Author's response to reviews

Title: Media suicide-reports, Internet use and the occurrence of suicides between 1987 and 2005 in Japan

Authors:

Akihito Hagihara (hagihara@hsmp.med.kyushu-u.ac.jp)
Kimio Tarumi (tarumi_kimio@jpm1960.org)
Takeru Abe (takeru-a@hsmp.med.kyushu-u.ac.jp)

Version: 3 Date: 25 July 2007

Author's response to reviews: see over
Reviewer's report

Title: Media suicide-reports, Internet use and the occurrence of suicides between 1987 and 2005 in Japan

Version: 2 Date: 11 June 2007
Reviewer: Paul S YIP

Reviewer's report:

The authors analyzed the suicide time series data in Japan to examine the relationship between newspaper coverage on suicide and actual suicide case. They also find that Internet use is a predictor of suicide. The authors adopted a similar method as in Phillips (1974) and Bollen & Phillips (1982) with some major differences.

i) Phillips (1974) had used monthly suicide data for analysis but then he admitted in his later work that this was problematic and he used daily data instead in Bollen & Phillips (1982). Pls justify your choice of using monthly data in the paper.

ii) Phillips (1974) and Bollen & Phillips (1982) used number of suicide news at previous month and past 10 days respectively as independent variable, rather than at same month or same day, in order to establish a temporal relationship between stimuli (suicide news) and response (suicide death). Please also justify the choice of the number of newspaper article at same month as independent variable.

iii) The inclusive criteria of news article is by searching keyword of "suicide" in the headline. This approach may be too loose by including some articles which may not directly relate to "media suicide-report", say editorial, commentary, fictional story, "suicide bomber" or even the keyword "suicide" using in contexts nothing related to suicide. Pls explain. Also, is a suicide news headline containing type of suicide method rather than keyword "suicide" possible in Japanese newspaper?

iv) Do frontpage coverage, photo of deceased or illustration matter?

v) If the dummy variables for months (Feb to Dec) are included in the model to control for seasonality factor, why is "the number of monthly suicide cases in the previous year" required to include as independent variable?

vi) The authors correctly point out the limitations of this study. I suggest the authors to redo the analysis by comprising those possible "predictors" as indicated by them, say unemployment rate, bankruptcy rate or economical/stock index etc, to minimize the possible confounding effect.

vii) The result about Internet use should be interpreted cautiously since as indicated by the authors, the extent of exposure to Internet news was not determined. Most of the online user might use Internet for leisure or communication purpose rather than news reading. Maybe only small percentage of Internet user were exposed to suicide news and an even smaller proportion among them were influenced by the news.
Responses to the comments by Dr. PS Yip

1. (p11, 7th line from the bottom- p12, 1st para, line 3)
   We have explained why monthly data were used in the revised manuscript.

2. (p6, 3rd para, 1st line-p7, 1st para, line 1; p11, 7th line from the bottom-p11, bottom line; Table 2)
   As suggested, we reanalyzed the data using independent variables for the previous month.

3, 4. (p11, 7th line from the bottom- p12, 1st para)
   We have referred to the problems concerning the measure on the impact of newspaper articles in the revised manuscript.

5. (p6, 3rd para, 1st line-p7, 1st para, line 1; Tables 1 and 2)
   As suggested, we reanalyzed the data using a model excluding “the number of monthly suicide cases in the previous year” as an independent variable.

6. (p6, 3rd para, 1st line-p7, 1st para, line 1; Tables 1 and 2)
   As suggested, we reanalyzed the data using a model including “the national jobless rate” as an independent variable.

7. (p12, 3rd para, line 1- p13, 1st para)
   Since we agree with the comment, we have added an explanation about a caveat for the variable concerning Internet use in the revised manuscript.
Reviewer's report

Media suicide-reports, Internet use and the occurrence of suicides between 1987 and 2005 in Japan

Title: [85x730] and 2005 in Japan

Version: 2 Date: 14 May 2007

Reviewer: Gernot Sonneck

Reviewer's report:

General

This study describes a significant correlation between the number of Japanese print-media reports using the word „suicide“ in their headlines with the actual number of suicides. The use of the internet is also found to be significantly correlated with the incidence of suicide. In the observed time-period, an increase of suicides of 200% in men and 100% in women was accompanied by an 30-fold increase of print-media reports on suicides. The internet was established in 1992 and has been available for nearly 90% of households since 2005.

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

[1] The study applies an unconditional maximum-likelihood autoregression method. For this analysis of time series data, the time series should normally be stationary, in order to obtain a constant mean and variance over time. Stationarity could, for example, be obtained by a difference transformation.

[2] An important aspect in analyses of this kind was originally formulated by D. Phillips in his seminal study in the topic area: In order to test the relationship between media reporting and actual imitative suicides in the real world, suicides have to occur after media reports on suicides. It is expectable, that the number of media reports increases following an increase of 200% in suicide incidence in men and 100% in women. A simple correlation analysis over the whole observation period is probably not the appropriate way to suggest that suicides have been triggered by media reports.

[3] Another aspect concerns the content of print-media reports and internet. First, also help organizations nowadays normally offer help via internet, so there might also be a preventive impact of the internet on suicide numbers.

[4] Second, the use of the internet has probably increased in the whole world in the observed time period. Nevertheless, suicide incidence has decreased in many countries. For that reason, it is important to determine if Japanese web-sites on suicide and on suicide prevention differ from web-sites in other countries with a decrease in suicide numbers accompanied by an increase in internet use.

[5] It would also be interesting if there was a more severe increase of suicides after 1992 than
before, because the internet was first established then and is considered to be a highly significant contributor to suicides in this study.

[6] In general, more current English literature should be referenced. The increase of 200% in male suicide rates and 100% in female suicides urgently needs further investigation. As the media might be an important factor in this issue, we encourage the authors to do further research in this area.
Responses to the comments by Dr. G Sonneck

1. (p7, 1st para, lines 16-19)
As suggested, the log-transformed data were analyzed rather than the raw data.

2. (p6, 3rd para, 1st line-p7, 1st para, line 1; p11, 7th line from the bottom- p11, bottom line; Table 2)
As suggested, we reanalyzed the data using independent variables for the previous month.

3-5. (p12, 3rd para, line 1- p.13, 2nd para, line 4)
Since we agree with the comments completely, we have added an explanation about a caveat on the variable concerning Internet use in the revised manuscript.

6. (References)
We have cited the current English literature in the revised manuscript.