PROVISION OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION RESOURCES AND SERVICES ON SUICIDE: NIGERIAN LIBRARIES PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: *This paper seeks to highlight the services and resources provided by Nigerian libraries on the prevalent incidents of suicide. The library is a hub of activities and its major purpose is to provide necessary and needed information to its teeming users. Library and information resources are those materials provided by the library both in printed and electronic formats which include the provision of information on suicide. These resources aid the provision of various information services such as current awareness service, selective dissemination of information, reader advisory service, and lots more. The diverse information services can be provided in collaboration with NGOs to create public awareness, provide signages on suicide and also train librarians on how to interact with users who are likely to possess such traits with the aid of the available resources that would help in suicide prevention, and also provide direction on how to get psychological help. From the literature review, very little is written on suicide by authors in Nigeria and it is a fact that Nigerian libraries do not give special attention to the provision of resources on suicide, especially the preventive aspect of it; therefore, a recommendation for a special corner in the library for such resources was proffered.*

KEYWORDS: Nigerian Libraries, Library and Information Services, Suicide, Public Awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries as seen today are more than places where books were kept for consultation, more than quiet places to hide from the world, and more than the four walls of the library building where librarians act as a custodian with minimal interaction with the users. Libraries are now with and without walls, meaning they could be accessed from anywhere at any time and in any place. It therefore means that the services also have changed along with the libraries and librarians become active members of the library with maximum interaction with users. Services that were once provided within the four walls of the library building can now be received anywhere as long as the libraries subscribe to relevant databases that aid learning and leisure. This is possible with the help of internet connectivity.

Library and information services are those services that are provided by the librarians to meet the information needs of the users, be it for learning or leisure. Library services that were limited to current awareness services, selective dissemination of information, circulation services, and much more have now extended to one-on-one services either physically or online. Information services include current awareness service, selective dissemination of information, reference service, readers advisory, and lots more. Effective provision of these services will help in suicide prevention in society.

Suicide is an act of one voluntarily taking his life or in the case of a suicide attempt, an act of taking one's life, but without success. Suicide is prevalent all around the world. It is not a new phenomenon in Africa and Nigeria in particular, as posited by the Medical Director of the Federal Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital, Enugu, Dr. N. Igwe, in a report by Mac-Leva, Ibrahim, Akor and Mutum (2020) that suicide has always been with us in Nigeria but it was unpopular because of stigmatization (the cultural impediments—seen as a taboo); it was reported to be rare in Africa. This is in agreement with Laubscher's (1951) investigation on suicide in South Africa over a two-year period, which found only 14 suicide cases in a population of 870,000—less than 1 per 100,000. However, between 2014 and 2020, Nigeria has recorded 264 suicide cases according to Mac-Leva, Ibrahim, Akor and Mutum (2020) from their investigations. The authors also reported that within the first and second quarters of 2020, no fewer than 42 Nigerians among which were 11 students committed suicide, with reasons stemming from financial hardship, marital issues, depression, job losses, and so many others. Suicide has therefore become a new norm because people feel it is the easiest way of ending their suffering.

The increase in suicide and suicide attempt by students should interest any librarian. This should ignite a librarian's frame of mine to ask what he could do to help tackle the increased rate of suicide amongst students. Of course, librarians are not psychologists but their nature of work projects them to behave as one; therefore, the provision of books, journals, magazine, databases on suicide would go a long way to help tackle the causes of suicide. Relatives and friends of such people could have an interest, and read about the causes and ways of preventing suicide.

Though users get access to information on the internet and online databases, this does not diminish the role of library and information services. This creates an avenue for librarians to increase and create awareness on their role in the provision of library and information services because most users lack the necessary search skills to effectively and efficiently search and find information, and more so, lack of information organization on the web is among the reasons for the need for library and information services in Nigerian libraries than ever before.

This paper therefore seeks to address the need to provide library and information services by Nigerian libraries to help curb the rampant incidents of suicide amongst students in Nigeria.

Concept of Library and Information Services

The concept of information services in libraries incorporate different sections of libraries' activities that are provided by librarians for different users of the library. These services are provided based on users' needs, their anticipations, and at the same time, satisfaction of information needs. These services are expected to encourage user awareness of the potential of information resources to fulfill individual information needs (Reference and User Services Association, RUSA, 2012). Though users are educated by librarians on the available resources while serving them, information services are now seen as a key element for libraries because librarians must help organize the services to meet users' information needs, information on suicide inclusive. The ever-increasing information on the internet and its hydra-headed nature, including online databases, have increased the role of library and information units. Most times, users demand quick and clear answers, but web information lacks proper organization, and poor technological skills of users has caused the rise for the need of more information services in the library nowadays.

This is why the goal of library and information services is to provide the information sought by users. Library and information services encompass services through which librarians directly supply users not only with information but also interfaces created by librarians through which users could independently find needed information (Stojanovski & Papić, 2012).

Concept of Suicide

Suicide has been a concern for centuries. Aristotle, Plato, and Pythagoras all condemned it; yet, there is no end to it (Aycock, 2019). Suicide is an act in which an individual terminates his or her life willingly. Every suicide is a mishap that distresses families, neighbours, the government, and the society at large. WHO in 2019 noted that suicide is a global phenomenon in all regions of the world. It is a stern public menace that has been occurring frequently in Nigeria in the last few years. Mac-Leva, Ibrahim, Akor, and Mutum (2020), affirming the statement, quote WHO's Suicide Ranking of 17.1 suicides per 100,000 population in a year. Nigeria was ranked the 30th most suicide-prone country out of 183 nations in 2015 and the 10th African country with higher rates of suicide in 2019. WHO also predicted in 2020, according to O'Rourke, Jamil, and Siddiqui (2020), that in the next two years, depression will be the leading cause of disability globally as depression is a serious medical disorder that comes with a high risk of suicide. This is true as the number of people committing suicide in Nigeria is on the increase due to lack of jobs, financial difficulties, a sense of no purpose in life, and many other social amenities. These acts are carried out in different places like living rooms, offices, toilets facilities, farmlands, classrooms, and even in police facilities. However, suicides can be prevented with timely interventions by family members, friends, peers, and even the library.

Types and Provision of Library Resources on Suicide

There is a vast array of information on the internet on suicide but unfortunately, this information is not organized to meet the needs of users. Suffice it to say that, members of the public in Nigeria and even students in Nigerian universities are not aware or may not term it as important to seek resources on suicide. The librarians are also at fault as they do not make any

attempt to research, display and organize information resources on suicide even when there is provision for it in the classification schemes. Despite the lack of these resources physically or of the organization of the available resources in libraries for utilization, there are electronic resources that if organized may provide salient information on how to deal with suicide potentials.

Librarians unknowingly have served people who have considered killing themselves or have attempted to, according to Boylan (2010), even though the ability to provide useful materials on suicide is a little difficult. It is advised that rather than libraries providing general mental health guides, it is important to provide research guides that are specific to suicide. Boylan shared the under listed resources that academic libraries specifically can provide:

- A comprehensive guide with articles, statistics, and catalogue search terms.

- Resources on hazing, bullying, depression, LGBT (Lesbianism, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender), and other related issues, restricted to library use.

- Collections of statistical resources, such as those from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- Accurate data, up-to-date research, and knowledge of effective strategies and interventions that are essential to prevent suicide.

The resources listed below would be of immense use to students in an academic environment. It therefore stresses the need for Nigerian libraries to create special information counselling units in their libraries for information on suicide and other related issues since there are many headlines in the newspapers of students committing suicide. The resources may be expensive to subscribe to, Nigerian libraries therefore need to collaborate with one another through networking to provide the resources, though some of them are provided free. Examples are

Indigenous Books

- Counselling against Suicide Ideation among Nigerian Youths by Erhunse Confidence

- Best Nigerian Suicide Short Stories

- Falling in Love Is Dangerous

- African Tragedy Series

- She Did It by Obinna Toby

- Happy New After by Tobi Loba

- Tales of Nene by Osazuwa Omoradion

- What Went Wrong by Elion

E-Books

- Culture, Suicide, and the Human Condition

- Expression and Survival: An Aesthetic Approach to the Problem of Suicide

- Preventing College Students Suicide

- Queer Youth Suicide, Culture and Identity: Unliveable Lives? Suicide among the Armed Forces: Understanding the Cost of Service

- Suicide in Children and Adolescents

- Teen Suicide Risk: A Practitioner Guide to Screening, Assessment, and Management

- The International Handbook of Suicide Prevention

- The Oxford Handbook of Suicide and Self-Injury

- The War Within: Preventing Suicide in the U.S. military

- Zachary's Choice: Surviving My Child's Suicide

Videos

- Conducting a State-of-the-Science Suicide Assessment Interview

- Journey through the Shadows: Hope for Healing after Someone You Love Has Committed Suicide

- Suicide among African-American Teens and Young Adults: A Discussion for People in a Position to Help

- Suicide Assessment and Intervention for the 21st Century

- Teen Suicide: Reach Out

Ways of Providing Library and Information Services on Suicide

Libraries are spaces where efficient service provision enhances effective utilization of the available resources in various formats for information needs satisfaction. In agreement with the third law of librarianship, "every user his book", the library provides information resources on all subjects including suicide. There are some information services available in the library that would help in the prevention of suicide in Nigerian libraries:

Current Awareness Service

Current awareness service is a service is provided in the library to educate and inform users on the availability of current information resources in libraries. This service is significant because there are various information resources in the libraries which users may not be aware of their availability in the library. This indicates that the resources acquired into the library must be scrutinized and organized and then brought to the notice of the users. The objective of the current awareness service on suicide prevention is to make available and accessible current

information on suicide and related issues for contemporary researchers, and to sustain the interest of the library users in the services rendered by the library to educate the users on the available resources on the subject.

Selective Dissemination of Information

Keeping users informed of available and significant information on their areas of need is referred to as Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI). Periodically, the library finds and organizes information resources on mental health, depression, broken marriages and relationships, suicide, etc. for users' interest, the reason being that SDI helps to keep users abreast of current issues and positively impacts efficiency and productivity.

Whitehall, as cited by Adetomiwa (2015), gives the objectives of SDI as follows:

- To provide current information on a particular subject

- To receive, scan, and provide literature to the right users.

- To notify of the latest information about a particular subject.

- To achieve current requirements through the scan of journals, current awareness bulletin, and other important resources.

Therefore, libraries in Nigeria attempt to help prevent suicide and suicide attempts which are predominant amongst students in Nigerian universities.

Readers Advisory Service

Readers advisory service involves guiding the users on the right service and resources that are available in the library to solve their information needs. Traditionally, this service was provided manually in the library where the librarian and the user will have a one-on-one interaction but in the information age, this service is provided electronically through the library website or the library's social media platform where librarians share useful information links on subjects of interest and other related resources to information seekers. There are various resources on depression, mental health, and causes and prevention of suicide on the internet and in scholarly databases which the librarian will cheerfully share to depressed, high tempered users or their relatives in addition to the one-on-one interaction with librarians.

Referral Service

A referral service is a service whereby a user is directed to another information centre to obtain resources or services that are not available in that particular library location. Librarians provide this service to different categories of information seekers based on their information needs. It is assumed that the heads of the counselling units in libraries through their interaction with users who may be depressed or have contacts with depressed users, friends, or close relatives should be able to refer either the centres listed below or other centres in the nation:

- National Depression/Suicide Prevention Initiative (NSPI)

- Mental health Desk office, Lagos State Ministry of Health

- Suicide Research and Prevention Initiative (SURPIN), Lagos State University Teaching Hospital

- Lagos State Helplines for Suicide Prevention

- Lagos Emergency Service

- LUTH Suicide Research and Prevention Initiative (SURPIN)

- Lagos Suicide Hotlines, by the Lagos State Government

- Nigerian Suicide Prevention Initiative Counselling Centre

Reference Service

Reference service to patrons who ask erroneous questions or who may be mentally ill are common in Nigerian libraries, especially in public libraries. For example, there are various cases in Akwa Ibom State public libraries and even in the University of Uyo libraries. In providing these services, every user must be given attention without the consideration of their demeanor, and meaningless questions should be treated with respect and confidentiality. More so, follow up questions must be asked for clarity. A reference librarian must always be in control, should not let users monopolize the time, especially those that have been noticed to have some mental issues and should always accept whatever a patron says without being part of their reality. It is pertinent for every Nigerian library to have a written policy on handling users with mental and suicidal traits.

Collaboration between Libraries and NGOs on Suicide Prevention Awareness

Libraries are centres for the gathering of all professionals for information seeking and satisfaction. In an attempt to achieve this purpose, other organizations and individuals are brought in to assist in satisfying the needs of all the users. To this end, they support the libraries through the donation of resources, training of staff, establishing new libraries, and advocacy to the rural communities and even the educated members of the society as needs arise. In education, social awareness is created. Lately, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in collaboration with librarians create awareness of suicide as it is prevalent among the youths in higher institutions.

For example, during international book week, resources on suicide are displayed in libraries to educate users on the availability of such resources. The purpose is to encourage depressed library users to visit the information counselling unit of the library for counselling and redirection to appropriate centres for help that would combat stigmatization, discrimination, suicide cases and improve access to health care.

Training of Librarians as Information Counsellors

Libraries should invest in crisis response training for public service staffers. Some libraries do employ social workers or mental health professionals to step in when needed. To meet this need, mental health professionals have started sharing their knowledge in libraries through brochures, advocacy, and orientation lectures for new students and faculty staff. Librarians also attend workshops and seminars organized by government and Non-Governmental Organisations on suicide and its prevention. These training opportunities avail librarians of

easy identification of depressed library users and ways of handling them for effective service delivery. For example, in the United States of America, librarians are trained in mental health first aid which helps in recognizing the symptoms of mental illness. The libraries also employ social workers who work alongside the librarians, to build relationships with users and become a familiar face, so that when users are ready for help, it becomes easy to connect them with organizations that provide counseling, medical care, and other services (Stringer, 2020). Nigerian libraries can get a cue from the example given and not just train librarians but also employ social workers as the nation is faced with some students either committing or attempting suicide.

Provision of Signages in and around the Library

Signage is a great graphical instrument for communication and a vital element of the library user experience. Signage can inform, direct, guide, educate, and influence users information seeking behavior in libraries. These oftentimes are presented in symbols which have various meanings to different classes of users. The choice of good signages by librarians therefore enhances effective information dissemination and proper understanding of the message by the users. Luca and Narayan (2016) noted that signages are important to help users feel comfortable and confident in using the library, and added that effective signage contributes to a user-friendly environment and guides users in the library.

Providing signages in and around the libraries is very important, but the effectiveness is most important as effective signage can be helpful to users because it reduces the number of questions asked. Therefore, signages could silently inform and educate users on the topic of suicide. Libraries should therefore undertake to design informative, creative and graphical signages in the modern libraries for advocacy on suicide, suicide attempts and the effects on families and the society at large. Some of these signages may also refer the depressed users to the information and counseling units of the library or other counseling centres in the society. Below are some examples of signages on suicide that could be made available in and around Nigerian libraries:

Challenges faced by Nigerian Libraries

Librarians in Nigerian libraries are ever willing to provide effective library services to all categories of users but they are constrained due to numerous challenges such as lack of awareness programs, budgetary constraints, inadequate space, inadequate and obsolete library materials, inadequate trained and skilled manpower, lack of appropriate government policy on collaboration between librarians and government agencies literacy.

The Way Forward

Today's libraries perform more functions than ever. Libraries around the globe, especially those in the developed world, employ health workers, psychologists and counsellors due to the situations they find themselves in lately. Therefore, to help curb the incidents of suicide and attempted suicide among Nigerian library users, there is a need to also employ the aforementioned workers for the purpose of counselling. More so, the ability to read body languages that could lead to suicide or any other form of mental health would be of immense help.

CONCLUSION

The provision of information and library services to users regarding various concepts is very important, so that of suicide is not an exception. It is quite necessary in Nigeria because of the prevailing situation. As seen in most works of literature, this was not quite considered, but now that it has been brought to the fore, library and librarians should see the need to provide information and disseminate the same to users, especially those that may be easily identified through their behaviour(s). Training of librarians for effective service in this direction is therefore very essential.

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