

Suicide and gender roles: newspaper reporting distorts reality

Men angry and rejected, women sociable and mentally ill – a study by the MedUni Vienna (Eisenwort et al, 2014)

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demonstrates that these gender stereotypes prevail when Austrian daily newspapers report on suicide. This has far-reaching consequences.

When it comes to suicidal behaviour, there is a clear gender paradox: the ratio of men to women who actually commit suicide is three to one, but with attempted suicides it is exactly the opposite – three women for every one man. The study demonstrates that the cultural script that bears partial responsibility for this is also found in reports by Austrian daily newspapers.

These gender-specific differences are made visible by the

formulation, the nature and frequency of reported suicide motives. Articles about suicide in women focus more on sociability, relationships with other people and motives that are anchored in the family environment. Psychiatric illnesses are also cited as a motive and are described in a stigmatising manner. More complex language and cautious expressions are also the hallmarks of articles about female suicide. In contrast, the articles about male suicide use more words that relate to anger and rejection.

A very specific problem arises from this, as study leader Dr Brigitte Eisenwort from the University Department of Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine at the MedUni Vienna explains: ‘Mental ill-

nesses are described in a stigmatising way and are also generally under-represented, since they are barely mentioned at all in reports about suicidal men. This means that one key approach to prevention fails to register in the minds of Austrian readers. Psychiatric illnesses can be treated. The suicide risk can be reduced as a result.’

The researchers emphasize that journalists should take care to present as correct a view as possible of suicidal tendencies and not revert to stereotypical portrayals of men and women.

Eisenwort B, Till B, Hinterbuchinger B, Niederkroenthaler Th (2014) Sociable, mentally disturbed women and angry rejected men: Cultural scripts for the suicidal behaviour of women and men in the Austrian print media. *Sex Roles* 71: 246–60

Depressive symptoms lead to poorer outcome of spinal surgery

Even mild depressive symptoms can weaken the outcome of lumbar spinal stenosis surgery, according to a study from Finland. Patients with depressive symptoms had a weaker functional capacity post-surgery even 5 years after surgery (Pakarinen et al, 2014).

The study involved 102 patients. Before surgery for lumbar spinal stenosis, patients filled out a survey charting their mental status, feelings of pain, and functional capacity such as limitations to walking, lifting or sitting.

The survey was repeated 3 months, 1 year, 2 years and 5 years after surgery. Patients with depressive symptoms suffered from weaker functional capacity during the 5-year follow-up, and after 5 years 15% of patients had

depressive symptoms that could be diagnosed as at least mild depression.

‘...attention should be paid to even mild depressive symptoms both before and after the surgery,’ said Dr Maarit Pakarinen, from the Department of Psychiatry, Kuopio University Hospital and University of Eastern Finland, Kuopio, Finland. Dr Pakarinen continued: ‘This would allow health care professionals to recognize patients who might benefit from enhanced psychosocial support as part of their surgery-related treatment and rehabilitation process.’

Pakarinen M, Vanhanen S, Sinikallio S, Aalto T, Lehto SM, Airaksinen O, Viinamäki H (2014) Depressive burden is associated with a poorer surgical outcome among lumbar spinal stenosis patients: a 5-year follow-up study. *Spine J* 14(10): 2392–6 (doi: 10.1016/j.spinee.2014.01.047)

Gap from child to adult palliative services ‘too large’

The differences between children’s and adult palliative care services are too wide for young people with life-limiting conditions to negotiate, according to research by a team from Bangor University (www.bangor.ac.uk/so/bridging-the-gap/index.php.en).

The researchers call for adult palliative care services to extend their scope to better meet the needs of young people with life-limiting conditions and their families.

Planning for the move from children’s to adult palliative care was often not focussed on the young person and what they wanted or needed. Many young people did not have a ‘key worker’ or someone to support them in organizing their transition so it was

easy for young people to get lost and fall through the gaps. Important things such as the young person’s views on their pain and symptom management and changes in the way that the young person liked or needed to eat and drink were often not covered by transition plans.

Young people and parents also highlighted how the differences between children’s and adult palliative care services affected them. Young people with life-limiting conditions were used to ‘parallel planning’ whereby children’s palliative care services provided holistic support from diagnosis onwards for young people and their families to enjoy life as well as planning for end of life care when needed.

Changing faces of *Streptococcus pneumoniae*

Every 10 seconds a human being dies from *Streptococcus pneumoniae* infection, also known as pneumococcus.

A team of international experts, including an interdisciplinary team from the University of Leicester, has unlocked a genetic switch controlling the bacteria's ability to cause disease. This finding could allow the development of improved vaccines (Manso et al, 2014).

Pneumococcus is the main cause of pneumonia, sinusitis, blood infections, meningitis and otitis media. Pneumococcal disease affects children and the elderly, and it is one of the leading infectious diseases worldwide.

The study was co-authored by Professor Marco Oggioni

from the University of Leicester's Department of Genetics with an international team including Professor Michael Jennings from Griffith University's Institute for Glycomics, Professor James Paton from the University of Adelaide and scientists from Pacific Biosciences, and has for the first time shown a genetic switch that allows this bacterium to randomly change its characteristics into six alternative states.

The discovery indicates that the ability of the pneumococcus to cause deadly infections is different in each of these six states and each form is randomly generated by a phase variable methylation system, as if the bacteria were playing dice

and assigning themselves to any one of the six potential outcomes. Some states favour harmless colonization or spread from person to person, while others favour invasive, life-threatening disease.

Professor Oggioni said: 'Facing a bacteria with six and more phase variable systems is like being simultaneously confronted with six different bacteria; it gives them an unfair advantage, but knowing the genetic basis now places us in an optimal position to reinvestigate drug and vaccine efficacy.'

Manso AS, Chai MH, Attack JM et al (2014) A random six-phase switch regulates pneumococcal virulence via global epigenetic changes. *Nat Commun* 5: 5055 (doi: 10.1038/ncomms6055)

Call for virtual e-cancer hospitals

Professor Mark Lawler from the Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology at Queen's University Belfast has highlighted how Cancer Core Europe, a visionary approach by six European institutions to create virtual e-cancer hospitals, will allow data sharing between different centres to help maximize success in diagnosing and treating cancer.

Perinatal mental health problems cost £8 billion, says LSE

Mental health problems in pregnancy cost the UK £8.1 billion each year, according to a report from the London School of Economics and Political Science and the Centre for Mental Health. The report calls for the NHS to spend £337 million a year to bring perinatal mental health care up to the level recommended in national guidance.

Once-daily bronchodilator treatment for COPD

Increase Ellipta is a maintenance bronchodilator treatment to relieve symptoms in adults with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Increase (umeclidinium 55 µg), a once-daily long-acting muscarinic antagonist, will let clinicians tailor treatments to patients' needs.

Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh calls for changes to surgical training system

For the first time trainee surgeons across the UK will be taught by accredited consultants using surgical standards developed specifically by the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh's



Faculty of Surgical Trainers (McIlhenny and Pitts, 2014).

Mr Craig McIlhenny, Faculty of Surgical Trainers Surgical Director, led the development of the standards. He believes that a more professional surgical landscape is vital to provide high quality patient care, and a service that is able to respond and adapt to 7-day working.

'Learning to be a surgeon... [is] a challenging area of medi-

cal training carried out in a high pressure environment where the life of a patient is at stake. The Standards will give trainers a framework of excellence that will ensure tomorrow's surgeons have the practical skills and technical knowledge they need – and importantly, a professional attitude,' he explained.

The standards will ensure that consultants who provide training should be able to:

- Prioritize patient care while delivering high quality training
- Challenge poor practice and promote improvements

- Support underperforming trainees

- Plan the best training opportunities for trainees at all levels.

Michael Moran, a specialty surgical trainee speaking on behalf of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh's Trainees' Committee, welcomed the introduction of the standards: 'There are many exceptional trainers across all surgical specialties, but there are also consultants who only allow their trainees to do operations they already know... In some cases we are being trained by excellent surgeons, but far from excellent surgical trainers.'

McIlhenny C, Pitts D (2014) Standards for Surgical Trainers. www.rcsed.ac.uk/media/355416/surgical%20trainers-web.pdf (accessed 31 October 2014)