

An Exploratory Study for Establishing More Realistic Media Guidelines for Reporting on Suicides:

**A Case Study of S. Korea, Which Has Had the Highest Suicide
Rate among OECD Countries for 13 Consecutive Years**

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This exploratory study attempted to develop more practical and realistic guidelines for media reports on suicides in Korea, which as of 2015 had the highest suicide rate among OECD countries for 13 consecutive years. An online survey was conducted in which 634 Korean citizens participated. This survey inquired as to the degree to which the respondents believed each specific item exposed in media reports covering suicides (e.g., “providing information on the method used to commit suicide,” “reporting on a celebrity suicide”) encouraged people to have positive or less negative perceptions of suicide. The specific items used in the survey were collected from several media guidelines used in 16 different countries as provided through the IASP (International Association for Suicide Prevention) website. The participants were presented with 43 different items (issues) and asked whether these items would lead people to have positive or negative perceptions of suicide. The author was able to identify some items that were considered by the 634 Korean participants to be more important than others with regard to preventing suicide. Participants were asked to disclose few personal details. Information such as the level of depression they were experiencing at that time could be considered important variables in studies regarding suicide. Based upon the results, this exploratory study suggested more practical and (or) realistic guidelines for the media professionals to use when covering suicides in Korea, a society that has experienced a serious suicide rate for many years.

Keywords: High Suicide Rate, Media Guidelines, Copycat Effect

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I. Introduction

Suicide has become one of the most serious societal problems in many countries. For countries and (or) societies that have experienced an extremely high suicide rates, many parties, including governmental organizations, broadcasting stations, and medical groups, have engaged in diverse efforts with a determination to reduce these rates (Luxton, June, & Fairall, 2012). These efforts includes a wide array of official interventions, from screening and monitoring specific groups of people who could be considered to be more likely to commit suicide compared to other people, to producing and airing public service announcements (PSAs) to promote several tips and helpful information regarding suicide prevention (Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, WHO, 2008). Many countries have invested enormous sums of money in implementing these various efforts, as suicides can clearly indicate that the society has serious problems to overcome in several respects, such as welfare, the health system, and economic disparity (Ciulla, Nogueira, Filho, Tres, Engroff, Ciulla, & Neto, 2014). According to several studies, there have been some notable accomplishments from these efforts in many European and Asian countries that have had seriously high suicide rates over a long period of time (Niederkrotenthaler, Voracek, Herberth, Till, Strauss, Etzerdorfer, Eisenwort, & Sonneck, 2010).

In addition to the efforts to prevent and (or) reduce the previously discussed suicide rates, many researchers have also suggested stringent media guidelines for reporting on suicides (Yu & Song, 2012). Several studies have actually discussed the strong possibility that a significant number of reports on suicides are highly related to subsequent suicides based on popular theoretical concepts such as Werther effect and (or) copycat effects (Niederkrotenthaler, Voracek, Herberth, Till, Strauss, Etzerdorfer, Eisenwort, & Sonneck, 2010). Even though it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine if there is any causal relationship between the media coverage of suicides and suicides that occur in the following days (Stack, 2000), many studies have indicated there could be an important linkage between the two

factors that should not be ignored (Stack, 2000; Gould, 2001). In particular, some studies have also reported that there might be more serious links when the media covers the celebrity suicides, such as those of famous entertainers (Gould, 2011). In other words, when there are reports on suicides of influential individuals who are very well known in society, it is highly possible that these suicides could trigger subsequent suicides (Stack, 2000). Some media reports actually provide extremely detailed information surrounding celebrity suicides, including the specific suicide methods used (e.g., hanging, charcoal, jumping) and (or) the pictures of the places in which the suicides occurred. Several researchers have suggested that these factors potentially stimulate imitative suicides (Luxton, June, & Fairall, 2012). Since this vicious circle of irrational media coverage of suicides and the increase in imitative suicides has become such a serious problem in some societies (Stack, 2000), several studies have attempted to discuss a variety of related solutions to improve this tragic situation (Gould, 2011). Based on these circumstances, many countries have established media guidelines for media professionals that suggest specific principles to follow when covering specific suicides (Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, WHO, 2008). These guidelines were created based on the belief that on some level screened reporting of suicides could contribute to preventing possible copycat effects (Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, WHO, 2008).

However, even though many countries have established media guidelines and have suggested that the media follow specific rules, there are still serious conflicts in some countries between the media and the parties who provide the guidelines for reporting on suicides (Niederkröthaler, Voracek, Herberth, Till, Strauss, Etzendorfer, Eisenwort, & Sonneck, 2010). Media guidelines have recently emerged in South Korea, a country which has had the highest suicide rate among OECD countries for more than 10 years. However, it does not appear as though many media companies in Korea thoroughly follow the guidelines for reporting on suicides (Yu & Song, 2012). Even though several parties including KSPC (Korea Suicide

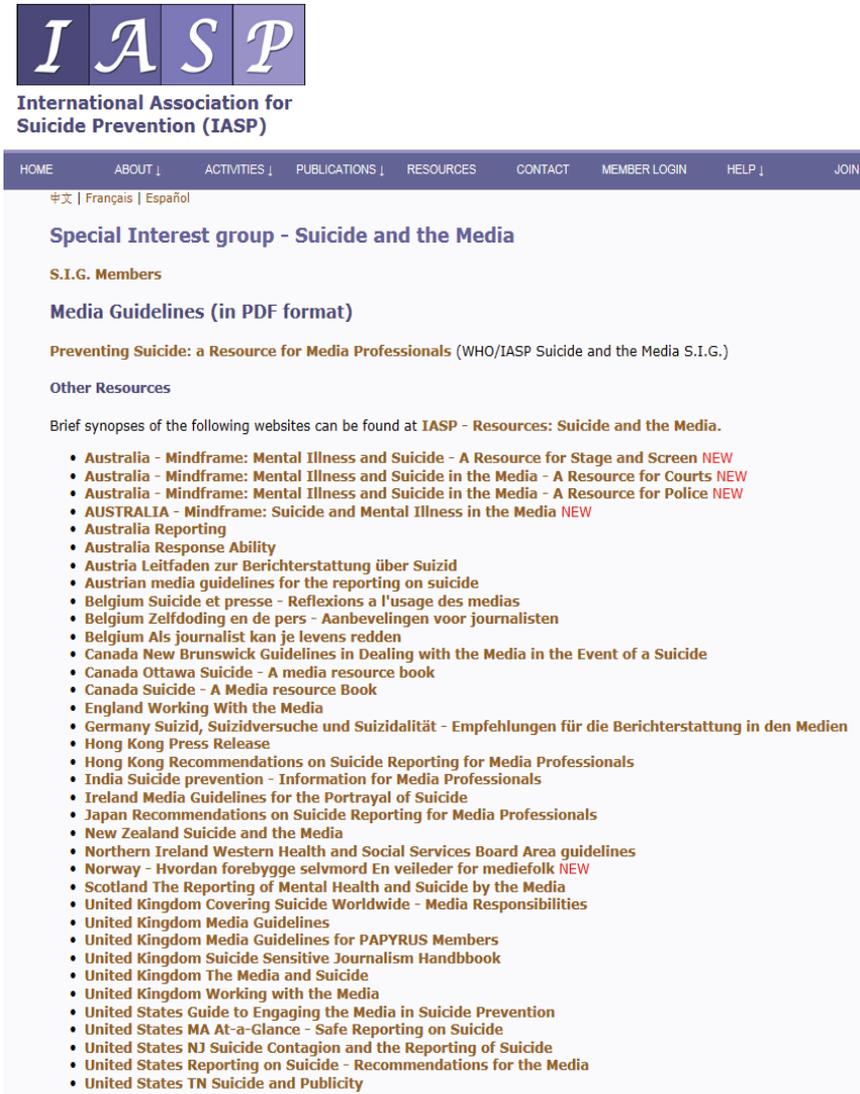
Prevention Center) have regularly monitored the content of the media reports on suicides based the media guidelines introduced in 2014 (i.e., The media guidelines for reporting on suicides 2.0), it does not appear as though that media has screened reports covering suicides based on these guidelines. One of the reasons some reporters have suggested that the guidelines have not been followed might be each guideline item's lack of feasibility (Yu & Song, 2012). These reporters have described the background against which few reports actually follow the guidelines, citing that the present guidelines need to be improved to reflect the real situations surrounding the media business and suicides (Gwangju Daily, 2015).

Influenced by these circumstances, this exploratory study is an effort to suggest more realistic and practical media guidelines that media companies can easily choose to follow. Based on the results of a survey of 634 Korean people, this study suggests a new version of media guidelines for Korea that could be considered more practical compared to the present guidelines.

II. Methods

The present research applied two steps of sub-studies: a brief content analysis and a survey. First, the author investigated 35 different media guidelines from 16 different countries provided on the IASP (International Association for Suicide Prevention: <https://www.iasp.info/>) website in September, 2015 in order to identify what specific items (topics) were used as media guidelines in many other countries (Figure 1). Media guidelines from around the world were analyzed by the author in this step, and a brief content analysis was conducted using the list of guidelines confirmed by IASP below.

Figure 1. The Media Guidelines around the World from IASP



I A S P
International Association for
Suicide Prevention (IASP)

HOME ABOUT | ACTIVITIES | PUBLICATIONS | RESOURCES CONTACT MEMBER LOGIN HELP | JOIN

中文 | Français | Español

Special Interest group - Suicide and the Media

S.I.G. Members

Media Guidelines (in PDF format)

Preventing Suicide: a Resource for Media Professionals (WHO/IASP Suicide and the Media S.I.G.)

Other Resources

Brief synopses of the following websites can be found at **IASP - Resources: Suicide and the Media.**

- **Australia - Mindframe: Mental Illness and Suicide - A Resource for Stage and Screen** **NEW**
- **Australia - Mindframe: Mental Illness and Suicide in the Media - A Resource for Courts** **NEW**
- **Australia - Mindframe: Mental Illness and Suicide in the Media - A Resource for Police** **NEW**
- **AUSTRALIA - Mindframe: Suicide and Mental Illness in the Media** **NEW**
- **Australia Reporting**
- **Australia Response Ability**
- **Austria Leitfaden zur Berichterstattung über Suizid**
- **Austrian media guidelines for the reporting on suicide**
- **Belgium Suicide et presse - Reflexions a l'usage des medias**
- **Belgium Zelfdoding en de pers - Aanbevelingen voor journalisten**
- **Belgium Als journalist kan je levens redden**
- **Canada New Brunswick Guidelines in Dealing with the Media in the Event of a Suicide**
- **Canada Ottawa Suicide - A media resource book**
- **Canada Suicide - A Media resource Book**
- **England Working With the Media**
- **Germany Suizid, Suizidversuche und Suizidalität - Empfehlungen für die Berichterstattung in den Medien**
- **Hong Kong Press Release**
- **Hong Kong Recommendations on Suicide Reporting for Media Professionals**
- **India Suicide prevention - Information for Media Professionals**
- **Ireland Media Guidelines for the Portrayal of Suicide**
- **Japan Recommendations on Suicide Reporting for Media Professionals**
- **New Zealand Suicide and the Media**
- **Northern Ireland Western Health and Social Services Board Area guidelines**
- **Norway - Hvordan forebygge selvmord En veileder for mediefolk** **NEW**
- **Scotland The Reporting of Mental Health and Suicide by the Media**
- **United Kingdom Covering Suicide Worldwide - Media Responsibilities**
- **United Kingdom Media Guidelines**
- **United Kingdom Media Guidelines for PAPHYRUS Members**
- **United Kingdom Suicide Sensitive Journalism Handbook**
- **United Kingdom The Media and Suicide**
- **United Kingdom Working with the Media**
- **United States Guide to Engaging the Media in Suicide Prevention**
- **United States MA At-a-Glance - Safe Reporting on Suicide**
- **United States NJ Suicide Contagion and the Reporting of Suicide**
- **United States Reporting on Suicide - Recommendations for the Media**
- **United States TN Suicide and Publicity**

The author also got some more information regarding other media guidelines in addition to those above from different pages on the website. Even though there were certainly other guidelines that have been established and used in some countries,

it was almost impossible for the author to confirm if those guidelines were legitimate and actually used in the individual societies. Therefore, the author decided to use the information obtained from the IASP's website as those for analysis since IASP confirmed those media guidelines have been actually used in specific societies. In addition to the IASP-confirmed guidelines from the website, this study also analyzed the guidelines from WHO, which has been used as an important reference for establishing each country's guidelines (Yu & Song, 2012). Therefore, a total of 36 guidelines (35 introduced on the IASP's website, and one from WHO) were analyzed to identify specific items (issues) that were to be used in the survey.

Second, a survey of Korean people was conducted in order to investigate how Korean people viewed each item in the media guidelines gathered in the first step. Through the survey, items or issues that were actually perceived by Koreans to be potentially more harmful to the public due the possibility of inciting the copycat effect ("Werther effect") were identified.

1. A Brief Content Analysis and a Pilot Study

Through content analysis of the 36 different guidelines previously cited, a total of 43 specific items were identified after redundant items or issues were excluded. The author planned to use the items gathered from the analysis in the survey that asked Korean citizens the degree to which they believed each item could trigger a subsequent suicide. However, the author deemed that 43 items was too many for survey participants to individually consider. Therefore, the author opted to conduct a pilot study in order to possibly eliminate some items that could be regarded as less important to the Korean people. A total of 101 people were recruited using snowball sampling for the pilot study to confirm which items could be dismissed from the main survey. Regarding the characteristics of the people for the pilot study, the author considered making balance between some involved people (e.g., reporters, media researchers, psychiatrists, and government officials) who could be assumed

to have some level of knowledge of media guidelines for suicide and ordinary people who are basically the audience of media reports covering suicide is very important. The author confirmed that there is a diversity he was hoping for in terms of the participants' backgrounds. Using the data from the pilot study, the author conducted a series of factor analyses to identify a detailed structure among the answers from 101 people to questions regarding each media content item used to report on suicides. Based on the results from the pilot study, it was determined that six items not only rated comparatively low on importance with the participants, but also lacked loading value in any factor. Therefore, the author decided to include the remaining 37 items in the next step, which was the main survey using a larger sample.

2. Main Survey

The next step in this study was to conduct an online survey of Korean people from diverse backgrounds. The principle regarding the characteristics of the participants (a total of 634) was exactly same meaning that making balance between some involved people (e.g., the expert groups including reporters, media researchers, psychiatrists, and government officials) who could be assumed to have some level of knowledge of media guidelines for suicide and ordinary people who are basically the audience of media reports covering suicide was kept in the main survey as well. Since the survey includes not only the expert groups in this field but also ordinary persons as the participants, it is not appropriate for the Delphi method was used as the main technique for this research.

The questionnaire for the survey was produced based on the specific items (issues) identified in the previous steps. Therefore, the goal of the main survey was to identify what Korean participants thought about each item gathered. More specifically, each question asked participants the degree to which they thought an individual item (e.g., "providing information on the specific method used to kill himself/herself") could

contribute to them feeling positive (or less negative) about suicide.

With regard to the statistical analysis using the survey results, the author intended to apply basic descriptive statistics and some inferential statistics, as well include factor analysis to identify the specific structure of the questions used in the survey. Final suggestions for more practical media guidelines will be introduced based upon the survey results.

III. Results

1. Gathering Specific Items

Using the list obtained from IASP (Figure 1) and the media guidelines from WHO, the author identified various items to be used as media guidelines for reporting on suicide. Through the author' screening process, several items used in multiple guidelines were consolidated into one item. In conclusion, a total of 43 different items were ready for the pilot test to identify any less important issues among the various items originally gathered.

2. Pilot Test and the Items for the Survey

In the pilot test, which was conducted through an online survey via www.surveymonkey.com, 101 people were recruited from a convenience sampling to identify which items were deemed important. For every item or issue (e.g., "Providing information on the specific devices the deceased used to kill him/herself," "Providing information on the specific location or address at which the suicides occurred"), participants were asked to rate their level of agreement to the statement: *"I believe that providing the following issue in a media report on suicide will influence*

people to think positively about suicide.” All 43 items gathered from the previous step were used in the pilot study. Regarding the translation, the author translated all the items gathered for the pilot study into Korean first, and a bilingual researcher was hired for conducting back translation to figure out correct meanings from each item are actually applied in the questions for the test.

Using the SPSS 20.0 program, descriptive statistics and a series of factor analyses (varimax rotation) were conducted. The author was able to eliminate 6 items that were not assigned to any factor. After removing six items, 37 different items were finally prepared to be used in the main survey with a larger sample. Even though only 6 items were the difference between the pilot test and the main survey, it was possible for the author to figure out how we can categorize the specific items in the media guidelines when we deal with Korean people. In other words, the pilot study made clear that what issues actually Korean people think critical in terms of the media reports covering suicide. The items for the main survey are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. The Final 37 Items Prepared for Use in the Main Survey

Items/Issues Used in the survey
“Using the word ‘suicide’ in the headline/key phrases”
“Using a word or expression implying suicide, even though the reason for death has not yet been identified”
“Using a picture and (or) the content from the suicide note from the person who killed himself/herself”
“Showing a picture of the person who killed himself/herself (either a picture before or after he/she died)”
“Providing the name of the place where the suicide occurred (e.g., OO bridge or a specific address)”
“Providing information about the device he/she used to commit suicide (e.g., gun, knife, belt)”
“Providing information on the method he/she used to commit suicide (e.g., jumping, hanging, burning charcoal)”
“Providing information about the job he/she held before he/she died”
<i>**Providing information about the related organizations (e.g., Korea Suicide Prevention Center) from which people could get help from when considering suicide”</i>

Items/Issues Used in the survey

“Providing factual information with adequate references, such as the significant rate of people who overcame their depression.”

“Generalizing the reasons for suicides (e.g., ...seems like he was facing financial difficulties after he got divorced three months ago...), even though the details were not yet confirmed”

“Using very stimulating/shocking graphics in media reports on suicides, such as a picture of blood on the ground and (or) a picture he/she left at the spot”

“Providing detailed information about the situation he/she went through before his/her suicide”

“Describing the person who killed himself/herself, citing that he/she was not at all behaving differently from ordinary days, or the he/she did not show any signs of being suicidal”

“Conducting media reports on a celebrity’s suicide”

“Providing picture(s) related to the suicide, such as the place where the suicide occurred”

“Revealing information about the private life of family members of the person who killed him/herself”

“Using very provocative/stimulating headlines in media reports on suicide (e.g., ‘unique usage of charcoal?’)”

“Using the expressions like ‘successful suicide’ or ‘unsuccessful suicide attempt’ in headlines for media reports on suicide”

“Using a conclusive expression such as ‘he killed himself because of ~’, even though the reason for death had not officially been confirmed”

**“Introducing cases in which people overcame personal crises and an attempted suicide in media reports on suicide”*

“Delivering detailed stories surrounding celebrity suicides in media reports”

**“Providing information about suicide prevention, such as the contact information for counseling offices, help hot-lines, and other related organizations”*

**“Offering warning comments right before media reports that deliver content to a specific audience, such as children or adolescents (e.g., ‘parents’ discretion is advised for this news...’)”*

**“Including advice from the experts in the suicide prevention field (e.g., featuring an interview with a psychiatrist in a media report on suicide)”*

“Locating a report on suicide as the top headline in newspapers and (or) on the front page of portal websites”

**“Including expert advice that could be helpful for overcoming the desire to commit suicide”*

“Using an emotional approach to deliver information regarding a suicide, such as dramatic music in a TV report or stimulating headlines in newspaper report”

**“Including information on solutions from the experts on how to overcome the impulsive suicidal tendencies”*

“Including information on other celebrities who committed suicide in a report on a celebrity’s suicide”

Items/Issues Used in the survey

“Including pictures and (or) the suicide victim’s voice from when he/she was alive in a media report on suicide”

**“Providing information about a current situation of a person who survived a suicide attempt”*

“Including quotes made by suicide victims when they were alive (e.g., ‘Due to extreme poverty, I want to kill myself...’), as provided by relatives”

“Using expressions that suggest the suicide victim no longer faces the agonies he/she experienced when alive (e.g., ‘Tom is now finally totally free from the bullies who gave him such a harsh time at school’)”

“Providing information regarding the tragic consequences people face after suicide attempts, such as being disabled or being hospitalized for a long time”

**“Providing information on advice that suggests that depression and (or) suicidal tendencies could be overcome if people visited experts such as psychiatrists”*

**“Providing information about an individual who now lives a normal and happy life after he/she overcame suicidal tendencies with the aid of experts”*

*The items that italicized and marked with * are the items that could potentially be considered as helpful to preventing suicides. On the other hand, the items without * could be considered as those which could potentially be influential to copycat effects.

3. Results from the Survey

The survey questionnaire was produced using the 37 items identified from the previous investigation (Table 1). These items were specific issues regarding primary content observed in media reports on suicide, such as “Headlines that provide information on how a person killed himself/herself” and “An article showing pictures of funeral for a movie star who killed himself/herself.” Therefore, the survey questions were drawn from 16 different media guidelines with specific issues that should not be included in media reports on suicides. The participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale the degree to which they thought each specific issue should not appear in reports. The following is an example of a survey question:

- Please circle your agreement level with regard to the statement given.
“I think showing a person’s suicide note in a media report could trigger another suicide”
1. Strongly Disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Neither Agree or Disagree, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly Agree.

The 634 participants' answers regarding agreement with each issue were analyzed in order to determine which item(s) the participants considered most important for inclusion or exclusion in media reports on suicides. From the 38 total items listed in the survey, the top 15 guidelines that participants rated comparatively highly are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. The Top 15 Items with High Levels of Agreement

(Average Scores are Higher than 4.00)

The Items with High Level of Agreement	Average	N(The # of Participants Answered)	Ranking by Agreement Scores
"Providing information on the method he/she used to committed suicide (e.g., jumping, hanging, burning charcoal)"	4.545	634	1
"Providing information about the device he/she used to commit suicide (e.g., gun, knife, belt)"	4.517	634	2
"Using the expressions that suggest that the suicide victim no longer faces the agonies he/she experienced when alive (e.g., 'Tom is now finally totally free from the bullies who gave him such a harsh time at school')"	4.359	601	3
"Delivering detailed stories surrounding celebrity suicides in media reports"	4.313	615	4
"Conducting media reports on a celebrity's suicide"	4.308	626	5
"Providing detailed information on the situation he/she experienced before committing suicide"	4.217	626	7
"Using very provocative/stimulating headlines in media reports on suicide (e.g., 'unique usage of charcoal?)"	4.293	626	6
"Using an emotional approach to deliver information regarding a suicide, such as dramatic music in a TV report or stimulating headlines in newspaper report"	4.197	612	8
"Including information about other celebrities who committed suicide in a report on a celebrity's suicide"	4.178	612	9
"Locating a report on suicide as the top headline in newspapers and (or) on the front page of portal websites"	4.136	615	10
"Providing the name of the place where the suicide occurred (e.g., OO bridge or a specific address)"	4.110	634	11

The Items with High Level of Agreement	Average	N(The # of Participants Answered)	Ranking by Agreement Scores
“Using very stimulating/shocking graphics in media reports on suicides, such as a picture of blood on the ground and (or) a picture he/she left on the spot”	4.066	634	12
“Using a picture and (or) the content from the suicide note from the person who killed him/herself”	4.045	634	13
“Generalizing the reasons for suicides (e.g., ...seems like he was facing financial difficulties after he got divorced three months ago...), even though the details were not yet confirmed”	4.044	626	14
“Using the expressions like ‘successful suicide’ or ‘unsuccessful suicide attempt’ in headlines for media reports on suicide”	4.006	634	15

Of the 38 various items, 15 received agreement scores higher than 4.00. Since a 5-point Likert scale was used in the survey, the researchers agreed the items with the scores higher than 4.00 could be considered as important items to be suggested. The item with the highest agreement level rating was “Providing information on the method he/she used to commit suicide (e.g., jumping, hanging, burning charcoal),” for which the average rating was 4.545. The item “Providing information about the device he/she used to commit suicide (e.g., gun, knife, belt)” ranked second in terms of agreement levels (4.517). The other high ranking items were regarding the use of expressions to suggest suicide victims were now perfectly free from all of the agonies experienced in life (4.359) and delivery of information regarding celebrities’ suicides (4.313, 4.308, 4.178). The items that highlighted stimulating and emotional headlines used in media reports on suicides received higher agreement scores as well (4.29 and 4.197). The participants also considered locating media reports on suicide at the top of portal websites or as the main news story to be problematic (4.136). In addition, the participants believed that if media reports included the name of the specific places the suicides occurred (e.g., OO apartment complex, OO building), this could potentially trigger copycat behavior, especially in people at high risk for

suicide (4.11). Using the pictures taken from the suicide location was also problematic according to the participants (4.044). In addition, information from the suicide notes left by the suicide victims was considered to be a trigger for copycat suicides (4.045). Table 2 shows a summary of the information regarding the top 15 items participants considered to be harmful.

IV. Discussion

1. Detailed information should not be listed in media reports on suicides

The participants in this study agreed that detailed information surrounding specific suicides should not be featured in the media reports in order to prevent possible negative consequences, such as copycat suicides. “Detailed information” includes pictures from the location of the suicide and the suicide methods used. The public is familiar with popular suicide methods, such as jumping, burning charcoal, and toxicology, due to media reports that provide detailed information when suicides occur. Many related studies that discuss the copycat effect regarding suicides have cited that there is a clear association between the frequent exposure to this information and people imitating these behaviors, even if the tragic consequences are not immediate (Gould, Jamieson, & Romer, 2003). Some researchers have also indicated that as more detailed information describing suicides is delivered through media reports, more serious consequences may materialize (Gould, Jamieson, & Romer, 2003). Ji, Lee, Noh, & Yip (2014) reported that, especially in Korea, there was a high increase in suicides in the year following the suicide of female actress Choi Jin-sil, who had been very popular with Koreans.

As easily expected, many media reports provided significant details on her death.

This included pictures from the building in which the suicide occurred and the information on her personal life, such as who she met on the day of her suicide. Some reports provided video clips and the multiple pictures of her family members, as well as footage from her funeral (Ji, Lee, Noh, & Yip, 2014; Myung, Won, Fava, Mischoulon, Yeung, Lee, Kim, & Jeon, 2015). Even though some media criticized other media's reporting for providing too much and too detailed information about the suicide, almost all media outlets covered many details regarding Jin-sil's tragedy. According to several references, a surprising increase in the suicide rate following her suicide could be explained by such abnormal media coverage (Kim, Park, Nam, Park, Cho, Kim, Choi, & Cho, 2013). As indicated in the literature review section, there are clear guidelines that discourage providing this kind of detailed description on suicides; in Korea, there is "Recommendations for Media Reports on Suicides 2.0." Since the guidelines were first developed by an expert group comprised of government officials, psychiatrists, public health professionals, and journalism researchers, there have been several modifications based on the new media environment in order to make the guidelines more efficient. However, several studies including that of Yu & Song (2012) noted that most media reports did not follow the guidelines. This situation appears to be considerably more serious with online media, including internet media that provides diverse and detailed information surrounding suicides (Yu & Song, 2012; Luxton, June, & Fairall, 2012). Even though the present research did not ask the participants if they would like to view this kind of information, it was clearly determined that the participants strongly agreed that providing this type of information could seriously trigger an increase in copycat suicide.

2. Celebrities' suicides should be handled minimally

As many researchers have indicated, celebrity suicides could be an important factor that leads to subsequent suicides (Kim, Park, Nam, Park, Cho, Kim, Choi, and Cho

2013). This phenomena has been observed not only in Korea, as in the case of this study, but also in many other countries (Ji, Lee, Noh, & Yip, 2014; Myung, Won, Fava, Mischoulon, Yeung, Lee, Kim, & Jeon, 2015). It is highly possible for the consequences to be more serious with deaths of popular celebrities such as actors, actresses, or singers (Ji, Lee, Noh, & Yip, 2014; Myung, Won, Fava, Mischoulon, Yeung, Lee, Kim, & Jeon, 2015). This association is no longer a prediction or a case based on empirical data provided by several related studies (Ji, Lee, Noh, & Yip, 2014; Myung, Won, Fava, Mischoulon, Yeung, Lee, Kim, & Jeon, 2015). For example, Ji and her colleagues have investigated and compared the suicide rates before and after the death of the famous Korean actress Choi Jin-sil. Results indicated that the suicide rate in Korea skyrocketed after her suicide, while a totally different rate was observed in the average monthly suicide rates last year (Ji, Lee, Noh, & Yip, 2014). We cannot indicate that there is a causality between famous celebrities' suicides and the sharp increase in suicides following their deaths. However, there is quite enough evidence to further investigate this relationship. In addition, there could be such a strong rationale not only for constructing stricter or practical media guidelines, but also for requesting that media follow guidelines in order to prevent possible copycat suicides triggered by the media reports covering celebrities' suicides.

There have been several instances of special efforts not to reveal too much information about the celebrities who committed suicide in order to prevent possible negative impacts on suicides. In northern European countries, including Finland and Sweden which had higher suicide rates in the latter twentieth century, specific media guidelines were enforced to prevent the possibility of copycat suicides. In those countries, only a short announcement on celebrity suicides can legally appear in the media. For example, the guidelines allow that one or two sentences notifying the public about a celebrity's death can appear in the newspaper. Any further information, such as the location of the suicide, the suicide method selected, and the reasons for committing suicide, is no longer provided (Yu & Song, 2012). Again, even though there has not been strong evidence for causality between the media's

delivery of information surrounding specific suicides and people imitating suicidal behaviors, many countries have been pursuing special efforts to minimize these reports based on the belief that these efforts could possibly prevent tragic consequences.

3. A “do” list is not as effective as a “do-not-do” list

As indicated in the results, the top 10 items suggested by the participants as the major content that should not be reported in order to prevent copycat suicide attempts were all from a “do-not-do” list.” This suggests that not a single item regarding useful information that could possibly discourage people’s desire to attempt suicide (e.g., contact number for psychiatric experts or examples of people who overcame serious depression) was included. Some researchers have supported the effect of these efforts by using the term “Papageno effect,” which suggests the opposite of the “Werther effect.” Werther effect is known as a behavioral imitation that occurs after people are exposed to suicides such as those of popular celebrities. Conversely, the Papageno effect reflects the motivation for not considering suicide, even if the outlook for life appears desperate. The term “Papageno” originated from Mozart’s musical, “The Magic Flute,” in which the main character “Papageno” was able to escape his desire to commit suicide after he overheard the sound from a wood pipe. Since some European researchers have indicated the effect’s existence in preventing prevalent desires to commit suicide, some deliberate efforts to prevent people’s suicidal tendencies have been attempted. Based on the theoretical “Papageno effect,” useful information has been provided, such as examples of the people who have fully recovered mentally and physically from suicide attempts, contact information for where suicidal people can get help, and advice from mental health professionals regarding how to eradicate the desire to commit suicide. The items with * in the Table 1 that italicized are those which could potentially be helpful for the “papageno effect” can be observed in Korean society.

V. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Multiple items were gathered from several different countries' media guidelines and used in a survey of 634 participants to determine their opinions regarding the degree to which each item could have a negative impact on potential copycat behaviors. However, these insights could be limited since the participants were not asked to freely discuss their perceptions of the issues. Since it could be assumed that people are already well aware of what the media reports on suicides and the degree to which the media widely covers them, it would have been beneficial to gather the participants' diverse opinions regarding these issues. Therefore, a possible follow-up study could include an in depth interview with participants from several backgrounds. Participants who work in the media industry could be another potential group for subsequent research.

Few inferential statistics were used in this study in order to determine which item was considered most important by the participants recruited. Even though a comparison of the average agreement level scores for each item could be an obviously important reference to identify the ten major specific items to be included in the suggested new media guidelines, useful variables regarding the participants could possibly be applied to uncover more valuable insights. For example, it is possible that people from different age groups could possess significantly different opinions toward the priority of different items with regard to the degree to which each item should be banned from media reports on suicide. In addition, the present study did not prepare for investigating the relationships diverse characteristics (demographic and psychographic) of the people and their perspectives toward media reports covering suicide. The researchers including the author should figure out more specific insights regarding what features could be important variables for making different perspectives toward the issues.

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유현재는 서강대학교 커뮤니케이션학부 부교수이며, 서강 헬스커뮤니케이션센터장을 맡고 있다. University of Georgia에서 헬스커뮤니케이션 전공으로 석/박사를 취득하였으며, 현재 헬스컴, 한국인의 건강과 소통 등에 대한 연구를 진행하고 있다. 중앙자살예방센터 운영위원으로서 자살 관련 보도와 미디어 콘텐츠 등에 대한 연구 및 과제를 수행 중이다. (E-mail: bus89@nate.com)

효과적, 현실적 자살보도 권고기준을 위한 탐색적 연구

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자살관련 미디어 보도는 베르테르 효과 등 부작용의 원인이 될 수 있으며, 향후 또 다른 자살과 관련된 일종의 부추김 현상이라는 측면에서 본격적으로 논의해야 한다는 지적이 있다. 따라서 해당 사안에 대한 학술연구는 더욱 활발해져야 한다고 판단된다. 물론 현재 십 수년 째 자살률 세계 1위를 기록하고 있는 우리나라의 현실에서 기존에 공표한 '자살보도 권고기준'이 과연 최근 미디어 콘텐츠에서 얼마나, 어떻게 준수되고 있는지에 대한 논의도 더욱 많은 연구자들의 관심이 필요할 것이다. 이 같은 상황을 배경으로, 본 연구는 향후 미디어 담당자들이 실질적, 현실적으로 용이하게 사용할 수 있는 자살관련 미디어보도 가이드라인을 제시하는 데 가장 중요한 목적이 있다고 하겠다. 약 650명의 각계각층 대상자들에게 온라인 설문조사를 실시하였으며, 과연 자살관련 보도 시 가장 지양되어야 할 것으로 생각되는 항목(예: 자살도구, 자살자의 개인정보 등)들에 대한 의견을 요청하였다. 대상자들에게 의견을 요청하기 위해 활용한 개별 항목들은 IASP(International Association for Suicide Prevention) 웹 사이트에서 확보한 각국의 자살보도 미디어 권고 기준에서 발췌하였다. 일부 중복 요소를 제외한 후 설문조사에 사용하였으며, 연구결과 각 항목 별로 대상자들이 반드시 권고기준에 포함되어야 한다고 생각하는 정도에는 차이가 존재한다는 사실이 확인되었다. 최종 설문조사에서 상위를 차지한 개별 항목들은 일부 현재 존재하는 '자살보도권고기준 2.0'에 포함된 내용도 있으나(예: 경제적 어려움, 가정 불화 등 자살의 원인을 일반화시켜 제공하지 말 것), 상당 부분 포함되지 않은 항목들(예: 자살위기 극복자의 근황제시 등)도 발견되었다. 본 연구를 통해 확보된 대상자들의 다양한 반응들은 향후 더욱 현실적이고 효과적인 새로운 자살보도 권고기준을 제정하기 위한 중요한 자료가 될 것이라 확신한다.

주요용어: 자살률 1위, 자살보도 권고기준, 자살과 미디어, 베르테르 효과