

## SUICIDE REPORTING: A COMPARISON OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS' NEWS FRAMING

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### ABSTRACT

Suicide is a popular cause of death in the contemporary era. Every suicide is a traumatic event that has a long-term impact on those left behind, impacting families, and even countries. The study relied on content analysis. The study was carried out using the Framing theory to learn about suicide news framing in local and national publications. Data was collected from two newspapers, Daily Chand and Daily Express, between April 1st and September 30th, 2020. The study found that Daily Express framed 31 stories and only 1 story was framed by Daily Chand through episodic framing. It has found that depression was the primary cause of suicide. The results demonstrate that the National newspaper gives mostly coverage to suicide on city or national/international page while local newspaper give space to suicide on the back page of the newspaper. In most of the cases poison were used by the victim as a tool to end their life. The overall result shows that suicide ratio is higher among the young generation.

### INTRODUCTION

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in the world. According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) every year, 703,000 individuals commit suicide, with many more attempting it. Every suicide is a tragedy that impacts families, communities, and entire countries, leaving a lasting impact on those left behind. Suicide occurs throughout life and was the fourth highest cause of death among 15 to 29 year olds worldwide in the year 2019. Suicide is not limited to high-income nations; it is a worldwide epidemic affecting all parts of the planet. In 2019, low and middle-income nations accounted for more than 77% of all suicides worldwide.

In south Asian Islamic countries, the rate of suicide cases as well as suicide attempts are illegal, religiously and socially condemned. In the recent studies the ratio of suicide cases has been increased. In this study, police data from the Sindh province were studied to provide the trends of suicide from 1985 to 1999. 2568

suicide cases were reported in the period in which 71 percent were men and 39 percent were women. In the year 1987, there were only 90 reported cases while the maximum numbers of suicide cases were reported in the year 1999. The most common method for suicide was organophosphates a poison while hanging was on the second number (Khan &Hyder 2006). The number of suicide rate in increased from 1947 to 1968 when such stories were published in the newspapers of Unites States and England. The study found that the number of suicide cases was increased due the methods shown the newspapers in the report as a person found similarities with the object, they tend to perform the same action to solve the problem (Phillips, 1974). According to World Health Organization reports one million suicides every year around the world, and while media does not directly promote suicidal behavior, its coverage could have a significant impact (Araujo, et all 2016).

Suicide appeared to occur after the median age of the disease was around 14 years. Symptoms of patients during the time preceding suicide were measured by interviewing doctors or family members of patients. In decreasing order, inner stress, racing or crowded thoughts, violent behavior, shame, psychomotor agitation, persecutory ideation, anxiety, and hallucinations were symptoms occurring in 10 percent of cases. Compared to other temperaments, the cyclothymic temperament was less associated with total suicide. In a milieu of agitation, mixed anxiety and depression, and psychosis, suicide is likely to happen. The incidence of completed suicide can be decreased by longer-term mood stabilizer therapy (Sani, et al 2011).

Some of the major risk factors which may cause to increase the rate of suicide are family history about suicide or violence and child abuse. Some other causes which are associated to suicide is feeling mental health problems, hopelessness, trauma, engaging in reckless or impulsive behavior, a feeling of seclusion or loneliness, not being able to access care for mental health issues, loss of work, friends, finances or a loved one, having a physical illness or health condition, possessing a gun or other lethal methods, not seeking help due to fear or stigma, stress due to discrimination and prejudice, historical trauma, such as the destruction of communities and cultures, having attempted suicide before, experiencing bullying or trauma, exposure to graphic or sensationalized accounts of suicide, exposure to suicidal behavior in others, experiencing legal problems or debt, being under the influence of drugs or alcohol (Jenifer, 2020).

### **Literature Review**

Each year millions of people die by suicide. Mostly, information on suicide comes from developed countries. Apart from western countries, some countries provide suicide information on regular basis to W.H.O (World Health Organization). 57 countries having a majority population of Muslims including Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan with a population of 100 million people. Suicide is an under studied and under researched subject in Pakistan. Epidemiological data on national counting are unknown. Variety of religious,

social and legal elements makes data collection tougher. Hanging, usage of medication for suicide, eating poison, self-immolation and drowning are some of the ways told read and showed via mass media. Countries as well as provinces are also hit by suicide but differently. Rates of suicide are at least calculated amongst six different cities while official rate of suicide are known. Suicide rates vary from a low of 0.43/100,000 per year (average 1991-2000) in Peshawar, Faisalabad with 1.11, 2.86 in Rawalpindi, Lahore with 1.08, Karachi with 2.1 and Larkana with 2.6 in different eras and areas. Gender specific rates are in age group of 20-40 years. Men are having high rates of suicide with 5.2/100,000 in Rawalpindi while for women the rates are 1.7. Currently a nongovernmental organization reported 5800 suicide cases in nine months from January to September of 2006. Almost 34% of Pakistani population suffers from common mental disorder and depression is intertwining more than 90% of suicide (Mahesar, 2018).

Due to irresponsible reporting by media imitative suicidal is common. Guidelines regarding suicide reporting have been defined by the World Health Organization. Aim of the study was to find out whether Indian newspapers is following the guidelines of WHO and is there any difference about the style of suicide news reporting among English and Hindi newspapers as well as local and national newspapers. Ten newspapers circulated in Jaipur, India were selected from October 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2014. Result of the study exposed that a single story about suicide was published in all the selected newspapers. Sensationalism was found in all the news stories related to suicide. Most of the newspapers didn't publish the pictures of the victims. The newspapers did not try to describe suicide as understandable and were largely neutral in the reporting. Pattern of the reporting were the same in local and national as well as English and Hindi newspapers. The study concluded that in India, suicide reporting is quite irresponsible and efforts are required about suicide reporting in the country (Jain & Kumar, 2016).

Communication is playing a vital role in the presentation of suicide as it is one of the leading causes of death in the United States of America.

A number of researchers found that a person who is committing suicide, inform more than one of their social network friends. Ninety-eight terms related to suicide were collected in the year 2018 and 19 from academic, online and other sources. The terms were then sent through electronic mail to the mental health professionals of the American Association of Suicidology to validate the terms. The study found that common terms were used about suicide. There were no international phrases found by the commenters committing suicide to communicate with their social network friends (Parrott, et al 2020).

Much controversy and contradictory results have defined studies on the impact of suicide coverage in the media on suicide in the real world. The study analyses have indicated that research based on nonfictional models is more likely than research based on fictional models to discover imitative effects. However, in the analysis confined to nonfictional suicide reports, there is a significant difference in media impact. Some examples of the difference in results in the work on nonfictional media are given in the present study. Logistic regression techniques applied to 419 results from 55 studies explored that studies evaluating the involvement of either an entertainment or political celebrity were 5.27 times more likely to discover a copycat effect, studies focusing on stores that emphasized negative suicide definitions were 99% less likely to reveal a copycat effect. Television-based study (which received fewer attention than print stores) was 79% fewer likely to identify a copycat effect, and studies focused on female suicide were 4.89 times more likely than other studies to identify a copycat effect. 77.3 percent of the results from the 55 studies were graded correctly by the complete logistic regression model (Stack, 2005).

Media reflect the face of the society, and people get inspired by the media constructed messages on certain issues, while framing a sensitive issue like suicide in leading newspapers, the issue is considered as a taboo in the conservative societies of Pakistan and especially when it comes to women, the publication can sometimes violates social and cultural fabrics of a community. The study was conducted to know about the portrayal of violence against women

rights in Pashtun and Punjabi communities, where the data was drawn through comparative study of the reputed Urdu Daily Express two different edition of Lahore and Peshawar from the news stories of early three months of 2015, both the edition framed the violence against women where the issue is framed 39 and 38 respectively, but in comparison the Peshawar edition followed the culture values more than Lahore edition on their respective communities and also framed the women rights violation on the front, city and back pages of both the edition of the newspaper (Hassan & Ali 2020).

In the recent years the suicide rate in major cities of Pakistan is growing by the day due to mental illness, personal and domestic problems, suicide is forbidden according to the court of law in Pakistan and is also prohibited in Islam, keeping in mind the 97% Muslims reside in the country, suicide has become a major health problem in the country. The study carried out by Murad M Khan under the topic, "Suicide Prevention in Pakistan: an impossible challenge?", argued that it is impossible to carry out exact number of suicide as the statistics comes from different sources because people tend to avoid the government hospitals due to the disgrace and the fear of harassment by the law enforcement authorities, the study took six big cities of Pakistan as a sample, and result showed that in last decade 5,800 cases was reported by the non-governmental organizations and other human rights organizations, where the city Rawalpindi was on top where people committed suicide, and the study also portrayed that the rate suicide was high in men as compared to women (Murad, 2007).

The way media giving coverage to suicide reporting is increasing the number of suicide cases around the world. Aim of the study is to know about how media is framing suicide reports in Malaysian English newspaper The Star from the year 2013 to 2017. Result of the study revealed that the most important frame found to cover suicide case is the method of suicide through which the victim took his life in the newspaper. Authorities as a source were found in the number of stories during reporting (Fong, et al 2019).

### **Research Question**

RQ1 What is the style of suicide news reporting in the local and national newspapers in the last six months?

### **Hypothesis**

H1: It is more likely that episodic framing may be more dominant related to suicide attempts in national newspaper than in local newspapers.

H2: It is more likely that national press gives more treatment to issue of suicide.

### **Framing Theory**

Frames are developed and intimate patterns are introduced that can be applied to new ideas. Apart from considering every micro and macro appearance of a new complex idea, public use frames simplify it to understand the context easily. Frames provide hints that human use to understand information and do so by restricting or defining a message's meaning in many ways that shape the conclusion make about the message. Because frame facilitates convention, framing supposed weakness is actually one of the concepts essential strength. Frames are used to understand modern and ancient ideas by placing these within an understood terrain. Framing works through preference and importance by selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more significant in communication text. Doing this promotes specific definitions, casual clarification, moral estimation or treatment recommendation for what is being drawn. In other words, to frame is to haul to masses what the most important appearance of a problem are. The essential nature of framing means that some information about a problem is made salient, while other information is kept apart, in order to provide contextual cues. (Entman1993).

Mass media set the frames of reference that viewers or readers use to clarify and argue public events. The news is sometime the only way for

the masses gain knowledge about new issues (Gitlin & Tuchman, 1980).

### **Episodic Framing**

Episodic framing is that type of framing which present and portray the news as a specific incident that serves as an anecdotal exemplification of the issue in broader since or story of affected person put a human face on the problem or issue (Iyengar, 1991).

Covering elderly abuse stories in newspaper, newspaper mostly featured criminal cases and stories of the victims mostly frame the issue as an individual problem rather than society level problem (Mastin, et all 2007).

### **Research Methodology**

A method which is used by the researchers to conduct their studies is known as research methodology. It is a technique by which problems are solved analytically (Kothari, 2004). Content analysis method was used as a research methodology to study the print media contents on

The suicide reporting. In this study, a quantitative research approach was used, and data was obtained via quantitative content analysis. Each story was categorized using multiple codes based on the aims and study questions, such as the newspaper name, date, title, length, location, frame, and lastly the tone of the newspaper. The data was organized into key theme: episodic framing. The articles' frames are examined to see if they are predominantly episodic or not.

### **Episodic Framing Parameter**

Parameters for episodic framing in the study would be depression, cut oneself through knife or blade, burn oneself, lost game and commit suicide, fight with lover and commit suicide, drink acid, fight with parents, poison, hanging, shoot oneself through gun, slow judiciary system, FIR and investigation.

**Data Analysis**

**Table 1 Total Stories Published in Newspapers from April 1<sup>st</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup>**

Newspapers	F
Daily Express	31
Daily Chand	1
Total	32

Table 1 shows the number of stories which are framed as episodic framing is published in both the newspapers. It shows that 96.9% episodic stories had published in Daily Express while 3.1% stories published in Daily Chand.

**Table 2 Stories Published Month Wise**

Table 2 reveals the number of stories published in every month. It shows that 9.4% stories had

published in the month of April and May. In June 15.6% stories were published. 18.8% of the stories in July. In the month of August 21.9% of the stories reading episodic framing had published while 25 % stories published in September.

**Table 3 Age of the Suicide Committer**

Table 3 explores the age of the people who committed suicide. It shows that 9.4% of the committer's age is from 15 to 20 years. Age between 21 to 25 years, the percentage of the committers is 18.8%. 3.1% of the reported suicide stories age is from 26 to 30 years. From 31 to 35 years and 36 to 40 years of age the number of suicide committers is 6.3% each. 12.5% of the reported suicide cases age is more than 40 years. While, 43.8% of the committers is not specified in the news story.

**Table 4 Gender of the Committers**

Gender	F	%
Male	20	62.5
Female	12	37.5
Total	32	100.0

Table 4 shows the gender of the people who committed suicide. It shows that 62.5% of the

committers of suicide were male while 37.5% of the masses who committed suicide were female.

**Table 5 Column Wise Coverage**

Column	F	%
1	11	34.4
2	20	62.5
3	1	3.1
Total	32	100.0

Months	F	%
April	3	9.4
May	3	9.4
June	5	15.6
July	6	18.8
August	7	21.9
September	8	25.0
Total	32	100.0

Table 5 illustrates column wise stores published about suicide stories. It shows that 34.4% of the stories published one column. Two column stories printed in the newspapers had 62.5%

while 3.1% of the stories published in three column stories.

Ages	F	%
15-20	3	9.4
21-25	6	18.8
26-30	1	3.1
31-35	2	6.3
36-40	2	6.3
More than 40	4	12.5
Unknown	14	43.8
Total	32	100.0

**Table 6 Page Wise Placement**

Pages	F	%
Front page	2	6.3
Back page	18	56.3
City page	8	25.0
National/International	3	9.4
Others	1	3.1
Total	32	100.0

Table 6 explores the page wise placement of the stories about suicide. In which, 6.3% of the suicide stories had published in front page. Stories printed on the back side of the newspaper is 56.3% while 25% of the stories regarding

suicide printed on city page of the newspaper. In national or international page 9.4% stories and 3.1% stories printed in other pages of the newspaper about suicide.

**Table 7 Tools Used to Commit Suicide**

Tools for Suicide	F	%
Shoot by pistol	4	12.5
Poison	14	43.8
Hanging	6	18.8
Cut by knife	2	6.3
Burn oneself	1	3.1
Jump into water	2	6.3
Jump from the building	1	3.1
Drink acid	2	6.3
Total	32	100.0

Table 7 found the tool from which the person took their life. 12.5% of the committers take their life by shooting themselves by gun. 43.8% of the people who committed suicide took their life taking poison. Hanging method used to take

life by the person is 18.8%. Committer took their life by cutting through knife; jump into water and drink acid is 6.3% by each method. 3.1% died by burning themselves as well as jump from building.

**Table 8 Status of the Suicide Committers**

Marital Status	F	%
Single	12	37.5
Married	11	34.4
Divorced	0	0.0
Unspecified	9	28.1
Total	32	100.0

Table 8 reveals the status of the committers who committed suicide. In which 37.5% of the committers are single, married suicide

committers are 34.4%. While 28.1% of the committers of the suicide are unspecified.

**Table 9 Stories Publicizing Particular Case Study**

Particular Case	F	%
Depression	9	28.1
Lost game	1	3.1
Fight with parents	5	15.6
Fight with lover	1	3.1
Fight with husband	3	9.4
Fail in love	1	3.1
Slow judiciary system	4	12.5
Because of illness	2	6.3
Wanted to get married	2	6.3
Disable person	1	3.1
Demand to buy new cloths	1	3.1
Killed wife and commit suicide	1	3.1
Blackmailing	1	3.1
Total	32	100.0



Table 9 illustrates that either the story was displayed as specific issue or case study. In which 28.1% committers took their life because of depression. 3.1% each life take commit suicide by lost game, fight with lover, fail in love, disable person, demand to buy new cloth, killed wife and commit

suicide and black mailing. 15.6% commit suicide by fight with their parents. Person took his life because of fight with husband is 9.4%. While, due to slow judiciary system 12.5% people took their life in the reported stories. Suicide done due to illness and wanted to get married is 6.3% each.

**Table 10 Is Legal Reforms Listed in the Story**

Legal Reform	F	%
FIR	18	56.3
Hospital	3	9.4
Both	6	18.8
No details	5	15.6
Total	32	100.0



Table 10 shows that whether legal reforms have done in the story or not. It shows that 56.3% of the stories, FIR has been reported and investigation is started by the police. In 9.4% stories, the victim has been sent to

hospital. While, in 18.8% stories both FIR and hospital reforms have reported in the stories. No details about legal reform found in 15.6% of the suicide reported stories in both the newspapers.

**Table 11 Does the Story Display as Repeated Event**

Repeated Event		
Yes	30	93.7
No	2	6.3
Total	32	100.0

Table 11 illustrates that 93.7% of the stories have found as separated event while 6.3% of the suicide stories do not reported as repeated event.

**Table 12 Is Blame Imposed on the Offender**

Blame		
Yes	12	37.5
No	20	62.5
Total	32	100.0

Table 12 explores that either blame was imposed on the offender or not. In which, 37.5% of the reported news stories blame was imposed on the offender. While, in 62.5% of the stories no blame was imposed on the offender in the reported stories.

**Table 13 Is there Common Method Used by the Victim**

Marital Status		
Yes	27	84.4
No	5	15.6
Total	32	100.0

Table 13 illustrates the method used by the victim for committing suicide. In which, 84.4% of the committers used common method while 15.6% of the suicide did not use common method.

more coverage to episodic framing than Daily Chand. Result of the study unveiled that suicide related news published in the month of September is higher in number which is 25%. While, in the month of April and May 9.4% each stories are printed in both the newspaper about suicide in episodic framing. It shows that most of the reported episodic framing suicide cases have reported in September. Result of the study also exposed that most of the suicide

**Results & Discussion**

Result of the study explored that 96.9% of the suicide reporting is framed as episodic framing in Daily Express and 3.1% in Daily Chand. It shows that Daily Express gives

related news printed in both the newspaper according to dateline is 21.9% from the Lahore as episodic framing. Result of the study revealed that the high number of suicide ratio is found in the age between 21 to 25 years which is 18.8%. One the other hand the result also disclosed the lowest rate of suicide between the age of 26 to 30 years which is only 3.1% which are framed as episodic framing. It shows that the young generation has the high tendency to commit suicide as compared to other age's people. Result of the study also unveiled that in covering suicide related news in episodic framing the higher number is found in male which is 62.5% while in the same framing the lower number of suicide cases found in female which is 37.5%. It shows that the higher number of suicide committed by male. Result of the study found that 62.5% of the suicide news stories are placed as two column stories while only 3.1% of the suicide news stories are placed as 3 column story. Which means that print media is mostly giving 2 column space to suicide news stories. Result of the study examined that 56.3% of the suicide news is printed in back page in episodic framing and 6.3% in front page. It shows that most of the stories about suicide news is printed in the back page of the newspaper. Result of the study also revealed that 43.8% of the suicide committers in episodic framing used to take poison to end their life. While, 3.1% of the committers take their life by jumping from the building and burning themselves. It shows that the most common method used by the

suicide committer is poison. Result of the study unveiled that in episodic framing suicide stories 37.5% of the committers are unmarried and 34.4% are married. It shows that the ratio of suicide is found more in both unmarried and unmarried people. Result of the study found that the story was reported a specific case or case study as it is done in episodic framing. It shows that 28.1% of the suicide committers lost their life due to depression. Suicide committed by the people because of lost game, fight with lover, fail in love, disable person, demand to buy new cloths, killed wife and commit suicide and blackmailing found 3.1% each. It shows that depression is one of the major problems which lead a person to death. Result of the study explored that in most of the suicide stories printed as episodic framing legal reforms have been done. In which 56.3% of the cases FIR have been filed and investigation is started by the police department to know about the case. In 9.4% of the cases the dead body has been shifted to hospital to investigate the study. It shows that legal reforms is done when such incident occur. Result of the study revealed that in episodic framing 93.7% of the suicide cases as reported as repeated event and 6.3% cases it was not repeated event. Result of the study disclosed that in 62.5% of the suicide stories framed as episodic framing blame was not imposed on the offender while in 37.5% of the suicide cases offenders were blamed that because of that person one is committing suicide. Result of the study found that in 84.4% of the



Months	Newspapers	
	Express	Chand
April	3	0
May	3	0
June	5	0

July	6	1
Aug	7	0
Sep	8	0
Total	31	1
Column wise coverage		
1	10	1
2	20	0
3	01	0
Total	31	1

stories, same method or tool is used for committing suicide. While in 15.6% of the cases printed as episodic framing same tool or method is not used by the suicide committer to take their life. It shows that most of the time same method, tactics or tool is used by a person to end their life.

**Hypothesis Verification**

**H1:** “It is more likely that episodic framing may be more dominant related to suicide attempts in national newspaper than in local newspapers.” **Independent Samples Test**



t-test for Equality of Means				
		Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Thematic	Equal variances assumed	.002	-1.68391	.52115
	Equal variances not assumed	.005	-1.68391	.55008
Thematic	Equal variances	.013	-8.45161	3.18965

assumed		
Equal	.	-8.45161
variances		
not assumed		

Since  $p < .002$  &  $.013$  is less than our selected meaning amounts  $p = 0.05$ , the null hypothesis can be rejected and we can infer that the mean episodic frames and thematic frames are substantially different. A substantial difference between episodic and thematic frames was observed in the mean suicide coverage ( $t = -1.68391$ ,  $p = .683$ ,  $p < .001$  &  $t = -8.45161$ ,  $p < .013$ ).

The hypothesis approved the assumption “It is more likely that episodic framing may be more dominant related to suicide attempts in national newspaper than in local newspapers” as Daily Express gives more coverage to suicide related stories as compared to local press.

**H2:** “It is more likely that national press gives more treatment to issue of suicide.”

The tables show the frequencies of the both newspapers news stories about suicide attempts whereas national newspaper has covered the issue more than local newspaper on the bases of month as well as space given to the news. Daily express published 3 news stories in

The month of April and May. June 5, July 6 and September 7, while Daily Chand published only one story in the month of July.

The hypothesis approved the assumption “It is more likely that national press gives more treatment to issue of suicide” as the national newspaper gives more coverage to suicide related news.

### Conclusion

Aim of the study was to know about how the local and national newspapers of the country are framing suicide. In this research, episodic framing about suicide was studied. Data was collected from the newspapers of six months, April 1<sup>st</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup> 2020. It was found that both local and national newspapers are giving episodic framing to suicide related news. It is concluded that a total of 32 news stories about suicide news stories were found and framed in episodic framing. In which 31 (96.9%) stories were found in Daily Express and 1 (3.1%) story in Daily Chand. It is also concluded that the ratio of suicide is found more in male as compared to female as well as in unmarried and married people respectively. It is also concluded that most of the suicide cases happened because of depression. It is also concluded that most of the suicide committers took their life by taking poison.

### Recommendations

- It recommended that suicide is not solution of the problem. Problems should be solved peacefully.
- It is recommended that media should not show the method of suicide as it may help a person to commit suicide.
- It is also recommended that media do not sensationalize the suicide.
- It is recommended that media organizations do not publish the photographs of the suicide victims.

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