

LETTERS

Media reporting of suicide

I congratulate Dr. Sinyor and colleagues for their excellent study on potential effects of media reports on suicide deaths, published in *CMAJ*.¹

The article clearly outlined prospects for further research. *CMAJ* readers will probably be interested to know that suicidal behaviour and contagion fuelled by media reporting (Werther v. Papageno effect) are also currently being investigated in many other countries, such as Austria, Germany, China, India, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Sri Lanka.²⁻⁷

For example, in German-speaking countries, when the term “free death” (in German: *Freitod*) is used in the news instead of the terms “suicide” (in German: *Suizid*) or “self-murder” (*Selbstmord*), readers seem to have a greater understanding of suicide among individuals with incurable diseases.² However, suicidal persons do not make a free, rational decision that the term “free death” supposedly implies (i.e., an emotional tunnel vision of one’s own life and environment).

Unfortunately, the problematic suicide referents “free death” and “self-murder” (allegedly related to crime) are still used regularly in German-speaking countries, although the term “suicide” is recommended for media reports.^{2,8}

I fully agree that the important findings of the study authors should be included in the development of future guidelines to the media for reporting on suicide.¹ Unfortunately, most newspapers and online publications do not yet follow the principles of good media reporting of suicides, as the current data show.^{3-5,7,9}

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■ Cite as: *CMAJ* 2018 December 10;190:E1458. doi: 10.1503/cmaj.70648

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Competing interests: None declared.