

PORTRAYAL OF SUICIDES IN NEWSPAPERS OF KASHMIR: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT: *Suicide is a major problem in the Indian context. It has become a severe mental health problem affecting the young population of this country. Many states in India record a greater than fifteen percent rate of suicide. An important demographic observation in this regard has been that a majority of suicides in India are committed by the younger population mostly below thirty years. Around thirty seven percent of people committing suicide in India are below the age of thirty. According to the World Health Organization, more suicides are committed under societal conflicts and due to occurrence of social distress which may be attributed to various social problems like dowry, divorce, problems due to cancellation of marriage or illegitimate pregnancies, extra-marital affairs etc. In India marriages play a crucial role in creating social conflicts for women in rural as well as urban areas alike (World Health Report, mental health, 2001). Like rest of India, Kashmir is also facing an alarming increase in the rate of suicides. Some of the reasons are same in Kashmir as rest of India, the conflict and political disturbance plays a major role in escalating the suicidal tendencies. The immediate effect of all these disturbances is depression which in extreme cases leads attempts by a person to end his/her life. That why there is a need to address this issue, create awareness among masses and counsel them about the nuisance of suicides. In this respect, media have an important role to play. In Kashmir electronic media doesn't prevail much and newspapers predominantly prevail over other media. That is why newspapers can be major contributors in spreading awareness among people. The current study analyses some leading newspapers and coverage given by them to the issue of suicides through reports, editorials and opinions. The study reveals that newspapers in Kashmir have given more importance to other issues like politics, conflict etc. and ignored much important issue of suicides.*

Key Words: *Suicide, Conflict, Newspapers, Reports, Opinions.*

INTRODUCTION:

The Kashmir valley is one of the most communally unstable and politically disturbed regions all over the world. There is a constant tug of war between the Indian Government and the Pakistani Government regarding the border issues in Kashmir. A constant conflict and cycle of violence creates mental disturbances among the people of Kashmir. The mass trauma situation faced by the people of Jammu and Kashmir for the last 20 years has resulted in many people to suffer from the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Mass trauma suffered by the victims of long lasting social-political conflicts in the region resulting in mass migrations by minority sections of the Kashmiri population and death, pain, suffering and loss of property suffered by those remaining in the region have all together contributed to creating such a disturbing war like conflicted zone in the erstwhile peaceful Valley region. Several natural calamities have added to the destruction and losses suffered by the people. Continuous damage to people and property of the valley has been the prime cause for the people experiencing PTSD (Margoob, Ahmad, 2006). Studies conducted show that significant sections of the Kashmiri population suffer from some or the other kind of mental illnesses, stress and psychological disorders specially depression. And these mental health disorders often lead to increased cases of suicides particularly among youth.

Because of the constant conflict and fluctuating weather conditions, newspapers are the only uninterrupted sources of information in Kashmir. The adoption of technology has added to the effectiveness of these newspapers in a place where social media is used to a great effect. That is why the role of newspapers in Kashmir to prevent increasing suicidal cases becomes more. Newspapers through constant reporting, impactful and informative editorials and articles can create awareness among people and act as counselling agents. The current study tries to relate the increasing suicidal rates in the Kashmir valley and the impact their reporting and portrayal by print media causes. Also, the aim is to find out the role of newspapers in highlighting the increased suicide rates in the Kashmir valley.

OBJECTIVES:

The study is undertaken with the following research objectives:

1. To analyze the coverage of suicide news in some leading dailies of Kashmir.
2. To study the pattern of portrayal of suicide in five leading newspapers of Kashmir in order to understand how these newspapers have reported the issues related to suicides in both rural and urban setting.
3. To suggest recommendations on the basis of findings.

HYPOTHESIS:

Print media in Kashmir has failed in influencing social attitudes to suicides and potentially the actions of vulnerable people. Thus it has not been able to generate awareness among masses about suicide prevention and also most of the suicidal issues go unreported due to lack of coverage given by them. Keeping the above generalisation in mind it is hypothesized that,
"There is no significant impact of media coverage on suicidal cases and its prevention in Kashmir like other states".

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

- i. A study was performed by Everall (2000) that explained the suicidal behaviour of the young adults. According to the researcher, the suicide among the young adult was considered as the most significant social and psychological problem. The study concluded that the suicidal behaviour of a person is developed by the factors like stress, depression, etc. He also explored various coping mechanisms that would help the person in reducing his stress and vulnerable factors and ultimately reducing the risk of suicide.
- ii. NCIPC, (2015) defines suicide attempt as plan for self-murder, when people try to harm them with intent of ending their own lives but they don't die as a result of their own actions. Suicide means "when individual direct violence at themselves with intent to have an end to their lives, as a result they die of their own actions. Suicide is actually fatal and can be a problem throughout their complete lifespan. People who attempt suicide and survive can experience serious injuries like broken bones, organ failure or even brain damage.
- iii. Akhter and Kulshrestha have cited few examples of the suicide news being reported in some local dailies of Kashmir. A news story about the suicide due to unemployment was given in Greater Kashmir and Rising Kashmir and it was found that the person ended his life by hanging. Another news about a 16 year old person who committed suicide after knowing that he failed to pass the 10th class final examinations, thereby ending his life by jumping into the river was reported by Greater Kashmir. One more incident of suicide by Shamima, a 39 year old lady who ended her life by consuming poison after she was unable to bear the death of her husband who was killed by the security forces was reported by the daily Rising Kashmir.
- iv. Michel, et al (2000) argue about the exercise for improving the print media suicide news. Local dailies always try to identify the readership of the news and the reach of the news to the readers. Today media plays an important role in converging the various issues in Kashmir, especially suicide reports. The Greater Kashmir has covered 128 stories on the suicide cases in Kashmir which implies that 1.08 percent space has been allocated to the suicide reports based on the total number of news stories. In the Rising Kashmir newspaper there are 1473 suicide stories which means that 1.42 percent space was occupied by the suicide reports with respect to total news publications. Daily Aftab published 848 stories and Srinagar Times 829 stories on suicides in Kashmir. That news the press educates the people by present time suicide or death news and the government affairs with it. Newspaper stories about the individual's death caused by suicide are the most newsworthy in readers view and that has to be covered to decrease the rate of suicide.
- v. Sisask and Varnik (2012) analyzed the role of media in the prevention of suicide attempts. The main intention of this research was to observe and give information regarding the roles of media in stopping suicides and also to determine possible effects of media coverage on suicide behaviors like attempted suicides, suicidal ideation and completed suicide. The strong modeling media effects reporting on suicide depends on gender and age.

METHODOLOGY:**Comparative Analysis**

Five leading dailies of Kashmir viz. Greater Kashmir, Rising Kashmir, Kashmir Images, Srinagar Times and Aftab were analysed over a period of six years from 1st January 2010 to 31st December 2015. The number of reports related to suicides was calculated for each newspaper over the stipulated period of six years. Besides a comparative analysis of the reports published about Suicides and other areas like Politics, Education, Health, Environment etc. was done for all the five newspapers over the stipulated period of five years. The editorial and op-ed pages of all the five newspapers were also studied to find out the coverage given to suicide related issues through editorials and articles. The Greater Kashmir, Rising Kashmir, Kashmir Images have the largest circulation in Kashmir among the English newspapers, hence were chosen for the study. The Srinagar Times and the Daily Aftab were chosen for the study since they have the largest circulation among the Urdu dailies in Kashmir Valley. Five newspapers were randomly selected for every month. This helped to get the overall resultant frequency and space of suicide reports in these five dailies of Kashmir (the rate at which suicide stories get published and the space they occupy in the newspaper). During the course of the study, no story about suicides was found at the first four pages of any newspapers, thus, the resultant space and frequency was analysed comparatively for page 5 and 6 only of all the newspapers. The dailies were identified on the basis of readership, reach etc.

FINDINGS:

All the five newspapers have given a good coverage to stories related to politics, conflict, health, education, environment, sports and other issues. However, there was a considerable difference in the coverage of suicide stories by all the five leading dailies of Kashmir. The evaluation of data also reveals that the limited efforts, inappropriate portrayal and reporting of increasing suicidal rates in Kashmir by the state's print media houses results in the failure of creating awareness among the policy makers.

The overall resultant frequency of Suicide reports during the six year period:

- Greater Kashmir has published 1128 stories on suicide which makes it to 1.08% space given to suicide reports with respect to the total number of news stories published.
- Rising Kashmir 1473 stories on suicide which makes it to 1.42% space given to suicide reports with respect to the total number of news stories published.
- Kashmir Images has published 1262 stories on suicide which makes it to 1.22% space given to suicide reports with respect to the total number of news stories published.
- The Daily Aftab has published 848 stories on suicide which makes it to 1.09% space given to suicide reports with respect to the total number of news stories published.
- Srinagar Times has published 829 stories on suicide which makes it to 0.78% space given to suicide reports with respect to the total number of news stories published.

This implies that the newspaper Rising Kashmir published the highest number of reports on suicide among all the newspapers, and the newspaper Srinagar Times published the lowest number of reports.

The overall resultant Space given to Suicide reports during the six year period:

- Greater Kashmir has published 546 stories on suicide which makes it to 2.36% space given to coverage of suicide reports with respect to the total number of news stories published on page No. 5 and 6 on suicide.
- Rising Kashmir has 547 stories on suicide which makes it to 2.1% space given to coverage of suicide reports with respect to the total number of news stories published on page No. 5 and 6 on suicide.
- Kashmir Images has published 328 stories on suicide which makes it to 1.3% space given to coverage of suicide reports with respect to the total number of news stories published on page No. 5 and 6 on suicide.
- The Daily Aftab has published 197 stories on suicide which makes it to 0.97% space given to coverage of suicide reports with respect to the total number of news stories published on page No. 5 and 6 on suicide.
- Srinagar Times has published 207 stories on suicide which makes it to 0.79% space given to coverage of suicide reports with respect to the total number of news stories published on page No. 5 and 6 on suicide.

Thus from the findings above it is very clear that the five newspapers which were selected for the study from 2010 to 2015 have given a very little coverage to suicide issues. It was found that very little percentage suicide reports appeared on page No. 5 or 6 of these newspapers. These reports got published in the form of single column news stories. Such reports mostly described the death of the suicide victim and sometimes the cause of the death was also written. The details exposed in the newspapers were therefore only limited. During the study period the researcher never found any suicide report which could have been published on the front page of these newspapers. This highlights the lack of importance given to such reports. Other issues like politics, conflict, health, education, environment, sports etc. on the contrary, got a good coverage in all the five selected newspapers whereas the suicide got the minimal percentage in terms of both the frequency and the space. This is an urgent issue which must be given adequate attention by the relevant parties.

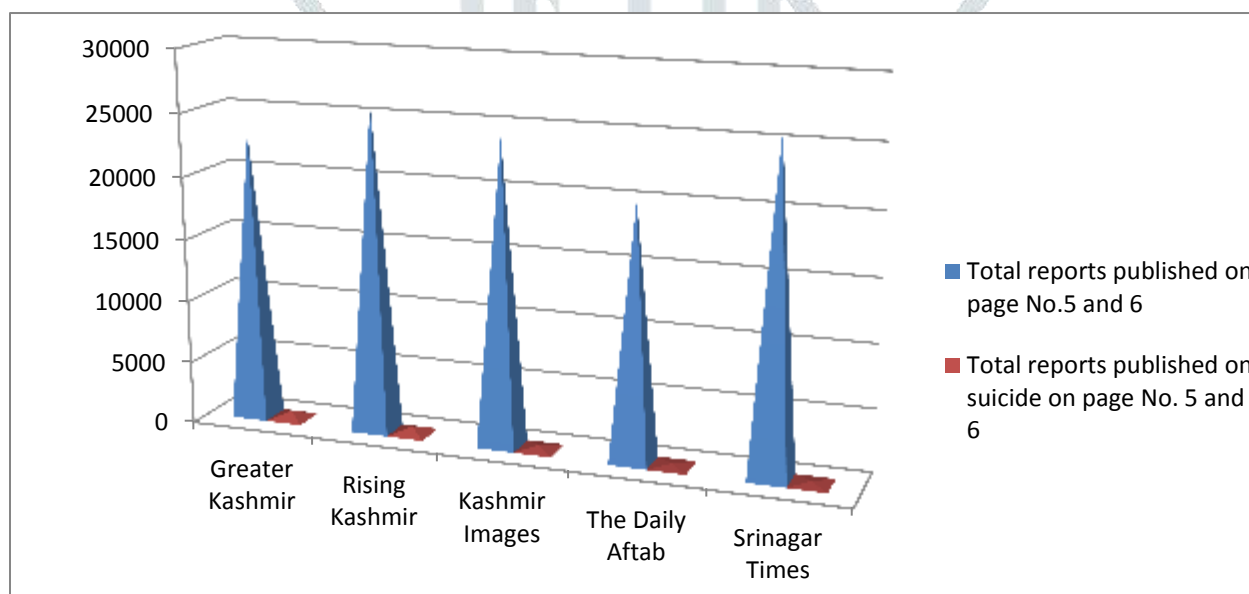


Fig. 1: Comparative percentage of coverage by Greater Kashmir, Rising Kashmir, Kashmir Images, the Daily Aftab and Srinagar Times from 2010-2015

For comparative analysis articles which appeared on the editorial page of five selected newspapers were selected. The editorial page had articles on issues which were considered important for the period. The articles were analytical in nature, and carried the views and opinions of the experts or the editor of the paper on these issues. Articles related to politics, conflict, education, health, domestic violence and disaster management were given a good coverage. In all the five newspapers it was found that articles related to Political Issues got the maximum coverage, ranging between 33% and 44%. The second issue of importance in all the newspapers was related to Kashmir conflict which got the second highest coverage ranging between 19% and 30%; environment related issues got the third highest coverage ranging between 9% and 14%; followed by articles related to Health and Education which represented the fourth highest percentage in some papers ranging between 6% and 11%; Domestic violence got the fifth highest percentage in all the selected newspapers ranging between 2% and 7%, while as Disaster Management represented sixth highest percentage in terms of coverage ranging between 1% and 6% given by all the five selected dailies. While doing comparative analysis of these five leading publications it was found that suicide related issues got the seventh highest percentage in terms of the coverage given to this issue by these five Newspapers of Kashmir which represented a very minimal percentage. The percentage of reports published on the issue was extremely low for all newspapers, with a meager 1% reports on suicide. Only Greater Kashmir was noted to be slightly higher at 2%. The articles were quite informative and represented the views of well-known experts of the valley. These articles though in least percentage highlighted the suicide as a grave issue in Kashmir and also mentioned the reasons behind increasing suicidal rates in Kashmir. The articles besides highlighting the suicide menace also informed readers and viewers about the likely causes of suicide, its warning signs, trends in suicide rates and recent treatment advances. However, the overall importance allotted to the issue of suicides, by way of allotting space in the newspapers was astonishing.

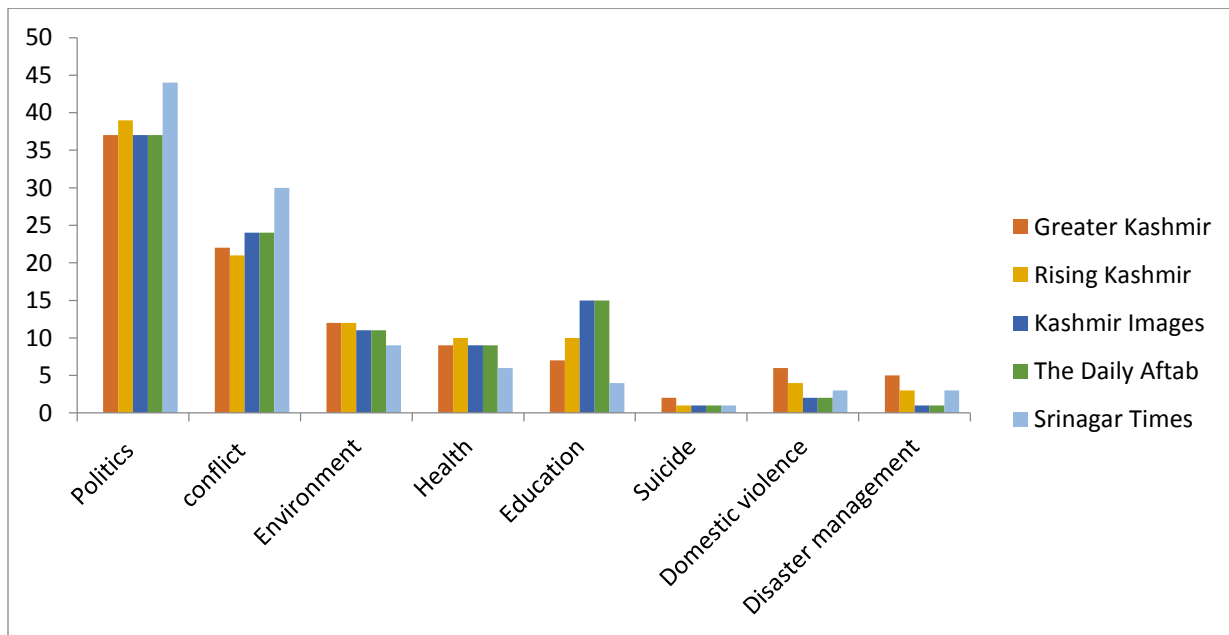


Fig. 2: The comparative report chart of “Greater Kashmir, Rising Kashmir, Kashmir Images, The Daily Aftab and Srinagar Times” from 2010-2015

Statistical Analysis

The present research collected its samples from various newspapers circulating in Kashmir valley. One of the most common tools adopted for studying the distributional characteristics of a group of scores and level of the scores is the box plot diagram. The present research will also use the box plot diagram to check the data distribution and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to see whether the effect of factors are different or not. In simple words, the tool is used to demonstrate the overall patterns, range, and other characteristics of responses for a group in a visual manner. Further, researches have been found to apply different “difference of means” tests, of which T-tests are commonly used. In the T-test, two sample mean values, or a sample mean and a theoretical mean value, are compared using null and alternate hypotheses. This is particularly suitable for the current research owing to its small sample size.

For the present research, the T-test will help to check the comparative assessment of suicidal publication to the other news related to the other fields.

The following hypotheses are set and the statistical analysis is used to check the acceptance or rejection of these hypotheses:

H1: the pattern of portrayal of suicide in different newspapers published in Kashmir valley is differently anticipated by newspapers.

H2: different newspapers have reported the issues related to suicides in both rural and urban setting differently.

H3: The numbers of Articles portraying various issues published by different newspapers are different and the articles related to suicide are least published.

BOX- PLOT

A good way to visually examine data where group differences may occur is the box-plot. Here we have two box plots; one is for the total number of Articles portraying various issues published by Greater Kashmir, Rising Kashmir, Kashmir Images, the Daily Aftab and Srinagar Times from 1st January 2010 up to 31st January 2015, and second is for percentage of news of suicide in Greater Kashmir, Rising Kashmir, Kashmir Images, the Daily Aftab and Srinagar Times.

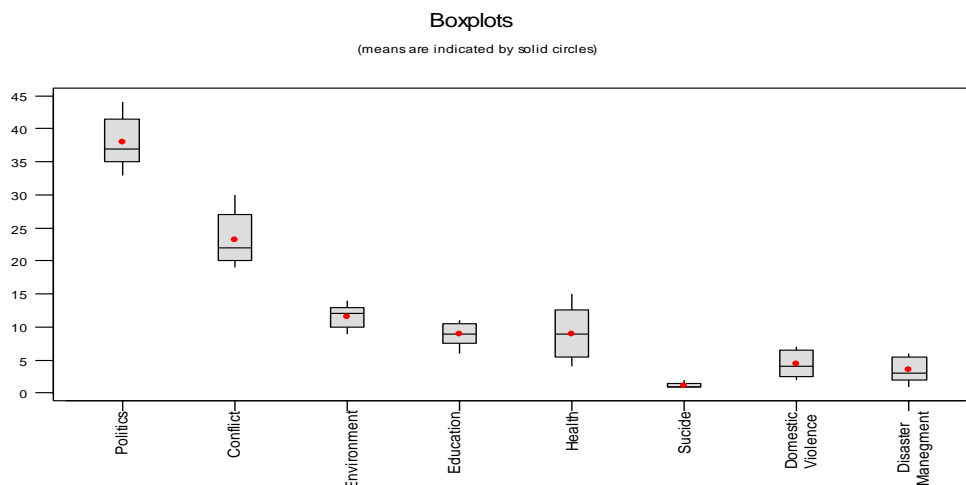


Fig. 3: Number of Articles portraying various issues

As can be seen in the above box plot, the shorter boxes for Environment, Education, and Suicide indicate a high level of agreement. Among these, Suicide indicates the most agreement. On the other hand, the box plots for politics, health, and conflicts are much taller, indicating wide differences in the level of agreements. It implies that there are different opinions regarding these aspects or topics. An interesting point is that there are no obvious outliers in any of the samples.

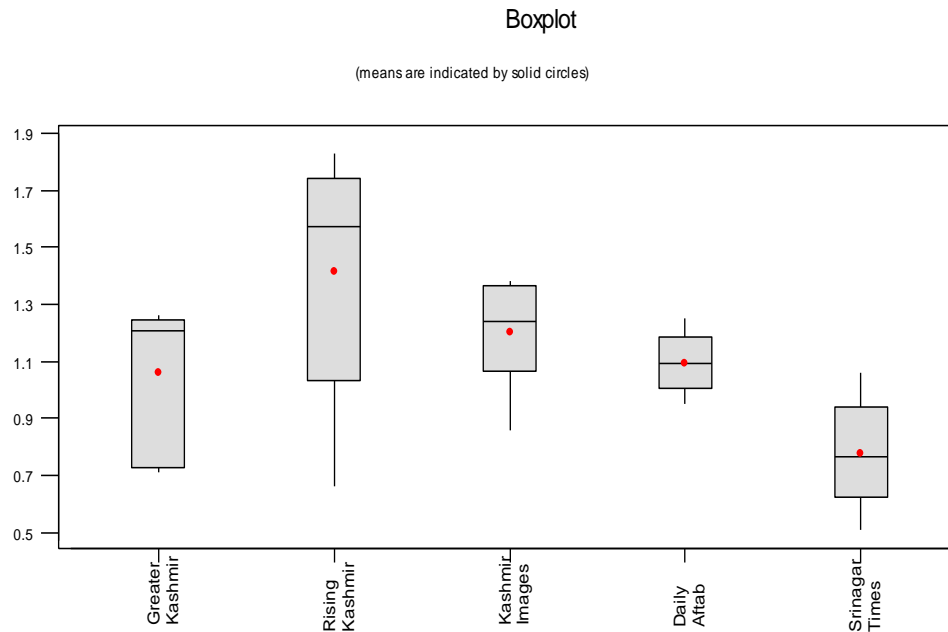


Fig. 4: Percentage of news of suicide in different newspapers

As can be seen in the above box plot, the boxes for Greater Kashmir and Rising Kashmir are much taller than those of Kashmir Images, Daily Aftab, and Srinagar Times. Also, the lower quartile for Rising Kashmir and Greater Kashmir are much wider than those of the other three newspapers which are relatively evenly spread out among the four quartiles. This implies that the responses for Greater Kashmir and Rising Kashmir are similar at certain parts of the scale (upper portions), but in other parts of the scale they are highly variable. An interesting point is that there are no obvious outliers in any of the samples.

Analysis of variance

As will be shown in the subsequent sections, the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is a hypothesis testing procedure used for testing whether two or more means are significantly different from each other or not. It involves the calculation of the F statistic, which measures the size of effects by comparing a ratio of differences between the means of the groups to the variability within groups. The two ANOVA tables are as shown below:

Table 1: Number of Articles portraying various issues

Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P
Factor	4		1.2987	0.3247	4.72 0.006
Error	25		1.7206	0.0688	
Total	29	3.0193			

Wherein;
 DF: Degree of Freedom
 SS: Sum of Squares
 MS: Mean Squares
 F: F statistic
 P: P value

Table 2: Percentage of news of suicide in different newspapers

Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P
Factor	7		5312.80	758.97	92.98 0.000
Error	32		261.20	8.16	
Total	39	5574.00			

Wherein;
 DF: Degree of Freedom
 SS: Sum of Squares

MS: Mean Squares
 F: F statistic
 P: P value

The ANOVA tables as shown compare the f-values for the factors, wherein the F statistic compares the joint effect of all the variables together. This F statistic is a value derived from an ANOVA test or a regression analysis to find out if the means between two populations are significantly different. From the output of one-way ANOVA in table I, the calculated F- value is greater than the tabulated F – value ($F_{4, 25}$). This indicates that there is a significant difference between the means of the factors, or in simple words, there is a high variability among the means implying that are farther away from each other. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis stating that the coverage of suicide news in some leading dailies of Kashmir is same. On the other hand, the alternative hypothesis is selected stating that the pattern of portrayal of suicide in different newspapers published in Kashmir valley is differently anticipated by newspapers.

H1: the pattern of portrayal of suicide in different newspapers published in Kashmir valley are differently anticipated by newspapers: Accepted

From the output of one-way ANOVA in table II, the calculated F- value is greater than the tabulated F – value ($F_{7,32}$). This indicates that there is significant difference between means of the factors, indicating a high level of variability among these means. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that portrayal of suicidal, political, educations etc. are different.

T- Test

Table 3: Result for T-test

T-Test								
	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
SUICIDE - POLITICS SUICIDE - CONFLICT SUICIDE - ENVIRONMENT SUICIDE - EDUCATION SUICIDE - HEALTH SUICIDE - DOMESTICV SUICIDE – DISASTERM	-36.80000	4.08656	1.82757	-41.87414	-31.72586	-20.136	4	.000
	-22.00000	4.30116	1.92354	-27.34060	-16.65940	-11.437	4	.000
	-10.40000	1.81659	.81240	-12.65559	-8.14441	-12.802	4	.000
	-7.80000	1.92354	.86023	-10.18839	-5.41161	-9.067	4	.001
	-7.80000	4.20714	1.88149	-13.02385	-2.57615	-4.146	4	.014
	-3.20000	1.92354	.86023	-5.58839	-.81161	-3.720	4	.020
	-2.40000	1.81659	.81240	-4.65559	-.14441	-2.954	4	.042

As shown in the table above, the absolute value of the t-value is greater than the critical value. Also, the significance values obtained are lower than the cut-off value set at 0.05. Therefore, Table III indicates that the null hypothesis is rejected; hence the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Thereby, indicating that as compared to others, the news on suicides, or the suicidal news publications are less. From ANOVA table II and T-Table we can accept the H3.

H3: The numbers of Articles portraying various issues published by different newspapers are different and the articles related to suicide are least published: Accepted

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Newspapers as we know play a very important role in information dissemination and hence generate a lot of awareness and educate the people about various evils rampant in a society. From the findings above it was found that newspapers in Kashmir have played a very little role in highlighting the serious issue of rising suicides in the state. During the study period it was observed that their coverage has remained confined to mere reporting of suicide attempts that have happened in different parts of the state that too in a lesser percentage. Their role in promoting education about increasing suicidal rates in Kashmir has remained minimal. On the basis of all the findings, analysis and observations during the course of the study, following recommendations are made:

1. There is an immediate need to educate journalists about suicide coverage which should go beyond the publication of deaths caused by suicide. It may be productive to adopt the suicide reporting guidelines recommended by various news organizations in the world.
2. Newspapers through their write-ups, editorials and features could generate a huge awareness about the suicide stigma and its consequences on the lives of the victims and their families.
3. Newspaper organizations in Kashmir need to understand and actively impact suicide reporting with regard to providing information about warning signs, risk factors, and referral options.
4. The newspapers organizations should assign their reporters to conduct a survey in order to provide monthly, sometimes quarterly and even annual reports in order to come up with actual figures of suicides in every district of the valley. This will develop a growing concern among the general masses and working groups and the collective efforts of all the people will help in lowering the increased suicidal rates in Kashmir.

CONCLUSION:

The objective of the study was to find out the portrayal of increased suicidal rates in Kashmir by five leading newspapers; greater Kashmir, rising Kashmir, Kashmir images, the daily Aftab and Srinagar Times. The purpose was to analyze the Reportage given by these five dailies to the suicide issues in Kashmir. All the five newspapers have given a good coverage to stories related to politics, conflict, health, education, environment, sports and other issues. However, there was a considerable difference in the coverage of suicide stories by all the five leading dailies of Kashmir. It is very much clear that the newspapers in Kashmir have failed in highlighting the grave issue of suicides as compared to other issues which find a good space in these papers. The reportage of suicide incidents has remained limited to just covering a story about a committed suicide. During the research period of six years while doing a comparative analysis of the five leading dailies of the Kashmir valley, no follow-up regarding any suicide story was found. Newspapers as we know play a vital role of information dissemination to huge number of readers in order to generate awareness about different social evils prevalent in a society and their preventive measures which to a good extent leads to the elimination of such issues from the society. But in Kashmir the reportage of print media regarding increasing suicide rates has just remained confined to publishing a story about a committed suicide that too in the form of a single column story. Mere reporting of suicidal issues as a news story will no way lead to eradication of this growing social menace from the society. Newspapers through their write-ups, editorials and features could generate a huge awareness about the suicide stigma and its consequences on the lives of the victims and their families. They can also suggest the people how to cope up with the distressful conditions and think beyond the death lines in order to live a happy life which in the long run could prevent society from human loss and lead towards progress and prosperity.

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