxiety, parental psychopathology, childhood traumatic experiences, mental disorders and stressful experiences. Trauma is experienced by many students which is the reason universities and other institutions of higher learning adopt some form of screening when admitting students.

❖ **Illness**

Illness is defined as any health-related disorders that affect the physical or mental status of an individual. Health ailments can affect the psychological status of an individual especially university students considering the social burden they bare as well as the transitional stage they are undergoing in life. In university, students who have medical conditions are known to hide it from their colleagues for fear of shame or being stigmatized (Wanyoike, 2015). Health ailments can result from infections or poor hygiene and include HIV/AIDS, cholera and tuberculosis. Medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, sickle cell anemia are hereditary. All these diseases if not handled well, can be fatal. Additionally, students may fear stating their medical condition due to the seclusion that comes after. Seclusion can be as a result of the constant need to be under treatment. Other students may opt to withdraw from their colleagues to avoid discrimination. The medical status of university students can lead them into depression and the seclusion that follows can create room for suicide to end the suffering they are experiencing (Arria, O'Grady, Caldeira, Vincent, Wilcox, & Wish, 2009).

Counselling Strategies for Reducing the Menace of Suicidal Ideation

Suicidal ideation is a problematic issue among students, and it has become a great concern for university authorities, school counsellors and individuals in the society. The rising cases of suicidal ideation among university students are preventable. In most cases suicidal ideations are temporary and can be treated, but in some cases, it places individual at risk of committing suicide. The university needs to play an important role in implementing preventive measures to counter suicide attempts. Some of the measures that can be utilized include: student counselling, student health care services and suicide-based prevention programmes. In implementation of the above preventive measures, it is necessary that consultation is done with primary health care givers which include: counsellors, psychiatrists, nurses, sociologists, psychologists, and the whole range of mental health practitioners. Some of the strategies for curbing the menace of suicidal ideation in schools.

- (1) *Public awareness and orientation programme:* public awareness and orientation programs on suicidal ideation would increase the general awareness of students in school, most especially issues related to mental health problems such as depression, schizophrenia, severe anxiety and drug abuse. The primary aim of counselling is to help students to ameliorate the negative feelings of students that may have mental health challenges. Therefore, public awareness and orientation programme are some of the main components of school guidance services, and they help in enlightening students on the menace of suicidal ideation in school.
- (2) *Early recognition and referral of students who are at risk:* early recognition and referral initiatives are part of counselling services; this helps school counsellors to train some mature students who have regular contact with other students in schools to act as “gatekeepers”. Being a gatekeeper means looking out for warning signs or risk indicators of suicidal ideation (recognition) and then to refer students to help services that specialize in intervention with suicide. Thus, peer recognition and referral gatekeepers are trained students who are watching out for warning signs in their peers and who further refer them to a professional counsellor for counselling services. Recognition and referral have been found to be effective in preventing suicidal ideation in schools.
- (3) *Assisting young individuals to overcome difficult emotional problems:* limited health literacy, help-seeking reluctance and not sticking to treatment may present barriers between students and the prevention/management of suicidal ideation. This is particularly true of students experiencing depression such as social withdrawal (which could prevent help seeking) or reduced motivation (which could prevent treatment adherence). Counsellors and other professional personnel working with suicidal ideation students are in a good position to educate them, encourage help-seeking from appropriate services and support students with suicidal thoughts with prescribed treatments.
- (4) *Psychotherapy:* several methods or techniques have been used in dealing with students with suicidal ideation. In particular, cognitive behavioural therapy has been an effective way of managing students with suicidal thoughts; dialectical behavioural therapy is effective in managing treatment adherence and reducing suicidal thoughts in those with borderline personality disorder; problem-solving therapy has been a potent therapy in managing students having hopelessness and depressive symptoms. Summarily, cognitive-behavioural prevention strategies have so far been effective in managing and reducing risk of suicidal thoughts in students.
- (5) *Availability of effective telephone helplines and text services:* recent researches have indicated that telephone helplines are effective means of preventing students from harming or feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. Telephone hotlines would help students to express their concerns freely. Joiner (2005) mentioned that students in schools preferred

expressing their thoughts and wishes through text messages than face to face encounter. It gives students more confidence and encouragement to express their emotional issues affecting their lives.

Succinctly, it is important for the counsellors and education stakeholders to be aware of students that are at risk of suicidal ideation based on various factors, some of the risk factors include; homelessness, low socioeconomic status and educational level, low academic performance, academic stress, academic conflicts, trauma, hopelessness, helplessness, sexual orientation issues as homosexuals, lesbianism, transgender, impaired judgement, lack of impulse control, and self-destructive behaviours, poor coping strategies, physical illness and chronic pains, exposure to suicide of other people, access to means of complete self-harm, destructive and violent events such as war or catastrophic disasters (Fadipe, 2021).

Role of School Counsellors in Curbing Suicidal Ideation

The role of school counsellors in curbing the menace of suicidal ideation among university students in schools cannot be overemphasized, as they carry out a lot of activities in order to ensure the safety of their students. Some of the roles of school counsellors include: early identification and locating of students who are at risk of suicidal ideation, making referral of students with suicidal thoughts to the appropriate health professional (mental health services) for assessment and management, and creating a good environment for safety of the students.

Also, school counsellors or personnel who are aware that a student have symptoms of suicidal ideation must contact the student's parents or guardians. Ideally, this contact should be made face-to-face and should include recommendations to parents about how to decrease the risk of suicidal ideation by increasing supervision, removing lethal means, and finding appropriate mental health services for the young person. A confidential record of parent notifications should be kept.

The school counsellors should be more knowledgeable of crisis management when it comes to the problem of suicidal ideation or crisis related to suicidal ideation. The counsellors help to check on vulnerable students and those who have attempted or threatened suicide in the past. Also, counsellors can help in raising awareness of suicidal ideation warning signs to the school authorities, parents, teachers, and students as this will help them in identifying those signs and provide appropriate help and referral where necessary.

Another method that school counsellors can use in curbing the menace of suicidal ideation in school is through resilience. The following resilience factors may act as buffers for university students, who could lessen the influence of vulnerability and risk; perceived fairness of teachers, feeling safe at school, good family connections, self-regulation skills, positive outlook in life, caring family relationships, good interpersonal communication with friends, and positive self-

esteem. Counsellors assist individuals in better understanding of the relationship between substance abuse and mood disorders, and suicidal thoughts and behaviours. The counsellors also help with relapse prevention planning, building social support and when necessary, making referrals to more intensive psychiatric and alcohol and drug treatment centers. It is the responsibility of the school counsellors to help in allocating and identifying students who are at risk of suicide in school. This helps in providing relevant intervention on time which goes a long way in managing or reducing suicidal ideation. The school counsellors can make a referral if the problem goes beyond their capacity to the appropriate health professionals (mental health services) for further assessment and management, after which follow up is carried out.

The school counsellors can help in assisting teachers in learning about identifying potentially suicidal inclined students and train other students to be aware of how they could be of help to their troubled peers in school. This means that the counsellors can also train the teachers on how to become para-counsellors as they are the closest to the students in the classroom. This will make them to be in a better position to identify at-risk students quickly and get them help before it is too late. The school counsellors also can help family and friends to understand the role of mental health illness in suicidal ideation as well as to manage the risk of suicide contagion or imitative suicides.

Apparently, it is part of the role of school counsellors in assisting students in altering their constricted thinking, and in moving from a death-orientated position to a life-orientated position, also to ultimately assist the suicidal students in untangling and addressing what is driving the suicidal feelings, and in helping them to redevelop a sense of hope, as well as increase connections with family and community support systems, including peer support in school. Besides, school counsellors may establish a crisis center and select and train the crisis team members on what to do and how to identify suicidal students. It is also the responsibility of the counsellors to continually update their knowledge on risk factors associated with suicidal ideation in order to be able to identify it quickly in students. These are some of the roles of school counsellors in curbing suicidal ideation or attempted suicides, although counsellors' roles are not limited to students but play a significant role to ensure safety of the students in school.

Succinctly, school counsellors can help to curb the menace of suicidal ideation through the use of educational settings as sites of intervention; promotion of research on suicidal ideation and suicide prevention; attempts to change the portrayal of suicidal ideation and mental illness in the media; efforts to increase and improve the detection and treatment of depression and other mental illnesses; emphasis on reducing the stigma associated with help-seeking behaviours, strategies designed to improve access to services, promotion of effective preventive efforts with rigorous evaluation and efforts to reduce access to suicide means.

Conclusion

Suicidal ideation is a big problem among university students. Students in school are vulnerable to suicidal ideation due to many risky factors including interpersonal difficulties, poor social support,

loneliness, high aggression/impulsivity, hopelessness, severe alcoholism, serious medical illness, suicidal communication, and prior suicidal behaviour. School counsellors and other professional personnel are in good position to curb the menace of suicidal ideation among students in school. Strategies to reduce suicidal ideation include prevention measures, such as surveillance, restriction of access to the means of suicide, guidelines for the media, stigma reduction, and public awareness, as well as school counsellors, training health workers, educators, police, and other gatekeepers.

Suggestions

Sequel to the earlier discussions, suggestions are made:

- (1) Programmes of preventive intervention strategies should be organized regularly by school counsellors for the university students.
- (2) School counsellors should make public awareness and information available on the factors that could predispose students to suicidal ideation.
- (3) University authorities and school counsellors should ensure that possession of harmful weapons by students must be drastically checked and those found with weapons should be rusticated from the university to serve as deterrent to others.
- (4) University based-mental health services should be established in various universities in Nigeria and these services should aim at finding out and taking care of those with mental health illness and prevent the incidents of suicidal ideation.
- (5) School counsellors should tackle vigorously all forms of behaviours that could affect the well-being of the students in schools. This can be done by sponsoring studies to identify vulnerable factors that can increase suicidal ideation and proffer solutions to the problems.
- (6) Government should provide suicide counselling personnel who will always be available to offer assistance to those in need of help. Seminars on dangers and effects of drug abuse, possession of lethal weapons should be organized regularly by school counsellors for the students.
- (7) Suicidal ideation is a social-health problem, there should be a research on the causes of suicidal ideation, the stigma of suicidal ideation victims, and the need for effective reporting of suicidal cases. This will help in formulating a blue print for preventive intervention strategies and service delivery in Nigeria.
- (8) Government and education stakeholders should help in the training and retraining of school counsellors in tackling the menace of suicidal ideation among university students.

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