October 15, 2021

Story on suicide

Attention has been drawn by the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka (PCCSL) for a story making headlines in most newspapers on Oct. 15, 2021, concerning two Iranians who committed suicide by drinking a 'sanitizer'.

The Editors' Code states in **Clause 6. General Reporting and Writing Sub Clause 6.5:** *When reporting suicide, care should be taken not to give excessive detail of the method used.*

The Editors' Guild included this provision into the Editors' Code after the media in Sri Lanka was held partly responsible for the very high rate of suicides in Sri Lanka.

Suicide is a major public health problem, with far-reaching social, emotional and economic consequences. World Health Organisation (WHO) statistics say more than 700,000 people die a day of suicides claiming to be the 4th highest form of death especially among teenagers between the ages of 15 to 19 years.

The factors contributing to suicide and its prevention are complex and not fully understood, but there is evidence that the media plays a significant role. On the one hand, vulnerable individuals may be influenced to engage in imitative behaviours by reports of suicide, particularly if the coverage is extensive, prominent, sensationalist and/or explicitly describes the method of suicide. On the other hand, responsible reporting may serve to educate the public about suicide, and may encourage those at risk of suicide to seek help.

Please alert your deputies, desk heads, sub editors and journalists to exercise care when reporting on suicides. As always, the PCCSL is ready if you need them to explain the Code of Professional Practice to journalists, which I include for your study.

Yours sincerely
PRESS COMPLAINTS COMMISSION

Sukumar Rockwood
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