

## 1. Abstract

### **Background:**

Stigma erodes confidence that mental disorders are valid, treatable health conditions. Psychosis is a major mental illness that is highly vulnerable to stigma. It is a well-researched fact that adverse reporting of suicide in media lead to copycat suicide. Many governments and non-government organizations has published guidelines for journalists to assist them in reporting on mental illness and suicide. There is a big vacuum in studies regarding Suicide and Psychosis reporting in Sinhalese Media, especially Newspapers.

### **Methodology:**

A cross sectional study was done among newspaper articles on Psychosis and Suicide from two major daily Sinhalese newspapers published in the period November/December 1986 and 2011. Papers were scanned manually for the terms Suicide and terms denoting Psychosis.

Articles on completed suicide were analysed to find whether they abide with published guidelines on suicide reporting.

Articles directly related to Psychosis were coded by principal investigator under six main themes. Articles were assessed by two independent assessors regarding the positivity of two key messages.

### **Results:**

There was a significant reduction in reporting of completed suicide in 2011. 12% articles carried photographs and all of which appeared in 2011. Trend to glorify the act in reporting were more in 2011. No difference was seen in relation to other indicators over the time. Majority of articles discussed the methods in detail, highlighted the method in headline, gave a simple cause for the act and depicted suicide as an appropriate way to resolve problems. Less than 10% articles carried details of a suicide note or appeared in front page. Very few articles discussed about prevention and involvement of mental illness. No articles discussed about help available or considered the impact on the family from the incident or from the report.

In 81 articles, term related to Psychosis was used to describe another person or an event. Most of these terms were pejorative and commonly appeared in fiction. Most of the descriptive terms denote the meaning irrationality or dangerousness.

There were 99 articles directly relating to Psychosis, out of which only 9 were medical news reports. About 70% articles discussed the theme dangerousness. About 40% articles discussed about causation mostly looking at a social aetiology. Over 70% articles discussed about treatment and mostly about Angoda / Mulleriyawa hospitals. The only theme where there was a difference between times was regarding advocacy aspects with a

marked reduction in 2011. Very few articles discussed about prevention or about an exact diagnosis.

15% articles carried the message that Mental illness is treatable while 56% articles were negative for the message that people with mental illness can live a worthwhile life.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation:**

Reporting on Suicide and Psychosis is quite negative in Sinhalese Newspapers and there were no improvement noticed over the last 25 years. Mental health professionals should liaise with media personnel and take effective measures, in order to remedy this deficiency assertively.

