

Suicidality in Prison: Effect of Religiosity on Suicidal Ideation at Agodi Prison in Ibadan, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT : Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in jail and prison, worldwide. It accounts for more than fifty percent of all deaths within correctional institutions. The average suicide rate in prisons globally falls between 24-89 per 100,000 inmates. But despite this stark reality, research examining its precursors such as suicidal ideation and attempt among this vulnerable population remains limited, especially in the developing nations. To fill this gap, this study examined the effect of religiosity on suicidal ideation among inmates at Agodi prison in Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design with a quantitative approach. The population of study included all the inmates incarcerated at Agodi Correctional Center in Nigeria at the time of data collection, which was about 1,500, from where a sample size of 150 was drawn. The correctional center was chosen based on purposive sampling considering accessibility, population size, and research team cooperation.

The quantitative information collected was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.

RESULTS : *Religiosity is associated with less suicidal ideation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most interesting and debated subjects, which is often seen as a sensitive topic and considered a taboo, is suicide. It is a phenomenon that occurs all over the world and affects people of all ages, genders, cultures, and backgrounds (Turecki & Brent, 2016). Unlike other ways people die, suicide is the only method where someone intentionally tries to end their life rather than avoid it (dos Santos et al., 2021). It is estimated that about 727,000 people around the world take their own lives every year, making suicide one of the top causes of death globally. Statistics show that about 1 in every 100 deaths worldwide is due to suicide. Every year, more people die by suicide than from HIV, malaria, breast cancer, war, and homicide (WHO, 2021). Suicide and its concomitant effects are not unique to high-income nations of the world, the low-and middle-income nations of the world also grapple with it. Indeed, majority of suicides worldwide, i.e., about 73% occur in low- and middle-income countries (WHO, 2025).

Suicide in prisons is worse and more troubling than the situation in the communities (Fazel, Ramesh & Hawton, 2017; Goyes, 2024). Studies indicate that contact with the criminal justice system sharply raises the risk of suicidal behavior (King et al., 2015; Webb et al., 2011). In fact, suicide has been recognized as the foremost cause of death among inmates (Goyes, 2024; Konrad et al., 2007; Rabe, 2012), accounting for more than fifty percent of all deaths within these institutions (Fazel & Baillargeon, 2011). Averagely, suicide rate in prisons globally falls between 24-89 per 100,000 inmates. The situation is worse for female than male. Female inmates are more likely i.e., 10.4 – 32.4, to take their lives by suicide than the male inmates, which is about 1.9-6.0 (Mundt et al., 2024).

Such high rates of suicide contradict the basic goal of correctional facilities, which, as noted by Bottoms (1999) and DiIulio (1987), are to ensure the safety and security of inmates. The occurrence and the rate of suicidality in prison simply imply a failure to safeguard the health and safety of inmates (Liebling et al., 2005), which may potentially hinder rehabilitation efforts and make prison environment more stressful and unsafe for both inmates and staff. This has been a great concern not only for the prison administrators and policy makers, but also for the international organizations, making suicide prevention in prison an international priority by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021).

However, despite the alarming rates of suicide within prisons, research examining the precursors of suicidal behavior, such as ideation and attempts among this vulnerable population, remains limited (Stoliker et al., 2023). Furthermore, extensive research and preventative strategies developed by scholars and policymakers over the past decades have not yielded significant reductions in suicide rates (Franklin et al., 2017; Klonsky,

May, & Saffer, 2016). This shortfall can be attributed, in part, to an inadequate or limited knowledge of precursors of suicide.

All ideation theories of suicide, for example, Interpersonal Theory of Suicide, Integrated Motivational-Volitional Model, Fluid Vulnerability Theory, and Three-Step Theory, all emphasize the significance of suicidal ideation as a precursor to suicidal behavior (O'Connor & Kirtley, 2018). It is important to note that not all instances of suicidal ideation result in suicide. Nevertheless, research indicates that suicidal ideation is one of the most robust predictors of both suicide attempts (Favril et al., 2022) and completions (Zhong et al., 2021), in prison. Hence, it is imperative to improve our understanding of suicidal ideation among this vulnerable population to help in the development of effective suicide preventive strategies in correctional settings (Stoliker et al., 2023).

It is based on the aforementioned points, that is, prevalence of suicide and its dire implications in prisons (Fazel et al., 2017; Goyes, 2024; Liebling et al., 2005; Rabe, 2012), paucity of academic work on suicidal ideation (Stoliker et al., 2023), and the relevance of knowledge of suicidal ideation viz-a-viz the prevention of suicide in prison (Favril et al., 2022; Zhong et al., 2021), that the current study was conceived. Recent findings from the World Health Organization indicate that a significant proportion of global suicides, approximately 73%, occur within low- and middle-income countries (WHO, 2025). In stark contrast, only around 6% of the studies addressing this critical issue originate from low-income nations (Bantjes et al., 2016). This discrepancy highlights a bias in our understanding of global suicidality, predominantly informed by research from wealthier nations, where only an estimated 27% of global suicides are reported. Consequently, the present study seeks to augment the limited body of research from the low-income nations by examining suicidal ideation - a precursor to suicidal behavior - among inmates at the Agodi Correctional Facility in Nigeria. Furthermore, it aims to explore the role of religiosity in mitigating suicidal ideation within this population.

Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (IPTS)

According to IPTS, painful experiences, that is, physical or emotional pain, and social alienation significantly contribute to suicidal ideation (Fässberg et al., 2012; Turecki & Brent, 2016; Wilson et al., 2013). The theory posits that what causes suicidal ideation is the combination of painful experience (Wilson et al., 2013) thwarted belongingness (TB), perceived burdensomeness (PB) (Joiner, 2005; Van Orden et al., 2010), and hopelessness about the changeability of the situation (Chu et al., 2018). In other words, when an individual is in pain, and his/her need to belong is not met, and s/he sees herself/himself/ as a burden to others and then thinks that there is no hope about the changeability of the situation, it leads to suicidal thought.

IPTS is premised on the fundamental need of humans to belong and when this need is not fulfilled, i.e., thwarted, then it could lead to various negative health outcomes (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014), which include suicidal ideation and attempts (Fässberg et al., 2012; Turecki & Brent, 2016). The proportion of thwarted belongingness, among others, include loneliness (i.e., fewer friends, broken family, social withdrawal) and absence of reciprocal care (Van Orden et al., 2010).

Perceived Burdensomeness also depicts an aspect of social alienation. It is a situation whereby an individual erroneously assumes that s/he is a liability or a burden on family, friends, and/or society. More specifically, the false assumption that his or her death is more valuable to others than his or her life. According to IPTS, those who contemplate, attempt, and ultimately die by suicide erroneously convert their thoughts of self-hatred into feelings of unimportance (Van Orden et al., 2010).

Hopelessness is an important factor that transforms passive suicidal ideation into active desire and intent. According to IPTS, hopelessness about the changeability of both thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness heightens suicide risk. When individuals believe that their feelings of burdensomeness and alienation are permanent and will never improve, their desire to die intensifies (Chu et al., 2018).

Inmates in correctional facilities experience alienation (Jarzębińska 2020), and go through all forms of pains (Rocheleau, 2013). From the moment s/he is imprisoned, s/he is disconnected from the source of many excitements and, more importantly, from the culture and society in which s/he has functioned so far. From that moment, such a person must obey the administrative decision which compels him or her to stay with a group of inmates, who sometimes are vastly different from themselves, both in terms of their behavior and personality. This facilitates the process of becoming a part of the informal life of a prison. Furthermore, the structure of contact between the inmates and their relatives and friends outside the correctional facilities also changes. The form, time and frequency of such contacts are being regulated, which can lead to being disconnected from reality (Jarzębińska 2020).

Nevertheless, not all inmates in correctional facilities that experienced alienation and unmet need for meaningful, reciprocal relationship and/or have the feeling of burdensomeness engage in suicidal desire. The question then is what inhibits some incarcerated offenders from engaging in suicidal ideation while others do despite being in the same environment and experiencing same social alienation?

One thing that is readily available and accessible to all inmates in prison, which may serve as a coping mechanism is religion (Agbakwuru, & Awujo, 2016; Koenig, 2009; Olson et al., 2012). Religion is a major

means whereby people deal with and manage their stress (Koenig, 2009). Religion is what the inmates use in sustaining themselves during incarceration. The dependence on religion is embedded in the feelings of inner peace, happiness, connectedness and optimism about the future (Agbakwuru, & Awujo, 2016; Jang et al., 2018).

Suicidality and Religion

One of the earliest scholars to examine the influence of religion on suicide in society is Durkheim. He suggested that a strong spiritual commitment can contribute to better emotional health because it offers a sense of meaning and structure in life. He pointed out that Catholics tended to have lower suicide rates than Protestants and argued that this difference might be due to Catholic teachings which clearly forbid suicide, whereas Protestant beliefs allow for more personal interpretation and a wider range of beliefs (Durkheim 1951). Ever since the Durkheim era, more scholars have carried out empirical studies on the role of religion viz-a-viz suicidality (Carli et al., 2014; Dervic et al., 2004; Kralovec et al., 2012; Rushing et al., 2013; Spencer et al., 2012; Young et al., 2011), without reaching a consensus per the role of religion on suicidality. On one hand, some scholars see religion as a protective agent against suicidality, and in contrast, others consider it a risk factor.

Studies that support religion as a protective agent against suicidality posit that religion proffers positive coping methods by providing spiritual support and spiritual connectedness to its followers and by redefining stressors (Olson et al., 2012). In other words, factors raised by the IPTS as causes of suicidal ideation, i.e., Thwarted Belongingness (TB), Perceived Burdensomeness (PB), and Hopelessness, are eliminated by religion. Cheng et al. (2000) concluded that religion provides individuals with the opportunities to develop a network that extends beyond the family into the congregation that serves as a protective factor against suicide. Other studies found that religion provides individuals with a sense of meaning and purpose in life and instills virtuous traits such as compassion, forgiveness and gratitude, which are inversely related to negative emotional state, thereby helping to embrace prosocial behavior instead of turning to maladaptive methods of dealing with the pain of imprisonment (Agbakwuru & Awujo, 2016; Jang et al., 2018; Mohr et al., 2006; Schneider & Feltey, 2009).

Furthermore, religion has been shown to be a protective factor against suicidality through moral and religious objection to suicidality (Lizardi et al., 2008; Olson et al., 2012; Osafo et al., 2013). In other words, religion may buffer suicidality through the shaping of a belief regarding who has the right to end life - which is God; and by giving hope to the hopeless (Gearing & Lizardi, 2009).

Conversely, other scholars see religion as a risk factor. Findings from Zhao et al. (2012) suggested that religion does not play a protective role; rather, it is the society and culture that impact an individual. In their view, societal and cultural factors are essential in determining how individuals perceive and react to suicide. Elements of culture, including philosophical and ideological traits, can significantly impact suicidal tendencies, and a person's belief system, particularly the dominant ideology promoted by the prevailing culture, may affect both mental health issues and suicidal behavior. Moving the argument further down, some scholars have even posited that religion elevates suicidality through negative religious coping (Exline, Yali, & Sanderson, 2000; Rosmarin et al., 2013; Stratta et al., 2012). Negative religious coping involves feelings of being abandoned or punished by God or having the feeling of committing an unforgivable sin, which could all lead to suicidality in response to prolonged stress without relief. In other words, negative coping is a maladaptive way of putting all blames on God and feeling abandoned by Him during problems and challenges of life (Rosmarin et al., 2013). Other scholars in this line of argument see religion as playing an incentive role for suicidality by giving hope of something better after death (Huguelet et al., 2007).

Other scholars that see no proof of religion playing any positive role in reducing suicidality, to name a few, include Eytan (2011), Ranuzi et al. (2020), and Kerley, Allison & Graham (2006). Specifically, Ranuzi et al. (2020) observed that religion plays no role in suicidality in prison; rather, variables such as gender (that is, being female), not having a partner, working within the penitentiary, and using controlled medications were the variables that had some influence on suicidality amongst the inmates in their study.

Thus, there are inconsistencies in literature in terms of the role of religion on suicidality. In dealing with these inconsistencies, the current study looked at religiosity, which is considered a dimension or an aspect of religion, and how it affects suicidal ideation in prison. And for the purpose of this study, religiosity was viewed from a sociological point of view, i.e., membership, attendance, belief acceptance, doctrinal knowledge, and living the faith (Cardwell, 1980). And the study was carried out amongst Agodi Correctional Facility inmates in Ibadan, Nigeria.

Overview of Nigerian Correctional Service – Agodi Prison

The Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS) falls under the exclusive legislative powers of the Nigerian Federal Government. This simply means that only the federal government could build and run a prison in Nigeria, unlike the situation in Europe and North America, where all sectors of government (local, state, and federal) and even private enterprise could build and run jails and prisons. Despite being under the exclusive legislative powers of the Nigerian Federal Government, Nigeria Correctional Service remains the least funded

and the most neglected institution in the Nigerian Criminal Justice System (Joshua et al., 2014; Ojukwu & Briggs, 2005).

The general perception of the Nigerian prisons is that the correctional facilities are overcrowded, the environment in which the staff works, and the inmates are housed are appalling, resources are inadequate, and justice system is slow (Onyiuke San, 2024). Most of the prisons in Nigeria are outdated; they were constructed during the colonial period when Nigeria's population was still less than 45 million merely to serve the interests of the colonial administration for labor and public works. And even after Nigeria's population has skyrocketed and its prison population exploded, with a great need for expansion and development of the facilities, the Nigerian prison facilities remain unchanged; only a handful of new prisons have been built, which are still not enough to accommodate the inmates' population (Joshua et al., 2014).

Approximately, there are about 81,406 inmates currently in 256 correctional facilities in Nigeria, which translates to an incarceration rate of about 35 per 100,000 based on July 2024 Nigeria population of 229,521,409 million (Galal, 2025). About 79,463 (98%) of the inmates are males, and 1,943 (2%) are females. Approximately, 34% of the Nigerian prison population are convicted inmates (Convicts), while 66% are Awaiting Trial Inmates (NCoS, 2025). Although Nigeria has a low incarceration rate when compared to other high-income nations of the world, however, its prison population is still considered overcrowded due to a lack of enough facilities to accommodate the inmates (Joshua et al., 2014). The number of prisoners in Nigerian prisons is growing quickly each day, but the facilities are not being expanded to handle the large number of people being held in custody. This means that more than three prisoners are often placed in spaces designed for just one (Onyiuke San, 2024). The system, which was originally designed for about 50,153 inmates, now houses over 80,000 inmates, operating at approximately 136.7% capacity, leading to severe overcrowding (World Prison Brief, 2025).

In a nutshell, the correctional facilities in Nigeria are in a state of disrepair (Ayade, 2010); they are overcrowded, burdened by inadequate facilities to properly keep their inmates secure and safe. (Agbakwuru & Awujo, 2016; Joshua et al., 2014). As a result, the inmates have become more vulnerable to psychological and social stress, often leading to issues associated with suicidality. (Awopetu, 2014).

The situation is not different at Agodi correctional facility in Ibadan, where the current study was carried out. Agodi Correctional Center, which is a key part of the Nigeria Correctional Service, was built by the colonial government in 1894 (Ojukwu & Agu, 2018). The facility functions as a medium to maximum security prison and was initially built to hold 390 inmates. Currently, it houses more than 1,400 to 1,500 inmates. Over 90% of the inmates are male, while less than 10% are female. Like the Nigeria Correctional Services as a whole, the Agodi Correctional Center has a much higher number of inmates who are awaiting trial compared to those who have been convicted. There are about 932 people awaiting trial and only 133 convicted individuals. Agodi Correctional Center is a miniature of Nigerian Correctional Services, which the socioeconomic and political situation in Nigeria has significantly hampered its functions within the justice system, thereby affecting practices such as inmate welfare and rehabilitation. The center faces multiple challenges such as overcrowding, inadequate educational, vocational, recreational, health facilities, and resource gaps (i.e., shortage of food, medicine, and other basic items) (Ojukwu & Agu, 2018).

In conclusion, despite the name changing with the Correctional Service Act of 2019 from Nigerian Prison to Nigerian Correctional Services to provide better treatment and services to the inmates in accordance with the International Minimum Standard for Treatment of Prisoners, the Nigerian Correctional Services as a whole, and Agodi Correctional Center in particular, have failed to fulfill its mandate of improving the correctional service, which reflects in its rehabilitation, reformation, and reintegration of the inmates (Onyiuke San, 2024).

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design with a quantitative approach. This design was considered appropriate because it allowed for the gathering, analysis, and interpretation of data from a sample of inmates in a methodical way to determine the contribution of religiosity in suicidal ideation. The use of this design agrees with the objective of examining existing relationships among variables without manipulation.

Population of the Study

The population of the study included all the inmates incarcerated at Agodi Correctional Center in Nigeria at the time of data collection. The correctional center was chosen based on purposive sampling considering accessibility, population size, and research team cooperation. The inmate population, as per the record of the correctional center, was approximately 1500.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size consisted of a total of 150 inmates, selected by the purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique was used for the sake of selecting respondents who were literate enough to respond to the items on the questionnaire and were mentally stable and willing to participate. The sample size

was determined with reference to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table of calculating sample size from a known population. The participation was voluntary and on the grounds of informed consent.

Research Instruments

The study utilized a structured questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The instrument consisted of four sections:

Section A: Demographic Data – age, gender, length of stay in prison, religious affiliation, first-time offender status, etc.

Section B: Religiosity Scale – measured the level of religious commitment and participation (adapted from the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10) developed by Worthington et al., 2003). Responses were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always).

Section C: Suicidal Ideation Scale – measured thoughts, plans, and control regarding suicide over the past month (adapted from the Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation, Beck et al., 1979).

Validity of the Instruments

The opinions of two psychologists and a correctional mental health professional were obtained to attain content and face validity of the instruments. Their suggestions were utilized to refine the questionnaire items to ensure that they were contextually applicable and suitable for prisoners.

Reliability of the Instruments

It was pilot tested on 20 inmates in a different correctional center not involved in the study. Using Cronbach's Alpha, the reliability coefficients obtained were as follows: Religiosity Scale (RCI-10): $\alpha = 0.87$ and Suicidal Ideation Scale: $\alpha = 0.82$. The figures indicate high internal consistency and reliability of the instrument.

Method of Data Collection

Permission was obtained from the Nigeria Correctional Service and ethical clearance was attained. The questionnaires were filled out by the respondents face-to-face by the researcher and the research assistants who were trained, with the prison officers' assistance. The two-week data collection activity was conducted. Confidentiality of their responses was guaranteed to the respondents, and voluntary participation only. Method of Data Analysis

The quantitative information collected was coded and computed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Two stages of analysis were conducted:

Descriptive statistics (frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviations) were used to examine the demographic variables and item-level responses.

Inferential statistics were used employing Simple Linear Regression Analysis for testing the hypothesis.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The analysis of data was done in two phases. The first phase dealt with the analysis of the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while the second phase dealt with the test hypothesis. The data gathered from 150 respondents were therefore analyzed below

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The demographic characteristics considered in this study are gender, prison status, length of stay and frequency in prison, and religion of the respondents. The following are the frequency distribution tables.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of respondents by Length of Stay in Prison

Length of stay	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 Month	20	13.3
1-6 months	40	26.7
7-12 months	35	23.3
13-24 months	30	20.0
More than 2 years	25	16.7
Gender		
Male	115	63.3
Female	35	36.7
First time in Prison		
Yes	90	60.0
No	60	40.0
Number of Previous Times in Prison		
2 – 5 times before	25	41.7
Once before	20	33.3
6-9 times before	10	16.7
10 or more times before	5	8.3
Current Status in Prison		
Sentenced	80	53.3
Remand	45	30.0
Convicted but not yet Sentenced	25	16.7
Religion		
Christian	65	43.3
Muslim	60	40.0
No Religion	15	10.0
Other Religion	10	6.7
Ability to Practice Religion in Prison		
Yes	120	80.0
No	20	13.3
Don't Know/ Don't want to	10	16.7
Total	150	100.0

The table above shows the demographic information of the respondents, distributed by length of stay, gender, first time in prison, number of previous times in prison, and status in prison. From the table, majority of the respondents (40) reported to have been in prison for one to six months.

Based on their gender, majority of the respondents are men at 63.33%, while females make up a minority proportion at 36.67%. The gender disparity is in line with well-documented gendered trends of imprisonment across the world and Nigeria, where it is not rare that male offenders outnumber their female counterparts in the penitentiary system. As of 2022, of the total world prison population of about 10.8 mil inmates, 93.6% are male and 6.4% female (UNODC, 2024). Many studies and imprisonment records worldwide have consistently indicated a higher rate of male incarceration, usually attributed to differences in femininity and masculinity by criminality, roles, exposure to dangerous surroundings, and involvement in certain types of crimes, particularly violent and property crimes. Besides, the criminal justice system, especially In Nigeria, has traditionally processed more males through arrest, prosecution, and sentencing procedures, leading to their surplus existence in prisons. The proportionately smaller female prisoner percentage is also accounted for based on differential criminal profiles, wherein females are likely to commit less violent crimes and at times are even qualified for alternative sentencing.

The table further reveals that many of the respondents, that is, 90 respondents (60%) reported they were prison newcomers, whereas 40% reported having had prior imprisonment. This division illustrates that although there is a large number of inmates having their first encounter with imprisonment, there is a significant minority with repeated experiences of prison involvement.

The distribution of respondents by number of previous times in prison revealed that from the 60 of the previous incarcerated respondents, the largest percentage (25 of the respondents) replied that they were imprisoned 2 to 5 times, and 20 respondents, who stated they were imprisoned once. Besides, there were fewer habitu  respondents, and 15 of the respondents had been in prison more than five times, and among them, there was a minority of those who had been in prison 10 or more times.

The distribution of respondents by status in prison indicated that most of the respondents (80) are sentenced prisoners, which is more than half of the total sample. In addition to this, many the respondents (45) are awaiting trial, while a notable but smaller percentage (25 respondents) are convicted but not sentenced.

Majority of the prisoners identified themselves as being either Christians (65 respondents) or Muslims (60 respondents), a trend corresponding to the dominant religious proportions normally recorded in most of African nations, including Nigeria. A comparatively lesser segment of prisoners (15 respondents) reported that they did not believe in any religion, whereas a lesser segment (10 respondents) identified with other religions apart from the two mainstream faiths. The above religious snapshot replicates the dominant mainstream socio-cultural context wherein Christianity and Islam are the sweeping major religious systems with minority members capturing secular or other religious identities within the prison context.

Regarding their ability to practice religion in prison, most of the respondents (80%) reported having the freedom to practice their religion during incarceration, which showed a primarily friendly environment towards religious practice in the correctional center. However, 20 respondents still reported obstacles or restrictions in religious practice, and another 10 respondents declined or were unsure about reporting their religious practice status. This distribution indicates that despite religious accommodation seemingly being mostly in place, there are discernible gaps evident which require consideration, especially to overcome obstacles encountered by some of the inmates and to provide equal access to religious rights to all faith groups across the prison establishment.

Table 2: Measure of Effects of Religiosity on Suicidal Ideation

s/n	ITEMS	Never	Rarely	Always	\bar{x}	S.D.
1	In the past month, how often have you had thoughts about suicide?	10 21.7%	93 42.9%	47 35.5%	2.14	0.745
2	In the past month, how much control have you had over these thoughts?	16 13.8%	35 40.6%	99 45.6%	2.32	0.704
3	In the past month, how close have you come to making a suicide attempt?	46 15.2%	52 42.4%	52 42.4%	2.27	0.710
4	In the past month, how much have thoughts about suicide interfered with your ability to carry out daily activities, such as work, household tasks or social activities?	23 18.9%	30 36.4%	97 44.7%	2.26	0.756
5	In the past month, to what extent have you felt tormented by thoughts about suicide?	35 16.1%	57 40.6%	58 43.3%	2.27	0.723
		Weighted Mean =2.29				

The suicidal thinking among inmates as indicated in the data reveals crucial information regarding the psychological state of inmates within the studied population. Out of the five items that were measured, one can see that while a percentage of inmates experience suicidal thoughts, a greater percentage of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they have such thoughts, indicating moderate suicidal thinking. Specifically, the frequency of suicidal ideas in the past month shows that 42.9% disagreed and 21.7% strongly disagreed, a total of 64.6% who in general did not have suicidal ideas very frequently. However, a large minority (35.5%) agreed to having ideas about suicide, suggesting that suicidal ideation, while not common, are a real concern among prisoners.

A closer look brings out a somewhat different pattern when it comes to control of suicidal ideation. While 45.6% of the subjects agreed they had control over suicidal ideation, and 40.6% of them disagreed, there appears to be a split view among prisoners towards their ability to control suicidal ideation. This finding implies that even among the suicidal ideation population, the majority believe they have the capacity to control such tendencies, possibly reflecting psychological resiliency or coping mechanisms as moderation. Interestingly, closeness to suicide attempts within the previous month was measured with a near equal response, with 42.4% of respondents disagreeing and 42.4% agreeing, indicating that while most prisoners do not get close to suicide attempts, a significant portion do, and specific mental health interventions are warranted.

Also, the impact of suicidal ideation on the daily lives of the inmates and their overall sense of torment further highlights the need for mental health treatment in the correctional system. Approximately 44.7% and 43.3% of the participants agreed that suicidal thoughts disrupt their daily lives and induce torment, while 36.4% and 40.6% disagreed. This indicates that apart from suicidal ideation, there are ensuing effects on the daily lives of the inmates and their mental states. The mean weighted score of 2.29 reflects moderate endorsement of the items assessed and indicates significant psychological distress among prisoners. The low standard deviations for the items further reveal agreement in response. These findings uphold the need for psychosocial intervention, religiosity, and structured mental health therapy in prisons to address suicidal thoughts and ensure psychological health among prisoners.

Test of Hypothesis

Research Question: Does religiosity buffer suicidal ideation in prison?

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression Analysis Summary for Religiosity Predicting Suicidal Ideation Among Prison Inmates

ANOVA	Sum of Square	B	Df	Mean Square	F	p-value	Remarks
Regression	720.34	25.312	1	720.34	24.15	.000	
Residual	3511.21	-.531	148	23.73			
Total	4231.55		149				Sig.

R= .412, R²= .170, Adjusted R²= .164

Table 3 revealed the outcome of the regression analysis which found religiosity to significantly and negatively predict suicidal ideation in prison inmates, $F(1,148) = 24.15$, $p < .001$, accounting for 17% variance ($R^2 = .170$). Religiosity is associated with less suicide ideation. The unstandardized coefficient ($B = -0.531$, $p < .001$) reveals a negative relationship between religiosity and suicide ideation. This means that as religiosity increases among inmates, suicidal thinking significantly decreases.

In confirmation of this assertion, Koenig et al. (2023) emphasized that individuals with more religious involvement will be lower in psychological distress and less suicidal behavior. Protection such as this is commonly attributed to emotional support, meaning, and coping imparted by religious practice. In prison environments, where people are vulnerable to increased stress and mental illness, religiosity is a vital psychological resource. In a study done by Arinze et al. (2022) in a Nigerian prison environment, it was found that prisoners who observed religion more regularly exhibited far lower levels of depression and suicidal thoughts compared to their non-religious counterparts. This finding emphasizes the therapeutic function of religion in acts as a buffer against the adverse psychological effects of imprisonment.

Besides, the mechanisms through which religiosity influences suicidal ideation in inmates have been extensively examined in recent studies. Religiosity is likely to bring hope and hardiness, both of which are valued in the face of adversity (Ishola & Adebayo, 2021). Most religions oppose killing oneself and the sanctity of life (prohibition against suicide). In a study among Kenyan prison inmates, Mbugua and Otieno (2020) identified that inmates who actively participated in religious worship and prayer exhibited improved mental health and lower suicidal behavior. Similarly, Osei-Tutu et al. (2023), in their examination of prisoners in Ghana, also observed a significant and high negative correlation between religiosity and suicidal thoughts, which indicated that prisoners with higher religious commitment had lower suicidal thoughts. Such observations provide additional support for the hypothesis that religiosity acts as a psychological buffer, which generates mental stability even in dismal environments like prisons.

Moreover, religiosity's function not only includes individual mental well-being but also influences interactions with others inside prisons. Religious participation fosters a feeling of belonging and belongingness among inmates, which serves to alleviate feelings of isolation that are a suicide risk factor (Okonkwo & Oyetunde, 2022). In the Nigerian context, religious worship encourages prisoners to have structured routines, moral teachings, and social connections, which contribute towards reducing mental health issues, including suicidal tendencies (Oladeji & Oladipo, 2019). Indeed, recently, studies have highlighted the relevance of integrating religious support systems into prison rehabilitation programs by prison authorities to enhance prisoners' well-being (Afolabi et al., 2024). Overall, replicable findings from research on prisons in Africa affirm the significance of religiosity in reducing suicidal ideation and verify the necessity for prisons to foster cultures that value and support religious practice as a fundamental aspect of mental health treatment.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered in the interpretations of this study's findings. The first notable one is the sample size, which is a total of 150 respondents. A small sample size like the one used in the current study may result in unreliable findings. Hence, further research is needed with a larger sample size to derive a more meaningful conclusion regarding religiosity and suicidal ideation. Secondly, there was no supplementary information through other sources about the participants' suicidality because the Nigerian Correctional Services at large and Agodi Correctional Center in particular lack the databases for inmates' suicidality (Kinyanda, et al., 2005; Okeke, et al., 2020) owing to lack of funds (Awopetu, 2014). Hence, the results are primarily based on self-reported data, which may concede the likelihood of bias. Another concern about self-reporting means of data collection is social desirability and faking (Arnold & Fekken, 2012). It is possible that the cultural and legal factors play a role in the respondents' responses. Culturally, suicidality is a taboo, and legally, it is against the law in Nigeria (Kinyanda et al., 2005; Omigbodun, et al., 2008; Ovuga, et al., 2005). Therefore, it is possible that the respondents underreport some of the variables on suicidal ideation. Thirdly, there is the possibility that the participants are different from the non-participants, which may also lead to results' skewness. The non-participants might be more prone to suicidal ideation and still display a high level of religiosity compared to the participants. Thus, due to the lack of information on the non-participants, it was difficult to examine probable selection bias.

IV. CONCLUSION

Two features that are commonly experienced by all inmates in correctional facility are social alienation (Jarzębińska 2020) and pain of imprisonment (Rocheleau, 2013). Studies have suggested that pain, social alienation, hopelessness, and other obnoxious variables, as being experienced by inmates in correctional facilities increase the risk of suicidal ideation (Chu et al., 2018; Klonsky et al., 2018). Although there is plethora of factors that may buffer suicidal ideation, this study concludes that religiosity is one way through which suicidal ideation in prison may be mitigated.

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