BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN IMPLEMENTING MEDIA GUIDELINES FOR SUICIDE REPORTING IN SINGAPORE: INSIGHTS FROM QUALITATIVE STUDY

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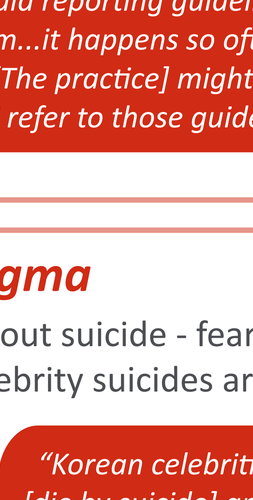
BACKGROUND

- Singapore currently **lacks a national suicide prevention strategy** that emphasises the importance of media guideline implementation in suicide prevention
- Clear evidence has shown that responsible reporting practices help to **mitigate potential contagion efforts** and support suicide prevention efforts with **stories of strength and stigma reduction**
- 2 existing guidelines:





- **Adherence remains inconsistent** across media platforms without clear enforcement measures

METHODS

14 focus group discussions (FGDs)

media personnel · LGBTQIA+ · health professionals · survivors of suicide loss · lived experience

Recruited through word-of-mouth and social media. FGDs explored:

- Understanding of suicide
- Perceived gaps in current local suicide prevention efforts
- Opportunities for improvement

Discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed via Zoom. Rapid Qualitative Analysis was used to identify patterns within and across domains of interest from the FGDs.

This study is part of a ground-up initiative to collate community views in order to co-design a national strategy for suicide prevention, including a current view of the local media reporting landscape.

BARRIERS

1 *Structural Gaps*

- Lack of training on responsible reporting practices
- Inconsistent application of guidelines
- Decisions are based on experience instead of guidelines

> *"I have not referred to [existing media reporting guidelines]. It's just something that it's so set in the newsroom...it happens so often that every time I know what to do and what not to do. [The practice] might have been set by someone in the past who did refer to those guidelines"*

2 *High Suicide-related Stigma*

- General reluctance to report about suicide - fear of copycat suicides
- Sensationalised coverage of celebrity suicides are still persistent

> *"For traditional media, we don't report every single case because of this concept that it will encourage people to copy the action. So that is not something we want to encourage. So that's why we don't report on everything."*

> *"Korean celebrities; when they do [die by suicide] and then it's reported in the news, then you see a little bit more people who follow the same method. So there's a grey line between whether [celebrity suicides] should be reported or not, and I feel that it does affect."*

3 *Platform-specific Differences*

- Social media vs. traditional media face different challenges
- Trivialisation of terminology, self-diagnosis on social media

> *"It's something that is ongoing in social media. And it's something that's made light of very easily in their way of speech. It's like, "Oh, yeah, just die."... So it's all these things that are so subtle. But then it really plants the idea in your head constantly."*

> *"Different social media companies have different guidelines. Youtube is a bit more lax, Tiktok is supposed to be very sensitive of any violence in general. So the thing is a lot of kids, or even adults, they know what to say to circumvent [the guidelines]. ...the companies do try as much as they can to prevent sensitive content, but there is no guarantee."*

OPPORTUNITIES

1 *Fill Structural Gaps*

- National strategy should explore incentives or regulatory mechanisms to ensure guideline adherence
- Encourage training for journalists and media personnel

2 *Promote Strengths-based Narratives*

- Highlighting stories of strength, recovery, and resilience
- Opportunity to reduce stigma and provide hope, especially for vulnerable populations

> *"As a trans person, that was actually a very beautiful story of a double minority...it's not because that person is lost or wanting to be someone else, or they're just in denial, but it's actually a true story of someone who lived as a double minority, but along the way tried and made a very good decision to still continue living and still have that scar. So I think, having a lot of these community stories documented in various media will help to alleviate that shame that somebody else is experiencing."*

> *"I remember that I watched on Youtube's Our Grandfather's Story, there was a teenage girl who attempted suicide, and she's now paraplegic, and she's just in wheelchair for the rest of her life. So she came forth with her story, and it was very well received. You look at the comments under the section. A lot of people thought that she was courageous in sharing her story, and that narrative has had an impact. "*

3 *Platform-specific Guidelines*

- Accounting for different users and formats, including social media algorithms and user-generated content
- Opportunities to leverage media platforms to enhance literacy and promote suicide prevention efforts

4 *Ongoing Community Engagement*

- Required for sustained implementation and accountability
- Buy-in from industry leaders and media influencers

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