

Suicide in the Danish media

Guidelines, publicity and influence

MA. Trine Banke d'Andrade, Centre for Suicide Research, Denmark, 2018

INTRODUCTION:

In 2008, WHO and IASP published Preventing suicide: a resource for media professionals, which is a guideline for sound reporting on completed and attempted suicides. An updated guideline was published in June 2017 and is available for download at the WHO website.

AIM:

The purpose of the project is to examine if current coverage comply with the recommended guidelines.

METHODS:

Analysis of national and regional media publicity on *suicide, suicide prevention, suicide research, attempted suicide, suicidal ideation, suicide rate(s), suicidal behaviour and suicide threat.*

RESULTS:

From January 1st to June 30th 2018, 237 articles and reader's letters were published with one or more of the above terms. Of these, 115 have been excluded from Table 1, as they only mention suicide once in relation to other themes, without it being emphasized in e.g. headline or caption. Table 1 shows in what relation the above terms were found in the remaining articles.

Headline	35	Each article may be represented in several categories, and follow-up articles on the same case or same major theme are each included.
Caption or 2nd headline	50	
Media meta-theme	29	The most prominent categories are Caption or second headline, Headline and Leader – debate – opinion. See Table 1.
Media's own ethical charter	2	
Major theme	27	
Minor theme	26	Debates and opinions are primarily written by non-professionals and it is unlikely that they are aware of the Media Guidelines.
Fact box	16	
Help box	5	Interestingly, 29 articles deal with suicide in the media (social media, YouTube, media smear campaigns that may have resulted in suicides). Only two articles/medias refer to their own ethical charter for reporting on suicide and the WHO/IASP Guidelines.
Location mentioned	10	
Method mentioned	12	
Celebrity - romanticization - otherwise relatable	8	
Metaphoric use	13	
Leader - debate - opinion	33	

Table 1. *n*=122

CONCLUSION:

Articles written by professional reporters, who often tackle difficult humanistic themes, primarily uses the suicide-term soundly, even if the articles do not observe the entire guideline. It could prove effective to direct the less attentive reporters to the media guidelines. Suicide as a concept is often used metaphorically e.g. political or cultural suicide. It is uncertain if such usages effects susceptible persons; however, WHO/IASP media guidelines recommend avoidance of such usage to prevent trivialization of the concept.

In order to examine a possible connection, it would be interesting to combine the media data with attempted and committed suicides for the period once those data become available.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information concerning the project, please contact MA. Trine Banke d'Andrade, Centre for Suicide Research, Denmark, email: tbk@cfsmail.dk.

