



Media reporting of suicide in Muslim countries

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Introduction

Suicide is a major problem in public health around the world (World Health Organization [WHO], 2014). To devise the suicide prevention programme, the analysis of suicide causes has always been the subject of research. Responsible reporting of suicidal behaviour is a population-wide preventive strategy (Niederkrötenhaler et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2017; Zalsman et al., 2016). It can have a significant impact on public awareness and attitudes towards suicide and its prevention. The majority of studies examining the role of media in suicide and its prevention have been carried out in developed countries (Niederkrötenhaler et al., 2020). However, two-third of the suicides happens in the low- and middle-income countries (WHO, 2014) where the assessment of the media reporting has been under-addressed.

As per the available reports, the rate of suicide is comparatively lower in Muslim countries though there are some enduring issues viz suicide reporting system, criminal status, and stigma (Lester, 2006; Rezaeian, 2009; WHO, 2018). Moreover, the Muslim world is diverse; socially, culturally, ethnically, and economically different from other nations in many social and economic ways with different moral and resilient factors than other religions (Lester, 2006). The level of religiosity is also responsible for the low suicide rate among Muslims (Ineichen, 1998). Nevertheless, few Muslim countries have a higher rate than the global average such as Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Kazakhstan, Sierra Leone (WHO, 2018). Here, we aimed to see the status of the assessment of media reporting of suicide in the Muslim countries.

Methods

The search was done in PubMed, PubMed Central, Google Scholar, and Google. Articles published since inception till the end of June 2020 were identified. Media, suicide, Newspaper, Muslim countries, quality of media reports, and media guidelines were used as

search terms. Original articles assessing the quality of media reports of suicide, published in the English language in Muslim countries were collected. Articles focused on celebrity suicide and its effects without necessarily determining the quality; commentary, correspondence, viewpoints/opinions, editorials, case studies/ research papers/systematic reviews/meta-analysis were excluded. The search was undertaken to show publicly available documents, and no formal ethical approval was obtained.

Results

Among the Muslim countries, studies assessing the quality of the media reports have been found in five countries i.e., Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan. A total of 10 studies have been identified; four from Bangladesh (Arafat et al., 2019, 2020, 2020a, 2020b), one from Egypt (Mesbah, 2014), one from Indonesia (Nisa et al., 2020), two from Malaysia (Johari et al., 2017; Victor et al., 2019) and two from Pakistan (Kamboh & Ittefaq, 2019; Mahesar, 2018). The studies from the South-East Asian countries revealed a nearly similar fashion where educative materials are scarce and abundances of potentially harmful characteristics such as mentioning the name, method, place, occupation, and mono-causality. The Egyptian paper revealed compliance with four guidelines mentioned as not defining suicide as “success” or “failure”, not posting a photo, not discussing suicide note, and not adding a quote regarding the individual (Mesbah, 2014). Surprisingly, published research was identified from the majority of the Muslim countries.

Discussions

We aimed to see the status of media reporting assessment in the Muslim countries and we searched the prime databases. The search revealed a dearth of research assessing the media reports in Muslim countries. The findings of these studies show that the quality of media reporting is poor in Muslim when compared with reporting guidelines; journalists are not trained on how to cover suicide and mass violations of ethical guidelines of media reporting. Therefore, Muslim countries could develop their strategies based on Islamic focus. However, further research is needed to understand for devising a policy that media can make to prevent suicides in Muslim countries.

In terms of limitations, the search was conducted to identify the papers published in the English language and the search was not systematic. Moreover, all databases were not searched.

Assessment of the quality of media reports is a grossly under-researched issue in Muslim countries. Promoting potential helpful reporting, educating the general population, training health reporters, designing ethical media guidelines, organising workshops to create awareness among journalists, and utilising media in suicide prevention are untapped areas. There is a need for framing and adhering to proper media guidelines in Muslim countries, especially the Society of Professional Journalists guidelines to cover suicide. Also, media ethics and the press code of ethics need revisions and updates accordingly.

The reporting of suicide is tented by media reporting in Muslim countries, and that reporters are not comfortable or correctly trained in reporting mental health issues. There is a dearth of search focusing on the media and suicide, as well as the role of

mental health issues on suicide in Muslim countries. Additionally, there may have a difference in how Islam is practiced in South-Asian countries than Middle-Eastern or North African regions. Culture plays a role in how individuals react and interact with suicide and how media can be used in prevention.

Disclosure statement

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