

## Support for continued caution in reporting suicide

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**Current Australian media codes and guidelines on the reporting of suicide have been backed by two new reports.**

The *Mindframe* National Media Initiative, which provides advice to media and health professionals about portrayals of suicide and mental illness, was today drawing attention to two reports, which follow recent media debates about the guidelines. The reports, have been uploaded onto the *Mindframe* website for viewing at [www.mindframe-media.info](http://www.mindframe-media.info)

The first report is an updated independent critical review of national and international research evidence related to news and information media, which indicates an overwhelming need for continued media caution due to the risk of copycat behaviour.

Key findings:

- Reports of suicide deaths can influence copycat acts in some cases;
- The risk of copycat behaviour is increased where the story is prominent, is about a celebrity, details method and/or location or glorifies the death in some way.

The second report, the Media Monitoring Study, shows that while the number of suicide and mental health related stories in the Australian media has increased almost two fold since the inception of the *Mindframe* guidelines in 2002, the overall quality of reporting has improved.

Key findings:

- News reporting of suicide and mental illness in 2006/07 (8,363 reports) was much more extensive than compared to 2000/01 (4,813 reports).
- The quality of suicide reporting improved overall from 57% to 75%, bringing Australian reporting more in line with the evidence and *Mindframe* resources.

The *Mindframe* resources provide advice to both the media and the mental health and suicide prevention sectors on ways to minimise potential harm in reports.

*Mindframe* has called on the suicide prevention sector and the media to work closely together to ensure any reporting is done responsibly and balanced against the public's 'right to know'. Especially since there is overwhelming evidence in support of potential harm and the lack of research evidence to support positive benefits of suicide campaigns in the media.

There is a clear difference between reporting suicide deaths and covering the issue of suicide in the media. The critical review of the evidence around media reporting of suicide confirms that the Australian guidelines are still as relevant to the media as they were 10 years ago. There is also often a perception the media reports less on suicide, when the Media Monitoring Study shows that since the inception of the guidelines, reports have almost doubled.

Copies of both reports as well as resources for media professionals, can be obtained from the *Mindframe* website at [www.mindframe-media.info](http://www.mindframe-media.info)

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