



How to cite this article in bibliographies / References

F Garrido-Fabián, A Eleazar Serrano-López, D Catalán-Matamoros (2018): “The use of WHO recommendations for the prevention of suicide. The case of the newspaper Abc”. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 73, pp. 810 to 827.




<http://www.revistalatinacs.org/073paper/1283/42en.html>

DOI: [10.4185/RLCS-2018-1283en](https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2018-1283en)

The use of WHO recommendations for the prevention of suicide. The case of the newspaper Abc

Fermín Garrido-Fabián   Departamento de Periodismo y Comunicación Audiovisual – Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, España – fermingarrido@protonmail.com

Antonio Eleazar Serrano-López    Departamento de Biblioteconomía y Documentación, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, España / Instituto Interuniversitario “Investigación Avanzada sobre Evaluación de la Ciencia y la Universidad” (INAECU) – aeserran@bib.uc3m.es

Daniel Catalán-Matamoros    Departamento de Periodismo y Comunicación Audiovisual – Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, España y Grupo de Investigación Ciencias de la Salud CTS-451 – Universidad de Almería, España – dacatala@hum.uc3m.es

Abstract

Introduction: Suicide is the first cause of non-natural death in Spain. According to the WHO, a better coverage of suicide by media can become an effective strategy for its prevention. **Objective:** This study analyses whether WHO recommendations for the coverage of suicide in media has influenced the mediatic treatment of suicide in the Abc newspaper. **Methodology:** Analysis of news about suicides published in the years 1995, 2000 and 2005. **Results:** 90 appearances about suicides were identified, observing a significant reduction in the percentage of news that informed about the method used, which informed about suicide as something unexplainable or simplistic and that described the suicide as method to face problems between 1995 and 2005. **Conclusions:** The informative coverage of Abc suicide has improved between 1995 and 2005 but not in all aspects recommended by the WHO.

Keywords

suicide; prevention; press; Abc; WHO, style.

Contents

1. Introduction. 2. Methods. 2.1. Methodological strategies. 2.2. Sample selection. 2.3. Analyzed variables. 2.4. Procedure. 3. Results. 4. Discussion and conclusions. 5. List of References. 6. Annex.

Translation by **Yuhanny Henares**
(Academic translator, Universitat de Barcelona)

1. Introduction

Suicide, defined by Albert Camus (1999) as the only “truly serious philosophical problem”, is an important public health issue. In Spain 3910 individuals died of suicide and self-inflicted injuries in 2014 (INE, 2016), being the first cause of non-natural death of the country. The suicide rate by every 100.000 inhabitants in Spain is 8.42 (INE, 2016). It is inferior to the average global rate, of 11.4 in 2012 compared to 7.1 of Spain that same year (WHO, 2014), and of the average rate of suicides of the European Union, which in 2013 was 11.8 and the Spanish rate was 6.7 (Eurostat, 2016). The prevention of suicides is possible and the WHO considers it a “World must”. In order to do this, member States of WHO have compromised to try to reduce the suicide rate 10% for 2020 (WHO, 2014).

Information spread about suicides on media is included among preventive interventions, because it demonstrated to reduce suicide rates. Therefore, improving the mediatic treatment of suicide is one of the key strategies to prevent it because “the appropriate diffusion of information and a sensitization campaign of the problem are essential elements for the success of prevention programs” (WHO, 2014). This way, media must have an active role in the prevention of suicide in our current society (WHO, 2000).

In 1999, the WHO launched the SUPRE program (Suicide Prevention), a world initiative for the prevention of suicide. In this strategy there is included the publication of the document ‘Suicide prevention: toolkit for media professionals’ (WHO, 2000). The text, targeted to media professionals in newspapers, television, radio and Internet, summarizes the evidence of the media impact when informing about suicides and advise communicators about how to inform about suicides. This strategy was updated and extended in 2008 and today it is considered a basic reference for media professionals regarding suicide communication.

For instance, one of the recommended guidelines to media consisted of reducing sensationalistic and extensive information about suicides in newspaper’s covers and headlines. This was done on Switzerland, observing a reduction of sensationalistic contents from 20% to 4% in covers and from 62% to 25% in headlines (Michel, Frey, Wyss and Valach, 2000). Another study found that after the introduction of mediatic guidelines in Wien (Austria) in six months there was a reduction of 80% of suicides by subway accidents, keeping in low levels since then. Besides, the global suicide rate in the Austrian city reduced (Sonneck, Etzersdorfer and Nagel-Kuess, 1994).

The responsible journalistic approach, following guidelines established by the scientific evidence, could have the reduction of the suicide behavior as effect. This is known as the Papageno effect, named so

after the character of ‘The Magic Flute’ opera by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart who desired to take his life but was persuaded by three children (Niederkrötenhaler *et al.*, 2010). The most known is the Werther effect (Philips, 1974), that is, the increase of suicides after the publication of a news about a suicide. The origin of the association between suicide and its informational treatment is the novel of 1774 ‘the sufferings of young Werther’ written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In the book, the protagonist takes his life with a gun shot after a love misunderstanding (Goethe, 2012). After its publication it was informed that several young lads suicided using the same method, therefore establishing a cause-effect relationship between both forbidding the book publication in several European countries (Pirkis and Blood, 2001).

Another case was the suicide of a famous singer in Austria using a firearm which caused the increase of 40% in the number of suicide by guns in the three weeks after the main newspaper of Austria dedicated extensive reports about it. The regional analysis found a strong correlation between firearm suicides and the newspaper distribution (Etzersdorfer, Voracek and Sonneck, 2004). The Werther effect seems to be greater among young people and when the suicide victim is a famous person (WHO, 2008).

The review of the scientific literature that exists about both effects concludes that the mediatic effect in suicides, suicide attempts and suicide ideas is a continuum between both effects (Sisask and Värnik, 2012; Scherr and Steinleitner, 2015). An irresponsible treatment of media can cause an increase of suicide behaviors (Werther effect) in the same way that media can help to reduce suicide behaviors by complying with recommended guidelines (Papageno effect) or not having any significative effects on suicides. However, after the suicide of the German goalkeeper Robert Enke in 2009 by throwing himself to a train, there was an increase of 120% in the suicide’s index in railways in the 28 days that followed after his death, despite the sensitive mediatic treatment and preventive measures taken (Ladwig, Kunrath, Lukaschek and Baumert, 2012). Therefore, this field of study in social communication requires performing an in-depth analysis that investigates the relationship between media and suicides, as well as the search of strategies to prevent those suicides from media.

In Spain, there are studies that have analyzed the informational treatment of suicide both in press (Herrera, Ures and Martínez, 2015) as well as in television (Olmo and García, 2014) but none have studied whether the publication of the document ‘Suicide prevention: toolkit for media professionals (WHO, 2000) as part of the SUPRE program has affected the informational treatment of suicide, suicide rates nor the evolution of the informational treatment of suicide through the years. In the bibliographic review we didn’t find any studies in any other country that has analyzed the direct effect of SUPRE in media. We only found a study conducted in Colombian media that analyzed the news about suicide published in a local newspaper during a six-year period, concluding that the newspaper did not comply with WHO recommendations (Rátiva, Ruiz and Medina-Pérez, 2013). Finally, other researchers have widened the focus and have focused on the temporary evolution of the coverage of British newspapers about mental health (Goulden *et al.*, 2011) and in the treatment of contents about health in Swedish and (Catalán-Matamoros, Axelsson and Strid, 2007) Spanish newspapers (Rico, 2010). Therefore, the main objective of this study is to determine whether the publication of WHO recommendations had any effect in the informational treatment of suicide in the daily and generalist Spanish press. In order to do this, we will perform an analysis about the coverage of one of the national newspapers of reference in Spain, Abc.

2. Methods

2.1. Methodological strategies

A descriptive and observational type of study was done, using a non-experimental design. We performed a content analysis including qualitative variables. The content analysis is considered “one of the most used research techniques in social sciences to confirm and verify hypothesis applied to communicative products or communicative interactions” (Gaitán and Piñuel, 1998: 281-283). Specifically, a content analysis of publications in a national circulation newspaper was done.

2.2. Sample selection

To study the effect of WHO recommendations in the Spanish press we selected the national newspaper *Abc* as sample. Based on the last General Study on Media (AIMC, 2017), *Abc* is the sixth generalist non-free press media *Abc* most consumed in Spain with 418.000 daily readers. We searched for the news informing about specific suicides in three time periods: a) the year the document ‘Suicide Prevention: Toolkit for media professionals’, b) five years before and c) five years after: 1995, 2000 and 2005. We selected these years when considering it is enough time so that some significant change could be produced in the journalistic issue of the suicide topic.

The search consisted in introducing the term “suicid*” in the newspaper and periodicals library of *Abc.es*. This way, the different versions of the word “suicide” as well as “suicide victim”, “suiciding”, “*suicidió*” and “suicided” were also included. The search was done both in the *Abc* of Madrid as well as *Abc* Seville in the period ranged between January 1st and December 31 of the three years mentioned, excluding supplements and other *Abc* editions.

The inclusion criteria of journalistic contents were that the text talked about a suicide, several suicides, a specific suicide attempt or attempts happening up to a year prior the news publication. Articles excluded were those using the search term as a literary resource or metaphoric style (“a suicide police”), referred to the suicide of non-human animals, anniversary of events, columns, open tribunes, letter to the director, synopsis of television programs and artistic works about suicide. The cases of assisted suicide or euthanasia, suicide bombings, the news were the suicide was secondary, texts talking about suicide rates nor cultural pieces regarding suicide. If the suicide was a hypothesis and not a confirmed fact the article was discarded as well. We also discarded those duplicated contents in both editions of *Abc* analyzed and that were published in several days. In that case we chose the most elaborated news and with greater information about the event.

2.3. Analyzed variables

A content analysis of texts meeting inclusion criteria was done to confirm whether they met the seven recommendations of the WHO (2000) to inform about a specific suicide described as follows:

- 1) The sensationalistic covering of suicides should be avoided in a diligent manner, particularly when it involves a celebrity. This covering should be minimized as much as possible. Likewise, any mental problem that the celebrity could have should be recognized. Efforts to avoid

exaggerations should be made. Pictures of the victim, of the method used and the scene of suicide should be avoided. The cover headlines are never the ideal place to inform about a suicide.

- 2) Detailed descriptions about the method used and how the victim had access to it, should be avoided. Researches have demonstrated that the covering from media has greater impact over the suicide method used, than the frequency of suicides. Certain settings –bridges, cliffs, high buildings, railways, etc.– are traditionally associated to suicide and the extra advertisement increases the risk that more people use them.
- 3) The suicide should not be informed as something unexplainable or simplistic. Suicide is never the result of a single factor or fact. It is usually caused by a complex interaction of many factors such as mental and physical health, substance abuse, family and interpersonal conflicts and stressful events. It is useful to recognize that a variety of factors contribute to suicide.
- 4) The suicide shouldn't be described as a method to face personal problems such as bankrupt, inability to pass a test, or sexual abuse.
- 5) Reports should consider the impact over family and other survivor in terms of stigma and psychological suffering.
- 6) To glorify the suicide victims as martyrs and objects of public flattering may suggest to vulnerable people that the society honors suicide behavior. Instead of this, there should be an emphasis on regretting the death of the person.
- 7) Describing the physical consequences of suicide attempts (brain damage, paralysis, etc.) may be helpful as deterrence element.

These seven points will be named in our study as 1) references to mental problems, 2) avoid descriptions of the method used and notes, 3) not presented as unexplainable or simplistic, 4) not described as method to face problems, 5) the impact over families is mentioned, 6) not to glorify victims as martyrs and 7) description of the physical consequences of suicide attempts respectively. These are qualitative variables: The first six have two possible values: complied or not complied with and the seventh one has three: complied with, not complied with and not applicable.

2.4. Procedure

The frequency and proportion of the recommendations met every year were analyzed with the program 'Statgraphics' version 'Centurion XVI'. The Pearson's chi-squared test was used to compare the differences in the proportions of recommendations met and the sum of all recommendations in every period of time. If the p-value was inferior to 0.05 for a significance level of 0.95 the null hypothesis was rejected and the statistically significant variation accepted.

3. Results

The search provided 5216 results. The results of this search increased in 57% between 1995 and 2000, from 1179 to 1852, and almost doubled between 1995 and 2005, with a total of 2185 results founds. The number of relevant articles, that is, that met the inclusion criteria, was 90. The number of relevant articles reduced in 51% between 1995 and 2000 and increased a 14% between 2000 and 2005, reducing to almost half between 1995 and 2005, from 43 to 25.

Table 1. Articles about suicides per year with the Pearson's χ^2 test to confirm whether there is variable dependency.

	Year						Dependency χ^2 (d.f. = P 2)	
	1995 (n=43)		2000 (n=22)		2005 (n=25)			
Recommendation	%	n	%	n	%	n		
Reference to mental problems	14	6	27.3	6	8	2	3.470	0.176
Avoid descriptions about the method used and notes	9.3	4	0	0	24	6	7.097	0.029
Not presented as unexplainable or simplistic	39.5	17	77.3	17	84	21	16.352	< 0.001
Not described as method to face problems	60.5	26	100	22	96	24	19.756	< 0.001
The impact on families is mentioned	14	6	0	0	0	0	7.027	0.030
Do not glorify victims as martyrs	86	37	95.5	21	100	25	4.715	0.095
Total of recommendations met every year	32.6	98	44.2	68	45.7	80	10.282	0.006

The frequency and proportion of the compliance of every recommendation of WHO is shown in the three years chosen (Table 1). There was a significant increase in the proportion of articles that complied with the recommendations 'avoid descriptions of the method used and notes' ($\chi^2 = 7.097$; d.f. = 2; $p = 0.029$), 'not presented as unexplainable or simplistic' ($\chi^2 = 16.352$; d.f. = 2; $p < 0.001$) and 'not described as method to face problems' ($\chi^2 = 19.756$; d.f. = 2; $p < 0.001$), as well as the total of recommendations met every year ($\chi^2 = 10.282$; d.f. = 2; $p = 0.006$). However, there wasn't any statistically significant change in the proportion of articles that met the recommendations of references to mental problems ($\chi^2 = 3.470$; d.f. = 2; $p = 0.176$) and there is no glorification of victims as martyrs ($\chi^2 = 4.715$; d.f. = 2; $p = 0.095$). On the other hand, the proportion of articles that met the recommendation 'the impact on families is mentioned', has a significative reduction ($\chi^2 = 7.027$; d.f. = 2; $p = 0.030$).

Table 2. Articles about suicide attempts per year with the Pearson χ^2 test to confirm whether there is variable dependency.

	Year						Dependency χ^2 (d.f. = P 3)	
	1995 (n=9)		2000 (n=6)		2005 (n=8)			
Recommendation	%	n	%	n	%	n		

Description of the physical consequences of attempts	33.3	2	100	2	66.6	2	3.492	0.175
Cases where there were no consequences or do not apply	33.3	3	66.7	4	41.7	5		

Regarding suicide attempts, we analyzed a total of 23 cases (Table 2). From these, in 12 articles there were no physical consequences of suicide attempts or did not apply the recommendation ‘description of physical consequences of suicide attempts’ and therefore, they were not counted. We haven’t found any significative dependency between the variables considering the proportion of articles that met the recommendation ($\chi^2 = 3.429$; d.f. = 3; $p = 0.175$).

Table 3. Articles that comply with each one of advises. %c: Compliance Percentage of every recommendation compared to the total of news. %r: Compliance percentage of every recommendation compared to the total of recommendations.

Recommendation	Total (n=246)		
	% compliance of every recommendation	% of recommendations met compared to the total	of n
Reference to mental problems	15.6	0.1	14
Avoid descriptions about the method used and notes	11.1	<0.1	10
Not presented as unexplainable or simplistic	61.1	22.4	55
Not described as method to face problems	80	29.3	72
The impact on families is mentioned	6.7	<0.1	6
Do not glorify victims as martyrs	92.2	33.7	83
Total of recommendations met	39	100	246

The table 3 gathers the frequency of the recommendations compliance in the three years and the compliance percentages of each one of them and the recommendations percentages met considering the total

Table 4. Other descriptive variables of articles analyzed.

Other data	Year							
	1995 (n=43)		2000 (n=22)		2005 (n=25)		Total (n=90)	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Accomplished suicides	81.4	35	72.7	16	68	17	75.6	68

Suicide attempts	20.9	9	27.3	6	32	8	25.6	23
Individual suicides	83.7	36	100	22	80	20	86.7	78
Double suicides	9.3	4	0	0	4	1	5.6	5
Suicides of several people	7	3	0	0	16	4	7.8	7
Suicides in Spain	39.5	17	50	11	32	8	28.9	36
Suicides in other countries	58.1	25	50	11	68	17	58.9	53
Suicides in non-determined places	2.3	1	0	0	0	0	1.1	1

Table 4 includes other variables such as frequency and percentages of accomplished suicides, suicide attempts, individual suicides, double suicides, suicides of several people, suicides of other countries and suicides in undetermined places in the three years analyzed and in the total of news analyzed.

4. Discussion and conclusion

This study shows a certain increase in the compliance percentage of some of WHO recommendations regarding the journalistic coverage of suicide. We observed an increase regarding ‘avoid descriptions of the method used and notes’, ‘not to present as unexplainable or simplistic’ and ‘not to be described as a method to face problems’. We didn’t find significant changes in the percentage of references to mental problems nor the glorification of victims as martyrs. On the other hand, the recommendation compliance of mentioning the impact on families was reduced in the analyzed period. The recommendation of describing the physical consequences of suicide attempts has not improved its compliance percentage in the period 1995-2005 although we must indicate that only 11 news have suicide attempts, therefore we cannot get solid conclusions about its evolution. The global analysis of the seven recommendations shows an improvement in the informative treatment of suicide of Abc between 1995 and 2005. Despite thereof, Abc non-complied the recommendations set forth by WHO in most of publications about suicides repeatedly in the years analyzed.

Out of the seven recommendations for media by WHO, Abc complied with the recommendation of ‘not glorifying suicide victims in 92% of contents. Regarding mentioning the ‘impact on families’ it was the recommendation complied with by the lower percentage of news (11.1%). Considering that often news about suicides were short, it was expectable that advises such as the non-glorification of victims were complied with and others such as mentioning the psychological impact on families didn’t. The method used to commit suicide is usually considered worthy of being mentioned in the information, therefore, this advice was usually non-complied with.

Comparing these data with the data obtained in the study of Herrera *et al.*, 2013 that analyzed the news related with the suicide appearing in the digital edition of five Spanish newspapers, including Abc on September and October 2012, we can partially compare the results of both studies. Considering that Herrera *et al.*, 2013 does not disaggregate results by newspaper, it is not possible to compare directly their results with the results of our work. However, and considering that Abc contributed with 21% of the news we proceeded to compare data of 2012 with the period 1995-2005 to observe how trends

indicated in this study could have continued but without aiming to get final conclusions due to the limitation mentioned.

The percentage of news that refer to the method (65.7%) is less than in Abc in 1995-2005 (88.9%). This bad informative practice has reduced in Abc since the publication of the document targeted to communication professionals, in agreement with the conclusion of this work. On the contrary, the percentage of news that position protagonist as hero is very similar in 2012 (7.4%) and 1995-2005 (7.8%), confirming the conclusion that this variable was not influenced by WHO recommendations. Although the percentage of news that do not refer to the backgrounds on victims' mental health in 2012 is superior (92.6%) to the 1995-2005 (84.4), it coincides with the data of 2005 (92%). When observing a great variance in the three years analyzed in this work, we can sustain that the percentage of news mentioning mental health backgrounds keeps constant, just as presented in this study's hypothesis.

We do appreciate a discrepancy between the hypothesis that the percentage of news telling about family suffering reduced after the publication of the WHO document. In 2012, the percentage was 81.8% and in 1995-2005 it was 93.3%. Due to this difference and because we did not find a reason why the introduction of a guideline improved the compliance of some recommendation but reduce done, we admit the hypothesis that there is no trend in 'the impact on families is mentioned'. The correlation observed could be spurious, because the difference is not very significative and the p-value ($p = 0.03$) is near the region of hypothesis rejection.

The premiere in Spain in 2000 of the film *Virgenes suicidas*, with its repeated appearance in every newspaper during several weeks in the Billboard section could partially explain the increase of results with the term "suicid*" despite the reduction of news talking about specific suicides. Likewise, in 2005 the texts about suicide attempts, especially in Iraq, were quite abundant and articles dedicated to 11-M that included reference to bombing terrorists in Leganes, called by the press as suicides, could have inflated the number of results obtained.

We must highlight that despite the increase of suicides in Spain, of 3.157 in 1995 to 3.399 in 2005 (INE, 2016), the number of news about suicides in the country reduced in that period. This could be die to a greater coincidence of the Werther effect and a greater caution to avoid contagion. Besides, both the style guide of *El País* as well as *El Mundo* include references to how suicide must be treated. In the case of *El País*, the non-free newspaper of general information with more readers daily (AIMC, 2017), it is worth mentioning that the regulation of mandatory compliance in its texts includes information about suicides on section 1 of principle 1, positioning on the first 'useful' page of the style guide. Due to its interest, we reproduce it completely:

The journalist must be especially cautious about information regarding suicide. Firstly, because not always the appearances coincide with reality, and also because the psychology has confirmed that this news promote in individuals inclined to suicide and who feel an imitation stimulus in that moment, to actually take their lives. Suicides must be published only when they are individuals of relevance or entail a social fact of general interest. (*El País*, 1996, p.12)

El Mundo, the second newspaper of general information with more daily readers (AIMC, 2016), reserves the final part of the style guide to set forth how to inform about suicide:

A suicide must not be a news by itself. It ends up being so when the author is a relevant character or when it becomes a significative fact due to the way it was performed, age or the social problem hidden behind.

When it comes to inform about a suicide we must previously consider two issues. First, we must value the common criterion of psychiatrists and psychologists warning about the fact that news about suicide draws other potential victims. Second, that we must not haste and qualify a death as suicide just out of appearances. We need to delve in the news. (*El Mundo*, 1996, p.68)

Both newspapers coincide in the caution while treating suicides due to the Werther effect but omit the benefit of Papageno effect they might have if these events were treated with rigorous journalistic criteria. The style guide of *Abc*, the newspaper analyzed in this study, does not include guidelines to inform about suicides both in their first edition (Vigara & Editing council of *Abc*, 1993) as well as its second (Vigara & Editing council of *Abc*, 2001).

The debate about the mediatic treatment of suicides should not relate about the dilemma of informing or not for fear of the Werther effect but instead about how we can inform of those suicides that can become potential news so to try to generate a Papageno effect or at least avoid the Werther effect. To avoid informing about suicides shouldn't be as relevant as the increase in the informative quality of suicides that are published on media. The objective of an adequate informative treatment, besides reducing suicidal attitudes, must be to increase the search of assistance by vulnerable individuals and the reduction of stigma (Niederkrötenhaller, Reidenberg, Till and Gould, 2014). A greater presence of suicide on media could help reduce the suffering of victim's families and friends when reducing stigma about suicide (Batterham, Calear and Christensen, 2013). Further researches should analyze how media can reduce the suicide stigma without glorifying it and help that vulnerable individuals look for help.

Media professionals must be aware of WHO recommendations as well as other entities' about how to and how not to inform about suicides. As we published before, communication influences noticeably on populations health either in a positive or negative manner (Catalán-Matamoros, Muñoz-Cruzado and Fuentes-Hervías, 2010; Catalán-Matamoros, 2015). The examples of Switzerland and Wien show that it is not only a matter of journalistic ethics but also reduces suicide attempts. Medical organizations and healthcare authorities can also play an informative role by directly informing journalistic professionals through talks or leaflets.

Media responsables must include, like *Abc*'s case, in their style guide advices of the WHO's SUPRE program. Those media (*El País* and *El Mundo*, for instance) who have advices in their style guides that do not comply with the scientific consensus and that have not updated the section that refers to suicide since the release of the WHO guideline in 2000 should update their style guides. References about the Papageno effect must be included as well as the relevant role on media to prevent suicide. Besides, the mere inclusion of recommendations in style guides is not enough since professionals must know and apply WHO's recommendations as much as possible. Performing interviews to media professionals to know the employee's awareness levels about WHO guidelines would be desirable. Besides sounding out the sector, this research could help that more communication professionals know the

recommendations to be complied with for treating suicide mediatically, which could cause, by itself, an increase in the journalistic information about suicide.

Although this study presents innovative data, it has considerable limitations. The reliability of this study is very limited because the sample universe (n=90) is rather scarce. The fact that only three years are analyzed to look for a trend reduces the significance of trends found due to the variability of news. Studies analyzing a longer time period are desirable. However, to guarantee the validity of this study we adapted the methodology used in similar previous studies such as Goulden's *et al.*, 2011 and Herrera's *et al.*, 2015.

The variability of the informative coverage among the different newspapers makes it mandatory to choose a greater sample of newspapers before extrapolating these conclusions to the rest of publications. To avoid ideological and geographically biases, the sample must be representative of the editorial line and the geographical area of the Spanish press. We cannot conclude anything about other media without new researches analyze the evolution of the informative treatment in radio, journals and television. The decision of exclusively analyzing those news informing about specific suicides neglects other informative texts that can contribute to reducing suicide behavior. Likewise, non-informative texts, such as opinion, that have not been included in this work, should be analyzed.

Another limitation of this study is the length of texts in the sample. The great variability of news, that include from brief double pages' reports, could affect the compliance percentage of WHO's advice. Longer texts could facilitate that some recommendations such as not informing about the method used could be contravened but also family suffering or suicide's mental health should be mentioned. Future studies about the relationship between the length of a text and the compliance of WHO guidelines are necessary. A qualitative analysis of media, when turning complex messages in a series of subjective generic categories, is another great limitation of the present study. Lastly, it is not possible to conclude a causality relationship between the publication of WHO guidelines and the variation of some of the news features about suicides. Many other factors could have influenced in producing this change.

Despite everything we have said, the comparison of the conclusions of this study with another similar one (Herrera *et al.*, 2015) contributes to validate results. More longitudinal studies that analyze the variation in the informative coverage of suicide and its causes are necessary. Our study did not aim to perform an extensive approach of the problematic about communication of suicides, but instead the objective was to conduct a pilot study by analyzing the level of compliance of WHO's recommendations by a national newspaper. Public communication about suicide is a very complex and critical field in current society, therefore we encourage other authors to investigate in this area to be able to clarify their different components and influences.

And as conclusion, our study manifests there is a certain improvement in the informative treatment of suicide in newspaper Abc between 1995 and 2005. There is a trend since 1995 in Abc to reduce the number of news of specific suicides that include descriptions of the method used and the publication of suicide notes, that present the suicide as something unexplainable or caused by a single factor and that describe it, to a greater extent as method to face problems. On the other hand, there are no changes in the percentage of news that refer to mental health problems of suicide victims, which mention the impact of a suicide in friends and family, and neither there is enough data to get conclusions about the

evolution of the description of physical consequences of suicide attempts. Most news talk about accomplished individual suicides in other countries. Further research is needed to evaluate the quality of the treatment of suicides on media.

5. List of references

AIMC (2017): *EGM: Año móvil febrero de 2017 a noviembre de 2017*: <http://www.aimc.es/aimc-c0nt3nt/uploads/2017/05/resumegm317.pdf> (10-12-2017 = fecha de la consulta)

PJ Batterham, AL Callear & H Christensen (2013): “Correlates of suicide stigma and suicide literacy in the community”. *Suicide Life Threat Behav* 43, pp. 406-417.

A Camus (1999): *El mito de Sísifo*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

D Catalan-Matamoros (2015): “Periodismo en salud: análisis de los públicos, formatos y efectos”. *Panacea*, 16, pp. 217-224.

D Catalan-Matamoros, R Axelsson & J Strid (2007): “How do newspapers deal with health in Sweden? A descriptive study”. *Patient Education and Counseling* 67, pp. 78-83.

D Catalan-Matamoros, M Muñoz-Cruzado, MT Fuentes-Hervías (2010): “Técnicas de comunicación para la prevención y control de enfermedades”. *Revista Española de Comunicación en Salud*, 1, pp. 50-65.

El Mundo (1996): *Libro de estilo El Mundo*. Madrid: Temas de hoy.

El País (1996): *Libro de estilo El País*. Madrid: Ediciones El País.

Eurostat (2016): *Estadísticas de causas de muerte*: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Causes_of_death_statistics/es (10-12-2017 = fecha de la consulta)

E Etzersdorfer, M Voracek & G Sonneck (2004): “A dose-response relationship between imitational suicides and newspaper distribution”. *Archive of Suicide Research* 8, pp. 137-145.

JA Gaitán & JL Piñuel (1998): *Técnicas de investigación en comunicación social*. Madrid: Síntesis.

JW Goethe (2012): *Los sufrimientos del joven Werther*. Barcelona: Debolsillo.

R Golden, E Corker, S Evans-Lacko, D Rose, G Thornicroft & C Henderson (2011): “Newspaper coverage of mental illness in the UK, 1992-2008”. *BMC Public Health* 11, pp. 796.

R Herrera, MB Ures, & JJ Martínez Jambrina (2015): “El tratamiento del suicidio en la prensa española: ¿efecto werther o efecto papageno?”. *Rev. Asoc. Esp. Neuropsiq.* 35, pp. 123-134.

Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2016): *Defunciones según la Causa de Muerte*: <http://www.ine.es/jaxiT3/Datos.htm?t=7947> (10-12-2017 = fecha de la consulta)

KG Ladwig, S Kunrath, K Lukascheck & J Baumert (2012): “The railway suicide death of a famous German football player: impact on the subsequent frequency of railway suicide acts in Germany”. *J. Affect Disord.* 136, pp. 194-198.

- K Michel, C Frey, K Wyss & L Valach (2000): “An exercise in improving suicide reporting in print media”. *Crisis* 21, pp. 71-79.
- T Niederkrotenthaler, M Voracek, A Herberth, B Till, M Strauss, E Etzendorfer, *et al.* (2010): “Role of media reports in completed and prevented suicide: Werther v. Papageno effects”. *Br. J. Psychiatry*, 197, pp. 234-43.
- T Niederkrotenthaler, DJ Reidenberg, B Till & MS Gould (2014): “Increasing help-seeking and referrals for individuals at risk for suicide by decreasing stigma: the role of mass media”. *Am. J. Prev. Med.*, 47, pp. S235-S243.
- A Olmo & D García (2014): “El tratamiento de las noticias sobre suicidios. Una aproximación a su reflejo en los medios de comunicación”. *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*, 20, pp. 1149-1163.
- Organización Mundial de la Salud (2000): *Prevención del suicidio: Un instrumento para profesionales de los medios de comunicación*:
http://www.who.int/mental_health/media/media_spanish.pdf (05-12-2017 = fecha de la consulta)
- Organización Mundial de la Salud (2008): *Preventing Suicide: A Resource for Media Professionals*:
http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/resource_media.pdf (05-12-2017 = fecha de la consulta)
- Organización Mundial de la Salud (2014): *Prevención del suicidio: Un imperativo global*:
http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/136083/1/9789275318508_spa.pdf (05-12-2017 = fecha de la consulta)
- DP Philips (1974): “The influence of suggestion on suicide: substantive and theoretical implications of the Werther effect”. *Am. Sociol. Rev.* 39, pp. 340-354.
- J Pirkis & R Blood (2001): “Suicide and the media. Part II: Portrayal in fictional media”. *Crisis* 22, pp. 155-162.
- JS Rativa, VA Ruiz & OA Medina-Pérez (2013): “Análisis de las noticias sobre suicidio publicadas en un diario local de Quindío, Colombia, entre 2004 y 2011”. *Rev. Cubana Hig. Epidemiol.* 51, pp. 184-191.
- A Rico (2010): “Análisis de los temas sanitarios publicados en dos periódicos digitales”. *Revista Española de Comunicación en Salud*, 1, pp. 130-136.
- S Scherr & A Steinleitner (2015): “Zwischen dem Werther- und Papageno-Effekt”. *Nervenarzt*, 86, pp. 557-565.
- M Sisask & A Värnik (2012): “Media roles in suicide prevention: a systematic review”. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 9, pp. 123-138.
- G Sonneck, E Etzendorfer & S Nagel-Kuess (1994): “Imitative suicide on the Viennese subway”. *Soc. Sci. Med.* 38, pp. 453-7.
- AM Vigara & Consejo de redacción de Abc (1993): *Libro de estilo de Abc*. Barcelona: Ariel.
- AM Vigara & Consejo de redacción de Abc (2001): *Libro de estilo de Abc*. Barcelona: Ariel.

ANNEX. LISTS OF NEWS ANALYZED

Date	Headline	Section	Pages
3/1/1995	Alarm in the United States for the suicide of three hundred thirty policemen in a year	Sociedad	75
4/1/1995 (*)	The autopsy of the builder's body of the «house of horrors» demonstrates that he committed suicide	Events	58
4/1/1995	The Irish police tries to identify the body of a man found in a flat in Dublin, with signs of committing suicide...	Events	58
6/1/1995	The inhabitant of Bilbao that changed a kidney for a job suicides	Society	73
17/1/1995	The main Episcopalian bishop of United States	Religion	57
24/1/1995	Dies after setting himself on fire in the bathrooms of a shopping mall in Murcia	Events	66
25/1/1995	Kobe: Suicides after not being able to repair a water bomb broken by the earthquake	Events	66
29/1/1995	A bullet pierces the face of a suicide and kills another person	Events	101
5/2/1995	The spirit of Romeo and Juliette	Events	88-89
18/2/1995	The Municipal Police saves the life of a suicide victim in Lavapiés	Events	76
23/2/1995	Belloch could indult a man that tried to suicide yesterday	Society	55
26/2/1995	A host prevents the suicide of a viewer	Radio Television	116
9/3/1995	The chief of the Belgian Air Force during the «Augusta case»	International	35
23/3/1995	Avoids the suicide of his wife by rickety holding her from a tenth floor	Events	87
10/4/1995	China: suicide for corruption	International	28
18/4/1995	The daughter of Marlon Brando suicides, sick since her half-brother murdered her boyfriend	Events	80
19/5/1995	The police from Cordoba under arrest as author of a bank robbery suicides in the police station	Events	49
21/5/1995	Argelia: self-sacrificed film-maker	International	53
27/5/1995	Suicides right after killing a girl with his motorcycle	Events	84
13/6/1995	Móstoles: takes his life, presumably, due to low scores	Events	94
17/6/1995	Suicides after believing, wrongly, that he won a lottery ticket he forgot to seal	Events	64

Date	Headline	Section	Pages
25/6/1995	A love and jealousy story ends with a murder and two suicides in Murcia	Events	87
7/7/1995	Swedish hatred: makes his wife to act as guarantor for a millionaire credit and suicides	Education/Society	57
12/7/1995	The «Golden Gate» achieves a macabre «record»: a thousand people have ended their life from the bridge	Society	73
15/7/1995	Letonia: suicide as protest	International	31
17/7/1995	The Vice-Minister of Israeli Defense, «Mota» Gur, suicides with a bullet in his head	International	34
24/7/1995	A diabolical sect can be behind a wave of suicides in a Colombian town	Society	49
2/8/1995	The soldier defender asks the Audience to investigate a suicide	National	22
13/8/1995	A suicide attempt derived into a neighbor's confrontation in a neighborhood of Lérida	Events	56
23/8/1995	Depeche Mode. David Ganan, singer of the group Depeche Mode, is hospitalized in Los Angeles, after a suicide attempt...	Performance	69
27/8/1995	Douglas Stegmeyer suicides, bass guitarist of Billy Joel's band	Performance	73
30/8/1995	A war film on TV causes the suicide of a child	Radio Television	107
2/9/1995	The agent found coughed and carbonized in Malaga committed suicide, according to Police	Events	71
6/9/1995	The young man that perished when his apartment burned, committed suicide	Events	70
27/9/1995	The friends of the Viaduct left pictures of their life in their rooms	Events	88-89
1/10/1995	The double suicide of Las Palmas revived the Legend of Garay and Jonay	Events	90-91
29/10/1995	Causes a gas explosion for feeling victim of racism	Events	63
7/11/1995	Deep sorrow in France for the suicide of Gilles Deleuze	Culture	62
8/11/1995	The wife of the «capo» Leoluca Bagarella suicided to «clean» family honor	Events	87
9/11/1995	Zoé Warwick, the former Europe champion of body building, suicided yesterday...	Sports	87

Date	Headline	Section	Pages
1/12/1995	Italy: A mother and his three children take their life by jumping to their deaths	Events	84
9/12/1995	An investigation about a «strange suicide» of a prisoner in Jaen's jail is requested	Events	64
14/12/1995	Fiancés through themselves form a 14 floor building in Barcelona	Events	82
21/1/2000	The suicide of a finance responsible dramatizes the internal crisis of CDÜ	International	29
16/2/2000	A suicide bomb explodes in Pekin	International	37
26/2/2000	The president of the Court Martial suicides	International	36
27/2/2000	The authors of several bomb cards suicides	International	36
29/2/2000	A Taiwan native sets himself on fire to request Independence while Pekin warns the USA about a new Vietnam	International	38
5/3/2000	Ejido: the man accused of murdering farmers tries to suicide	Andalusia	70
26/3/2000	The Civil Guard avoids a suicide [sic] in Utrera	Seville	48
31/3/2000	A suicide attempt is stopped thanks to a film shooting	Neighborhood	12
20/5/2000	Jerez: a suicide caused the interruption of train traffic	Andalusia	62
22/5/2000	A former minister suicide	International	36
23/5/2000	A suicide attempt causes the death of two individuals and injured another five in Ecija	Seville	37
24/5/2000	Reveal that the shot of the young woman of Vallecas was done in front of a mirror	Madrid	7
23/6/2000	Founded the body of an old man with a machete in his chest	Seville	45
25/7/2000	Shotgun snatched when he was about to suicide	Andalusia	50
6/8/2000	Tries to suicide by setting himself on fire while shouting: «I want to die!, I want to die!»	Seville	41
9/8/2000	A pedophile suicides in the United Kingdom when he reads a death threat when his name appears in «News of the World»	Society	41
20/8/2000	The young woman that tried to set herself on fire continues critical	Seville	37
8/9/2000	Found with slit throat in Mexico a high officer related with the former repressor Cavallo	International	36

Date	Headline	Section	Pages
8/10/2000	Richard Farnsworthll takes his life, the protagonist of «The Straight Story»	People	86
14/10/2000	A Serbian man accused of war crimes suicides during his arrest	International	32
5/12/2000	Composer Gerhard Schedl suicides	Culture	54
16/12/2000	The priest expert in sects could have protected a third party with his silence	Society	42
16/12/2000	An old lady suicides when she loses two million in a swindle	Andalusia	72
2/1/2005	The lad that threatened with jumping to his death with a boy, suicides	National	26
10/1/2005	The military chief of Gibraltar suicides after being accused of pederasty	International	30
12/1/2005	Found dead the technician that told how they humiliated South Africans	Sports	93
13/1/2005	The Police believes that the dead doctor in Tarragona committed suicide	National	18
25/1/2005	An Internet user saves the life of a woman that tried to suicide	Seville	16
26/1/2005	Suicide attempts in Guantánamo	International	25
27/1/2005	A frustrated suicide causes a triple derailment in USA [<i>sic</i>]	International	32
2/2/2005	Announced suicides	Society	52
3/2/2005	The director of Mundial Montreal 2005 suicides	Sports	95
6/2/2005	Another nine individuals suicide in Japan after agreeing a covenant through Internet	International	35
16/2/2005	The suicide of a contestant does not stop the premiere of a «reality» in USA [<i>sic</i>]	Television and radio	111
25/2/2005	Hung in his cell, the Islamist that celebrated with coffee the killing of 11-M	National	13
5/3/2005	The suicide of the Ukrainian former Internal Affairs Minister compromises Kuchma	International	29
22/3/2005	Suicides victims of Zamora wanted to wear shackles to avoid regrets	National	18
31/5/2005	Suicide attempt of the Israeli Ambassador in Ethiopia	International	26

Date	Headline	Section	Pages
7/4/2005	The family of a suicide victim from the Army, request for a compensation to Defense	Seville	29
14/5/2005	A woman committed suicide with her four year old daughter in Barcelona	National	21
26/5/2005	Investigate whether the suicide of a teenager in Elda hides another case of school harassment	National	21
12/7/2005	Claims for her son «disappeared in Spain»	International	31
21/8/2005	A man sets himself on fire and throws himself out of the balcony after arguing with his boyfriend	Society	53
13/10/2005	The death of the Syrian Internal Affairs Minister adds uncertainty to «Hariri case»	International	26
29/11/2005	The suicide of a young woman in New Jersey is avoided	Madrid	44
30/11/2005	Firemen stop a suicide	Seville	11
26/12/2005	Four young lads die in another collective suicide in Japan inside a car	International	29

(*) Note: In bold, the Seville edition of Abc. The rest corresponds to Madrid's edition.

How to cite this article in bibliographies / References

F Garrido-Fabián, A Eleazar Serrano-López, D Catalán-Matamoros (2018): “The use of WHO recommendations for the prevention of suicide. The case of the newspaper Abc”. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 73, pp. 810 to 827.

<http://www.revistalatinacs.org/073paper/1283/42en.html>

DOI: [10.4185/RLCS-2018-1283en](https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2018-1283en)

Article received on 19 January 2018. Accepted on 21 April.
Published on 25 April 2018.