

Online supplement

References to the international media guidelines used for the development of codes in the qualitative content analysis of media reports.

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Guidelines from the World Health Organization

World Health Organization (WHO). Preventing Suicide. A Resource for Media Professionals. WHO, 2008 (http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/resource_media.pdf).

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Table DS1 Code definitions, code categories and coding examples for the code families: (a) harmful item characteristic; (b) protective item characteristics.

Code, subcode	Subcode definition	Coding example ^a
<i>(a) Harmful item characteristics</i>		
Identity of the suicidal person		
Name reported	At least first name reported	Jo Woods was found dead...in her flat (s-7)
Description of character	Use of adjectives to describe the person's personality beyond sociodemographic characteristics and illness. Reporting of mental illness (e.g. 'he was ill', 'depressed . . .') alone does not qualify as a character description	She was . . . a loving mother (s-1011)
Suicidal act		
Method in headline	Reference to a specific method in the headline	Car damaged: 18-year-old boy threw himself in front of car (s-1226)
Step-by-step 'guide'	Description of how to use a suicide method. At least two consecutive steps in the accomplishment of a specific suicide method are reported	She opened the kitchen window, climbed on the window sill, and jumped (s-717) She dissolved the tablets in water . . . swallowed the poison, and laid down on her bed to die . . . (s-708)
Suicide location reported	Readers are provided with enough information to identify the location where the event took place. The exact mail address is identifiable or a well-defined area of local interest is reported (e.g. a small lake in a specified village)	. . . on top of the steeple of St. Gebhard . . . in Bregenz (s-81)
Suicide pact or mass suicide reported	A report describes the suicidal acts of two or more individuals in an agreed plan. Alternatively, the plan is made by a group leader. The plan may involve dying together, or dying separately but at a close interval	In Japan, nine people committed suicide together. The police are investigating whether the individuals met on the internet (s-1063)
Causes of suicidality		
Life event(s) reported	Any event that had a considerable impact on the life of the person before the suicide (attempt), or any event that triggered suicidal ideation	The background [of the suicide] was . . . unemployment (s-163) After the man found his wife dead on the floor, he wanted to follow her into death . . . (s-801)
Monocausality	Exactly one motive, cause, or trigger is reported. The causal relationship is not subject to speculation. Speculation about the cause is indicated by phrases such as 'the reason may be', 'some uncertainties about the cause of his suicide remain'	The 19-year-old boy, who suffered from depression, listened to voices in his head, climbed up the balustrade and jumped into the icy Pacific Ocean . . . (s-249) She wanted to break up with him, that was his death sentence (s-669) (no other reason/trigger reported)
Societal problems reported to have increased	Societal problems that are reported to have resulted in suicide become more prevalent or more pressing	Nowadays, there are fewer and fewer ways of recovering from stress. People fear for loss of work, and there is bullying . . . Communication itself is on the decrease . . . We have to live in a world of increasing violence and brutality . . . People cannot cope with this any more . . . and choose to die (s-950) Nowadays, people live longer, and they get more isolated and lonely. This is why . . . they end their lives . . . (s-951)
Citation from suicide note	(A part of) the suicide note of the victim is cited or printed	K. C. left a suicide note: 'Don't expect money from my life assurance—they won't pay, because it's a suicide', he wrote (s-70)

(continued)

Table DS1 Code definitions, code categories and coding examples for the code families: (a) harmful item characteristic; (b) protective item characteristics (*continued*)

Code, subcode	Subcode definition	Coding example ^a
Effects of suicidality		
Effects on bereaved	Any effects on bereaved persons reported. Relatives, friends of the victim and other private persons involved in the suicidal act or in the investigation of the suicide are defined as bereaved persons. Any professionals involved do not qualify as bereaved persons	The children discovered the bloody act when they got home. The 15-year-old boy opened the door, found his parents lying on the ground, and called the emergency services (s-693)
Effects on public life	Effects on public life include all effects of the suicidal act on public facilities and on people not directly affiliated to the victim or not directly involved in the investigation	. . . [due to the suicide] . . . all streets to the hotel were closed (s-80) . . . Unbelievable: A crowd of . . . drunken witnesses [of the suicidal act] tried to deter the police from saving the man and shouted that he should jump to his death (s-94) Tragic suicide on the motorway: The young man died immediately (s-1219)
Immediate death without suffering reported	The individual suicidal act is reported to result in immediate death. Alternatively, it may be reported that the method used generally does not cause any suffering	
Style and wording		
Photo	Presence of a photo in the article	–
Several independent suicidal acts reported	Several suicidal acts that occurred independently of each other, but may show some similarities, are reported in the same item	Suicides that may be copycat suicides also qualify as independent acts Again, a tragic suicide: <i>[description of first suicide]</i> . . . On the Sunday before, another adolescent had jumped from a bridge on the motorway <i>[description of second suicide]</i> . . . Hours later, the next suicide: . . . <i>[description of third suicide]</i> . . . (s-1204) A wave of suicides (s-663), a series of massacres (s-705), highest suicide rate in the world (s-465), the series does not stop (s-414) Man found hanged (s-133) Tragedy: it was a suicide (s-783) The . . . act of desperation happened without any warning signs . . . (s-717). <i>[Headline]</i> : Not foreseeable . . . None of the 19 suicides was foreseeable . . . His colleagues thought he <i>[the 19th suicide victim]</i> went to the toilet . . . but then they heard the lethal shot (s-414) In the past few years, the 39-year-old jobless man repeatedly climbed up high cranes, threatening to commit suicide . . . You never knew when, where and how he would do it next . . . This time, he climbed up the steeple for another suicide threat. There is some risk of injury involved in climbing manoeuvres of this kind (s-89)
Reference to a suicide ‘epidemic’	Wording that describes suicide as spreading and involving more and more individuals, or an extraordinarily high number of individuals	–
Headline explicitly on suicide	The reader knows that the article is about suicide simply from reading the headline	–
Public myths reported	One or more of the following public myths is enhanced by the text: those who talk about suicide are less likely to attempt suicide; there are no preceding warning signs; there is nothing you can do about suicidality; someone who has a history of making ‘cries for help’ will not commit suicide; talking about suicide encourages suicide; only the mentally ill exhibit suicidal behaviour; once a person is suicidal, he or she is always suicidal; suicide can be a blessed relief for the individual or those around him or her	<i>[Words expressing high emotionality]</i> : aggression, murder, pressure, jealousy, hatred, explosion, crisis, pain, force, scream <i>[nouns and corresponding adjectives and verbs were included, and inflected forms were considered as part of the same word family]</i> <i>[Words indicating high certainty]</i> : certain, proven, undeniable; <i>[words indicating low certainty]</i> : doubtful, maybe, potentially, nearly
Article length ^b	Total word count	–
Sentence length ^b	Total word count in the text divided by the number of sentences	–
Emotionality ^b	Defined in accordance with the Affective Dictionary Ulm (see main text). To obtain an emotionality score for each media item, we calculated the number of indicator words listed in the dictionary as a proportion of the total word count	
Dichotomous thinking ^b	Based on word lists (see main text), we calculated a ‘certainty score’, defined as the number of words indicating high certainty divided by the number of all words related to certainty	
Standardised type/token ratio ^b	The average proportion of new words in consecutive text fragments of 100 words (see main text)	–

(continued)

Table DS1 Code definitions, code categories and coding examples for the code families: (a) harmful item characteristic; (b) protective item characteristics (*continued*)

Code, subcode	Subcode definition	Coding example ^a
<i>(b) Protective item characteristics</i>		
Background information		
Focus on suicidal ideation	Item is on a case of suicidal ideation, not followed by suicide attempt or suicide. An aborted suicide attempt also qualifies as suicidal ideation, referring to a case in which the individual is one step away from a suicide attempt but changes his or her mind immediately before the act	<i>See main text for coding examples</i>
Focus on prevention programme	Item is primarily on an initiative to prevent suicide, and not on a case of suicidal behaviour	Chinese women have the highest suicide rate in the world . . . One of the first non-governmental care project tries to support suicide-prone Chinese women [<i>description of the programme</i>] (s-832)
Focus on suicide research	Item is primarily on research findings, epidemiology, statistics, not on a case of suicidal behaviour	[<i>Headline</i>]: Pills against failure. [<i>Subheadline</i>]: Pills before tests, suicidal thoughts in case of failure . . . Apprentices suffer from exam nerves, new study says [<i>detailed information on the study findings</i>] (s-1167)
Expert opinion reported	A statement about a person who belongs to a professional group generally dealing with suicidality, suicidal acts or the investigation of suicide (e.g. the police, fire brigade, medical doctors)	'Only 25% of patients receive the right diagnosis and treatment. The illness [<i>bipolar disorder</i>] is often mixed up with depression. About 15% of patients with bipolar disorder commit suicide,' an expert says (s-1)
Mental disorder related to suicide	The relationship between mental disorder and suicide (attempt) is acknowledged, either at the level of an individual suicide, or in general terms. Colloquial terms such as 'crazy' do not qualify as a reference to mental disorder	The reason for her suicide was probably depression (s-579) When a child suffers, this may manifest itself as an eating disorder, in the form of behavioural problems, or, in the worst case, in suicide (s-271)
Myths debunked	Myths, as listed in the field 'public myths reported', are debunked	Many think that people who talk about suicide will not do it. That is not true. 80% of suicide victims talk about suicide shortly before they die (s-353)
Contact support service	Reference to a specific public support service, including address or telephone number. For online services, the web address is provided	Support for bereaved is available from [<i>address, telephone number</i>] (s-744)
Suicide-related statistical data reported	A quantitative summary/analysis of any suicide (attempt) data-set, or of morbidity data or social data related to suicide is reported	58 000 people die from suicide each year in the EU. In Austria, 1456 people take their lives each year, which compares with 876 traffic injury fatalities. . . . Suicide rates are on the decrease . . . (s-1173)
Suffering of the person resulting from suicidal act	As a direct consequence of the suicide (attempt), the victim is reported to suffer from pain or other non-lethal negative health outcomes. Suicides reported not to result in immediate death also qualify as 'suffering'	He tried to commit suicide, but survived, seriously injured. On Sunday, he died despite an emergency operation (s-371)
a. References to the location of the text segments in the material are given in parentheses. b. Continuous variable. All other variables are categorical and dummy-coded: presence (1) versus absence (0) of the item characteristic.		