

**I-ROLE 2023****International Conference of Research on Language Education****THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF MALAYSIAN ONLINE NEWS ON  
PEOPLE LIVING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS**

S. M. Mohd Ali (a)\*, W. N. A. Wan Adnan (b), W. F. W. Wan Fakhruddin (c),  
E. A. Azizan (d)

\*Corresponding author

(a) Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities Kuala Lumpur, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

(b) Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities Kuala Lumpur, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, asyura.kl@utm.my

(c) Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities Kuala Lumpur, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, wanfarah@utm.my

(d) Faculty of Education, Humanities and Arts, Kolej Universiti Poly-Tech MARA, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, ezzan@kuptm.edu.my

**Abstract**

People from many walks of life are affected by mental diseases. Although mental illness is curable, most people who suffer from it avoid treatment since there is a strong public stigma against people who suffer from it. The general public is exposed to mental illness daily through various media, including news articles. However, media reporting on mental illness has been found to perpetuate stigma and influence the public view of those who suffer from mental illness. This study examines the extent to which mental illness-related news associated with violent crimes and suicidal behavior is reported in Malaysian online news articles. An inductive thematic analysis approach was adopted to analyze 86 news articles from six mainstream Malaysian newspapers. The study results indicate that most of the media negatively portrays violent crimes and suicidal behavior among individuals who suffer from mental illness. In addition, news reporting on the risk factors associated with violent crimes and suicidal behavior is often portrayed in a derogatory and stigmatizing manner. This further impact public stigma and reinforces negative stereotypes about people with mental illness in the media. This paper suggests that responsible reporting of mental illness to the public should be introduced with standard guidelines so that stigma reduction on mental illness and people who suffer from it can be achieved.

2672-815X © 2023 Published by European Publisher.

*Keywords:* Malaysian newspapers, mental illness, news discourse, suicidal behavior, violent crimes

## 1. Introduction

Mental illnesses are one of the most significant causes of disability globally, affecting millions. As a result, the disease burden of mental illness is among the highest diseases, with depression being the most common cause of disability (World Health Organization, 2017; Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak, 2020). Even though mental illness is a curable disease, most mentally ill people refuse effective treatments due to the stigma associated with mental illness (Harun, 2020; World Health Organisation, 2012). This mental illness is perceived as similar to madness and an unsound mind, as well as fragmented and vague (Harun, 2020). Because of this stigma, many Malaysians are unaware of and do not understand the country's mental health conditions. However, existing studies in the country mainly focused on media reporting on suicidal behavior (Fong, 2021; Johari et al., 2017; Yang & Victor, 2021) and put less emphasis on mental illness-related issues specifically related to violent crimes. In the Malaysian context, suicidal behaviors such as committing suicide and suicide attempts are regarded as crimes under Section 309 of the Malaysian Penal Code (Zolkepli, 2020). This suggests a need for a more comprehensive account to examine the risk factors associated with suicidal behaviors and violent crimes. A review of the literature on the portrayal of mental health-related illness in Malaysia revealed that two studies had been done on mental illness issues in newspapers (Nor et al., 2021; Razali et al., 2018). Both studies focused on analyzing how language is used in newspapers. Therefore, this study can contribute to the scant literature on mental health-related issues and media in Malaysia.

Most people mainly learn about mental illness through the media, especially the news (Newman et al., 2017). However, media representations of mental illness perpetuate stigma towards mental disease (Stout et al., 2004), significantly impacting the general perception of individuals with a mental illness (McKeown & Clancy, 1995). Previous studies reported that print media have always constructed and conveyed messages about mental health and illness, but the focus has always been on disorder, crises, and risk. In fact, mental illness is constantly represented in print and broadcast media as being related to violence, dangerousness, and loss of control (McGinty et al., 2014).

In the Malaysian context, Malaysian newspaper portrayals of mental health-related illness are primarily harmful, damaging, and misleading (Johari et al., 2017; Pendit & Choo, 2020; Razali et al., 2018). Johari et al. (2017) found that suicide stories in Malaysia have been presented in more harmful than productive manners. Thus, based on the widespread assumption that mental illness is stigmatized in Malaysia (Ab Razak, 2017), the stories are portrayed with sensational headlines and negative tones (Johari et al., 2017). Fong (2021) investigates reporting on suicide in Malaysia concerning the problem characterization and solution advocacy by the media. The study found a significant difference between issue narrative styles and suicide solutions, and the most coverage of suicide issues in the articles was published in the form of straight news with negative depictions of suicide.

On the other hand, a study by Razali et al. (2018) looked at how Malay-language newspapers covered stories about mental illness and counted how many times mental illness patients were shown in a negative or positive light. They found that most of the tone used in the headlines of articles was neutral, but the tone used in the text was commonly negative (Razali et al., 2018). Another study by Nor et al. (2021), which conducted a more recent study, examined how two English newspaper articles represent

mental health from the lens of corpus-driven analysis by analyzing the linguistic patterns of mental health-related articles. The portrayal of mental health issues in those two newspapers was positive, focusing on initiatives and activities to help those suffering from mental illnesses. Similar to Razali et al. (2018), the study from Nor et al. (2021) was limited by the inclusion in the sample of only two English newspaper channels, News Stairs Times and The Star Online, and only a limited one-year period (January to December 2020). Thus, this recent study intends to look at a wide range of newspapers, including Malay and English, from January 2017 to July 2021, a span of three and a half years. It focuses specifically on the risk factor in news stories of violent crimes and suicidal events that involve people with mental illness to identify predominant themes in portraying such related issues. Therefore, the researchers are optimistic that online newspaper articles are a more relevant data source for the study.

## 2. Research Method

### 2.1. Approach to analysis

The current study aims to analyze mental illness-related news articles in six Malaysian online newspapers. This study applied an inductive thematic analysis to examine the data, a qualitative approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes in data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive thematic analysis was used to code the data in news articles without a priori explicit theory. This research phase employed an inductive approach, and initial codes were developed. The coding process aims to determine the prevalent themes (discourse topics) that pattern across the data to address mental illness issues. To analyze the data, we adopted the 6-stage procedures from Braun and Clarke (2006), as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Six-stage procedures for thematic analysis (Adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Stage	Explanation
Stage 1: Familiarising oneself with the dataset	Read and re-read and note down initial ideas. The initial ideas are most likely to be initial categories (or codes) of information being classified.
Stage 2: Coding the data	Generating initial codes to organize the data, with full and equal attention given to each data set - Labelling and organizing data items into meaningful group
Stage 3: Generating themes	Involve the process of sorting out the codes into initial themes and also identifying the meaning of and relationship between initial codes - writing themes and their defining properties.
Stage 4: Reviewing themes	Identifying coherent patterns at the level of the coded data. This stage involves reviewing the entire data set as a whole - ensuring there is enough data to support a theme, collapsing overlapping themes and re-working and refining codes and themes.
Stage 5: Defining and naming themes	Identifying the story of each identified theme and fitting the broader story of the data set to respond to the research questions - cycling between the data and the identified themes in order to organize the story
Stage 6: Producing themes	Presenting a concise and interesting account of the story told by the data, both within and across themes - writing a compelling argument that addresses the research question. This stage requires writing beyond the simple description of the themes.

## **2.2. Source of data**

The data source of this study is Malaysian online news articles. The newspaper articles were extracted from six major online newspaper websites and archives. The selection of online newspapers based on readership held a prominent position in Malaysia's media industry. These online newspapers in two languages are used as the primary data to reduce bias. The newspapers used are the Berita Harian (BH), Harian Metro or myMetro (HM), Sinar Harian (SH), The Malay Mail (MM), The Star (TS), and The New Straits Times (NST). Articles were screened to remove duplicates ( $n = 26$ ). Later, all articles that did not discuss the keywords not referred to as broadly as "mental illness" were excluded. Approximately 86 news articles meeting study inclusion criteria were collected and analyzed. In the selection of news articles for the thematic analysis, their inclusion was according to the following criteria:

- i. The keywords consist of general terms and specific diagnostic terms related to mental illness - "mentally ill", "run amok", "commit suicide", "depression", "hallucination", "insanity", and "mental problem/disorder".
- ii. The keywords 'run amok' and 'commit suicide' that are not referred to as generally mental illness are omitted from the analysis (e.g., run amok due to drug-related or suicide due to financial issues).

We collected newspaper articles published between January 2017 and July 2021. The Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Malaysian Mental Health Association (MMHA) have made substantial efforts to lessen prejudice against those who have mental illnesses between 2017 and 2021. Moreover, a rise in the prevalence of mental diseases, in general, has been brought on by the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) epidemic in Malaysia, which has also affected people's mental health (Beckstein et al., 2021; Hassandarvish, 2020). As a result, mental illness has become a public health concern with societal repercussions. Therefore, it is essential to research the manner in which media inform the public about issues relating to mental health.

## **3. Findings**

### **3.1. The risk factors for violent crimes and suicidal behavior among people with mental illness**

The risk factor increases risk or susceptibility (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), for instance, things that make a person more likely to get a particular condition. This theme refers to specific factors that may increase the risk of developing a mental illness (Mayo Clinic, 2022). Here, the news reported on the explanations given by others for the (generally endangerment and criminality) behavior of those with mental illness. A history of mental illness and trauma correlates with aggression toward others and suicidal behavior in this situation. The key sub-themes that were present in the data were extracted via the application of thematic analysis to the textual data. The following two sub-themes were used to group the codes. The extracts from the newspaper articles that effectively convey the substance of the corresponding subthemes are included in the following subsection – 3.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Existing psychological illness; and 3.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Traumatic Consequences.

### 3.1.1. Sub-theme 1: Existing psychological illness

The link to mental illness is sometimes implied by mentioning that an offender has previously received psychiatric treatments or has a history of psychiatric illness. For instance, a family member of a person with mental illness sought to explain the circumstances leading up to their violent deeds. These excerpts show that psychological illness is a risk factor for violent crimes and suicidal behavior.

#### ▪ Excerpt 1

(Malay Mail 5 – July, 12, 2019)

*Melaka Tengah police chief ACP Afzanizar Ahmad said in the 9.30am incident, the victim, Samnah Mohamed, 55, died at the scene after being stabbed four times by her husband using a kitchen knife. "The woman who had four stab wounds, two in front and two at the back, was found lying next to her husband who was also injured in the stomach after he tried to commit suicide. "Initial investigations found the couple had a quarrel before the 56-year-old man stabbed the victim," he told reporters when met at the scene here today. ... According to him, the man holds a psychiatric treatment card but police are still determining his last treatment apart from two previous records under Section 380 of the Penal Code for theft and a drug related offence.*

#### ▪ Excerpt 2

(The Star 4 – September, 04, 2018)

*The man who set fire to a clinic, resulting in five including a doctor and three nurses suffering burns in the urology unit of a private hospital in Jelutong Monday (Sept 3), was a mental patient. Northeast District Police chief ACP Che Zaimani Che Awang said the 39-year-old man who was detained had received treatment for mental illness at the Penang Hospital. He has been remanded for seven days to assist in investigating the case. "The man, who is single and has no permanent job, was arrested after the incident took place at 4.30pm Monday, and based on his health record, he had received treatment for mental illness.*

In Excerpts 1 and 2, violence perpetrated by someone experiencing mental illness is explained as a consequence of their mental illness. The authors also highlight criminal victimization and stress the history and treatment of mental illness received by delinquents. Medical treatments for these delinquents with mental illness were mentioned, often involving hospitalization. For instance, information such as the man holds a psychiatric treatment card, but police are still determining his last treatment and based on his health record, he had received treatment for mental illness" is highlighted after these people were detained. This condition seems to be a repercussion of their wrongdoing and is much more related to their mental health. In this case, the combination of criminal behavior with a mental health issue may give the false impression that there is a high correlation between mental illness and violence, while there is none (Ross et al., 2022). Therefore, including mental illness history or diagnosis in news stories outlining violent occurrences might cause readers to assume a connection between the two (Chan & Yanos, 2018). The role of mental illness in violent crime or dangerous behavior in the above excerpts is elusive. Harmful stereotypes suggest that mentally ill people are frequently violent criminals, and their mental

illness increases the risk of violence and victimization. However, there is less agreement on the psychopathology and symptoms that lead to violence (Webermann & Brand, 2017). Hence, the author should provide accurate information to the public; misinformation about mental illness, its causes, and its symptoms is another concern.

At this juncture, we could deduce that the news media frequently presents mental illness as untreatable or unrecoverable. For instance, in Excerpts 1 and 2, the reporter reports justification of the suspect's condition as someone with a mental illness record still under treatment. This description suggests that they seemingly cannot be recoverable and have no hope for a "normal" life, even if they have undergone therapy or treatments. Wahl (2003) remarked, "in the media, recovery is unusual." Even when individuals are told to seek counseling and psychiatric treatment, they seldom get better; if they do, it is not enough to stabilize and have friends and jobs. This construction with such information creates a false picture of mental illness. As a result, the depiction hinders people with the same psychotic features from getting the help they need, causes difficult recovery because they feel less confident, causes isolation due to social fear, and promotes discrimination among people with the same mental health conditions (Boyle, 2018). When a reporter describes perpetrators as "struggling with mental health," it is a subtle cause of their deteriorating crime. This description of mental health conditions can potentially internalize stigma among the readers. Therefore, if a reporter writes about an individual who has committed a crime, their mental health condition is irrelevant, but their actions are.

Besides violent acts, suicidal behavior is also associated with the person's psychological illness or mental health condition. Mental health conditions are a significant risk factor for suicidal behavior, where those who attempt to die by suicide are known to have some form of mental illness (Armstrong et al., 2014; Stack, 2014). Suicidal behavior was also discussed alongside depression and hallucinations in Excerpts 3 and 4.

▪ Excerpt 3

(Malay Mail 06 – August, 31, 2017)

A woman and her three-year-old son were killed after they fell from the 32nd floor of Kiara Residence 2, Bukit Jalil here at about 2pm today. The bodies of the 32-year-old woman and the boy were found at the first floor landing. Cheras police ACP Chong Kok Sin said her husband told police that **she was suffering from depression**. "Her husband, aged 28, a real estate agent, had once **brought his wife to get psychiatric treatment at Universiti Malaya Medical Centre (UM) sometime in May or June**. According to her husband, **she had always said she wanted to commit suicide**," he told reporters here today.

▪ Excerpt 4

(New Straits Times 23 – February, 06, 2020)

*The 45-year-old woman, who was rescued by her husband after jumping off the Penang Bridge this afternoon, is **suffering from depression**. "Interview with the victim's husband revealed that **she has been suffering from depression for the past few years**. "We are still probing the matter further. The case is being investigated under Section 309 of the Penal Code for attempted suicide," Seberang Prai Tengah district police chief Assistant Commissioner Shafee Abd Samad said tonight.*

Excerpts 3 and 4 show that mental health disorders, such as depression, are correlated with suicidal behavior. Undeniably, depression is the highest risk factor for attempting suicide (Trakhtenbrot et al., 2016), and this psychotic symptom of psychosis has been identified as a risk factor for suicidality (DeVylder et al., 2015). However, the news of people with depression and suicidal behavior in the above excerpts was portrayed in harmful reporting with the facilitation of sensationalized headlines such as, "Woman, son die in suspected murder-suicide in Bukit Jalil" (Excerpt 3) and "Police: Woman rescued by husband at Penang Bridge suffered from depression" (Excerpt 4). As Bowles and Borden (2000) noted, the news headline must summarize the main point of the whole story. The information in the headline is also used to equip the reader with the knowledge necessary to comprehend the whole narrative, and it is retained in the reader's memory (Garst & Bernstein, 1982; Salih & Abdulla, 2012). Thus, information such as method (murder-suicide) and location (Penang Bridge) activates the reader's general information about suicidal scenarios. These headline descriptions also breach the media guidelines on reporting suicidal behavior, where the method and location should not be disclosed (World Health Organization, 2017).

Other than the existing psychological illnesses discussed earlier, which lead to violent actions or crime and suicidal behavior among individuals who experience mental illness, another reason or risk factor is associated with those behaviors, as mentioned earlier. Having a traumatic consequence, is another risk factor recognized in this study. This risk factor is explained in the second sub-theme, traumatic consequences.

### 3.1.2. Sub-theme 2: Traumatic consequences

This sub-theme focuses on a catastrophic event that results in physical, emotional, spiritual, or psychological suffering. The individual experiencing the traumatic incident may feel physically intimidated or terrified. These traumas may cause loss of hope, restricted expectations about life, or anticipation that normal living will not occur, such as access to education, and the capacity to have a substantial and devoted relationship. Suicide, for example, occurs in the context of many other psychological and social-environmental (i.e., society and surroundings influence, in some ways, relationships and family) risk factors. Excerpts 5 and 6 show that the psychological triggers of suicidal behavior among people who experience mental illness are stressful life events such as divorce and failed matrimonial relationships.

#### ▪ Excerpt 5

(Harian Metro 14 – December 06, 2020)

***Suicide is believed to be the motive for three children who were found dead in a fire in a rented room of a three-storey shophouse unit at Jalan Kampar Barat 3, Taman Kampar Putra, here this morning. Hasron Nazri said, based on information obtained from the woman's good friend, that the victim often talked about her family and marriage problems, despite having been in depression for two weeks. "The victim also told her good friend to take care of her body and never hand over her body to the family if she dies. Preliminary police investigations found that the motive for the incident was suicide due to personal and family problems faced by the victim.***

Excerpt 5 mentions that the primary motive for suicide is personal and family problems. A friend described the woman as depressed and facing many problems, and her friend also recalled a message from that woman asking her not to give her body to her family in the aftermath. This situation shows she experienced a tough time with her family relationship other than she had already ended her marriage. There is a strong correlation between psychosocial (lack of social support and negative feelings about one's own family) factors and suicidal ideation (Shilubane et al., 2014). For these reasons, it is learned that she decided to end her own life and her children's lives as a solution. Fong (2021) notes that one of the significant drivers of suicide in Southeast Asia includes factors such as family conflicts. Therefore, a journalist must adopt interpretative journalism, where they should go beyond the facts related to the event and provide more in-depth news coverage. This kind of interpretative journalism is essential to prevent suicide on internal, individual, personal, societal, institutional, systemic, and policymaking levels (Fong, 2021).

▪ Excerpt 6

(Sinar Harian 2– December, 18, 2020)

*A 34-year-old woman found dead hanging in Machang on Tuesday is **believed to be experiencing depression and has a record of being involved with drugs**. Datuk Shafien Mamat said, according to their investigation, the woman was **alleged to have had depression after divorcing her husband**. "When she got divorced, **she had depression and had a record of being involved with drugs**". "She may have problems she can't handle, so she chose the easy way out," he told reporters at the press conference at Taman Angkat Amanita Inauguration on Thursday.*

In another case, Excerpt 6 states that the exact factor mentioned earlier, a broken-up marriage, has led to drug offenses and the same psychological disturbance (depression) in a woman who later decided to end her life as "an easy way out of her problems." The people who died by suicide in Excerpts 5 and 6 were characterized by impulsivity, hopelessness, and depression. They seemed vulnerable, sufficiently stressed, and dangerously aggressive toward themselves. There are aspects of these suicide deaths that make them of public interest.

▪ Excerpt 7

(NST 23– February, 06, 2020)

*Malaysian Tamilar Kural president David Marshel, who spoke on behalf of the family, said they believe **the boy had suffered from some form of depression after being allegedly "targeted" by certain teachers at school**. He said the boy, who was in the second last class in school, had appealed to be transferred to a better class since the start of the new school session but to no avail. "**Certain teachers would often subject the boy to shame by reprimanding him on his attire, his hair and such**". "Last month, Logamitraa was **made to take off his trousers** after teachers claimed it was tight-fitting and **made him wear shorts for the rest of the day**. Even his favourite key chain, which had been with him for a long time, was **taken away from him as teachers claimed it was a sharp object**.*

Another significant point observed is that the news item in Excerpt 7 portrayed negative issues and attitudes toward suicide by linking this suicide issue with a social stressor, such as having conflicts with



teachers. The impact of bullying on teenagers' mental health was the topic of a news story with the headline "Penang boy who committed suicide 'targeted by teachers', claims the family". Hence, the teenager commits suicide to escape the grief and loss. This individual also experienced traumatic events, such as being targeted and bullied by his teachers, which later made him depressed and led to his suicide.

The boy who died of suicide in Excerpt 7 experienced a psychological risk factor when he was a bully victim in school. Being "targeted," bullied, and humiliated by teachers made him more vulnerable than he was. Family members described him as 'someone with no problem before' as shown in Excerpt 8.

▪ Excerpt 8

(New Straits Times 23– February 06, 2020)

***Everything started when he asked to change class. One thing led to another and the boy could no longer take it anymore. "We demand answers from the school. He never had any problems before and now he is gone," he said when met at Logamitraa's final rites at his house in Taman Taman Sejahtera here this morning. Logamitraa is survived by his parents and 15-year-old sister. Family members were too distraught to speak to newsmen present. Logamitraa's cousin asked for understanding that the family be given time to grieve. Logamitraa's mother found her son hanging from a blanket tied to the ceiling fan in his room at 6pm on Tuesday. He was rushed to the Bukit Mertajam Hospital but was pronounced dead upon arrival.***

Being bullied raises the likelihood of mental health problems and suicide ideation, planning, and attempt. Bullying may lead to poor impulse control in teens, the most significant indicator of suicide attempts (Bakken & Gunter, 2012). Consequently, such media reporting and depictions of suicide might influence suicidal behavior and lead to imitative actions (Sisask & Värnik, 2012), particularly among groups of the population with the same conditions and problems (e.g., young people and people with depression) (Gould et al., 2014; Niederkrotenthaler et al., 2014). Sisask and Värnik (2012) also demonstrated significant modeling impacts with various suicide methods. For instance, in Excerpt 8, the reporter reported on how the boy took his own life and how his mother found him, "Logamitraa's mother found her son hanging from a blanket tied to the ceiling fan in his room." This kind of description of method and location has violated the guidelines for media reporting of suicidal behavior by the World Health Organization, which does not give specific details about suicide, such as the method and location (Marzano et al., 2018; World Health Organization, 2017). The evidence for this impact is most remarkable in connection to newspaper reporting (Hawton & Williams, 2005), and there is evidence that lowering the number and enhancing the quality of reporting may lead to decreases in actual suicide behavior (Sisask & Värnik, 2012).

The kind of portrayals in Excerpts 5, 6, 7 and 8 might trigger suicidal behavior among vulnerable people (young people, people experiencing mental health issues or with the same problems) who imitate the suicidal action. The social learning process depends on how the suicide decedent is depicted in the media as someone to identify with or admire (Lee et al., 2014; Niederkrotenthaler et al., 2010; Niederkrotenthaler et al., 2012). Those who admire or identify with a role model who commits suicide may adopt the same method to cope with their stress or problems. In certain circumstances, the media

should not reveal the motivation (Wang, 2012). Reporting that represented suicide negatively was less likely to raise suicide rates (Gunn et al., 2020).

Similarly, Niederkrotenthaler et al. (2010) found it less probable that suicide rates would rise by posting stories of people overcoming suicidal situations. This situation is termed the "Papageno effect". Thus, reporting and portrayal of suicidal behavior in the media can affect those exposed to such stimuli, especially those in which reporting is dramatic and includes details of the method used (Hawton et al., 2012; Sisask & Värnik, 2012). However, reformations to reporting suicidal conduct have been shown to reduce the incidence of suicide (Sisask & Värnik, 2012).

The finding also reveals that when portraying the issue of suicidal behavior, suicide was spoken differently between an adult and a teenager. When the news article discussed a story of a teenager's death by suicide, he was described as vulnerable to depression due to several risk factors. The headline highlights the risk factor, and the story's description is sympathetic and lengthier, with enough information about what led to the incident. Risk factors such as low self-esteem, a lack of positive relationships with teachers, and bullying have caused depression and led to suicidal behavior. Kassis et al. (2017) found that depressive symptoms in young people have been linked to a similar risk factor. The portrayal of youth was more compassionate and supportive for the individual with depression and family (Fernandez, 2014). Unlike news articles about adult suicide cases, implicit descriptions of the method and setting associated with a completed or attempted suicide were described in headlines and news text. In terms of media guidelines, most news items on suicidal behavior in this research violated Malaysian media guidelines relating to the precise method of suicide, the location of the suicide, the location of the article in the newspaper, and sensationalized language. Despite the possibility of reporting bias, reporters consistently demonstrate sensationalized and detailed media reporting on suicide behavior.

Overall, the findings have demonstrated that almost all news reports regarding violent crimes and suicidal behavior among people living with mental illness are reported negatively. The risk factor theme had a generally derogatory and stigmatizing manner. The most dangerous or violent acts often included significant links with mental illness as the main subject of the stories. The following were the violations of the regulations that were most often confirmed: Mentioning self-harm or suicide; using the phrase "commit suicide"; disclosing how a violent crime was committed; or using sensational language to depict self-harm, aggressive behavior, or mental illness. The offenders are also described as vulnerable, impulsive, and hopeless. They were described that way due to their current mental health state, a history of mental illness, or traumatic consequences that caused various mental illness symptoms and later drove them to commit violent crimes and suicidal behavior. Thus, promoting significantly stigmatized perspectives of psychosis and those who are suffering from it.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study has analyzed news articles reporting violent crime and suicidal behavior among people with mental illness to discover the mechanisms that underlie those events, as mentioned earlier. The findings revealed that the media's relentless focus on implying a link between mental illness and violent crime and suicidal behavior greatly paints suffering individuals with mental illnesses as dangerous, vicious, vulnerable, and socially inept. Many news reports sensationalize violent acts and killings

committed by people with mental problems by associating their history of mental illness and trauma with aggression toward others and suicidal behavior in the news. These sensational and misinformed depictions perpetuate stigmatizing attitudes and negative perceptions toward people living with mental illness. Consequently, they make people feel wrong about people with mental illness and reinforce negative stereotypes. Newspapers can shape people's thoughts and talk about mental health-related. Hence, newspaper descriptions of mental health-related issues must be monitored to reduce the stigma and fear of people with mental illness. Thus, the findings of this study contribute insights into the current state of Malaysian online newspapers when reporting mental health-related illness, hence calling for practical and realistic actions on the development of Malaysian news reporting guidelines related to mental health-related illness news by media practitioners.

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the financial support from Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia for the funding received under the Geran Penyelidikan Dalaman (URG) UPTM.

## References

- Ab Razak, A. (2017). Cultural construction of psychiatric illness in Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences*, 24(2), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.21315/mjms2017.24.2.1>
- Armstrong, G., Jorm, A. F., Samson, L., Joubert, L., Singh, S., & Kermode, M. (2014). Suicidal ideation and attempts among men who inject drugs in Delhi, India: psychological and social risk factors. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 49(9), 1367-1377. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-014-0899-8>
- Bakken, N. W., & Gunter, W. D. (2012). Self-Cutting and Suicidal Ideation among Adolescents: Gender Differences in the Causes and Correlates of Self-Injury. *Deviant Behavior*, 33(5), 339-356. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2011.584054>
- Beckstein, A., Rathakrishnan, B., Hutchings, P. B., & Mohamed, N. H. (2021). The covid-19 pandemic and mental health in Malaysia: Current treatment and future recommendations. *Malaysian Journal of Public Health Medicine*, 21(1), 260-267. <https://doi.org/10.37268/mjphm/vol.21/no.1/art.826>
- Bowles, D. A., & Borden, D. L. (2000). *Creative editing*. Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Boyle, M. P. (2018). Enacted stigma and felt stigma experienced by adults who stutter. *Journal of Communication Disorders*, 73, 50-61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcomdis.2018.03.004>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Chan, G., & Yanos, P. T. (2018). Media depictions and the priming of mental illness stigma. *Stigma and Health*, 3(3), 253-264. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sah0000095>
- DeVylder, J. E., Jahn, D. R., Doherty, T., Wilson, C. S., Wilcox, H. C., Schiffman, J., & Hilimire, M. R. (2015). Social and psychological contributions to the co-occurrence of sub-threshold psychotic experiences and suicidal behavior. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 50(12), 1819-1830. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-015-1139-6>
- Fernandez, B. (2014). A Thematic Analysis of Mental Illness in New Zealand News Articles (Thesis, Master of Social Sciences (MSocSc)). University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/10289/9290>
- Fong, Y. L. (2021). Reporting on suicide in Malaysia: Problem characterization and solution advocacy by media. *KOME*, 9(2), 46-64. <https://doi.org/10.17646/kome.75672.66>
- Garst, R. E., & Bernstein, T. M. (1982). Headlines and deadlines. In *Headlines and Deadlines*. Columbia University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7312/gars91378>

- Gould, M. S., Kleinman, M. H., Lake, A. M., Forman, J., & Midle, J. B. (2014). Newspaper coverage of suicide and initiation of suicide clusters in teenagers in the USA, 1988–96: a retrospective, population-based, case-control study. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 1(1), 34-43. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2215-0366\(14\)70225-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2215-0366(14)70225-1)
- Gunn III, J. F., Goldstein, S. E., & Lester, D. (2020). The Impact of Widely Publicized Suicides on Search Trends: Using Google Trends to Test the Werther and Papageno Effects. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 24(sup1), 142-155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13811118.2018.1522284>
- Harun, R. (2020, September 13). Mental illness is a treatable disease. *New Straits Times Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2020/09/624035/mental-illness-treatable-disease>
- Hassandarvish, M. (2020). Malaysian expert: Silent mental illness ‘pandemic’ to arrive following COVID-19 economic fallout. *Malay Mail*.
- Hawton, K., & Williams, K. (2005). Media influences on suicidal behaviour: evidence and prevention. *Prevention and Treatment of Suicidal Behaviour*, 293-306. <https://doi.org/10.1093/med/9780198529767.003.0017>
- Hawton, K., Saunders, K. E., & O'Connor, R. C. (2012). Self-harm and suicide in adolescents. *The Lancet*, 379(9834), 2373-2382. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(12\)60322-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(12)60322-5)
- Johari, M. A., Shukri, M. Z. M., Abd, M. A. S., Karim, M. H. H. I., Khazali, A. K., Nasarudin, A. A., & Razali, S. (2017). Akademia Baru. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 7(1), 59-67.
- Kassis, W., Artz, S., & White, J. (2017). Understanding Depression in Adolescents: A Dynamic Psychosocial Web of Risk and Protective Factors. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 46(5), 721-743. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-017-9404-3>
- Lee, J., Lee, W.-Y., Hwang, J.-S., & Stack, S. J. (2014). To What Extent Does the Reporting Behavior of the Media Regarding a Celebrity Suicide Influence Subsequent Suicides in South Korea? *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 44(4), 457-472. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sltb.12109>
- Marzano, L., Fraser, L., Scally, M., Farley, S., & Hawton, K. (2018). News Coverage of Suicidal Behavior in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. *Crisis*, 39(5), 386-396. <https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910/a000533>
- Mayo Clinic. (2022, December 13). *Mental illness: symptoms and causes*. Retrieved on 2022, December 25 from [https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/symptoms-causes/syc203749\\_68](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/symptoms-causes/syc203749_68)
- McGinty, E. E., Webster, D. W., Jarlenski, M., & Barry, C. L. (2014). News Media Framing of Serious Mental Illness and Gun Violence in the United States, 1997-2012. *American Journal of Public Health*, 104(3), 406-413. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2013.301557>
- Mckeown, M., & Clancy, B. (1995). Media influence on societal perceptions of mental illness. *Mental Health Nursing-London-Community Psychiatric Nurses Association*, 15, 10-10.
- Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak. (2020, March 18). [Www.who.int. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-MentalHealth-2020.1](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-MentalHealth-2020.1)
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Risk factor. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/risk%20factor>
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., Levy, D. A., & Nielsen, R. K. (2017). Reuters Institute digital news report 2017. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford.
- Niederkrotenthaler, T., Fu, K.-w., Yip, P. S. F., Fong, D. Y. T., Stack, S., Cheng, Q., & Pirkis, J. (2012). Changes in suicide rates following media reports on celebrity suicide: a meta-analysis. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 66(11), 1037-1042. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2011-200707>
- Niederkrotenthaler, T., Reidenberg, D. J., Till, B., & Gould, M. S. (2014). Increasing Help-Seeking and Referrals for Individuals at Risk for Suicide by Decreasing Stigma. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 47(3), S235-S243. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2014.06.010>
- Niederkrotenthaler, T., Voracek, M., Herberth, A., Till, B., Strauss, M., Etzersdorfer, E., Eisenwort, B., & Sonneck, G. (2010). Role of media reports in completed and prevented suicide: Werther v.

- Papageno effects. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 197(3), 234-243. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.109.074633>
- Nor, N. F. M., Jeffree, N. B., & Nor, H. A. M. (2021). Health is wealth: A corpus-driven analysis of the portrayal of mental health in Malaysian English online newspapers. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 21(2), 46-71. <https://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2021-2102-03>
- Pendit, U. C., & Choo, K. A. (2020). Openness Towards Mental Illness in Malaysia. *e-BANGI*, 17(3), 46-56.
- Razali, Z. A., Rabi'atul, A., & Sanip, S. (2018). *Mental illness portrayal in media: A content analysis of Malaysian newspapers*. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305767867\\_Mental\\_Illness\\_Portrayal\\_in\\_Media\\_A\\_Content\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Malaysian\\_Newspaper](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305767867_Mental_Illness_Portrayal_in_Media_A_Content_Analysis_of_Malaysian_Newspaper)
- Ross, A. M., Morgan, A. J., Wake, A., Jorm, A. F., & Reavley, N. J. (2022). Key stakeholders' recommendations for improving Australian news media reporting of people with severe mental illness, violence and crime. *Advances in Mental Health*, 20(3), 253-265. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18387357.2021.1942101>
- Salih, Y. M., & Abdulla, Q. A. M. (2012). Linguistic features of newspaper headlines. *Journal of Al-Anbar University for Language and Literature*, 7, 192-213.
- Shilubane, H. N., Ruiter, R. A. C., Bos, A. E. R., van den Borne, B., James, S., & Reddy, P. S. (2014). Psychosocial Correlates of Suicidal Ideation in Rural South African Adolescents. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 45(2), 153-162. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10578-013-0387-5>
- Sisask, M., & Värnik, A. (2012). Media Roles in Suicide Prevention: A Systematic Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 9(1), 123-138. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph9010123>
- Stack, S. (2014). Differentiating Suicide Ideators from Attempters: Violence-A Research Note. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 44(1), 46-57. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sltb.12054>
- Stout, P. A., Villegas, J., & Jennings, N. A. (2004). Images of Mental Illness in the Media: Identifying Gaps in the Research. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 30(3), 543-561. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.schbul.a007099>
- Trakhtenbrot, R., Gvion, Y., Levi-Belz, Y., Horesh, N., Fischel, T., Weiser, M., Treves, I., & Apter, A. (2016). Predictive value of psychological characteristics and suicide history on medical lethality of suicide attempts: A follow-up study of hospitalized patients. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 199, 73-80. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2016.03.054>
- Wahl, O. F. (2003). News media portrayal of mental illness: Implications for public policy. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46(12), 1594-1600. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764203254615>
- Wang, X. (2012). Media guidelines for the responsible reporting of suicide: a review of effectiveness. *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention*, 33(4), 190. <https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910/a000137>
- Webermann, A. R., & Brand, B. L. (2017). Mental illness and violent behavior: the role of dissociation. *Borderline Personality Disorder and Emotion Dysregulation*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40479-017-0053-9>
- World Health Organization. (2017). Depression and other common mental disorders: global health estimates. *World Health Organization*. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/254610>. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.
- World Health Organization. Regional Office for the Western Pacific. (2012). Malaysia health system review. *WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific*. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/206911>
- Yang, L. F., & Victor, J. (2021). Assessing adherence to guidelines of media reporting on suicide based on the Precaution Adoption Process Model and Agenda-Setting Theory. *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies*. [https://doi.org/10.1386/ajms\\_00066\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/ajms_00066_1)
- Zolkepli, F. (2020). Move to decriminalize suicide long overdue, says Lam Thye. *The Star*. <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/220/01/01/move-to-decriminalise-suicide-long-overdue-says-lam-thye>



## Educational Sciences

Search in this book series



Looking for an author or a specific book?

Use advanced search

Home  
> Book Series  
> EpES

Font size A A A A



### About EpES

ISSN: 2672-815X (online)

This publication is dedicated to offering a platform to encourage academics to publish original articles on the current developments in all fields related to the discipline of Educational Sciences. Papers which are theoretical, experimental or application-based with an aim to contribute to the understanding and development of Educational Sciences are welcome.

- > About EpES
- > Abstracting and Indexing
- > Aims and Scope
- > Author Guidelines
- > Organisers/Volume Editor Guidelines
- > Originality and Plagiarism
- > Policies
- > Series Editors
- > Archiving
- > Series Titles

To be considered for review, papers must be written in internationally accepted standard English, utilize a valid, rigorous and scientifically accepted methodology within the discipline and abide by all the stated guidelines for paper submission as set out in EP.

The EpFE publishes either monographs (i.e. master thesis/doctoral dissertations) or edited volumes based on the outcomes of conferences.

Once published, all proceedings are submitted for evaluation and possible coverage in **Web of Science Core Collection™ Conference Proceedings Citation Index - Social Sciences & Humanities (CPCI-SSH)** and **Google Scholar**.

Due to the high volume of submissions, Clarivate prioritizes evaluation of those volumes of highest interest to the global Web of Science user community. Those volumes that are evaluated and pass all **Clarivate Selection Criteria** will be selected for WoS-CPCI coverage.

Please take note that as Clarivate has its own policies as to the duration for acceptance, processing, and indexing new content, European Proceedings cannot guarantee acceptance or a specific time frame for the indexing process to be completed.

For further enquiries, please contact us at [admissions@EuropeanProceedings.com](mailto:admissions@EuropeanProceedings.com)





## Embracing Change: Emancipating the Landscape of Research in Linguistic, Language and Literature

Proceedings of International Conference of Research on Language Education (I-  
RoLE 2022), 12-14 March, 2022, Nakhla Resort Hotel Malacca, Malaysia

### We care about your privacy

We use cookies or similar technologies to access personal data, including page visits and your IP address. We use this information about you, your devices and your online interactions with us to provide, analyse and improve our services. This may include personalising content or advertising for you. You can find out more in our privacy policy.

### Manage My Preferences

You have control over your personal data. For more detailed information about your personal data, please see our Privacy Policy and Cookie Policy.

#### ☒ Strictly Necessary Cookies

These cookies are essential in order to enable you to move around the site and use its features, such as accessing secure areas of the site. Without these cookies, services you have asked for cannot be provided.

#### ☐ Marketing Cookies

Third-party advertising and social media cookies are used to

- (1) deliver advertisements more relevant to you and your interests;
- (2) limit the number of times you see an advertisement;
- (3) help measure the effectiveness of the advertising campaign; and
- (4) understand people's behavior after they view an advertisement.

They remember that you have visited a site and quite often they will be linked to site functionality provided by the other organization. This may impact the content and messages you see on other websites you visit.

Accept all

Accept selected

Published: 31 May 2023