

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A PREDICTOR OF SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG UNDERGRADUATES PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN ANAMBRA STATE.

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Abstract

This study investigated emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state. The aim of the study was to examine the predictive value of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation of university students in Anambra state. The study was guided by two research questions and two null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study comprised 54,998 undergraduates from public universities in Anambra state. The sample consisted of 397 (167 males and 230 females) respondents. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample. Two instruments used for data collection were Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) developed by Shutte et al (1993) and Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (SIQ) by Joiner et al (1997). The instruments were validated and the reliability established using Cronbach Alpha. The computation yielded coefficient values of 0.86 for EIS and 0.79 for SIQ. The instruments were validated and the reliability established using Cronbach Alpha. The computation yielded coefficient values of 0.86 for EIS and 0.79 for SIQ. Simple Linear regression was used for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed that emotional intelligence had a moderate negative predictive value for suicidal ideation of university students. In addition, the results showed that emotional intelligence had a negative predictive value for suicidal ideation of male and female undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state. Based on the findings, it was recommended that university management should organize workshops or seminars that teach emotional intelligence skills such as emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy and interpersonal communication.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Predictor, Suicidal Ideation, Undergraduates, Public Universities.

Introduction

The university environment, while full of opportunities for growth and development, can also be a source of significant emotional and psychological stress for students. University students are often confronted with multiple pressures, academic pressures such as academic workload, financial challenges, family expectations, relationship issues, and the demands of adapting to a new and more independent lifestyle. These stressors, if not properly managed, can lead to suicidal ideation.

Suicidal ideation refers to thoughts, considerations, or plans about taking one's own life. Harmer et al, (2023) defined suicidal ideation as thoughts or ideas that encompass a variety of contemplations, aspirations, and obsessions with suicide and death. Similarly, Mohamed and Ahmed (2021) viewed suicidal ideation as thinking of engaging in behaviour planned to end one's own life. The researchers conceptualized suicidal ideation as the thoughts, ideas or preoccupations about ending one's own life. It encompasses a wide spectrum of thoughts related to suicide, ranging from vague notions of wishing to be dead to detailed plans for ending one's life. These thoughts can be transient or persistent and may fluctuate on intensity overtime.

Studies suggested that university students are more susceptible to suicidal ideation, (Arria et al 2019). Higher risk of suicidal ideation among undergraduates may be due to academic stress, financial constraint, non-parental or family support, academic failure, and substance abuse (Okechukwu et al, (2022). Similarly, Alabi et al (2016) identified risk factors for suicidal ideation as financial crises, the end of romantic or emotional relationships, easy access to poisonous chemicals, substance abuse, hopelessness, isolation, burdensomeness and depression. Suicidal ideation among university students can have profound and far-reaching effects, impacting on their mental health, academic performance and overall well-being. It can lead to increased stress, anxiety, sadness, school dropout, depressing and feeling of hopelessness, (Mortier et al 2019). Additionally, it may interfere with concentration leading to poor academic performance, motivation, social interaction, thereby making it difficult for students to function optimally in school.

In recent years, researchers have sought to identify both risk and protective factors that influence suicidal ideation, particularly among university students. One psychological construct gaining increasing attention is emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence involves the ability to recognize, understand and manage one's own emotions, as well as perceive and influence the emotions of others. Okello and Aomo (2018) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to assess one's emotion and the emotions of others in the environment and apply it appropriately. Similarly, Mayer et al (2024) viewed emotional intelligence as individuals' ability to perceive, understand, use and regulate emotions effectively in themselves and others. Obi, et al (2025) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize, understand, manage and effectively use one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others,. It involves being aware and responsive to emotional cues, both in oneself and in others, using this awareness to navigate social situations, manage stress and build relationships. Ohamobi, et al (2025) sees emotional intelligence as the ability to identify, comprehend and control one's emotions as well as being sensitive to those of others. An individual is considered emotional intelligent if he is able to decipher and understand not

only his own feelings but that of others as well, and capable of reconciling the two and applying the outcome in his operation in order to make positive impact and have success in whatever is involved.

Individuals with high emotional intelligence are generally better equipped to manage life's challenges and maintain mental health. Students' mental health and general well-being increases as a result of reduced stress anxiety and behavioral problems.(Onyekazi et al 2024, Lameraz, 2021). Conversely, individuals with low emotional intelligence may struggle to manage emotional distress, become overwhelmed by negative feelings, and find it more difficult to seek help-factors that can increase the risk of suicidal ideation (Ciarrochi et al, 2002). They are more likely to employ adaptive coping strategies, communicate effectively, and maintain supportive social networks-all of which can buffer against the risk of developing suicidal ideation, (Schutte et al, 2007).

Among the numerous factors influencing suicidal ideation, gender has been identified as a potential predictor. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions, and identities that a society considers appropriate for individuals based on their assigned sex (Owusu-Ansa et al, 2020). It encompasses a wide range of characteristics, including but not limited to masculinity, femininity, and non-binary identities. Gender is distinct from biological sex, which refers to the physical and physiological characteristics that define male, female and intersex bodies (Oguejiofor & Obigwe, 2025). Research on gender differences in predicting suicidal ideation has been inconsistent. The study of Park and Kim (2018) found that female students reported higher levels of suicidal ideation while male students are more likely to die by suicide. In the same vein, Okoro (2019) found that female students are higher in the manifestation of suicidal ideation than male students. On the other hand, Zhu et al (2024) noted that male students reported higher levels of suicidal ideation than female students. However, Lin et al (as cited in Farag 2023) showed no significant difference between male and female students in the manifestation of suicidal ideation. Due to inconsistency in the results, there remains a need for more context-specific research to understand how gender predict suicidal ideation among undergraduates.

Suicidal ideation among university students is a serious issue that can affect their academic performance. Despite numerous efforts made by previous researchers to find a lasting solution to the problem of suicidal ideation among university students, the problem no doubt still persists and something needs to be done to curtail the problem before it gets out of hand. Although, a good number of researchers like Okafor et al (2023) examined emotional intelligence as a predictor of suicidal ideation among Nigerian youths in federal universities, the problem still persists and remains a source of worry and concern to many researchers. This necessitate this study which sought to examine emotional intelligence as a predictor of suicidal ideation among undergraduates in federal universities in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

Suicidal ideation among undergraduates is a growing concern in Nigeria with alarming rates of suicide attempts and mental health struggles in academic institutions. Higher rate of suicidal ideation among undergraduates may be due to academic pressures, financial constraints, non parental or family support, academic failure, substance abuse, end of romantic or emotional relationship, depression and isolation. Suicidal ideation among

students can have profound and far-reaching effects, impacting on their mental health, academic performance and overall well-being. It can lead to anxiety, mental health issues, feelings of hopelessness, school drop out, depression and poor academic performance. It is essential for universities and support services to recognize the impact of suicide ideation and provide timely intervention and support to help students cope with these challenges effectively. This has necessitated this study which sought to investigate emotional intelligence as a predictor of suicidal ideation among undergraduates in federal universities in Anambra State.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the predictive value of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation of undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State.
2. Determine the predictive value of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation of male and female undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What is the predictive value of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation of undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State?
2. What is the predictive value of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation of male and female undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. Emotional intelligence will not significantly predict suicidal ideation of undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State.
2. Emotional intelligence will not significantly predict suicidal ideation of male and female undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State.

Method

The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study was 54,998 undergraduates; 39,999 (18,143 males and 21,856 females) from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and 14,999 (5,597 males and 9,402 females) from Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. The sample of the study consisted of 397 undergraduates. This comprised 216 (92 males and 124 females) from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and 181 (75 males and 106 females) from Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. The sample size was drawn using Taro Yamane. Proportionate Stratified Sampling Technique to select the sample. Two instruments used for data collection were Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Shutte et al (1998) and Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire developed by Joiner et al (1997). The instruments were validated by experts in Guidance and Counselling. The reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha. The computation yielded co-efficient values of 0.86 for Emotional Intelligence Scale and 0.79 for Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire. The researchers administered the instruments to the respondents with the help of two research assistants who were briefed on how to administer and retrieved copies of the questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed using Simple Linear regression analysis.

Results

Research Question One: What is the predictive value of emotional intelligence on suicidal ideation among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State?

Table 1: Simple Regression Analysis with Emotional Intelligence Scores as Predictor of Suicidal Ideation Scores among undergraduate in public universities in Anambra State.

Predictor	B	SE	β	Remark
Constant	37.78	1.88		
Emotional Intelligence	-0.42	0.05	-0.38	Moderate negative predictive value
R = 0.38				
R ² =0.15				
Adj.=0.14				

Table 1 presents the summary of simple regression result using emotional intelligence scores of undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State as a predictor of their suicidal ideation. The beta weighting (β) = -0.38 shows that emotional intelligence had a moderate negative predictive value for suicidal ideation. This implies that a change unit change in emotional intelligence leads to 0.38 unit decrease in suicidal ideation among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State.

Research Question Two What is the predictive value of emotional intelligence for suicidal ideation among male and female undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State?

Table 2: Simple Regression Analysis with Emotional Intelligence Scores as Predictor of Suicidal Ideation Scores among Male and Female Undergraduates in Public Universities in Anambra State

Predictor	B	SE	β	Remark
Male				
Constant	31.67	3.11		
Emotional Intelligence scores	-0.26	0.08	-0.24	Modest negative predictive value
R = 0.24				
R ² = 0.06				
Adj.= 0.05				
Female				
Constant	42.99	2.26		
Emotional Intelligence scores	-0.56	0.06	-0.51	Strong negative predictive value
R = 0.51				
R ² = 0.26				
Adj.= 0.26				

Table 2 presents the summary of simple regression using emotional intelligence scores of undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State as predictor of their suicidal ideation based on gender of the students. The beta weighting (β) for the male students was = -0.24 while that of female students was -0.51. These values show that emotional intelligence had a modest negative predictive value for suicidal ideation among the male students, but a strong negative predictive value for suicidal ideation among female students. This implies that emotional intelligence's capacity to predict suicidal ideation was stronger among female undergraduates students than the male students.

Hypothesis One: Emotional intelligence will not significantly predict suicidal ideation of undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State.

Table 3: Test of Significance of Simple Regression with Emotional Intelligence Scores as Predictor of Suicidal Ideation among Undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State.

Predictor	B	SE	B	t	p-value	Remark
Constant	37.78	1.88		20.09	0.00	
Emotional Intelligence	-0.42	0.05	-0.38	-8.20	0.00	Significant

Table 3 shows emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of suicidal ideation among undergraduates of public universities in Anambra State, $\beta = -0.38$, $t = -8.20$, $p < 0.05$. Since the p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis Two: Emotional intelligence will not significantly predict suicidal ideation of male and female undergraduate in public universities in Anambra State.

Table 4: Test of Significance of Simple Regression Analysis with Emotional Intelligence as Predictor of Suicidal Ideation among Male and Female Undergraduates in Public Universities in Anambra State

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p-value	Remark
Male						
Constant	31.67	3.11		10.18	0.00	
Emotional Intelligence scores	-0.26	0.08	-0.24	-3.15	0.00	Significant
Female						
Constant	42.99	2.26		18.98	0.00	
Emotional Intelligence scores	-0.56	0.06	-0.51	-8.96	0.00	Significant

Results displayed in Table 4 show that emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of suicidal ideation among male undergraduates of public universities in Anambra state, $\beta = -0.24$, $t = -3.15$, $p < 0.05$. Emotional intelligence was also shown to be a significant predictor of suicidal ideation among female undergraduate, $\beta = -0.51$, $t = -8.96$, $p < 0.05$. Since the p-values were less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study as shown in Table 1 revealed that emotional intelligence had a moderate negative predictive value for suicidal ideation. This implies that a unit change in emotional intelligence leads to 0.38 unit decrease in suicidal ideation among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. The results of the corresponding null hypothesis in Table 3 revealed that emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of suicidal ideation among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. The findings of this study is in consistent with the results of Odedokun (2022) who found a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation among undergraduates. The finding is also in agreement with the results of Mohamed and Ahmad (2021), Ageeb et al (2022) and Okello and Aomo (2018) which revealed a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation. However, the results contradict with the findings of Mohammed et al (2017) who found a non significant correlation between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation. The possible explanation for this findings may be that undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State have high emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is often linked to better problem-solving abilities, especially in emotionally charged situations. Students with higher emotional intelligence can navigate academic, social and personal challenges more effectively, thereby reducing feelings of hopelessness or despair that can lead to suicidal ideation.

The findings of the study as revealed in Table 2 showed that emotional intelligence had a negative predictive value for suicidal ideation of male and female undergraduates. This implies that students with higher emotional intelligence are less likely to have suicidal ideation. The findings of the corresponding hypothesis in Table 4 indicated that emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of suicidal ideation among male and female undergraduates in public universities in Anambra state. The results is in agreement with the findings of Agebe et al (2023) who found negative correlation between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation of male and female patients. This is also in consistent with the findings of Ciarrochi et al (2002) which showed that there was a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and suicidal ideation of male and female. However, the protective effect of emotional intelligence was stronger in female. Furthermore the findings is in line with the findings of Tolejzo and Mathew (2020), Richards and Sarah (2018) who found that emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of suicidal ideation among male and female students.

The possible reasons for this finding could be that male and female undergraduates have higher levels of emotional intelligence and are better able to recognize and understand their own emotions, which can help them identify and manage any underlying emotional distress that may be contributing to suicidal ideation. In addition, higher levels of emotional intelligence help male and female undergraduates develop healthier interpersonal relationships and seek support from others when needed, which can help them cope with stress and other risk factors for suicidal ideation.

Conclusion

The study investigated emotional intelligence as a predictor of suicidal ideation of undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State. The findings revealed that emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of suicidal ideation among undergraduates. The study

also showed that emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of suicidal ideation of male and female undergraduates. Based on the findings, the study concluded that emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of suicidal ideation among undergraduates in public universities in Anambra State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Policy makers should incorporate emotional intelligence skills, such as emotional regulation, self-awareness, empathy and relationship management into educational curricula. Teaching students how to manage their emotions and interact with others effectively can build a protective layer against suicidal ideation.
2. University management should organize workshops or seminars that teach emotional intelligence skills such as emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy and interpersonal communication. These should be designed to be applicable to both male and female students, taking into account any gender-specific emotional expression patterns.
3. Guidance counsellors should help students build strong and meaningful connections by fostering supportive counselling environment, promoting peer and family support, offering social skill training, and advocating for systematic changes. These efforts can create a well-rounded approach to mitigating suicidal ideation in undergraduates.

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