

Suicide in the Danish media

Guidelines, publicity and influence

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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 available for download in June 2017.

AIM:

The objective is to examine if current coverage comply with the media guidelines for sound reporting on completed and attempted suicides, as recommended by WHO and IASP in their joint 2017-publication.

METHODS:

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

RESULTS:

From January 1st to December 31st 2018, 734 articles and reader's letters were published with one or more of the above terms. Of these, 276 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 are found in the remaining articles.

Headline	93	Each article may be represented in several categories, and follow-up articles on the same case or same major theme are included.
Caption or 2nd headline	151	
Media meta-theme	34	The most prominent categories are <i>Caption or second headline, Headline and Leader, opinion, discussion papers</i> . See Table 1.
Media's own ethical charter	3	
Major theme	74	
Minor theme	92	Discussions papers are primarily written by non-professionals and it is unlikely that they are aware of the Media Guidelines.
Fact box	40	
Help box	17	Interestingly, 34 articles deal with suicide in the media (social media, YouTube, media smear campaigns that may have resulted in suicides). Only 3 articles/medias refer to their own ethical charter for reporting on suicide and the WHO/IASP Guidelines.
Location mentioned	10	
Method mentioned	20	
Celebrity, romanticization, otherwise relatable	12	
Metaphoric use	46	
Leader, opinion, discussion papers	164	

Table 1. *n*=458

CONCLUSION:

Articles written by professional reporters, who often tackle difficult humanistic themes, primarily use the suicide-term soundly, even if the articles do not observe the entire guideline. It may 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 – especially in discussion papers, when the writer seeks to boost the argument. It is uncertain if such usages affect susceptible persons; however, WHO/IASP media guidelines recommend avoidance of such usage to prevent trivialization of the concept.

Next step will examine if coverage increases activities on the Centre's website by analysing tracking data prior to, during and after coverage. An interesting possible follow-up could combine the media data with attempted and committed suicides for the period once these data become available.

For further information concerning the project, please contact Trine Banke d'Andrade on tbk@cfsmail.dk

