



Authoritarian Parenting and Gender as Predictors of Suicidal Ideation: The Moderating Role of Effective Communication

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Abstract

The present study examined whether authoritarian parenting style and gender are correlated with suicidal ideation and if effective communication can moderate this relationship. Two hundred and forty (240) undergraduate students drawn from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra state Nigeria, participated in this study. The participants comprised 111(44%) males and 129 (56%) females. Their ages ranged from 15-30 years (Mean age = 20.2, SD= 2.7). Three instruments were used to collect data from the study: The suicidal Ideation scale, Parental Authority Questionnaire and Assertiveness Formative Questionnaire. Moderated multiple regression was used to analyze the data. The Results showed that authoritarian parenting predicted suicidal ideation at a coefficient value of .16, effective communication negatively predicted suicidal ideation at a coefficient of -.28. Also, there was a significant interaction between authoritarian parenting and effective communication at a coefficient of -1.86. Gender did not significantly predict suicidal ideation, and there was no significant interaction between gender and effective communication on suicidal ideation. It was suggested that effective communication skills should be part of family interventions for families whose child have suicidal tendencies.

Keywords: Suicidal ideation, Authoritarian parenting, Gender, Effective communication.

Introduction

The suicide rate has been increasing and appears to be a serious public health issue. WHO (2019) postulated that 800,000 people die by suicide each year and 79% of such incident is mainly seen in low and middle-income countries; Nock, Borges, Bromet, Cha, Kesler and Lee (2008) defined suicidal ideation as thoughts, impulses of engaging in behaviour which is intended to end one's life. Marcia and Amy (2020) defined suicidal ideation as the act of one trying to take his or her own life, and



therefore, they are of two kinds: active suicidal ideation and passive suicidal ideation. Active suicidal ideation refers to thinking about suicide and having plans and intent to commit suicide, while passive suicidal ideation refers to the act of wishing for suicide but having no intention or plan of committing suicide (Marcia & Amy, 2020).

Globally, lifetime prevalence rates are approximately 9.2% for suicide and 2.7% for suicide attempt (Nock, Borges, Bromet, Alonso & Angermeyer, 2008), while in Nigeria, the prevalence rate of suicide among Nigerian youth is high; Ogunleye, Azikiwe, Aroso, Tenibiaje and Solomon, (2019) posited that 80 undergraduate students of Nigerian universities committed suicide in 2018. Data from the suicidal prevention initiative, Nigeria (2009), showed that one-fifth of suicide cases seen at its affiliated institutions are 13-19 years. More so, over 50% of the crisis calls received through their ever-busy phone line are from those within the age range of 13-29 years, of which 27.8% of them were students.

In young adults, suicidal ideation is not uncommon among young adults; 22% and 38% of young adults have thought about suicide, and between 12% and 26% admitted having such thoughts in the previous year (Nock, Bojes & Bromet, 2008). Suicide and suicidal ideation are not without consequences, and the consequences range from individual, family, and community. The consequence to the individual who attempts suicide may include, brain damage which may have a long term effect on the health, depression and other forms of mental issues (CDC, 2019). To the family, it can lead to negative stigma, guilt and blame among family members,



rumination and anger, grief and depression, shame, social withdrawal, mental and physical health decline among family members and as well as family disunity (Batya, 2018)., it can also lead to a financial burden to the society (CDC, 2010; WHO, 2014).

Many factors can necessitate suicidal ideation, such as depression, helplessness, low self-esteem, family problems, physical abuse, substance abuse, peer pressure, frustration, broken homes and as well as family history of suicide (Brent, Perper, Moritz, Liotus, Schweers, Balach & Roth, 1994). No single study can explore all the factors necessitating suicidal ideation, which is why this study focused on Authoritarian parenting and gender as predictor variables and effective communication as moderating variable.

Authoritarian parenting is a style of parenting that demands unquestionable obedience and exerting excessive control over their children (Baumrind, 1991). this style of parenting is characterized by a lack of warmth, with the method of training characterized as threatening, forcing, love withdrawal, guilt induction and punishment (Barber & Harmon, 2002). Authoritarian parents are mostly thought of as disciplinarian, using strict disciplinarian measures with little negotiation; punishment is endorsed, and there is limited communication which is primarily one-sided and one way mostly from parents to the child. Therefore, rules are not usually explained, and expectations are high with less or limited flexibility; these kinds of activities trigger a lot of negative consequences on the child, such as being prone to higher levels of internalizing problems and low levels of life satisfaction (Randall,

Bohmer & Travers, 2015). Many factors are associated with Authoritarian parenting. They include depression, anxiety, exhibiting inappropriate and risky behaviours, struggling with self-control, the problem with decision making, having a sense of failure and low self-esteem (Wang, Deng & Du, 2017). It can also result in externalizing problems such as bullying, truancy and substance abuse, as well as internalizing problems such as fear, depression and anxiety (Akhtar, Malik & Berger, 2016)., it can also cause problematic behaviours like rebelliousness (Samiullah, 2016); necessitating lower academic achievement and motivation (Watabe & Hibbard, 2014). Given that previous studies have suggested the negative effect of authoritarian parenting style in predicting other constructs, it necessitated the need to explore whether authoritarian parenting will play an essential role in predicting suicidal ideation.

Gender refers to the cultural meanings ascribed to male and female social categories in the society, which also refers to masculine and feminine self-definition (Wood, 2009). According to APA (2011), women with anxiety disorder are more likely to internalize emotions, resulting in withdrawal, loneliness, and depression. On the other hand, men are the other hand are more likely to externalize emotions which may result in aggression, impulsiveness, coerciveness, and non-compliant behaviours; as a result of enumeration of these variables, it is important to examine whether gender will play a significant role in predicting suicidal ideation among adults.



Effective communication in the scope of this study can be seen as assertiveness. Pfafaman (2017) defined assertiveness as appropriately expressing ideas, feelings, and boundaries while respecting others right and maintaining a positive effect in the receiver and considering potential consequences of the expression, which includes both positive and negative expressions to achieve personal or instrumental goals. Assertiveness is also the ability to express your feelings and thoughts in a way that makes your view clearly understood by others while putting other people's rights into cognizance and expressing thoughts and feelings openly in an honest appropriate, respectful and direct manner (Hunter, Goodle, Oordt & Dobmerger, 2009). Lack of effective communication has its consequences, such as harbouring feelings of frustration, depression, anger, resulting in the accumulation of resentment that will lead to the inhibition of effective communication (Maccutcheon, 2016). A healthy communication pattern can necessitate harmony, understanding, respect, healthy psychological well-being and higher academic performance (Parry & Kumar, 2017). Among school children, effective communication can result in a positive relationship between students and teachers and increase the enthusiasm about learning, enabling them to perform better academically. This variable (effective communication) was used as a moderator variable to ascertain whether it will have a differential impact on other study variables.

Some researchers have made hypothetical assumptions concerning the origin, causes and consequences of suicidal ideation; these can be seen in the interpersonal



psychological theory of suicidal ideation by Joiner (2009) and the authoritarian parenting model by Baumrind (1966), which were used as a theoretical framework for this study. The interpersonal psychological theory of suicidal ideation posited that an individual would not die by suicide except if such individual has the desire to die by suicide, and this can be seen when such individual holds two psychological states in mind persistently for an extended period which triggers the desire to die by suicide. These two psychological states are; perceived burdensomeness and a low sense of belongingness. Perceived burdensomeness is the perception suicidal victims have based on their existence burdens family, friends and society. Therefore their death will be worth more than their life to family members and friends. A sense of belonging is a basic human motivation that can affect the onset and course of depression (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hagerty & Williams, 1999). These two psychological states can trigger a third variable that Joiner (2009) called the acquired ability to enact lethal self-injury. This is the ability of an individual to inflict pain on self after battling with self-preservation in many domains. Its function to stare down the capacity for self-preservation due to pain habituation, thereby resulting in suicide. The authoritarian parenting model emphasizes features of the authoritarian parenting style, which does not encourage verbal give and take. This parenting style is obedience oriented and status-oriented, expecting orders to be obeyed without questions. This parenting style controls a child through shaming,



love withdrawal, and punishment induction and this style are characterized by two features: lack of warmth and excessive control.

Some previous related empirical works were reviewed to support the study variables; Nunes and Mota (2017) examined parenting style and suicidal ideation using 604 adolescents aged 15 and 18 years. The result showed authoritarian parenting style to be causing suicidal ideation; Grening, Stoppelbein and Luebbe (2010) researched parenting style and suicidal ideation using African-American and Caucasian children, 172 participants, findings showed that authoritarian parenting style predicted suicidal ideation. Miller, Esposito-smythers and Leithweiss (2015) examined social support and suicidal ideation using 143 adolescents aged 13-18. Lower social support predicted suicidal ideation and suicide attempt. Mattlin, Molock and Tebes (2011) investigated suicidality and family and peer support using 212 African American adolescents; findings showed that increased family support and peer support are associated with decreased suicidality. Huiwen, Xu et al. (2015), research on the prevalence and influence factors of suicidal ideation among females and males using 4291 participants. The result showed there was no significant difference between males and females about suicidal ideation. Freeman, Mergl and Kohls et al. (2017) examined gender difference in suicide intent. Results reviewed that there was no significant difference in the frequency of suicide between males and females; Keith and Rebecca (2017) examined parenting behaviours linked to suicide among adolescents. Findings reviewed that lack of effective communication is

one of the hallmarks of authoritarian parenting, contributed to suicidal ideation. Finally, Jegannathan and Kullgren (2011), in their study on gender and suicidal ideation, found that males reported more suicide plans, but females reported more suicide attempts

The following five questions will be answered in this study

1. Will authoritarian parenting positively predict suicidal ideation?
2. To what extent will effective communication positively predict suicidal ideation?
3. Will gender predict suicidal ideation?
4. Will there be an interaction between authoritarian parenting and effective communication on suicidal ideation?
5. Will there be an interaction between gender and effective communication on suicidal ideation?

METHODS

Participants

Participants comprised of two hundred and forty (Males= 111 and females= 129) undergraduates students randomly chosen from five faculties in a Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Anambra state, south-east Nigeria. The participants' ages ranged from 15-30 years, their mean age was 20.2 years, and the standard deviation was 2.7.



Instruments

Three instruments were used to measure the study variables:

Suicidal ideation scale

This is a 10-item scale developed by Rudd (1989), which measures the severity of suicidal ideation. Each item was anchored on a Likert-type response format of Never=1, infrequently = 2, Sometimes =3, frequently = 4, Always = 5. Samples of the items include: I have been thinking of ways to kill myself, I believe my life will end in suicide; I feel life isn't worth living. Rudd (1989) reported a Cronbach alpha of .86, but the current Cronbach alpha for the study was .83.

Authoritarian parenting style scale

This 10 item questionnaire was developed by Buri (1991) to assess the level of authoritarianism used by parent(s) on a child. It is also anchored on a 5-point Likert scale which was 1= strongly disagree, 2 = strongly agree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= Agree and 5= strongly agree. The Cronbach alpha for the present study was .70.



Assertiveness Scale

This was developed by Gaumer and Noonan (2018). It contained 20 items measuring the levels of assertiveness. The response ranged from Not very like me = 1, to Very like me = 5. The Cronbach alpha for the present study was .78

Procedure

The Nnamdi Azikiwe review board approved the study. After that, the researcher randomly selected five departments from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka campus Nigeria. In the departments selected, 25 copies of the questionnaires were distributed to year one and two students. A total of two hundred and fifty participants were selected. They were briefed about the research, and their confidentiality was assured. Instructions were read and explained; 250 copies of questionnaires were administered. However, only 240 were correctly completed and were used for final analysis.

Design and statistics

The study adopted a correlation design and moderated multiple regression was employed to establish the predictive and moderated effects. Statistical package for social sciences SPSS Inc., (version 23) was used to analyze the data.

RESULTS



Table 1: Zero-order correlation for Authoritarian parenting, Gender and Effective Communication on Suicidal ideation.

Table 2 Effective communication moderating the relationship between gender and

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Suicidal ideation	1			
2. Authoritarian Parenting	0.43*	1		
3. Effective Communication	0.149*	0.124	1	
4. Gender	-0.145*	0.114	-0.261*	1

Suicidal Ideation
 $P < .05$

Independent variables	R^2	$Df1(Df2)$	F	B	SE	T
Model 1	.092	2(237)	11.975			
Authoritarian parenting (A)				.16**	.044	2.495
Effective communication(B)				-.28**	.050	-4.467
AXB				-1.86**	.007	-4.097

**= $P < .01$



The table 2 above shows model 1 of the analyses. The result was analyzed using moderated multiple regression. For model 1, authoritarian parenting was considered an independent variable, while effective communication was considered as moderating variable. The dependent variable was suicidal ideation. The adjusted R square for this model is .09 (9%). This adjusted R-square was significant at $F(2,237) = 11.97, P < .01$. The Beta coefficient estimate showed that authoritarian parenting predicted suicidal ideation at $Beta = .16, P < .01$. Similarly, effective communication negatively predicted suicidal ideation at $Beta = -.28, P < .01$. The result also showed a significant interaction between authoritarian parenting style and effective communication at a Beta estimate of $-.186$.

Table 3 Effective communication moderating the relationship between gender and Suicidal Ideation

Independent variable	R ²	Df1(Df2)	F	B	SE	T
Model 2	.081	2(237)	10.387			
Gender (C)				.11	.600	1.807
Effective communication(B)				-.244**	.050	-3.877
CXB				.10	.101	.295

**= $P < .01$

In Table 2 for the second model, gender was considered the independent variable, while effective communication was considered the moderating variable, while the



dependent variable is suicidal ideation. The adjusted R square for this model is .081(8%). The adjusted R -value was significant at $F(2,237) = 10.387, P < .01$. The Beta coefficient estimate showed that gender did not significantly predict suicidal ideation at Beta = .11 $P > .05$. However, effective communication negatively predicted suicidal ideation at Beta = -.244, $P < .01$. Nevertheless, there was no significant interaction between gender and effective communication on suicidal ideation at Beta = .10. $P > .05$

DISCUSSION

The primary aim of this study is to investigate whether authoritarian parenting style and gender will predict suicidal ideation and to ascertain if effective communication will moderate this relationship. The result revealed that authoritarian parenting style positively and significantly predicted suicidal ideation. This concurred with the interpersonal psychological theory of suicidal ideation by Joiner (2009), which stated that lack of sense of belongingness and feeling of burdensomeness which are hallmarks of authoritarian parenting, can manifest children through maltreatment by parents and can foster suicidal tendencies. Also, some empirical works including (Nunes & Mota, 2017; Grening, Stoppelbein & Luebbe, 2010) found similar results.

Secondly, effective communication negatively predicted suicidal ideation. This means that effective communication helps in inhibiting suicidal thoughts in children. This is because it allows children to express themselves effectively to parents and caregiver.



These findings also concur with (Miller, Esposito-Smythers & Leichtweis, 2015; Mattlin, Molock & Tebes, 2011).

Thirdly, gender did not significantly predict suicidal ideation. The study by Xu et al. (2015) and Freeman, Mergl and Kohls (2017) also showed that gender did not significantly predict suicidal ideation. Fourthly, the study found a significant interaction between authoritarian parenting and effective communication on suicidal ideation, such that increased ineffective communication reduces the probability that authoritarian parenting will predict suicidal ideation. A previous study (Keith & Rebecca, 2017) showed that parenting behaviours linked to suicide among adolescents. Authoritarian parenting style is shown as a parenting style that necessitates problematic behaviours and conducts behaviours among adolescents. They disregard or ignore their children's needs and which might degenerate to the avoidant attachment. In response, such a child learns early in life to suppress the natural desire to seek a parent for comfort when frightened. Individuals with this kind of avoidant attachment with a parent tend to rely heavily on self-soothing, self-nurturing behaviours, as a result of that; they have little desire to seek out help from others; this may sometimes result in helplessness and hopelessness, which are the core factors resulting in suicidal ideation (Joiner, 2009).

Finally, the result indicated no significant interaction between gender and effective communication on suicidal ideation; this finding goes contrary with the work of (Jegannathan & Kullgren, 2011). They found males to be more assertive than females,



while females reported more suicidal attempt than males. This may be a result of the uprising in gender equality seen today in our contemporary society. Males and females now operate on the same basis, and most parents are now incorporating gender equality among their children.

Limitations

The result should be viewed within the context of its limitations necessitated by the sample size and individual differences in personality traits and genetic makeup of an individual. Another limitation is that the researcher only studied a style (authoritarian) of parenting; other styles may contribute to suicidal ideation.

The implication of the study

The present study has theoretical implications and practical implications. Firstly, the study's findings show that authoritarian parenting can trigger suicidal ideation among young adults, and effective communication can ameliorate or reduce the risk of the possibility of suicidal ideation. Theoretically, this study agrees with the interpersonal psychological theory of Joiner (2009) and the authoritarian parenting model (Baumrind, 1966). Secondly, parents should be part of their children's lives and be sensitive and responsive to their children's needs. Counsellors, church teachers, and other family coaches should key into training parents and their wards on the importance of effective communication.



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