

NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF NURSE SUICIDE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM: A CONTENT ANALYSIS STUDY

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BACKGROUND:

Suicide and self-harm rates can be influenced by the reporting of suicide in the media. Groups at heightened risk of suicide, such as **nurses**, may be influenced by poor news reporting

AIM: To examine UK newspaper reporting of suicide of nurses and student nurses, including during the COVID-19 pandemic

FINDINGS:

134 Articles were identified covering **50 individual** suicides among nurses and associated students



- 86.6% of articles included images
- Most images were of the nurse/student who had died by suicide
- 22.5% of online articles contained videos e.g. signposting info or images of body on stretcher



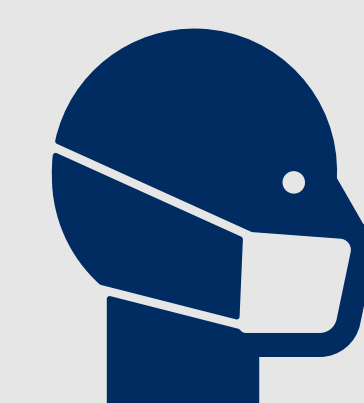
- 21.6% of print articles were on the front page
- Some online articles were shared over 76,000 times
- 31.3% of online articles included public comments



- 82.1% of headlines stated the suicide was of a nurse/student
- 47.3% discussed occupation as contributing to suicide e.g. stress
- 68.7% named the workplace or university of the nurse/student
- 12.2% named colleagues of a nurse/student
- 27.6% included occupation-related images e.g. workplace



- Multiple factors were suggested as contributory to suicide e.g. mental health /occupation/physical health
- 71.0% contained quotes from individuals bereaved by suicide, such as family or friends



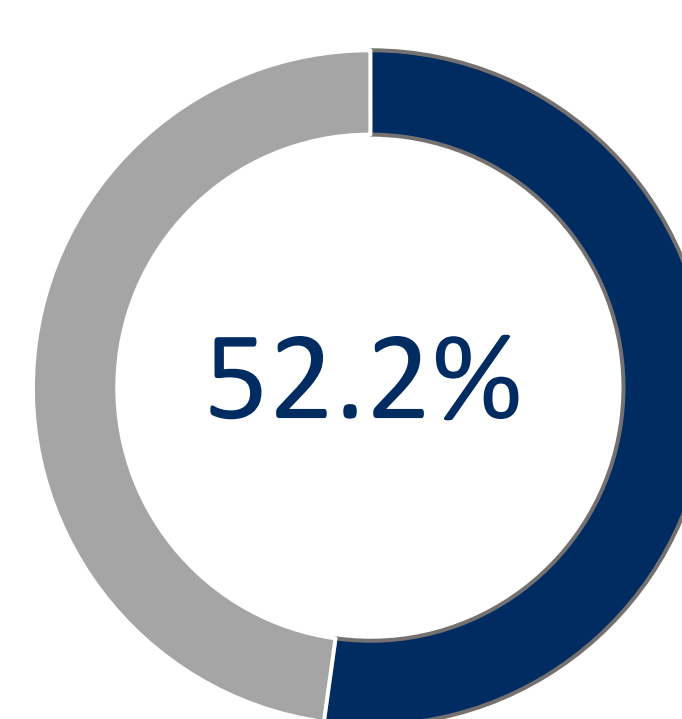
- Peak in reporting following first COVID-19 UK lockdown
- Most frequently reported links to COVID and suicide in articles were working on the frontline and fear of infecting others
- Half contained a pandemic-related image, such as an individual wearing personal protective equipment

QUALITY & COMMON PROBLEMS IN REPORTING

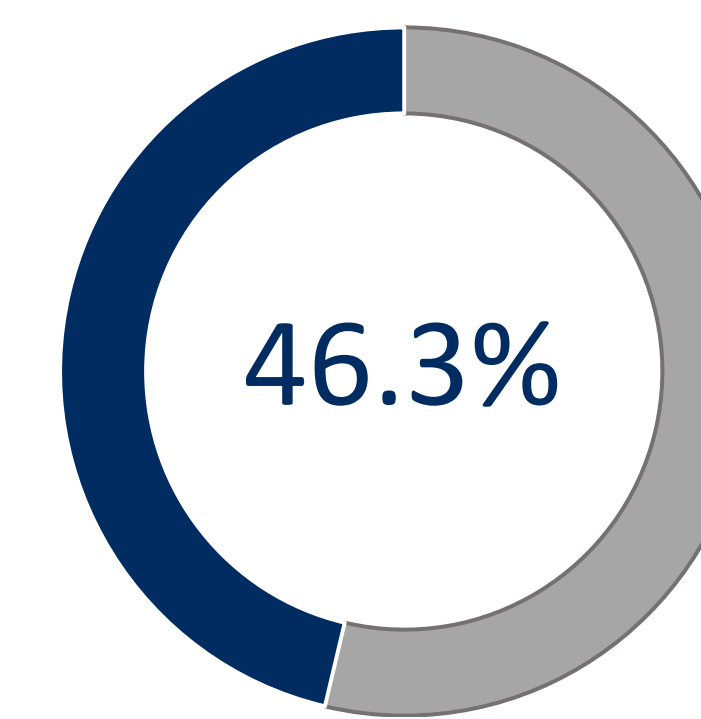
Most articles were acceptable against Samaritans' media guidelines. However many articles included problems in reporting

Common issues with language included:

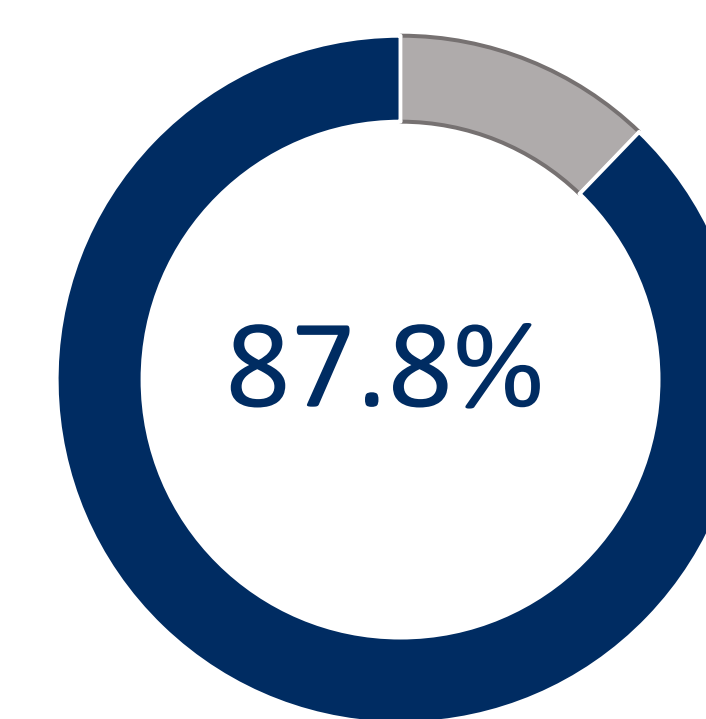
- Stigmatisation: **"commit suicide"**
- Romanticisation: **"heroism"** or **"selflessness"**
- Sensationalism: **"suicide scandal"**
- Over-simplification: speculation about suicide triggers, not acknowledging the complexity of suicide



Articles named method of suicide



Did not include signposting to suicide prevention services



Did not include suicide prevention-framed messaging



RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

- Qualitative research to explore the impact on nurses/students of reading articles related to suicide among fellow nurses/students
- Investigation of whether media reporting of suicide regarding a specific occupation has an impact on suicide rates within that group



PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

- Educational interventions for journalists to encourage adherence to guidance
- Develop a workplace strategy to respond to media attention in case of a nurse suicide

The article corresponding to this study has been accepted by the International Journal of Mental Health Nursing, and will be shortly published Open Access 10.1111/INM.13057



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