

Older People, Suicide and Media Reporting

The media have a powerful influence in educating the general population about suicide in older people and its prevention. There is growing evidence that the way the media reports the suicide of an older person can influence the public's knowledge about warning signs and behaviours, causes, and supports and treatments that are available. Television, radio, newspapers and the Internet are ideally placed to influence the wider public's perception of suicide in older people. It is possible to report the suicide of an older person accurately, sensitively and ethically whilst maintaining media 'freedom' to report.

Unfortunately *sensational* and *over-simplistic* reporting of suicides by older people persists. This can have potentially disastrous consequences; whilst such unhelpful reporting does not cause suicide it can act as 'trigger' for vulnerable older people who are already predisposed to the idea of taking their own life. Evidence tells us that suicide rates increase when the media:

- Increase the number of stories about suicide
- A significant suicide is reported in detail, or in many stories
- A suicide story is placed on the front page or is the lead item in a report
- Headlines about a suicide are presented dramatically

Good practice in reporting suicide involves:

- Being sensitive to the feelings of relatives and friends
- Avoiding too much detail about the method used
- Providing information about the help that is available
- Appreciating the complex nature of the problem

For more information see the Mediawise Web site at:
www.mediawise.org.uk

