Reviewer's report

Title: Media suicide-reports, Internet use and the occurrence of suicides between 1987 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 a 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.

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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.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
[7] Reference number 2 is authored by Gould MS and Shaffer D.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare I have no competing interests.