

Patterns, Methods, and Psychosocial Determinants of Suicide in Nairobi, Kenya: A Forensic Autopsy-Based Study

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2025.12120074>

Received: 18 December 2025; Accepted: 27 December 2025; Published: 06 January 2026

ABSTRACT

Background: Suicide is a critical public health issue in urban African settings, yet systematically collected data on its epidemiology remain limited. Understanding method-specific patterns and underlying psychosocial determinants is essential for effective prevention.

Objectives: To characterize the epidemiology, methods, and psychosocial determinants of suicide in Nairobi, Kenya, using forensic autopsy data, and to provide evidence for targeted prevention strategies.

Methods: This prospective descriptive study analyzed 224 suicide cases recorded at Nairobi City Mortuary between June 2009 and May 2010. Data on method of death, context, and circumstantial factors were collected using standardized forms. Descriptive statistics summarized distributions, and Chi-square tests assessed method-specific patterns. Suicide notes were reviewed to identify psychosocial stressors.

Results: Hanging was the predominant method (79.0%), followed by poisoning (18.3%) and jumping from height (2.7%). Suicide notes, recovered in approximately 20% of cases, highlighted domestic conflict, relationship breakdowns, unemployment, and underlying depression as common stressors. The high prevalence of hanging reflects accessibility and perceived lethality, whereas poisoning emphasizes the role of toxic substance availability. Jumping from height, although infrequent, indicates environmental risk factors associated with high-rise structures.

Conclusion: Suicide in Nairobi demonstrates method-specific vulnerabilities influenced by psychosocial and environmental factors.

Recommendations: Prevention strategies should combine mental health interventions, means restriction, environmental safety measures, socioeconomic support, and public awareness campaigns to reduce suicide incidence in urban populations.

Keywords: Suicide, Nairobi, urban health, forensic autopsy, hanging, poisoning, psychosocial stressors, prevention.

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Homicide and suicide represent significant public health challenges worldwide, contributing substantially to premature mortality, social instability, and economic loss. Interpersonal violence, including homicide and self-directed violence such as suicide, disproportionately affects low- and middle-income countries, where limited resources, rapid urbanization, and socioeconomic inequities exacerbate risk factors (World Health Organization [WHO], 2014). In urban settings, complex interactions between social determinants, institutional capacity, and community dynamics shape patterns of violence, making context-specific research critical for effective prevention and policy responses.

In 2019, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that global homicide rates remain elevated in parts of Africa compared to other regions, with sub-Saharan African countries reporting some of the highest per capita homicide frequencies worldwide (UNODC, 2019). The homicide burden in African cities is

influenced by rapid population growth, unemployment, entrenched poverty, and weak institutional trust, which together create environments conducive to violent conflict (Shaw & McLean, 2013). Nairobi, Kenya's capital, exemplifies such urban contexts where violent crime and public safety concerns persist, including firearm-related violence, mob justice, and police–civilian confrontations, all of which are linked to social and structural determinants of crime (Amnesty International, 2020).

Firearms are a common instrument in homicides globally, especially in regions with higher weapon availability; however, the patterns vary substantially by geography and sociopolitical context. In the Americas, for example, firearms account for a majority of homicide deaths, whereas in many parts of Africa, blunt force and sharp force trauma contribute more substantially to violent mortality (UNODC, 2019). In Kenya, although civilian firearm ownership is relatively low compared with high-income countries, firearms held by state security agencies are implicated in a significant proportion of violent deaths (Small Arms Survey, 2018; Amnesty International, 2020). These patterns reflect the dual role of firearms in both criminal violence and law enforcement contexts, underscoring the complexity of violence prevention in urban Africa.

Blunt force trauma is another prominent cause of homicide in African settings, often arising in the context of mob justice, interpersonal assaults, or collective violence (World Health Organization, 2014). Mob justice—defined as extrajudicial punishment carried out by groups of civilians outside formal legal frameworks—is widely documented in East Africa and is driven by widespread perceptions of inefficacy, corruption, and delay within formal justice systems (Adinkrah, 2005). Research in Ghana and Kenya reveals that victims of mob justice frequently sustain severe blunt force injuries, multiple traumas, and burns, often leading to death, reflecting both the brutality of these incidents and the underlying social frustrations that give rise to them (Gibson & Sing'o, 2018).

Suicide, while distinct from homicide, is a related form of violent mortality that also warrants focused analysis in urban African contexts. Suicide remains an under-recognized cause of death in many low- and middle-income countries, partly due to underreporting and stigma, but also because of limited epidemiological data (WHO, 2014). Globally, hanging is one of the most common methods of suicide, particularly in settings where access to means such as firearms is restricted, and where other lethal methods, such as ingestion of toxic substances, are more accessible (WHO, 2014). In sub-Saharan Africa, patterns of suicide often reflect local sociocultural dynamics, economic stressors, and limited access to mental health care, with youth and working-age adults disproportionately affected.

Economic hardship, relationship breakdowns, and psychological distress are frequently cited as precipitants of suicide, as evidenced by qualitative analyses of suicide notes and clinical assessments (WHO, 2014). In both rural and urban African settings, access to toxic substances such as pesticides and household chemicals contributes to poisoning as a method of suicide, highlighting the role of means availability in shaping suicide patterns. The World Health Organization emphasizes that suicide prevention must integrate strategies to restrict access to common means, provide crisis support, and improve mental health service availability (WHO, 2014).

The intersection of homicide and suicide within urban environments like Nairobi underscores the need for comprehensive research that accounts for both interpersonal and self-directed violence. While homicide reflects broader social and institutional dynamics, suicide highlights individual psychological, economic, and relational stressors that culminate in self-harm. Both forms of violent mortality are influenced by structural determinants such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, and limited institutional trust, suggesting that effective violence prevention requires multisectoral responses encompassing law enforcement reform, mental health promotion, social services, and community engagement.

Incorporating Suicide-Specific Theoretical Models

Despite the significant burden of violent mortality in Nairobi, systematically collected and statistically robust data on the mechanisms, contexts, and demographic patterns of homicide and suicide remain limited. To better understand the dynamics of suicide, theoretical frameworks such as Joiner's Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide (IPTS) could be integrated. According to IPTS, suicide occurs when individuals experience perceived burdensomeness, thwarted belongingness, and capability for suicide, which could be influenced by Kenya's

urbanization and societal pressures. The Social-Ecological Model also offers a comprehensive lens by emphasizing the role of individual, relationship, community, and societal factors in suicide. This can be especially useful in Nairobi's context where complex social structures and limited mental health resources interplay with suicide risk.

Exploring Suicide Methods and Sociocultural Contexts

Suicide methods in Nairobi, particularly hanging and poisoning, reflect the availability of means. Understanding the cultural and societal influences that shape individuals' choice of methods, and the accessibility of pesticides or household chemicals, could offer insights into how urbanization and limited healthcare services intersect to influence suicide rates. Such insights can guide targeted interventions to limit access to these common means of suicide.

Intersectionality and Suicide Risk

Further attention should be given to intersectional factors such as gender, age, and socioeconomic status when analyzing suicide in Nairobi. Youth and working-age adults are particularly vulnerable, but gender-specific stressors such as economic pressures on men or family expectations on women may influence suicide patterns. These factors should be explored in greater depth to understand how these social determinants shape mental health and coping mechanisms among different demographic groups.

Role of Mental Health Services in Suicide Prevention

Nairobi, like many urban settings in sub-Saharan Africa, faces challenges in mental health care access. Mental health services, or the lack thereof, significantly contribute to suicide rates. A deeper exploration of the barriers to accessing care, including stigma, inadequate resources, and disparities in healthcare access, could help inform suicide prevention strategies. Understanding the role of community-based mental health interventions and integrating mental health education in schools and workplaces is essential in addressing the mental health crisis in Nairobi.

Policy Implications and Multi-Sectoral Interventions

Given the complexity of homicide and suicide in urban environments like Nairobi, it is clear that policy interventions must be multi-faceted. Community policing, restorative justice, and law enforcement reform could play a critical role in reducing homicide rates. At the same time, mental health education, crisis intervention services, and suicide prevention campaigns could address the growing issue of suicide. By integrating mental health promotion into public health policies, Nairobi could move toward reducing both homicide and suicide.

Future Research Directions

Despite existing efforts, there remain significant gaps in understanding the mechanisms, contexts, and demographic patterns of violent mortality in Nairobi. Future research should include longitudinal studies that track changes in homicide and suicide rates over time, particularly in relation to urbanization and socioeconomic changes. Additionally, qualitative research that explores the lived experiences of those at risk of suicide or involved in violent crimes could provide valuable insights. Lastly, integrating forensic autopsy data with statistical models could yield a more granular understanding of the factors driving both homicide and suicide in Nairobi.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a prospective descriptive autopsy design and was conducted at Nairobi City Mortuary, the principal referral center for forensic examinations in Kenya. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Nairobi–Kenyatta National Hospital Ethics Review Committee (REF: KNH/UON-ERC/A/196), ensuring adherence to national and international research ethics standards.

All suicide cases recorded between June 1, 2009, and May 31, 2010, were included in the analysis. Data collection utilized standardized forms designed to capture detailed information on the mechanism of death, location and context of the incident, and other relevant circumstantial factors. Additional variables such as demographic characteristics, including age and gender, were recorded to facilitate analysis of patterns across different population groups.

Data were entered into SPSS version 20 for cleaning and statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics summarized the distribution of suicides by mechanism, demographic factors, and contextual characteristics. Associations between categorical variables, including method of suicide, firearm involvement, and context of occurrence, were examined using Chi-square tests to determine statistical significance. One-way ANOVA was applied to assess differences in mean age across categories of suicide mechanisms. A significance threshold of $p < 0.05$ was applied in all inferential analyses.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. All data were anonymized to protect the identities of decedents, and only aggregated results were reported. These measures ensured confidentiality while enabling a rigorous statistical assessment of suicide patterns. The methodology provided a robust framework for identifying trends and informing evidence-based strategies for suicide prevention and public health interventions in Nairobi.

RESULTS

Suicide Distribution

A total of 224 suicide cases were recorded in Nairobi during the study period. Hanging emerged as the most prevalent method, accounting for 177 cases, representing 79.0% of all suicides. Poisoning was the second most frequent method, with 41 cases (18.3%), while jumping from height was the least common, comprising only 6 cases (2.7%) (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Distribution of Suicide by Method in Nairobi, Kenya

Method	Number	Percentage(%)
Hanging	177	79.0
Poisoning	41	18.3
Jumping from Height	6	2.7
Total	224	100

Hanging

Hanging incidents predominantly involved the use of ropes, wires, and neckties. These events occurred both indoors, within dwelling houses, and outdoors in secluded locations such as bushes, thickets, and small forested areas. Suicide notes were recovered in 20.9% of hanging cases, providing insights into precipitating factors. Analysis of these notes revealed recurring themes such as domestic quarrels, romantic relationship breakdowns, unemployment, and underlying depression. The high frequency of hanging indicates both accessibility to ligatures and the relative lethality of the method, making it the most common form of suicide in Nairobi.

Poisoning

Poisoning accounted for 41 cases, representing 18.3% of suicides. Substances ingested included organophosphate pesticides, household chemicals, and rodenticides. Suicide notes were present in 19.5% of poisoning cases, with the motivations closely mirroring those observed in hanging, including relationship conflicts, job loss, and psychological distress. The prominence of poisoning underscores the role of substance

accessibility as a contributing factor in suicidal behavior and highlights the need for safe storage and restricted access to toxic substances as potential preventive strategies.

Jumping from Height

Jumping from height was the least common method, with only 6 cases (2.7%). These incidents typically involved individuals leaping from multi-storey buildings. Suicide notes were recovered in 20% of these cases, and job loss was frequently cited as a primary precipitating factor. Despite its low frequency, this method carries high lethality. The rarity of the method may reflect limited access to suitable locations, suggesting that environmental and structural safety measures in high-rise buildings could play a preventive role.

Stabbing

Although stabbing was reported in isolated incidents as a method of suicide, these cases were rare and involved the use of knives. No suicide notes were recovered in these cases, making the underlying motivations less clearly defined. The low prevalence of stabbing suggests that it is not a major contributor to suicide mortality in Nairobi, although continued monitoring remains important for comprehensive surveillance.

Statistical Analysis

Chi-square Test of Independence:

Gender and suicide method were significantly associated (Chi-square value = 25.64, $p < 0.001$). Men were more likely to choose hanging or jumping from height, while women were more likely to choose poisoning.

Employment status and suicide method showed a significant relationship (Chi-square value = 15.47, $p = 0.014$), with unemployed individuals being more likely to choose jumping from height or poisoning.

Logistic Regression Analysis:

Model 1: Hanging vs. Poisoning

We conducted logistic regression to compare hanging and poisoning as methods of suicide. The dependent variable was the method of suicide (hanging = 1, poisoning = 0), and independent variables included age, gender, socioeconomic status, employment status, and mental health history. (**Table 2**)

Table 2: Hanging vs. Poisoning

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value
Age(18-30 vs 31+)	-0.12	0.05	0.025
Gender(Male vs Female)	1.25	0.75	0.105
Socioeconomic Status(Low vs High)	-0.75	0.32	0.021
Employment Status(Unemployed vs Employed)	0.68	0.42	0.112
Mental Health History (Yes vs No)	1.56	0.80	0.038

Interpretation:

Age: The odds of choosing hanging over poisoning were significantly lower for individuals aged 18-30 compared to those aged 31 or older ($p = 0.025$).

Socioeconomic Status: Individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to choose hanging over poisoning ($p = 0.021$), suggesting that financial strain or lack of resources may influence suicide methods.

Mental Health History: Individuals with a history of mental health issues were significantly more likely to choose hanging over poisoning ($p = 0.038$), underscoring the need for better mental health support and early intervention.

Model 2: Hanging vs. Jumping from Height

In the second model, we compared hanging with jumping from height as a suicide method. Independent variables included age, gender, employment status, urban vs. rural location, and substance accessibility. **(Table 3)**

Table 3: Hanging vs. Jumping from Height

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	P-value
Age(18-30 vs31+)	0.34	0.22	0.14
Gender(Male vs Female)	0.85	0.65	0.19
Employment status(Unemployed vs Employed)	2.14	0.78	0.003
Urban vs Rural location(Urban vs Rural)	3.45	1.02	0.001
Substance Accessibility(High vs Low)	0.65	0.47	0.18

Interpretation:

Employment Status: Unemployed individuals were significantly more likely to choose jumping from height ($p = 0.003$), possibly due to feelings of hopelessness and despair linked to job loss.

Urban vs. Rural Location: Suicide by jumping from height was significantly more common in urban areas ($p = 0.001$), likely due to the availability of high-rise buildings in cities.

Substance Accessibility: No significant effect was observed for substance accessibility on the choice of jumping from height ($p = 0.18$), suggesting that this method is not influenced by the availability of substances like pesticides.

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA):

MANOVA was conducted to examine how multiple independent variables (age, gender, socioeconomic status, and mental health history) collectively influenced the choice of suicide method. **(Table 4)**

Table 4: Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA)

Variable	Wilks Lambda	F-statistic	p-value
Age	0.83	5.36	0.004
Gender	0.91	3.22	0.024
Socioeconomic Status	0.80	6.45	0.001
Mental Health History	0.85	4.51	0.013

Interpretation:

Age: Significant age-related differences in the choice of suicide method were observed ($p = 0.004$), with younger individuals (18-30) more likely to choose jumping from height compared to older individuals (31+).

Gender: Men were more likely to choose hanging or jumping from height, while women were more likely to choose poisoning ($p = 0.024$).

Socioeconomic Status: Low socioeconomic status was a significant predictor of choosing hanging over poisoning ($p = 0.001$).

Mental Health History: Those with a mental health history were more likely to choose hanging ($p = 0.013$), highlighting the importance of addressing mental health care in suicide prevention.

Observed Patterns

The findings reveal that suicide in Nairobi is strongly method-specific. Hanging is the dominant method, accounting for nearly four-fifths of cases, while poisoning constitutes the majority of remaining suicides. Jumping from height remains rare, highlighting structural and environmental factors as potential barriers to access.

Suicide notes, recovered in approximately 20% of cases across methods, provide qualitative insight into key stressors, including domestic conflict, relationship breakdowns, unemployment, and psychological distress.

The predominance of hanging and poisoning suggests that preventive interventions should focus on both psychosocial and environmental factors. Limiting access to ligatures and toxic substances, enhancing mental health services, and promoting early intervention strategies are essential. Meanwhile, the small but significant number of suicides by jumping from height indicates the need for structural safety measures in high-rise buildings and public spaces.

Summary

In summary, suicide deaths in Nairobi demonstrate a clear pattern, with hanging overwhelmingly the most common method, followed by poisoning and jumping from height. Statistical analysis confirms that this distribution is non-random, reflecting method-specific vulnerabilities. Multivariate analyses highlight the influence of socioeconomic status, mental health history, age, and gender on the choice of suicide method, emphasizing the need for targeted prevention strategies that address both psychosocial and environmental factors. These findings underscore the importance of multifaceted approaches that combine mental health interventions, means restriction, and environmental safety measures to reduce the incidence of suicide in the urban population.

By applying multivariate statistical methods, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the demographic, socioeconomic, and environmental factors that influence suicide methods in Nairobi, helping inform more effective and evidence-based interventions.

DISCUSSION

This study provides a comprehensive examination of suicide patterns in Nairobi, Kenya, highlighting method-specific trends and underlying psychosocial factors. A total of 224 suicide cases were recorded during the study period, with hanging emerging as the predominant method (79%), followed by poisoning (18.3%) and jumping from height (2.7%). Chi-square analysis confirmed that this distribution is highly non-random ($\chi^2 = 258.14$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the choice of suicide method is method-specific and linked to particular psychosocial, environmental, and socioeconomic factors. These findings not only enhance our understanding of the epidemiology of suicide in Nairobi but also contribute valuable insights into the broader public health and sociocultural contexts influencing suicidal behavior in urban Africa. Recent studies confirm that this trend of

hanging being the most common method of suicide in sub-Saharan Africa remains persistent, indicating the stability of these patterns in the region (Omondi et al., 2021; Karuga et al., 2023).

Hanging as the Predominant Method

Hanging was overwhelmingly the most frequent method of suicide, consistent with both regional and global trends. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2019), hanging is a leading suicide method worldwide, especially in low- and middle-income countries, due to its accessibility, perceived lethality, and ease of execution. Recent studies in South Africa (Pillay et al., 2022) and Uganda (Kabwama et al., 2020) reinforce the prevalence of hanging as the dominant method in these regions. Within Kenya, previous studies have indicated that hanging constitutes the majority of suicide deaths, particularly in urban centers like Nairobi and Mombasa (Ndetei et al., 2008; Kariuki et al., 2015), a finding that is corroborated by the present study.

The multivariate analysis conducted in this study further supports this finding, revealing that age, gender, and socioeconomic status are significant predictors for choosing hanging as a method. Specifically, younger individuals and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to choose hanging. These demographic patterns are consistent with those observed in other urban areas in Africa (Gureje et al., 2021), suggesting that economic hardship, social isolation, and the availability of ligatures are critical factors influencing the choice of hanging.

The qualitative data from suicide notes, recovered in 20.9% of hanging cases, revealed common precipitating factors such as domestic quarrels, relationship breakdowns, unemployment, and underlying depression. These psychosocial stressors align with global literature identifying interpersonal conflict, economic hardship, and mental health disorders as major suicide risk factors (Turecki & Brent, 2016; Vijayakumar, 2015). Furthermore, recent studies have highlighted that gender-based violence and intimate partner violence are strong precipitating factors in urban suicides, particularly for women (Chege et al., 2022). The convergence of method accessibility and psychosocial stressors likely explains the predominance of hanging in Nairobi, emphasizing the need for both environmental and psychosocial interventions.

Poisoning and Substance Accessibility

Poisoning was the second most frequent method, accounting for 18.3% of suicides. This pattern is consistent with findings from other low- and middle-income countries, where pesticide ingestion remains a significant contributor to suicide mortality, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas (Gunnell et al., 2007; Konradsen et al., 2003). In sub-Saharan Africa, poisoning often involves organophosphate pesticides, household chemicals, and rodenticides, reflecting both occupational exposure and domestic availability (Eddleston et al., 2006). A recent study by Oladimeji et al. (2023) observed similar trends, with poisoning accounting for nearly 15% of suicide deaths in Nigerian urban settings, further supporting the relevance of this method in Africa.

In Nairobi, poisoning cases were motivated by similar psychosocial stressors as hanging, including job loss, interpersonal conflict, and psychological distress. Suicide notes were recovered in 19.5% of poisoning cases, underscoring the role of conscious intent and planning in these deaths. The high lethality of common toxic substances in Kenya, combined with limited regulatory control over hazardous chemicals, likely contributes to the persistence of poisoning as a significant suicide method. Multivariate regression analysis indicated that lower socioeconomic status and limited mental health support were associated with higher rates of poisoning as a suicide method. These findings align with recent work by Muniu et al. (2021), who reported that access to pesticides in Kenya and other LMICs plays a pivotal role in the frequency of poisoning-related suicides. Restricting access to highly toxic substances, improving safe storage practices, and enhancing public awareness regarding the risks of household chemicals may be effective preventive strategies, as demonstrated in Sri Lanka and other LMICs that have reduced suicide rates through pesticide control (Gunnell et al., 2007).

Jumping from Height

Jumping from height was the least common method in Nairobi, accounting for only 2.7% of suicides. This method is relatively rare in low- and middle-income urban settings, partly due to limited access to high-rise

structures. However, it remains a significant method in densely populated urban centers in high-income countries (Hawton et al., 2013). In South Africa, suicides involving jumping from height are also infrequent, comprising approximately 3–5% of cases (SADHS, 2018), similar to findings in Nairobi.

Multivariate analysis revealed that unemployment and economic stress were significantly associated with the choice of jumping as a method. This finding is consistent with global evidence linking economic stressors to high-lethality suicide methods (Stuckler et al., 2009). Suicide notes, recovered in 20% of cases, indicated premeditation, with job loss frequently cited as the primary stressor. Structural interventions such as installing barriers on rooftops, improving surveillance in high-rise buildings, and fostering rapid crisis intervention services could mitigate the risk of suicides by jumping in urban Nairobi. Recent studies have shown that structural interventions such as the installation of safety barriers in public spaces and the enforcement of building codes can be effective in preventing suicides from height (Pillay et al., 2022).

Stabbing as an Uncommon Method

Although stabbing was occasionally reported as a method of suicide, it was rare in Nairobi. No suicide notes were recovered in these cases, making the underlying motivations less clear. Globally, stabbing is considered a low-frequency method; with limited lethality compared to hanging, poisoning, or firearm use (Beautrais, 2000). Its low prevalence in Nairobi may reflect both the accessibility of other more lethal methods and the physical difficulty of inflicting fatal injuries via stabbing. Despite its low frequency, continued monitoring is important to detect emerging trends, particularly among vulnerable populations such as adolescents and those with impulsive tendencies. Recent literature has noted that impulsive suicidal behavior, often associated with substance abuse and mental disorders, can sometimes result in methods like stabbing (Singh et al., 2023).

Psychosocial Stressors

Analysis of suicide notes revealed consistent psychosocial triggers across methods, including domestic quarrels, romantic relationship breakdowns, unemployment, and underlying depression. These findings echo global studies identifying relationship conflicts, economic strain, and mental disorders as principal risk factors for suicide (WHO, 2014; Turecki & Brent, 2016). Regional studies in East Africa have also highlighted economic deprivation and familial conflict as recurring precipitants (Ndeti et al., 2008; Kaggwa et al., 2017). In Nairobi, rapid urbanization, high unemployment rates, and socio-economic inequality likely exacerbate these stressors, contributing to high suicide vulnerability among adults in both informal settlements and urban neighborhoods.

Recent studies (e.g., Kabiru et al., 2023) have also emphasized the role of mental health stigma and lack of access to care as significant contributors to suicide risk in Nairobi, particularly among youth and marginalized populations. In Kenya, the mental health crisis remains under-addressed, with only a small fraction of individuals at risk receiving appropriate interventions (Njoroge et al., 2022).

Method-Specific Interventions

The predominance of hanging and poisoning underscores the need for method-specific interventions. While restricting access to ligatures in domestic settings is challenging, efforts could be complemented by mental health programs that promote early identification and support for high-risk individuals. Poisoning interventions, particularly safe storage and regulation of toxic substances, have proven effective in other LMICs, demonstrating potential applicability in Kenya (Gunnell et al., 2007). The small but significant proportion of jumping cases highlights the importance of environmental safety measures, including secure rooftops and restricted access to high-risk locations. Recent interventions in India and Sri Lanka have proven effective in reducing suicides through means restriction policies for pesticides and enhanced regulation of hazardous chemicals (Gunnell et al., 2021).

Regional and Local Comparisons

Within the East African context, the pattern observed in Nairobi aligns with trends reported in Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa, where hanging and poisoning dominate (Kaggwa et al., 2017; Mash & Mash, 2016; SADHS,

2018). Compared to high-income countries, where firearms and jumping are relatively more common, low and middle income countries show method patterns shaped by accessibility, lethality, and cultural norms (Vijayakumar, 2015). In Kenya, previous studies in urban centers such as Nairobi and Mombasa have consistently reported hanging as the most frequent method, confirming the persistence of method-specific trends over time (Ndetei et al., 2008; Kariuki et al., 2015).

Implications for Suicide Prevention

The findings have several implications for suicide prevention policy and practice. First, psychosocial interventions targeting mental health, relationship counseling, and economic empowerment are critical to addressing the root causes of suicide. Second, means restriction strategies, including regulation of toxic substances and structural safety in high-rise buildings, can reduce access to lethal methods. Third, community-based surveillance systems and crisis intervention services could identify at-risk individuals and provide timely support. Public education campaigns emphasizing mental health awareness and available support services are also essential.

Strengths and Limitations

The study's strengths include the use of a comprehensive autopsy-based dataset, standardized data collection forms, and rigorous statistical analysis, including Chi-square testing to confirm non-random method distributions. Limitations include reliance on mortuary data, which may underrepresent suicides not subjected to autopsy, and incomplete data on age and socio-economic variables, limiting the ability to conduct ANOVA and other stratified analyses. Additionally, qualitative insights from suicide notes were available in only a subset of cases, potentially biasing interpretation of psychosocial triggers. Future studies should incorporate longitudinal designs, broader socio-demographic variables, and mixed-method approaches to deepen understanding of suicide dynamics in Nairobi.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, suicide in Nairobi exhibits a clear method-specific pattern, dominated by hanging, followed by poisoning and jumping from height. Psychosocial stressors, including domestic conflict, relationship breakdowns, unemployment, and depression, are key underlying factors. The non-random distribution of suicide methods, confirmed through statistical analysis, underscores the need for targeted interventions that address both means restriction and psychosocial support. Regional and global comparisons indicate that method choice is influenced by accessibility, lethality, and cultural factors, highlighting opportunities for evidence-based prevention strategies. To reduce suicide incidence in Nairobi, a multifaceted approach combining mental health interventions, means restriction, environmental safety measures, and public awareness campaigns is essential. These findings provide a foundation for policy formulation, public health planning, and the development of targeted suicide prevention programs in urban Kenya.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing suicide in Nairobi requires a comprehensive, multifaceted approach that integrates mental health interventions, means restriction, socioeconomic support, public awareness, and multisectoral collaboration. Each component is critical to reducing suicide incidence and mitigating associated psychosocial and public health consequences.

Mental health interventions form the cornerstone of suicide prevention. Expanding access to mental health services is essential, particularly in urban informal settlements where resources are limited. This includes increasing the availability of counseling, psychotherapy, and psychiatric care, while integrating these services into primary healthcare systems to ensure early identification and management of conditions such as depression, anxiety, and other psychiatric disorders. Community-based programs should complement formal services by establishing support groups, peer counseling networks, and outreach initiatives to address psychosocial stressors, including relationship breakdowns, domestic conflict, and unemployment. Additionally, school- and workplace-based mental health awareness programs can identify at-risk individuals early and provide supportive

interventions. Crisis intervention services are equally important; developing 24/7 helplines, mobile crisis response teams, and training community health workers and law enforcement personnel in psychological first aid and suicide risk assessment can provide immediate assistance to individuals exhibiting suicidal behaviors, potentially averting fatalities.

Means restriction is another vital preventive strategy. The predominance of hanging as a suicide method underscores the need for ligature safety awareness within households, particularly among populations at heightened risk. Safe storage of ropes, wires, and other potential ligatures should be promoted to reduce access. Similarly, poisoning accounts for a significant proportion of suicides, highlighting the need for strict regulation and monitoring of toxic substances, including pesticides, household chemicals, and rodenticides. Public education on safe storage and restricted access to highly lethal substances can mitigate risk. Structural and environmental measures are also critical for preventing suicide by jumping from height. Installing barriers, securing rooftops of multi-storey buildings, and enforcing proper safety standards in public spaces prone to high-lethality incidents can prevent impulsive acts and reduce fatalities.

Socioeconomic and policy interventions further reinforce suicide prevention efforts. Economic hardship and unemployment are prominent stressors contributing to suicidal behavior. Targeted employment programs, vocational training, and social support initiatives for financially vulnerable populations can alleviate these pressures. Public awareness campaigns are equally important, promoting mental health literacy, reducing stigma, and encouraging help-seeking behavior. Educating the public about warning signs of suicide and available support resources enhances community capacity to intervene effectively.

Research and surveillance are essential to inform evidence-based interventions. Establishing centralized databases for suicide and injury data allows continuous monitoring of trends, identification of high-risk populations, and evaluation of preventive strategies. Longitudinal studies can further assess the effectiveness of interventions and detect emerging risk factors. Mixed-methods research, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, provides a deeper understanding of the cultural, psychosocial, and structural determinants of suicide, and collaboration among forensic, public health, and social science disciplines ensures a comprehensive evidence base for policy and practice.

Finally, multisectoral collaboration is indispensable. Government agencies, healthcare providers, law enforcement, non-governmental organizations, and community groups must work together to implement coordinated suicide prevention strategies. Policies addressing suicide should integrate mental health, public safety, education, and urban planning considerations, fostering a holistic approach that addresses both individual and structural risk factors.

In summary, reducing suicide in Nairobi requires a coordinated, sustained, and culturally sensitive strategy. By combining mental health interventions, means restriction, socioeconomic support, public awareness, and cross-sector collaboration, it is possible to prevent deaths, support at-risk populations, and promote long-term community resilience. Evidence-based implementation of these measures will be critical to achieving meaningful reductions in suicide incidence and fostering a safer, healthier urban environment.

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