Ghana Guidelines for Appropriate Media Reporting of Suicide

This media resource has been developed in collaboration with: Association for Suicide Prevention Ghana [GASP], Centre for Suicide and Violence Research [CSVR], National Media Commission [NMC], Mental Health Authority [MHA], Ghana Health Service [GHS], Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association [GIBA], Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana [PRINPAG], Department of Psychology–University of Ghana, School of Public Health–University of Ghana, Ghana Psychological Association [GPA], Department of Journalism–University of Media, Arts and Communication [UniMAC], Key Advocates, Persons and Families with lived and living experience of [attempted] suicide, Key Journalists, and Leading representatives of the three main religious bodies in Ghana [African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam].

DOs	
✔	Protect the identity of the victim and survivors of suicide and relatives.
✔	Include comments from [mental] health professionals or suicide prevention experts, and multi-source experts [in the absence of a mental health expert, consult verified suicide resources (Online) such as https://www.iasp.info/suicidalthoughts/; https://www.who.int/health-topics/suicide#tab=tab_1].
✔	Use appropriate terminologies and language.
✔	Provide help-seeking information [e.g., you may consider including the Ghana Mental Health Psychosocial support toll-free helpline, 0800678679, or email the Association for Suicide Prevention Ghana through, suicideprevention.ghana@gmail.com]
✔	Demystify the myths about suicide with evidence-based facts about suicide.
✔	Be informed and educated about the legal framework for covering stories on suicide.
✔	Exercise caution and circumspection in interviewing bereaved family members, loved ones, friends or persons with lived and living experiences of suicide.
✔	Media owners should make provision for psychosocial support for their personnel, as media professionals can be affected by suicide and its coverage.
✔	Apply particular caution when reporting celebrity suicide or suicide by influential people, as this could increase the risk of imitative (copycat) suicide in vulnerable readers, listeners or viewers.

DON'Ts	
X	Don't use criminalising language that presents suicide as a crime or sin [e.g., "commit/committed suicide"]. Avoid referring to a suicide as "successful", "unsuccessful attempt" or "failed attempt" in the news report.
X	Don't use sensational language in headlines, and as much as possible avoid using the word "suicide" in a headline (except where the article is about "suicide prevention" where the word "prevention" is used in the headline). Instead of "suicide", you can consider saying "ended his/her life", "taken/took his/her life", etc.
X	Don't attribute the cause of suicide to a single reason or factor.
X	Don't use prejudicial, condemnatory, pejorative, sarcastic, stigmatising or inflammatory comments about the suicidal person.
X	Don't describe the methods used.
X	Don't draw religious interpretations and condemnations of the suicidal person or relatives.
X	Don't publish suicide notes, text messages, or social media posts of the deceased.
X	Don't name or provide specific details about the specific site and location of the suicide.
X	Don't use photographs [including images of the victims or graphics or illustrations showing methods/detailed descriptions of the suicide], video footages, audio recordings, or digital or social media links.
X	Don't give prominence to suicide and suicide-related stories, and don't unduly repeat such stories.
X	Don't allow caller commentaries and deactivate reader comment functions.

GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING CHILD SUICIDE

1]. Avoid describing a suicide or suicide attempts.
2]. Avoid sharing videos, images, and illustrations in the suicide story.
3]. Avoid reporting suicide as a trivial issue.
4]. Avoid words or phrases that support suicide as an option to dealing with challenges.
5]. Avoid words or phrases that make suicide appealing.
6]. The story should be focused on suicide prevention.
7]. Share hopeful stories about (young) persons who have overcome suicidal thoughts, feelings, or attempts.
8]. Spread in-depth awareness about mental health, resilience, and suicide prevention.
9]. Respect the privacy of the bereaved family while reporting on suicide.
10]. Children and adolescent suicide related stories should have disabled comment sections [for all platforms].
11]. Provide helpline numbers, chatlines and email addresses of child and adolescent mental health services.
12]. Suicide is a complex phenomenon, therefore, involve a mental health expert in your reportage [in the absence of a mental health expert, consult verified suicide resources (Online) such as https://www.iasp.info/suicidalthoughts/; https://www.who.int/health-topics/suicide#tab=tab_1].

GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING SUICIDE ON DIGITAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

1]. Be cautious when referring to online sources on suicide news or reports.
i]. Ensure that your source is credible and reliable.
ii]. Take caution and be culturally sensitive in the reportage.
iii]. Ensure that the use of hyperlinks leads to suicide-preventive material or supportive information.
iv]. Avoid hyperlinking of suicidal contents in social media that lead to video or audio footage or online links to the method or location/site of a suicide.

2]. Moderate inappropriate comments on website forums.
i]. Managers and owners of various platforms [including bloggers, social media influencers] should put in place measures or mechanisms to ensure that comments in response to suicide reports do not promote or encourage suicide. Mechanisms should include moderating or delaying comment display on the platform or delete comment.
ii]. Ensure that users accessing the platform/page are provided with suicide literacy and what constitutes appropriate material worth sharing.
iii]. Moderators of website forums should provide evidence-based feedback to reader concerns, questions, and comments.
iv]. Be familiar with and follow directives of the Data Protection Act, 2012 [Act 843].

3]. Social media platforms should include features for managing suicidal content and preventing suicides.
i]. Provide for a reporting mechanism [e.g., a clickable button] for users to report if they are concerned about a person who is vulnerable and/or at risk of suicide based on the information presented on their social media accounts.
ii]. Conduct regular workshops for owners and managers of social media websites, organisations, content managers etc. on implementing the guidelines for suicide reporting in the media.
iii]. Provide a reliable helpline/contact which directs people to an expert [e.g., consider including the Ghana Mental Health Psychosocial support toll-free helpline, 0800678679, or email the Association for Suicide Prevention Ghana through, suicideprevention.ghana@gmail.com, or verified suicide resources (Online) such as https://www.iasp.info/suicidalthoughts/; https://www.who.int/health-topics/suicide#tab=tab_1].

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