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Original Article

A Survey on the Frequency of Suicide News Published in Newspapers and National News Agencies in Iran in the Year of 2018 and Its Concordance with the Suicide News Publishing Guideline in the Media

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: *Irresponsible reporting by media has got the potential of leading people to imitative suicidal behavior. The present study aimed to determine the frequency of suicide news published in Iranian national newspapers and news agencies during 2018 and its compliance with the printing guidelines for suicide news in the media.*
Materials and Methods*: In this descriptive study, according to the criteria mentioned in the media guidelines based on suicide reports, all information on printing suicide news of 9 national newspapers and 6 national news agencies during 2018was collected. The data of each news item was entered in the prepared checklist (from the guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2000 and the guide for reflecting news of suicide in the media in Iran in 2007) and was analyzed using the SPSS software version 21.*
Results: *During the one-year assessing period, 256 suicidal news reports were published by each of the selected national newspapers and news agencies. Keyhan newspaper with an average of 10.88 and a standard deviation of 1.53 and Mehr News Agency with an average of 10.52 and a standard deviation of 0.71 had the highest scores of conformity. Respectively, 14.3%, 17.2%, and 26.6% of newspapers and news agencies avoided publishing the word "suicide" in their headlines, detailed suicide methods, and exciting news report and magnification of suicide. Moreover, 1.8% of Newspapers and news agencies referred to suicide prevention methods, and this difference was statistically significant.*
Conclusion: *Suicide report is somewhat irresponsible in Iran. Efforts should be made to ensure that the media staff receives the necessary training in this context. Besides, more monitoring from media monitoring organizations and editors is of great need. Training should be accomplished using an active approach and be part of the curriculum for journalists and editors.*

Keywords
Media reports, Suicide, Instructions, Monitoring, Quality

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Introduction

Suicide is a non-accidental death, mainly carried out by the person himself with the aim of deliberately or partially destroying himself. The action is not accidental and meaningless, yet can be related to unmet needs and feelings of despair [1]. Suicide is one of the most common public health issues facing outstanding increases [2].It has been estimated by the World Health Organization (WHO) that nearly 800,000 deaths worldwide are due to suicide [3]. In 2016, suicide was the second leading cause of death among young people aged 15-29 worldwide [4] and at least 6 people are affected following each death due to suicide [2]. Suicide and its associated behaviors have significant emotional and economic burdens on the family, community, as well as adverse consequences for the public services and other social support systems [5]. Several environmental and individual factors including personal, time- and place-related factors affect the suicide process [6].

Media is one of the most powerful and pervasive environmental factors longly been identified by researchers for suicide occurrence [7-11]. Mentioning the suicide news in media outlets such as newspapers and magazines may increase the risk of the negative effects of this news compared to short oral news on radio and television due to its persistence, re-reading, and repetition [12-14]. Production and distribution of suicide movies based on true stories might also contribute to the enhancement of its risk in susceptible individuals [12-14]. Thus, by incorrect reporting suicide, media create an opportunity to transmit suicidal behavior [7]. The way to portray suicide might have a negative effect, mainly because prominently and repeatedly reporting this action on a large scale leads to the romanticization of suicide [15]. When depicting the detailed description of suicide using a particular device, this suicide method might be increased throughout the whole population [16].

This may spread suicide or in other words contribute to imitative suicide, which is attributed to Werther effect - the hero of Goethe's novel namely "The Sufferings of Young Werther" who shot himself to death due to his lover's betrayal [17] and thus, by romanticizing suicide-induced death, the risk of suicide in adolescents steps up[11]. On the counterpoint to Werther effect, the Papageno effect exists, attributed to a character in Mozart's opera –called Magic Flute- who was refrained from carrying out suicide by receiving help from his friends [18, 19]. Accordingly, irresponsibly reporting suicide by media has the potential to contribute to imitative suicide behavior [20]. Time [21], the amount and prominence of the report, reporting suicide by describing the methods [22], and reporting emotional suicide [23] may all contribute to the elevation of imitative suicide behavior. On the other hand, existing evidence indicates that responsibly reporting leads to suicide prevention [24]. The present study was designed to determine the suicide news published in national newspapers and news agencies in Iran and its compliance with the guideline for publishing suicide news during 2018.

Materials and Methods:

The present descriptive study was conducted on 9 national newspapers and 6 national news agencies in Iran, publishing suicide news during 2018. The ISNA newsgroup, the Iranian Student Opinion Polling Center (ISPA) conducted a survey on the opinions of the 21st press exhibition visitors about media on November7-13, 2015. The survey asked the newspaper reader respondents about the newspapers they prefer to read. 9 out of 125 national newspapers were named in response to the mentioned question, having the opportunity to choose several options as they wished. According to the findings of this survey, Hamshahri newspaper was recognized as the most widely read newspaper with 61%, followed by Jam-e Jam (42.4%), Iran (37.9%), Etelaat (29.4%), Keyhan (25.4%), Shargh (23.7%),

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Etemad (20.9%), Arman (20.3%) and Shahrvand (14.1%) [25].

Furthermore, the way to select news agencies was conducted according to the ISNA report and as announced by the public relations of ISPA, this center conducted a poll survey on news activists about news agencies and websites during the 22nd Press and News Agencies Exhibition on October 27 till November 3, 2017. Based on ISPA's poll results from a total of 12 national news agencies across the country, 66.7% of respondents usually visit the ISNA website, followed by IRNA (64.2%) and Fars News (53%) with a small difference in the next ranking positioning. Moreover, 48.7%, 47.9%, and 46.2% of news activists visited online news, Mehr and Tasnim, respectively [26].

Therefore, we selected the desired national newspapers from the best newspapers of the people's points of view in the press exhibition and the best national news agencies in the country of the news activists' points of view.

To prepare the checklist, the guidelines of the WHO in 2000, and the guidelines reflecting the suicide news in the media, prepared by the Office of Mental, Social, and Addiction Health of the Mental Health Department in 2007 in Iran have been used. A checklist including 26 items was prepared, of which 14 items were for media coverage of suicide news and 12items for demographic information and the number of suicides per published suicide news. According to the guidelines of WHO and the Guidelines for Reflecting Suicide News in the Media, it is necessary to avoid the accurate description of the suicide method, the reasons for simplification of suicide, printing images and videos of people who have suicide, publishing the word "suicide" in the headlines of newspapers, news agencies and printed manuscripts, and reporting "suicidal behavior" as a comprehensible response to social and cultural conversions, or social degradation as well, and other guidelines include avoiding the publication of suicide-related information on the front pages of newspapers, describing suicide as successful or failed, suicide epidemics, reporting suicide statistics with numbers, admirable and exciting descriptions of suicide and its magnification. The checklist also mentions suicide prevention methods, in which suicide is not described as an admirable heroic act. To assess compliance with these guidelines, number one and number zero were applied for compliance and non-compliance, respectively, and therefore, achieved maximum total score for this compliance was 14.

Subsequently, all 9 selected newspapers and 6 national news agencies were daily screened for their suicide publication news. To screen national news agencies, all the reported suicide news was checked following selecting the type of news agency and entering the word suicide in the search field. However, whole days and months of 2018 in terms of suicide news were screened to assay Ettela'at, Etemad, Shahrvand, Shargh, Iran, Arman, Keyhan, and Hamshahri newspapers, following selecting the counters of the desired newspapers. Since we were not capable of accessing the pages of Jam-e-Jam newspaper by selecting its counter, we were allowed to access it by selecting the title, newspaper number, and date.

After screening, a detailed investigation of each item was accomplished and every suicide-related news item was assessed as consistent or inconsistent with the responsible reporting. Therefore, the news item following the guidelines of the WHO and the Guidelines for Reflecting Suicide news in the Media was considered as consistent and, in the case of not following the above instructions, considered as inconsistent. As the present study was accomplished on elected national newspapers and national news agencies in Iran and as the newspapers were not allowed to publish movies, news agencies were solely examined for the item of avoiding the publication of movies. Also, due to the lack of specific paging by news agencies, we were not capable of reviewing the suicide-related items on the main pages, and therefore, this item was only reviewed in newspapers. Afterward, all statistical calculations

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were performed using the SPSS software version 21 and described in terms of number (percentage), average, and standard deviation. The compliance degree of the news item with the print guidelines in the media was calculated as percentage as well, and the Chi-squared test, independent t-test, and ANOVA test were used to compare the ratio of items regarding the guidelines in the above-mentioned newspapers and news agencies. The acceptable level of significance was established at $p<0.05$ unless otherwise indicated.

Results:

Of the 9 national newspapers and six national news agencies screened during the study period, 512 suicide-reported news was detected.

Table 1 indicates the number of news items published in each of the national newspapers and news agencies. The highest number of suicide news publication referred to the Iran newspaper, numbered 60 items (11.7%) and the Online news agency, numbered 99 items (19.3%), and the lowest number referred to the Keyhan newspaper with 17 items (3.3%) and Mehr News Agency with 20 items (3.9%), While the number of suicide news publication by Ettela'at and Etemad was zero (Table 1).

Table 1. The number of suicide-related news items published in each newspaper and news agency.

Name of newspaper	Percentage	Count
Iran	11.7%	60
Sahhrvand	9.4%	48
Jam-e-Jam	8.8%	45
Arman	7.8%	40
Shargh	4.5%	23
Hamshahri	4.5%	23
Keyhan	3.3%	17
Name of the news agency	Percentage	**Count**
Online news	19.3%	99
Fars	8.0%	41
Isna	7.8%	40
Tasnim	6.1%	31
Irna	4.9%	25
Mehr	3.9%	20
Total	100%	512

Table 2 declares the compliance score average for each newspaper and news agency with the suicide news publication guidelines in the media. Keyhan newspaper and MehrNews Agency with the averages of 9.88 and 9.25 and standard deviations of 1.53 and 0.71 had the highest scores of conformity while the lowest scores of conformity went to Shargh newspaper and online news with averages of 8.34 and 8.39 and standard deviations of 1.07 and 1.18, respectively. It was also observed that national newspapers further followed the instructions of the media to cover suicide news, compared to news agencies (Table 2).

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Table 2. The average score for the compliance of each newspaper and news agency with the suicide news publication guidelines in media

Newspaper	Average	Maximum	Minimum	Count	Standard deviation
Keyhan	**9.88**	**12**	**7**	**17**	**1.53**
Iran	**9.35**	**12**	**7**	**60**	**1.29**
Hamshahri	**9.08**	**12**	**8**	**23**	**1.31**
Shahrvand	**8.81**	**12**	**7**	**48**	**1.37**
Jam-e-Jam	**8.88**	**11**	**7**	**45**	**1.04**
Shargh	**8.34**	**11**	**7**	**23**	**1.07**
Arman	**8.85**	**11**	**7**	**40**	**0.97**
Newspaper	**Average**	**Maximum**	**Minimum**	**Count**	**Standard deviation**
Irna	**9**	**11**	**5**	**25**	**1.22**
Mehr	**9.25**	**10**	**8**	**20**	**0.71**
Isna	**8.75**	**11**	**6**	**40**	**1.10**
Nasim	**8.51**	**10**	**7**	**31**	**0.76**
Fars	**8.43**	**10**	**6**	**41**	**1.02**
Online news	**8.39**	**12**	**6**	**99**	**1.18**

Table 3 shows the compliance frequency of each news item and the suicide report differences based on the national newspaper and the national news agency. It was observed that the number and percentage of items avoiding using the word suicide in the headlines, was 69 (27%) for newspapers, 4 (1.6%) for news agencies, and 73 (14.3%) in general, respectively and this difference is statistically significant. In 244 news items published by news agencies, 95.3%, it has been avoided to print the suicides videos. The number and percentage of items avoiding publishing the picture of the person who has carried out suicide was 241 (94.1%) for newspapers, 213 (83.2%) for news agencies and 454 (88.7%) in general, respectively and this difference is statistically significant. respectively 117 (45.7%), 147 (57.4%) and 84 (51.6%) items of news published by newspapers, news agencies, and in total avoided the description of suicide as an inexplicable or simplistic issue and this difference is statistically significant. Avoiding the publication of articles written by individuals before carrying out suicide was indicated in 230 (89.8%) and 234 (91.4%) news items published by newspapers and news agencies which accounts for 464 (90.6%) news items in general and this difference is not statistically significant (Table 3).

Avoiding exciting and large-scaled coverage of the news in newspapers and news agencies was observed in 72(28.1%) and 64 (25%) news items which accounts for 136 (26.6%) items in general and is not statistically significant. Avoiding mentioning the detailed suicide method in newspapers and news agencies was indicated in 43(16.8%) and 45 (17.6%) news items, accounting for 88 (17.2%) items in general which are not statistically significant. In 256 (100%) news items published by newspapers and news agencies, 512 (100%) items in general, it was avoided to describe suicide as an admirable heroic act. The avoidance of publishing suicide-related information on the front pages of newspapers was 251% (98%). Also, avoidance of publishing the "successful suicide" words for completed suicides leading to death was 256 (100%) in newspapers, 253 (98.8%) in news agencies and 509

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(99.4%) in general which is not statistically significant. The avoidance of mentioning terms such as "suicide epidemic" or "region with the highest suicide rate in the world" was 256(100%) in newspapers, 249 (97.3%) in news agencies and 505(98.6%) in general which is statistically significant. In 256 (100%) and 252 (98.4%) news items published by newspapers and news agencies respectively, (508 (99.2%) items in general), it was avoided to report suicide statistics with numbers and figures which is statistically significant. It was observed that the number and percentage of news items avoiding reporting the suicide behavior as a "comprehensible response to social, cultural changes" or "degradation of social rank" was 256 (100%) for newspapers, 235 (91.8%) for news agencies and 491 (95.9%) in general, respectively and the difference is statistically significant. Also, in 4 (1.6%) and 5 (2.0%) news items respectively published by newspapers and news agencies, 9 (1.8%) news items in general, suicide prevention methods were referenced and the difference is statistically significant (Table 3).

Table 3. The compliance of each item with the guidelines for publishing suicide news in media, segregated by newspapers and news agencies

News scale	Accommodation number in the newspapers	Accommodation percentage	Accommodation number in the news agencies	Accommodation percentage	Total number	Total	Acceptance level
Avoiding printing the word "suicide" in the headline	69	27%	4	1.6%	73	%14.3	<0.001
Avoiding publication of videos of people committing and completing suicide			244	95.3%	244	95.3%	
Avoiding publication of pictures from people committing and completing suicide	241	94.1%	213	83.2%	454	88.7%	<0.001
Avoiding publication of articles written by people before committing suicide	230	89.8%	234	91.4%	464	90.6%	0.544
Avoiding exciting and magnificent coverage of suicide	72	28.1%	64	25.00%	136	26.6%	0.423
Avoiding detailed description of the suicide method	43	16.8%	45	17.6%	88	17.2%	0.815
Avoiding description of suicide as an inexplicable or simplistic issue	117	45.7%	147	57.4%	264	51.6%	0.008
Avoiding description of suicide as an admirable heroic act	256	100%	256	100%	512	100%	
Avoiding publication of suicide-related information on the main pages	251	98.00%					
Avoiding the words "successful suicide" for completed suicides leading to death	256	100%	253	98.8%	509	99.4%	0.082

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Avoiding phrases such as "suicide epidemic" or "region with the highest prevalence of suicide in the world"	256	100%	249	97.3%	505	98.6%	0.008
Avoiding the suicide statistics reporting	256	100%	252	98.4%	508	99.2%	0.045
Avoiding the report of suicidal behavior "as a comprehensible response to social, cultural changes" or "degradation of social rank"	256	100%	235	91.8%	491	95.9%	<0.001
Mentioning the suicide prevention methods	4	1.6%	5	2.0%	9	1.8%	0.737
Is suicide news related to another country?	41	16%	53	21.5%	94	18.7%	0.112

Using an independent t-test, a significant difference between the compliance of newspapers (with an average of 9.01% and standard deviation of 1.26) and news agencies (with an average of 8.59 and standard deviation of 1.10) was observed (Table 4).

Table 4. The average scores for the compliance of newspaper and news agency with the suicide news publication guidelines in media

	Count	Average	Standard Deviation	Significance level
Newspaper	256	9.01	1.26	<0.001
News Agency	256	8.59	1.105	

*Independent-samples t-test

Discussion:

It has been indicated by many studies that irresponsible media reporting can lead to imitative suicidal behaviors [27, 28]. There is a lack of systematic research on the quality of media reporting and adherence to media guidelines by journalists and editors in Iran. The present study provides a regular review of the journalists and editors adherence to media guidelines and analyzes trends over a period of time. These findings provide insight into the impact of the remaining guidelines and challenges. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the frequency of suicide news coverage in national media and news agencies during 2018and its compliance with the guide for publishing suicide news in the media in Iran.

In the present study, the average rate for the compliance of newspapers (9.01) was observed to be higher compared to news agencies (8.59), and it was found that Iranian national newspapers and news agencies tend to standard reporting of suicide news. In the present study, less than 90% in 6 out of 13 suicides reports in newspapers and news agencies avoided mentioning detailed description. Approximately 17.2% of the reports avoided the detailed description of the suicide method, and 14.3% avoided publishing the suicide word in the headline.

Despite the widespread dissemination of World Health Organization guidelines on how to report suicide by

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media, most studies have been less adherent to these guidelines and there are differences between countries regarding the observance of the adherence to the available options with the suicide news publication guidelines [29-37]. Due to the effect of mentioning the word suicide in the headlines of newspapers and news agencies on readers, the avoidance of printing the word suicide in the headlines is the most serious issue in the present study.

In Iran, avoidance of mentioning suicide in the headlines of newspapers and news agencies is 14.3%, while investigating 4 suicides in 243 media reports over a three-year period between 2009 and 2012, mentioning percentage of the word suicide in Ireland was 79.9% [35], similar to Austria which was 86.1% [38] and this estimated percentage in the printed and online media of Taiwan [39], India [40], Australia [41], Slavonia [42], USA [43], China [44], Egypt [45] were respectively 85.45%, 77%, 70.5%, 57%, 50%, 19.5% and 5%. Also, in a study conducted on the printed media of four countries in the Southeast Asian region, mentioning percentage of the word suicide in 4 newspapers reviewed in Bangladesh ranged from 5.9 to 59.4% (and on average 39.15%), in a newspaper reviewed in Bhutan was 33.3%, in 3 newspapers reviewed in India ranged from 27.5 to 40% (and on average 32.97%) and in one newspaper reviewed in Indonesia was 100%, which ranks Iran beneath other surveyed countries and overhead Egypt in the mentioned context [46].

Detailed referring to the suicide method, such as drug overdose, can affect vulnerable people using the same method to perform similar actions, especially in cases using an unusual or unknown method. Mainly because media reports of a new method can quickly increase the prevalence of suicide using that method. In the present study, avoidance of the detailed referring to the suicide method in newspapers and news agencies was 17.2%, while 84.15%, 80.1%, 78.5%, 62%, 50.4%, 44%, 21%, 11%, 2% and 0.55% in the printed and online media of Taiwan [39], printed media of Ireland [35], Austria [24], Britain [47], Australia [48] , United States [43], Slovenia [49], India [40], Egypt [45], and Indonesian online media [50], respectively.

Also, in a study conducted on the printed media of four countries in the Southeast Asian region, detailed referring to the suicide method ranged from 1.6 to 29.3% (and on average 12.65%) in 4 newspapers reviewed in Bangladesh, 100% in a newspaper reviewed in Bhutan, 7.3 to 100% (and on average 39.44%) in 3 newspapers reviewed in India and 0.6% in one newspaper reviewed in Indonesia [46], which ranks Iran beneath other surveyed countries and overhead Egypt, India, Indonesia, and Bangladesh in the mentioned context. Therefore, due to the imitative effects of the detailed reporting of the suicide method and due to the low compliance of avoiding the details of the suicide method with the guidelines of the WHO and publishing suicide news in the present study in Iran and compared to other countries, this is an important concern, because the researches have indicated the correlation between media reports about suicide and contagious suicide with such a method [23].

The most important aspect of media reports related to increased suicidal behavior is a description of overt suicide and an exciting and exaggerative descriptive report about suicide which account for 26.6%, 88.4%, 55%, 31.2%, and 21% in Iran, Ireland [35], Slovenia [49], India [51], and Britain [47], respectively. Exciting and exaggerative descriptive report about suicide has been discussed in the media for many years and indicates that Iran has avoided this action less than Ireland, Slovenia, and India, and more than Britain.

In the present study, avoiding describing suicide as an unexplained or simplistic issue was 51.6% while

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44.15% in the printed and online media of Taiwan [39] during a two-year investigating period. It has been indicated that suicide reports in Iranian national newspapers and news agencies tend to describe suicide as inexplicable or simplistic action.

Many studies around the world have pointed that publishing photos of people attempting suicide and completed suicide is a common practice [22, 52-55], while the harmful effects of such reporting methods are widespread. It has been recorded [53, 56] that this dangerous pattern of reporting may be thought of as believing in the great sale of emotional news.

Also, appropriate publishing of the images in suicide reports and limited suggestion of the location and content of the suicide note would be a positive trend proposed to observe as by publishing inappropriate pictures, location, and content of a suicide note, vulnerable readers could be affected and widespread media coverage in an area has the potential to encourage vulnerable people to suicide [57, 35, 29]. Accordingly, due to the greater impact of photo publishing on readers [58], 88.7% of the cases avoided printing the pictures of people who carried out suicide in our study, while the percentage stands for 95.8% [35], 91% [59], 87.1% [24], 52% [45], and 42.5% in Ireland, Hong Kong, Austria, Egypt and China, respectively, and also this percentage stands for 24.2% in the printed and online media of Taiwan, 45.7-97% (on average 81.3%) [39] in a study conducted in the printed media of four countries in the Southeast Asian region, in 4 newspapers reviewed in Bangladesh, 100% in one newspaper reviewed in Bhutan, 78.5-100% (on average 91.94%) in 3 newspapers reviewed in India and 59.5% in a newspaper surveyed in Indonesia [46], indicating the unfavorable ranking for Iran compared to Ireland, Hong Kong and Bhutan and its more favorable ranking rather to Austria and Egypt in this area.

Uncovering the explicit content of a suicide note may affect vulnerable people, including the bereaved ones. This information alone, without context, may not include the whole story [60]. In the present study, avoidance of publishing the notes written by individuals before suicide in national newspapers and news agencies was 90.6%, while 100% [31], 94% [45], 86% [40], and 95.2% [24] in Ireland, Egypt, India, and Austria, respectively and also in the study conducted in the printed media of four countries in the Southeast Asian region [46], the percentage stands for 91-95.8%, an average of 93.3%, in Bangladesh, 100% in butane, 90.5% in Indonesia and 82-90.5%, an average of 89.4, in India [46]. Therefore, avoidance of publishing their written articles was favorable to India and unfavorable to Ireland, Austria, Egypt, and Iran.

In the present study, 95.3% of news agencies avoided printing the video film of those attempting suicide and completed suicide. Furthermore, the overemphasis on society's grief may indicate people's pride in their suicidal behavior, leading them to suicide more likely [35, 61].

Highlighting the suicide report on the front pages of the news and the indiscriminate repetition of the suicide story should be avoided, as it may lead to imitative behaviors [56]. 98% of newspapers avoided publishing suicide-related information on the front pages of newspapers and complied with the guidelines in the present study. While in the studies conducted in Austria, United States, printed and online media of Taiwan, Ireland, Egypt, Australia and India, avoidance of publishing information related to suicide on the main pages of the news achieved a compliance rate of 96.8% [38], 94% [43], 93.7% [39], 90.5% [35], 86% [45], 83.1% [41] and 68% [40], respectively, and on the other hand, in a study conducted in the printed media of four countries in the Southeast Asian region [46], the

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percentage stands for 92.3-100%, on average of 98.1%, in 4 newspapers surveyed in Bangladesh, 98.9% in Bhutan, 67.7-95.1%, on average of 83.6%, in India, and 100% in Indonesia, indicating the unfavorable quality of Iranian reporting to Indonesia, Bhutan, and Bangladesh and its favorable action to other investigated countries in avoiding the publication of information on the main pages.

Avoidance of using the words "successful suicide" for completed suicides leading to death was 100% in the national newspapers (printed ones), 98.8% in the national news agencies (online) and 99.4% in total, Whereas in the two-year survey in Taiwan, the percentage was 98.4% in printed media, 98.2% in online media and 98.3% in total [39].

Many studies have pointed that romanticizing suicide or ideally portraying the behavior of people who carry out suicide by picturing suicide as a heroic or romantic act may motivate others to suicide [62]. Avoiding describing suicide as an admirable heroic act in the present study was 100%, while in the print and online media of Taiwan was 98.4% [39], in Ireland 88.4%, in Britain is 79% and in Slovenia 55% [35, 47, 49].

Preliminary studies have shown that by including useful educational materials and referring to suicide prevention methods as well, protective effect against suicide can be achieved [24, 51]. However, fewer suicide news outlets have informed people about suicide and its prevention methods. In the present study, 1.8% of newspapers and news agencies referred to suicide prevention methods, while the number was 0.0% in India [51], 0.0% in Kerala India [51, 54], and 0.1% in Switzerland [51, 52] and in a study conducted in the print media of four countries in the Southeast Asian region, referring to suicide prevention methods was 2-3.6%, on average of 1.8%, in India and 0.0% in Bangladesh, Bhutan and Indonesia [46]. Furthermore, most ethical guidelines seek to educate audiences about the negative consequences of suicide and to point out ways to prevent suicide. It is therefore important to refer to suicide prevention methods and details such as support websites and help phone numbers to facilitate assistance to people at risk of suicide [5, 29, 35, 63]. The media plays a principal role in this regard, helping to reduce the risk of suicide by promoting helpful behaviors [35, 64].

99.2% of suicide news items avoided reporting suicide statistics in our study while in the study conducted in the print media of four countries in the Southeast Asian region, reporting accurate suicide statistics in India was 2.6%-4.1%, on average of 2.2%, and 0.0% in Bangladesh, Bhutan and Indonesia. The report of accurate suicide statistics is one of the potentially useful measures in India [48]. Therefore, not referring to broad topics such as mental health, history of service usage and lack of accurate statistics is an issue we should be worried about because referring to broad subjects has a deep significance in people's deep perception of death and suicide conditions [29, 63, 65]. Reporting the exact number of suicides in a particular community or area is of great importance in informing readers [29] and misleading information in this regard has the potential to leave detrimental effects on communities, behind.

In the present study, avoiding reporting suicidal behavior as "a comprehensible response to social, cultural changes" and "degradation of social rank" was about 95.9% and avoiding terms such as "suicide epidemic" or " the highest suicide rate region in the world" was 98.6%. Since investigating the literatures had not announced the suicide behavior "as a comprehensible response to social, cultural changes or "degradation of social rank" and had avoided using terms such as "suicide epidemic" or " the highest suicide rate region in the world", findings represented here are solely limited to the present study.

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In this study, approximately 98% of online news reports (news agencies) did not comply with at least one media guideline, and this percentage accounts for more than 86.9% of online articles conflicting with at least one Samaritan guideline recently reported in the UK [66], indicating the evident and widespread ignorance of the instructions.

Limitations

It should be stated that this study has limitations including its one-year review period, investigating limited number of major national newspapers and news agencies, and not reviewing the local newspapers.

Recommendations

In the present study we analyzed only national newspapers and news agencies. It will be therefore useful to review other media sources as well. Therefore, given the growing influence and connection of the Internet and social media, it is necessary to gain more insight into the potential risks and benefits of the Internet. Also, holding training courses and workshops and examining whether they are effective or not and researching on social media such as how the messenger networks, including Telegram and Instagram, affect the annual report of suicide news, are of the suggestions of this study.

Conclusion

The suicide report is somewhat irresponsible in Iran. Efforts should be made to ensure that the media staff receives the necessary training in this context. Besides, more monitoring from media monitoring organizations and editors is of great need. Training should be accomplished using an active approach and be part of the curriculum for journalists and editors.

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