

## Influence of Emotional Maturity on Suicidal Ideation among University Undergraduates in Osun State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Emotional maturity partly explains the variations in individuals' reaction to the same issue under the same circumstances, the thought process has been linked to either high, moderate or low level of emotional maturity. Suicide ideation is the first stage in the development process of suicide behaviour, it involves thoughts about killing oneself as a means of escape from unpleasant life experience(s). Recently development in the study of suicide as revealed several factors that could influence the process of ideation-to-action framework. One of such factor((emotional maturity) is employed in this study to examine it influence on suicide ideation among the studied population using descriptive survey research design. Multi-stage sampling techniques was employed for selection of samples. Three universities were selected using ownership as basis for stratification, four faculties were selected using commonality in the three universities as basis, out of the total population of 38,348 students in the three selected universities, one hundred and twenty (120) students were selected from each faculty totaling one thousand four hundred and forty(1440) samples. An adapted instrument titled 'Questionnaire on Influence of Emotional Maturity on Suicidal Ideation (QIEMSI)' adapted from Desrossier and Reynod suicide ideation scale were used to elicit information from respondents using convenient sampling technique. Data collected were analysed using SPSS. To address research question on the influence of demographic factor on suicide ideation, results showed that items on the demographic section of the research instrument (Birth order, Family size, Parenting, Family type, Final decision maker and parent occupation) had no significant influence on suicidal ideation except for family size which showed negative correlation. However, analysed data showed that emotional maturity exert a negative influence on students' suicide ideation. This study concludes that emotional maturity and family size exerts a combined negative influence on suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Osun State, therefore, this study pose it that the greater the emotional maturity, the larger the family size, the lower the tendency to conceive suicide ideas, plan suicide and commit suicide. Based on the findings of this study, university authorities show put in place online counselling platforms where suicide ideates can seek help under anonymity to prevent the burden of stigmatization.*

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### Introduction

Suicidal ideation is a stage in the development process of a behaviour called suicidal behaviour. This stage acts as a foundation for other stages, i.e., suicide attempt and committed suicide. Suicide remains a leading cause of death worldwide and is projected to remain so through 2030 (WHO 2017). Suicidal ideation can be

described as a broad term used to describe a range of contemplations, wishes, and preoccupations with death and suicide. It is the thoughts about killing oneself which may include a plan. Research has revealed that there is no generally acceptable definition of suicide ideation, according to Harmer et al (2022), suicidal ideation is a broad term used to describe a range of contemplations, wishes, and preoccupations

with death by suicide. In the study of suicidology, the definition of suicide ideation and suicide varies from one profession to another; for instance, World Health Organization (WHO 2012) defines suicide as 'the act of killing oneself, deliberately initiated and performed by the person concerned in the full knowledge or expectation of its fatal outcome while the American Psychology Association (APA 2018) defines suicide as the act of killing oneself which occurs in the context of a major depressive episode, which may also occur as a result of a substance use or other disorder. The slight variation in both definitions could be attributed to the difference in an area of focus of the two professional organizations. Suicide Ideation among adolescents and young adult populations enacts the need for studying the cause(s), knowing that the period of adolescence and young adulthood is a period of life surges at its peak. This period is characterized by several developmental changes, including cognitive, emotional, physical, social, and others, which at times can result in conflicts within the individual passing through this period. This stage is a period in which most individuals are at the level of acquiring life-changing skills in the form of educational pursuits with the hope of establishing a career. This type of education may be formal or non-formal. The focus of this research is on learners in the formal education sector, particularly the university undergraduate students in Osun state.

Among the students population of tertiary institutions, suicidal ideation may surface at a particularly important moment due to leaving adolescence and entering the young adult age and/or the changes experienced in academic life. Suicide has been pointed out as the second leading cause of death among students of tertiary levels of education in the world. According

to World Health Organization (WHO), in 2012, it was estimated that 804,000 people committed suicide in the world. Among young people (aged 15 to 29 years), an increase in cases of suicide has been shown, accounting for 8.5% of deaths in this age group worldwide. This undoubtedly indicates an increase in the rate of suicide among this segment of the world population which calls for concern considering the fact that people of these age bracket are just emerging into the world .

This deadly act is mostly carried out in Nigeria through pesticide ingestion, hanging, and jumping into large bodies of water such as Lagoon. Suicide attempts are of extremely serious public health concern in most societies, though they tend to be under-reported due to factors like cultural beliefs and associated stigma. The under-reporting and other sources of inadequate gathering of statistical information on suicide often lead to grossly low incidence rates being reported. The growing rate of suicide among young individuals has become alarming. Media reports show that between 2019 and the first quarter of 2021 in Osun State, Western Nigeria, there were several cases of committed suicide among university undergraduates in the state. Premium Times and Punch Newspaper reported 3 committed suicide cases from Obafemi Awolowo University and one from Osun State University. According to Deputy Director of Medical Social Services, Lagos University Teaching Hospital, LUTH, and training coordinator of, Suicide Research Prevention Initiative, SUPRIN, Dr. Titilayo Tade, the suicide rate in Nigeria in 2019 is 6.9/ 100,000, which is higher than 6.5 rate in 2012, the current rate of suicide in Nigeria is 9.50% out of 100, 000 people (Iwalaiye 2021). A wave of suicidal behaviour is increasingly threatening the well-being of young adults. Research has focused on identifying major risk factors

that predispose adolescents and young adults to suicidal ideation. However, little is known about the influence of demographic factors related to family structure and emotional maturity of university undergraduate students as it relates to suicidal ideation in Osun State. A wave of suicidal behaviour is increasingly threatening the well-being of young adults. Since suicidal ideation is the first stage in suicidal behaviour which precedes suicide attempt and suicide, there is the need to examine factors that may be contributing to suicidal ideation among young adults with a view to stemming the waves of suicide attempts and suicide among university undergraduates.

In trying to do this a search light was beamed at the link between demographic factor (family structure) and emotional maturity of students and suicidal ideation. In viewing the family from a structural perspective, it is observed that different structures operate in various families. A family can be said to be a natural small group version of the society. As societies change so do families, and the role of family as a social institution cannot be over emphasized. The family is a natural group that has evolved patterns of interacting over time and makes up the family structure. Family structure governs the functioning of family members, determines their behaviors and facilitates their interaction. Ajibola et al (2022) pose it that undergraduates that have academic challenges, engages in substance abuse, and have parents with marital problems are prone to suicidal ideation. Psychologists tend to understand how factors from the relationship level and the individual level interact to predict suicidal ideation and suicide. Baumeister (1990), for example, provided a model of how an individual's environmental stress is transformed into individual stress, leading to suicidal thought and suicidal act. First,

there is a negative event. Then, the person makes internal self-attributions for the occurrence of that event. Third, as a consequence of this self-blame, the person has an aversive state of self-awareness. After that, the person develops negative emotions. Then in the fifth stage, the person tries to escape from meaningful thought or cognitive construction. Finally the person starts to think of a solution to escape from the world (suicidal ideation). This is an indication that an individual's analysis of external stressors may lead to negative internal responses, which in some cases tend towards a search for an escape root which generate series of thought and ideas in which suicide may be included. The stress-buffer effect of family as a social institution has been proven, Durkheim (2010) underlines that 'family is a powerful safe guard against suicide, so the more strongly it is constituted the greater its protection'.

Family problems are constantly seen as one of the characteristics of youth suicide ideation across cultures. Omigbodun (2008) affirms that Adolescents living in urban areas, from polygamous or disrupted families, had higher rates of suicidal behaviour. Study have also shown that in Hong Kong, among the 11,695 cases of overall attempted suicides recorded during 2002 by the Hong Kong Samaritan Befrienders, the most common reason for suicide was family disputes, which accounted for 14.1% of total cases (HK Samarian, 2005). In another study by Lai and McBride-Chang (2001), various indicators about family climates were used to predict suicidal ideation among adolescents. It was discovered that there exist a significant association between negative family climate and the prevalence of suicidal ideation. Therefore, these studies suggested the important role of family in predicting young adults suicidal ideation.

This affirms (Wu & Bond, 2006) assertion that the more family disputes, the higher the stress and the lower the level of home satisfaction and lack of home satisfaction could lead to loneliness or perceived burdensomeness, thereby resulting in suicide ideation. This is to say that family factors could contribute to suicides ideation among young adults and the elderly. In accessing the intensity of family problems a commonly used model is the Family Functioning Model by Epstein, Baldwin, & Bishop, 1983, according to this family functioning model there are six(6) dimensions of family functioning namely:

- Problem Solving- refers to the family's ability to solve problems.
- Communication- refers to the effectiveness and information exchange among family members.
- Roles- refers to whether the family has recurrent patterns of behavior to handle family functions
- Affective Responsiveness- refers to the family members' ability to respond with appropriate effect to environmental stimuli.
- Affective Involvement -refers to the amount of affection family members exchange with each other, and
- Behavioral Control assesses- whether the family has norms or standards governing individual behavior and responses to emergency situations.

Using the above model (Family Functioning Model), it could be said that a family that is high in communication and affective responsiveness will enhance share of love among its members, which plays an important role in preventing suicide by providing supports, such as emotional subsistence, guidance and assistance, and fostering a sense of belonging, Samm et al., (2010) acknowledged that good communication with the mother or father

reduces the risk of suicidal ideation in both genders and in all age groups. In view of the foregoing, it could be deduced that dysfunctional family structure is a risk factor for suicidal ideation because family have been seen as a means of support and growth which enable the individuation of its members while providing a sense of belonging. Also the importance of a supportive extended family relationship has been demonstrated in the works of McFarnlane et al., 1994; Samm et al., 2010. Additionally, compared with children brought up in intact families with two parents, a child whose family structure is weaker are more likely to have emotional problems, including depressive feelings and suicidal ideation (Ram & Hou, 2003). With this, there arise the need to investigate the contribution of emotions to suicidal ideation.

Emotion plays a central role in human functioning. McRae & Gross, (2020) sees Emotion as a tool in regulating a set of processes used to evaluate, modulate, and change emotional responses. The ability of an individual to accept constructive criticisms gracefully, avoid self-pity, control his/her emotions, accept responsibility for their actions, not being easily hurt, and not expecting special consideration from anyone are vital elements to human functioning. Salovey and Mayer (1994) suggested that the ability of emotions to form an important link with the personality of individuals constitutes differences in the ways in which he or she sees the world. This explains why different individuals react to the same situation in different ways. Therefore, emotional maturity can be referred to as the intelligence that shapes accuracy, efficiency and achievement of processing mechanisms with which humans interact with their immediate environment and the world at large. Since suicide ideation is seen has a the initializing stage in suicide behaviour,



the social environment of individuals and emotions have been connected to the central functioning of humans then there arises the need to establish the influence of family structure and emotional maturity on suicidal ideation. An emotionally mature individual is one whose emotional life is self-controlled, to a large extent, emotions influence several aspects of human behavior. Emotional maturity can be said to be the ability to exercise self-control which is a product of thinking and learning processes. This process is achieved in constant interaction between an individual and his or her environment. Adeyemi (2016) presented the following six stages of emotional maturation as it concerns human emotions:

1. Basic emotional responsibility- at this level people assume responsibility for their emotions and do not seek external factors to explain their emotional feelings and responses
2. Emotional honesty- this stage involves an individual's willingness to know his or her own feelings and accept them, coupled with the ability to deal with the conscious and unconscious fears related to emotional expression.
3. Emotional openness- emotionally mature individuals are able to express both positive and negative emotions at the right proportion, time and socially acceptable manner without repressing or suppressing their emotions.
4. Emotional assertiveness- emotionally mature people at this level have positive self-expression and are able to express their emotions appropriately in any situation. They satisfy personal needs and are able to accommodate the needs of others. Such persons make room for their feelings and respect that of others.
5. Emotional understanding- those on this level understand the cause and effect of emotional responsibility. They possess

good self-concept and at the same time are aware of their complementary negative self-concept, since self-concept has corresponding negatives.

6. Emotional detachment- this is the peak of emotional maturity. Individuals at this point live without the burden of self-concept, self-image, self-construct and all group-concepts. Their detachment is the direct consequence of their true understanding of emotions and therefore, letting go of their emotions.

From the above it can be deduced that emotionally matured individuals are most unlikely to engage in suicide ideation, plan suicide and commit suicide as available researches show that emotional maturity has an inhibitory effect of mediating, mitigating and controlling suicidal ideation in people (Motahar et al, 2011; Cha et al, 2009; Kwok et al, 2011). These findings evidently support that emotional maturity entails the ability to regulate emotions, show steadiness and endurance under pressure, and be free from neurotic tendencies. Emotional maturity as seen by Kapri and Rani (2014), is synonymous with emotional stability and the ability to adapt emotions and feelings to changeable conditions.

Therefore, university education, which mostly comprises adolescents and young adults population, is a stage where support is drawn from the social environment such as the family and university community. The presence, absence or weak social support could be attributed to high, moderate or low emotional maturity and this could be key in understanding suicidal ideation among adolescents and young adults in universities.

#### **Objectives of the study:**

1. Determine the level of suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Osun state.

2. Investigate the influence of demographic factors on suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Osun state;
3. Investigate the influence of emotional maturity on suicidal ideation among universities undergraduates in Osun State.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the conduct of the study:

1. What is the level of suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Osun state?
2. What influence has demographic factor (family structure) on suicidal ideation among university undergraduates' students in Osun state?
3. What influence has emotional maturity on suicidal ideation among university undergraduates' students in Osun state?

### Methodology

The research adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised 38,348 university undergraduates students

from 3 selected universities in Osun state. The study sample comprised 1440 undergraduate students which were selected using multi-stage sampling technique. Universities were selected based on stratification using ownership as the basis of stratification. This was done by selecting one federal, one state, and one privately owned university from the 9 universities in Osun state, making a total of three universities. Four faculties common to all the selected universities were used for the study making a total of 12 faculties. A total of 120 participants were selected from each of the faculties using simple random sampling techniques making a total of 480 participants from each university. An instrument titled: "Questionnaire on Influence of Emotional Maturity on Suicidal Ideation (QIEMSI)" adapted from Desrossier (2003) emotional maturity scale and Reynod suicide ideation scale (1991a), were used to elicit information from respondents using convenience method. Data collected were analyzed using SPSS and appropriate inferential statistics methods.

*Table 1 shows the population of the selected universities.*

S/N	Name of universities	Category	Total
1	Obafemi Awolowo University	Federal	26,382
2	Osun State University	State	10,268
3	Adeleke University	Private (non-faith based)	1,698
			Total 38,348

*Table 2 Descriptive Result of the level of Suicidal Ideation among University Undergraduates in Osun State*

Extent of Suicide Ideation	Frequency	Percent
Low	1218	91.7
Moderate	80	6.0
High	30	2.3
Total	1328	100.0

**Table 3:** Individual Influence of Demographic Factors on Suicidal Ideation among University Undergraduates in Osun State

Family Structure	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	F	Sig.
<b>Birth Order</b>						
1st to 3 <sup>rd</sup>	986	5.7901	8.15893			
4th to 6 <sup>th</sup>	277	6.6426	9.06291			
7th and Above	31	6.6129	10.46160	2	1.195	0.303
Total	1294	5.9923	8.42105			
<b>Family Size</b>						
4 and Below	561	6.7790	8.91754			
5 and Above	759	5.4572	7.97310	1	8.011	0.005
Total	1320	6.0189	8.40965			
<b>Family Type</b>						
Nuclear	1141	6.0158	8.40821			
Extended	172	5.6977	7.76417	1	0.218	0.641
Total	1313	5.9741	8.32455			
<b>Parenting</b>						
Single Parent	227	6.9251	8.61613			
Co-parent	171	5.8538	8.60484			
Surrogate Parent	9	5.6667	9.50000	3	1.227	0.299
Both Parent	899	5.7419	8.22716			
Total	1306	5.9617	8.35634			
<b>Fathers' Occupation</b>						
Government Worker	619	6.0452	8.35874			
Private Worker	146	6.0753	8.79662			
Artisans	160	6.0000	7.99685	3	0.158	0.925
Entrepreneurs	265	5.6415	8.57386			
Total	1190	5.9529	8.40558			
<b>Mothers' Occupation</b>						
Government Worker	536	5.3974	7.93412			
Private Worker	59	6.4915	8.88892			
Artisans	357	6.5098	8.47157	3	1.510	0.210
Entrepreneurs	288	6.2639	9.08534			
Total	1240	5.9710	8.41906			
<b>Final Decision Maker</b>						
Father	1114	5.9219	8.30204			
Mother	181	5.8785	8.21629	1	0.004	0.948
Total	1295	5.9158	8.28696			

**Table 4:** Model Summary of the Influence of Emotional Maturity on Suicide Ideation among University Undergraduates in Osun State

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	0.261 <sup>a</sup>	0.068	0.067	8.10569	96.891	0.000 <sup>b</sup>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Maturity

**Table 5:** Coefficient of the Individual Influence of Emotional Maturity on Suicide Ideation among University Undergraduates in Osun State

Model	Unstandardized		Standardize		
	Coefficients		d	Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1 (Constant)	18.508	1.291		14.341	0.000
Emotional Maturity	-0.369	0.037	-0.261	-9.843	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Suicide Ideation

## Discussion

**Research Question One:** what is the level of suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Osun state? Table 1.2 shows the descriptive results of the level of suicide ideation.

The scale used was scored in a way that Always was allotted 4, Often was allotted 3, Sometimes was allotted 2, Rarely was allotted 1, and Never was allotted 0. These were summed to constitute students measure of Suicide Ideation. The mean and standard deviation were 5.99 and 8.39 respectively, while the minimum and maximum scores were 00 and 40 respectively. On the scale, those who scored 20 and below were said to exhibit low suicide ideation, those who scored between 21 and 30 were said to exhibit moderate suicide ideation, while those who scored above 30 were said to exhibit high suicide ideation. These were subjected to descriptive analysis, as presented in Table 1.2 above. From the result, the majority of the students (91.7) exhibited low level of suicide ideation, 6.0% of the students exhibited a moderate level of suicide ideation, while only 2.3% of the students exhibited high level of suicide ideation.

**Research Question Two:** what influence has demographic factors on suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Osun state.

Table 1.3 shows the results of the influence demographic factor (family structure) on suicide ideation among university undergraduates in Osun State. From the results, birth order ( $p = 0.303$ ), family type ( $p = 0.641$ ), parenting ( $p = 0.299$ ), fathers' occupation ( $p = 0.925$ ), mothers' occupation ( $p = 0.210$ ) and decision making ( $p = 0.948$ ) do not have any significant influence on suicide ideation as the  $p$  values are greater than 0.05 threshold. Only family size had significant influence on suicide ideation among the students as the  $p$  value (0.005) is less than 0.05 level of significant. Also, the results showed that students whose family size is less than 5 may exhibit high level of suicide ideation with a mean score of 6.7790 than students whose family size were 5 and above which had a mean score of 5.4572. This implies that students from larger families had less propensity of suicide ideation than those from smaller families.

**Research Question Three:** What influence has emotional maturity on suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Osun state.

Table 1.4 shows the model summary of the influence of emotional maturity on suicide ideation among university undergraduates in Osun State. From the table, the R Square and R Square Adjusted showed the values of 0.068 and 0.067, respectively. This implies that the minimum



and maximum influence emotional maturity could exert on students suicide ideation were 6.8% and 6.7% respectively. Also, the p value showed 0.000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. This can be interpreted to mean that emotional maturity significantly influence suicide ideation among the students. To know the extent and strength of this influence, the coefficient table is presented in Table 1.4.

Table 1.5 showed the coefficient of the influence of emotional maturity on suicide ideation among the respondents. From the table, results showed that the influence is significant as the p value (0.000) is less than 0.05. Also, the table shows the B value to be -0.369. This implies that emotional maturity had an inverse or negative influence on suicide ideation among the respondent. This can be interpreted to mean that the more emotionally matured the students, the less suicide ideation among them and vice versa.

### Summary

Based on the results of the analysed data the level of suicidal ideation among university students in Osun state is relatively low compared to the rate of occurrence of suicide. Then the important question to ask is what accounts for the low level of suicidal ideation with the high rate of suicide among university undergraduates in the state. The work of Oladele & Oladele (2016) shows that there is a thin line between suicide ideation and the actual act of committing suicide. Therefore it could be said that the issue of stigma and shame of owning up about suicide ideation among individuals based on cultural belief and societal stigmatization may have effect on the respondents. Therefore the low suicidal ideation level as shown in the analyzed data could be attributed to any of the above stated reasons since news report indicated an increase in the rate of suicide among

tertiary education students between 2019 and first quarter of 2021 in Osun state. On the other hand majority of the items on the family structure scale do not exact an influence on the respondents suicide ideation except for family size which indicated that respondents with large family sizes(5 and above) scored low on the suicide ideation scale while those with small family sizes(5 and below) scored high.while emotional maturity exact a negative correlation with suicide ideation among the studied population.

### Conclusion

1. The present study established that the level of suicidal ideation among university undergraduates in Osun state is low to the rate of occurrence of committed suicide.
2. Also this study revealed that aside family size items used in measuring family structure for this study does not influence suicide ideation among the studied population.
3. Furthermore, this study establishes that emotional maturity poses a greater influence on suicide ideation; therefore, the greater the emotional maturity, the lower the tendency to conceive suicide ideas, plan suicide, and commit suicide.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research and the conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made to help in identifying and managing suicide ideates among university undergraduate students in Osun state.

1. The university student affairs division should make available a medium of online counselling services where student can seek counselling under anonymity to help protect them from stigmatization and shame of owning up to suicide ideation.

2. In collaborations with communication service providers and hospital emergency units, Universities should have a suicide emergency respond toll free line. To aid rescue operation in cases of attempted suicide.
3. Rules guiding university entry age should be reviewed by University Commission to enable certain level of emotional maturation among university undergraduates.

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