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Relationship between Hopelessness, Materialism and Suicidal Ideation among University Undergraduates

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Abstract

This study investigated relationship between hopelessness, materialism and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates. 201 undergraduate of Caritas University, Enugu were used as the sample. The participants who comprise of 97 males and 104 females were within the age barge of 17-25 years with a mean of 21 years and a standard deviation of 2 years. Three instruments were used for data collection namely: Beck hopelessness Scale, Material Value Scale and Beck scale for suicidal ideation. Two hypotheses were stated and tested: there will be no significant positive relationship between hopelessness and suicidal ideation and there will be no significant positive relationship between materialism and suicidal ideation. A survey research design was adopted while Regression statistics was used for data analysis, findings revealed a positive significant relationship between hopelessness and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates ($\beta = .297, P < .001$). The results of this study support other empirical works that have shown that hopelessness is a significant predictor of suicidal ideation. Therefore, the signs of hopelessness should be closely watched and noticed among individuals in other to avoid suicidal behaviours. Also materialism was found not to be a significant predictor of suicidal ideation, however, materialism measured in its dimensions suggested that individual drive to seek happiness, success and materialism in its centrality will hinder suicidal ideation.

Keywords: *materialism, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation*

Introduction

The psychological consequences of the socio-economic state of Nigeria are of great theoretical and social importance as these have in turn increased the recorded number of suicide cases. It is estimated that about 804 000 people die by suicide every year (World Health Organization,2013), representing an annual age-standardized suicide rate of 11.4 per 10 000 populations globally and 6.11 per 100 000 populations in Nigeria specifically. Suicide is one of the three leading causes of death among those in the most economically productive age group (15–44 years). It is a public health issue that is estimated to contribute more than 2% to the global burden of disease by the year 2020, especially in the sub-Saharan African countries where services are scarce (WHO,2013). Suicide was recently identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a priority condition in the Mental Health Gap Action Programme (MHGAP), yet our knowledge of the specific markers of risk is limited (Franklin et al., 2017). There is a general recognition that we need to move beyond mental disorders and embrace more sophisticated explanatory models of suicide that highlight the complex interplay of risk

and protective factors of particular interest, from a psychosocial perspective is how people interact with their social environment and how this may lead to harmful psychological consequences (e.g., Lynch, Smith, Kaplan, & House, 2000). Most people with suicidal behavior usually present with warning signs, and proper understanding of those signs are very crucial in preventing further episodes of suicide attempts. The signs considered for suicidal ideation and attempts include previous suicide attempts; giving away prized possessions, making final arrangements; putting affairs in order; loss of interest in usual activities or hobbies; failing or decline of grades in school; recent loss of a friend or a loved one; break-ups; loss of job or housing; neglect of personal appearance; sleeping and appetite problems; increased alcohol and drug use; and talking about, making plans, or threats about suicide. For elderly who are isolated or socially withdrawn, acquiring a firearm is a risk factor for committing suicide. A sudden increase in alcohol or drug intake is considered as a warning sign. Some warning signs of suicide that are unique to veterans include calling old friends (particularly military friends) to say goodbye, cleaning a weapon kept as a souvenir, visits to graveyards, wearing their uniform when not required, hoarding alcohol, sudden spending sprees, buying gifts for family members and friends to remember them by, failure to talk to other people or make eye contact, PTSD, and traumatic brain injury that would cause significant functional impairment in everyday life.

Indeed, how we perceive ourselves compared to others, and the resulting social rank, has long been recognized as important in the etiology of well-being (e.g., Festinger, 1954). More recently, research has established that individuals with depression (Gilbert & Allan, 1998) and those who self-harm (Gilbert, McEwan, Bellew, Mills, & Gale, 2009) tend to make more unfavourable social comparisons with others. Therefore, the extent to which we perceive ourselves negatively compared with others is a good candidate for understanding suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

At some point in life, around 1% to 5% of people may attempt suicide, but the percentage for adolescents can range from 3% to 20% and it has been also emphasized that the risk of suicide increases with the number of attempts (Vidal et al, 2013). Teixeira and Luis attempted to justify the higher prevalence among adolescents because adolescence is a period of development with biological, psychological, and social changes, accompanied by conflicts and distresses that tend to favour suicidal ideation. (Teixeira, 1997). Several variables have been linked to suicidal ideation such as hopelessness, materialism, psychache, social comparison, depression, personality (Klonsky et al., 2012; Stewart et al., 2005; Velting, 1999a).

Hopelessness has been the loss of hope and what the future holds, should be characterized by other symptoms as well (see Abramson, Alloy, et al., 1988, in press; Abramson, Metalsky, et al., 1988; Alloy & Koenig, 1988). Beck and others have demonstrated that hopelessness has been a key factor in serious suicide attempts and suicidal ideation, serious suicide attempts and suicidal ideation are likely symptoms of hopelessness depression (Beck, Kovacs, & Weissman, 1975; Kazdin, French, Unis, Esveldt-Dawson, & Sherick, 1983; Minkoff, Bergman, Beck, & Beck, 1973; Petrie & Chamberlain, 1983). If lack of energy, apathy, and psychomotor retardation are, in part, concomitants of a severe decrease in the motivation to initiate voluntary responses (see Beck, 1967), then they should be symptoms of hopelessness

depression. The logic here is that people are likely to ruminate about their hopelessness because the outcomes involved are very important to them. Such rumination should interfere with falling asleep and make it difficult to focus attention on other aspects of life. Based on work showing that mood affects cognition (e.g., Bower, 1981) we predict that as individuals suffering from hopelessness depression become increasingly sad, their cognitions will become even more negative.

Materialism is generally considered a negative value, trait or behavior is associated with greed, shallowness, and lack of spiritual values. Collins English Dictionary defines materialism as “interest in and desire for money, possessions, etc, rather than spiritual or ethical values” (“Materialism” 2015). Studied within various disciplines materialism is defined from different perspectives: as a way of life, a value orientation, a cultural system, a personality trait, a second-order value, an aspiration (Bindah and Othman 2011). There are two main approaches to materialism in contemporary empirical research. One that views materialism as the personality trait and others that assumes that materialism should be treated as a part of a personal value system.

Belk (1985) relates materialism to the personality traits of “possessiveness (the inclination and tendency to retain control or ownership of one's possessions), non-generosity (an unwillingness to give possessions to or share possessions with others) and envy (displeasure and ill will at the superiority of another person in happiness, success, reputation, or the possession of anything desirable)”. Fourth trait, preservation (a tendency to make experience tangible through souvenirs and photographs), was added later, due to cross-cultural findings on materialism (Ger and Belk 1996). Belk (1984a, pp 291) defines materialism as “the importance a person attaches to material possessions and the belief that certain possessions are the primary source of happiness”. At the highest levels of materialism, possessions take a central place in a person's life and are believed to provide the greatest sources of satisfaction (Belk 1984b).

Another widely accepted approach to materialism suggests that materialism can be viewed as a value that consumers give to possessions and should be studied within the context of the larger value systems that individuals hold (Richins and Dawson 1990; Kasser and Ryan 1996; Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002). Richins and Dawson (1992, pp 308) define materialism as a “value that emphasizes the importance of possessions and material goods in a person’s life toward achieving life goals or desired states”.

In previous studies, a significant association between thought, planning, and attempting suicide and to meet up with the demands of peer groups was identified, which led to concern about this behavior. A study published in the journal of happiness studies revealed that high levels of gratitude & low levels of materialism in adolescents were associated with high life satisfaction, social integration & low envy & depression. Therefore, making negative social comparisons, and the resulting perceptions of being of lower rank, may make an individual feel defeated and trapped in their environment (Gilbert & Allan, 1998).

One should not forget that in Nigeria this social ranking or need for acquisition has been made obvious and possible due to the increase in social media usage, thereby leaving in the hearts of individuals who can’t meet up these demands hopelessness and suicidal ideation. Although materialists are less happy overall than their lower materialism counterparts, it is entirely possible that they would be even less happy if they do not have recourse to the

acquisition & use of desirable products to increase the number of positive feelings in their lives. Middle age is generally considered to be the joyful era of one's life. Despite this philosophy, the suicide rate in this age group has been increasing for many years. Currently, this age group has the highest number of suicides among all the age groups, whereby suicide takes lots of courage involving suicidal ideation, planning and then attempts is thereby necessary to look into factors that could be predictors to this concept.

Two leading theories within the field of suicide prevention are the interpersonal psychological theory of suicidal behaviour (IPT) and the integrated motivational-volitional (IMV) model. The IPT posits that suicidal thoughts emerge with high levels of perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness. The IMV model is a multivariate framework that conceptualizes defeat and entrapment as key drivers of suicide ideation. We applied network analysis to examine which psychological factors derived from these models are uniquely related to suicide ideation. We used cross-sectional data collected in the Scottish Wellbeing Study, in which 3508 young adults (18-34 years) completed a battery of psychological measures. Within a network that included only the core factors from both models, each separate factor was uniquely related to current suicide ideation. Statistically, internal entrapment contributed most to current suicide ideation. Within the network of all available psychological factors, 12 of the 20 factors were uniquely related to suicide ideation. Perceived burdensomeness and internal entrapment made a statistically equal contribution to current suicide ideation, as did depressive symptoms and history of suicide ideation. These network analyses highlight the complexity of the relationship between psychological factors and suicide ideation and the utility of theory-driven approaches to understanding suicide risk.

The role of psychological buffers (life satisfaction, self-esteem, perception of family cohesion, and perception of social support) in the development of hopelessness and suicidal ideation. The participants were 314 university students, 71 males and 243 females, who were asked to complete a battery of instruments measuring the psychological buffers mentioned above. The results of a set of hierarchical multiple regression analyses suggested that life satisfaction and self-esteem are independent predictors of lower levels of hopelessness, while perception of social support seems to be the major predictor of lower levels of suicidal ideation independent of depression and hopelessness severity. Thus, hopelessness seems to be minimized by the level of life satisfaction and level of self-esteem exhibited by the individuals, while the key factor to the mitigation of suicidal ideas seems to be perception of social support.

We aimed to investigate whether negative social comparisons are associated with key components of the integrated motivational-volitional (IMV) model of suicidal behavior. Specifically, we investigated the relationship between negative social comparisons, suicide ideation, defeat, entrapment, socially prescribed perfectionism, and resilience. Adult participants (N = 422) completed an online survey comprised of a range of psychological measures. An initial regression analysis indicated that negative social comparisons were associated with suicide ideation. Three mediation models were tested based on the IMV model, all controlling for depressive symptoms. In the first, social comparison partially mediated the relationship between socially prescribed perfectionism and defeat. In the second, defeat mediated the relationship between negative social comparisons and entrapment, and resilience moderated the relationship when defeat was high. In the final model, entrapment mediated the relationship between defeat and suicide ideation, with resilience moderating this relationship

when entrapment was high. These findings are novel and lend support to the IMV model. The clinical implications include highlighting the importance of targeting resilience given its potential association with defeat and entrapment. This study aims to ascertain the correlation between hopelessness, materialism and suicidal ideation.

Hypotheses

The study will be guided by the following null hypotheses;

1. There would be no significant positive relationship between Hopelessness and Suicidal Ideation among University Undergraduate.
2. There would be no significant positive relationship between Materialism and Suicidal Ideation among University Undergraduate.

Method

Participants

The participants were gotten from a random selection in Caritas University Amorji-Nike, Enugu State, Nigeria. A total of 201 participants were used as sample for this study. The participants comprise of 97 males and 104 females which ranged from 100 level to 500 level and aged 16 to 25 years with a mean age of 21 years and standard deviation of 2 years.

Instruments

Three instruments were used to gather information in this study. There are Becks Hopelessness Scale, Material Value Scale and Becks Scale for Suicidal Ideation.

Beck Hopelessness Scale (Beck et al., 1974)

The Beck Hopelessness Scale measures the extent of negative expectancies about the future, and consists of 20 true-false statements. The BHS has been demonstrated to have strong psychometric properties. Alpha reliability coefficients have ranged from .65 to .93 in student, forensic, and psychiatric samples (Beck et al., 1974; Holden, 1986), and it has also been found to be adequately stable with 3-week and 1-year test-retest reliabilities of .85 (in university students) and .61 (in prison inmates), respectively (Holden, 1986; Holden & Fekken, 1988). Its validity has also been established. Correlations of the BHS with clinical ratings of hopelessness have ranged from .66 to .74 (Becket al., 1974), and BHS scores of 9 and above have accurately predicted actual suicide commissions in outpatients (Beck et al., 1990).

Scoring.

A 20 item questionnaire with dichotomous response option of true and false. The items have both direct and indirect items, the direct items are items that measures True of hopelessness and is awarded 0 points while indirect items otherwise known as revise scores are negatively warded with 1 points.

Thus response option of true in the following items (2,4,7,9,11,12,14,16,17,18,20) are awarded 1 points while response of false are wared 0 point, furthermore response options of false in the following items (1,3,5,6,8,10,13,15,19) are awarded 1 point while true are awarded 0 point.

Scores ranging from 0-3 are indicated to have absence of hopelessness, 4-14 mild hopelessness while 15+ has severe cases of hopelessness.

Material Value Scale (Richins 2004)

The 9-item short version form of Material Values Scale (MVS; Richins 2004) was used in this study to assess participants' level of materialism. Participants had to answer how much they agree or disagree with the statements on a five-point Likert scales which ranged from 1 as "strongly disagree" to 5 as "strongly agree". Original scoring provides scores on three factors of materialism: Success (example item: "*The things I own say a lot how well I'm doing in life.*"), Centrality (example item: "*I like a lot of luxury in my life.*") and Happiness (example item: "*I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.*") which are distributed three item for each subset. Thus, item 1,3,4 take up scores for happiness, item 2,6,7 for success and item 5,8,9 measures centrality.

Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation (Beck, & Steer, 1993).

The Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation is a 19item rating scale that gauges suicidal intent, and that can monitor the quality and quantity of ongoing suicidal ideation. The BSS has yielded alpha reliability coefficients of .90 and .87 in inpatient and outpatient ideates (Beck & Steer), as well as correlations with a clinician-administered version of .90 and .94 for inpatients and outpatients, respectively (Beck, Steer, & Ranieri, 1988). The BSS has two subscales (Beck, Brown, & Steer, 1997): Motivation and Preparation. Motivation taps individuals' ambivalence about living or dying, as well as the frequency and duration of suicidal thoughts. Preparation refers to a more active stage that involves planning the act. Holden and DeLisle (2005) found support for this two-factor structure in a sample of suicide attempters, and they reported alpha reliability coefficients of .85 and .73 for Motivation and Preparation subscales, respectively, each item had a scale of 0 to 3; summing the item ratings yielded a possible score of 0 to 38. Where the norm is 30.66, scores higher than the norm indicates suicidal ideation why scores lower than the norm indicates absence of suicidal ideation.

Procedure

A total of two hundred and ten copies of these questionnaires were distributed within a period of two weeks to select the participants for this study. The questionnaires were distributed to the participant by the researcher during their class period and during breaks. All participants were asked for voluntary participation, and the primary use of the study was explained orally and in writing. The majority of participants completed the different instruments in their hostels and had it returned to the researcher and in some cases the researcher stayed with the participants to answer any specific questions that arose while participants completed the self-report. two hundred copies were shared out of which some were discarded and some not returned, as a result of this, the researcher was left with 201 appropriately filled questionnaires which were used for the analysis.

Design/ Statistics

A survey research design was adopted by the researcher, and this was because questionnaires were used as means of retrieving the information needed from the participants. Based on the scores gotten from the findings and based on the topic “Relationship between Hopelessness, Materialism and Suicidal Ideation among University Undergraduates” the most suitable statistics adopted was linear regression statistics, this is to help showcase the relationship between the independent variables (Hopelessness and Materialism) and the dependent variable (Suicidal Ideation) and to analyse the formulated hypothesis.

Results

Table 1

Summary of descriptive statistics of means and standard deviation for hopelessness, materialism and suicidal ideation, where materialism was measured in its subset happiness, success and centrality.

Descriptive Statistics

VARIABLES	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
SUICIDAL IDEATION	21.35	6.29	201
HOPELESSNESS	2.73	2.90	201
HAPPINESS	11.63	2.68	201
SUCCESS	10.22	2.48	201
CENTRALITY	11.78	2.31	201

Table one shows the different variables, their means and standard deviation, where the participants obtained a group mean of 2.73 and standard deviation of 2.90 on Beck Hopelessness Scale, on Material Value Scale and its subset:

(a) Happiness mean of 11.64 and standard deviation of 2.68,

(b) Success mean of 10.21 & standard deviation of 2.48,

(c) Centrality a mean of 11.77 and a standard deviation of 2.31 and on

Beck Scale for Suicidal Ideation a mean of 21.35 and standard deviation of 6.29

Table 2: Model summary table of hopelessness, materialism and suicidal ideation.

MODEL SUMMARY

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.316 ^a	.100	.082	6.02

CHANGE STATISTICS

Model	R Square Change	F change	Df ₁	Df ₂	Sig. f change
1	.100	5.488	4	196	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), CENTRALITY, HOPELESSNESS, HAPPINESS, SUCCESS

The result of the analysis presented in the table two above shows that the predictor variables hopelessness, materialism (happiness, success, centrality) accounted for 10%(ΔR^2) variance on suicidal ideation which is significant ($\Delta F_{4,196} = 5.448, P < .001$).

Table 3: Regression coefficient table of hopelessness, materialism (happiness, success, centrality) and suicidal ideation.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	18.502	2.629		7.037	.000
	HOPELESSNESS	.645	.148	.297	4.36	.000
	HAPPINESS	.230	.174	.098	1.32	.187
	SUCCESS	-.263	.197	-.104	-1.33	.182
	CENTRALITY	.094	.209	.034	.449	.654

a. Dependent variable: Suicidal Ideation

Table three (coefficient table) reveals that in the regression equation, hopelessness shows a positive significant predictor of suicidal ideation

($\beta = .297, P < .001$).

Happiness dimension of materialism showed no significant prediction of suicidal ideation ($\beta = .098, P > .05$),

Success revealed no significant prediction of suicidal ideation ($\beta = -.104, P > .05$).

Finally, centrality did not show any significant predictor to suicidal ideation ($\beta = .034, P > .05$).

Discussion

The goal of this study was to throw more light on the relationship between hopelessness, materialism and suicidal ideation, the findings did not support the null

hypothesis which states that there will be no significant positive relationship between hopelessness and suicidal ideation among university undergraduate due to the significant level of hopelessness and that of suicidal ideation ($\beta = .297, P < .001$). Result indicated that hopelessness is a risk factor for suicide ideation but not for the progression from ideation to attempts. The interpretation could be drawn from the fact that hopelessness is a possible force that could drive a person to violate and override the “survival” instinct to kill him or herself. (Beck, 1970). Beck (1970) posited that hopelessness could be seen as the “catalytic agents” that drives the suicidal desire. Based on work showing that mood affects cognition (e.g., Bower, 1981) we predict that as individuals suffering from hopelessness become increasingly sad, their cognitions will become even more negative. However, one implication of our findings is that hopelessness relates to suicide ideation not to the extent of having a relationship and does not predict suicidal outcomes beyond ideation. This finding is in partial contradiction with theories of suicide that implicate hopelessness as the primary factor in suicide (Abramson et al., 2002; Beck, 1967). Instead, findings are consistent with the more recent perspective that hopelessness plays a key role in ideation, whereas other factors explain the progression from ideation to attempts (Klonsky & May, 2015).

Aging is truly challenging, as it brings many changes in one’s life. Many young, as well as elderly people suffer from various physical problems, mental stresses, or financial crises. They lose hope with thoughts of unimproved problems, and these feelings of hopelessness and sadness succumb to suicidal thoughts. (Heathy place 2011). The rising suicide rate among the middle-aged groups is of great interest to researchers. Recently, information has come to light that gives credence to ongoing stressful situations such as the current financial crisis and substance abuse and alcohol. Middle-aged baby boomers are more prone to develop drug addictions and depression, which may put them at risk of hopelessness.

A critical task for future research is to elucidate distinct risk factors associated with suicide ideation and its progression to attempts (Glenn & Nock, 2014). Specifically, our results support prior research which has suggested that greater levels of hopelessness are related to an increased risk for suicide ideation and behaviors (DeCamp & Bakken, 2016; Labelle et al., 2013; Nock & Kazdin, 2002; Stewart et al., 2005). It is also important to observe that, although we have suggested a relationship between hopelessness & suicidal, this does not prove that hopelessness causes suicidal ideation.

Furthermore, Materialism which was measured in its dimensions; happiness ($\beta = .098, P > .05$), success ($\beta = -.104, P > .05$), and centrality ($\beta = .034, P > .05$) did not show any statistically positive significant relationship with suicidal ideation, thereby accepting the hypothesis earlier stated that there would be no significant positive relationship between Materialism and Suicidal Ideation among University Undergraduate. However, the finding that materialism would not predict suicidal ideation was unexpected, one would have to consider the fact that in the quest for happiness and success one can only feel sad when the possible means doesn’t work out but not to the extent of having suicidal intent/ideation. According to Materialistic Value Theory (Richins & Dawson, 1992, Richins, 1994; Belk, 1982, Belk, 1985, Tatzel, 2003), every individual has a need for the devotion to acquisition and possession which is due to individual differences. Materialism could as well be categorised into two (Tatzel, 2002): highly materialistic people and Low materialist. Highly materialistic people compared

to low materialistic, want more money, are less apt to share and are preoccupied with money, value financial security (Tatzel, 2002), tend to be concerned with appearances, so that possessions are used for impression management (Browne & Kaldenberg, 1997) and are involved with status consumption (Richins, 1994; Holt, 1995; Wong, 1997).

Implications of the Study

The implication of this study concentrated on the relationship between hopelessness, materialism and suicidal ideation among university undergraduates, however, this study is supporting other empirical works that have shown that hopelessness has always been a key in suicidal ideation. Therefore, the signs of hopelessness should be closely watched and noticed among individuals in order to avoid suicidal behaviors, which is to say that the increase in hopelessness gives rise to the presence of suicidal ideation.

On the other hand, the findings of this study is of the opinion that materialism is not a predictor of suicidal ideation, materialism measured in its dimensions suggested that individual drive to seek happiness, success and materialism in its centrality will hinder suicidal ideation.

Limitations of the Study

The participants' unwillingness to filling the questionnaire was a big limitation thereby reducing the sample size.

The number of questionnaire shared wasn't what was returned thereby reducing the number of participants for this study.

Time was a big factor as the need to use other participants from other tertiary institution were limited.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this work, the researcher made the following recommendations:

The need to examine social comparison and peer pressure as a factor of materialism.

Increasing Psycho-education on the symptoms of hopelessness and suicidal ideation.

A prevention plan should be made available and followed up by the authorities.

Suggestion for further studies

This study is an addition to series of studies on finding factors that causes suicidal ideation, as hopelessness has been seen as a variable that plays a role in suicidal ideation in past researches, but then the findings of this study isn't enough to prove the level of hopelessness that could cause suicidal intent, as well as materialism as a casual effect of suicidal ideation shouldn't be overlooked, as materialism measured in its dimensions should also be looked into because needs are unique to human species (humanistic approach of materialism). According to Maslow (1962) the most important of these is the need for self-actualization (achieving out potential), this could be association success. Thus a successful person is happy and has a meaningful life. Anything that blocks our striving to fulfil this need can be a cause of depression.

The materialism subscales are said to be manifestation of the underlying materialism construct and, for the purposes of analysis, recommend using the summed score of the three dimensions/ subscales.

Summary and conclusion

Based on the outcome of this study, hopelessness has a positive relationship with suicidal ideation and no relationship between materialism and suicidal ideation among undergraduates of Caritas University Enugu.

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