

Institution: University of Strathclyde
Unit of Assessment: 29
Title of case study: Promoting Higher Standards of Media Reporting of Mental Health, Suicide and the Bereaved through Improved Professional Guidelines.
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Dr Sallyanne Duncan's research on journalists' reporting of the bereaved during 2010-12 prompted the National Union of Journalists (Scotland) to commission her to revise and enhance their existing media guidelines on the reporting of mental health and suicide, between June 2012 and March 2013. This was the catalyst for an event that Dr Duncan organised at the University of Strathclyde on May 2, 2013 titled 'Reporting Mental Health and Suicide by the Media'. Impact can be traced in two distinct areas: improved NUJ guidelines, incorporating academic research relating to mental health, suicide and bereavement; and, sharing knowledge and best practice by bringing together mental health and suicide groups, journalists and the NUJ at the 'Engage with Strathclyde' event.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Context: Many journalists need guidance or reassurance on the most appropriate action to take in a given situation, even if evidence suggests that they handle situations responsibly, because journalists generally work autonomously and have to rely on their own interpretation of regulatory systems. The research that underpins this case study is a body of work that explores the manner in which journalists report stories about vulnerable people (specifically the bereaved), the characteristics and narrative forms of reporting death, the expectations of editors and news managers, and the perceptions of bereaved relatives who engage with the media. Dr Duncan (University of Strathclyde) and Ms Jackie Newton (Liverpool John Moores University) are the first to conduct significant research into personal bereavement reporting. In their collaborative research, Duncan's contribution focuses on reporters' attitudes and approaches to death reporting and their use of social media within this circumstance, whereas Newton's contribution tends to focus on bereaved families and their experiences.</p> <p>Key Findings: Research by Duncan (from 2008 – 2013) indicates that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most journalists are insufficiently informed about mental illness, suicide and bereavement and receive little training in dealing with traumatised interviewees despite the sensitive nature of such contact [reference 1]. • Reporters prefer face-to-face contact with the bereaved rather than taking material from social media [2]. • Editors are central to the establishment of professional standards on their news organisations and are in a key position to set the standard, tone and style of intrusive reporting [3]. <p>Duncan and Newton's collaborative work (2009 – 2013) mainly led by Duncan, resulted in the following findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journalists would welcome further guidance on the use of social media when reporting on vulnerable people [4]. • News managers will continue to expect reporters to resolve ethical dilemmas themselves despite reform after the Leveson Report [5]. • Journalists can experience mental distress when reporting traumatic stories [6]. • Journalists, specifically reporters, enter into a veiled contract with the traumatised which depends on consideration of the context of the reporting, the consent of those involved in the story to use certain material and consequently, the provision of an element of control to vulnerable people when reporting their stories [7]. <p>Key researchers: Dr Sallyanne Duncan. Lecturer in Journalism and Programme Director, MLitt Digital Journalism, University of Strathclyde; 2002 - present. Ms Jackie Newton, Senior Lecturer in Journalism at Liverpool John Moores University.</p>
3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)
Outputs 1, 2, 3 and 4 are included in the REF2 submission for UoA29.

Impact case study (REF3b)

- [1] Duncan, S. & Newton, J. (2010), 'How do you feel? Preparing Novice Reporters for the Death Knock'. *Journalism Practice*, 4 (4), pp.439-453. ISSN 1751-2786.
- [2] Newton, J. & Duncan, S. (2012), 'Hacking into Tragedy: Exploring the Ethics of Death Reporting in the Social Media Age'. In *The Phone Hacking Scandal: Journalism on Trial*, Richard Lance Keeble and John Mair (eds.), Abramis Academic Publishing, 2012, pp.208-219. ISBN: 978 1 84549 533 6.
- [3] Duncan, S. (2012), 'Sadly Missed: The Death Knock News Story as a Personal Narrative of Grief'. *Journalism*, 13 (5), pp.589-603. ISSN 1464-8849.
- [4] Duncan, S. & Diamond, P. (2010), 'Professional and Ethical Issues in Reporting the Traumatic Testimony of Women Asylum Seekers'. In *Trauma, Media, Art: New Perspectives*. Broderick, M. & Traverso, A. (eds). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp.194-210. ISBN 978-1-4438-2283-1.
- [5] Duncan, S. & Newton, J. (2013), 'A Better Death in a Digital Age: Post-Leveson Indicators for More Responsible Reporting of the Bereaved'. In *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics*, 10(1) pp.22-28. ISSN 1742-0105. Special ICE conference issue: After Leveson?
- [6] Newton, J. & Duncan, S. (2012), 'Journalists and the Bereaved: Constructing a Positive Approach to the Teaching of Death Reporting', *Journalism Education*, 1(2) pp.59-67. ISSN: 2050-3903. This publication is the online journal of the Association for Journalism Education (UK).

Other evidence for quality of research

All journal articles are peer-reviewed by two academic referees. Journal editors, peer reviewers and academic commentators have described Duncan's work (both her own and with Newton) as "ground-breaking", "unusual", "brilliant" and "terrific". They highlight the research's cultural implications and importance to the daily practice of journalism and relationships with the bereaved, stating the research is "the kind of information needed at the Leveson Inquiry." Consequently, the authors submitted evidence to the Inquiry in April 2012.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)**Process from research to impact**

Duncan's research has been disseminated at several practitioner/academic events: International Association for Media and Communication Research, Dublin June 2013; Future of Humanitarian Reporting, London March 2013; Institute of Communication Ethics, London October 2011 and October 2012; Future of Journalism, Cardiff 2009; and Association for Journalism Education, Liverpool 2008 and Preston 2012. Also, in June 2012, she led a roundtable discussion of her co-authored research with a group of practicing journalists and trauma charity directors for the renowned DART Centre Europe, a global network for journalists who cover trauma and violence. Their director said: "[Dr Duncan's] research on media intrusion, interviewing technique and the reporting of bereavement offers insight that is useful for both academic researchers and journalists working in the field. It comes at a time of great ferment within UK journalism and it makes a valuable contribution to any coherent programme that seeks to raise professional standards within journalism and to make reporting both more ethical and more relevant to its public" (Source 1).

Duncan's research on journalists' reporting of the bereaved prompted the National Union of Journalists (Scotland) to commission her to revise and enhance their existing media guidelines on the reporting of mental health and suicide. Her research informed revisions to the improved guidelines which were re-written between June 2012 and March 2013. Specifically, the revised guidelines address vital issues in contemporary journalism ethics by including new sections offering advice on best practice in interacting with the bereaved and appropriate use of social media in mental health and suicide reporting. Research findings described in Section 2 appear specifically in the following sections of the new guidelines: 'Digital Media Reporting of Mental Health and Suicide'; 'Interviewing a Person with a Past or Current Mental Illness'; 'Working with the Bereaved'; 'What it's like to be a Bereaved Person'; and 'Interview Tips and Appropriate Angles to Pursue: During the interview; After the interview'.

Duncan also organised an event 'Reporting Mental Health and Suicide by the Media' as part of the University of Strathclyde's 'Engage with Strathclyde' week between April 29 and May 3, 2013. The

event brought together a range of people with interests in media reporting of mental health and suicide (editors and journalists, health professionals, mental health and suicide prevention groups and academics) to discuss the implications of media reporting of mental health and suicide, forge relationships between mental health and suicide groups and journalists and the NUJ, and encourage dialogue about how the revised NUJ guidelines will affect current practice.

Description of Impact

Improvements to existing ethical guidelines for journalists in Scotland: The revised guidelines are now completed and are due to be published in late 2013. They have already assisted the NUJ in achieving a more comprehensive product based on current best practice and academic research. The guidelines have enabled the Journalist's union to demonstrate their commitment to strive for the highest professional and ethical reporting standards, particularly in regard to vulnerable members of society. They provide a tangible artefact of ethical intent towards best practice at a time when journalism ethics are under great scrutiny. Duncan's work on the revised guidelines enables the NUJ to provide journalists with an accessible, single source of substantial current advice on appropriate procedure in the aftermath of the Leveson Report, to be used either during the reporting process or as a training tool. The NUJ's Scottish Organiser said that through her "*many hours of work on revising the NUJ guidelines Dr Duncan has made a meaningful contribution to a wider understanding of mental health and suicide. Her research has had a significant impact on the NUJ's desire to improve media reporting in these areas and to promote ethical journalism*" (Source 2).

Impact on professional standards of reporting suicide and bereavement: The Assistant News Editor at The Scotsman, who attended the 'Engage with Strathclyde' event, has commented (Source 3), "*From my own experience, I know that her [Dr Duncan's] research has formed a crucial framework on how to report suicides and mental health issues in a sensitive manner. I have related the points she has made to dozens of colleagues both on my own newspaper and I have discussed its merits with editors of other publications, including the Edinburgh Evening News...Before her research, there was an ad hoc approach to the reporting of suicide, but she has brought an order and structure to the issue which allows journalists to refer to the key points each time they are about to write an article on this difficult subject matter.*" A multimedia journalist from the Press Association news agency noted the direct impact that the Engage event had on her work. "*A short time after I attended the event a man took his life at a Glasgow shopping centre. Given the very public nature of the suicide and the disruption and alarm it caused, the decision was made to report on the man's death. As a result of the seminar I felt comfortable advising the reporter responsible for covering the story*" (Source 4).

The BBC College of Journalism, part of the BBC Academy, approached Duncan and Newton in March 2013 to write an online blog on best practice for working and aspiring journalists based on insights gained from their research. This advice specifically focussed on positive approaches to reporting bereaved families and negative effects of the interaction; advice for trainee reporters on approaching the newly bereaved, including the use of social media; professional consequences of becoming too personally involved in the families' distress; and the effect on the journalist of reporting bereavement and how best to manage that trauma. The Editor of the BBC's College of Journalism blog stated that "*[Duncan and Newton's] blog post was exemplary in that it both drew on extensive original research and was able to translate that into useable guidelines for journalists tackling stories about bereavement. We were lucky to be able to publish the advice of two people who were able to combine the academic and the practical in such a vivid and useful way*" (Source 5).

Increasing awareness and stimulating debate on ethical reporting of suicide and bereavement: Impact has arisen from discussion generated at the 'Engage with Strathclyde' event attended by 25 representatives from organisations such as the British Red Cross, the Choose Life campaign (the Scottish Government's suicide prevention strategy which is delivered nationally by NHS Health Scotland), Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH), The Scotsman and the NUJ. The NHS Scotland Communications Manager noted: "*We are grateful to Dr Duncan for organising [the event] to contribute to the wider understanding of mental health and suicide, and keep the momentum going in this area of suicide prevention work*" (Source 6). The External

Impact case study (REF3b)

Communications Assistant for SAMH added: *“These important discussions would not have taken place without Dr Duncan’s commitment to researching media reporting of mental health and suicide. This work will contribute to challenging stigma and ensuring that journalists understand their role in changing attitudes and ultimately behaviour in society, which, in turn will significantly increase the quality of life of those experiencing mental health problem.”*

On May 1, 2013, journalist Roy Greenslade previewed the “Engage with Strathclyde” event in a blog for The Guardian, titled ‘Suicide Reporting Guidelines to be Revised’ (Source 7). After reading Greenslade’s article, the Director of Services of Console, the National Suicide Charity in Ireland, contacted Dr Duncan. The organisation, which is considering revising their own media guidelines, invited her to be a key speaker at their conference in September 2013, which was attended by the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins (Source 8).

In May 2013, the Director of Standards of the Australian Press Council asked for a recording of the ‘Engage with Strathclyde’ event (Source 9) in order “to ensure that their standards remain current and reflect best practice”. In June 2013, Dr Duncan was contacted by the Project Officer at the Mindframe, the government-funded national mental health promotion and suicide prevention organisation in Australia, stating that Mindframe would like to work with her in order to continue building on their current evidence base, as well as learn more about the outcomes from the ‘Engage with Strathclyde’ event. Consequently, an on-going dialogue has been established. Duncan and Newton’s chapter ‘Hacking into Tragedy’ [2] attracted considerable attention in the media, the journalism trade press, funeral care websites and on Twitter. The Senior Media Relations Officer for the British Red Cross (Scotland) stated: *“Without the kind of research carried out by Dr Duncan, a wider understanding of mental health and suicide would not be possible. Her evidence-based conclusions allow the NUJ to offer constructive, realistic and practical guidance to journalists who, through their writing, have the power to influence society’s attitudes, to destroy myths, remove taboos and to educate”* (Source 10).

Impact beyond journalism: The reach of the revised NUJ guidelines also extends to the Scottish Government Engagement process. They are devising a new ten-year suicide and self-harm strategy to replace the current ‘Choose Life’ campaign. The guidelines and associated research have the potential to form part of a media awareness element to this proposed strategy. Health organisations and vulnerable people also benefit from reduced stigma and increased awareness through responsible media reporting. NHS Scotland’s Communications Manager, who works with Choose Life, said: *“Choose Life relies on robust media guidelines to challenge and educate the media, using them to reinforce concerns and provide practical tips for producing articles that are newsworthy, yet responsible. That’s why we welcome the revised NUJ guidelines on reporting mental health and suicide, with a new, contemporary section on using social media as an information source”* (Source 6).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Email from the Director of the DART Centre Europe, and organiser of the roundtable discussion on death reporting in June 2012
2. Letter from the Scottish Organiser of the National Union of Journalists
3. Letter from the Assistant News Editor of the Scotsman newspaper
4. Letter from a multimedia reporter, Press Association news agency
5. BBC College of Journalism blog, titled *Inaccuracy can do more harm than intrusion in ‘death knock’ reporting* (screenshot)
6. Statement from NHS Scotland Communications Manager
7. Roy Greenslade’s blog, titled ‘Suicide guidelines to be revised’, in The Guardian (screenshot)
8. Leaflet for Console conference, (practitioners’ conference on bereavement by suicide) Dublin September 2013 (agreement to participate made in June 2013)
9. Video file of Reporting Mental Health and Suicide event at Engage with Strathclyde, May 2013
10. Letter from the Senior Media Relations Officer (Scotland) of the British Red Cross.