


## Exploring the Roles of Government and Churches in Curbing Suicide among the Youths in Nsukka Urban of Nigeria

### Authors:

Bright Kowhiroro<sup>1</sup>   
Festus Osom Omosor<sup>2</sup>

### Affiliation:

<sup>1</sup>Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

<sup>2</sup>Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Delta State University, Abraka

### Corresponding author:

Bright Kowhiroro

### Dates:

Received: 30 Mar. 2021

Accepted: 04 July. 2021

Published: 24 Aug. 2021

### Disclaimer:

All opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the editors of Nsukka Journal of Religion and Cultural Studies (NJRCS) or the Department at large.

### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Copyright:

© 2021. Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license



## Abstract

The current rate at which the youth in Nsukka urban commit suicide has become quite worrisome. The inability of some youths to overcome personal problems leading to depression, mental disorder, risk-taking, and poverty leads them into various forms of suicide. The aim of this paper is to explore the roles of the government and the church in addressing the challenge of suicides among the youth in Nsukka urban. The phenomenological method was used in this research to achieve this aim. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Data gathered were analyzed using the historical, descriptive and evaluative approaches. The paper recommends that the Nigerian government should create more opportunities for the youths. Also, church leaders in Nsukka urban are encouraged not to relent in enlightening worshippers on the value of life irrespective of difficult times.

**Key words:** Suicide, Youth, Government, Churches, Nsukka Urban

## Introduction

From time immemorial, there have been cases of suicide in every human society. Indeed, it is a global phenomenon (Hajiyousouf, 2022; Okafor, 2020; Stack and Laubepin, 2018; Hogan and Grumet, 2016 and Masango, and Motojesi, 2008) and necessary machineries to prevent it have been put in place by some countries (WHO, 2014, pp 72-73 and 95). Yet, there are increasing reports of death by suicide with different methods among the youths in Nsukka urban one of the fastest growing townships in Nigeria. According to Olibamoyo et al, (2019), hanging was the most common method of suicide amongst men whereas poisoning was the most common method of suicide amongst women in Nigeria (p. 6). Indeed, these methods are prevalent among the youth in Nsukka urban of Nigeria. This paper therefore, examined the causes and effects of suicide among the youth in Nsukka urban, Nigeria with the aim to draw the attention of both Nigeria's government and churches in the campaign against suicide in Nsukka urban. The research methods adopted in this study are the historical, descriptive and evaluative methods. The historical method was used to survey and interpret information about the events of suicide in Nsukka. The descriptive method was used to describe the occurrence and youths' attitude to suicide as well as its causes and effects in Nsukka Urban, Nigeria. The evaluative method enabled the assessment of the impact of suicide in Nsukka and the response of the Government and the Church. More so, there was personal interview in form of oral communication. For the personal interview method, it gives the researcher the opportunity to interact directly with the respondents (Nwabueze, 2013, p. 66) and this made it possible to comprehend the situation of suicide in Nsukka urban through interactions with its residents. The population interviewed was mixed in terms of gender and age distributions. Twenty respondents ranging from 20 years of age and above and dispersed across different locations within the Nsukka Urban were interviewed which included 10 male and 10 female respondents respectively. Out of the 20 respondents, 8 were youths while 12 were adults. The reason for this age distribution was to elicit shades of opinion and information relating to causes, effects and remedies of suicide in Nsukka from different categories of persons. The data gathered were analysed and interpreted qualitatively and the findings were weaved into the body of this paper.

## **Reality of suicide among the youth in Nsukka urban area of Nigeria**

Nsukka urban is a major town in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State in South-East Nigeria. It shares a common border with communities such as Edem Ani, Alor-Uno, Opi, Orba, Ede-Oballa and Obimo (Ugwu et al, 2018, p. 23). It is also where the main campus of University of Nigeria is located (see Nzeadibe, 2009, p. 138). Indeed, the news of suicide in Nsukka urban area of Nigeria is on the increase as residents both indigenes and strangers mostly known to be students of the University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) are embracing suicide "supposedly, as a way out of their travails" (Asogwa and Onyezere, 2018, p. 78). In March 14 2021, a 300 level Biochemistry undergraduate of the University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) identified as Daniel Mba plunged from the third-floor of a storey-building to end his life (E. Okwudili, personal communication, March 3 2020). It was gathered that the suicide victim (Daniel Mba) left the examination hall after he was caught cheating with his phone during one of the ongoing examination in the school thereby prompting a lecturer to tear his script few minutes to the end of the examination. F. Omeje asserts that in August 4 2020, a tax collector identified as Emmanuel Eze took his life in an uncompleted building in Nsukka urban (F. Omeje, personal communication, March 3, 2022). He adds that the suicide victim was having mental challenges and that his wife had been carrying him to places for a solution, only for him to take his life.

According to O. Evans, a young girl identified as Chinwendu Odoh a student of Microbiology Nsukka attempted suicide in September 10, 2019 when she drank Sniper insecticide due to depression (O. Evans, personal communication, March 3 2022). According to the interviewee, the victim was rushed to the hospital immediately by neighbours who noticed she was in pain and her life was saved. The NAN (June 20 2019) reported that a final year student of Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria Nsukka, identified as Samuel Elias, committed suicide by drinking Sniper in June 17 2019. The reason (s) behind the victim's action was not known. However, NAN (20 June 2019) reported that the mother of the suicide victim opined that her son could have died of depression, noting that he had been lamenting of his inability to graduate from University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) because of his final year project which had been holding him. Also, Chukwuma et al (May 1, 2019) gave account of how Chukwuemeka Akachi, a 400 level student of the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria Nsukka, took his life. It was gathered that Akachi allegedly slipped into coma after taking two bottles of an

insecticide, Sniper. According to O. Innocent, Akachi committed suicide as a result of depression due to mental disorder (O. Innocent, personal communication, March 3 2022). In 27 November 2016, a final year student of Agric Economics of University of Nigeria Nsukka, Tobechukwu Okeke committed suicide. According to F. Chinelo, the victim committed suicide because of financial issues. It was gathered that the victim lost huge sum of money he borrowed from friends to a cyber-business known as MMM and the frustration of his inability to pay back made him commit suicide (F. Chinelo, personal communication, March 3 2020). From the data gathered, it is clear that suicide is increasing in Nsukka urban area of Nigeria. Therefore, the urgent attention of the Nigeria government and the churches in Nsukka is highly needed to curb this preventable menace.

## **Major causes of suicide in Nsukka urban of Nigeria**

### **Mental disorder**

According to Bilsen (2018, p. 2), 90% of people who commit suicide have suffered from at least mental disorder. Such mental disorder may appear to be life time ailments and it causes frustration among human beings especially in a country like Nigeria where psychiatrists are not enough to treat and counsel mental disorder victims. Other health issues that Nigeria's youth faces that may encourage suicide are infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, gonorrhea and other communicable disease (Muhammad et al, 2017). In most cases, a victim of such disease who cannot afford to pay for the prescribed medications feel depressed and unequalled with their peers. A recovery suicide notes of Chukwuemeka Akachi (student of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka) who took his life in Nsukka urban in 2019, gives credence to this assertion. According to the suicide note, Akachi was on life support for a long time and that life support was expensive. The victim felt depressed and unequalled among his peers. Eventually, he took his life.

### **Depression**

Globally, depression is another thing leading to death caused by suicide. It is an important risk factor which may lead to suicide attempt or suicide (Oladele and Oladele, 2016; Takahashi, 2001, Razzak et al, 2019 and Wanyoike, 2014). Compared to the children, adults are most affected when it comes to depression (Bhowmik et al, 2012). In most cases, one feel depressed as a result of unexpected disappointment. No doubt, this is the case with some vibrant Nsukka youth who indulge in suicidal act. Though, there are other symptoms of depression but disappointment appears to be the common cause of depression among the youth in Nsukka urban. According to Miller (2009), disappointment has ruined more lives than the diseases known to human beings. This assertion

confirmed the contents of the series of suicide notes or death notes recovered in victim's home after their death. Majority of youth who took their lives intentionally points towards depression as a result of disappointment.

### **Poverty**

According to Okoedion and Okolie (2019, p. 58), poverty is associated with increased risk of suicide and suicide attempt in Nigeria. Poverty is the act of being poor. Despite the fact that Nigeria is a land full of *milk and honey* in terms of agriculture and crude oil, her citizens struggle to survive on daily basis. This economic issue is a significant stressor for the youth especially the students (Wanyoike, 2014). While it has deprived many youth right to education, it has led most youth into suicidal ideation especially those youth with mental health issue who cannot financially afford their medication.

### **Risk-Taking**

This is a common phenomenon among business persons or experts. Risk-Taking is good but it exposes one to possible harm when he deviates from an expert's advice (Zinn, 2019). In recent time, most Nigerian youths especially those in Nsukka urban who are ignorant of online businesses engage in it to their detriment. The most common of such online businesses in the Nigerian society is the Cyber fraud (Jegede and Olowookere, 2014). In most cases, people especially the youth invest all their life savings into these businesses. Some even go to the extent of borrowing from friends or banks, using their properties or their parent's properties as collaterals. When they fail, such people become frustrated and depressed. According to Becky (2015), people tend to find different ways to deal with such pressure; and by ways of alleviating the depression, they may resort to factors such as substance abuse like alcohol which may encourage suicidal ideation (see Takahashi, 2001, p. 362).

### **Effects of suicide among youths in Nsukka urban of Nigeria**

Just as in other African societies, the effects of suicide in Nsukka urban area has three pervading effects viz., an individual's effect, a family's effect and a communal effect.

On the individual's effect, a person who commits suicide in Igbo land is likely to be thrown into the evil forest because "suicide is considered as bad death" (Ugwu and Ugwueye, 2003, p. 59). Another consequence is that such person denies himself/herself the opportunity to have lived a long life not to mention forfeiture to traditional burial rites. (Ugwuoke and Ani, 2018, p. 182). Whenever such a person's name is mentioned in the society, people usually feel reluctant to talk about him/her because of his/her bad death.

On the other hand, in Igbo land, suicide affects victim's family. It is likely to occur again in same family if cleansing is not done (see Ugwuoke, 2016, p. 6). Suicide affects victim's relatives psychologically, socially and economically. The family of one who committed suicide is often times stigmatized and denied social opportunities like empowerment and leadership role in the community (Lawal, 2018; Ohayi, 2019 as cited by Oyetunji et al, 2020). And it is rightly believe that everything will not go well with the community where a suicide occurred and cleansing is not done. Cleansing requires money and victim's relations are required to make all payments irrespective of whether they have money or not. In most cases, it may lead to unwanted borrowing of funds from individuals or organizations attracting huge sum of interest.

### **The role of the Government in curbing suicide in Nsukka urban of Nigeria**

It is worthy to note that by the joint efforts and participations of families, schools, communities, government and churches, suicide ideation or suicide can be prevented successfully in the society. This research therefore looks at the joint efforts of the Nigeria government and churches in order to curb this menace in Nsukka urban. Recently, the Nigeria government has shown concern over the increase rate of suicide in the country. She reduces the availability of suicide methods through her agency (NAFDAC) which banned the sale of the insecticide called sniper and other dichlorvos brands (a common suicide method in Nsukka urban) in open markets and supermarkets nationwide in September 1, 2019 (Akinkuotu, 2019).

The federal government played an important role in reducing poverty and idleness among the youths which may encourage suicide ideation. An example of this important role is the establishment of Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) in 2016. Many youths in Nsukka Urban have benefitted from programs under the scheme like N-power. This study did not have access to the official records to establish the exact number of beneficiaries of these schemes, but respondents are in sync in their account that more than 300 persons have benefitted from the various batches of the N-Power scheme alone, including those posted out to neighbouring villages and towns.

### **The role of the Churches in curbing suicide in Nsukka Urban of Nigeria**

In spite of the continuous occurrence of suicide in Nsukka urban, the role of the church as a protective factor against suicide in Nsukka cannot be overlooked since they have moral obligations over the lives of worshippers. Currently, churches in Nsukka urban are working very hard in order to curb suicide

ideation or suicide among the youth in the society. For example, the Restoration Outreach Ministry Church, Nsukka, conducts counseling sessions every Tuesday in the church premises. Through such means, potential suicide victims such as emotionally unstable, psychological imbalanced and depressed individuals are engaged and possibly find solutions to their challenges (K. Promise, personal communication, June 09, 2022). Other churches in Nsukka like City of Purpose Ministry Int'l have also shown much concern about how to curb the increasing rate of suicide ideation in the society. One way this church has been helping is by organising health services and counseling sessions. The church is always available every day for counseling (E. Okechukwu, personal communication, June 08, 2022). According to Diolu of Shekinah Chapel Church, Nsukka, and the CAN Chairman Nsukka Chapter, one way through which the church is fighting against suicide is effective teaching and counseling. He added that Shekinah Chapel Church has a charitable organisation which renders help to people facing difficulties, especially the less privileged ones and also give scholarship to brilliant students who cannot afford to pay their school fees.

The church also established skills acquisition programs where youths are not only trained to specialise in particular skills but are also provided with funds for startup (V. Diolu personal communication, June 09, 2022). The church is the house of God, a place where worshippers are taught to behave in a certain way; "Therefore, the extent of the individual's commitment to church creeds can potentially act as a deterrent factor in committing suicide" (Lotfi, et al, 2012, p. 1050). Similarly, Church doctrines/beliefs and rituals which act as buffers against stress and provide an element of comfort to distressed individuals also provide the love, healing, and hope that suicide victims need to bring worth and love into their lives for themselves (Bhugra, 2010; Rudolph, 2021 and Tettey, 2014).

### Recommendations

It is certain that the Nigerian government and the church are not unconcerned about the issue of suicide in the society, particularly in Nsukka. However, other things they can equally look into in order to further curb this menace in Nsukka include the following:

- i. Nigerian government should build a psychiatry home in Nsukka urban and make it free for all Nsukka residents to access. Also, more psychiatrists should be engaged and deployed to Nsukka urban to effectively deal with those psychiatric conditions that could lead to suicide.
- ii. Nigerian government should create more opportunities like job and empowerment for Nigeria youths. This will engage

Nsukka youths and prevent such idleness that could encourage suicide ideation.

- iii Church leaders should never relent in enlightening Church members on the value of life irrespective of difficult times.
- iv. Jingles should be made on radio and television condemning suicide on daily basis.
- v. More counselors should be trained by the church and more counseling offices should be created by the churches to cover more areas to handle cases that may degenerate into suicide.

### Conclusion

The issue of suicide has been discussed as a great challenge to the country especially in Nsukka urban area of Nigeria. In this paper, it has been observed that there are several factors responsible for the increasing rate of suicide among the youth in Nsukka Urban and the effects were stated. It is believed that both the government and churches in Nsukka urban area of Nigeria have made some contributions in order to curb this menace. However, there is need for more efforts by the government and the church to effectively deal with and possibly curb this catastrophic suicide ideation and the incidence of suicide in Nigeria, especially in Nsukka urban.

### References

- Akinkuotu, E. (July 11 2019). Suicide: NAFDAC bans sales of Sniper, others in the open market. <https://punchng.com/suicide-nafdac-bans-sale-of-sniper-others-in-the-open-market/?amp>
- Asogwa, E.U and Onyezere J.O (2018). Economic Recession in Nigeria: An important Risk Factor for Suicide. *Archive of Business Research*, 6, (11), 73-83.
- Becky, W.W. (2015). Suicide among University Students in Kenya: Causes, implication and intervention. *Journal of Language, Technology and inter premiership in Africa*, (1)..
- Bhowmik, D. et.al (2012). Depression- Symptoms, Causes, Medications and therapies. *Pharma Journal*, 1, (3), 41-55.
- Bhugra, D. (2010). Commentary: Religion, Religious attitudes and Suicide. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 39, 1496-1498.
- Bilsen, J. (2018). Suicide and Youths: Risk Factors *Front. Psychiatry*, 9, (540),
- Chukwuma, M., Akpunonu, S and Onyenucheya, A (May 21 2019) Addressing rising cases of suicide among teenagers in Nigeria. <https://guardian.ng/features/addressing-rising-cases-of-suicide-among-teenagers-in-nigeria/>
- Hajiyousouf, I.B and Bulut, S. (2022). Mental Health, Religion and Suicide. *Open Journal of Medical Psychology*, 11, 12-27.



- Hogan, M.F and Grumet, J.G (2016). Suicide Prevention: An Emerging Priority For Health Care. *Health affairs*, 35, (6), 1084–1090. doi: 10.1377/hlthaff.2015.1672.
- Jegede, A. E. and Olowookere, I. E. (2014). Cyber Risks and Fraud in the Nigeria's Business Environment: A Postmortem of Youths Crime. *Journal of Social and Development Sciences*, 5, (4), 258-265.
- Lawal, O., (2018). "Attitudes Towards Depression And Suicide: An Analysis Of News Coverage and Online Comments on Nigerian News Sites." (Thesis).
- Loffi, Y., Ayar, L. and Shams, S. (2012). The Relation Between Religious Practices and Community Suicide: Common and Suicide People in Darehsahr, Iran. *Procedia\_ Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 50, 1051-1060.
- Masango, S.M and Motojesi, A.A (2008). Suicide and Suicide Risk Factor : A Literature Review. *SA Farm Pract*, 50, (6), 25-28.
- Miller, M.V. (2009). *Are you depressed or just disappointed?* Retrieved from [www.edition.cnn.com/2009/LIVING/personal/01/27/o.atfar.beginning/index.html](http://www.edition.cnn.com/2009/LIVING/personal/01/27/o.atfar.beginning/index.html).
- Muhammad, F., Abdulkareem, J.H., and Chowdhury, A.A (2017). Major Public Health Problems in Nigeria: A review. *South East Asia Journal of Public Health* 7(1),6-11.
- NANS, (June 20 2019) Another final year student of UNN commits suicide. <https://guardian.ng/news/another-final-year-student-of-unn-commits-suicide/>
- Nwabueze, E. (2013). *Research Methods: An Integrated Approach 2nd Edition*. ABC BOOKS.
- Nzeadibe, T.C. (2009). Development Drivers of Waste Recycling in Nsukka urban area of Southeastern, Nigeria. *Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management*, 3, (12), 137-149
- Okafor, S.O (2020). Suicide among Undergraduate Students in Southeast Nigeria: An Empirical Evaluation of Durkheim's Classifications of Suicide. *Open Journal for Anthropological Studies*, 4, (2), 35-50.
- Okoedion, E.G. and Okolie, U.C (2019). Youths Suicidal Behaviour: An Evaluation of Risk Factors in Edo State, Nigeria. *International Scientific Journal*, 51-71.
- Oladele, A.O. and Oladele, I.T (2016). "Depression and Suicide Ideation among College Students with and without Learning Disabilities in Nigeria. *European Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 14,;2084-2100.
- Olibamoyo, O, Ola, B. Coker O, Adeeuya, A and Onabola, A (2021). Trends and patterns of suicidal behaviour in Nigeria : Mixed method analysis of media reports from 2016-2019. *South African Journal of Psychiatry*, 27, (0), <https://doi.org/10.4103>.
- Oyetunji T.P., et al. (2021). Suicide in Nigeria: observations from the content analysis of newspapers. *General psychiatry*, 34, e100347. doi:101136/gpsych.
- Razzak, H.B., Harbi, A. and Ahli, S. ( 2019). Depression: Prevalent and Associated Risk factor in the United Arab Emirates. *Oman Medical journal*, 34, (4), 274-283.
- Rudolph, J.W. (2021). Adult Suicide : Church Awareness, Support and Prevention Education (PhD thesis).
- Stack, S and Laubepin, F. (2018). Religiousness as a Predictor of Suicide: An Analysis of 162 European Religious Suicide and Life. *The eternity Behaviour* 49, (2), 371-381.
- Takahashi, Y. (2001). Depression and Suicide. *JMAJ*, 44, (8), 359-363.
- Tettey, G.E. (2014) Exploring the Role of Religiosity on Suicide Identification: A Study Among a Pollution - Based Sample of Adolescents in the United States. Electronic Theses and Dissertations Paper. <https://dc.etsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3754&context=etd>.
- Ugwu, C.O.T. and Ugwueye, L.E. (2004). *African Traditional Religion: A Prolegomenon*. Merit International Publication.
- Ugwu, K. C., Echiegu, E. A. and Okonkwo, W. I. (2018). Solid Waste Generation and Management in Nsukka urban, Enugu State of Nigeria. *World Journal of Engineering Research and Technology*, 4, (1), 21 - 34.
- Ughwuoke, A.C (2016). Suicidal Behaviour and Intervention Strategies. For in-school Adolescent in Enugu State, Nigeria (PhD thesis). [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247516904\\_Suicide\\_reduction\\_and\\_prevention\\_Strategies\\_and\\_interventions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247516904_Suicide_reduction_and_prevention_Strategies_and_interventions).
- Ugwuoke, A.C and Ani, N.R (2018). Special Practices that Influences Adult Suicide in Eden Community in Nsukka LGA of Enugu State, Nigeria. *Journal of Science and Computer Education*, 3, (3), 181-191.
- Wanyoike, B.W. (2014). Depression as a cause of suicide. *Journal of Language, Technology and Entrepreneurship in Africa*, 5 (2), 58-68.
- WHO, (2014). Preventing suicide: A global imperative. [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/131056/9789241564878\\_eng.pdf](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/131056/9789241564878_eng.pdf).
- Zinn, J.O. (2019). The meaning of risk-taking - key concept and dimensions. *Journal of risk research*, 22,(1),1-15.