



PREDICTIVE POWER OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ON SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG FEMALE STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITIES IN NORTH-EAST, NIGERIA

Ahmed Sadiq

Department of Educational Foundations,
Faculty of Education,
Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State, Nigeria
Email: ahmed.sadiq@fukashere.edu.ng

And

Nathaniel Terna Igbangi

Department of Educational Foundations,
Faculty of Education,
Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State, Nigeria
Email: nathanieligbangi@fukashere.edu.ng

And

Aliyu Hassan Dalhatu

Department of Arts and Social Science Education,
Faculty of Education,
Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State, Nigeria

Abstract

This study examined the predictive power of gender-based violence (sexual and physical violence) on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria. The study was guided by two research questions and two null hypotheses. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a correlation survey research design. The population of the study comprised 11,988 female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria. 450 female students randomly selected from the population were used as sample. Gender-Based Violence Questionnaire (GBVQ) and Suicide Screening Questionnaire- Self-Rating (SSQ- SR) were used in collecting data for the study. Using Cronbach's Alpha reliability test, a reliability index of 0.95 and 0.82 were obtained for GBVQ and SSQ- SR respectively. Linear regression was used to answer the two research questions. In testing the hypotheses, t-test associated with linear regression was used to test the two hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant predictive power of sexual violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities. It was also revealed that there is a significant predictive power of physical violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that universities' managements should offer resources and referrals for female students struggling with suicidal ideation as a result of sexual violence.

Key words: Gender-Based Violence, Suicidal Ideation, and Female Students

Introduction

The prevalence of suicide among undergraduate students has become a serious problem. Media houses, in these years, always carry disturbing news of suicide or

suicide attempts by young individuals. Isabu, Arunibabe, and Ifemegbulem (2022) stated that the Guardian Newspaper of 12th June, 2018 reported that Nigeria lost about 80 people by suicide in one year, mostly



students. Isabu, Arunibabe, and Ifemegbulem added that Chukwuemeka Akachi a 400 level student of English and Literary Studies of University of Nigeria, Nsukka allegedly committed suicide on Monday 13th May, 2019. Despite being preventable, close to one million people die by suicide while the low and middle-income countries account for approximately 80% of the global suicides. Nigeria with a population of over 200 million is one of the epicentres of suicide in the world with a suicide estimate of 17.3 per 100,000 people which is higher than the global (10.5 per 100,000) and Africa (12.0 per 100,000) estimates (Oyetunji, Arafat, Famori, Akinboyewa, Afolami, Ajayi, & Kar, 2020).

Suicide is the act of taking one's own life voluntarily and intentionally. Suicide is defined as death caused by self-inflicted injurious behaviour with the intent to die as a result of the behaviour (Klonsky, May, & Saffer, 2016). Close to 800, 000 people die by suicide every year (World Health Organisation, 2019). Suicide is a complex, multifaceted public health issue with societal, environmental, interpersonal, biological, and psychological components (Curtin, Hedegaard & Ahmad, 2020).

Suicidal ideation, therefore, implies thinking about committing suicide. One of the common problems among undergraduate students is suicidal ideation and as such it has become an issue of concern among scholars. Undergraduate students are faced with a lot of problems, including academic stress, financial constraints, relationship difficulties, parenting and peer influences. These factors can constitute stress to them which could consequently lead to suicidal ideation (Olaseni, 2018). Olaseni further stated that the situation in Nigeria is rather unnerving as issues pertaining to suicidal ideation are less investigated because of the stigma attached to persons who belong to this category. Suicidal

ideation is considered a taboo among different cultures in Nigeria.

Moreover, adolescents and young adults whose ages correspond to the university students are at risk of having suicidal ideation. Kim and Park (2019) stated that young adults in their 20s showed a higher rate of suicidal ideation than adults which seems to result in higher rates of the suicidal ideation, plans and suicide attempts. According to Adamawa News Agency of January 29, 2024, a female student of Federal Polytechnic, Mubi, Adamawa State, Jamima Shetima Balami, has reportedly committed suicide. Jamima was a National Diploma II student of Mass Communication Department. Therefore, available literature reported that suicidal ideation has a link with GBV, more especially, in schools.

Gender is a social word which describes how people express masculine or feminine traits. Gender refers to all the characteristics, expected behaviour and roles of men and women which a particular society has determined and assigned to each sex (Ogbuegwu, 2016). Therefore, gender plays a vital role in cases of violence. Because, most of the survivors are female gender and most of the perpetrators are male gender.

Violence is one of the common types of human behaviour that occurs in all parts of the world. According to Lee and Blackwell (2019), violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation. Several forms of violence occur in and around the universities. One of the violence is Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

The prevalence of GBV is a major public health and human rights problem worldwide. According to John, Casey, Carino and



McGovern (2020), data from over 80 countries of the world suggest that ‘1’ in every ‘3’ women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lives. In view of this, Yemisi (2019) stated that in Nigeria’s higher education institutions, GBV appear to be rampant, especially, gang rape and other forms of sexual harassment. However, only few cases seem reported. Yemisi further stated that factors like social stigmatisation and fear of repercussion make GBV become a silent scourge which mostly affects women who are unable to voice out their bitter experiences.

GBV is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is done against a person’s will based on gender differences. According to Grace (2021), GBV is violence involving men and women; and which is derived from unequal power relationships between the 2 genders. Similarly, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) 2015 Guidelines for Integrating GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Action defined GBV as any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed differences between females and males, (Perrin, Marsh, Clough, Desgroppes, Yopephanuel, Abdi, & Glass, 2019). GBV has been classified into many forms by different organisations. However, two forms were used for the purpose of this study, namely: sexual violence and physical violence.

Sexual violence can be non-consensual penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis or other body part by a perpetrator. For example, gang rape, sodomy, forced oral sex, etc. It can also be any form of non-consensual sexual contact that does not result in or include penetration. For example, attempted rape, unwanted kissing, touching of breasts, genitalia, buttocks, etc. According to Villaveces, Shankar,

Palomeque, Padilla and Kress (2024), sexual violence was defined as having ever experienced (a.) unwanted sexual touching, such as: fondling, pinching, grabbing or touching around person’s sexual body parts, (b.) attempted unwanted sexual intercourse, (c.) pressured intercourse (unwanted sex was completed through the use of harassment, threats or tricks) and (d.) physically forced sex (unwanted intercourse completed through physical force) by any perpetrator.

Physical violence is not sexual in nature. For example, hitting, slapping, choking, cutting, shoving, burning, shooting, acid attacks or any other act that results in physical pain, discomfort or injury. According to Villaveces, Shankar, Palomeque, Padilla and Kress (2024), physical violence was defined as being punched, kicked, whipped, beat with an object, choked, smothered, tried to be drowned or burnt, threatened with a knife, gun or other weapon.

Jonasson, Wiberg and Dennhag (2024) carried out an empirical study on sexual harassment and patterns of symptoms and functional abilities in a psychiatric sample of adolescents and found that about 60% of the adolescents reported having been subjected to sexual violence and also reported higher levels of suicidal ideation, anxiety, and depression. Another empirical study was conducted by Vega and Lorenzana (2022) on prevalence and risk factors of suicidal ideation among victims of child abuse seen at the Phillipines general hospital, child protection shows unit and found that sexual violence and suicidal ideation have a strong relationship. Similarly, another empirical study was conducted by Bahk, Jang, Choi, and Lee (2017) on the relationship between childhood trauma and suicidal ideation: role of maltreatment and potential mediators and found that both childhood sexual and physical violence predicts suicidal ideation indirectly through depression. In the same



vein, Kang, Qu and Zhou (2023) carried out a study on the influence of physical violence on people's suicidal behaviour: the mediating roles of depression and anxiety and found that physical violence is positively related to suicidal tendencies. Therefore, this study examined the predictive powers of both the sexual and physical violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Female students in universities and other tertiary institutions are expected to be free from all forms of Gender-Based Violence, particularly sexual and physical violence. It is only when these students are free from such violence that psychological challenges like suicidal ideation among them (female students) could be eradicated. However, what is currently obtainable in Nigerian universities is the increase rate of suicide by female students. It has been observed that the number of suicide, which always starts from suicidal ideation, among female students is always increasing. Gender-Based Violence (GBV), particularly sexual and physical violence are also increasing. Consequently, there is every tendency that suicidal ideation among female students in universities is caused by sexual and physical violence.

The consequences of sexual and physical violence include: rape, sexual harassment, hitting, slapping, choking, cutting, shooting, acid attacks, etc. Available literature revealed that suicidal ideation has a link with sexual and physical violence. With this, the researchers examined the predictive power of sexual and physical violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed at investigating gender-based violence as predictors of suicidal ideation among female students in

universities in North-East, Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined the predictive power of:

1. sexual violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria.
2. physical violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. what is the predictive power of sexual violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria?
2. what is the predictive power of physical violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study, and were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant predictive power of sexual violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria.

H₀₂: There is no significant predictive power of physical violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study employed a correlation survey research design. According to Shikka et al. (2023), correlation survey research designs are used to describe the statistical associations between two or more variables. According to them, the design enables researchers to assess the direction and strength of the relationship which can be positive, negative, or non-existent. The study was conducted in the universities in North-East, Nigeria. The population of this study consisted of 11,988 female students of Faculties of Education in Public Universities



in North-East, Nigeria. About 450 female undergraduate students were randomly selected as sample. The two instruments used for data collection in the study were: Gender-based Violence Questionnaire (GBVQ) and Suicide Screening Questionnaire- Self-Rating (SSQ- SR). Gender-based Violence Questionnaire (GBVQ) was developed by the researchers which had four (4) clusters, namely: sexual violence, physical violence, psychological violence, and economic violence. It was addressed 'Section A' and the section contained 20 items that elicit data from respondents on different types of gender-based violence among female university students. The items were structured on four-point scale of: Not at all, Rarely, Often, and Very often. Suicide Screening Questionnaire- Self-Rated (SSQ- SR) was adapted. It was addressed 'Section B'. The section initially had 25 items in which 20 items were extracted and used for this study. The items were rated from "very untrue" to "very true" based on experiences. Hence, Gender-based Violence Questionnaire measured the predictive power of violence based on gender among female students in universities; and Suicide Screening Questionnaire- Self-Rating measured the level of suicidal ideation

Table 1: Regression analysis of the predictive power of sexual abuse on suicidal ideation among female students in universities

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.321	.103	.101	6.62009

a. Predictors: (Constant), Sexual Abuse

The result in table 1 indicates that the correlation coefficient for the relationship between sexual abuse and suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria is ($R = .321$) with a coefficient of determination of ($R^2 = .103$). This means that there is a low positive relationship between sexual abuse and

among female students in universities. The research instruments were subjected to face validity by 3 experts; 2 experts in the field of Educational Psychology and 1 expert in Measurement and Evaluation Unit in the Department of Science Education. All the departments were from Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. All corrections, suggestions and criticisms from the experts were considered and taken care of so as to establish the validity of the instruments. Using Cronbach's Alpha reliability test, a reliability index of 0.95 and 0.82 were obtained for GBVQ and SSQ- SR respectively. 450 questionnaires were administered to the students in the 6 selected universities in North-East. Linear regression was used to answer the 2 research questions. In testing the 2 hypotheses, t-test associated with linear regression was used at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The results were presented in tables based on the research questions and null hypotheses guiding the study.

Research Question One: What is the predictive power of sexual abuse on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria?

suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria. Besides, the coefficient of determination of ($R^2 = .103$) implies that 10.3% positive variation in the suicidal ideation among female students in universities is attributed to sexual abuse. Hence, the predictive power of sexual abuse on suicidal ideation among female students in



universities in North-East, Nigeria is 10.3%. Thus, 89.7% variation in the suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria is attributed to other factors.

Table 2: Regression t-test analysis of the predictive power of sexual abuse on suicidal ideation among female students in universities

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients			Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	37.940	1.180		32.154	.000
	Sexual Abuse	1.006	.140	.321	7.176	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Suicidal Ideation

The result in table 2 reveals that there is a significant predictive power of sexual abuse on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria, $t = 7.176$, $p = .000$. This means that the null hypothesis is rejected since the associated probability value of .000 is less than the .05 level of significance. The inference drawn is that

Hypothesis One: There is no significant predictive power of sexual abuse on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria.

sexual abuse is a major positive determinant of suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria.

Research Question Two: What is the predictive power of physical violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria?

Table 3: Regression analysis of the predictive power of physical violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.315	.099	.097	6.63424

a. Predictors: (Constant), Physical Abuse

The result in table 3 indicates that the correlation coefficient for the relationship between physical violence and suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria is ($R = .315$) with a coefficient of determination of ($R^2 = .099$). This means that there is a low positive relationship between physical violence and suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria. Besides, the coefficient of determination of ($R^2 = .099$) implies that 9.9% positive variation in suicidal ideation

among female students in universities is attributed to physical violence. Hence, the predictive power of physical violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria is 9.9%. Thus, 90.1% variation in the suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria is attributed to other factors.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant predictive power of physical violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria.

**Table 4: Regression t-test analysis of the predictive power of physical violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	38.920	1.070		36.390	.000
	Physical Abuse	.658	.094	.315	7.026	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Suicidal Ideation

The result in table 4 reveals that there is a significant predictive power of physical violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria, $t = 7.026$, $p = .000$. This means that the null hypothesis is rejected since the associated probability value of .000 is less than the .05 level of significance. The inference drawn is that physical violence is a major positive determinant of suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria.

Discussion of the Findings

The result showed that sexual violence is a major positive determinant of suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria. The result of testing the corresponding hypothesis further revealed that there was a significant predictive power of sexual violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria. This implies that sexual violence is a major positive determinant of suicidal ideation among female students in universities. This could be attributed to absence of psychological therapy and referrals for female students struggling with suicidal ideation as a result of sexual abuse. This finding is in agreement with the study of Vega and Lorenzana (2022) that carried out a study on prevalence and risk factors of suicidal ideation among victims of child abuse which revealed that sexual violence and suicidal ideation have a strong relationship.

The finding of this study also showed that physical violence is a major positive determinant of suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria. The result of testing the corresponding hypothesis further revealed that there was a significant predictive power of physical violence on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria. This implies that physical violence is a determinant factor of suicidal ideation. The finding is in line with the study conducted by Abdelaziz, Anwa, Muhammad and Hashish (2022) on suicidal ideation and its association with childhood maltreatment among undergraduate students of faculty of medicine, Suez Canal University which revealed that suicidal ideation was associated with physical violence and multiplicity of childhood maltreatment.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, Gender-Based Violence has predictive power on suicidal ideation among female students in universities in North-East, Nigeria. This is because the findings revealed that sexual violence has significant predictive power on suicidal ideation among female students in universities. The findings further revealed that physical violence has significant predictive power on suicidal ideation among female students in universities.



Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. It was recommended that universities' managements should offer resources and referrals for female students struggling with suicidal ideation as a result of sexual violence.
2. It was also recommended that universities should establish 24/7 help lines for female students that will allow them to seek reinforcement when need arises.

References

Abdelaziz, S.H., Anwar, M. M., Muhammad, O. Y., & Hashish, R. K. (2022). Suicidal ideation and its association with childhood maltreatment among undergraduate students of Faculty of Medicine, Suez Canal University, *Egyptian Society of Clinical Toxicology Journal*, 10(1), 62-73.

Adamawa News Agency (January 29, 2024). A female student of Federal Polytechnic, Mubi, Adamawa State, committed suicide. https://web.facebook.com/groups/544534219649371/posts/1632287050874077/?_rdc=1&_rdr#/ Accessed 15th September, 2025.

Bahk, Y., Jang, S., Choi, K., & Lee, S. (2017). The relationship between childhood trauma and suicidal ideation: Role of maltreatment and potential mediators. *Psychiatry Investigation*, 14(1), 37-43. <https://doi.org/10.4306/pi.201714.1.37>

Curtin, S. T., Hedegaard, H. M. D., & Ahmad, F. B. (2020). Provisional numbers and rates of suicide by month and demographic characteristics:

United States. *Vital Statistics Vital Release*, 16.

Grace, O. T. (2021). Addressing gender-based violence in Africa (Nigeria and Botswana). *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 6(10), 405-413. <https://doi.org/10.36348/sjhss.2021.v06i10.004>

Isabu, A. C., Arunibabe, L. L., & Ifemegbulem, V. A. (2022). Perceived suicidal behaviour and risk factors among students in a selected Nigerian university. *Nigerian Journal of Health Promotion*, 15, 168-178.

Jonasson, M., Wiberg, M., & Denhag, I. (2024). Sexual harassment and patterns of symptoms and functional abilities in a psychiatric sample of adolescents. *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry*, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08039488.2024.2318732>

Kang, J., Qu, J., & Zhou, Z. (2023). The influence of physical abuse on people's suicidal behaviour: The mediating roles of depression and anxiety. *The International Conference on Interdisciplinary Humanities and Communication Studies*, 730-735. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/6/20220667>

Kim, I. & Park, Y. (2019). Factors influencing suicidal ideation among Korean university students. *International Journal of Advanced Smart Convergence*, 8(3), 151-160. <https://doi.org/10.7236/IJASC.2019.8.3.151>



- Klonsky, E. D., May, A. M., & Saffer, B. Y. (2016). *Suicide, suicide attempt, and suicidal ideation*. Columbia: Clinpsy.annualreviews.org. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-021815-093204>
- Lee B. X. & Blackwell, W. (2019). *Violence: An interdisciplinary approach to causes, consequences, and cures*. Hoboken: John Willy & Sons, Inc.
- Olaseni, J. T. (2018). Rumination and academic hardiness as predictors of suicidal ideation among Nigerian adolescents. *Abnormal and Behavioural Psychology*, 4(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.4172/2472-0496.1000133>
- Ogbuegwu, S. N. (2016). The effects of gendered violence to education in Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Reviews*, 6(3), 199-208.
- Oyetunji, T. P., Arafat, M. Y., Famori, S. O., Akinboyewa, T. B., Afolami, M., Ajayi, M. F., & Kar, S. K. (2020). Suicide in Nigeria: Observations from the content analysis of newspapers. *Original Research*, 34(1).
- Perrin, N., Marsh, M., Clough, A., Desgroppes, A., Yopephanuel, C., Abdi, A., & Glass, N. (2019). Social norms and beliefs about gender-based violence scale: A measure for use with gender-based violence prevention programmes in low resource and humanitarian settings. *Conflict and Health*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-0190189-x>.
- Shikka, S., Vandana, E. Astha, A., & Jasmine, A. (2023). Development of a valid outcome measure for sensory testing in children with cerebral palsy: An exploratory sequential research.
- Vega, P. A. G. & Lorenzana, R. C. (2022). Prevalence and risk factors of suicidal ideation among victims of child sexual abuse seen at the Philippine general hospital child protection unit. *Acta Med Philipph [internet]*, 56(15). <https://doi.org/10.47895/amp.v56i15.2062>
- Villaveces, A., Shankar, V., Palomeque, F., Padilla, M., & Kress, H. (2024). Association between violence and mental distress, self-harm, and suicidal ideation and attempts among young people in Malawi. *Author Manuscript*, 1-20.
- World Health Organization (2019). Suicide in the world: global health estimates. *World Health Organization*, Geneva. [https://doi.org/10.1016/52215-0366\(14\)00129-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/52215-0366(14)00129-1)
- Yemisi, A. C. (2019). Gender-based violence prevalence in tertiary institutions, Ekiti state, south western Nigeria. *American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research (AJHSSR)*, 3(8), 135-145.