

Critical study of the written discourse of the suicide news published by a local newspaper in the city of Valledupar during 2015

Estudio crítico del discurso escrito de la noticia suicidio publicada por un periódico local en la ciudad de Valledupar durante 2015

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SUMMARY

The objective of the research was to carry out a critical study of the written discourse of suicide news in a local newspaper in the city of Valledupar during 2015, considering the recommendations delivered by the World Health Organization (WHO), to disseminate this type of acts. Quantitative descriptive research was carried out and the particular variables of analysis (suicide news) were systematized and established, based on the use of written language, the suicide news reported by the newspaper during the chosen

year was analyzed. As a result, it was obtained that in the period studied, the newspaper reported 17 suicides, of which 59 % of the written reports present explanatory causes of the fact in the news, 17 % show suicide as an alternative solution to internal or external causes of discomfort, 88 % of the news uses language to generalize the event, 23 % of the news features photographs, 100 % reports the method used and 88 % of the news contains a description of the scene. As a general conclusion, the newspaper does not follow the recommendations of the WHO, whose behavior constitutes a possible risk factor for suicidal acts in the region.

Keywords: *Suicide, risk factors, social learning, press, Colombia.*

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RESUMEN

El objetivo de la investigación fue realizar un estudio crítico del discurso escrito de noticias suicidas en un diario local de la ciudad de Valledupar durante 2015, considerando las recomendaciones entregadas por la Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS), para difundir este tipo de actos. Se realizó una investigación descriptiva cuantitativa y se sistematizaron y establecieron las variables particulares de análisis (noticias de suicidio), con base en el uso del lenguaje escrito, se analizó la noticia de suicidio reportada por el periódico durante el año elegido. Como resultado, se obtuvo que en el período estudiado, el diario reportó 17 suicidios, de los cuales el 59 % de los reportes escritos presentan causas explicativas del hecho en la noticia, el 17 % muestra el suicidio como una solución alternativa a causas internas o externas de malestar, el 88 % de las noticias utiliza lenguaje para generalizar el hecho, el 23 % de las noticias presenta fotografías, el 100 % informa el método utilizado y el 88 % de las noticias contiene una descripción de la escena. Como conclusión general, el diario no sigue las recomendaciones de la OMS, cuyo comportamiento constituye un posible factor de riesgo de actos suicidas en la región.

Palabras clave: *Suicidio, factores de riesgo, aprendizaje social, prensa, Colombia.*

INTRODUCTION

There are different views about the communication of news in written media. Some of them address lines of work from approaches related to language, culture, or the social, as well as economic and population orientations. The news about tragedies and other types of catastrophes must be mediated by non-“yellowish” information, which tends to reinforce the phenomenon and scarcely provides preventive elements to the reading population (1). This problem is visible in the suicide news, which focuses its attention on epidemiological conditions related to age, gender, and the way-method to kill oneself, just as it tends to globalize the little-explored reasons, which makes expeditious and reductionist the explanations given by the press (2). That is why this work aims to study the written communication of suicide news in a local newspaper in the city of Valledupar, to identify its characteristics, trends,

preventive methods, and errors, which together can modify the perception that the population creates of the phenomenon individually and collectively.

In this work, communication was worked from how the information is transmitted, and how the informed person can decode it, in addition to the possible influences it may have on the receiver. For many years, education regarding communication and language has been a subject of constant analysis since there are several problems encountered in daily living, problems ranging from ignorance of the mother tongue to lack of understanding at the time of transmitting some information (3); since there are many investigations that are made in front of these subjects and many are the answers but few have given any results that satisfy the needs in front of this situation. Forms of communication are one of the main sources of information for people today. In this project, only the written press will be worked on and it will be analyzed in a local newspaper in the city of Valledupar, Cesar; Colombia, because of this, it is important to know what this newspaper is communicating and also what people are absorbing, what they are learning from all that information that reaches them.

The mass media saturate the population, taking advantage of the uncertainty and curiosity that prevail in them and the desire to know the situation of their environment (4). This happens to respond to the visual needs of a society of mass consumption of visual media, which often sensationally present news. It cannot be denied that the written press is a powerful instrument of socialization whose objectives should be to intervene in the dissemination of the news, to inform, and to be impartial when transmitting. The common people play a commodity role in the consumer society. For this reason, the logical thing would be to point to the press as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, if it is used wisely, it becomes a tool used to inform and teach. Thanks to her, today we can communicate with the whole world and know what happens in each country and at all times.

It is an immense source of information with playful and immensely interesting content. Very useful in daily life to broaden the horizons and

knowledge of thousands and thousands of topics. However, it is also a weapon capable of modifying behaviors, thoughts, and even beliefs. It is a source of information in which negative contents abound that do nothing more than confuse and create unhealthy habits in the population. As previously mentioned, people play a role of merchandise of information because, they serve as a bridge between them, thus sowing seeds and allowing them to bear fruits that poison them and their environment. Many people identify and compare their situation with that presented in the news. Hence, the repeated exposure of violence, the exploitation of sex and pleasure or stereotyped models, and the news about suicides that are presented cause serious distortion of values in people, leading to violent and risky behaviors. For this reason, the problem comes when people do not know or cannot distinguish between what brings them some good or what is harmful, and this is where the information decoding process plays a fundamental role.

It is here where this investigation begins to play a fundamental role, since an analysis will be carried out in a local newspaper to see how it is transmitting some news, in our particular case, the news about suicide, during 2015. Critical Discourse Studies (ECD) are a series of interdisciplinary principles and theories, in which different approaches are mixed for the search and interpretation of various levels of study, among which are the micro and macro-discursive level, whose center of the analysis is always a social, cultural or political problem, distinguished for the community in which the discourse originates, distributes and understands. This way of analysing sociocultural problems is guided by a critical position through which the researcher intends to discover social inequality, which becomes a reality in the discourses that are promulgated, sustained, and legitimized by the members of society when making use of the sign expressions (that generate the signs) and favorable technological resources. It is assumed that, from this figure, public discourse guides social action to prioritize benefits collectively elaborated and positioned, in deterioration of the interests and expectations of other social sectors.

The micro-discursive study is expressed in terms of the set of resources and tactics that allow constructing the discourse as an expression in

which sign systems are enunciated to originate meanings. At this point the contributions of linguistics, semiotics, rhetoric, cognitive sciences, and, in general, the disciplines that allow describing and explaining what has been indicated in terms of how the human experience is symbolized and conceptualized as individual knowledge coincide. and collective to guide, in some sense and measure, the ways of proceeding in social life.

The macro-discursive analysis is located in relation to the discursive structure with the social structure through the ways of knowing and representing. In this way, it is identified that the discursive action and its use are preceding the process that the subject develops in the face of the interpretation and understanding of the addressed phenomena, as well as the identity, social objects, beings, and other aspects of the reality in which the subject lives, therefore, this understanding goes hand in hand with the constructions that the person makes mediated by the community in which they are part (5). Therefore, when speaking of ECD, the conceptualization in which discourse is spoken is brought to the scene, which is sign expression, cognition, and Society (6,7).

Discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary and interdiscursive method, which is interested in the analysis of the different contexts of discourse, that is, in the epistemological processes in production and acceptance, and in the general dimensions of the use of language and communication. We care about the complicated relationships between the text of the news and the context: how do cognitive and social limitations establish the structures of the news and how are the reception and uses of the news influenced by its textual organization? This approach to the news will be primarily relevant to mass communication research if we can specify such relationships. If we are not, this analysis will contribute to a renewed and clear study of the content of the messages of the written media in our region. While this will undoubtedly establish a legitimate goal, to place such an analysis within a more compelling explanatory and theoretical framework. We also seek to know how the news is structured and what role these structures play in communication and their influence on man (6-8).

Therefore, it is fundamentally concerned with the cognitive process that can make a story with an explicit language about suicide affect an affectively unstable person, the way the professional writes the headline, the development of the story, even the graphic content, and therefore part of the reader and their reception of the content, furthermore, this allows us to make explicit the well-known role of news values and ideologies in news production and understanding. Since these values or ideologies are also inherently social, we believe in this way to be able to build a bridge between the psychological and sociological studies of the news, and even more so if it is a topic of such worldwide relevance as suicidal behavior, described from its different aspects.

One of the first known references between suicide and the media comes from Goethe's novel *Las Penas del Joven Werther* published in 1774. From it, imitation elements related to the protagonist of the novel are identified, as well as a "model" to replicate the behavior carried out, in the novel the imitation is evidenced in several suicides after the protagonist. Now, from this point on, reference is made to the term "Werther effect" or "papagene" used in the technical literature to designate imitation in suicides (9-11). From this fact, it is possible to establish some characteristics that could be associated with suicide, such as "imitation, swarms", which refer to the proximity of suicide events due to temporal and spatial proximity, also "contagion", which although it is, Of course, it is not transmitted as a viral and/or bacterial disease, the occurrence of suicide is associated with the fact that it facilitates and increases the probability of the occurrence of another, without having direct or indirect contact with the fact that occurred directly (eleven).

There are other studies related to the role of the media in suicide (12), as well as the publication of the book *Final Exit (Final Exit)*, written by Derek Humphry, which after its publication, there were increases in suicides in New York City, using the methods described in the book (13). Just as the publication of *Suicide, mode d'emploi (Suicide, mode of employment)* also produced an increase in the number of suicides (14), therefore it is related and taking into account the results of the documented studies, the cases. The number of suicides may be increased by the information generated in the description of the

event, its characteristics, the method and even the subject who performs it, since a relationship with celebrity suicide and an increase in cases after this has been evidenced, so the level of publicity given to the event (15-18) how the information is approached from the media, in this case, the written press would favor or not the imitation of the conduct, elements to take into account from the ECD.

Suicide is one of the serious public health problems, which largely affects young people and adolescents in the department of Cesar, the city of Valledupar, and Colombia in general. The understanding of this problem generates a need, due to the biopsychosocial conditions that drive such a decision and its precipitating factors. In the last 45 years in the world, suicide rates have increased by 60 %, looking back at the years before 2015, it is established that in 2014, Colombia had the highest suicide rate per 100 000 inhabitants (6.50) which was prevalent in age groups 20-24 and 70-74, both exceeding the 2014 national rate. The departments that were most affected by this problem were: Antioquia (330 cases), Valle del Cauca (175 reported cases), and the city of Bogotá (293 records). "In 2014, the Colombian medical-legal system reported a suicide mortality rate of 4.33 cases per 100 000 inhabitants, similar to that reported during the last 9 years" (19), registering a greater number of cases that occurred in men. 20-24 years (235 cases) and in women between 15-17 years (48 confirmed). In the department of Cesar, in 2010 there were 37 suicide cases, 28 in 2011, 27 in 2012, 33 in 2013, and 34 in 2014, 19 of these suicides were in the city of Valledupar. The department in 2010 ranked sixth among the highest suicide rates per 100 000 inhabitants with (6.1 %), in the same way, the department of Cesar counted in 2015 it decreased with a total of 29 suicides where 17 of them were held in the capital of Valladolid (19,20).

One of the concerns has been the suicide of some minors in the department and in the city, identified in years before 2015, hence the interest in carrying out the ECD of the news in this specific year, for example, in the municipality de Codazzi, Cesar, in 2012 a child under 13 years of age carried out the suicide act. This same year another less than 11 years old carried out the suicide act in the city of Valledupar and 2013, two

minors aged 14 and 16; In 2014, the victim was a minor under 17 years of age, which represents Cesar and Valledupar a problem that goes there to work, economic, or emotional problems, but proposes to look for different studies to find out the reasons that lead to the act suicide and in the same way propose different strategies to do the prevention exercise (19,20).

There are explanatory hypotheses embodied in research studies in which it is revealed that suicide in adults is linked to marital, love, emotional, work, and academic problems. In boys, girls, and adolescents this is associated with parenting methods, the family, school, and political environment that surrounds them learning models at home and the influence of the peer group (21,22). Many of the suicidal acts are related to a notable deterioration in life skills since these provide valuable tools for people to face adversity at critical moments (23,24). It is important to strengthen life skills in children and adolescents, since "suicidal thoughts become abnormal in children and adolescents when the realization of these thoughts seems to be the only way out of their difficulties" (23), being this Difficulty finding a way out in the face of adversity, one of the greatest risks of attempting or the perpetration of the suicide act, to which many more factors are attributed, among which the vulnerability of the spaces that interact and the support provided by society is manifested to which it belongs, among others (24-26). In recent years the suicide rate in the city has had different and diverse variables, rates are variable and prevention efforts are not clear, leaving the possibility of generating new studies and various strategies for the prevention of risk factors ajar in vulnerable populations (27).

Reading, writing, speaking, and listening as elements of communication facilitate people the possibility of expressing what they think, feel and want, to transform themselves and transform their social and cultural context in a meaningful way. Hence, the media play a fundamental role in the development of these communication processes and the transmission of information (28,29). Thus, from the teaching of specific knowledge, such as the Spanish language, the fundamental axis of people's communication with the world that surrounds it and an articulating element of other specific knowledge, and it is here where

education and education are of vital importance. Learning from psycholinguistic and constructivist research on reading and writing to guide people in the construction and reconstruction of these communication skills, so that in this way they can access higher levels of human and academic training. From the concepts that are known in the processes of reading, writing, speaking, and listening that people live, it will allow the development in a clear and timely way to address the difficulty when decoding the information raised by newspapers, to be able to analyze what the population is receiving and how it is understanding this from our social, cultural and psychological contexts since without a mastery of communication and linguistic processes and skills it will be easier to mishandle information and get to the point of misrepresenting or being manipulated by those who I know who want to inform us. Due to this, it is necessary to know and make an analysis of the influence of a local newspaper in the Vallenata suicide-logical worldview, to get to know to what extent what is being read influences the decision-making of people with suicidal ideation in the city of Valledupar in the department of Cesar.

METHODS

This is a quantitative-descriptive and cross-sectional investigation, in which the reference year 2015 was taken, a local newspaper was chosen, and the particular variables of analysis (suicide news) were established, to seek to determine the influence Among these variables, the way they are presented at a given moment, an aspect that makes the study cross-sectional (30).

Instruments

The information collection and analysis matrix was used based on the model established by the World Health Organization, in relation to the reporting of suicide news (28), and aspects related to the descriptive analysis of the information to explore links in particular multi-discursive events, using a three-dimensional framing of the analysis (31,32) in which each discursive event has three dimensions or facets: the first is a text,

oral or written, the second is an instance of a discursive practice which implies the production and interpretation of the text, the third is if it is part of social practice. These are three perspectives that can be taken, three complementary ways of reading a complex social event.

The following elements of the Critical Study of Discourse (ECD) written for the news were established as categories of analysis:

- A. Language of the news item: within which the use of the language of what was reported was analyzed, the presence or not of the following elements: (a) prevention characteristic, (b) Description of causes to the fact, (c) suicide as an alternative for problem-solving, (d) condition of generalization of suicide.
- B. Condition of the news item and report of the event: category in which the presence or absence of the following elements was analyzed: (a) use of sources with criteria of statistical reliability, (b) use of photographs of the victim, (c) description of the method used for the suicide, (d) description of the scene of the events, (e) location of the news item within the newspaper (such as main page- Headline)

Of all the news items reviewed during the year, 17 were identified directly related to the reporting of suicide events, which were subjected to the written Critical Study of Discourse (ECD) process to identify the results of the analysis.

RESULTS

The printed review of these newspapers was carried out in the newspaper library of the municipal public library. The news was searched throughout the newspaper, and as a specific criterion on the first page and in the judicial section, the name of the local media chosen is not made public due to the possible repercussions and/or perspectives that may be derived from the investigation process, as well as Limitations associated with the publication of results, exposing the name of the newspaper.

Once the news related to suicide was identified, it was read, and according to its content, characteristics, and report elements, it was analyzed in light of the components described

above in the ECD data analysis matrix, tools, which They served to systematize, organize and categorize the information. An important element within the results is that when analyzing the dimension of the discursive practice of the news, the interest is focused on the discursive event at the level of influence and power from the cultural point of view, a rigorous integration between discourse (text plus context) and cognition, and clear observation of the way qualitative and quantitative data are triangulated.

The consolidation criteria of the search, analysis, and categorization and from which the results of the research process were established are listed in Table 1.

The above information and the consolidation of the findings generates as consolidated results that the use of language from a critical study stance of the written discourse of the analyzed news shows use that is not responsible or consistent with the parameters for reporting and managing suicide news in the media. communication worldwide (28).

DISCUSSION

The communication of news is not a random event that emerges in a random and senseless way, it implies an ethical, aesthetic, responsible, and honest treatment of the news, for which it is necessary to know all the information of the events, contrast the sources, verify them and give them a meaning according to the context (33). In this regard, Chomsky (2007) the media often manipulate information, according to political strategies focused on managing what people know and, to a great extent, think about social phenomena, so that even the interpretation of the facts tends to be handled by powers external to the subject (34). In this sense, it should also be mentioned that suicide when communicated inadequately, given the growing desire to increase television ratings or sales of local newspapers, ends up generalizing and approving disruptive, maladaptive, and/or inappropriate behaviors, and this at its own expense. Sometimes it opts for aptitudes of approval or disapproval of such behaviors (35). In the investigation whose objective was to analyze the news of suicide

CRITICAL STUDY OF THE WRITTEN DISCOURSE OF THE SUICIDE NEWS

Table 1

Critical Study Category of the written discourse of the news

	Compliance percentage (# of articles)	Evidence found
Language of the news (prevention characteristic)	0 de 17 0%	The use of language in the description of the fact of completed suicide does not generate prevention strategies for the population.
Language of the news (Social responsibility and caring for the population)	10 de 17 59%	The news establishes explanatory criteria, possible causes of the fact that could be taken by the population as replication conditions
Language of the news (Presents suicide as a problem-solving alternative)	3 de 17 17%	The news when presenting explanatory causes and/or hypotheses in its description raise suicide as an alternative solution associated with said causes.
Language of the news (Suicide generalization condition)	15 de 17 88%	From the analysis of the written discourse, there is evidence of a tendency towards the use of generalization, normalization, and/or viralization terms of the fact, promoting identification in the readers and possible conditions of replication.
Condition of the news and report of the event (Use of sources with criteria of statistical reliability)	11 de 17 65%	Use terms of "Epidemic, viralization", among others
Condition of the news and report of the event (Use of photographs of the victim)	4 de 17 23%	The news generates a detailed description of the events, descriptions of relatives, acquaintances of the victim. It does not show figures or conditions of statistical rigor or alternative sources of information
Condition of the news and report of the event (Description of the method used)	17 de 17 100%	The news features photographs of the victim, there are photographs from before the fact and after the fact.
Condition of the news and report of the event (Description of the scene)	15 de 17 88%	The news describes in detail the method used, use of tools, and strategies implemented by the victims to consummate the act.
Condition of the news and report of the event (News as the main page- Headline)	8 de 17 47%	The news describes specific details about the suicide scene, physical description, material, and/or people in the fact.

Source: self-made

in a local newspaper in the city of Valledupar, it was found that the press does not handle the information about suicide events responsibly since it tends to generalize expressions related to its causes such as If it were about everyday events, take as an example: “he argued with his mother about using a cell phone and committed suicide”; “Debts drove him to suicide”. In these examples, it is clear that the press tends to omit the preventive factor, and focuses on the fatal event (suicide), which can constitute a reinforcement or approval for the behavior of people who have considered taking their own lives (1,25-29). Likewise, it was evidenced that the newspapers do not contain preventive information on suicide, which constitutes another indicator to consider that there is little responsible handling of the news, the newspapers tend to have a yellowish and generalizing attitude of the suicidal act so that at the time of communicating the news they focus more on the form of death or method, and on the information that the immediate environments in which the events take place can provide (29,35). These elements show that the mass media (MASS MEDIA) can have a more damaging than a preventive-educational influence on its readers. The characteristic of having suicide as the headline news or on the front page of a newspaper in the city of Valledupar shows the low preventive awareness about suicide since the first pages are usually those that contain the most important news or that should be highlighted (33-35). Other important elements are the detail in the news about the method used, the use of photos of the victim, and other aspects related to the suicide scene, which is often explained in a neat way, which can generate an underpinning of Suicide ideas and attempts in people who seek not only social approval of their behavior but also knowledge about the most effective methods to kill themselves (34-36). The investigation also found that in all cases authentic and reliable sources are used, related to government institutions in charge of registering such cases, such as the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (Forensis). This means that the error in the handling of the information is not found in the reliable sources highlighted-implemented in addition to the news, but in the inappropriate handling of the data that the newspaper does. The mass media manage the news according to the impacts they plan to

generate on the population so that one news item can lessen the impact of another or divert attention to aspects that are not so relevant in the social and political sphere (37-39).

The news is usually manipulated based on interests that escape the logic of the majority, in this sense, rather than serving as an element for the prevention of behaviors and social dangers, the media constitute a benchmark of massive domination (34). In this research, it was also evident that the news indirectly suggests that suicide is an effective method of solving personal problems and that to a large extent it can be “understandable and/or justifiable” according to these vital inconveniences.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the analysis of the data found, and from the corroboration of these with the parameters proposed by the World Health Organization (28,39), it is evidenced that the regional newspaper does not comply with the parameters required by the said organization, which leads us to recognize that it is of utmost importance to be able to generate spaces where the parameters indicated when reporting a suicide can be disclosed. Based on the foregoing, it is worth asking, then, what impact can the description of a suicidal story have on people who are going through a period of vulnerability? Could this news be replicas of new suicidal acts? (40,41) Having clarified that, due to their accessibility and because it is one of the first important newspapers in the department, any type of person can have access to the newspaper. In this way, the need to disseminate this type of information is evidenced, not only by how the news related to this type of problem is being reported, but also to warn the community that the suicidal act is not the only measure of the solution to the daily problems of human life, and in this way avoid the growth of the suicide rate in the department of Cesar. The limitations of the study lie in relation to the period analyzed, it is proposed to carry out the analysis in a much broader period and with various media, to generate an impact on them and that the results achieve a change in the way in the one that writes the news associated with suicide.

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