

# MEDIA GUIDELINES FOR NON-SUICIDAL SELF-INJURY REPORTING

## BACKGROUND

Coverage of non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) by the media is fundamental in providing helpful education to the public since this is a public health issue. Such coverage must be done in a sensible manner and hence why the importance of the following guidelines.

The rationale for media guidelines for NSSI is mainly to prevent increasing stigmatisation of mental health issues and victims of NSSI by making use of appropriate jargon. Furthermore, using evidence-based knowledge and the appropriate choice of words to educate the public, may help mitigate misconceptions or myths surrounding such subject and provide hopefulness and optimism for recovery.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MEDIA

- **Sensitive reporting including:**
  - Avoid the use of graphic photographs as these may encourage NSSI behaviour in some individuals.
  - Avoid details within the text especially with regards to NSSI wounds, means of NSSI or tools used for NSSI.
  
- **Evidence-based and accurate reporting:**
  - Avoid misinformation including making the distinction between NSSI and suicide.
  - Using peer-reviewed material to educate the public.
  - Report new, emerging knowledge using regularly updated guidelines and algorithms.
  
- **Present information neutrally**
  - Avoid sensational headlines, especially when they involve the methods of NSSI.
  - Avoid exaggerated descriptions of NSSI and its prevalence.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MEDIA

- **Use non-stigmatising language**
  - Avoid jargon that tends to victimise or blame the individual.
  - Distinguish between the act and the person by avoiding words such as cutter, mutilator as these tend to conflate the person and behaviour, thus further stigmatising NSSI.
  - Provide response guidelines to respondents, moderate online article/post comments, identify and remove those that are clearly damaging or stigmatising, and apply dire consequences for repeat offenders.
- **Focuses on road to recovery and treatment**
  - Emphasise the importance to seek treatment and the availability of resources for help.
  - Responsible media platforms should aim to promote resources, educational material, supporting entities and help for mental health issues (eg: through the use of pop-ups) when certain NSSI keywords are inputted.
  - Highlight stories of recovery and adaptive coping strategies to prevent NSSI.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SOCIAL MEDIA

- **Adopt and post clear platform rules**
  - Inform employees and platform followers of rules
  - Avoid triggering content
  - Use trigger warnings
- **Post clear response guidelines** - adopt a user friendly flagging system for damaging or stigmatising responses to be identified and removed.
- **Adopt human and/or machine moderation protocols** to facilitate identification and removal of damaging or stigmatising posts and replies breaching platform guidelines.
- **Apply meaningful consequences** for repeat offenders (removal from platform and prosecution).
- **Regularly update guidelines, site moderators and/or algorithmic responses** (incorporating new emerging knowledge about posting trends).
- **Provide help and resources pop-ups** triggered by certain keywords or phrases example; 'cutting', 'self-harm' or 'self-injury' and linking to support resources, help-seeking, educational and awareness materials.

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*For more information and practical tips on how to use the guidelines provided, you can refer to the article published in the scientific journal BJPsych: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/media-guidelines-for-the-responsible-reporting-and-depicting-of-nonsuicidal-selfinjury/F9B81777FE962305A3130163853A536D>*