

AN ANALYSIS OF NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS' ONLINE COVERAGE OF SUICIDE AND ITS ASSOCIATED FACTORS

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Abstract

This study assessed the dominant suicide methods reported by Nigerian newspapers and the associated factors. A quantitative content analysis was employed as a research design to analyse 205 suicide-related news stories reported on the online news portal of 10 selected national newspapers. The study covered the period of one year (January to December 2021). The data were coded using a well-designed coding guide and were analyzed using descriptive statistics (arithmetic mean, frequencies, percentages, and Kruskal Wallis Test). Findings revealed that the reported suicides were dominantly committed by hanging (32.2%) and poisoning (use of chemicals) (31.7%). The reported suicide methods were significantly associated with the period within the year when the suicide was committed ($\chi^2 = 20.501$; $P < 0.005$); type of suicide story ($\chi^2 = 10.606$; $P < 0.005$); and gender of the suicide victim ($\chi^2 = 10.428$; $P < 0.005$). The paper made bare the dominant suicide method reported by the newspapers and revealed copycat behavior in the adoption of suicide methods among suicide victims, as seen in the popularity of the use of chemicals and hanging among different strata, and therefore recommends population/context-specific suicide prevention messages/efforts in stemming the growing tide of suicide among the Nigerian population.

Keywords: Suicide methods, Newspaper coverage, Prevention, Victims, Associated factors.

Introduction

Suicide has been one of the global phenomena that portend a lot of consequences not only to the victims but also to the family/friends, the community, and the nation. Although suicide is preventable, it has continued to rank high among the leading non-communicable causes of death in the human population. In the Low- and Medium-Income Countries (LMICs) like Nigeria, suicide accounts for about 80% of the global suicide rate (WHO, 2019; Oyetunji, Arafat, Famori, Akinboyewa, Afolami, Ajayi and Ka, 2021). According to the WHO report (2019), Nigeria has a suicide rate of 17.3 per

100,000. This is higher than Africa's 12.0 per 100,000; and the global estimate of 10.5 per 100,000 people. Research evidence continues to point towards an increase in suicide rate in Nigeria even though suicide is often underreported and under-documented in the country (WHO, 2019).

Poor attitude of Nigerian Governments towards the collection, storage and processing of factual statistical data on suicide and other health issues has been the bane of reliable data on suicide in the country (Alabi, Alabi, Ayinde & Abdulmalik, 2015; Oyetunji et al, 2021). Social stigmatization that goes with suicide, religion and cultural

sentiments, as well as criminalization of suicide by the Nigerian constitution, also discourage people from reporting suicide incidents to appropriate authorities (Oyetunji et al., 2021). More so, suicide death or attempt is usually regarded as a taboo or sin, caused by evil spirits or forces in most Nigerian cultural and religious settings (Ohayi, 2019; Oyetunji et al., 2020). As such, the bereaved are often stigmatized or deprived of some social benefits. This often leads many to hide the cause of the death of their loved ones when it occurred by suicide (Ohayi, 2019; Oyetunji et al., 2020). In the case of a suicide attempt, the suicide victim does not only have to contend with the stigma that comes with it but also the law since suicide remains a criminal offence rather than a health issue in the Nigerian constitution. Besides, the lack of quality mental health service delivery in Nigeria and the mystification of mental illness in the country also greatly affect the extent to which people seek medical help when mentally ill (Oyetunji et al. 2021). To this end, general data on suicide in Nigeria could be accessed piecemeal from three major sources: First, the Nigerian hospitals where depression/mental illness, as well as victims of suicide attempt or completed suicide, are usually brought for treatment or death confirmation. Second, the Nigerian Police records where suicide cases could be reported as a criminal case for further investigation and prosecution, as documented in section 327 of the Nigerian criminal code. Third, the mass media (radio, television, newspaper, social media and so on) - which sees the newsworthiness in suicide incidents and reports the same to the populace.

Among the above sources, however, the mass media portends greater implications for the general populace due to its wider coverage and reach. The drama, emotions, and issues surrounding suicide tend to attract media attention, and literature has been building on the relationship between suicide and mass

media across the globe (see Armstrong, Vijayakumar, Niederkrotenthaler, Jayaseelan, Kannan, Pirkis, et al., 2018; Ohayi, 2019; Oyetunji et al., 2020; Onoja, Ojih, Onoja, Onoja, Bebenimibo & Akor, 2023).

Existing studies like Oyetunji et al., (2020) and Onoja et al., (2023) suggest that suicide death or attempt often occur by taking chemicals like pesticides, slitting one's throat, setting oneself on fire, hanging, shooting self with a firearm, and drowning self in a flowing river/water reservoir.

Just as suicide reporting and documentation are still relatively poor in Nigeria, media coverage of suicide remains a relatively under-researched phenomenon among communication scholars in the country. As such, knowledge regarding the reported dominant suicide method and the associated factors seems to be relatively scarce in the existing literature. However, such knowledge could be vital in designing and relaying population and context-specific suicide prevention messages that could help in stemming the growing tide of suicide among Nigerians. This paper therefore, attempted to interrogate Nigerian online newspapers' coverage of suicide and the associated factors.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What were the dominant suicide methods among Nigerian suicide victims as documented by Nigerian newspapers in 2021?
2. What is the association between the reported suicide methods and demographic variables of the suicide victims?

Review of Empirical Studies

There has been a rising interest among scholars in suicide methods and associated factors globally owing to their relevance in suicide prevention and management. The available literature suggests that hanging, poisoning, slitting one's throat, setting oneself on fire, shooting self with a firearm, and drowning are the commonest suicide methods globally (Oyetunji et al., 2020; Arafat et al., 2018; Bidaki, Shirani, Shamsian, Tezerjani, Heidari, Shirani, Farsham, 2016; Cano-Montalbán & Quevedo-Blasco, 2018; Gawliński, Sołtyszewski, Wiergowski, 2020; Han, Kang, Cho, Cho & Na, 2018; Kőlves & de Leo, 2016; Morovatdar, Moradi-Lakeh, Malakouti, & Nojomi, 2013; Lasota, Mirowska-Guzel & Goniewicz, 2021; Onoja et al., 2023; Wu, Chen and Paul, 2012).

While reviewing the various suicide methods used around the world, Bidaki et al. (2016) specifically observed that the most common suicide methods among victims globally are hanging and poisoning, the deadliest was by gun, and the most unsuccessful suicide attempts were overdoses of medication. According to them, dominant suicide methods among suicide victims are similar globally with little variations across different climates due to culture, economic, social conditions, and availability of various methods. They equally reported gender differences in suicidal behaviour noting that 'suicide rates are higher among men than women... and non-lethal suicide is more common among young people and women' (p. 505). Similar study conducted among children and adolescents aged 10-19 years in different countries/territories worldwide by Kőlves and de Leo (2016) also reported that the most frequently used suicide method is hanging, followed by poisoning (use of pesticides) among females and firearms among males. These finding corroborated

earlier finding of the study from the Eastern Mediterranean region by Morovatdar et al. (2014) who reported self-immolation, asphyxiation, hanging and poisoning, as dominant suicide methods that collectively accounted for 77.4% of all the methods of suicide in the region. They also reported that 'self-immolation and poisoning were gender dependent and hanging was country dependent' (p. 335).

The above findings are similar to earlier report by Wu et al. (2012) who after their review of 42 articles with leading suicide methods in 17 Asian countries/regions observed that although, hanging was not a common suicide method in Asia, poisoning like 'pesticide and native plant poisoning' was dominant alongside 'charcoal burning, self-immolation, and jumping' (p. 1136).

Evidence from the systematic review of articles and reviews published between 2005-2015 in PsycINFO, Medline, Web of Science Core Collection, Scopus, and SciELO by Cano-Montalbán and Quevedo-Blasco (2018) also acknowledged that 'hanging, firearm use, and jumping from heights were more frequently used methods of suicide' among both genders in Europe and America. However, unlike the global data (Bidaki et al., 2016), Asia's (Wu et al., 2012) and Eastern Mediterranean region's (Morovatdar et al., 2014), 'firearm' was reported as dominant suicide methods in Europe and America thereby further substantiating the assertion that suicide method could be location and availability dependent. That use of firearm is common among suicide victims in the region is explainable considering the fact that firearm ownership and use is legalized in most parts of Europe and America, meaning vulnerable citizens can easily access firearms unlike Asia and Eastern Mediterranean regions.

Countries specific studies, like Han et al. (2018), 'to investigate age and sex associated

variations in suicide methods' in 239,565 suicides incidents from 1991 to 2015 in Republic of Korea also reported hanging and poisoning as the dominant suicide methods among the population. They equally highlighted gender and age differences in the use of suicide methods among the Koreans. While 'charcoal burning was most commonly used by males younger than 45 years of age, pesticide was commonly used by both sexes ages 55 years and older' (p. 770).

In Poland, Gawliński et al. (2020) used official nationwide data collected by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) and the National Police Headquarters (NPH) from 1990-2018 to 'examine the magnitude of the [suicide] phenomenon and suicide trends over the past 3 decades, focusing on the number of suicide deaths and attempts, the method and place of suicide, gender, age, day of the week, and state of mind' (p. 222). At the end of the study, the researchers reported hanging as the most commonly used suicide method among the Polish followed by jumping from a height and poisoning which varies by sex and age. These findings were further substantiated by Lasota et al. (2021) finding following their 'analysis of suicide methods and substances influencing the state of consciousness of their victims in Poland'. Lasota et al equally reported 'hanging, jumping from a height, self-harm, impairment of the cardiovascular system or taking sleeping pills' as the most dominant suicide method especially among the population (p. 7).

In Nigeria, research evidences on suicide methods and associated factors are beginning to emerge, howbeit, skeletal and there is need to further investigate suicide methods and the associated factors. For instance, Olibamoyo, Ola, Coker, Adewuya and Onabola (2021) analysed 'the trends and patterns of suicidal behaviour in Nigeria using media reports from 2016 to 2019 and

the effect of gender and age groups on these trends and patterns of suicidal behaviour' and observed that hanging was the dominant suicide method among the suicide victims followed by poisoning. They also noted variation between age groups, places, and motivation (p. 1). Also, a study titled: Suicide in Nigeria: Observations from the content analysis of newspapers by Oyetunji et al (2021, p. 1) to 'examine the demographic information and precipitating events for suicides in Nigeria' revealed that hanging and poisoning were the dominant suicide method among the suicide victims which vary by age, marital status and gender.

It is therefore obvious from the existing literature that hanging and poisoning were the dominant suicide methods among suicide victims globally and suicide method changes based on location, gender, age, economic status, and time of suicide. However, there is need for more empirical results on dominant suicide methods among suicide victims in Nigeria and their associated factors to better guide suicide prevention and management efforts in the country.

Research Methodology

The study employed quantitative content analysis and analysed manifest contents of the selected suicide related stories.

Population of the Study/Sampling Frame

The population of this study comprises 10 purposively selected Nigerian online national newspapers (*The Vanguard, The Punch, The Sun, The Daily Trust, The Premium Times, The Guardian, The Daily Independent, The Leadership, The Nation and The Tribune* newspapers). The choice of the newspapers was premised on their national presence (as they were among the top 20 in the country) with higher online presence.

The 10 selected newspapers reported 319 suicide-related news stories from January 1st to December 31st, 2021 which formed the sampling frame for the study.

Sample Size

After using specified inclusion and exclusion criteria, the sample frame was pruned down to 205. Criteria for inclusion of the stories include: the suicide incident reported must be non-fictional, and it was about completed suicide, suicide attempt, and or suicide idea or threat to commit suicide. Again, only stories on suicide incidents that occurred in Nigeria and among Nigerians were included. Nevertheless, news stories on suicide incidents relating to foreigners residing in Nigeria or Nigerians residing in foreign countries were excluded. Mass suicide bombing news stories and news stories that contain the word suicide or any other related words, but without appropriate contextualization of the word to the active objective of this study, were also excluded. Where a single suicide incident is reported by more than one newspaper, all were treated as separate reports as the researcher expected disparities in the reportage of suicide incidents by different newspapers. As such, focus was on suicide stories rather than suicide incidents.

Sampling Technique(s) and Procedure

The paper employed a purposive sampling technique for the selection of the 10 Nigerian online national newspapers as earlier stated. The study further adopted a census sampling technique to select all the 205 suicide-related news stories reported by the selected newspapers that met the inclusion criteria.

Method of Data Collection

The researchers downloaded the suicide related stories from the official websites of the selected newspapers between April and May 2022. That was done by searching for the word 'suicide' and other related terms like pesticide (e.g. sniper), chemical, substance, jumping, diving, hanging, burning self, cutting and the related stories that fell within the study period were saved in PDF while the links were copied into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Content Categories

The selected suicide stories were coded with the use of a well-developed coding guide that categorized the stories into names of newspapers, time of publication, type of suicide events reported (whether the suicide event was a completed one, an attempted suicide, suicidal ideation/threats or not); location (urban/semi-urban or rural); economic status of the suicide victims; their age; their gender; and the reported suicide methods.

Units of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study is individual suicide -related news stories reported by the selected newspapers. These include each story that focused on completed suicide, suicide attempt and suicide threat or idea. In cases where the same suicide incident was reported by multiple newspapers, each of the stories was coded separately to account for possible variation in the manner of presentation across various newspapers.

Test of Reliability of The Instrument

The coding was carried out by the author and one research assistant using an explicit coding framework. The reliability test based on 48 sampled data items yielded 0.77 to 0.97 with an average of 0.87. This was achieved by frequent meetings (four meetings in all) among the coders during the coding with the view to maintaining high level of consensus all through the coding period.

Method of Data Analysis

The data were coded and entered using Microsoft Excel 2016 and SPSS version 23 for data analysis. Descriptive statistics like the arithmetic mean, as well as the frequency and percentage tables, were employed in the analysis. Test of association between the reported suicide method and the socio-demographic variables was analysed using

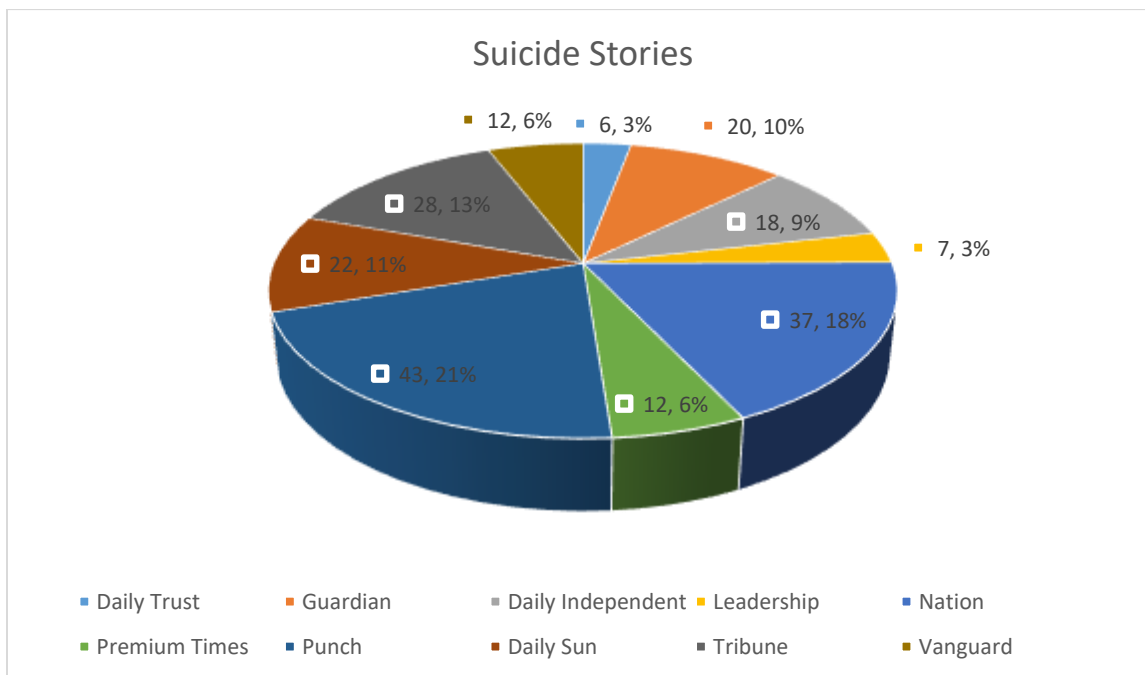
Kruskal-Wallis' test. The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Data Presentation and Analysis

As seen in Figure 1 below, a total of 205 suicide stories were identified from January 1st to December 31st 2021. The mean number of suicide stories published by the 10 newspapers was 20.5 at 0.56 per day.

However, *The Punch* newspaper's suicide stories were more than two times higher than the general average (43 stories in all and 0.12 per day), while that of *The Daily Trust* newspaper was more than three times lower than the general average (6 suicide stories in all and 0.02 per day). The mean number of stories published by the 10 newspapers in each quarter was 51.3.

Figure 1: Newspaper Distribution according to Suicide Related Stories



As seen in Table 1 below, the majority of the stories (61.4%) were published in the 1st and 2nd quarters (31.2% and 30.2% respectively). The majority of the reported suicide cases in the 1st (71.9%), 2nd (64.3%), and 3rd (71.0%) quarters were by the use of chemicals and hanging, while that of the 4th quarter (59.5%) was by hanging and drowning. The trend in suicide methods, as seen in this table, suggests a copycat attitude in the employment of suicide methods among suicide victims in Nigeria.

The data in Table 1 also indicate that the majority of the stories (72.2%) were on completed suicide, while only 9.8% of the

stories were on suicide threats or thoughts. While most of the completed suicides occurred through the use of chemicals (40.5%) and hanging (41.2%), the majority of the attempted suicides occurred by drowning (24.3%) and other methods (35.2%) like running into a moving vehicle, setting oneself ablaze, slitting one's throat, and so on. However, when people contemplated suicide or issue threats of suicide, most of them (85.0%) kept the suicide method secret, while only 10% of them hinted at their intention to get drown.

The majority of the reported suicide cases (87.2%) occurred in the urban/semi-urban

areas, whereas only 12.3% occurred in the rural areas. While the dominant suicide methods among suicide victims in the urban/semi-urban areas were the use of chemicals (36.7%) and hanging (29.4%), those of the rural areas were hanging (56.0%) and others (20.0%), like running into a moving vehicle, setting oneself ablaze, slitting one's throat, and so on.

Gender distribution of the reported suicide victims suggests that the majority of them were male (77.6%), whereas only 21.5% of them were female. While all the suicide victims by shooting (100%) were males, and other dominant suicide methods among them were hanging (36.5%) and use of chemicals (26.4%); there was no female suicide victim by shooting, but use of chemicals (47.7%) and others (20.5%) were the dominant methods among female victims.

Age distribution of suicide victims indicates that the majority of them (59.5%) were between 19-65 years old while only 5.4% and 1.5% of them were juvenile (≤ 18 years) and older adult (≥ 65 years), respectively. This implies that the majority of the reported suicide victims were in their active, productive age. While hanging (72.7%) was the only dominant suicide method among juvenile victims, use of chemicals (35.0% and 23.8%) and hanging (31.7% and 35.6%) were dominant among youth victims (19-35 years old) and middle adults (36-65 years old), respectively.

Data generated on the marital status of victims of reported suicide indicate that suicide was more common among married (33.7%) and single (30.2%) victims than among widowed (1.5%) or divorced (0.5%). While hanging (46.8% and 21.7%) and use of chemicals (32.3% and 30.4%) were the dominant suicide methods among single-suicide victims and married-suicide victims, respectively. The only case of suicide by a divorced-victim occurred by use of chemical.

Use of chemicals and hanging (42.1% each) were the dominant suicide method reported among student-victims of suicide, while hanging was the major suicide method among victims that were economically active but unengaged (70.0%).

The majority of the suicide stories (79.5%) provided details of the suicide methods used by the victims, even though almost all of the stories (92.2%) did not mention the suicide method in the headlines. Suicide stories involving the two dominant suicide methods: use of chemical (36.2%) and hanging (32.3%), provided details of the suicide methods; and those involving hanging and drowning in water (31.2% each) mentioned the suicide method in the headline points to possible copycat effects on the use of the suicide methods among suicide victims.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Distribution of Suicide Stories (N= 205)

Variables	Chemicals	Hanging	Water	Shooting	Others	Not Stated	Total
Quarters							
1 st (Jan. -March)		29(45.3%)	17(26.6%)	3(4.7%)	5(7.8%)	6(9.4%)	4(6.3%)
64(31.2%)							
2 nd (April-June)	16(38.1)	11(26.2%)	0(0.0%)	4(9.5%)	3(7.1%)	8(19.1%)	42(20.5%)
3 rd (July-Sept.)	18(29.1%)	26(41.9%)	6(9.7%)	1(1.6%)	5(8.1%)	6(9.7%)	62(30.2%)
4 th (Oct.-Dec.)	2(5.4%)	12(32.4%)	10(27.1%)	0(0.0%)	3(8.1%)	10(27.0%)	37(18.1%)
Type of Suicide Story							
Completed Suicide	60(40.5%)	61(41.2%)	8(5.4%)	10(6.8%)	4(2.7%)	5(3.4%)	148(72.2%)
Attempted Suicide	5(13.5%)	4(10.8%)	9(24.3%)	0(0.0%)	13(35.2%)	6(16.2%)	37(18.0%)
Suicide Idea/Threat	0(0.0%)	1(5.0%)	2(10.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	17(85.0%)	20(9.8%)
Location of Suicide							
Urba/Semi-Urban	65(36.7%)	52(29.4%)	17(9.6%)	8(4.5%)	12(6.8%)	23(13.0%)	177(87.2%)
Rural	0(0.0%)	14(56.0%)	2(8.0%)	2(8.0%)	5(20.0%)	2(8.0%)	25(12.3%)
Not Stated	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	1(100%)	1(0.5%)
Gender							
Male	42(26.4%)	58(36.5%)	18(11.3%)	10(6.3%)	12(7.6%)	19(12.0%)	159(77.6%)
Female	21(47.7%)	8(18.2%)	1(2.3%)	0(0.00%)	5(11.4%)	9(20.5%)	44(21.5%)
Group	2(100%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.00%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	2(0.9%)
Age							
Juvenile (≤18 years)	2(18.2%)	8(72.7%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	1(9.1%)	0(0.0%)	11(5.4%)
Youth (19-35 years)	22(35.0%)	20(31.7%)	7(11.1%)	0(0.0%)	5(7.9%)	9(14.3%)	63(30.7%)
Mid Adult (36-65 years)	14(23.8%)	21(35.6%)	11(18.6%)	1(1.7%)	4(6.8%)	8(13.6%)	59(28.8%)
Older Adult (≥65 years)	0(0.0%)	2(66.7%)	0(0.0%)	1(33.3%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	3(1.5%)
Not stated	27(39.1%)	15(21.7%)	1(1.5%)	8(11.6%)	6(8.7%)	12(17.4%)	69(33.7%)
Marital Status							
Single	20(32.3%)	29(46.8%)	3(4.8%)	0(0.0%)	3(4.8%)	7(11.3%)	62(30.2%)
Married	21(30.4%)	15(21.7%)	12(17.4%)	2(2.9%)	8(11.6%)	11(15.9%)	69(33.7%)
Divorced	1(100.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	1(0.5%)
Widowed	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	3(100.0%)	3(1.5%)
Not stated	23(32.9%)	21(30.0%)	4(5.7%)	8(11.4%)	10(14.3%)	4(5.7%)	70(34.1%)
Economic Status							
Student	24(42.1 %)	24(42.1%)	1(1.8%)	0(0.0%)	2(3.5%)	6(10.5%)	57(27.8%)
Economically active/engaged	25(31.3%)	15(18.7%)	12(15.0%)	10(12.5%)	3(3.8%)	15(18.7%)	80(39.0%)
Economically inactive	0(0.0%)	2(33.3%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	4(66.7%)	6(2.9%)
Economically active/unengaged	0(0.0%)	7(70.0%)	1(10.0%)	0(0.0%)	1(10.0%)	1(10.0%)	10(4.9%)

Not stated	16(30.8%)	18(34.6%)	5(9.6%)	0(0.0%)	12(23.1%)	1(1.9%)	52(25.4%)
Details of Suicide Method							
Not Provided	6(14.3%)	6(14.3%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	3(7.1%)	27(64.3%)	42(20.5%)
Provided	59(36.2%)	60(36.8%)	19(11.7%)	10(6.1%)	14(8.6%)	1(0.6%)	163(79.5%)
Method Mentioned in Headline							
Not mentioned	63(33.3%)	61(32.3%)	14(7.4%)	9(4.8%)	14(7.4%)	28(14.8%)	189(92.2%)
Mentioned	2(12.5%)	5(31.2%)	5(31.2%)	1(6.3%)	3(18.8%)	0(0.0%)	16(7.8%)
Total	65(31.7%)	66(32.2%)	19(9.3%)	10(4.9%)	17(8.3%)	28(13.7%)	205(100.0%)

Kruskal-Wallis' Test of Association between the reported suicide methods and the demographic variables of suicide victims as seen in table 2 below reveals a positive and significant association between the reported suicide methods and periods (quarters) of suicide reportage ($\chi^2 = 20.501$; $P < 0.000$); the type of suicide story ($\chi^2 = 10.606$; $P < 0.005$); and gender of the suicide victims ($\chi^2 = 10.428$; $P < 0.005$). However, others, like the location of suicide incident, age, marital and economic status, test positive but no significant association with suicide methods in the reported suicide stories.

Table 2: Kruskal-Wallis' Test of association between the reported suicide method and the demographic variables of suicide victims (N= 205)

Variables	DF	χ^2	P	Decision
Quarters	3	20.501	0.0001	Sign
Type of Suicide Story	2	10.606	0.0050	Sign
Location of Suicide incident	2	4.866	0.0878	Not Sign
Gender	2	10.428	0.0054	Sign
Age	4	4.168	0.3837	Not Sign
Marital Status	5	10.879	0.0538	Not Sign
Economic Status	4	7.220	0.01247	Not Sign

Discussion of Findings

This study adds to the relatively emerging studies on media coverage of suicide in Nigeria. This was done by retrospectively examining reported dominant suicide methods among suicide victims in the Nigerian newspapers' online news portals. The study also examined the association between suicide methods and other reported variables like victims' demographics such as age, gender, marital status, and economic status; and other variables like time of the publication and location of the suicide incident.

Findings revealed that the reported dominant suicide methods among the suicide victims were hanging (32.2%) and the use of chemicals (31.7%). Other fairly dominant methods were drowning (9.3%), and other methods like running into a moving vehicle, setting oneself ablaze, slitting one's throat, jumping from a height and so on (8.3%); and shooting oneself (4.9%). These findings further substantiate the increasing global trend of suicide by hanging and poisoning

(Shah, Ahmed, & Arafat, 2017; Arafat, 2019; Oyetunji, 2021). For instance, while reports from Ethiopia, Senegal, Uganda, South Africa, and Ghana identified hanging as the dominant method of suicide in those countries, poisoning and use of firearms were the reported dominant suicide methods in Malawi, Egypt, Tanzania and Cameroon (Mars, Burrows, Hjelmeland and Gunneli, 2014). Earlier studies in Nigeria, like Oyetunji et al. (2021), also reported that hanging and poisoning (use of chemicals) were the dominant suicide methods in Nigeria from 2010 to 2019.

The second research question was to ascertain the association between the reported suicide methods and the demographics of the suicide victims/other variables. The study revealed a positive and significant association between the reported suicide methods and the gender of the suicide victims. Other factors that were positively associated with suicide methods are periods (quarters) of suicide reportage and the type of suicide story. Even though the location of the suicide incident, age, marital status and

economic conditions of the victims were positively associated with the suicide method, they held no statistical significance.

The variation in terms of suicide methods used and demographic compositions of the victims support previous studies like Arafat, Mali, and Akter (2018), Naghavi (2019), Demir (2018), and Oyetunji et al. (2021) who equally reported similar findings. For instance, while Demir (2018) reported that suicide mortality varied according to age group, gender and regions, Naghavi (2019) asserted that men had a higher rate of suicide (fatality) across regions and countries compared to women. Oyetunji et al. (2021), also opine that not only did a greater percentage of the reported suicide cases in Nigeria from 2010-2019 have male victims, the majority of the reported completed suicide victims within the period were also male. High prevalence of suicide among male in the country could be linked to their attitude of not speaking up on their challenges to maintain their supposed 'macho status' conferred on them by the patrilineal cultural set-up. As a fallout of the above, Nigerian men were equally reluctant to seek help when facing depression or having mental issues.

Conclusion

This study examined Nigerian newspapers' online coverage of suicide, focusing on the dominant suicide methods reported and their association with selected variables like age, gender, marital status and economic status of victims, as well as the location of suicide incident and period of the year when the incident occurred. Using the 205 suicide-related news stories published by the ten selected newspapers from January 1st to December 31st, 2021, the study provided empirical evidence on patterns of suicide methods portrayal in a country like Nigeria with a weak suicide surveillance system and

heavy reliance on media accounts for public information.

Findings revealed that the use of chemicals (poisoning) and hanging were the most dominant suicide methods reported among the suicide victims in Nigeria within the period under investigation. These methods consistently appeared among most demographic categories like age group, gender, marital and economic status, and location of the suicide incident, thereby suggesting a strong pattern of method convergence. The dominance of these methods, especially among completed suicides may be due to their perceived accessibility, lethality, and cultural familiarity within the Nigerian societies.

The paper further established statistically significant associations between reported suicide methods and period of suicide incident, type of suicide story, and gender of suicide victims. Specifically, the distribution of suicide methods varied across quarters of the year, between completed and attempted suicide stories, and between male and female victims. Conversely, no significant associations were found between suicide methods and other variables like location, age, marital status, and economic status; suggesting that these factors did not meaningfully influence the methods reported in newspaper stories during the period.

The study therefore concludes that Nigerian newspapers' online coverage of suicide in 2021 was characterized by the recurrent reporting of specific suicide methods, with variations linked primarily to time of the incident, type of the suicide story (whether completed suicide, attempted suicide or suicidal thought/idea), and gender of the suicide victims. This study therefore provides empirical insight into suicide method reportage patterns in Nigeria and establishes

an evidence base for further research on media portrayals of suicide in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The study recommends that Nigerian governments at all levels should tighten regulations and control of the sale and use of chemicals (especially pesticides like Sniper) that have been popular among suicide victims. Special suicide prevention campaign messages and efforts should be designed to dissuade vulnerable youths, men, and

urban/semi-urban dwellers from hanging themselves, or using chemicals, firearms or other methods to take their lives. However, similar messages and efforts targeted at female population should focus more on chemicals.

Suicide prevention campaign messages and efforts targeted at vulnerable populations in rural areas should focus more on discouraging hanging and the use of other suicide methods such as setting oneself ablaze and slitting one's throat.

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