



## Analysis of Metaphor of Pain and Escape in Nigerian Suicide Notes

<sup>1</sup>Ifeoma Amalachukwu Nwegbo\*

Department of English and Literary Studies, Godfrey Okoye University Uguwuomu Nike, Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria.

<sup>1</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6927-101X>

\*Corresponding Author: [ifeomanwegbo@gmail.com](mailto:ifeomanwegbo@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Suicide is a growing public health concern in Nigeria, often hidden due to stigma, moral judgment, and legal repercussions. Suicide notes, as personal expressions of distress, provide valuable insight into the psychological and emotional struggles of victims. Metaphors in these notes serve as a lens through which individuals communicate unbearable pain, the desire to escape, and attempts to shift responsibility.

**Objective:** This study examined how metaphors in suicide notes reflect emotional pain, conceptualize death as an escape, and illustrate the denial or displacement of personal responsibility among Nigerian suicide victims.

**Method:** Employing a qualitative research design, suicide notes from five Nigerian victims were purposively collected from media outlets and social media platforms between April 2022 and July 2025. The notes were anonymized and analyzed using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) to identify recurring metaphorical themes of pain, escape, and responsibility displacement. Textual analysis was conducted, and findings were presented descriptively.

**Results:** The analysis revealed that victims frequently represented pain as overwhelming, using metaphors of darkness, blockage, and brokenness. Death was consistently portrayed as a form of release, peace, or liberation from intolerable suffering. Additionally, victims often shifted moral or causal responsibility onto external forces, such as family, society, or circumstances beyond their control.

**Conclusion:** Nigerian suicide notes show that language, through metaphors, provides a window into the inner emotional worlds of victims, revealing extreme suffering, the pursuit of escape through death, and attempts to minimize personal accountability. Understanding these metaphorical expressions can guide mental health practitioners, families, and policymakers in developing culturally sensitive suicide prevention strategies.

**Unique Contribution:** This study offers new insight into how linguistic metaphors communicate extreme emotional distress in a highly stigmatized context. It emphasizes the importance of language analysis for understanding the experiences of individuals whose suffering is often hidden or silenced.

**Key Recommendation:** Suicide prevention efforts should integrate awareness of metaphorical expressions of distress, train mental health professionals to recognize linguistic indicators of extreme emotional pain, and promote culturally sensitive communication strategies to identify and support at-risk individuals before suicide occurs.

**Keywords:** Suicide, Metaphor, Emotional pain, Escape, Nigeria, Conceptual Metaphor Theory



## INTRODUCTION

Suicide is a severe world health concern. According to the estimates of the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2021), approximately 727,000 people commit suicide annually, and even more are attempting to do so. Although Suicide is a global concern, it has various patterns and meanings across various cultural and regional settings. Suicide in Nigeria is also a growing problem that is not well reported due to stigma, cultural taboos, and legal limitations. The term “suicide” is used to describe any death caused by self-harm to die as a consequence of the act. Mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and trauma provoked by the demands of life are the leading causes (WHO, 2021). In Nigeria, factors that have been identified to contribute to suicide include poverty, unemployment, family disagreements, and broken relationships (Odejide, 2006). Unfortunately, most of the people in need of mental health services do not receive them due to a lack of facilities, specialists, and the fear of stigmatization (Abubakar et al., 2024; Adebowale & Adelufosi, 2022). In Nigeria, Suicide is viewed through the moral and spiritual lenses beyond personal tragedy. In the Igbo community, a major tribe in the eastern part of Nigeria, victims are traditionally denied decent burial and are usually left in the “evil forests” which further stigmatizes their families. The situation is worsened by the laws that criminalize attempted suicide in the Nigerian Criminal Code Section 327 (Criminal Code Act, Cap C38, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004) and impose the penalty of imprisonment, which discourages people who have suicidal tendencies from seeking help and makes accurate reporting even harder.

Suicide notes, despite these shortcomings offer a useful understanding of how individuals conceptualise the pain they are experiencing and seek to escape it. Metaphors serve as guides through which individuals describe abstract emotional states. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) developed the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), a metaphor theory used to organise thoughts and experiences rather than linguistic decoration. Phrases like “life is a burden”, “the world is dark” and “death is freedom” explain how suicide victims convey pain and see death as the solution. The above approaches can be predominantly applied to the situation in Nigeria where the process of criminalization and stigmatization influences how people justify or frame their actions (Ugwu & Nnamani, 2024).

The literature on the problem of suicide in Nigeria has focused primarily on its epidemiology, psychological risks, and legal or religious concerns. Little research has been done on the linguistic aspects of suicide (Akinyemi et al., 2015; Odejide, 2006), which is why this study fills the gap by examining suicide notes of Nigerians using the CMT. This study is an exploration of how people in Nigeria use metaphors in suicide notes to express their perception of pain, desire to be liberated, and the need to transfer the responsibility to outside factors. To achieve this aim, there are three objectives of the study (1) To explore how metaphors reflect emotional pain in suicide notes (2) To establish which metaphors of escape are employed in these notes, and (3) To see the linguistic strategies of denying, altering, or downplaying the responsibility of suicide.



Based on these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do suicide notes metaphorically represent emotional pain? (2) What metaphors of escape appear in these notes? (3) Which linguistic strategies deny, alter, or downplay suicide responsibility? Answering these questions helps the study to make contributions to the knowledge on suicide discourse in Nigeria and the importance of language in suicide prevention.

This study is significant as it shows how Nigerians in distress express themselves through suicide notes. By the expression of pain, the desire to escape and transfer the responsibility to the outside factors, we learn more about the experiences these people are going through. These insights will help families, friends and mental health practitioners recognise warning signs and provide support.

The study examines suicide notes left by Nigerian suicide victims. It only considers notes that have been published on Nigerian media outlets and social media platforms from April 2022 to July 2025. The focus is on the language used in the notes and not on judging the victims. With a close examination of these writings, the study helps us to see how people can convey deep suffering in words.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This review acknowledges that there is a substantial amount of psychologically based research on suicide and suicidal ideation and little on linguistically based research. Related work in these areas will be covered one at a time.

### **Psychological Perspective on Suicide**

Psychologically, suicide is largely associated with intense emotional suffering, untreated mental illnesses, and very high psychosocial pressures. Studies over the years have consistently shown that depression, anxiety, trauma, substance abuse, and feelings of despair are some of the main causes that drive individuals to suicidal behavior (Shneidman, 1985; Joiner, 2005). Such conditions usually distort the way individuals perceive themselves, their self-worth, and belonging to the point that suicide appears to be the only option.

Edwin Shneidman (1985) proposed the term *psychache* to refer to psychological suffering that can result in suicide. He stressed that the primary point of suicide is not the wish to die but rather the wish to end the unbearable suffering. Similarly, Joiner (2005) in his Interpersonal Theory of Suicide also indicated that people tend to commit suicide when they believe that they are a burden or when their sense of belonging is disrupted. Both views reveal the reason why victims employ metaphors such as darkness, heaviness, and burden to describe their suffering.

These struggles in Nigeria are further complicated by social and cultural factors. Poverty, dysfunctional families, academic failure, unemployment, and the lack of mental health services have been found to be common triggers of suicide (Odejide, 2006; Akinyemi et al., 2015). The



moral or spiritual interpretations of mental illness often deprive sufferers of depression the avenue to seek help. This is compounded by the fact that suicide is highly condemned and in some cases, criminalized.

Although there has been a prominent contribution of psychological studies in identifying risk factors and patterns of suicidal behavior, they do not give attention to the aspect of how the victims use language to reveal their pain. The language in these notes, particularly the metaphors offers valuable understanding of how suffering is depicted. This is one of the reasons why it is worth taking a linguistically oriented approach, which adds some meaning to the experiences of people whose voices have been habitually silenced by stigma, or reduced to statistics.

### **Linguistic Perspective on Suicide**

Suicide is a well-debated medical, psychological, and sociological issue but not much has been done to examine how language can be used to explore the emotional world of individuals who commit suicide. Suicide notes should not be considered as just facts or clinical evidence because they are highly personal texts produced under extremely weak circumstances which include the manifestations of pain, regrets, misunderstanding, or even love and forgiveness. They are not only conveyors of what people would like to say before their death but also how they say it and this makes them valuable documents of linguistic Study.

Suicide notes have been studied linguistically in different ways. Loannou (1992) examined how people express their decision and parting using words while Jasim and Jaafar (2022) listed devices used creatively such as repetition, the use of figures of speech, and tone. In the same note, Fata et al. (2021) examined suicide note discourse, particularly how the language selection can indicate power dynamics and emotional placement. Handelman and Lester (2007) exemplify the usage of negative construction and passive voice to display a lack of agency. Other studies like those by Carroll and Lester (2011) and Samraj (2015) employ the use of grammar, tense, and sentence structure to indicate the effect of language on opinion as to the mental state of the writer.

In Nigeria, there are still relatively few linguistic approaches to suicide. Most studies have mainly concentrated on the sociocultural or psychological factors (Akinyemi et al., 2015; Odejide, 2006) with limited studies focusing on the examination of the actual language used in suicide notes. Cultural and religious taboos do not allow open discussion on the issue of suicide, so the few texts available are very important. According to Ajuwon and Adebayo (2021), Nigerians are inclined to manifest distress indirectly through culturally specific metaphors that require deeper interpretation of language. Also, Ugwu and Nnamani (2024) reveal that the strategies of agency suppression, rhetorical interrogatives, and expressions of hopelessness tend to be frequently applied by Nigerian suicide note writers, which evidences the fact that such texts are demonstrative of both emotional states and efforts to deny culpability.



This study aims to fill the gap by analyzing the suicide notes of Nigerians. It uses the CMT propounded by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) to explain that metaphors are not purely decorative language, but a very important technique used by suicide victims to communicate what influenced their actions.

## **THEORETICAL CONCERNS**

This study employed the CMT by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which proposes that metaphors are not just decorations in language but a considerable channel through which individuals develop their thoughts and experiences. Here, metaphors are a thought tool and they assist the processing of abstract and otherwise unbearable experiences, such as despair, hopelessness, or the sense that might drive one to suicide. Therefore, metaphors can be considered a prism through which people internalize and communicate psychological truths, which are usually very difficult to communicate.

According to CMT, metaphors are a result of the cognitive grouping between the abstract target domain and a more concrete source domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In suicide, metaphors are not decorative tools. They are used to depict the emotional and psychological state of the person. They serve organizational and communicative roles to enable individuals to understand their pain better and to make it easier to be understood by other people. When a person metaphorically describes his pain, he not only recounts the events of his pain but he also creates a way to order and make sense of it at the same time (Kövecses, 2010).

Expressions like “There is no light now”, “I am sinking” indicate the manner in which individuals cognitively frame their experiences of pain and despair. There are two metaphorical themes that are prominent in this study: PAIN and ESCAPE. By analyzing these themes in Nigerian suicide notes, the study aims to reveal how people understand suffering and create a space in which death can be seen as a relief.

Despite the wide application of CMT to several disciplines, the use of CMT in the study of suicide, particularly in the African context, has been minimal. The available literature is, in most cases, based on Western data that do not reflect the role of cultural beliefs, language practices, as well as social stigma in how suicide is communicated or concealed (Ajuwon & Adebayo, 2021). The study helps to fill that gap by applying CMT to the discourse of Nigerian suicide to show how metaphor is used to navigate moral, spiritual, and emotional boundaries.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a qualitative research design. The Purposive sampling technique was employed to sample relevant data across various sources. Only cases containing suicide notes were analysed. The suicide notes were collected from Nigerian media outlets like Vanguard, The Guardian, Lindaikejiblog and social media platforms from April 2022 to July 2025. The texts chosen represent manifestations of psychological problems, despair, and isolation.



The identities of the people whose texts were used were withheld and all the identifiable informations were removed to accommodate ethical issues. Cases were numbered as Victim 1, Victim 2, Victim 3, Victim 4, and Victim 5. Even though suicide notes were absent in most cases of suicide, the study concentrates on those that contain them, since they offer textual resources for the linguistic study. The focus of the analysis was on how the victims expressed their emotional pain and their wish to get out of the situation metaphorically before they passed away.

The study adopted the CMT of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), to examine the abstract experiences that are perceived with reference to more concrete domains. Metaphorical expressions were identified according to both contextual and literal sense, which helped to understand implicit messages in suicide notes. The metaphorical analysis of the metaphors of PAIN and ESCAPE and displacement of agency in the writing is directly supported by this methodology.

## **PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

### **Victim 1 (V1)'s suicide note**

*“Nothing is working in my life. My figures are low. My brain is clogged up. The economy is getting harder. My decisions are wrong. My mind is messed up. The future doesn't seem bright at all. I see extreme hardship. I can't bear the pain anymore, I'm sorry Mum, I'm sorry Dad, I'm sorry Nene, Okwe, Toto, Nazor, Chuchu, Ifunanya. Dear Lord, have mercy on me!”* **Source: *The Guardian* – January 12, 2024**

The inability to cope with the high level of stress and the deep emotional pain is reflected in the note by V1. The statement, “Nothing is working in my life”, creates the image of an unsuccessful life, a sense of helplessness, and frustration. The same feeling is reflected in the line, “My figures are low”, which gives personal worth to material and economic outcomes to such a degree that it causes emotional suffering in the case of a financial mess. The lines “My brain is clogged up” and “My mind is messed up” share the idea of brain blockage and disorganization, and the conflict within the sufferer is unique and easy to sympathize with. These images of breakdown and dysfunction bring the psychological struggle to life in a way that others can imagine it.

The phrase “I can't bear the pain anymore” shifts the attention from describing the distress to pointing the direction of death as the only way to get free. This escape is not merely physical, but also mental and emotional, a process of trying to get out of a burden that is no longer bearable. The guilt and awareness of the consequences of the act are evident in the repeated apologies to family members and the request for divine mercy, but at the same time, the inability to balance personal responsibility and outside pressures like economic hardship, stress, and fear of the future can be seen. The suffering described in the entire note is heavy and unrelenting with death seen as the relief.



### **Victim 2 (V2)'s Suicide Note**

*"I have nothing left. My family abandoned me. My church disowned me. They said I stole N3.8 million, something I know nothing about. Even my own people refused to hear me. My church turned their back on me. I can't survive this disgrace. I don't want to continue in a world where my name is already destroyed." Source: Lindaikejiblog, July 15, 2025*

The note left by V2 leaves a strong impression of isolation, rejection, and hopelessness. The first line "I have nothing left" brings out the emptiness of life, and this reflects the magnitude of loss and hopelessness the victim experienced. This feeling of emptiness is further supported by being abandoned by the family, church, and even the community. These rejections are not just social, they are also spiritual since being disowned by the church implies a deprivation of belonging and identity to a holy community. The theft accusation, and the inability of other people to believe the victim, add to the feeling of shame and helplessness.

The phrase "I can't survive this disgrace" indicates how shame is intolerable not only as a feeling but as a state of living that puts survival itself at risk. Likewise, "I don't want to continue in a world where my name is already destroyed", dwells upon the fact that the social reputation and self-image are ideally connected with the will to live. Life is seen as impossible to survive when honor and belonging are gone. Also, V2 shifts responsibility away from personal choice and the suicide act is the consequence of rejection and false accusation. The note describes a fight not only with inner feelings, but with the oppressive burden of societal opinion and rejection.

### **Victim 3 (V3)'s Suicide Note**

*"Forgive me. In case you are the one who found the body, I am really sorry. It had to be someone, you know. I have chosen Jo Nketaih's poem as my suicide note: 'They said you came looking for me. I didn't drown; I was the water.' Where do atheists go to when they die? lol. Amen." Source: Victim's Facebook Account, May 12, 2022*

The note by the V3 is full of sadness, guilt, and a bit of dark humor. The opening words, "Forgive me. In case you are the one who found the body, I am really sorry", V3 was already wondering how his demise would affect others. It was not just his suffering but also his understanding of the suffering he would inflict on loved ones with his action.

The poem V3 selected, particularly the line "I didn't drown; I was the water", illustrates the extent to which V3 felt engulfed by misery. V3 was not just experiencing pain but believed himself to be pain itself. This implies that his pain has totally taken over and the only solution was death. Also, the line makes it appear like death was not something he struggled against, but something that is inevitable.



The question “Where do atheists go to when they die? lol. Amen” is a blend of uncertainty, humor, and a bit of prayer. It shows V3 making his situation less serious by making a joke but he still questions what will happen after death. The fact that the apologies in the note are repeated shows that V3 knew how much pain his action would inflict, but the note clarifies that pain had left him with no real choice. Summarily, the note creates the image of a person who is grappling with guilt, engulfed by pain, and seeking a way out.

#### **Victim 4 (V4)’s Suicide Note**

*“Very very soon. The testimony you expected will be a tribute to me from the mouths of those who truly cared. I came to this world, I sojourned but this world is actually not my place. I have beautified myself with pain and glory in tears, but soon, I will only watch the world from a distance. I will only read from shadows...the tributes you will write to me. Death is peaceful, don’t be deceived.”* **Source: Victim’s Facebook Account, August 16, 2023**

The note of V4 is very emotional and poetic. V4 describes life as a journey in a place that she is not supposed to be, saying “this world is actually not my place”. This demonstrates that V4 was out of place and fed up with life. By V4 saying that “I have beautified myself with pain and glory in tears”, it is clear that she has experienced a lot of suffering and has accepted it as a part of her. These words imply that these pains have defined her identity and they have become marks of honor on her.

The second section of the note reveals that V4 has accepted death peacefully. V4 quotes such things as “I will only watch the world from a distance and “Death is peaceful, don’t be deceived”, which means that she views death as a means of escape from pain and getting peace. V4 envisions that people will still remember her even when she dies and write tributes to her. By so doing, V4 places less emphasis on her act and more on how she would like to be remembered, an act that minimizes her personal responsibility in the suicide. It demonstrates that, although she is exhausted with life, she still does not want to be judged but to be understood. Finally, the note demonstrates that V4 is tired, death sounds to her like relief, and her language balances her pain and demands compassion and understanding.

#### **Victim 5 (V5)’s Suicide Note**

*“If I am no more, please hold my family responsible. I have tried to be the best I can be, stayed away from them just because they blamed me for their mistakes and they can’t love, help, and take care of me like their own. My Mum has made life a living hell for me because she is bipolar and frustrated, accusing me of being a witch and a cursed child even though my brother is responsible for my education and upkeep. The only thing she helps me with is my feeding money. I have gone out of my way to take care of my Mum by giving her food and money but I still end up being her problem. My brother can’t stick to his promise anymore because he feels I am not his responsibility and I have my own family. I hope and believe that now that I am gone, it will bring them relief and happiness. I am so sorry Collins I had to leave you this way. Maryam Olayemi you have been more than a bestie to me. I am also sorry to all my friends and well-wishers. I love to be happy but I am nothing but a*



*broken child. I don't believe in God anymore because I can't see my purpose anymore. I love you all so much." Source: Vanguard Newspapers April 3, 2022*

The note of V5 shows a lot of emotional pain and feeling rejected by family and loved ones. The first line "If I am no more, please hold my family responsible" is an attempt at assigning the blame for the act to others. This makes the suicide a response to the continuous neglect and not a personal decision. Family tension, false charges, and being misunderstood are also revealed in the note. Such expressions as "I have tried to be the best I can be" and "I am nothing but a broken child" demonstrate exhaustion from repeated attempts to be accepted, leaving the victim feeling unloved.

V5 also shows death as peace following excessive pain. The statement in the line "I hope and believe that now that I am gone, it will bring them relief and happiness", also implies death as a means of escape, as well as a means of making things easier for others. By portraying herself as a victim of family brutality and the absence of God, V5 takes the blame off her own shoulders and lays it on her condition. The loss of hope is summed up in the confession, "I don't believe in God anymore because I can't see my purpose anymore". The note unites the suffering, escape, and the rejection of personal responsibility in demonstrating how significant emotional trauma can be to view death as the sole release.

## RESULT

The first research question examined the ways emotional pain is expressed in suicide notes using metaphor. The analysis reveals that the five victims refer to pain as something unbearable. Victim 1 describes life as broken and intolerable, referring to pain as an obstacle to living normally. In the case of Victim 2, the pain is connected to shame and rejection, making loneliness a bleeding wound. Victim 3 describes pain as the complete loss of self, whereas Victim 4 views life as strange and unlivable, describing her struggle as an exile. Victim 5 describes herself as shattered and unloved, and that her suffering is connected to years of neglect by her family. In general, pain is seen as something burdensome and impossible to escape. The victims use images that are associated with the body and space to define pain that is hidden as real and tangible. Just as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explained that individuals tend to use physical and tangible words to convey extreme emotions.

The second research question was how suicide notes employ metaphors to convey the concept of escape. As seen in the analysis, all five victims viewed death as not only an end but also a way out of intense suffering. Victim 1 desired to get out of the mental and emotional burden that life had turned out to be. Victim 2 sees death as an escape from shame and social rejection where dignity would eventually be restored. Victim 3 regards death as a kind of reunion with peace, finding it easier to embrace death than fight against it. Victim 4 presents death as homecoming, which is peaceful, and that life is just a stop on the way to a bigger journey. Victim 5 identifies death as a solution to family issues and rejection, and a means to end the emotional torture of neglect. All these notes reveal that the victims viewed death as a relief, tranquility, or an escape from a world that was too cruel to live in. In their metaphors, a desperate attempt to find a resting



place can be observed, where death was not considered as destruction but as a way to escape miserable life.

The third research question discusses the ways the victims utilize language to deny, minimize, or shift responsibility from themselves. In all five notes, the victims portray themselves as powerless against circumstances out of their control. Victim 1 concentrates on the incessant demands of life, implying that there is no other option to the unbearable stress. Victim 2 stresses social rejection and false accusations and suicide becomes a reaction to the societal humiliation instead of a personal choice. Victim 3 presents death as something that is an inseparable part of his life like it is his destiny. Victim 4 emphasizes that her suffering defines her identity and the way she wants to be remembered and redirects the focus to her own direct responsibility. Victim 5 finds fault in family feuds and neglect, offers death as a solution not just to herself but also to those around her. In general, the language of the notes demonstrates a steady attempt to present the act as a result of external pressure, which makes the victims look less like decision makers and more like individuals reacting to forces they are no longer able to face.

The results reveal that suicide victims in Nigeria rely on language to cope with and describe their suffering, emphasising extreme pain, presenting death as an escape, and bargaining moral responsibility. The notes indicate how people trapped amidst too much emotional distress and a stigmatizing society, express their struggles. The victims bring their inner suffering into reality, expressing pain, the need to escape, and shift blame. They convey the reasons why they cannot help it and want to die. Collectively, the notes show how language can be both a means of expression of suffering and an attempt at finding meaning in it.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study concludes that suicide notes are not mere farewell messages but personal writings of suffering, distress, and a need to rest. People put their feelings into words in these notes and employ metaphors to say what cannot be said in ordinary language. Metaphors of pain and escape help to understand that life is unbearable and death is calm. They also demonstrate how individuals in distress shift blame to social, spiritual, or economic forces that they cannot control.

These findings are also useful in the context of suicide prevention. When people are hopeless, families, friends, and health workers should be aware of the language they employ. The use of words like heavy, dark, or blocked may be a sign of deep emotional suffering. Rather than being judgmental, empathy will assist in creating the difference between staying silent and seeking assistance. The cultural and religious background in Nigeria should also be taken into account during support, and people should be free to speak without fear or punishment.

There is a need to carry out further research to analyze other suicide notes from other African countries to study how language conveys distress. This can be used to implement mental health programs that can actually make people share their suffering. Suicide notes written by Nigerians remind us of the fact that through language, we can enter the minds of those who are suffering. Victims communicate pain through their words, which they are unable to express normally.



Listening to such words may help us be mindful of some of the sufferings within and act before it is too late.

### **Ethical Clearance**

This study relied exclusively on suicide notes that were already available in the public domain through Nigerian media outlets and social media platforms. No direct contact was made with individuals or families connected to the cases. All identifying information was removed, and the victims were anonymised as Victim 1–Victim 5 to ensure confidentiality and respect for privacy. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving publicly available data.

### **Acknowledgements**

The author acknowledges the assistance of Dr. Ugwu J.C who provided guidance during the data collection stage. Appreciation is also extended to the staff of Godfrey Okoye University Library for their support in accessing relevant scholarly materials.

### **Sources of Funding**

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

### **Author's Contribution**

The author conceived the study, designed the research framework, collected and analysed the data, and prepared the manuscript.

### **Data Availability Statement**

The dataset used for this study consists of suicide notes obtained from publicly accessible Nigerian media reports and social media posts between April 2022 and July 2025. The compiled dataset used for analysis is available from the author upon reasonable request.

### **Citation**

Nwegbo, I. A. (2026). Metaphors of pain and escape in Nigerian suicide notes. *International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research*, 4(2), 381-392

### **REFERENCES**

- Abubakar, A., Magaji, B. A., Bakare, A. T., Yakubu, A. I., Umar, M., Illo, N. M., & Yusuf, S. M. (2024). Barriers to mental health service utilization. *Journal of the Nigerian Academy of Medicine*, 3(1), 19–23.
- Adebowale, T., & Adelufosi, A. (2022). Mental health service utilization in Nigeria. *Journal of Medical Education and Curricular Development*, 9, 23821205241275420. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23821205241275420>



- Ajuwon, A. J., & Adebayo, A. M. (2021). Culturally specific manifestations of distress in Nigeria. *African Journal of Psychiatry*, 24(1), 1–7.
- Akinyemi, O. O., Adebayo, A. M., & Akinyemi, J. O. (2015). Suicide and psychosocial factors in Nigeria. *African Journal of Psychiatry*, 18(2), 1–6.
- Carroll, L., & Lester, D. (2011). Language use in suicide notes: An analysis. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 30(3), 335–344.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X11416610>
- Criminal Code Act, Cap C38, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria. (2004).  
<https://lawsofnigeria.placng.org/laws/C38.pdf>
- Fata, A., Ahmed, S., & Khan, M. (2021). Suicide note discourse: Power dynamics and emotional placement. *Journal of Forensic Linguistics*, 28(1), 1–20.  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17588928.2021.1899876>
- Handelman, J. L., & Lester, D. (2007). Expressing lack of agency in suicide notes. *Death Studies*, 31(5), 437–444.  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07481180701313773>
- Joiner, T. E. (2005). *Why people die by suicide*, . Harvard University Press.
- Jasim, M. M., & Jaafar, M. (2022). Linguistic devices in suicide notes. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 18(2), 1–15.
- Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A practical introduction*, (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*, . University of Chicago Press.
- Loannou, P. (1992). Decision-making and parting in suicide notes. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 18(3), 287–306. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(92\)90002-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(92)90002-3)
- Odejide, A. O. (2006). Suicide and suicidal behavior in Nigeria: A review. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 36(2), 1–10.
- Samraj, B. (2015). Grammatical features of suicide note discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 85, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2015.04.003>
- Shneidman, E. S. (1985). *Suicide as psychache*, . Jason Aronson.
- Ugwu, J. C., & Nnamani, O. C. (2024). Culpability denial and admissibility in suicide notes in Nigeria: A linguistic interrogation. *AKSU Journal of English*, 24(6), 1–15.
- World Health Organization. (2021). *Suicide worldwide in 2019: Global health estimates*, . World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240026643>