

How Online Media Reports Suicide News Coverage

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: News, Suicide, Online Media

Received: 4 February 2024

Accepted: 11 February 2024

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to find out about the coverage of suicide cases in the online media. This is because suicide is a very sensitive issue, which is often inextricably linked to the stigma attached to it. Often, the sensationalizing effect of the media becomes an issue rather than minimizing a better understanding of the problem. This situation raises curiosity about the media's adherence to guidelines for reporting suicide and suicide attempts. Through a qualitative method by analyzed five online media reports on suicide in Central Java. The data source comes from news articles that fit the topic of the five online media. The results showed that some news articles did not follow the news guidelines and did not reflect the principles of social responsibility, such as mentioning sensitive issues such as identity and sensationalism. There is a tendency for the media to sensationalize suicides to attract readers' attention, which can lead to an increase in the imitation effect. Items 1 and 6 are often overlooked. It is important that suicide reporting takes into account ethical, prudent, and responsible approaches that raise awareness and early detection of preventative measures.

INTRODUCTION

Suicide is a sensitive topic in people's lives. It encourages a different approach to reporting, as it can significantly impact the people who read the news. Many journalists seem to be aware of the potential risks of reporting on suicide and consider their reporting practices with caution due to the high risk of suicide contagion and copycat effects (Beam et al., 2018). The development of media with rapid information flow has made suicide coverage more complex. In the period from January to October 2023, the National Police recorded 971 suicides in Indonesia. This number exceeded the data from 2022 when 900 cases were recorded. The number of suicides is likely to be much higher than the official figures. Globally, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), as of 28 August 2023, more than 700,000 people die by suicide each year and suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 18-29-year-olds (Defianti, 2024; Imami, 2024). Meanwhile, the highest number of suicides in Indonesia is found in Central Java with 356 cases, followed by East Java: 184 cases, and Bali: with 94 cases (Muhamad, 2023).

While information about suicide can raise awareness of mental health issues and encourage prevention efforts, the way it is reported often creates new problems. Insensitive reporting can have a contagious effect, increasing the risk of subsequent suicide. Lack of self-control and a sense of hopeless vulnerability, of helplessness, are sensitive issues that can influence a person's decision when reading suicide news. Too frequent or sensational coverage of suicide can reinforce the perception that suicide is an acceptable or even normal solution in certain situations. This can change society's perception of suicide from a tragic act to a more acceptable option. This means that it can normalize the reporting of suicide. Suicide contagion, or the spread of suicidal thoughts and behaviors through exposure to sensational and harmful content, is a well-known phenomenon. However, the guiding principle of voluntary suicide reporting is that more sensational content is perceived as more appealing to readers, increasing media visibility and engagement (Sumner et al., 2020).

Seeing this condition, the journalistic code of ethics becomes a guideline and moral principle to guide the behavior of journalists in carrying out their duties and determining what is right and wrong, good and bad, and responsible or not in the news. There are online media reporting suicide cases with the construction of criminal issues and not a health issue that should focus on suicide itself. But writing in detail about the victim's background (Novianti, 2021). The journalistic code of ethics is very important in the world of journalism because journalists have an ethical obligation to convey information that is true, accurate, and does not harm the public. News that does not adhere to the code of ethics can create damage not only to the individuals concerned but also to the wider community.

One of the issues that often comes to the fore in relation to breaches of journalistic ethics is the reporting of suicide. Suicide is a very sensitive issue and has the potential to inspire similar actions. It

is still considered taboo to talk about suicidal behavior, and suicide victims or survivors are still vulnerable to the negative stigma that society places on them. This stigma can be shaped or reinforced by media coverage as a source of information (Latifah Murniati & Hasfi, 2021). Each media has its own perspective in dealing with any event that occurs, this cannot be separated from the subjectivity and ideology that the media has (Wildianna & Yulianto, 2018). Therefore, news about suicide must be covered with great care and empathy. Insensitive coverage of suicide cases that do not adhere to journalistic ethics can have a negative impact on the victim, the victim's family, and the wider community.

The news about student suicide in Central Java, it become very sensitive, which affects many people. These conditions are important to see the journalistic code of ethics or commit violations that can have a negative impact. If the media does not follow the principles of the journalistic code of ethics, it can cause behavioral effects in the form of copycat suicide in the news related to suicide attempts (Kencana & Junaidi, 2019). Ethical issues in journalism are often complex and require careful consideration. Therefore, the question of how to communicate the ethics of suicide reporting by understanding the implications and the ethics of responsibility is formulated. By identifying news ethics in online media.

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

General media coverage of suicide does not appear to be associated with suicide. The best intervention available at the societal level to address the negative impact of media coverage is responsible reporting guidelines (Niederkrötenhaler et al., 2020). Such responsible reporting models include suicide and 'other' narrative typology models, ethical rules and moderation standards. Journalists need to interact more effectively with important risk factors such as stigma, imitative effects, and harmful speculation highlighted in media reporting guidelines (Duncan & Luce, 2022). Shared suicide reporting requires compliance that includes protective rather than sensational elements (Sumner et al., 2020). Although some suicide news stories do not show an increase in suicide rates, widespread violations of media guidelines in reporting often occur (Stack, 2020). As a public health issue, suicide is known to be influenced by media reporting. Violations of reporting guidelines can increase the number of mock suicides (Roth et al., 2020).

Collaborative strategies should be designed to foster the positive contribution that the media can make to preventing suicide deaths (Armstrong et al., 2018). Media reporting guidelines that are specific to suicides can improve the quality of media reporting on suicide (Arafat et al., 2020; Sinyor et al., 2020).

The journalistic code of ethics has four principles, namely: morality, professionalism,

democracy and the rule of law (Kencana & Junaidi, 2019). The Dewan Pers, (2019) assessed that press coverage shows that suicide cases are often treated as a criminal event. Many journalists lack sensitivity when reporting on suicide attempts and attempts. This has led to the development of reporting guidelines on suicide crimes and attempts.

METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. Qualitative methodology is seen as a form of research that produces descriptive data through information obtained from the subject and through observable behavior. It uses statistical analysis, instrument-based questions, and statistical interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The unit of analysis was news texts about suicide of university students in Semarang. The media selected were Tribunjateng, Solopost, radarsemarang.id, and Suara Merdeka online, with a minimum selection of 3 articles per source. The news criteria in this study are the top news in each search. Primary data was obtained from news articles from the four media and secondary data from related documents. The research steps started with reading the news by searching with keywords, the keywords used were "student suicide in Semarang". The selected period is the month of 10 October 2023 to 16 October 2023. The selection of this period with the emergence of student suicide cases and interesting online media coverage in Central Java. Second, the selection of news items that are consistent with the story. Third, reading the news writing to see the content of the news to see the emphasis of the news.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Dominant Suicide News Reporting

All five online media were interested in covering the Semarang suicide case. In addition to reporting the chronology, the media were interested in reporting various stories related to the victim, including her personal life. Although they did not pay attention to the expectation of reducing the suicide rate, the online media placed the news on the social impact that highlighted the victim's life. From 10 October 2023 to 16 October 2023, the news of a suicide case of a student at a university in Semarang City appeared. Many media raised this case as the main issue that affected people's lives. This can be seen from the fact that more than three news items appeared in each media. There are two main concerns. The first is the possible imitation effect of the published suicide news and the news content of the story's adherence to the guidelines. Both are likely to arise from the dominant issues raised in the news.

A total of fifteen news stories were analyzed and several dominant themes emerged (see table). Firstly, the theme of motive appears as a complement to several news topics. Motives such as economy,

romance, family, and depression. The motive complements the chronology that becomes the background of the student suicide. The most dominant motives that appear relate to family problems and depression. Although the content refers to the relationship between economic and romantic motives.

Table 1: Dominant News Issues

Dominant issue	Details
Motive	Economy, romance, family and depression
Exploiting the case/opinion-mongering	Details of the victim's problems
Mention of identity	Location, name, publication of photos or videos of the victim and the identity of people around them
Chronology of the suicide	Reviewing the chronology of the suicide, the testimonies of neighbours and the evidence left behind.
Outside the case	relate the law of suicide to religious teachings

Source: Processed research, 2023

Second, Exploring the case/opinion-mongering. This issue is inseparable from efforts to reveal the motives that arise from the various speculations that have developed. This is done by linking the victim's life with various surroundings such as the closest people and family. This process leads the reader's opinion to be interested in personal life rather than the chronology of suicide. Call one of the news headlines *"Fakta Baru Mahasiswi Unnes Bunuh Diri, Mantan Pacar Sebut Nadaa Jiilaana Punya Kekasih Baru"*. Opinion-mongering that leads to a romantic motive has become a framing that ignores moral guidelines about efforts to provide victim protection by seeking various perspectives of people around. This encourages similar efforts to become an integral part of the event.

Thirdly, the mention of identity, this issue by mentioning the name of the victim, the identity of the victim, and the surrounding people associated with the victim. In the news, the name of the victim was revealed, but different identities were associated with the victim on social media platforms. One of them is the victim's TikTok account. Mention of the news headline, *"Fakta Baru Mahasiswi Unnes Bunuh Diri, Mantan Pacar Sebut Nadaa Jiilaana Punya Kekasih Baru"* and, *"Perempuan Lompat dari Lantai 4 Mal Paragon Semarang Ternyata Mahasiswi Unnes"*.

Fourth, the chronology of the suicide. Checking the chronology of the suicide is inseparable from the media's efforts to find facts through the testimony of people close to the event, one of the main sources being the testimony of the security forces and local residents. Both have the role of sources of information about the beginning of the incident. Then the victim's evidence, such as equipment, becomes an effort to find out how the motive left by the victim. This question is reinforced by the news of the victim's will and bag. The news leads to a history of suicide attempts and details of

the victim's problems. Mention in the headline "*Diduga Bunuh Diri, Mahasiswi yang Tewas di Mall Paragon Semarang Tinggalkan Surat Wasiat, Isinya Bikin Nyesek*".

Fifth, outside the case, this news emerges from the development of news angels by linking to the main issues that are happening, such as linking to religious law, mental health problems. Rather than reviewing the victim's chronology, news with this category of issue appears when the incident tends to dominantly provide information related to issues such as mental health and religious law. One of the news headlines "Marak Tragedi Bunuh Diri di Semarang: Bagaimana Perspektif Islam Soal Bunuh Diri, Simak Penjelasannya".

Media efforts to overcome the stigma of suicide reporting

To find out the news of suicide, which is inseparable from the stigma of the victim, it is inseparable from the dominant themes of the news that arise. Stigma is inseparable from the issue of exploiting the case and leading public opinion, the victim's chronology with detailed mention of the problems faced. Reporting by stigmatising people who commit suicide, such as mentioning their identity, name, place of study, origin and address, is a media effort that cannot be separated from reviewing the chronology and identity of the victim. A bad and negative stigma is created when the media reveals the victim and the place. This is inseparable from the reader's interpretation of the various possibilities that are believed. Call it, the title "*Diduga Bunuh Diri, Mahasiswi yang Tewas di Mall Paragon Semarang Tinggalkan Surat Wasiat, Isinya Bikin Nyesek*". In this context, the media can develop safe information by not showing the identity of the place and avoiding images that allow other interpretations of the place. A similar pattern can be found in the news, "*Perempuan Lompat dari Lantai 4 Mal Paragon Semarang Ternyata Mahasiswi Unnes*". In the Press Council's guidelines for reporting on suicides and suicide attempts, point 6 says: "Journalists should avoid mentioning specific locations such as bridges, cliffs, tall buildings that have been used as suicide sites to avoid repetition". But in fact the news item above mentions the location of the scene.

Efforts to reduce stigma can also be made through mass media coverage that reduces the negative impact of suicide news by developing news that reinforces positive public perceptions of suicide and mental health. This can take the form of treatment for mental health disorders. News headlines "*Pesan Menyayat Hati di Tas Mayat Mahasiswi Unnes : Jangan Lupa Berdoa buat Aku, Maaf Mih Aku Nyerah*", Instead of educating the public about the problem, it create a sensational effect. The choice of the angel, by raising the will of the victim, becomes its own burden in building emotional readers by showing sadness and regret. Meanwhile, the effect of minimizing action is reported. Well-delivered news can have a protective effect, such as early recognition of suicide, rather than prolonged regret. The News Lift portrays suicidal behavior as a 'natural' response or even normalizes the act as a response to a particular problem. Point 7 states that "When conducting interviews about suicide,

journalists should be sensitive to the traumatic experiences of family members or others close to them". This is an important guideline for reporting that leads to prevention efforts in the future, rather than leaving traumatic effects. The decision to develop preventive information can help detect similar acts at an early stage.

Implementation of Responsible Reporting Principles

Reducing the negative influence of the news as a form of media reflection that is responsible for suicide-related news. Instead of placing the victim as a criminal behavior, it is important for the media to place the victim's aspect as a mental problem has become a guide for the news that is expressed Dewan Pers, (2019). One of the efforts is to reduce the stigma that arises. However, this requires high ethical awareness as a form of media responsibility for reporting. Mention in the headline, "*Sosok Cantik NJW, Mahasiswi MIPA Unnes yang Bunuh Diri di Mall Paragon Semarang sampai Respons Mantan Pacar*", reporting the victim as beautiful by turning people around reinforces the self-stigma of experiencing negative self-beliefs. Well-delivered news can reinforce positive public perceptions of suicide and mental health. However, exposing the victim can obscure the chronology of events that require problem solving such as how to deal with difficult situations, and how to overcome these situations is not seen in detail.

The four media have almost the same pattern and content of news coverage. Each media has news with the same content but with different titles. For example, the news titled "*Mahasiswi Unnes Bunuh Diri di Mall Paragon; Diduga Depresi, Pernah Menyilet Lengan*". In principle, the media has a great responsibility to report news with ethics and caution, especially in sensitive cases such as suicide. In the Press Council guidelines point 1, it is stated "Journalists carefully consider the benefits of reporting on suicide. Even if news is made, it must be directed to concern for the problems faced by the suicide who is also a victim, rather than exploiting the case as sensational news". These guidelines should be used as the basis for reporting this information. The principle of responsible media can place, suicide with sensitivity, such as avoiding dramatization of events and exposing the victim's personal information. Mention in the headline, "*Wanita Tewas di Mall Paragon, Rokhiman Kira Suara Mangga Jatuh dari Pohon: Suaranya Keras Kedubrug*", where the news focus on the testimony of a person who has a tendency to dramatize packaged in the initial testimony. In principle, reporting on suicide by describing the step-by-step process of someone committing suicide and emphasizing prevention is an effort to overcome the imitation effect and protect victims from stigma. While the media has the freedom to broadcast/publish news, they must be aware of the impact of the news on society. In principle, the media has a great responsibility to report news with ethics and caution, especially in sensitive cases such as suicide. Violation of these guidelines can be detrimental not only to the victim's family but also to society at large.

The media, which is supposed to be a source of public information, guarantees proper and balanced reporting and an obligation as an online media that must be carried out professionally regarding information. Prioritizing media obligations by providing honest, accurate, fair, and objective information with the principle of educating the public will prevent the imitation effect that arises. Responsible reporting of suicide news is the cornerstone of suicide prevention diri (Markiewitz et al., 2020). Adherence to protective effect guidelines in reporting will have a preventive effect on suicide (Acosta et al., 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the research on the coverage of female student suicides in Semarang City, it was found that there were still many news articles that did not reflect the principles of social responsibility, such as mentioning sensitive issues such as the victim's identity, location, and sensationalism. The four media tended to use suicide cases as a tool to attract readers' attention through sensationalism and revealing details. The use of the victim's identity, both names and pictures, is one of the most common violations. News has also been found by mentioning the victim's initials. However, these efforts have implications for efforts to influence public perceptions of victims. The media's tendency to sensationalize suicide in order to attract readers' attention can lead to an increase in the imitation effect. However, media efforts to include information on prevention and treatment need to be maximized in order to apply the principles of responsible reporting. The Dewan Pers guidelines for reporting on suicide and suicide attempts are not fully implemented by the media, with points 1 and 6 often ignored. This can lead to stigmatization of the victim rather than being positioned as a mental health issue. When reporting suicide news, it is important to consider ethical, prudent, and responsible approaches that raise awareness, reduce stigma and provide early detection support to prevent similar acts.

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