

## Newspaper Coverage of Suicide: A Content Analysis of Daily Kawish Newspaper - An Elite Sindhi Newspaper of Pakistan

Mahezar RA\*

Department of Media and Communication Studies, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan

### Abstract

This paper is aimed at observing the coverage of suicide issues in Daily Kawish newspaper-a well-recognized Sindhi language newspaper. Content analysis technique is applied in this study. News items excluding editorials, articles, columns and letters to editor features were analyzed.

Results show that 38 items in terms of frequency were reported by newspaper in the month of June. Items carrying attempted and completed suicide acts reported were 13 and 25, respectively. 21 news stories depicted females committing suicide acts and while 17 portrayed males committing suicide acts. Given that 17 news items did not identify the age of those committing suicide, 14 news depicted age bracket from 21 to 40 years of people committing suicide acts, and while 7 news items elaborated the age bracket under 20 years of people committing suicide. As for placement, 21 news items were placed on the inner pages excluding showbiz and editorial, 9 were placed on agriculture and business section page, and 8 items were placed on the second page of the newspaper. 19 news items showed that people who committed suicide used hanging method and 14 showed people committed suicide by using poisoning technique and 5 by using other techniques. In terms of causes of committing suicide, 22 news items explained the domestic conflicts, 8 unidentified, 5 mental disorder and whereas 3 items showed other issues as causes behind committing suicide acts.

All the news items detected to have not come up with images of suicide acts. The respective newspaper must also cover announcement news and awareness campaign concerned news against this phenomenon as well.

**Keywords:** Newspaper coverage; Suicide reporting; Public health

### Introduction

In Pakistan, integrated media plays a significant role in disseminating the news concerning perilous issues comprising of terrorism, joblessness, unemployment, child labor, corruption, theft, robbery and suicide as per level of their approach and access to the discrepant societies. Later one is the issue that happens due to manifold causes like unemployment, poverty and some kinds of home based conflicts caused by land disputes among families inclusively.

Teenagers and youth are special in this matter. These kinds of suicide based stories are aired through electronic media and being read and written in the print media across the globe.

A phenomenon in which someone kills him or herself on some kinds of reasons is likely to be called suicide. Around the globe, according to estimations, one million people kill themselves for some dangerous situations. People who commit this act wrongly think it as only a panacea for their compelling various perilous conditions and some kinds of dangerous situations.

In a report presented by Krug et al. [1] showed that suicide as a self-directed violence is recognized as a global social problem. Only by the year of 2000, 815,000 people around the world were tallied to have killed themselves. 14.5 Per 0.1 million suicide rate was estimated as per average. This estimation shows that one death befalls within every 40 seconds, thus suicide stands as the thirteenth of death causes worldwide. Within those ages, inflict themselves on bruise, between the ages of 15 to 55 years, are the fourth of the death causes and the sixth of ill-cum-disability health causes.

In Pakistan, without an iota of doubt, it is yet one of the prevailing and common issues which are being not paid attention on. One person, after every 16 minutes, dies not merely because of accident or any other disease but intentionally because of suicide [sic].

Stuart [2] conducted his study entitled as “Principle and practice of Psychiatric nursing”, in his study he indicated that Suicide is the third of the death cause in USA. The rate of suicide act between 15 to 24 age bracket was 5% in the days of yore which has rapidly now increased as to 14%. He further states that the rate of attempting suicide act is higher in females than their contemporary males commit

Against this hateful phenomenon, Pakistan has scanty of awareness programs and campaigns to choke its throat. But the only media has the valiant power to change the mindset of people in making them say this heinous act stop.

Khan and Prince [3] had conducted the study on “Beyond rates: the tragedy of suicide in Pakistan” it was indicated that Suicide is an under-researched and under-studied subject within Pakistan. Unfortunately, the Basic epidemiological data, for instance, on national rates are not available. A variety of legal, religious and social factors report accurately and collect the data in a difficult manner.

This study we have conducted to see and analyze the news items related to suicide issue according to gender based, age wise, placement of news stories, frequency of the news stories, size measurement of the stories and the routine of the stories being published and given space by Daily dawn newspaper of Pakistan.

**\*Corresponding author:** Mahezar RA, Department of Media and Communication Studies, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan, Tel: +92 22 9213181; E-mail: [rameezalimahesar@gmail.com](mailto:rameezalimahesar@gmail.com)

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## Literature Review

A chunk number of researchers have been conducted their researches with regard to suicide acts across the world. With regard media and suicide relation the research we have found in a great deal. The researchers in great deal have demonstrated that there has been an increased risk towards placements of suicide stories on the front page of newspapers.

Weimann and Fishman [4] had conducted their study as “Reconstructing suicide: reporting suicide in the Israeli press” in their study they analysed the content of over 430 suicide cases which were published in two of the leading daily newspapers in Israel. They analysed each suicide report as per their form of coverage—including placement in the paper, space allocation including the picture—and for its content coverage—comprising demographic variables of the victims, attribution of responsibility, mode of suicide and general attitude toward the people as per their act. They concluded that the space allotted to the suicide stories and the importance of the stories increased steadily around the decade of 1980s and 1990s. Newspaper reports applied their focus more on the violent ways of suicide. The financial and economic motives were devoted mainly to the males, while motives connected with romantic attitudes or issues with a partner were given especially to females. Besides, approximately 18% and 8% were those that expressed the positive and negative attitudes respectively. And while in the rest of reports most of them were neutral. Positive coverage was in great deal but when the external causes were told and when suicide acts were attempted during military service.

Michel et al. [5] had conducted their quantitative and qualitative analysis of suicide reports in Swiss print media. Quantitative aspects of the review included the positioning and length of the article, size of headline, frequency of reporting and absence or presence of a picture. Whereas Qualitative aspects comprised contents of the report, whether articles might serve as a model, treatment resources and presence of prevention. A coding and scoring scheme was developed, like an “imitation risk score” was counted for each report.

Almost exactly near 400 magazines and newspapers were observed. Within an 8-month period, 74 magazines and newspapers were met to have suicide articles, yielding 151 articles. The headline in 47% of the stories was deemed to be thrilling. In 13% of the articles, the headline was considered as glorifying the person or romanticizing the event. This was about 26% of the articles’ text. Improper images were met in 20% of the articles. Overall, 44% of the articles were observed to be in the high not real risk group. The topic of prevention was studied in extension in nearly 11% of the articles, and therapeutic advice was also shortage (9%). Significant discrepancies between newspapers were found. The conclusions of these analyses were shown at a national press conference as a means to introduce guidelines for suicide reporting; they were dispatched newspaper editors at all. These endeavors are talked over in a later phase.

Fekete et al. [6] conducted their study “Media reports on suicide in Hungary, Austria, Germany and Lithuania in 1981 and 1991. In Suicide Prevention” they exaggerated the compare of newspaper headlines to other countries— Austria, West and East Germany, Greece, Hungary, and Lithuania. In accordance with earlier results, there were more depictions of prominent and attractive personalities, and positive repercussions and fewer “negative” famous people and negative results of suicides in the Hungarian and Lithuanian press than in the Austrian and German newspaper headlines.

Fekete et al. [6] carried out a content analysis of suicide-related headlines in Hungarian and German newspapers as “The impact of mass media reports on suicide and attitudes toward self-destruction: previous studies and some new data from Hungary and Germany” to check out the cross-cultural dissimilarities in reporting way. German accounts shown a trend to call suicidal behavior as psychiatric or criminal in nature, while Hungarian newspapers more often portrayed suicide in a romantic style. The investigators guessed that this may be hold responsible for the higher numbers in Hungary.

One issue of prominent status is if suicide stories are placed on the front page. Phillips’s work was compatible to this. Phillips et al. [7] conducted the study on “Suicide and the media” in which they opined that studies do not prevent the reports to get placed on front page news. Reduce the impact, and this may be responsible for their clear inability to represent an effect.

In the first paper based on the study carried out below we depicted quantitative segments of media reporting of suicide (position, frequency of reporting, content of articles, form, position, size and wording of the headline and representation of pictures). The great deal of articles portrayed cases of completed suicide, mainly brought out through violent techniques (hanging and shooting) by ordinary young people. Attempted suicide (e.g., overdosing) was only portrayed when the person was some kind of celebrity. This choice of cases does not show the true happenings of suicide and attempted suicide in different social classes-cum-age groups in Switzerland. There were the whole dissimilarities between the articles in many newspapers. Newspapers having frequent suicide reporting are mostly those having large circulation numbers. Their articles as usual have a news character, are mostly placed on the front page and frequently describe the techniques and circumstances of the (attempted) suicide.

A very recent study carried out by Fu et al. [8] in their study “Newspaper reporting of suicides in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Guangzhou: Compliance with WHO media guidelines and epidemiological comparisons”, they reached the results and found low compliance with the WHO suicide reporting suggestions in newspaper reports in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Whereas suicide reports were commonly not deemed front-page news, photographs were added in 33.6%, 89.3%, and 26.7% of articles in Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Taiwan, in the respective manner. In addition, suicide method (75.7%, 91% and 69.8%) and gender (71.7%, 83.3% and 54.9%) were also generally described in article headlines, and preventative suggestion was not often offered. The authors examined newspaper reports and suicide data, representing an underreporting of over reporting of youth suicides in all regions and female suicide in Guangzhou and Taiwan.

A content analysis of newspaper suicide articles in Taiwan “Who’s the killer? Ambiguity between the media and the suicides (Chinese)” seeks striking differences between tabloid and general type papers in some media characteristics, such as location where the suicide took place, the placement of articles in the newspapers and pictorial presentations of suicide victims in the news.

A comparison of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Guangzhou newspapers showed that reports often found on the front page of a publication; however, the great deal of suicide media reports depicted a photo, with more than 80 per cent of headings describing the suicide technique and more than 40 per cent recognising a problem met by the person who committed suicide, while 85 percent or more ignored to describe preventative suggestion such as helpline information [9,10].

Tatum et al. [11] carried out a study on "Suicide coverage in US newspapers following the publication of the media guidelines", a review of a representative sample of US newspaper reports on individual suicide seen that there was fairly a good acquiescence of guidelines concerned with story placement (that is, not on the front page), enlarged the use of improper images and furthered the discussion of celebrity suicides. However, there were the lesser adherences to guidelines concerned with discourse of warning signs or a relation with some mental disorder, nor reference to information services.

Fu et al. [12] carried out their study in which they showed as the literature from Asia on this topic is restricted to a report from China that studied newspaper articles of suicides from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Guangzhou (1,086, 967 and 226 newspaper reports, respectively). The results showed entire submission in only one characteristic (only 2% of the articles were significantly placed). The work too found that newspapers highlighted more on suicides of young people.

Michel et al. [13] conducted their study in Switzerland, has, although, reported significant betterment in reporting, following training and media sensitization. These added the number of headlines placed on the front page (20% to 4%), use of thrilling headlines (62% to 25%) and text (49% to 14%), exalting headlines (17% to 3%) and text (33% to 6%) and addition of pictures (43% to 8%). No change was seen in the description of name, place in the headline, time, the description of suicide technique in the headline or text and repeating the articles about the same case.

Phillips [14] published a germinal work which was comparison between the number of suicides happening in the months in which a front-page article on suicide was showed in the United States press with the number happening in the months in which no such article was portrayed. Around the 20-year span study, there were 33 months in which a concerned front-page article was appeared, and was a significant rise in the number of suicides in 26 of those months.

The authors [11,12] in their studies displayed that 32% of the reports were mostly placed on the front page and the third page; however, studies conducted in Austria, the United States and China displayed better acquiescence in newspaper placing of the suicide reports.

## Suicide in Pakistan

About a million people die by suicide each year ecumenic. The research information on suicide mostly comes from high-income countries. Few countries outside the Western world provide suicide information to the WHO (World Health Organization) on the regular basis. Significant among those which do not provide are most of the 57 countries having Muslim population as a majority, adding those having populations in excess of 100 million people, namely Bangladesh, Indonesia and Pakistan.

Suicide is an under-researched and under-studied subject in Pakistan. Basic epidemiological data, for suppose, on national counting are unknown. A variety of religious, social and legal elements develops accuracy based reporting and makes data collection tough.

In Pakistan, happenings of suicide issues in many types like eating poisoning things, hanging, using medication for suicide, taking poisoning tablets, self-immolation and drowning have been told, read and showed via integrated media the most. In every aspect of Pakistan like rural to urban and province to country it prevails but differs in each area and surrounding within the country. While official rates of suicide are lacking, it has been possible to calculate rates of suicide in at least six

different cities of Pakistan. Crude rates vary from a low of 0.43/100,000 per year (average for 1991-2000) in Peshawar to a high of 2.86/100,000 for Rawalpindi (in 2006), with other cities falling in between: Karachi, 2.1/100,000 (1995-2001); Lahore, 1.08/100,000 (1993-95); Faisalabad, 1.12/100,000 (1998-2001) and Larkana, 2.6/100,000 (2003- 2004).

Gender based attempt to suicide act also differs with one another. Gender- specific rates show that for men, highest rates are 5.2/100,000 in Rawalpindi, while for women the highest rates are 1.7/100,000 in Larkana. The highest age and gender-specific rates for men and women are in the age group 20-40 years: 7.03/100,000 and 3.81/100,000 in Larkana respectively.

Recently, a non-governmental organisation reported 5,800 suicides in nine months (January to September) of 2006.

As far as suicide prevention is concerned, this requires a multi-sectoral approach. Almost 34% of Pakistani population suffers from common mental disorders and depression is implicated in more than 90% of suicides.

## Objectives of Study

This study is attempted to have following objectives;

1. To determine themes dominating the reports on suicide.
2. To determine prominence given to reports on suicide.

## Research Questions

1. What are the themes dominating reports on suicide in the selected newspapers?
2. What prominence do the selected newspapers give suicide day?

## Unit of Analysis and Content Category

### Units of analysis

**Prominence:** The prominence of the stories in the study was determined by the placement of the stories such as in: front page, editorial, back page, news page and inside page.

**Frequency:** The frequencies of stories are calculated in the forms of numbering of news items concerning suicide issue.

### Research design

Content analysis was applied to capture the media features of the suicide items which were gathered from Daily Kawish newspaper. Only news stories as items were analyzed. Duration of analysis was restricted to one month July of 2017. Editorials, letters to editor, articles and columns in this study were excluded but only news story item was selected to analyze. The frequency, types of suicide acts, methods, reasons, acts committed by people according to their gender and as per their age brackets were chosen to analyze. All these items are presented in the below tables.

### Data analysis

Table 1 shows that frequency in terms of number of attempting and completed suicide news stories reported in the selected newspaper is 13

Type	Frequency
Attempted	13
Completed	25
Total	38

Table 1: Distribution of types of suicide act.

and 25 respectively. Total frequency of both types of suicide acts has been portrayed at the number of 38 by the esteemed newspaper.

Table 2 presents the gender-wise frequency of suicide acts. Hence, given that from the Table 2, greater frequency at the number of 21 of committing suicide reported by the newspaper is of females and males concerned news stories of committing suicide reported by respective newspaper have been reached the number of 17, while transgender is no more in the concerned news stories.

Table 3 explains the depicted news stories in terms of age brackets. Reported news stories have shown that chunk number (17 out of 38) of suicide does not show the ages of those who have committed suicide act. The second number (14 out of 38) is of those stories which depict the age of those who commit suicide and these stories show that suicide acts are committed greatly by those who stand under the age bracket of 21 to 40 years. The third number (7 out of 38) has been that of those stories which show that people who commit suicide remain under the age bracket of 20 years. In addition, age bracket from 40 to above years is not depicted in the news stories.

Table 4 elaborates the news stories as per their placement. Most of the news stories at the number of 21 out of 38 are placed on the pages other than front, showbiz and editorial. 08 out of 38 news stories are placed on second page. 09 out of 38 news stories are placed on the page of business and agriculture section. Though, front page is left deprived of such news stories.

Table 5 elaborates the distribution of news stories according to suicide methods. Hanging method of committing suicide act is depicted by 19 new stories. While, poisoning technique applied by the people for committing suicide is portrayed by 14 news stories. Whereas, drowning method is shown by only 5 news stories.

Gender	Frequency
Male	17
Female	21
Transgender	0
Total	38

Table 2: Distribution of people committed suicide according to their gender.

Age Bracket	Frequency
Below 20 years	7
21 to 40 years	14
Above 40 years	0
Unidentified	17
Total	38

Table 3: Distribution of people committed suicide according to their age bracket.

Placement section	Frequency
Front page	00
Second page	08
Agriculture and Business Section page	09
Others	21
Total	38

Table 4: Distribution of suicide issues according to their placement.

Method	Frequency
Hanging	19
Drowning	05
Poisoning	14
Others	00
Total	38

Table 5: Distribution of suicide issues according to their methods.

Table 6 professes the distribution of news stories concerning causes of suicide acts. Therefore, 22 news items displayed the domestic conflicts as the reason behind committing suicide acts. Whereas, 8 news items have been those which did not identify any cause behind the heinous act of committing suicide. 5 news items have shown the mental disorder as a cause behind committing suicide act. While, 3 items are filled with other causes behind the suicide acts.

Reasons	Frequency
Domestic conflict	22
Mental disorder	05
Others	03
Unidentified	08
Total	38

Table 6: Distribution of suicide issues according to their reasons.

## Results and Findings

A total of 38 suicide news stories were retrieved. These news stories come up with the findings that 38 items in terms of frequency were reported by newspaper in the month of June. Items coming up with attempted and completed suicide acts were 13 and 25 respectively. 21 news stories depicted females committing suicide acts and while 17 portrayed males committing suicide acts. Given that 17 news items did not identify the age of those committing suicide, 14 news depicted age bracket from 21 to 40 years of people committing suicide acts, and while 7 news items elaborated the age bracket under 20 years of people committing suicide. As for placement, 21 news items were placed on the inner pages excluding showbiz and editorial, 9 were placed on agriculture and business section page, and 8 items were placed on the second page of the newspaper. 19 news items showed that people who committed suicide used hanging method and 14 showed people committed suicide by using poisoning technique and 5 by using other techniques. In terms of causes of committing suicide, 22 news items explained the domestic conflicts, 8 unidentified, 5 mental disorder and whereas 3 items showed other issues as causes behind committing suicide acts. In terms of average of news stories reporting concerning suicide acts, the esteemed newspaper publishes 21.727 news stories concerning suicide on every 15 days. Standard deviation of such news items has been found 14.452.

### What to do

- Work closely with health authorities in presenting the facts.
- Refer to suicide as a completed suicide, not a successful one.
- Present only relevant data, on the inside pages.
- Highlight alternatives to suicide.
- Provide information on helplines and community resources.
- Publicize risk indicators and warning signs.

### What not to do

- Don't publish photographs or suicide notes.
- Don't report specific details of the method used.
- Don't give simplistic reasons.
- Don't glorify or sensationalize suicide.
- Don't use religious or cultural stereotypes.
- Don't apportion blame.

**Source:** Preventing suicide: A Resource for Media Professionals: Department of Mental Health, Social Change and Mental Health, WHO; 2000.

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