

MASS MEDIA AWARENESS ON THE PREVALENCE OF SUICIDE CASES IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates mass media awareness on the prevalence of suicide cases in Rivers State. The objectives of the study are to: identify the predominant media channels used for the report of prevalence cases of suicide in Rivers State; identify the degree of audience awareness or exposure to suicide cases in the mass media; find out the causes of suicide in Rivers state. It is anchored on Media Development Theory, using survey research design with the questionnaire as the instrument of data collection. The study has a population of 7, 303, 924. It employed Taro Yamene sample size determination formula to arrive at a sample size of 400. The study adopted multi stage sampling technique. The study found that: radio and social media are the predominant media channels used in the reportage of the prevalence of suicide cases in Rivers State; the degree of audience awareness exposure to suicide cases in Rivers State is very high; while separation of partners, depression and mental ill health are the causes of suicide in Rivers State. The study concluded that mass media awareness contributes to the prevalence of suicide cases in Rivers State. It recommends that the print media organisations (Newspaper and magazine) and television should consider suicide stories as important since it concerns human interests and that Rivers audience should be cheerful and avoid separation after marriage since they contribute and lead to suicide events and stories.

Keywords: Mass Media, Suicide, Prevalence, Cases and Rivers State

INTRODUCTION

The believe that media reportage on the cases of suicide prevent or not prevent further cases of suicide generates arguments and public discourse. Some scholars believe that the amount reportage and exposure of the audience to the dangers of suicide cases prevents them from such action. Others also believe that no amount of mass media reportage prevents people from committing suicide. There has been reportage of suicide cases in the Nigerian media, yet people commit suicide on regular basis. Suicide is applied to all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim which he/she knows produce this result.

Exposure or awareness to media messages helps to express needs, emotions, desires, goals, and sentiments among human beings. The media messages appear like codes, text, symbols and languages and must be understood by the parties involved (Udoakah, 2004). In most cases, media messages on suicides carry the dangers of such action and warning. They are built to enlighten the audience on the action taken by people and the danger in such action.

The goal of every mass media message is for social change, this social change helps to mode attitude and behavior, especially to prevent suicide among the audience. This is why Asemah (2011) opines that the mass media is the oxygen of life. Otamiri (2020) maintains that the end of every communication is the beginning of another communication and this predisposes Maamaa & Akurega (2019) to posit that communication is the spring of life. And this communication is an integral part of everyday life without which modern society may not survive (Ukaegbu, 2019).

There many cases of suicide around the world especially Nigeria. Nigeria has one of the highest suicide rates in Africa. For every 100, 000 people in Nigeria, according to World Health Organisation, there are 9.5 suicides. A total of 350 suicides were reported between 2010 and 2019 (Oyetunji, 2021). On July, 2022 Edo Police Command arrested the husband of 27 year-old Cynthia Agho, who allegedly committed suicide in Benin City, Edo State Capital. Most of the suicide cases are committed by hanging, the use of other dangerous substances like hypo, sniper among other means. The Nigerian Government has banned sniper. Sniper is an insecticide commonly used for suicides.

Today, the number of suicide cases is becoming increasingly common, this is because of the stress many people faced in our society, poor economy, failure in human endeavours, hardship, cheating or separation among couples for various identifiable and unidentifiable reasons. Durkheimian, (2000; Lee 2018) identifies four types of suicide; altruistic, anomic, egoistic and fatalistic suicide

In Rivers State, a 21-year old man identified as Justice from Rivers State on February 21, 2022 committed suicide in Rivers State. The suicide was traced to a lifestyle of depression, hardship and challenges. Again, on the July 21st 2022, another 21-year old apprentice mechanic identified as Sunday Orime committed suicide at his residence in Wobo street, Mile 3 Diobu, Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The incidences of suicides among youths are recurring decimal and if care is not taking may lead to group or mass suicide one day (Oyetunji, et al 2021).

The radio, television, newspapers, magazines and other channels of the media in Rivers State have been engaged on the enlightenment of the citizens on the danger of committing suicide. Yet, there is an increase in the number of those committing suicide in the State. Could it be that there is minimal level of audience awareness or exposure to suicide enlightenment programmes on the media or that there is poor reportage of suicide cases in the media in Rivers State? The study investigates mass media awareness and the prevalence of suicide cases in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

There has been report on the increase cases of suicide cases in Nigeria especially Rivers State. Within January and July about 2, 000 cases of suicide have been reported in Nigeria out of which 42 are from Rivers State. For instance, on February 21st 2022, a 21-year old man identified as Justice from Rivers State committed suicide in Rivers State. The suicide was traced to a depression, lifestyle of hardship and challenges. Again, on the July 21st 2022, another 21-year old apprentice mechanic identified as Sunday Orime committed suicide at his residence in Wobo street, Mile 3, Diobu Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The occurrence of suicide among youths has become a recurring decimal and if care is not taking, it may lead to group or mass suicide in the future.

This increase in the number of cases of suicide has given a concern not only to researchers but to the government, media and civil societies in Nigeria. For example, The Nigerian Government has banned the use of sniper in Nigeria. The media report all cases of alleged cases of suicide and the danger of such actions to the mass media audience.

In spite of these, the number of suicide cases have continued to increase in an astronomic order. There has been argument that the mass media have or not done well on the enlightenment of the audience. It on this premise the study investigates mass media awareness and the prevalence of suicide cases in Rivers State.

Objectives of the study

The following are the objectives of the study which are to:

1. identify the predominant media channels used for the report of prevalence cases of suicide in Rivers State;
2. identify the degree of audience awareness or exposure to suicide cases in the mass media;
3. Find out the causes of suicide in Rivers state.

Research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the predominant media channels used for the report of prevalence cases of suicide in Rivers State|?
2. What is the degree of audience awareness or exposure to suicide cases in the mass media?
3. What are the causes of suicide in Rivers state?

Literature Review

Durkheimian (2000) sees the term suicide is applied to all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim, which he/she knows will produce this result (Pickering & Walford, 2011). Durkheimian (2000) identifies four different types of suicide which are egoistic suicide, altruistic suicide, anomic suicide and fatalistic suicide.

Egoistic suicide is seen as stemming from the absence of social integration. It is committed by individuals who are social outcast and see themselves as being alone or an outsider. These individuals are unable to find their own place in society and have problems adjusting to groups. They received little and no social care. Suicide is seen as a solution for them to free themselves from loneliness or excessive individuation.

Altruistic suicide occurs when social group involvement is too high. Individuals are so well integrated into the group that they are willing to sacrifice their own life in order to fulfil some obligation for the group. Individuals kill themselves for the collective benefit of the group or for the cause that the group believes in. An example is someone who commits suicide for the sake of a religious or political cause, such as the infamous Japanese Kamikaze pilots of World War II, or the hijackers that crashed the airplanes into the World Trade Centre, the Pentagon, and a field in Pennsylvania in 2001. During World War II, Japanese Kamikaze pilots were willing to lay down their own lives for their countries in the hope that they will win the war. These pilots believed in their nation's cause and were willing to sacrifice their lives. Similarly, suicide bombers around the world were willing to give up their lives in order to make a political or religious statement because they firmly believed in their group's cause.

Anomic suicide is caused by the lack of social regulation and it occurs during high levels of stress and frustration. Anomic suicide stems from sudden and unexpected changes in situations. For example, when individuals suffer extreme financial loss, the disappointment and stress that individuals face may drive them towards committing suicide as a means of escape. The study is related to the present study since they deal with

Fatalistic suicide occurs in social conditions where the individual experiences pervasive oppression. Durkheimian (2000), defined fatalistic suicide as suicide resulting from excessive regulation. Fatalistic suicide is committed by individuals whose passions are choked by oppressive discipline. A classic example of fatalistic suicide is when a slave commits suicide to escape the control of his or her owner. We can call it fatalistic suicide because the individual considers himself condemned by fate or doomed to be a slave. A fatalistic and hopeless situation calls for fatalistic suicide as a solution. Fatalistic suicide served as a descriptor for suicides in traditional societies, because Durkheimian was faced with the issue that even in societies with abundant social capital, individuals nevertheless killed themselves.

Empirical Review

Oblibamoyo, et al (2021) investigated "Trends and Patterns of Suicide Behaviour in Nigeria: Mixed Methods Analysis of Media Reports from 2016 to 2019". The aim of the paper was to analyse the trends and patterns of suicides in Nigeria media reports between 2016 and 2019. The study employed qualitative content analysis of suicide events. A total of 4,365 events were recorded with 336 as the sample size. The findings of the study revealed that the most common reported suicide behaviour was hanging followed by poisoning. The study is related to the present study since they deal with suicide reports in Nigerian media. The previous focused on the trends and patterns of suicide behaviour in Nigeria while the current study focuses on the role of the mass media and prevalence of suicide in Rivers State.

Umar, Armiya'u ad Ali (2020) studied suicide "The Awareness on Social Media in Nigeria". The study adopted survey research design and the result showed that there are warning signs of suicide posed by individuals on their Facebook walls but help was not provided on time or after the incidents with resultant completion of suicide. The study is similar to the present study because they deal with awareness of media on suicide. The previous however concentrated on the social media in Nigeria while the present paper studies mass media in Rivers State.

In another development, Chukwere & Chukwere (2022) evaluated "The Role of Social Media in the Promulgation of Depression and suicide Behaviour in Nigeria". They employed a qualitative and quantitative study with a total of 113 questionnaire. The result of the study showed that social media influences an increase in depression and suicide cases. It further found that social media users get influenced, depressed and suicidal because posts, videos, messages live videos stream online and effective social media campaigns on ethical will surely curtail depression and suicide was recommended for the study. The study is related to the present study in the area of the role of media awareness on the increase of suicide in Nigeria. The previous study focused on the role of social media in the promulgation of depression and suicide Nigeria while the current study looks at the role of the mass media awareness and prevalence of suicide in Rivers State.

Again, Adebayo & Makwambeni (2022) studied 'I did not down, I was the water: A discourse analysis of newspaper reports of suicide in Nigeria'. The paper looked at all the news stories published on two Nigerian newspapers; *The Punch* and *Daily Trust* newspapers between January and July 2019. The paper identifies four framing clusters; suicide as government's failure, the jilted over suicide as a crime and suicide as a demonic attack. The findings revealed that the most salient frame found in the coverage of Suicide cases is the method or suicide; how victims died was described and most of the articles used the straight news reporting approach, relying mainly on official sources.

Theoretical Framework

Development media theory

Development media theory was propounded by McQuail in 1987. The theory according Omega and Nwachukwu (2013) was propounded for the developed and the developing countries. The underlying fact behind the beginning of the theory was that there cannot be development without communication (information). Asemah, Nwammuo and Nkwom-Uwaoma (2017) argue that the media undertook the role of carrying out positive development programmes, accepting restrictions and instructions from the state. The media subordinate themselves to political, economic, social and cultural needs, hence, the stress on the development communication development journalism. The media can do this by functioning as government instruments for achieving economic, political growth, cultural development and national sovereignty. The theory sees the media as agents of development and social change in any given community in the rural areas. Thus, the theory postulate that the media should be used to complement government's efforts by carrying out programmes that will lead to positive behavioural change.

Human interest especially eradication suicide cases is a development programme aimed at changing the habits and behaviour of people to avoid further cases of suicide around the world. It is the responsibility of the media and other information industries to disseminate such information about danger in taken ones' life in Rivers State, since the media reflect the Scio-cultural, political and economic conditions of the society they operate in.

The usage of media to communicate positive development programmes like human is to protect its citizen from committing suicide. The media in Rivers state need to hold and set their priorities in human news and information packaging link to every local government areas in Rivers State for the championing of social, economic, political, educational and cultural development of the citizenry. This according to Folarin (2002) gives the media the responsibilities and make them socially responsible to themselves and the people devoid of committing suicide.

METHODOLOGY

The nature of this study required the use of the survey research design. The justification for the use of survey was borne out of the need to identify respondents who are familiar with suicide cases and to elicit responses from them. It therefore provides the researchers the opportunity to use

quantitative (survey) research with a view to weighing the responses of the residents on suicide cases prevalence in the mass media social media.

The population of this study comprised residents of Rivers state. Rivers State 2006 National Population Census was 5,198,605. The population was projected with an annual exponential growth rate of 3.31% in 2021. This gives a total of 7,303,924 people. (<http://www.macrotrends.net>). The population of study is therefore, 7,303, 924.

In determining the sample size for this study, Taro Yamane (1967) sample size was adopted. Therefore, a sample size of 400 respondents was drawn from the population.

The sample size was statistically determined using Taro Yamane's sampling technique.

Formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

where; N = total population, e = Expected error image (0.05)², 1 = constant. N = 7,303, 924, e = (0.05)²

n = 399.8752079 = 400 respondents (approximately).

The multi-stage sampling technique was used to get respondents for the survey. In view of this, therefore, the stages of sampling for this study was thus:

Stage one: The study focused on four Local Government Areas in Rivers State namely: Port Harcourt City, Obio/Akpor, Eleme and Oyibo. This is because of the high level of suicide cases were reported in these metropolitan areas.

Stage two: From each of the four Local Government Areas, communities were purposively selected from each of them. In Port Harcourt City, we have Diobu, Oroworokwo, Port Harcourt town, Rebisi and Ama/Abuloma. In Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, we have, Akpor, Aboh, Rumueme, Okoronugu, Rumuokorosi, from Eleme, Aletto, Alesa, Agbeta and Ajejoh while in Oyibo, Afam, Egbwru and Azusorgu were selected. The selected communities have a total of 193, 135 residents. The reason for selecting them was borne out the fact that these communities have more residents and most of them have access to the mass media with reports of experiencing suicide cases on regular basis.

Stage three: At this stage, respondents were selected using the simple random sampling technique. Respondents were selected at every interval of three of the streets in the communities selected.

Fourth stage: Proportionate sampling technique was used to administer the questionnaire to the various streets in each of the community selected. Each local government has 100 copies of the questionnaire. However, out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire administered, 381 were returned in a usable condition for analysis.

The questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was used in generating data. The questionnaire comprised two sections: the demographic (sex, age, educational qualification and occupation) and psychographic section consisting of questions about the predominant mass media used for the reports of prevalence cases of suicide in Rivers State; the degree of audience exposure to suicide cases in mass media and; the causes of suicide in Rivers State. Simple percentage and a likert scale was used to measure the degree of respondents' position on a statement or questions. The response of the respondents on the instrument were weighted in this order: Strongly Agree (SA) -4 point Agree (A)-3 points; Disagree (D)-2 points; Strongly Disagree (SD) 1 point. The implication of using the weighted mean score is to either agree or disagree with respondents' responses. If the result is 2.5 (i.e. 4+3+2+1 divided by 4) then, it is accepted. That is, any response that measures 2.5 or higher is accepted by respondents while scores below 2.5 are rejected.

Data Presentation and Analysis**Table 1: Responses on predominant mass media channels for reporting suicide cases in Rivers State**

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Magazine	15	4
Newspaper	23	6
Radio	153	40
Television	41	11
Social media	149	49
Total	381	100

Table 3 indicates that radio and social media are the predominant media channels used in the reportage of the prevalence suicide cases in Rivers State.

Table 2: Degree of audience awareness or exposure to suicide cases in the mass media

Statement	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL 1	WMS	RMK
I am exposed to reports of suicide cases regularly	131	98	87	65	1057/381	2.8	Accepted
I am exposed to reports of suicide cases two times every week	107	161	69	44	1093/381	2.9	Accepted
I am exposed to reports of suicide cases weekly	39	77	101	167	756/381	2.0	Rejected
I am exposed to reports of suicide cases bi-weekly	43	59	123	156	751/381	2.0	Rejected

The data in the show that the degree of audience awareness or exposure to suicide cases in Rivers State is very high.

Table 3: Causes of Suicide in Rivers State

Statement	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL 1	WMS	RMK
Suicide is caused by depression	102	143	95	41	1008/381	2.6	Accepted
Suicide is caused by economic hardship	56	71	131	123	822/381	2.2	Accepted
Suicide is caused by separation of partners	139	98	81	63	1075/381	2.8	Rejected
Mental ill health contributes to suicide	396	269	272	57	994/381	2.6	Accepted

The data on the table indicated that separation of partners, depression mental ill health are the causes suicide in Rivers State.

Discussions of Findings

Research Question 1: What are the predominant media channels used for the report of prevalence cases of Suicide in Rivers State?

The study investigated mass media awareness and the prevalence of suicide cases in Rivers State and found that radio and social media are the predominant media channels used in the reportage of the prevalence suicide cases in Rivers State. This is because out of 381 respondents analysed in

the study, 153 representing 40% agreed that they are exposed to suicide cases predominantly on radio, 149 respondents (49%) on social media, 41 (11%) on television, 23 (6%) on newspapers while 15 (4%) are exposed to newspapers.

The finding is related to the findings of other studies, for instance, Chukwere & Chukwere (2022) evaluated the role of social media in the promulgation of depression and suicide behaviour in Nigeria and found that social media influences an increase in depression and suicide cases. It further found that social media users get influenced, depressed and suicidal because of posts, videos, messages live videos stream online, Also, Umar, Armiya'u ad Ali (2020) found that there are warning signs of suicide posed by individuals on their Facebook walls but help was not provided on time or after the incidents with resultant completion of suicide. The study investigated suicide awareness on social media in Nigeria. The most salient frame found in the coverage of suicide cases is the method of suicide; how the victims that died were described and most of the articles used the straight news reporting approach, relying mainly on official sources. (Adebayo & Makwambeni, 2022).

The finding agrees with the Media Development Theory used in the study. Asemah, Nwammuo and Nkwom-Uwaoma (2017) argue that the media undertook the role of carrying out positive development programmes, accepting restrictions and instructions like prevention of suicide in the state. The media can do this by functioning as government instruments for achieving economic, political growth, cultural development and national sovereignty.

Research question two: What is the degree of audience awareness or exposure to suicide cases in the mass media?

The study also found that the degree of audience exposure to suicide cases in Rivers State is very high. The respondents' responses confirmed that they are exposed to suicide cases on a regular basis. The responses on these statements were above 2.5 set out as decision rule in the study and were accepted.

Chukwere & Chukwere (2022) evaluated "The Role of Social Media in the Promulgation of Depression and Suicide Behaviour in Nigeria". The study revealed that social media influences an increase in depression and suicide cases.

Research Question 3: What are the causes of suicide cases in Rivers State?

The study further revealed that separation of partners, depression and mental ill health are the causes of suicide in Rivers State. The responses on the causes of suicide revealed that it is caused by depression', 'mental ill health which contribute majorly to suicide' and 'suicide is also caused by separation of partners'. This was found at above 2.5 set out as decision rule in the study and was accepted.

The finding is similar to the findings of Oblibamoyo, Ola, Coker, Adewuya and Onabola (2021) and others. They found that the most common reported suicide behaviour was hanging and followed by poisoning. Social media influences an increase in depression and suicide cases (Chukwere & Chukwere, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The study investigated mass media awareness and the prevalence of suicide cases in Rivers State and found that radio and the social media are the predominant media channels used in the reportage of the prevalence of suicide cases in Rivers State. Majority of the respondents are exposed to suicide stories on radio and social media on a regular basis. The study confirmed that separation of partners, depression and mental ill health are the causes of suicide in Rivers State. The exposure to media content about suicide stories are on regular basis and can help citizens to deal with depression. Meaning the Media Development Theory used in the study is suitable. The theory believes that the media undertook the role of carrying out positive development programmes, accepting restrictions and instructions like prevention of suicide in the State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The print media organisations (newspaper and magazine) and television should consider suicide stories to be important since it concerns human interests.
2. Rivers audience should be cheerful and avoid separation after marriage since it contributes and leads to suicide stories or events.

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