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# Suicidal Behavior in Bangladeshi and Indonesian Media After the Death of an Indian Celebrity by Suicide

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## Abstract

The Indian cinema industry greatly impacts the world, especially in South Asian nations, including Bangladesh and Indonesia. This study examines the quality of suicide reporting by media following non-native celebrity suicides in nations with a comparable culture. This study was conducted for one month immediately following the suicide of an Indian celebrity. Two Indonesian and two Bangladeshi investigators collected information about published media reports in regional languages on popular online newspapers of the respective countries. All newspaper articles about suicide behavior published throughout the study period were included. A total of 155 news reports were obtained, of which 56 were from Bangladesh and 99 were from Indonesia. More than half of the news reports from Bangladesh reported the suicide of unmarried people (55.36%). Indonesian reports mentioned gender (57.57%) and age (80.81%) in most reports, followed by the presence of life events and mention of mental illness. Celebrity suicide reports in media catch the attention of more viewers and are likely to have a more intense impact on the public than any other suicide report. Hence, there is a desperate need to adhere to the media suicide reporting guidelines while reporting suicide stories.

## INTRODUCTION

Suicide is a significant public health issue worldwide, and the critical initiative of suicide prevention is identifying the risk factors.<sup>1</sup> According to World Health Organization, every 40 seconds, a person dies by suicide globally.<sup>2</sup> It was estimated that four suicides out of five global suicides are happening in

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low and middle-income countries.<sup>3</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone, regardless of age, race, or socio-economic status. People suffer from various psychiatric disorders like anxiety, distress, fear, depression, discomfort, panic, and suicidal behaviors.<sup>4,5</sup> Celebrities are the people most affected during this pandemic for various reasons such as loss of public identity, employment, contract cancellation, changes in lifestyle, and boredom which may lead to stress and suicidal behavior. According to media reports, many celebrities in India died suicide during COVID-19. Celebrity suicide is considered a risk factor for suicidal ideation and suicide attempts among the general public.<sup>6</sup> Bangladesh and Indonesia are the two LMICs in South-East Asia, with a large population but without national suicide data.<sup>7</sup>

The suicidal issues catch media attention quickly; the sensationalist portrayal of suicide by celebrities is especially problematic. According to a meta-analysis, celebrity suicide media reporting is associated with a higher incidence of suicide in public.<sup>8</sup> The recent increase in the suicide rate among celebrities is an alarming concept. WHO launched a media guideline for suicide prevention in 2000.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Bangladesh and Indonesia have revealed poor adherence to the guideline (Arafat *et al.*, 2020).

India, Bangladesh, and Indonesia have many social and cultural affinities. The Indian cinema industry greatly impacts the world, especially in South Asian nations. Celebrity suicide will likely impact the public since they are idolized and used as role models for many people outside their home nation. This study is distinctive because it examines the quality of suicide reporting by media following non-native celebrity suicides in nations with a comparable culture. Here, examining the media suicide coverage, the reporting standard in Bangladesh and Indonesia following the suicide of an Indian celebrity was assessed.

## **METHODS**

This study was conducted for one month (14 June 2020 to 15 July 2020) immediately after the reported suicide case. Two Indonesian and two Bangladeshi investigators collected information about published media reports in regional languages on popular

online newspapers of the respective countries. The news from Indonesia was reported in Bahasa Indonesia, the Indonesian national language, and those from Bangladesh were in Bengali. All newspaper articles about suicide behavior published throughout the study period were included. News reports that discuss the suicide of the celebrity exclusively were excluded. Additionally, expert opinions, debates, and columns discussing different aspects of suicide were excluded from the analysis.

The investigators involved in data extraction had prior experience in doing a similar task. This explored the sociodemographic details of the deceased, reference to Indian celebrity suicide in the media report, and the helpful and harmful media reporting parameters.<sup>10</sup>

Data were extracted to the Microsoft Excel sheet, and cleaning was done for duplicate and incomplete entries. The finding was presented as percentages and proportions. Analysis was performed by applying the Chi-square test. The *p-value* was deemed significant if it was less than 0.05. No official ethics committee permission was requested because the study used data already in the public domain.

## **RESULT**

A total of 155 news reports were obtained, of which 56 were from Bangladesh and 99 were from Indonesia. Among the news reports of Bangladesh, females and males had almost equal representation, whereas, in the Indonesian news reports, there was a male preponderance (65.66%). In Bangladesh, more than half of the news reports mention that the deceased was married. In Indonesia, nearly half of the news reports did not mention the marital status of the person who died due to suicide. The employment status of the deceased has been missing in most of the reports in Indonesia. In Bangladesh and Indonesia, most news reports mention that the deceased was employed. In both countries, most reports discussed completed suicide, and the most common mode of suicide was found to be hanging. Table 1 below compares Bangladesh and Indonesia in the sociodemographic characteristics, suicide-related details, and degree of adherence to the WHO media reporting guidelines. Age, gender,

**Table 1:** Comparison of characteristics of news reports between Bangladesh and Indonesia

Variables	Bangladesh (n=56)	Indonesia (n=99)
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	27 (48.21%)	15 (15.15%)
Male	29 (51.79%)	65 (65.66%)
Not Mentioned	0 (0%)	19 (19.19%)
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married		24 (24.24%)
Unmarried	31 (55.36%)	22 (22.22%)
Widow-widower	12 (21.43%)	5 (5.05%)
Divorced/Separated	3 (5.36%)	3 (3.03%)
No Information available	10 (17.86%)	45 (45.45%)
<b>Occupation</b>		
Employed	21 (37.5%)	14 (14.145)
Students	7 (12.5%)	8 (8.08%)
Housewife	10 (17.86%)	7 (7.07%)
Unemployed	2 (3.57%)	6 (6.06%)
Farmer	0 (0%)	3 (3.03%)
Others	2 (3.57%)	1 (1.01%)
Not Mentioned	14 (25%)	60 (60.61%)
<b>Type of Suicide</b>		
Completed	52 (92.86%)	87 (87.88%)
Extended	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Attempted	4 (7.14%)	11 (11.11%)
Not Mentioned	0 (0%)	1 (1.01%)
<b>Mode of Suicide</b>		
Hanging	39 (69.64%)	72 (72.73%)
Poisoning	13 (23.21%)	8 (8.08%)
Shooting	0 (0%)	1 (1.01%)
Drowning	0 (0%)	2 (2.02%)
Burning	1 (1.78%)	3 (3.03%)
Jumping from height	0 (0%)	5 (5.05%)
Jumping in front of a train or vehicle	2 (3.57%)	1 (1.01%)
Others	1 (1.78%)	5 (5.05%)
Not mentioned	0 (0%)	2 (2.02%)
<b>Compliance with the WHO media guidelines</b>		
Present life events in the report	32 (57.14%)	57 (57.57%)
Mentioning gender	56 (100%)	80 (80.81%)
Reporting age	47 (83.93%)	86 (86.87%)
Reporting suicide note	7 (12.5%)	5 (5.05%)
Mention of mental illness	10 (17.86%)	12 (12.12%)
Mention of substance use	0 (0%)	1 (1.01%)
Suicide pact	8 (14.28%)	8 (8.08%)
Mention about abetment	0 (0%)	8 (8.08%)
Response to abetment	0 (0%)	1 (1.01%)
Discussing the link with SSR suicide	0 (0%)	4 (4.04%)

and mention of life events associated with suicide have been commonly reported in the news reports of Bangladesh and Indonesia. None of the Bangladeshi news reports referred to an Indian celebrity (Sushant Singh Rajput: SSR) suicide, whereas 4% of the Indonesian news reports referred to the Indian celebrity suicide.

All the newspaper reports from Bangladesh mentioned gender. While most Indonesian articles listed gender, only 19 omitted the same. More than half of the news reports from Bangladesh reported the suicide of unmarried people (55.36%), followed by widows/widowers (21.43%). None of the news reports from Bangladesh reported suicide by married subjects.

No information about marital status was available in most Indonesian news reports (45.45%). The frequency of reported suicide among married (n= 24) and unmarried (n = 22) were similar. Both countries reported an equal number of cases of suicide among divorced or separated (n= 3). Bangladesh reported the highest suicide among employed (37.5%), followed by suicide among homemakers (17.86%). A quarter of the reports mentioned no occupation (25%).

Most reports from Indonesia did not mention occupation (60.61%). The frequency of student suicide was roughly equal in both countries. Most reports from both countries included accounts of completed suicide. Accounts of attempted suicide were few. Hanging followed by poisoning was found to be the predominant mode of suicide in both countries. Indonesia also listed jumping from heights and other methods in the articles (5.05%).

## Reporting of Parameters not Compliant with WHO Media Guidelines

All the reports from Bangladesh mentioned gender. Most reports mentioned age (83.93%) and stressful life events (57.14%). A sizeable proportion mentioned mental illness (17.86%), the presence of a suicide pact (14.28%), or a suicide note (12.5%). There was no mention of substance use, abetment of suicide, or response to abetment. None of the reports discussed the link with SSR suicide. Likewise, Indonesian reports mentioned gender (57.57%) and age (80.81%) in most reports, followed by stressful



**Table 2:** Comparison of suicide-related parameters between Bangladesh and Indonesia following popular Indian celebrity suicide

Parameter of assessment	Bangladesh	Indonesia	p-value
Gender			
Female	27	15	0.0003
Male	29	65	
Occupation			
Unemployed#	21	25	0.263
Employed	21	14	
Mode of suicide			
Hanging	39	72	0.576
Others (non-hanging)	17	25	
Life event			
Absent / not mentioned	24	42	1.000
Present	32	57	
Suicide note			
Present	7	5	0.121
Absent/not mentioned	49	94	
Mental illness			
Present	10	12	0.345
Absent/ not mentioned	46	87	
Substance use			
Present	0	1	1.000
Absent/ not mentioned	56	98	
Number of persons who died from suicide			
One	38	98	0.0001
More than one	18	1	
Mention SSR death			
Yes	0	4	0.297
No	56	95	

life events and mention of mental illness. A few reports included suicide pacts (8.08%)—only one report detailed substance use. Indonesian accounts also discussed abetment (8.08%) and response to abetment (1.01%). There were reports of a link with SSR suicide ( $n=4$ ), unlike in Bangladesh.

It also included students, homemakers, and retired persons/retirees (getting pensions). It refers to persons who do not have any money-earning occupation/who are not gainfully employed. Fisher's exact test was applied.

In comparing the suicide-related parameters between Bangladesh and Indonesia after the reported suicide case, only the gender ( $p = 0.0003$ ) and the number of persons who died from suicide ( $p = 0.001$ ) were found to be significant (Table 2). Otherwise, analysis of remaining reporting parameters like occupational status, mode of suicide, mention of stressful life events, presence of mental illness

or substance use, citation of a suicide note, and mention of SSR death yielded no significance.

## DISCUSSION

This study is unique in that it measures the influence of non-native celebrity suicide on the media suicide reporting of countries with a similar culture. Here, the quality of media reporting following Indian celebrity suicide was measured in Bangladesh and Indonesia by analyzing the media suicide reports.

In this study, Bangladesh and Indonesia were arbitrarily selected. Bangladesh and Indonesia share lots of socio-cultural similarities with India. The Indian film industry has significant influence globally, particularly in South Asian countries.<sup>11-14</sup> Indian films (particularly Bollywood films) are widely viewed, and celebrities are commonly acknowledged and appreciated. The shooting of Bollywood films often occurs in destinations of South Asian countries, facilitating cultural interaction.<sup>12,15</sup> Hence, it is evident that celebrities are idealized and considered models for a diverse group of population beyond the boundary of their native country. Celebrity suicide is likely to have an impact on the public.

In the present study, only 4% of the Indonesian media reports refer to Indian celebrity suicide while describing an index suicide case. In contrast, none of the Bangladesh media reports mentions Indian celebrity suicide. The celebrity died from suicide by hanging. One month following this incident, when the suicide reports in Bangladesh and Indonesia were analyzed, suicide by hanging was the prominent mode in Bangladesh (69.64%) and Indonesia (72.73%). Arafat *et al.* (2021) evaluated 68 studies from South Asia that discussed the modes of suicide and found that approximately 55.8% of studies report that suicide is the most common mode of suicide, and 35.5% of studies report poisoning as the most common mode of suicide.<sup>16</sup> There is no dedicated database in Bangladesh and Indonesia that gives an idea about the trends of suicide and methods of suicide. However, collateral evidence suggests that hanging and poisoning are the two most common modes of suicide in most South Asian countries.<sup>16,17</sup> In the present study, hanging was three times more

common than poisoning in Bangladesh and nine times higher than poisoning in Indonesia.

Stressful life events might have a bearing on the pathogenesis of suicidal behavior. Stressful life event has been consistently reported to increase the risk of suicide.<sup>18,19</sup> In the present study, both Bangladesh and Indonesia media reports have mentioned life events regarding suicide in approximately 57% of cases each, respectively. There is no significant difference in the quality of media reporting between Bangladesh and Indonesia. A study evaluating Indian media reports regarding index celebrity suicide mentions poor adherence to the media reporting guidelines.<sup>10</sup> The current study reports no difference in the quality of suicide reporting by media in countries like Bangladesh and Indonesia. The media in both countries have not followed the media guideline in reporting suicide cases.<sup>20,21</sup> On the other hand, celebrity suicide reports in media catch the attention of more viewers and are likely to have a more intense impact on the public than any other suicide report. Hence, there is a desperate need to adhere to the media suicide reporting guidelines while reporting suicide stories.

## LIMITATION

This study has significant limitations. Fundamentally, the sociodemographic and suicidal behavior variables were extracted from purposively selected media outlets that may not reflect the actual estimates. Additionally, it is limited by the short study duration and lesser number of media reports. Similarly, only two countries were arbitrarily chosen, which limits its generalization to other countries. Lastly, other important suicide-related news content reports, such as the display of photos, steps of suicide, location of suicide, effects on the bereaved, and warning signs, were missing from our current report, the limitations of which should be considered in the future.

## CONCLUSION

Though there is a vast viewership of Indian cinema in South Asia, Bangladesh, and Indonesia, media reports have little reference to the famous Indian celebrity suicide immediately after the celebrity

suicide. However, the quality of media reporting in Bangladesh and Indonesia is often poor and not significantly different from each other. The media should follow the guideline for reporting any suicide case.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY

Data is freely available from the media news report.

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