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STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON SUICIDE-PREDISPOSING DYNAMICS IN A SELECTED UNIVERSITY, SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT
Distressingly, the South African sector of tertiary education is battered by an unswerving ill of suicidal behaviours among students enrolled in their universities. This paper explores students' perspectives on suicide-predisposing dynamics in a rural-based university in South Africa. The study utilised an exploratory and descriptive approach to describe and explore student perceptions of suicide-predisposing factors affecting institutions of higher learning. A case study design as a specific design was employed to comprehensively navigate students' lenses about causative suicide dynamics in rural-based universities. In-depth interviews were cross-sectionally conducted across 10 participants and thematically analysed. The Three Step Theory (3ST) was also used. The study established the following suicide-predisposing factors: acute academic pressure, parental or family neglect, stigma and discrimination based on sexual identity inclinations, self-harm on account of substance or drug abuse, and suicidal behaviour due to the digital divide. As such, these researchers advise universities, parents, and communities to strategise on fostering adequate parental support, adopting a one-student-one-laptop initiative, strengthening suicide empathic societies, and LGBTQIA+ destigmatisation campaigns.

Keywords*: suicide; university students; self-harm; suicide empathic society; LGBTQIA+*

INTRODUCTION
Fundamentally, suicide is explained as a mortal self-injurious act with some evidence of intent to end one's life (Bilsen, 2018). According to De Leo et al. (2021), a critical limitation to the understanding of suicide dynamics is the absence of nomenclatural consensus as to what is the exact definition of suicide, creating a barrier towards analysing and interpreting suicide behavioural trends from the different regions of the world.

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Unequivocally, the phenomenon of suicide among tertiary students is exacerbated by variegated predisposing factors across the globe, regions, and nations, with these most likely to intensely differ from setting to setting. Therefore, students' viewpoints on suicide dynamics are critical to drawing the study closer towards the probability of determining any possible extraneous exacerbating susceptive factors besides the traditionally known predisposing factors. Contemporaneously, the comprehension of suicide dynamics in such a focused domain is crucial in establishing and offering setting-based relevant interventions, given that suicide is a menacing thorn in the neck of understudied South African institutions of higher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although tertiary institutions of education are cognisantly considered ivory towers where students and academics freely pursue their ambitions as a conducive environment, to some, it appears to be a catalytic avenue that offers them more reasons to escape life. The phenomenon is pervasively discommoding, such that the World Health Organisation posits it as a second cause of mortality for youth between the ages of 15-29 years compared to cancer, homicides, and road traffic accidents (Crispim et al., 2021). A study by Bantjes *et al*. (2023) connotes the fact that there is an increasing prevalence of suicidal behaviour among university students across the globe, where one study of 13 984 first years from 19 universities in 8 countries reported a 12-month prevalence of about 17,2% of suicidal ideation; 8,8% of suicidal plans, and 1,0% of suicidal attempts. On the other hand, the World Health Organisation pointed out that 800,000 people die through self-harm, where approximately 118,000 students between the age cohort of 15 to 24 are hospitalised for fatal self-inflicted wounds annually (Ede & Okeke, 2023). The previous researchers further distinguish Nigeria as a student-suicide capital of Africa. Statistics reporting the prevalence of suicidal behaviour among students in South Africa are scarce, according to Makhubela (2021). However, Pillay (2021) posits that current findings by Bantjes in 2019 reflected that out an average sample of 1 402 South African university students , 46,4% experienced suicidal ideations, 26,5% had suicide plans, and 8,6% attempted suicide. In analysis, South African statistics prove to be just behind Nigeria when compared against the global average. Gender-wise, research proves females are more prone to suicidal behaviour than males (Alabi et al., 2021). Against this idea, Miranda-Mendizabal et al. (2019), on the other hand, postulate that males use more lethal methods to kill themselves than females.

Popularly, research pervasively associates suicide with traditional causative dynamics such as psychological, mental health-related and environmental predisposing factors, of which these researchers believe there might be an array of new others possibly propelled by the rapid speed of global development into commercialised digitalisation, for which digital-primitive countries like South Africa get subjected to competitive pressure to advance into the world of computational innovations. Due to this, even the delivery of basic needs and services has become a challenge for antediluvian-rated institutions in rural areas. A perfect example is that higher education institutions continued using digital platforms to render tuition even after COVID-19, forcing each student to at least own a laptop gadget to access electronic software platforms for learning. The author, Fauzi

(2022) concurs with the idea that the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the educational transition from contact teaching and learning to e-teaching and learning.

These researchers opine that, for some, the seeming gap of the digital divide is perhaps a combination of psychological, mental health-related and environmental predisposing matters to student suicidality. According to Muhuro and Kangethe (2021), for Southern African developing countries, remote learning is yet a mirage, so coercive implementations of remote learning by institutions of higher education to disadvantaged students might inflict some sense of burdensomeness on parents, siblings and others when they have to ask for money to buy gadgets or borrow from others. Teismann et al. (2023) highly commend perceived burdensomeness as a leading risk factor for suicide.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The following question guides this paper:

What are the students' perspectives on suicide dynamics in a selected rural university in South Africa?

AIM & OBJECTIVE

The study's aim and objective of the paper is to empirically explore students' perspectives on suicide dynamics in a selected university in South Africa.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Indubitably, the suicide phenomenon among university students represents the most significant public health concern, whether globally, regionally or nationally. While literature outlines an array of traditional predisposing factors to suicide, among other things including intense feelings of internal entrapment, defeat, burdensomeness and impulsivity, most data is Western-centric compared to being Afrocentric. Since research on the institutions of higher learning in South Africa suffers from a paucity of literature on suicide dynamics compared to especially the Western world, these researchers, therefore, wish to establish what predisposing factors drive suicide among students in this selected rural university. They also consider it important to explore and determine how these predisposing dynamics play out. The results of this paper are important for strengthening the policy environment and interventions towards addressing suicide problems in institutions of learning in South Africa.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The article utilises the Three-Step Theory (3 ST), the most recent theoretical model, to render a foundational understanding while simultaneously simplifying the presence of complex suicidal behaviours in individuals. For this paper, specifically, the root bases of suicide offered by the theory are critical for effective navigation into probable extraneous developments of suicide causative factors, except the popularly documented. According to the founders of the theory, Klonsky and Alexis, in 2015, their model tenets are primarily on three steps, namely, the combination of pain and hopelessness, intensification of suicidal desire when pain surpasses connectedness, and strong suicidal desire advancing to suicide attempts at the presence of suicide capability (Klonsky et al., 2021).

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Step 1: The combination of pain and hopelessness stimulating suicidal desire
The proponents of the theoretical model posit that suicidal desire is stimulated by the presence of pain and hopelessness combined, where human beings are perceived to possess powerful instincts to escape when experiencing life as extremely painful, miserable or aversive.
Step 2: Intensification of suicidal desire when pain surpasses connectedness
When the pain experienced by an individual surpasses their connectedness with social circles, suicidal desire due to deficient social support intensifies. This means that, if connectedness exceeds suicidal desire, due to having a sense of purpose, for instance, the individual has less chance to commit suicide.
Step 3: Strong suicidal desire advancing to suicide attempts at the presence of suicide capability
This step contends that lethal suicide attempts may result if suicidal desire advances in the presence of suicide capability. Suicide capability is itself a resultant advancement due to some factors depending on an individual's access to knowledge about lethal techniques to take their own lives. For relevance in application for this study, the 3-Step theoretical model is concise to describe the foundational behaviour for suicidality and a dual predictor for advanced suicidal behaviour. Concurrently, the factorial underpinnings of the model somehow inform the root base of the possible existence of new risk factors of suicide among students in rural tertiary education centres, for which the study aims to answer whether there are any.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Regarding research parlance, methodology outlines the methodical approach or system to elucidate a research problem by sensibly adopting defined steps. A simpler explanation by Sileyew (2019) contends it is a systematic path followed by researchers in conducting their studies. This paper's methodology comprises the following systematic steps: research approach and design, study domain and justification of choice, research population, sampling techniques, methods of data collection, data analysis, and finally, ethical considerations.

a. Research approach and design

The study used a qualitative research approach to extract tentative students' perspectives on suicide-predisposing factors in a selected rural university in South Africa. Qualitative research approaches study the nature of phenomena, quality, forms of manifestations, contextual appearances or perspectives from which they can be perceived (Busetto et al., 2020). Advantageously, this approach premises the study to accept any personal perspective concerning suicide predisposing dynamics from the student participants as an answer.
The study's research design is exploratory and descriptive for the purpose of discovering new, unique or recent South African based student perceptions of suicide predisposing factors that affect them extraneously in the countryside institutions of higher learning. The descriptive instinct of the design verily describes how these factors affect the student participants in academic productivity and holistic life.

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b. Specific design

The study espoused a case study as its specific design. A case study is a methodological design used to formulate an in-depth understanding of a contemporary concern or phenomenon in a complex system or institution (Coombs, 2022). Therefore, the case study design allows for the in-depth navigation of student lenses about causative suicide dynamics with very few limitations on what can be perceived as a relevant perspective.

c. Research domain and justification of choice

The study was pursued in one rural university in the Eastern Cape, O.R. Tambo Region. The setting of the study is located approximately 4.2 km away from Mthatha Central Business District along the N2 road of Nelson Mandela Drive. A study of this nature is highly significant for this part of the South African region, considering the unabating prevalence of suicide and associated behaviours battering the institution. Apart from that, there is a remarkable paucity of literature deliberating on tertiary student challenges related to suicidal behaviour and related mental ills, focusing on countryside settings. This study is justifiable because, according to the institutional student counselling unit of the researched institution, 3 students succumbed to suicidal ideations between the 2018 and 2023 academic years in the studied campus, while a total of 5 suicide deaths account for the entire institution across the other institutional delivery sites. Crucially, dynamics across suicide phenomena notably differ from setting to setting, so authoring students' perspectives on suicide dynamics directly affecting the Eastern Cape region is verily significant, more especially to create a base for further studies to compare and analyse dreadful suicide predisposing factors between rural and urban-based institutions of higher learning.

d. Population under the study

The population under study consists of students enrolled in the rural institution of higher learning and pursuing undergraduate studies. Experiences of suicide gesticulations may be rich and unique across the undergraduate population compared to postgraduate adult students who probably, overtime developed, mechanisms of resilience against the suicide concern at hand.

e. Sample size

A total of 10 students informed the specific subject matter of the study and were interested in enquiring about their perspectives on suicide dynamics dreadfully affecting their university.

f. Sampling procedure and techniques

The study followed a non-probability sampling procedure, specifically a purposive sampling technique. A non-probability sampling chooses its participants based on a non-random selection benchmark whereas, a purposive technique under the banner of non-probability sampling itself, explains the sampling method of choosing participants based on the researcher's discretion (Vadakedath & Kandi, 2023). Moreover, this technique warranted these scholars to investigate and study students' viewpoints on suicide predisposing dynamics in their original and intended setting. Suitably for this move, the authors, Kang'ethe and Mpateni (2023) connote purposive technique as that which considers well-informed or experienced participants to offer responses to the study.

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g. Data collection process

The sample collection process was cross-sectional because the study collected its data in a short period

h. Methods

Data collection methods in research are crucially recognised as imperative instruments to collect and synthesise fervent and fructiferous information that fulfils the intention of research endeavour (Paradis et al., 2016). Out of the key five types of collection methods, the study conducted in-depth interviews to deduce pressing suicide risk factors among students in the university.

i. Data analysis

The researchers employed a content thematic analysis to scrutinise and crumble voluminous crude data to categorise and code it into themes. The themes identified recurring patterns that assisted the researchers to synthesise meaningful insights from intricate data findings, thereby allowing scholars to explore the magnitude and diversity of their perspectives (Humble & Mozelius, 2022).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Research ethical considerations define a set of moral values and principles guiding the study process, where scholars must diligently consider the rights and interests of their participants, audience, academic communities and society at large (Mirza et al., 2023). Legal requirements, on the other hand, involve compliance with the codes and other legislative ethical obligations stipulated, for example, by the POPIA Code of Conduct for Research. The research project from which this paper is derived was issued the ethical clearance in October 2023 with the reference number (16/10/2023). This paper contemplated the following ethical considerations and legal requirements:

a. Voluntary participation and autonomy

Participants exercised their free will to participate in the study, meaning they were not coerced to be subject informants. Autonomously, the participants exercised their right not to share or give responses where they felt uncomfortable. Informed consent was sought from participants.

b. Avoidance of further psychological or emotional harm

The researchers paid attention to avoid causing further psychological or emotional harm and avoided questions that could lead to some emotional triggers when dealing with the study participants. Cogently in the extant literature, it is noted as the duty of researchers to practice and implement specific protections to reduce participants' discomfort and harm to align with the principle of beneficence when studying sensitive subjects from human beings (Barrow et al., 2022).

c. Non-violation of beneficence

Pseudonyms hid the participants' real names to ensure and maintain anonymity. The study bound itself to treat participants' sensitive information privately and confidentially.

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d. Commitment to collecting and reporting accurate findings

These scholars committed to upholding ethical competence to collect and present accurate findings relevant to the subject matter. The success of this ethical aspect of the study is defined by the critical concentration on factors such as information clarity, organisation, completeness, accuracy and conciseness when communicating the findings to the reader of the research paper (Johnson et al., 2020).

STUDY FINDINGS

This part of the paper presents the study's emergent findings concerning students' perspectives on suicide dynamics in a selected university in South Africa. It is presented in two parts, one for participant demographics and one for discussion of the findings

Table 1: The demographic profile of the research participants

Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Specific suicide predisposing factor	Level of study in the university
Claudine	18	Female	Acute academic pressure	1
Boicy	23	Male	Family neglect	4
Pinky	21	Female	Forced prostitution	2
Oscar	27	Male	Sexuality crisis	6
Nelly	24	Female	Substance abuse	4
Catherine	20	Female	Family neglect	
Dave	21	Male	Substance abuse	2
Nadia	22	Female	Substance abuse	3
Finn	30	Male	Acute academic pressure	6
Paul	21	Male	Sexuality crisis	2

a. Participants' age cohorts

The participants' ages ranged between 18 and 30 years, a normal demographic age cohort for students enrolled in South African institutions of higher learning.

b. Gender

The aspect of gender was evenly balanced to ensure gender objectivity for the study's validity. Simultaneously, the study sought to discover which factor is prominently apparent, *mutatis mutandis,* the two gender demographics.

c. Specific suicide predisposing factor

The special attention to specific suicide predisposing factors is utilised as a variable to answer the research question. In other words, specific suicide predisposing factors are the evident extraneous reasons behind student suicide behaviours.

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d. Level of study in the university

The study inquired about dynamics related to student suicidality across all undergraduate course levels offered by the selected university, including medical students who reach up to the 7th level to complete their studies. This is to widen the diversity and data validity.

Table 2: The emergent themes

Number	Thematic findings
1.	Student experiences of acute academic pressures
2.	Parental or family neglect
3.	Stigma and discrimination based on sexual identity inclinations
4.	Perilous self-harm due to drug or substance abuse
5.	Suicidal behaviours perpetuated by the digital divide

Student experiences of acute academic pressure

The study found that students in institutions of higher learning experienced acute academic pressures, with some first years revealing that the workloads are unbearable when compared with that of compared to high school work. On the other flip of the coin, the exiting classes, lamented increasing modules as they progressed with school and unjust practicum treatment by colleagues. The following sentiments vouched for the theme:

The pressure to succeed in all 12 modules this semester is unbearable. I see my straight-A record from high school going down the drain; I would rather return home in a coffin than an academic transcript full of failed modules. (**Finn**)

On top of having to attend late classes and submitting many assignments in one day, I have to show up for practicums to those cruel supervisors… final year is really…. (**Claudine**)

The mounting acute academic pressures emanating from frustrations related to their studies make some students consider and harbour suicidal behaviours as a way to escape the unbearable pressures.

Parental or family neglect

The study established that a majority of the participants suffered immense parental or family neglect, which reflected in multifarious ways from participant to participant. This resulted in their lack of compassionate support and motivation to continue living life. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), is not enough to cater for all their needs as university students. Refusal of additional financial support by their families makes them feel unwanted and think perhaps they will be better off dead. The following sentiments support the finding:

It is no bombshell to me that my family cares very little about my financial needs as a student, because even at home, I'm barely taken care of, just like my siblings. They cry once and receive everything… my parents never even think of checking up on me with plastics like others do for their children. I doubt whether they love me. (**Catherine**)

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Ever since I enrolled and started in university, I have never received a penny back from home, yet, my druggie brothers, are given huge allowances and bought expensive clothes. Am I not deserving of support in equal measures as them? It is indeed a very painful treatment. (**Boicy**)
…because I was only left to fend for myself as if I were orphaned, my neighbour, tired of my daily begging for transport to school, forced me to join his brothel to start earning, as I attend classes. (**Nelly**)
The verbatims above herald socio-economic desperations from parental or family neglect that made students prone to risky and sacrilegious means of living with the environment motivating suicidal ideations and behaviours.

Stigma and discrimination based on sexual identity inclinations
Some participants in the research study attested to having experienced inhumane treatment because of their gender affiliations with LGBTQIA+ community. Student participants felt as if the institution was not LGBTQIA+ friendly at all. The subsequent verbal connotations confirm the above finding:
The residence officer, because of my affiliations with LGBTQIA+, allocated me a double room to live by myself because I'm considered a curse to mix with others. The most pernicious thing to me is the knowledge that my residence mates refer to my room as Sodom and Gomorrah. This is very stigmatising and sometime ago, my resmates once incited that I must be stoned to death (**Paul**)
One other day, I got harassed by students from the Christian Organisation in my room. They came to exorcise the demons they believed I possessed as a gay person. Imagine an entire whole night prayer! I cannot forget the day they came with their pastor to baptise me of the big sin! (**Oscar**)
Indeed, such verbatim statements prove beyond doubt that the university is LGBTQIA+ unfriendly, judging by undue stigma and discriminatory acts intended for persons with different sexual preferences outside the normative heterosexual representation.

Perilous self-harm due to drug or substance abuse
Research findings reflected a high predisposition to perilous self-harm by students when intoxicated with substances or drugs. Participants owned that, for them to be more gallant to harm themselves, they needed to get intoxicated first and assented to be less brave when they are in a sober state of the mind. The following verbal sentiments assert this finding:
*When I'm drunk and alone, I tend to be unimaginably gallant, cutting my wrist veins, for which I'm scared of the pain when in a normal state of mind. … My friend caught me with a cord ready to hang myself in the room. (***Nadia**)
*I overdosed some substances because I wished to wake up dead…. This life God gave me is putting me in perpetual pain and therefore I do not find it worth living. (***Dave**)
There had been a time during my amateur prostitution when…. judgments from everyone. That drove met to consider ending my life! I knew that they would never understand the situation at home… I drank and took substances and stood on the national road for a car on the fast lane to knock me dead. (**Pinky**)
Undoubtedly, an environment of substance abuse and drug overdose forms a platform to easily commit suicide.

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Suicidal behaviours perpetuated by the digital divide experienced by students in universities

This study revealed incidents of suicidal behaviours due to difficulties in understanding the use of computers. The following statements support the findings.

My computer literacy class at level one was my first experience with a computer. We never had them in the village schools. I was very scared of it, and the class laughed and mocked me… it took me a long time to understand how to use a computer and deliver typed assignments. The frustration motivated me to consider ending my life. (**Finn**)

*COVID-19 caused me immense suffering. Amid everything, I had to endure the grief over the loss of my parents, who would have supported me when they demanded we have laptops at school for blended learning. For some time, I thought of following them to the next life***.** (**Claudine**)

*Being a needy student who could not have a smartphone or a laptop during COVID-19 was a great pain because my entire NSFAS allowance had to take care of my sick grandparent…as a result, I'm 2 classes behind and the talk of the village… (***Nelly***)*

Indeed, student experiences of a lack of requisite infrastructure such as a computer and a smart phone to advance studies during the COVID-19 era led students of low digital divide and socio-economic status to experience circumstances that subject them to immense suffering that propels them to consider killing themselves to escape mockeries and mean behaviours directed to their situations by others.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This research reflected that the participants' age cohorts in the institution ranged between 18 and 30 years. According to Swart and Mafunda (2020), the average age of first year students in South Africa lies between 18 and 24 meaning, from 18 years and above it is appropriate to find students enrolled in South African institutions of higher learning. In terms of gender participants identified themselves as either male or female. Popularly in the past, risky behaviours such as engagements in alcohol, substance abuse and more lethal life-threatening tantrums were associated with males more than females, but this research contrarily discovered the opposite. Dominantly across literature it is siloed that women and girls notably supersede and drink or smoke more than men and boys and begin doing so at very younger ages (Dada et al., 2018; Fonseca et al., 2021; Greenfield et al., 2010). A quiver- causing aspect illuminated by Lange et al. (2022) is the fact that alcohol use is a significant risk factor of suicidal behaviour also with the most heightened risk effect predominantly among women. Specific suicide predisposing factors represented extraneous variables that prone students to suicidal behaviour in the university. Student participants in the study were between the first and fourth levels at most except for the level six medical student. In South Africa, universities prefer that their students graduate at honours level after four years, an insight that most courses offering beyond fifth year in the country are postgraduate courses except for medical streams which graduate students after the seventh year (Archer, 2017).

The study disclosed experiences of acute academic pressure by students as a prominent factor that motivates some students to suicidal behaviours and suicidal ideations. According to Okechukwu *et* al. (2022), chronic academic stress and pressure are dire triggers of suicidality among students in tertiary institutions of education. These authors put forth predisposing factors such as concerns

related to completing tertiary education, destitution, and feelings of insecurity as motive forces that subject students to risky suicidal behaviours. On the other flipside of the coin, under Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs, student interns report unfair, disrespectful, and unprofessional treatment by supervisors that includes undermining and making them feel less of professionals deserving of dignity to participate at work. To these prospective professionals, such acts trigger feelings of uselessness and valuelessness that prompt them to become suicidal (Wakefield & Schmitz, 2016) . King et al. (2021) asseverate the pivotal significance for supervisors to treat students at workplaces with utmost dignity proven to be central to their well-being and learning process. Crucially, Lawlis et al. (2024) add that successful practicums for students require stakeholder collaborations to ensure equitable and relevant practicum experiences, especially for disabled students who already experience poor attitudes of incapabilities from society.

This research study discovered that there is a dearth of parental or family support once students reach tertiary education, with those negatively impacting their academic livelihood and holistic health. Across various studies, monetary struggles suffered by students have received notable recognition as a suicide background factor influencing suicidality. For this fact, research studies by Kaggwa et al. (2022), Kabir et al. (2024) and Bøe et al. (2021) documented financial stresses and anxieties among factors associated with suicidal behaviours among students in tertiary institutions of education. Such a finding warrants the need and significance for parents and families to commit to supporting their progenies or relatives enrolled in institutions of higher learning to motivate them to succeed. Undisputably, there is a significant link between pecuniary parental support and the motivations for students to study effectively (Moneva et al., 2020). Additionally, Mntambo et al. (2021), propound that parental support must be holistic enough, not to cover monetary needs alone, but also cover the provision of emotional and physical availability for early identification and attendance of psychological or mental health-related strains. In tandem with the previous author, Zuma (2020) contends that parental support is key to encouraging academic self-efficacy and promoting perseverance in suffering students while further capacitating them with coping resilience during onerous times of strain from psychological, mental, and social challenges. During difficult times, parental involvement is proven to improve student coping adjustment to those who suffer difficulties with social adjustments and withdrawal issues, signifying the depth of need for parental availability beyond financial support (Benito-Gomez et al., 2022).

The study reflected a prevalence of incidents of perilous self-harm by students on account of drug or alcohol abuse, making them highly susceptible to death. In support of this finding, Honkala et al. (2016) classified a total of 53 injuries experienced by students in their study under deliberate self-harm and drunken driving, further asserting conceivably that it could be a coping mechanism for students to manage emotional distress and release tensions. Worldwide, alcohol and drug abuse are recognised by Gasa et al. (2022) as a public health issue, accounting for about 5,9% of deaths annually among the youths. According to previous researchers, alcohol consumption is the key risky behavioural factor among students strongly related to deleterious health outcomes and mental disorders such as suicidal behaviours, self-harm, and aggressiveness. Moreover, Miziara and

Miziara (2023) postulate the fact that psychoactive substances increase impulsiveness while decreasing inhibitions, making one more likely to be brave to act on their suicidal ideas and tendencies. On the other hand, it is critical to note that, binge drinking and drug abuse are not solely predisposing factors that aid one with the braveness to act on suicidal ideations but dually indicators of the presence of suicidal behaviourism in an individual. The most notable recreational drugs and substances known to have a deleterious impact affecting students suffering suicidal behaviours inter alia include alcohol, cannabis, methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin, and nicotine, while ketamine and psilocybin potentially confer a protective effect rather than exposure to harm (Bala & Kang'ethe, 2020).

Suicidal behaviours perpetuated by an environment where students lacked infrastructure such as a laptop or a smartphone to use in remote learning has been documented by a number of scholars such as Muhuro and Kangethe (2021). Reasons substantiating this finding are also apparent in a study by Hlatshwayo (2022) reflecting that students, and even lecturers in South Africa, struggled and found themselves in immense states of helplessness when teaching and learning had to be facilitated through internet-based systems. The previous author goes on to make it explicit that this is the case in South Africa because the country's information and communication technology infrastructure is inaccessible to poor and working-class households. As daunting and unintended as the consequences of the digital revolution are, they impose repercussive, noteworthy, and pervasive social and information deficits that COVID-19 intensified and triggered suicide among vulnerable students (Cheshmehzangi et al., 2022). These authors further posit that the COVID-19 pandemic, in connection with digital barriers, was a predisposing component to a wide array of mental health problems, not just suicidal behaviours alone, but also anxiety, depression, and negative perceptions about student livelihood. Jones et al. (2023) highlight a very significant view that major societal disruptions that came with the pandemic shifted not just blended learning, thereby leaving situations that rapidly destabilized job and financial securities. Significant life events such as institutional graduation ceremonies were cancelled for technically poor universities, while some were held in blended platforms which allowed one person to witness the ceremony. Without doubt, such experiences evoked and catalysed mental outbursts, with suicidal behaviours not being an exception for some students due to exclusions related to digital inequalities (Mekonen et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

There is still a need for universities to focus their attention on mental health and clinical interventions, more especially those concerned with addressing suicidal behaviours. Universities need strong units for psychotherapy and psychosocial empowerment for students. Such psychotherapeutic units must have strong social workers and psychologists to detect students' vulnerabilities holistically, especially the detection of early signs of suicidal habits and ideation. Moreover, since students' challenges and experiences revolve and change with time, it is also important that current responses to suicide focus more on socio-digital barriers and gaps created by digital revolution that demands advanced skills and resources from students, subjecting them somehow to mental health strains or disturbances that put their lives at risk.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted over a short period in one South African university and collected its data from a small number of samples. This means there still has to be a longitudinal study covering several tertiary institutions of education with a huge number of samples, where other student perspectives on suicide may be broad and data-rich enough to reveal other extraneous predisposing factors that this study could not uncover.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES

Adequate parental psychosocial support

Parents must offer compassionate and adequate psychosocial support to their children at universities. This gives them a sense of motivation and value for their efforts when well cared for.

One student- one laptop initiatives

Institutions of higher learning need to make the One -Student-One Laptop initiatives effective to ensure that each student enrolled owns one. This will further aid them in escaping victimisation by digital evolution. Given the mental aftereffects of post-COVID-19, such initiatives will also premise institutions of higher education to surge into digital and interminable infrastructural interventions that will operate 24 hours a day. This includes universities having requisite clinical infrastructure, advanced enough to offer variegated psychiatric services to aid mental health and other comorbid challenges

Suicide empathic society

Persons with suicidal behaviour tend to be notionally associated with attention-seeking tendencies. For this reason, their grievances are usually trivially attended, subjecting them to intensified psychological compulsions.

LGBTQIA+ destigmatisation campaigns

Institutions of higher education are supposed to dynamically establish campaigns to destigmatise discrimination intended towards students affiliating with the LGBTQIA+ community. Such campaigns may include initiatives ensuring a welcoming special gender normative environment within the institutions from students to institutional staff.

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