

CENTRE FOR MENTAL HEALTH

MPhil Completion Seminar

The University of Melbourne



Media reporting of Robin Williams' suicide

Presenter: Professor Jane Pirkis

Supervisors: Professor Dallas English & Professor Melanie Wakefield



Thursday 13th August 9.00am-10.00am

Via Zoom <https://unimelb.zoom.us/j/95513874979?pwd=SGtxT3dSanIPVkpvbVRVVC81cmQ2UT099>

This presentation will describe three studies that examined the nature and impact of Australian media reports of Robin Williams' suicide. Collectively, these studies showed that local newspaper reporting of Robin Williams' suicide was largely consistent with Australia's *Mindframe* guidelines. Despite this, there were increases in suicides in the immediate aftermath of his death, which is obviously a negative outcome. There were also increases in calls to helplines, which may be interpreted either as negative (i.e., suggesting that people's levels of distress and feelings of suicidality were heightened) or positive (i.e., suggesting that people who might have otherwise been influenced to harm themselves called a helpline instead).

It may be that Australians were exposed to reports that contravened safe reporting recommendations, particularly via overseas media social media and/or that some Australian reports may have had unhelpful overarching narratives, despite largely adhering to the *Mindframe* guidelines. The *Mindframe* guidelines constitute international best practice but consideration should be given to whether certain recommendations within them should be further reinforced and whether more nuanced information about how stories should be framed could be provided.

Professor Jane Pirkis is the Director of the Centre for Mental Health at the University of Melbourne.

She has worked in the suicide prevention field for nearly 25 years and has a particular interest in reporting and portrayal of suicide in news and entertainment media.

She is Vice President of the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP), and was a founding co-Chair of IASP's Suicide and the Media Special Interest Group.

She is the Editor-in-Chief of *Crisis*, and recently co-edited *The International Handbook of Suicide Prevention*.

For more information contact the Centre for Mental Health
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