

Guidelines on Ethical and Responsible Reporting on Suicide

CENTRE FOR
**INDEPENDENT
JOURNALISM**
Advocating Media Freedom and Access to Information

IN COLLABORATION WITH
BeFriends
Kuala Lumpur



Worries and anxiety surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic in the country has caused a severe strain on people's mental health and wellbeing.

631

suicide cases were reported to the police in 2020 compared to **609** cases the previous year.

In the **first five months of 2021**, the police recorded

468 suicide cases,

reaching nearly 75% of the total number of cases reported last year.

Befrienders KL received

10412

calls between March and May 2021, a **52%** jump from 6858 calls from March to May last year.

1,080

cases of suicide attempts were reported during last year alone.

EXAMPLES OF REPORTING ON SUICIDE

THE GOOD - RESPONSIBLE REPORTING



Mental health awareness on the rise

Thursday, 12 Aug 2021



Help is just a phone call away for people suffering from depression and mental ailments. — Flickr

MANY Malaysians are finding it difficult to cope with mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, isolation and family problems, which have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

But thanks to efforts from non-governmental health organisations and volunteer groups, there is now a greater awareness about the issue and the stigma of reaching out for help is slowly eroding.

This can be seen through the increase in the number of calls to volunteer support group Befrienders Johor Baru.

According to its president Daviny Loo, calls to Befrienders Johor Baru totalled 1,807 for the first six months of the year, despite the centre having to suspend operations twice because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Support helpline

Befrienders Malaysia
Johor Baru: 07-267 0707
Kuala Lumpur: 03-7627 2929

For full list of numbers nationwide and operating hours visit:
befrienders.org.my/centre-in-malaysia

Malaysian Mental Health Association (MMHA)
03-2780 6803

Mental Health Psychosocial Support Service
03-2935 9935 or
014-322 3392

Talian Kasih
15999 or 019-261 5999
on Whatsapp

Department Of Islamic Development Malaysia's (Jakim) Family, Social And Community Care Centre
0111-959 8214
on Whatsapp

Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)
+603 7956 3488

- Did not provide graphic images or photos.
- Did not release the name of the deceased.
- Raised awareness regarding suicidal ideation and prevention.

- Provided positive messages to explain that there is support out there.
- Included appropriate support helpline numbers.
- Did not mention specific means used to perform the act.



THE BAD - IRRESPONSIBLE REPORTING ON SUICIDE



- Both news articles included graphic photos of the deceased during an active suicide attempt or shortly after (before we blurred them).
- They speculated on the 'reason' for the suicide without acknowledging the reality that

- suicide is caused by a complex interplay of many contributing factors that varies widely between individuals.
- They did not provide any useful information regarding suicide or appropriate helplines for support.

WHY IS UNETHICAL REPORTING ON SUICIDE PROBLEMATIC?



Suicide Contagion

Stories about celebrity suicides, headlines that include information about the methods used, and statements that make suicide seem inevitable were all correlated with suicide contagion or increase in copycat suicides.

For example, fans of the late K-Pop star Kim Jong-hyun wrote to Befrienders KL on how the musician's death had affected them emotionally after learning he had died by suicide.



Publishing graphic images can be triggering and traumatising

Befrienders KL received feedback that many are triggered and emotionally disturbed after reading or seeing photos in the news or social media posts about suicide.

WHY IS ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE REPORTING ON SUICIDE NEEDED?



'Papageno Effect' demonstrates the influence that mass media can have by responsibly reporting on suicide and presenting non-suicide alternatives to crises. Stories of hope and lived experiences can help to reduce suicide rates.

Note: The effect is named after a character in Mozart's opera, 'The Magic Flute' wherein the character was contemplating suicide but was dissuaded by other characters who offer alternatives to conquer his mental anguish.



Ethical reporting serves to acknowledge the problem and emanate positive messages to individuals who are struggling with suicidal ideation. There are avenues to help with the emotional and physical pain one is experiencing.





For the general public, it is important to raise the awareness of suicide and help those who are in need by communicating the right messages.


HOW TO REPORT ETHICALLY?


The Malaysia's Ministry of Health (MOH) has prepared guidelines for ethical reporting on suicide based on recommendations from the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s guidelines for "Media Reporting on Suicide".


DO's

 Always **ensure that 'messages of hope' can be added** in the news report which include mentioning people who have recovered from suicidal crises, regardless of how brief this might be.


 Work closely with the police and health authorities in presenting the facts.


 Must **provide sources for support or helplines** in the news article, videos, or audio clips.


 Media or news outlets should **ensure strict adherence** by their employees to **ethical suicide reporting guidelines**.


 Review all video and audio content and **remove negative elements** that depict attempts of suicide.


DON'Ts


 **DO NOT** publish photographs (especially graphic images) of the deceased or where the incident took place, pictures or videos of an ongoing suicide attempt and suicide notes.


 **DO NOT** publish the victim's name, unless deemed absolutely necessary. In ALL cases, ensure that 'messages of hope' and professional viewpoints on suicide are also included.

 **DO NOT** publish suicide reports on the front page.

 **DO NOT** report specific details of the methods used.

 **DO NOT** use cultural or racial stereotypes regarding suicide in movies, dramas, or video and audio content.

 **DO NOT** use phrases such as 'committed suicide' or 'successfully attempted suicide'. USE appropriate terms and phrases such as 'died by suicide' to destigmatise suicide and minimise distress to bereaved family members.

 **DO NOT** use sensational statements that have no factual basis in empirical research data, for e.g. labelling suicide as an epidemic in certain groups or communities.

IF YOU ARE EVER IN NEED OF HELP AND SUPPORT, PLEASE CONTACT:

- Befrienders Kuala Lumpur (03-7627 2929 or <https://www.befrienders.org.my/> for a full list of numbers and operating hours)
- Mental Health Psychosocial Support Service (03-2935 9935 or 014-322 3392)
- Talian Kasih (15999 or WhatsApp 019-261 5999)
- Jakim's Family, Social and Community care centre (WhatsApp 0111-959 8214)
- If you need to seek professional help, head over to <https://people.my/the-ultimate-guide-to-receiving-mental-health-services-in-malaysia/> for a guide to receiving mental health services in Malaysia.

REFERENCES

**THE BEFRIENDERS
KUALA LUMPUR**
Guidelines for Reporting
on Suicides

**MINISTRY OF HEALTH
MALAYSIA**
Guidelines for Media Reporting
on Suicide, 2011

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