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A Theologico-Ethical Assessment of Suicide among Undergraduate Students in Delta State of Nigeria

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Abstract:

This research is a theological and ethical assessment of suicide among undergraduate students at tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria. The historico-descriptive and analytical approaches were used to achieve the research's goal. The focus was on seven postsecondary institutions in Delta State. The study revealed that variables such as suicidal ideation and prior suicide attempts are contributing factors to the suicide rate among undergraduates at Delta State. In addition, views from the theological and ethical spectrum show that religion lowers the student suicide rate. It posited that to curb student suicide in higher education institutions in Nigeria, it is crucial to employ ethical attitudes and religious practises, hence, there is a need to carry out more research on student suicide in Delta State and across Nigeria.

Keywords: Suicide, Religion, Theologico-Ethical, Students, Tertiary Institutions, Universities, Delta State.

Introduction

The issue of suicide has long interested theologians and moral philosophers. Concerning suicide and suicide prevention, their ideas have had an impact on both the general public's perception and medico-legal practice. In recent research, indicators of religious or theological affiliation have been incorporated. Nigeria and other West African nations have gotten little attention in the research on religion, theology, ethics, and suicide, despite having highly religious populations. A moral community is one in which there are disproportionately many religious people, which reinforces spiritual practises and beliefs.[1] There is controversy over the link between suicide and

[1] J. Hecht, A History of Suicide and the Philosophies against It (Yale: University Press, 2013), 29.

theology, and further study is required to address this gap. More so, the use of variables such as suicidal ideation and prior suicide attempts has been generally recognized and even advised due to the substantial links between suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, and completed suicides. In recent years, there has been an evolution and improvement in the way that religiosity and morality are measured as far as suicide is concerned. Most people have advocated that there should be more ethical and theological research on suicide since it is a worldwide problem. High degrees of both internal and external religiosity, according to some studies, have been linked to decreased rates of contemplation of suicide and successful suicide among students at higher institutions in Delta State. However, several studies have been carried out on how places with high and low religiosity and ethical behaviours significantly impact suicide rates. However, previous research has not particularly focused on the theological and ethical assessment of suicide in Delta State.

This research aimed at a theological and ethical assessment of suicide among undergraduate students at tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria. Delta State is located in the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria, with Asaba as its headquarters or capital city. Delta State currently has an anticipated population of around 5.6 million people.[2] The state is made up of several distinct ethnic groups, including minor tribes such as the Urhobos, Ukwuani, Ika, and Aniocha peoples, as well as the Isokos, Ijaws, and Itsekiris. The bulk of the population affirms Christianity and traditional religion. Delta State ranks as the fourth-highest index of human development in the country. It has four colleges of education, five polytechnics, and 11 universities. The historical, descriptive, and analytical approaches were used to achieve the study's goal. This was aided by the responses to interviews and the documented evidence gathered from the student affairs, security, and medical records of the institutions surveyed. Seven postsecondary institutions were chosen, namely: University of Delta, Agbor (formerly College of Education, Agbor); Delta University of Science and Technology, Ozoro (formerly Delta State Polythetic); College of Education, Warri; Petroleum Training Institute, Effurun; Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba; and Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba.

Suicide in Context

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "suicide" first appears in Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*, which was composed in 1635 and originally released in 1642.[3] Expressions like "self-murder" and "self-killing" had previously been employed to refer to the action of taking one's own life until it became a mainstream phrase. Suicide is a deliberate attempt to end one's life. Ekeh claims that the Latin words *suicidium* as well as *mors voluntaria*

[2]E. Boyitie, "Social media influence and suicide rates among youths in Delta State of Nigeria". Journal of Social and Management Sciences, 15.1(2020): 35-45.
[3] Cited in T.P Oyetunji, et al., "Suicide in Nigeria: Observations from the content analysis of newspapers". Gen Psychiatr, 34.1(2021): e100347.

are where the concept of suicide first appeared.[4] Most people who commit suicide do it out of desperation and often think that doing so will end their problems forever. Durkheim defined suicide as a death that happens as a direct or indirect result of the victim's own good or poor deeds, of which they are aware that a terrible conclusion would ensue.[5] Suicidal behaviour that does not end in death but involves at least some attempt to take one's own life is known as non-fatal suicidal behaviour or self-harm. When someone indirectly aids another person in taking their own life by offering assistance or bringing about an end to it, this is known as assisted suicide. Suicidal ideation is having suicidal thoughts without really trying to terminate one's life. When someone commits a murder-suicide, also known as a homicide-suicide, they also intend to take the lives of others. When a person thinks they are outside of society, they may commit egoistic suicide. Suicide is a conscious, intentional effort to end one's own life. It is a purposeful, self-inflicted death. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), it is a deliberate act that is started and finished by the subject of the act with full knowledge or expectation that it would end in death.[6] The concept of "social constraint" and Durkheim's analysis of the division of work are both related to his thesis on suicide.[7] Suicide is the deliberate act of taking one's own life to end excruciating suffering or to improve undesirable living conditions. It is among the top twenty leading causes of mortality for young people globally and is the second most common cause of death for younger people across the ages of 15 and 29.

In advanced nations, suicide has been ranked as the second-most common cause of mortality for persons between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. Scholars and other stakeholders see early signs of depression as a suicide warning indicator. Higher education students' suicidal thoughts may have a unique etiology. In the past, suicide was permitted in Mediaeval Rome, but it has since come to be considered an offence against the state. While Aristotle was opposed to all forms of suicide, Plato was ambivalent about the subject.[8] Choosing to take their lives in a gladiator fight, feeling bad about murdering someone, attempting it in order to safeguard the existence of another person going through a terrible period, feeling humiliated after being assaulted, and running away from uncomfortable situations were some of the reasons given for suicide. Suicide was deemed wicked and outlawed across Christian Europe during the era of the Council of Arles.[9] David Hume argued that suicide was unlawful due to the fact that it had no negative repercussions on other people

[4] G. Ekeh, "The value of human life in the light of suicide tendencies among Students in Nigerian tertiary institutions: Implications for education." Journal Corner of Education, Linguistics, and Literature (JCELL), 2.1 (2022): 9-18.
[5] E. Durkheim, Suicide, a study in sociology (Glencoe, Il: Free Press, 1897/2006), 18.
[6] World Health Organization. National suicide prevention strategies: Progress, examples and indicators (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2018), 97.
[7] Cited in S Okafor, "Suicide among Undergraduate students in Southeast Nigeria: An Empirical Study". AIJS, 6.2(2020): 50-58.
[8] Plato, "Phaedo." In Hutchins (ed.), Great Books of the Western World (Chicago. Britainnica, 1952), 222-223.
[9] Okafor 2020, p.222.

and could possibly be beneficial to the sufferer.[10] Around the nineteenth century, the stigma surrounding suicide in Europe shifted from one of guilt to one of disease. By the second decade of the twentieth century, suicide had become a common habit across the majority of the western world, and English law had begun to differentiate between suicide and murder by the year 1879.[11] With 828,000 fatalities worldwide in 2015, an upsurge from 1990, suicide is the tenth greatest cause of death in the globe.[12] Weapons, hanging, and chemical poisoning are typical methods of committing suicide.

Mental, physical, and drug-use illnesses all increase the risk of suicide, as can impulsive behaviours brought on by stress, interpersonal issues, harassment, and bullying. The efficacy of suicide prevention initiatives, such as restricting access to suicide means, treating mental illnesses, monitoring media, and improving economic situations, has not been well investigated. Based on the works of significant Christian theologians of the Middle Ages, most sects of Christianity see suicide as wicked.[13] Suicide is seen as a violation of the Ten Commandments according to Catholic and Orthodox belief systems.[14] Judaism emphasizes the value of life and views suicide as a denial of God's kindness in the world. Notwithstanding this, there are many reports of Jews taking their own lives, either alone or in groups. In fact, the Jewish liturgy includes a prayer for individuals who take their own lives "to sanctify God's name".[15] Jewish authorities' views on suicide are ambiguous. Individual suicide is prohibited by the Quran and is considered a sin in Islamic religious teachings, which are against it.[16] Hinduism is often despised and seen as just as immoral as murder. Hinduism acknowledges a human's right to terminate his life via the non-violent practise of fasting until death, known as Prayopavesa, despite the fact that Hindu Scriptures teach that someone who commits suicide will enter the spirit realm. Santhara is a comparable ritual in Jainism. In Hindu culture, sati is an uncommon and forbidden practise.

Studies conducted in Europe, for instance, have shown the prevalence of suicide throughout many years. Suicide across the United States (US) has dramatically increased over the last several decades, confounding the effectiveness of social measures intended to reduce it.[17] With some degree of discrepancies across the

[10] D. Hume, *On Suicide*. Of the Standard of Taste and Other Essays, edited by J. Lenz. London: Bobbs-Merril, Reprinted 1965), 281.
[11] S. Dowie, "What is suicide? Classifying Self-killing." Medicine, Health Care, and Philosophy, 23(2020): 717–773.
[12] Dowie 2020, p. 736.
[13] World Health Organization. Suicide in the world: Global Health Estimates (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2019), pp. 27-94.
[14] S. Stack and A. Kposowa, "Religion and suicide acceptability: A cross-national analysis". Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 50.2(2011): 289–306.
[15] S. Stack, "The effect of religious commitment on suicide: A cross-national analysis". Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 24(1983): 362–374.
[16] Stack and Kposowa 2011, p. 299.
[17] M. Silverman, "Suicide and suicidal attempts in the United States: Costs and policy implications." Suicide Life Threat Behaviour, 46.3(2016): 352-362.

sub-social groups, juvenile suicide episodes in Canada have been a concern for the public health institution, especially if compared to other wealthy countries, the overall incidence is rather high.[18] According to a 2017 analysis by the World Bank Group, low- and middle-income nations account for 79% of all suicides worldwide.[19] However, compared to lower-middle-income nations (11.4 per 100,000), high-income countries had the greatest age-standardized suicide rate (11.5 per 100,000).[20] According to the male and female suicide ratios, males in high-income nations had the highest suicide rate (17.2 per 100,000) when compared to males in other income level groupings, while females in countries with lower middle-incomes had the lowest rate (9.1 per 100,000.[21] According to World Health Organisation data from 2016, suicide rates were higher than the world average (10.5 per 100,000) in Southeast Asia (13.4 per 100,000), Europe (12.9 per 100,000), and Africa (12.0 per 100,000). Comparatively speaking, the Eastern Mediterranean area had the lowest suicide rate - 4.3 per 100,000.[22] Africa had 16.6 per 100,000; the Americas had 14.5 per 100,000; South-East Asia had 15.4 per 100,000; and notably, Europe had 21.2 per 100,000, the highest male mortality rates.[23] It is further noted that a male-to-female ratio of 0.5:1 and a suicide rate of 2.1% in Morocco.[24] Nigeria has a suicide frequency of 0.7% and a male-to-female ratio of 1.0:1.[25] According to Bekry, the suicide rate in Ethiopia was as high as 49.8 suicides per 100,000 people, with a male-to-female ratio of 2.9:1.[26] It is also estimated that there were 100.0 suicides for every 100,000 people in Namibia, with a male-to-female ratio of 0.9:1.[27] It is revealed that a male-to-female ratio of 0.3 and a lifetime suicide frequency of 2.9% in South Africa.[28] In Uganda, 10.1 per 100,000 people have a male-to-female ratio of 1.7:1.[29] In Tanzania it is reported that there is a suicide rate of 5.2 per 100,000 people with a male-to-female ratio of 0.2:1.[30]

[18] Silverman 2016, p. 355.
[19] World Bank Group. World Bank development report-governance and law (Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / the World Bank, 2017), 210.
[20] World Health Organization 2019, p. 29.
[21] World Health Organization 2019, p. 29.
[22] World Health Organization 2019, p. 29.
[23] World Health Organization 2019, p. 29.
[24] World Health Organization 2019, p. 29.
[25] World Health Organization 2019, p. 29.
[26] A. Bekry, "Trends in suicide, para-suicide and accidental poisoning in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia". Ethiopia Journal of Health, 13.3(1999): 247-262.
[27] World Health Organization 2019, p. 30.
[28] World Health Organization 2019, p. 30.
[29] World Health Organization 2019, p. 30; H. Koivumaa–Honkanen et al., "Life satisfaction and suicide: A–20 year follow–up study". American Journal of Psychiatry, 158 (2021): 433-439.
[30] World Health Organization 2019, p. 30.

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Philosophy and Suicide

In several academic fields, such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and psychiatry, suicide has been a major issue. Suicidology still has a lot of unresolved issues, such as whether procedures are best for determining suicide's causes and whether or not it is possible to completely separate the study of suicide from the political and institutional allegiances of its researchers. Philosophers have posed several philosophical, ethical, and psychological queries about suicide, including what constitutes suicidal behaviour, what drives such behaviour, and whether suicide is ethically acceptable or morally required in certain extreme cases. Some ancient and contemporary intellectuals, including Stoics, Janis, Taoists, and Buddhist mystics, have both condemned and accepted the act of suicide.[31] The extent of acceptance or condemnation of suicide by various philosophers is primarily decided by their stance on the subject. The numerous philosophical perspectives on suicide are crucial to this article. Suicide was condemned by Hume, Hobbes, Freud, Rousseau, James, Hegel, Montesquieu, Locke, Aristotle, Kant, Spinoza, St. Augustine, Aquinas, and others. According to Minois and Cochrane, different groups in ancient Greece had different views on suicide.[32] While the Stoics and Epicureans believed that one's fate might be changed, others, including Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, Ovid, and Cicero, condemned it.[33] Other thinkers, like John Locke, Rousseau, and Soren Kierkegaard, as well as religious authorities like Martin Luther and Puritan intellectuals, were vehemently opposed to suicide.[34] Suicide, according to philosophers, is morally reprehensible since many of the causes are temporary and curable with treatment and dietary adjustments.

The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates held the views that the gods are humans' guardians and stewards and that death is exceptional.[35] The hatred of his fellow inhabitants drove him to commit suicide as he began to doubt the judgment of the city's elite. The belief that humans are the property of the state and that the state has judicial obligations was shared by Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Hegel, and Aristotle.[36] According to the social argument school of thought, suicide is morally wrong in light of the benefits that society would have earned if the act had not been performed. The understanding that exists between a person and society is constrained and presupposes that both parties stand to gain. Regarding suicide, Plato and Aristotle argued that it was always wrong and that individuals who committed suicide deserved to be interred in

[31] D. Wasserman and C. Wasserman, Oxford Textbook of suicidology and suicide prevention (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), 352.
[32] G. Minois, *History of suicide: voluntary death in western culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 119-391.
[33] Minois 1999, p. 124
[34] Minois 1999, p. 124
[35] Minois 1999, p. 121
[36] Minois 1999, p. 124

unmarked graves.[37] According to the Stoics, suicide may be acceptable if a person lacks access to the resources necessary to live a naturally flourishing life. This might have made it more difficult for them to argue against suicide.

Immanuel Kant makes the case that it is immoral to kill oneself in order to fulfill one's own desires.[38] Allowing a person to choose between life and death rejects the notion that suicide is always or often illogical and instead views it as a solution to pressing issues. Suicide is the ultimate consolation in life, according to pessimist thinkers like Nietzsche, Goethe, and Schopenhauer; Arthur Schopenhauer believed it was everyone's right to commit suicide.[39] Although Schopenhauer had a great deal of compassion for persons who commit suicide, it is often thought of as a willed act. Suicide, according to liberalism and Thomas Szasz, is the most fundamental of all rights, and according to Jean Amery, it is the pinnacle of human freedom.[40] Nihilists reject this focus on the ability of the person to create meaning and accept that all things, including suicide, are equally meaningless. Suicide, according to some, is permissible in certain situations, such as old age and terminal illness.[41]Cicero stated that it is reasonable for humans to stay alive when their surroundings include a majority of natural things. A Stoic philosopher named Lucretius thought that those who were suffering should be allowed to commit suicide. He reasoned that if life required him to commit suicide, he would be left with no choice but to accept it. He was said to have afterwards shown manic outbursts and lunacy since he eventually committed himself to C55BC.[42] Although he considered suicide to be self-murder, he would rather recommend it as an unavoidable evil that might be used as a remedy for avoiding pain.

Theoretical Underpinning: Hirschi's Theory of Social Bond

Hirschi's Social Links Theory (SLT) is predicated on the idea that people have a propensity towards criminal behaviour.[43] He contends that individuals are more likely to act in line with norms the greater the level of underlying control over society as well as the more extensive the structure of social ties. He specifically mentions juvenile offenders and refutes the notion that juvenile offenders have a significant impact on their age-group peers. According to the notion, the social connection between a person and society is made up of four components: attachment, commitment, time, energy, and effort. The term "attachment" describes a person's interest in being sensitive to, caring for, and

[37] Minois 1999, p. 124
[38] M. Curtice, "Article 3 of the Human Rights Act 1998: implications for clinical practice". *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment,* 14(2008): 389–97.
[39] Wasserman and Wasserman 2009, p.354.
[40] Wasserman and Wasserman 2009, p.354.
[41] Wasserman and Wasserman 2009, p.354.
[42] Wasserman and Wasserman 2009, p.354.
[43] T. Hirschi, Causes of delinquency. Berkeley (Calif: University of California Press), 1969), 37

concerned about other people's needs, wants, and expectations.[44] Time, effort, and commitment are all used to describe traditional activities.[45] If a person is invested in society, then acting defiantly puts that investment at risk. The degree of effort put towards accepted norms and objectives is called commitment. It is believed that someone who has dedicated more time, effort, and resources to reaching compliance objectives has more to lose by engaging in disobedient conduct than someone who has put in less effort to pursuing goals that are socially acceptable. Participating in traditional activities helps people develop the self-control necessary to withstand the urges to engage in abnormal conduct.

Hirschi discovered that students in high schools who were very close to their families were more likely to commit suicide; they enjoyed and did well in school and seemed less likely to commit suicide; they had higher academic goals and seemed less likely to engage in delinquent behaviour.[46] Hirschi's hypothesis of control is questioned because it ignores the individual causes of aberrant behaviour and assumes the motive for such behaviour. His four factors are not simply relevant to all types of crime, including white collar crime, where offenders are often well bonded and incorporated into society. Engagement with delinquent peers substantially correlates with deviance, although the link between engagement and deviance is ambiguous and studies have produced mixed findings. Hirschi vehemently refuted his own thesis, which he then developed into the "General Theory of Crime" in 1990.[47] According to Uviekovo, the social integration and social control theories of Johnson, Hirschi, Lester, Orbach Bar-Joseph and Dror, and Simonds, McMahon, and Armstrong are either extensions or revisions of Durkheim's theory.[48] These hypotheses are all connected. The interaction between the person and society is the fulcrum for all of them. The social tie between the person and society is at the centre of Durkheim and Hirschi's ideas, which fit into other social control theories.

Suicide and its Causes among Undergraduates

In Delta State, there are not many incidences of student suicide; federal and private universities have more cases than state universities do. Even though there are many occurrences of suicidal thoughts, there have been no known cases of completed suicide at private universities in the state up to the time of this study. The results of the few instances examined indicate that Delta State students are more likely to commit egoistic and anomic suicide. That is, committing suicide as a consequence of academic failure, pressure, failed

[44] Hirschi 1969, p. 33.
[45] Hirschi 1969, p. 37.
[46] Hirschi 1969, p. 33.
[47] Hirschi 1969, p. 33.
[48] A.A. Uviekovo, "Durkheim's Theory of Suicide in the Nigeria Context: A Critical Evaluation". Alphabeta International Consult Journal of Religion, 1.1(2022): 45-55. Also cf. B. B. Mohanty, "Farmer suicides in India: Durkheim's types". Economic & Political Weekly, (2013): pp. 45-54.

relationships, and despair. In Delta State, there have been no examples of fatalistic or altruistic suicide among tertiary students, at least not in a religious sense. There are no known instances of students turning on themselves for political or religious reasons, such as Jihad. The results seem to support Hirschi's theory that students are more emotionally susceptible. A large portion of the participants who were men said that having a broken relationship was a risk factor for suicide[49]. This research identified some gender disparities, and previous work has shown that women often use suicide as a cry for assistance.[50] Whenever it relates to suicidal behaviours, boys often take severe measures. When boys encounter emotional disruptions, they may be reluctant to discuss their personal issues with others. Instead, they decide to commit severe suicide. Family problems were the second cause of suicide that was found. As a consequence of societal development, families will undoubtedly experience many changes. Today's culture is becoming more and more fast-paced, competitive, and filled with risk-taking, quick change, insecurity, and other negative traits.

If it were because of a lack of social connections that students were unable to handle boy-girl relationships, felt lost in an environment at school that was becoming more and more stressful, and were unable to be integrated into the present-day family and social system, the actuality of suicide as a worldwide social issue might be more complicated. It is critical to avoid underestimating the complexity of contemporary society, which Bauman refers to as liquid modernity.[51] Families working together and parents providing supportive but strong direction are two things that may prevent our children from considering suicide. However, because of recent social and economic developments that have forced moms as well as parents in Nigeria to find employment in order to make ends meet, providing this protective element may now be more challenging. According to this report, students are becoming more and more dissatisfied with how society regulates them, including the educational system and social changes.[52] It could also be brought on by a lack of integration with society's ever-changing ideals. Suicidal thoughts are more likely to occur in students who feel disintegrated within their school, relationships, communities, or society. They feel inadequate and are unable to handle uncertainty since they have little control over their own lives. According to Durkheim's concept, this dearth of seamless integration into the world in which the persons are positioned should be categorized as egoistic suicide, although it is oversimplified to reach such a conclusion.[53] This phenomenon also demonstrates how collectivist values are gradually giving way to individualistic ones and how the current environmental and systemic contexts within which

[49] Hirschi 1969, p. 37.
[50] J. Kok and J. Lee, "Anomic or egoistic suicide: suicide factors among Malaysian youths". International Journal of Social Science and Humanity, 64.2(2013): 47-51.
[51] Z. Bauman, Liquid Modernity (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 21.
[52] Okafor 2020, p.53.
[53] Cited in Mohanty, 2013, pp. 47.

youths are living today are being replaced by traditional protective factors like family, collectivism, and religious norms.

From the interactions with interviewees, it shows that suicide among undergraduates occurs based on several factors. They include, but are not limited to, a broken home caused by the separation or divorce of the parents, depression brought on by poverty, unresolved spiritual or mental issues, guilt over a secret act of evil, lack of confidence and loneliness, disappointments from family members and friends, drug abuse and addiction-related depression, social stigma brought on by sexual abuse and terminal illness, academic difficulties, failures, and victimization, among other factors. The majority of people interviewed agreed that more individuals think that these variables may contribute to suicide or suicidal thoughts among students at higher institutions. This result supports Ekeh's assertion that suicide is not a random or unintentional act. Instead, it was a planned move that the performer thought would solve a problem.[54] A severe case of depression often leads to suicide. Depression may be treated, but doing so often requires the patient to put in time, effort, and energy. Sometimes a depressed person may feel sad yet have increased energy when they experience the energizing benefits of antidepressant medication. Many patients resort to suicide and other forms of suicidal behaviour during this phase of therapy. Young people who attend postsecondary schools disproportionately struggle with depression, a condition that has serious long-term effects, including a higher risk of suicide. Some of them feel as if they have nowhere to turn since they are just dissatisfied and overburdened by present- and future-related worries.

In an effort to find the answers, they can start using drugs and start self-medicating. Or they could take violent actions to vent their fury and frustration. Because they could feel that it would make them a burden to others or that others would make fun of them, they do not want to speak about their feelings or issues. These distressed teenagers most often decide to commit suicide instead. Youths who have access to weapons have a much higher risk of suicide. Additionally, a highly prevalent risk factor for suicide attempts and completion is drug overdose and the use of over-the-counter, prescription, and non-prescription medications. Some kids exchange various prescription medications at school and keep them in their lockers or backpacks. Because of this, it is crucial to keep an eye on teenagers at home and at school. Conversations about death in general, dropping indications that they may not be around anymore, withdrawing from friends, peers, and family members without cause, composing songs, poems, or letters concerning death, divorce, and loss, and performing odd acts of generosity are all warning signs of suicidal tendencies. These symptoms can include a sudden loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities; withdrawal from peers, playmates, study groups, and close friends; difficulty paying attention or thinking clearly; speaking coherently and with coordination; changes in eating and sleeping patterns; risk-taking behaviours;

[54] Ekeh 2022, p. 11.

and a lack of interest in school-related activities. These warning indicators, if not seen and addressed, might result in disrespect for all educational curricula and ideals and, if not stopped in its tracks, could finally lead to suicide.

Theological Response

Most fundamental theological questions in this area are in some way related to the teachings of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Catechism makes a number of claims about suicide and deadly sin. The Church refuses to believe that constantly committing suicide results in an eternity in hell.[55] The "mortal" and "venial" sins are still separated by the Catholic Church. Venereal sins, albeit grave, do not exclude humans from God's love; only mortal sins do. One cannot be certain about the spiritual condition of a suicide. It is possible that this individual has severe psychiatric problems, which can lessen the personal accountability of the individual who is committing suicide. Mortal sin cannot be reduced by inadvertent ignorance; it needs total awareness and assent. However, if the individual was completely conscious of his or her conduct and was not experiencing any severe psychiatric problems, they would not have committed murder, which is a "gravely sinful" crime. It follows logically that someone who commits self-murder (suicide) cannot be redeemed from hell since they are unable to atone for their sin.[56] Saul, Samson, and Judas are among the seven suicides mentioned in the Bible that are the most well-known. Saul reportedly took his own life to escape facing the Philistines' wrath and suffering humiliation. Despite their apparent acceptance of his suicide, the Israelites honour him with a hero's funeral (1 Samuel 31:1–6). Scripture is once again mute on the ethical implications of Judas Iscariot's suicide out of regret, despite the fact that there was no hero's funeral for him (Matthew 27:5-7). Christian theologians have more of a dilemma now because of Samson's suicide. After deliberating on the issue, Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Augustine both came to the conclusion that Samson's suicide was acceptable since it was a response to a clear order from God.

The Church has a long tradition of opposing suicide. The notion that suicide is an unpardonable sin, however, is more difficult to prove. Saint Augustine was one of the most well-known and well-respected opponents of suicide among the Church fathers. Early church councils also ruled that bequests from suicide victims (as well as those who attempted suicide) should not be accepted, and throughout the Middle Ages, Christians refused to bury suicide victims in a proper Christian grave.[57] Thomas Aquinas held that suicide constituted a deadly sin since it did not include a last act of repentance. Dante's placement of suicide victims in the seventh circle of the inferno is likely to have had at least as great

[55] P. Baelz, "Suicide: Some theological reflections in suicide: The Philosophical Issues." (London: St Martin's Press, 1980), 99.
[56] E. Colucci and G. Martin, "Religion and spirituality along the suicidal Path". Suicide and Life-Threatening Behaviour, 38.2(2008): 229 –244.
[57] Baelz 1980, p. 213.

an impact on Christian theology as Saint Thomas did.[58] Despite their abhorrence of suicide, Luther and Calvin do not imply that it is an unforgivable sin. The most helpful person on the subject is probably John Calvin, who came to the conclusion that suicide need not be considered blasphemy and that the only unforgivable sin (according to Matthew 12:31) is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The division made by the mediaeval church between deadly and venial crimes seems to be where the idea that suicide is unforgivable has its roots.

According to Ottuh, the idea of human dignity, at its most fundamental, is the conviction that each and every person has intrinsic worth derived exclusively from their humanity.[59] It has absolutely nothing to do with their social standing, ethnicity, gender, or any other characteristic other than their humanity. Comprehending human existence is crucial to comprehending both the problem of suicide in particular and the happenings of the world in general, claims Ekeh (2022). People are viewed as the most significant component of creation. In this world's created creatures, he is also supreme. Thus, of all life on earth, human existence is the one that is most highly treasured. There is an overwhelming belief in the sanctity of human life throughout the majority of the world's cultures and faiths. According to Ottuh and Idemudia, this is based on the conviction that God, the Supreme Being, gave us life as a gift. For instance, the worldview is deeply ingrained in African society.[60] Thus, Africans place a great value on and adore everything that contributes to, supports, promotes, discloses, saves, protects, or otherwise enriches life. The aforementioned instances demonstrate how precious human life is and why it should not be taken lightly. Although various people have varied understandings and interpretations of human existence, its origin, and its purpose, there is a shared conviction that life as a whole is a datum (a given). People get it from an authority above and beyond human capacity, not from people themselves. It is thus impossible to purchase or prolong life outside of the intentions of the giver. The same applies to playing with someone else's or your own life. Life is a gift that has been given for a reason, and the giver himself has created that reason. According to Ottuh and Jemegbe, the goal of human existence has been addressed by several philosophies, religions, civilizations, and sciences through communication and praxis.[61] For instance, Metz (2013) holds the philosophical position that life is seen as a phenomenon that is beneficial for its own sake. Judaism holds that the purpose of life is to use good acts to rehabilitate and

[58] M. Cholbi, "Suicide". In Zalta, E. (ed.). Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Stanford University: The Metaphysics, 2017), 41
[59] P.O.O. Ottuh, "A Prudential Personalist Ethical Appraisal of Human Cloning". Journal of Liberty and International Affairs 7. 3(2021): 310-330.
[60] P.O.O. Ottuh and M. Idemudia, "Navigating Trajectories in African Biblical Studies: DT Adamo and the future of African cultural hermeneutics." Ianna Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies 2.1 (2020a): 55-64.
[61] Peter O.O. Ottuh and Mary O. Jemegbe, "Communication in religion and its integrative implications for Society". Pinisi Discretion Review, 4.1 (2020): 1-10.

enhance the world (Resch, 2020). Life, according to Christians, is defined as loving God with all of one's being and one's neighbour as oneself.

The phrase "image of God" is translated as "*Imago Dei*" in Latin and appears in Genesis as part of the creation myth. It is the conviction that, since people were made in God's image, they are not entitled to kill themselves. The statement is derived from Genesis 1:27, which states that God made humans in his own image.[62] The Christian view of human existence is fundamentally based on the imago *Dei doctrine,* which explains the essence of humankind as both an individual and a social body. It also suggests the function of humanity in the present and the future. The Old Testament passages Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1, and 9:6 as well as the New Testament passages 1 Corinthians 11:7 and James 3:9 all provide instruction on this subject.[63] Additionally, there are apocryphal or deuterocanonical texts that suggest that people are formed in the likeness of God. In Genesis 1:26-27, God is shown as deciding and arranging the creation of humanity, and humans reflect God's divinity in their capacity to realize the special traits that have been given to them. *Imago Dei* refers to both God's caring for humanity and God's own self-actualization through people. Saying that people are formed in God's image acknowledges the unique aspects of human nature that enable God to appear in people. According to this theory's moral implications, if people are to love God, they also need to love other people and themselves, since all living things are manifestations of God. Kant contends that because man is God's property, he does not have the right to decide how to live his own life. However, Kant also makes a number of secular arguments, one of which is that by regarding oneself like nothing more than an object, suicide dehumanizes and degrades mankind.

Ethical Response

Suicide raises challenging issues for ethics and other areas of philosophy. There is only one philosophical issue that is actually serious, and that is suicide, as Albert Camus famously said at the opening of his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus".[64] Religious philosophy opposes suicide, whereas nonreligious positions lean towards toleration. These are the two main categories into which philosophical or ethical positions on suicide may be categorized. The utilitarian position is unclear. The main moral question regarding suicide is whether there are any circumstances under which it is ethically acceptable and, if so, which ones. The moral acceptability of suicide, its logic, and the obligations of individuals and society at large are complicated interrelationships. The two

[62] P. Gushee, "The Old Testament and Sanctity of Human Life". 2008. *www.personhood.ne*t (Accessed 2, October, 2022).
[63] P.O.O. Ottuh and M. Idemudia, "Historical criticism versus African biblical hermeneutics: Issues and prospects of interpretative dialogue." Biblical Studies Journal (BSJ), 3(2020b): 1-18.
[64] K. Obasala and A. Omania, "Philosophical Perceptions of Suicide and implications for the Sanctity of Human Life". Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences, 2.10(2014): 47-62.

principal moral questions raised in this text are whether it is morally acceptable to commit suicide and, if so, under what conditions, as well as whether and how much of an obligation an observer has to intervene when they learn that a person is thinking about or trying to commit suicide. Suicide has long been a subject of debate among theologians and moral philosophers, and thus, suicide is no longer a crime in Britain, Scotland, or Northern Ireland.[65] Some act-utilitarianism has considered the correlated possibility that the positive effects of suicide may exceed its negative consequences to the point that it would be commendable or even morally required. The societal arguments opposing suicide are inherently consequentialist. However, detractors contend that although there is a responsibility to die, this obligation should not be interpreted to mean that others may force individuals who have it to commit suicide.

Tom Beauchamp divided the ethical examination of suicide's contributing aspects into five categories: the religious perspective, the autonomy principle, the concept of responsibility to others, and the utilitarian viewpoint.[66] According to the respect for life concept, every living thing has inherent worth that merits respect. According to Ottuh, the concept of autonomy, is necessary to respect the ability of independent individuals to make decisions by preserving their freedom to do so.[67] The ideas of autonomy and mental ability are strongly intertwined. The right to commit suicide is an inherent right of non-intrusion, according to libertarianism, although other people contend that this additionally constitutes an autonomy and claim right. One major concern with physician-assisted suicide is this. Despite this seeming conundrum, every person has a lesson that informs them of the meaning of life, which may be summed up as doing good and avoiding evil. According to Singer, the ephemeral idea of human dignity appears in ethical, legal, and political contexts as a tenet of human worth or standing.[68] It is debatable where that value came from or what kind of significance it has. There are two partly, or perhaps entirely, distinct deontological interpretations of human dignity that entail virtue-based responsibilities on the one hand and retribution-based rights and standards on the other, raising questions about the concept's normative implications. Additionally, the many practical and philosophical assumptions of law, ethics, and politics imply that disciplinary in commensurabilities thwart the ability to definitively adjudicate between several interpretations. This implies a variety of responsibilities, chief among them the need to safeguard life rather than end it and to promote rather than obstruct progress—whether that life is one's own or that of another. In the end, this raises concerns about the motivation for suicide, particularly among young people.

[65] Obasala and Omania 2014, p. 47.
[66] T. Beauchamp, "Suicide". In Matters of Life and Death: New Introductory Essays in Moral Philosophy. editors Regan, T, Beauchamp, TL, Callicott, JB et al. (London: MNT), 83–104.
[67] P.O. O. Ottuh, "Religious Approach to Nonanthropocentric Ethics in Environmental Philosophy". Cogito: Multidisciplinary Research Journal, 12.1(2020): 7-24.
[68] P. Singer, Animal liberation (London: Ecco Press, 2001), 62.

Christian ethics places a strong emphasis on respect for human dignity. The Catholic Church's Catechism affirms that the dignity of the human person has its foundation in creation and in being made in the image of God. According to the Church, all human beings have the dignity of a person inasmuch as they were created in God's image. According to Catholic catechism, everyone has the right to exercise their freedom because that right is inextricably linked to their dignity as human beings.[69] The Catholic Church holds that human dignity derives from human agency and free will, with the additional knowledge that free will itself derives from the creation of humans in the image of God.[70] This is similar to Kant's concept of human dignity. The topic that comes to mind while discussing suicide and the dignity of human life is, "Does a person who commits suicide have dignity for human life?" In a way, it might imply that someone has the right to end their own life if they so desire. However, when examined from a Christian viewpoint, it implies that a person's life is not really their own. Additionally, euthanasia—also known as assisted suicide or mercy killing—is sometimes seen as a type of suicide in modern society. However, a philosophical investigation of the ideas of "human being," "human person," "biological life," and "life of a human person" demonstrates that the real reasons for euthanasia and suicide are quite different. Suicide seeks to end the life of a person who is seen to be devoid of dignity. The effective justification for euthanasia is to preserve the dignity of a life that is in danger due to a short biological life expectancy brought on by the illness as well as the administered therapy, even if it is merely palliative. The major conclusion is based on these arguments: as suicide and euthanasia have distinct moral (material) subjects, they should likewise be morally assessed differently.[71]

According to Ottuh and Idjakpo, religion also fosters morality and good values in society, which is a constructive function for it.[72] Every good religion promotes a set of moral principles that it instructs its followers to follow. They argue further that each religion possesses its own ethics, or a unique perspective on and method of imparting morals. As a result, among other qualities, Christianity teaches affection, perseverance, humility, honesty, moderation, obedience, forgiveness, and persistence.[73] Due to the fact that they improve both the individual and the community in which they live, these qualities are advantageous to both. When morality and good values are well-established, they act as a deterrent to suicide. People go across nations and continents in quest of their ancestors because humans are in search of identity. The urge for belongingness, according to Abraham Maslow, is one of the most significant aspects of human nature and what motivates people to take action.

[69] O. Sensen, "Human dignity in historical perspective: The contemporary and traditional paradigms". European Journal of Political Theory, 10.1(2011): 71–91.
[70] Sensen 2011, p. 77.
[71] Sensen 2011, p. 77.
[72] P.O.O. Ottuh and O.G. Idjakpo, "Ludwig Wittgenstein: Language Game and Religious Belief". Interference: Journal of Languange, Literature, and Linguistics, 1.2(2020): 166-81.
[73] Peter O.O. Ottuh and O. Godwin Idjakpo, "Imperativeness of ethics in Christianity: Perspectives and praxis". KIU Journal of Social Sciences, 7.1 (2021a): 129-135.

Religion fosters a sense of community, which is consistent with Durkheim's ideas on integration and regulation. As demonstrated among students of higher education institutions in Delta State, people's resistance to suicide increases the more they are aware that they are a part of a family.

No one should be made to suffer against their will from a decision as personal as suicide. Additionally, it is seen as a less sinister and more acceptable option than living a pointless and ludicrous existence. Suicidal advocates contend that when life becomes intolerable, living becomes a worse option than dying. This school of thought has strong backing from David Hume.[74] Suicide is not against the rules of nature, reason, or God; rather, it is a sensible use of the gift of life. Suicide, in the opinion of its supporters, is not against the rules of nature, reason, or God. A human's decision to go is more logical than to stay if God has put him or her on the world as a sentinel. Kant's use of the notion of free will to support suicide runs afoul of internal logical conflict. He stated that while humans can only discard objects like animals, he should be treated differently since he is not a thing. The way that Kant views the treatment of someone who has tried suicide is dehumanizing since he views the person as having the worth of an animal and ought to be treated as such.[75]

Conclusion

This research has shown that theological scholars and ethical philosophers have long been interested in the topic of suicide. It also revealed that the incidences of suicide among undergraduates in Delta State, though low, are due to variables like depressive disorders, academic stress, substance abuse, parental marital issues, financial constraints, a difficult economic climate, and poor relationships, despite the fact that suicide among young people overall and in Nigeria is rising. Findings show that suicide attempts among undergraduates occur 25 times more often than suicides that are successfully completed. The risk factors for suicide are emphasized among students in postsecondary institutions in Delta State and may have a fatal impact on victims' friends, families, fellow students, and the institutions. Analysis of religious and philosophical views demonstrates that religion reduces student suicide. Students who subscribe to the sanctity of human existence, human dignity, and the *imago dei* (image of God) profit more from this belief than those who do not. Moral opposition to suicide is also based on religious principles, convictions, and hope. It has been discovered that certain belief systems reduce suicide. It is important to employ ethical attitudes and religious practises, teachings, and beliefs to prevent suicide among students at higher education institutions in Delta State. This might include, but is not limited to, anti-suicide advocacy campaigns, studies of religious scriptures, seminars, and other religious organisations' sponsored programmes that can deter suicide among tertiary

[74] Hume 1965, p. 36.
[75] I. Kant, Grounding for the metaphysics of morals (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 85.

students. While this research offers a moral framework for the prevention of suicide, more investigations into suicide among tertiary students in Delta State and across Nigeria are needed in the future.

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