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Homicide And Suicide In Benin City, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

A review of homicides and suicides as they occurred in Benin City, Nigeria over a period of two years was carried out with respect to age, sex and methods employed. Homicides and suicides form 19% and 1.8% respectively of the medico legal autopsies carried out during the period in review.

The male to female ratio of homicides and suicides were 4.3 to 1 and 3.3 to 1 respectively and the ages of the majority of the victims fell between 20 and 40 years.

The commonest method for committing homicide in Benin City was by firearms, while ingestion of poisons, particularly 'Otapiapia' an insecticide, is the commonest method for committing suicide in this region.

Keywords: Homicides, Suicides, Methods employed

Introduction

Defective psychosocial environment as occurs in broken homes or parental hostility may lead to aggressive behaviors. When the aggression is directed towards self it results in suicide, and when directed towards others, homicide.1-4

Suicide rates are said to be very low in Africa due to paucity of depressive conditions as well as increased frequency of communal clashes that divert the aggression in the direction of others.5 **Depression is however not uncommon among Africans. It presents with somatization rather than feeling of guilt and self-reproach, which is the commonest mode of presentation among patients outside Africa.**6

The majority of homicides in Africa are said to be un-premeditated usually following family squabbles or occurring accidentally, such as during hunting expedition.7

This study is to investigate the pattern of homicide and suicide in Benin City. Benin City is in the Mid-Western region of Nigeria and occupies a strategic location with many major highways passing through it and leading to other major towns of the country.

Materials and Methods

The records of medico-legal autopsies performed at the mortuaries of University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) and the State Government owned Central Hospital, Benin City from January 1996 to December 1997 were retrieved and analyzed with respect to age, sex and the methods employed. All cases of death requiring medico-legal autopsies are usually referred to the mortuary of either of these two hospitals for examination.

Results

A total of 726 medico-legal autopsies were studied during the period. Out of this number 138 (19%) cases where those of homicide and 13 (1.8%) cases were suicide

Sex

There were 112 male and 26 female victims of homicide giving a ratio of 4.3 to 1. For suicide there were 10 male and 3 females (M:F=3.3:1)

Age

Table 1 shows a 10-year age and sex distribution of homicide and suicide victims.

Table 1

AGE IN YEARS	HOMICIDE		SUICIDE	
	M	F	M	F
10-19	17	8	0	0
20-29	44	5	4	0
30-39	17	4	3	1
40-49	18	2	2	1
50-59	32	5	1	1
60-69	3	1	0	0
70-79	7	2	0	0
TOTAL	112	26	10	3
GRAND TOTAL	138	13		

The ages of the majority of the victims of both homicide and suicide were between 20 and 40 years with 50.7% of the homicides and 61.5% of the suicides falling within this age group. 69.2% of the victims were 30 years and above. Of the homicide victims, 44.7% of the males and

43.5% of the females fell into this age group. In the case of suicide victims 70% of the male victims were in this group while only one out of the 3 victims was in this age bracket.

Methods Employed

Table 2 shows the different methods used in committing homicide.

Table 2

METHODS	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
Firearms	39	8	47
Cutting and Piercing Instrument	22	7	29
Blunt Force	21	10	31
Others	4	1	5
Total	86	26	112

The commonest mode of suicide was by ingestion of toxic substances (46.2%) followed by hanging (30.8%) and gunshot (7.7%). Of the 3 females, suicide was committed by cut throat, hanging and ingestion of "Otapiapia" respectively. "Otapiapia" is a locally made insecticide, which is readily available in all parts of the country, and peddled by ordinary people.

DISCUSSION

The majority (50.7%) of people who got killed was between the ages of 20 to 40 years. This figure tallies with 55% in Ile-Ife, Nigeria[7] and 52% in Singapore.8 **This observation goes to confirm the belief that this age bracket being the most active period of life, results in great interpersonal interactions which may end up in misunderstandings and frustrations and therefore predisposing to causation of felonies, including homicide.**

The finding of 69.1% of suicides being of the ages 30 years and above however is at variance with the generally well established fact that the third decade of life is the most vulnerable period of suicide in both sexes.9 **This is supported by the observation that 70% of the victims of self-poisoning in Lagos were below 30 years and most of the cases of suicide in Northern Sudan were between 17 and 30 years.**10 **Similar observation was also made in Ile-Ife, Nigeria where 46% of suicide victims were in the third decade. The reason for the observation in this study may be due to the smallness of the number of suicide cases and also the duration of the study. It is envisaged that observation over a longer period will reveal the true situation in this area.**

The sex ratios in homicide and suicide of 4.3 to 1 and 3.3 to 1 respectively are not different from those recorded by other workers (Homicide: 4.6:1 in Ile-Ife, 4.4:1 in Uganda11 **and 4:1 in USA)**12 **Male to female ratio of suicide in Ile-Ife is 3.6:1. This observation goes to confirm the male sex as more aggressive and violent. This attribute has been blamed of the sex hormone testosterone.**

The commonest method for homicide in Benin City is by firearms and 42%of the victims were killed by this method. This method was also the commonest in Ile-Ife, although the socio-cultural settings are different in both places. Ife a rural university town, while Benin is a

cosmopolitan city. It is interesting to note that while most of the killings by gunshot in Ile-Ife were not premeditated, (usually occurs accidentally or following an argument) the killings in Benin city were mostly in course of committing another felony – armed robbery.

Ingestion of poisons, being the commonest cause of suicide in Benin City, is similar to the finding in Ile-Ife where majority of the victims committed suicide also by ingesting poisons. While most of the victims in Ife ingested "Gammalin 20"13 **a pesticide used by the farmers in the cocoa farms, the victims in Benin used "Otapiapia" a locally concocted insecticide, which is used to kill mosquitoes and cockroaches. This observation goes to show that in the commission of suicide by poisons, the commonest available everyday substance is likely to be used.**

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