

**POVERTY:
A MAJOR CAUSE OF SUICIDE
IN AFRICA.**

**A PAPER PRESENTED
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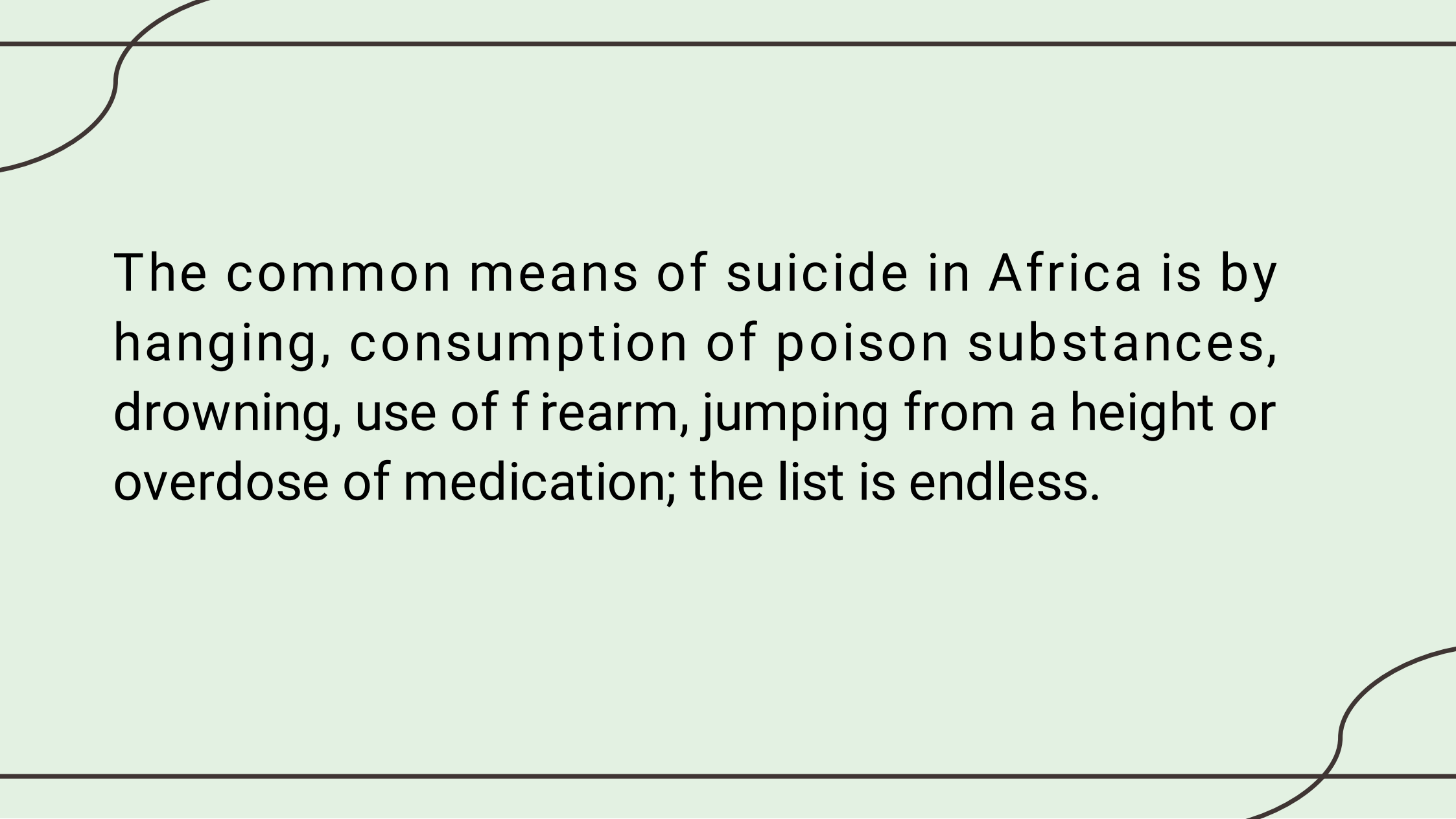
Introduction

It is estimated that over 804000 people die by suicide every year particularly in low- and middle-income countries where the majority of the world's population live and where poverty is concentrated. There is therefore a significant correlation between suicide and poverty in low- and middle-income countries. Suicide is defined as an intentional act of killing one self. It is a serious social problem among youths.

Some mental health practitioners have identified societal pressure as a major cause of suicide in Africa. It is also believed that poverty contributes largely to cases of suicide among persons in underdeveloped countries. In Africa, suicide is a complex phenomenon associated with psychological and social factors.

Below are some signs that may indicate that an individual is about to commit suicide:

- When one is always talking about death.
- Expression of frustration.
- When one concludes that there is no solution to his/her problems.
- Feeling of emotional and physical trauma.
- Always talking about being a burden to others.
- Always staying in isolation.
- Display of extreme mood swings.
- Excessive use of alcohol and hard drugs.

The image features a light green background with two horizontal black lines, one near the top and one near the bottom. On the left side, a dark brown curved line starts from the top edge and curves downwards. On the right side, a similar dark brown curved line starts from the bottom edge and curves upwards.

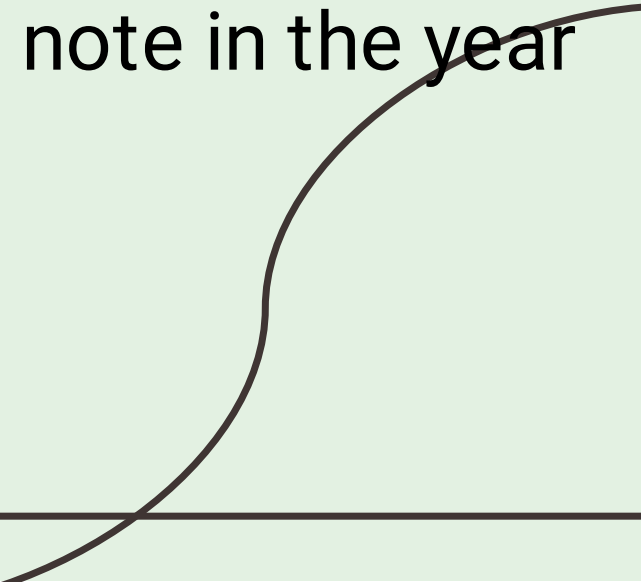
The common means of suicide in Africa is by hanging, consumption of poison substances, drowning, use of firearm, jumping from a height or overdose of medication; the list is endless.

Origin of Suicide!

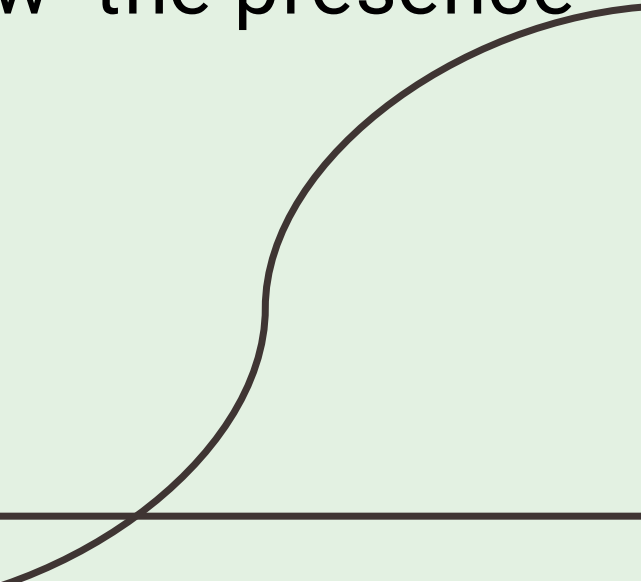


According to Wikipedia, one early Greek historical person to die by suicide was Empedocles around 434 B.C. He believed that death was a transformation and it is possible this idea influenced his decision to commit suicide. He died by throwing himself into the Sicilian Volcano on Mount Etna.

Furthermore, the Pagan world of both Roman and Greek are said to have a simple attitude towards the idea of suicide. For instance, the council of Arles (452) stated that “if a slave commits suicide, no reproach shall fall upon his master”. In Africa, Egypt recorded the first ever suicide note in the year 2040 BC.



Early Scientists believed that depression and suicide behavior can be linked to decreased serotonin (hormone) in the brain as post mortem studies and examination of certain brain region of suicide victims show the presence of cerebral spinal fluid.



Poverty!



Poverty means lacking of basic needs of clothing, shelter, health facilities. It also refers to limited resources and low standard of living. The World Bank Organization describes poverty as having many faces; changing from place to place and across times. Poverty is a situation many do not want to experience. It is indeed a call for action for both the poor and the wealthy. A call to change the world so that people can have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health.

Protection from violence and a voice in what happens in their communities. These are some basic things that Africans lack hence find an easy way out ending it up in suicide. In addition to lack of money, poverty is the inability to give ones children quality education or education at all. According to Wikipedia, causes of poverty vary from one nation to the other.

An estimated 8% of the global population live in poverty. Africa has a higher percentage of persons that live in extreme poverty. Nigeria, the largest nation in Africa has families who live below one dollar a day. This sounds farfetched but this is what is experienced daily. Healthy and educated persons are reduced to beggars.

The 2021/2022 survey conducted in Nigeria by the National Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with the National Social Safety –Net Coordinating Officer (NASSCO) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) revealed that 63% of persons living within Nigeria (133 million people) are multidimensionally poor.

Some of the causes of poverty in Africa



1. Marginalization.

Marginalization in Africa is often based on race or tribal affiliations. In Nigeria for instance, people are denied access to basic resources needed to live a full and productive life.

2. Lack of Education

Lack of Education has been identified as one of the causes of poverty in Africa. However, not every person living in poverty is uneducated. In the same vein, some persons without education engage and excel in various skills.

3. Banditry and Terrorism

Large scale and protracted violence experienced in some parts of Africa, especially Northern Nigeria, has been identified as a major cause of poverty. This level of violence and destruction of infrastructure, as is happening in Nigeria, causes people to flee from their houses to refugee and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, often leaving without any tangible thing leading them to extreme poverty.

Suicide In Africa



According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Africa records the highest number of suicide cases in the world. It is estimated that eleven (11) people per hundred thousand per day die of suicide. It is said that out of the ten countries in the world with the highest suicide cases, Africa alone has six. This is due to inability of African leaders to address and prevent the risk factors including severe mental health conditions and poverty.

Unbelievably, the African region has one psychiatrist to every 500 thousand people. This figure is far below the WHO recommendation. Although, there is little or no information on the causes of suicide in sub-Saharan Africa, the rates are rising particularly among young people. In cast for instance, suicide is considered a terrible event for family and close friends (Swift, 1997). prior to this time, suicide rates were quite low due to less depressor conditions and fragment communal clashes which rather diverted aggression from self others

However, this view has changed considerably with high records of suicide recorded in Africa on a daily basis. The common means of suicide in the African region are hanging and the use of pesticides for self poisoning, overdose of medications, drowning, jumping from a height; the list is endless. Studies have shown that in Africa, for each completed suicide there must have been an estimated twenty suicide attempts. This is largely because African leaders as it were, do not show interest in the welfare of citizens.

Correlation between Poverty and Suicide in Africa

In order to effectively handle suicide prevention, there is need to fully understand the correlation between suicide and poverty particularly in middle and low income countries. Recent studies and interactions have shown that poor people lack hope for the future. This is because they are made to think they do not matter, they are worthless and have no economic or social value. Generally in Africa, poor people live in hopelessness.

They are helpless and exposed to preventable violence especially in the rural communities with no presence of security agents. The poor are unprotected, uncared for and not given any form of attention. They live in rural areas and are also found in over crowded urban areas. The living conditions in these slums increase the risk of conflict, disease and avoidable deaths.

As a matter of fact, poverty and hunger are synonymous with violence and war. These often expose the poor to environmental disaster leading to high death toll. According to the World Data Lab, citizens of 42 African countries live in poverty. The poverty rate is rising by the day in Africa due to bad governance.

RECENT SUICIDE CASES CAUSED BY POVERTY AND BAD GOVERNANCE



In Nigeria, reports have shown that there have been multiple cases of suicide between 2021 and 2022. Investigations carried out indicate that no fewer than 74 persons have died by suicide within the period under review. The economic hardship in the country has pushed the youths and the old alike below the poverty line.

Some suicide cases recorded in Nigeria are as a result of failed marriages, financial indebtedness, failed businesses, loss of means of livelihood and other depression situations.

In Osun State, South West Nigeria, a lady committed suicide in October, 2022 by jumping into the Osun River from Gbodofon Bridge on the Gbodofon-Osogbo road. Report has it that the lady lost her job and suffered severe depression.

Few days later, a man identified as Oladeji Saheed was rescued as he attempted to jump into the Osun River. Another 19 year old man in Plateau State committed suicide by hanging upon the declaration of the 2023 election result. Close family source indicates that the young man felt there was no hope and future in Nigeria.

It has been identified that many factors lead suicide victims to such hard decisions. Summarily, mental health experts believe that factors leading to suicide include societal pressure, poverty, marital conflicts, financial constraints, and depression. It is therefore very clear that most suicides occur in rural and sub-urban areas.

Poverty in Africa and among Africans is a threat to the existence of the continent. Today in Nigeria and other Africa countries, millions live on less than one dollar per day. Extreme poverty destabilizes lives, brings down self esteem, creates despair and reduces an individual to nothing. African leaders have used poverty and hunger as a tool to subdue citizens.

Poverty marginalizes and erodes human decency and leads to powerlessness and dependence. Unemployment and underemployment subject young adults to hardship which exposes them to thuggery and self-destruction. In Nigeria, hunger is a weapon in the hands of politicians.

PREVENTION OF SUICIDE AMONG AFRICANS



It is estimated that a high percentage of suicides occur in middle and low income countries (LMICS) where rates of poverty are high. There is therefore very strong evidence that there is a correlation between poverty and suicides. To achieve effective suicide prevention, there is need to understand the behavioral pattern of those who commit suicide or attempt to commit suicide.

To prevent suicide among Africans, 3 major approaches are recommended.

- Psychological intervention for survivors of attempted suicide
 - Breaking the Chain of Poverty Among African Youths
 - Good Governance
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Psychological intervention for survivors of attempted suicide



The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) opined that suicide does not discriminate. Individuals of any class, gender, age and ethnicity are at risk. There seems to be no single and universally accepted cause of suicide. Members of the society are therefore urged to pay attention to persons showing signs of depression and other mental illness to reduce the tendency to commit suicide.

In some cases, traditional approaches that focus on community and clinically based intervention are deployed. Family members and friends are advised to remove dangerous objects, firearms, and lethal drugs from persons that show some signs of depression and withdrawal.

Breaking the Chain of Poverty Among African Youths



Over 50 percent of Nigeria's population of 180 million is under 30 years of age (Business Day Newspaper, 2016/11/19). Given the nation's extreme dependence on oil, this statistics appears frightening since that industry can only accommodate a very small fraction of the working population. This excessive reliance on oil also implies that other potentially profitable areas of development are largely ignored much to our detriment.

It is no surprise, therefore that the unemployment and underemployment rates have risen to an unimaginable level by the first quarter of 2015. The high rate of unemployment has been identified as the major cause of the numerous social ills that have slowly decimated our growth on several fronts and our prospects as an economic giant in Africa.

Although many Nigeria economists and leaders of thought have acknowledged the overdependence on oil as a major contributor to the problem of underdevelopment in other sectors and its attendant unemployment in general, little sustainably practical actions have been taken over the last 30 years to reverse his fatal direction. For instance, post 1960 economic analysis shows that Nigeria's agricultural sector has witnessed steady decline, and has not kept pace with rapid population growth.

Like other economies in the world, Nigeria's economy is dualistic in nature. It is made up of a slow growing formal sector and a very active and rapidly growing informal sector. Clearly, the informal sector is larger and far more beneficial to Nigeria primarily because of its potential for higher youth absorption into the labour force.

Unfortunately, the latter sector has been largely untapped, resulting in painful economic consequences; chief of which is youth unemployment.

Youth unemployment and under employment have been identified as some of the major causes of poverty and suicide.

Good Governance



Breaking the circle of poverty is a major way of preventing poverty among Africans. Providing food and access to clean water, health care and education, creating healthy living environments where children can grow and be protected. Reducing poverty in Africa will go a long way to reducing incidences of suicide and attempted suicide.

African leaders, should intentionally create policy programmes that will guarantee free education for all, birth control, establishment of microfinance schemes, transparency and prudence in government spending, eradication of corruption and reforms in agriculture programmes can reduce poverty and prevent suicides.

Conclusion

Knowledge about suicide and suicide attempts in Africa is important, not only for African policy but also to improve the precision of global estimates of the magnitude of suicide. Findings from this review suggest that suicide is an important public health issue in Africa, with reported figures highly likely to underestimate the true incidence. Systematic data collection is urgently required in order to compile reliable suicide mortality and morbidity statistics across the continent. There is also a need for more qualitative studies, which are able to take into account the socio-cultural context.

THANK YOU!!!



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