

Preventing Suicide among Students and Lecturers in the Event of Sexual Scandals and Blackmail in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

The study focused on preventing suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities. Survey design was adopted for this study. The sample for the study comprised 500 students and 366 lecturers were selected using stratified sampling technique. This was done by dividing the total population into smaller groups known as strata and taking random samples from each group. The Taro-Yemane formula was used to determine the adequacy of the sample size. A self-structured questionnaire titled "Preventing Suicide among Students and Lecturers Questionnaire - PSSQL" was used to collect data for the study. Four-point Likert scale was used. The options are Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The researcher administered a total of 866 questionnaire to randomly selected respondents in the study area. Simple percentage, mean scores and standard deviation provide answers to the research questions while Pearson Product Moment Statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed knowledge of the causes of suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities and the strategies to curb suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities. The study concluded that by equipping students and lecturers with the knowledge, skills, and resources to address harassment, blackmail, and mental health crises, universities can foster safer and more supportive environments. This requires a multi-faceted approach involving education, policy enforcement, and mental health support, backed by collaboration between universities, government, and advocacy groups. Addressing this issue is not only a matter of protecting individual well-being but also of restoring trust in Nigeria's higher education system.

Keywords:

Suicide Prevention, Sexual Scandals, Blackmail, Students, Lecturers, Nigeria.



Introduction

Suicide constitutes a serious public-health challenge both in Nigeria and across the globe. Turecki and Brent (2016) characterise it as a fatal, self-directed act performed with the clear intention of ending one's life. The phenomenon has generated substantial scholarly discussion in the fields of education, psychology and mental health, particularly because it disproportionately affects adolescents and young adults (Robinson, Caeleir & Bailey, 2018). In essence, suicide is deliberate self-harm that results in death. The World Health Organization (2012) classifies it as a major global health priority. Recognised contributing factors include mental disorders, social isolation, physical illness, substance misuse, domestic violence and intense societal pressure. De Leo and colleagues (2016) likewise define suicide as an intentional fatal act aimed at achieving a desired outcome.

As a social occurrence, suicide is embedded within the socio-economic conditions of its time and can produce damaging consequences for community life (White & Morris, 2019). Empirical evidence indicates that developing nations, especially those in Africa, account for the largest share of unreported suicides (Adewuya et al., 2016). Consequently, countries such as Nigeria contend with incomplete suicide statistics and frequently depend on broader socio-economic indicators to detect suicidal events, ideation and risk (Okafor, 2020). Nigeria's recorded rate of 3.2 percent is regarded as alarming within African and developing-country contexts (Adewuya et al., 2016).

Suicidal behaviour ordinarily begins with ideation—thoughts or plans about ending one's life. Individuals who feel overwhelmed by circumstances such as financial hardship, the death of a loved one, relationship breakdown or serious illness may experience these thoughts (Eric et al., 2020). Millions of people worldwide are affected each year; under-reporting is common because of stigma, legal barriers and inadequate surveillance systems (Pitman et al., 2014; Cerel et al., 2019). Suicide arises from a complex interaction of social, psychological, cultural and other influences, yet the accompanying stigma often discourages those in need from seeking assistance. High-risk groups include persons with previous attempts, mental-health difficulties, substance problems, relationship strain, trauma, abuse, violence or chronic illness (WHO, 2014).

Scholars in psychology, social work and mental health regard suicide in Nigeria as a matter of pressing concern. Among young people, suicidal thoughts are interwoven with their social networks and can be reduced when supportive systems respond promptly and appropriately. Simultaneously, sexual harassment, campus scandals and blackmail involving students and lecturers have become more conspicuous in recent years. Some female students have contemplated or completed suicide after intimate images were circulated on social media and they were subsequently blackmailed. Documented cases include a 19-year-old student in Ogun State who died by suicide in 2018 following harassment by a lecturer (Ajibola & Agunbiade, 2021), a 17-year-old Lagos secondary-school student who attempted suicide in 2019 after similar treatment (Adewuya et al., 2016), and a student at an Abuja institution who attempted suicide in 2020 after sexual assault by an instructor (Vanguard, 2020).

Available evidence suggests that educational institutions are increasingly failing to guarantee secure and inclusive environments and are instead becoming sites of hostility and harassment. Many countries now recognise sexual harassment as a widespread form of gender-based discrimination that students, particularly women, encounter on campus. A large-scale British survey, for example, found that one-quarter of female students had experienced unwanted sexual behaviour (Biden, 2010).

The true extent of campus-based sexual scandals and blackmail remains uncertain because of substantial under-reporting. Rather than disclose incidents, many victims remain silent or avoid the issue out of fear or embarrassment (Cortina & Wasti, 2015). Earlier work by Dziech and Weiner (cited in Smit & Plessis, 2011) showed that sexual harassment by academic staff is a longstanding problem whose concealment has been aided by victims' silence and feelings of self-blame. In response, institutions have introduced policies and, in some jurisdictions, criminal sanctions in order to protect the educational environment.

Nigeria has confronted sexual harassment for many years, yet the issue has received insufficient sustained attention. Heightened awareness emerged in the higher-education sector during the early 2000s amid reports of moral decline. Nationwide studies documented high rates of sexual misconduct (Okafor, 2020). Unfortunately, few institutions translated these findings into robust policies and enforceable sanctions. As a result, sexual harassment continues as a serious but inadequately addressed problem. Beyond its inherently offensive character, it produces profound social and psychological consequences for victims, restricts equal access to education and impedes academic and personal development, especially among female students.

The phenomenon constitutes a severe mental, social, emotional and psychological burden that has ruined many lives within school communities. Despite the existence of sexual-harassment statutes, regulations and institutional rules, the problem remains widespread on university campuses. Educational stakeholders therefore need to mount sustained awareness campaigns and prevention training aimed at reducing suicide among both students and staff. Coordinated action can prevent suicide and foster resilience among individuals, families, communities and students inside and outside educational settings (Menon et al., 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Sexual scandals and blackmail on Nigerian university campuses have become critical issues that generate severe psychological and social harm, including elevated suicide risk among affected students and, in some instances, lecturers. One common pattern involves lecturers using their positional power to solicit sexual favours from students in return for grades or other academic advantages. Such encounters frequently escalate into blackmail, with victims threatened by public exposure, academic failure or social stigma. The resulting psychological burden, intensified by societal stigma, weak institutional support and victim-blaming attitudes, has been associated with serious mental-health crises, including suicidal ideation and attempts.

Victims of sexual scandals, particularly women, often encounter harsh social judgement that can produce feelings of worthlessness and suicidal thinking. Lecturers implicated in such scandals may themselves experience public humiliation, reputational damage and career destruction, which in turn contribute to their own mental-health difficulties. The widespread occurrence of sexual harassment therefore underscores the urgent need for focused suicide-prevention strategies that address the emotional and psychological aftermath of these events. The present study seeks to identify vulnerable individuals, groups and situations so that interventions can be appropriately targeted. It also aims to inform the design of effective prevention programmes. In doing so, the research contributes useful insights that can help reduce suicidal behaviour among students and lecturers in Nigerian universities.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised in the study

1. What are the causes of suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities
2. What are the strategies to curb suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated in the study:

1. There is no significant relationship on the causes of suicide in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail among university students and lecturers
2. There is no significant relationship on the strategies to curb suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities

Literature Review

The theoretical foundation of the study rests on Durkheim's (1897) Sociological Theory of Suicide and Shneidman's (1993) Psychache Theory. Durkheim maintained that anomie (the absence of clear social norms) and the degree of social integration are decisive influences on suicide rates. He argued that suicide is shaped primarily by social rather than individual psychological or biological factors, and that excessive individualism combined with weak social bonds elevates risk. Shneidman's Psychache Theory posits that intense psychological pain—overwhelming sadness, anger, shame or guilt—is the principal driver of suicidal behaviour. Unbearable emotional suffering, often stemming from unmet psychological needs, propels individuals toward suicide.

Baechler (2021) identified several specific precipitants linked to sexual scandals and blackmail in university settings, including coerced or manipulated sexual encounters, emotional manipulation, and threats of exposure or retaliation. Ajibola and Agunbiade (2021) categorised the principal causes of suicide among students and lecturers in such circumstances as emotional distress and shame (feelings of guilt, embarrassment and self-blame), fear of social ostracism and stigma, loss of reputation and future

opportunities, a sense of powerlessness, and verbal, physical or online bullying and harassment.

Additional factors associated with suicidal and self-destructive behaviour among students include frustration, anger, bullying, aggression, alcohol misuse, hopelessness, substance abuse, access to lethal means, terminal illness, bereavement, family psychiatric history, poor academic performance, betrayal, guilt, business failure and depression. Depression itself produces persistent sadness and loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities. Ciesielski (2013) further lists acute anxiety, insufficient social support, mental disorders (mood, anxiety or substance-related) and a history of suicidal planning, ideation or attempts. For lecturers, professional reputational damage, fear of job loss and financial insecurity, public humiliation, erosion of trust and resulting anxiety or depression are salient concerns. Despite these insights, relatively few studies have specifically examined suicide among university students and lecturers in the context of sexual scandal and blackmail in Nigeria.

Preventing suicide in the aftermath of sexual scandals and blackmail requires a multi-layered approach that integrates education, early intervention and strong support systems. Taylor and Tiller (2022) emphasised the importance of recognising early warning signs of suicidal behaviour, acknowledging the impact of scandals and blackmail, developing coping resources, and cultivating a campus culture of respect, inclusivity and empathy. Hamilton and Sampasa-Kanyinga (2016) outlined several prevention-training components suitable for university settings: Gatekeeper Training Programmes. These programmes equip academic staff, faculty and peer counsellors with the ability to recognise individuals at elevated suicide risk and to refer them to appropriate services. Training can be adapted to the particular risks associated with sexual scandals and blackmail. Participants learn to detect signs of distress such as withdrawal, anxiety or abrupt behavioural change, to reduce stigma surrounding mental health and victimisation, to engage at-risk persons effectively, and to follow clear referral pathways to campus counselling or external mental-health providers (Taylor & Tiller, 2022).

Psychoeducation Programmes. Psychoeducation incorporates mental-health awareness and suicide-prevention content into the curriculum, enabling students and lecturers to understand risks and seek help without shame. Content addresses coping skills, the psychological impact of blackmail or public shaming, and an “amnesty” approach that allows individuals to request assistance without fear of punishment. Instruction also covers the dangers of sharing intimate images online, recognition of sextortion tactics, and practical steps such as preserving evidence and reporting to authorities (Baechler, 2021).

Policy and Environmental Changes. Institutions must establish a supportive climate that both prevents suicide and responds effectively to sexual misconduct and blackmail. Confidential reporting channels, rigorous enforcement of anti-exploitation policies with clear sanctions, and rapid-response procedures for individuals identified as at risk are essential components (Ajibola & Agunbiade, 2021). Awareness of Sexual Scandals and Blackmail. Because sextortion and related scandals intensify suicide risk through shame and fear of exposure, education should cover common tactics (including

the use of false identities), appropriate responses (avoid panic, refuse payment, preserve evidence), recognition of grooming behaviours, and the role of social media. Immediate counselling, peer-support groups, legal and technical assistance for image removal, strengthened campus cybersecurity, and collaboration with law-enforcement agencies are recommended (Okafor, 2020).

Tailoring for Students and Lecturers. Student-focused interventions should address developmental vulnerability to peer pressure and online manipulation, integrate prevention messages into orientation and wellness programmes, and target high-risk subgroups. Lecturer-focused efforts should train academic staff as gatekeepers, address the distinctive stressors of reputational harm, provide confidential mental-health support, and reinforce ethical boundaries that discourage misconduct (Ajibola & Agunbiade, 2021).

Methodology

Survey design was adopted for this study. The population of the study comprised 15000 participants from five universities namely Niger-Delta University, Wilberforce Island; Federal University of Petroleum, Effurun; Marine-Time University, Okorinkoko; Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye and University of Benin, Benin-City. The sample for the study comprised 500 students and 366 lecturers were selected using stratified sampling technique. This was done by dividing the total population into smaller groups known as strata and taking random samples from each group. The Taro-Yemane formula was used to determine the adequacy of the sample size. A self-structured questionnaire titled “Preventing Suicide among Students and Lecturers Questionnaire - PSSLQ” was used to collect data for the study. Four-point Likert scale was used. The options are Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The reliability coefficients were determined via a pilot study using test re-test reliability technique with a coefficient index of 0.86 was used. The researcher administered a total of 866 questionnaire to randomly selected respondents in the study area. Simple percentage, mean scores and standard deviation provide answers to the research questions while Pearson Product Moment Statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1: Response to causes of suicide in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail among university students and lecturers

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	STD	Remark
1	Feelings of guilt, embarrassment, and self-blame	230 (26.56%)	251 (28.98%)	139 (16.05%)	246 (28.41%)	2.84	.81	Agreed
2	Fear of social ostracism and stigma	310 (35.80%)	215 (24.83%)	222 (25.64%)	119 (13.74%)	3.76	.77	Agreed
3	Bullying and harassment	250 (28.87%)	250 (28.87%)	135 (15.59%)	231 (26.67%)	3.71	.79	Agreed
4	Professional reputation damage	222 (25.64%)	260 (30.02%)	200 (23.09%)	184 (21.25%)	3.88	.74	Agreed

5	Social humiliation and embarrassment	330 (38.11%)	157 (18.13%)	190 (21.98%)	189 (21.82%)	3.67	.78	Agreed
Grand Mean Score and Standard Deviation						3.03	.79	Agreed

From table 1, out of 866 respondents, 230 (26.56%) and 251 (28.98%) respondents agreed that feelings of guilt, embarrassment, and self-blame are some of the causes of suicide while 139 (16.05%) and 246 (28.41%) respondents disagreed. Also, 310 (35.80%) and 215 (24.83%) respondents agreed that fear of social ostracism and stigma are some of the causes of suicide while 222 (25.64%) and 119 (13.74%) respondents think otherwise. More so, 250 (28.87%) and 250 (28.87%) respondents agreed that bullying and harassment are some of the causes of suicide while 135 (15.59%) and 231 (26.67%) respondents disregard the statement. In the same vein, 222 (25.64%) and 260 (30.02%) respondents agreed that professional reputation damage causes of suicide while 200 (23.09%) and 184 (21.25%) respondents disagreed. Finally, 330 (38.11%) and 157(18.13%) respondents agreed that social humiliation and embarrassment stigma are some of the causes of suicide while 190 (21.98%) and 189 (21.82%) respondents opposed.

Table 2: Response to suicide prevention strategies to curb sexual scandals and blackmail among university students and lecturers.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	STD	Remark
1	Gatekeeper training programs: Gatekeeper training equips school staff, faculty, and peer counselors with skills to identify individuals at risk of suicide and refer them to appropriate services	325 (37.53%)	250 (28.87%)	29 (3.35%)	262 (30.25%)	2.76	.79	Agreed
2	Psychoeducation Programs: Psychoeducation: integrates mental health awareness and suicide prevention into curricula.	140 (16.17%)	308 (35.57%)	219 (22.98%)	199 (22.98%)	3.76	.79	Agreed
3	Policy and Environmental Changes: Institutions must create a supportive environment to prevent suicide and address sexual scandals or blackmail effectively.	286 (30.03%)	301 (34.76%)	199 (22.98%)	80 (9.24%)	2.84	.84	agreed
4	Awareness on Sexual Scandals and Blackmail	50 (5.77%)	430 (49.65%)	213 (24.60%)	173 (19.98%)	3.05	.76	Agreed
5	Integrate prevention into student orientation and wellness programs.	170 (19.63%)	300 (34.64%)	150 (17.32%)	246 (28.41%)	2.90	.82	Agreed
Grand Mean Score and Standard Deviation						3.96	.80	Agreed

From table 2, out of 866 respondents, 325 (37.53%) and 250 (28.87%) respondents agreed that gatekeeper training equips school staff, faculty, and peer counselors with skills to identify individuals at risk of suicide and refer them to appropriate services while 29 (3.35%) and 262 (30.25%) respondents opposed the statement. Also, 140

(16.17%) and 308 (35.57%) respondents agreed that integrates mental health awareness and suicide prevention into curricula while 219 (22.98%) and 199 (22.98%) respondents disagreed. More so, 286 (30.03%) and 301 (34.76%) respondents agreed that institutions must create a supportive environment to prevent suicide and address sexual scandals or blackmail effectively. while 199 (22.98%) and 80 (9.24%) respondents declined. In the same vein, 50 (5.77%) and 430 (49.65%) respondents agreed that there should be awareness on sexual scandals and blackmail while 213 (24.60%) and 173 (19.98%) respondents disregard the statement. In another development, 170 (19.63%) and 300 (34.64%) respondents agreed that integrate prevention into student orientation and wellness programs while 150 (17.32%) and 246 (28.41%) opposed the statement.

Table 3: Pearson “r” on the causes of suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities.

Variables	N	X	r-Cal.	r-Crit.	Level of Sign	Decision
Causes of suicide	866	2.78	2.92	2.93	0.05	Not Significant
Students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail		2.80				

Data in table 3 revealed Pearson product moment correlation coefficient analysis on causes of suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities. The mean was 2.78 and 2.80. The calculated r - value was 2.92 while the critical r-table value was 2.93 at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated r - value was lesser than the critical r-table value, the null hypothesis is retained. Thus, there is no significant relationship on the causes of suicide in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail among university students and lecturers.

Table 4: Pearson “r” the strategies to curb suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities

Variables	N	X	r-Cal.	r-Crit.	Level of Sign	Decision
Strategies to curb suicide	866	2.88	2.92	3.20	0.05	Not Significant
Students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail		2.90				

Data in table 4 revealed Pearson product moment correlation coefficient analysis on the strategies to curb suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual

scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities. The mean was 2.88 and 2.90. The calculated r - value was 2.92 while the critical r -table value was 3.20 at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated r - value was lesser than the critical r -table value, the null hypothesis is retained. Thus, there is no significant relationship on the strategies to curb suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities.

Discussion of Findings

Findings revealed the causes of suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities. It showed that every case of sexual harassment and blackmail creates social and psychological effects on the victim such as feelings of guilt, embarrassment and self-blame. Fear of social ostracism and stigma. Professional reputation damage, etc. This is in line with Ajibola and Agunbiade (2021); Baechler (2021) who classified the causes of suicide among students and lecturers such as emotional distress and shame, fear of social ostracism and stigma, loss of reputation and future opportunities, feeling trapped or helpless, bullying and harassment, professional reputation damage, fear of job loss and financial instability, social humiliation and embarrassment, loss of credibility and trust, anxiety and depression. Thus, there is no significant relationship between the causes of suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities. Other causes related to sexual scandals and blackmail among students and lecturers in the university such as forced or manipulated sexual interactions, emotional manipulation, threats of exposure or retaliation (blackmail, extortion).

The findings also showed prevention strategies to curb suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities. It showed approaches that combine education, early intervention, and robust support systems as strategies to curb sexual scandals and blackmail among university students and lecturers. This is in line with Taylor and Tiller (2022) who pointed out prevention strategies to curb suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in the university environment. They noted that stakeholders should identify early warning signs of suicidal behavior among students and lecturers, recognize the impact of sexual scandals and blackmail, develop coping mechanisms and support strategies, foster a culture of respect, inclusivity and empathy. In the same vein, Hamilton & Sampasa-Kanyinga (2016) classified prevention training to reduce suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in the university setting. The study preventing suicide among students and lecturers in the event of sexual scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities has several aspects that can contribute to improving the current situation of suicide. It examines sexual scandals and blackmail which are significant stressors potentially leading to suicide ideation among students and lecturers.

Conclusion

Sexual scandals and blackmail in Nigerian universities have created a toxic climate of fear, shame, and despair that elevates suicide risk among both students and lecturers. Silence, weak institutional response, and the weaponisation of power deepen isolation and make victims feel trapped. Preventing these tragedies requires decisive action: strict enforcement of anti-harassment policies, confidential reporting channels, independent investigations, accessible mental-health support, and public accountability for perpetrators. Universities, regulators, and society must replace a culture of cover-up with one of protection and justice. Only sustained, transparent efforts can restore safety, dignity, and hope on campus.

Recommendations

The study recommended that educational stakeholders should adopt and strictly implement clear anti-sexual-harassment codes with independent investigation units, mandatory timelines, and public reporting of outcomes. Create anonymous digital platforms, dedicated hotlines, and trained gender-desk officers so students and lecturers can report scandals or blackmail without fear of retaliation. Provide free, on-campus counselling, 24/7 crisis hotlines, and partnerships with professional mental-health organisations specifically for victims of sexual coercion and blackmail. Conduct regular orientation, workshops, and peer-education campaigns that teach consent, power dynamics, digital safety, and how to recognise and resist blackmail. Apply transparent disciplinary measures including suspension, dismissal, and referral for criminal prosecution—against any staff or student found guilty of sexual exploitation or blackmail.

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