Words in This Story

commit – v. to do (something that is illegal or harmful)

stress – v. to give special attention to (something)

stigma – n. a set of negative and often unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something

taboo – n. not acceptable to talk about or do

encourage – v. to make (someone) more determined, hopeful, or confident

anxiety – n. fear or nervousness about what might happen

distress – n. unhappiness or pain : suffering that affects the mind or body

sensationalize – v. to describe or show something in a way that makes it seem more shocking than it really is

glamorize – v. to make (something) seem exciting and attractive

Media Should Not 'Sensationalize' Suicide

In the United States, September is Suicide Prevention Month. The World Health Organization says that every year about 800,000 people commit suicide around the world.

September 10 was international suicide prevention day. To mark that day in 2017, the WHO stressed the important part that the media can play in stopping people from taking their own lives.

The WHO reports that for every suicide, 20 other people attempt to take their own lives. These people are mostly young. The WHO says suicide is the second leading cause of death among people aged 15 to 29 years.

The health organization also finds most suicides -- more than 78 percent -- happen in low-and middle-income countries. Issues that put people at risk include mental problems as well as depression and anxiety resulting from alcohol use.

WHO also states growing evidence shows that the media can play an important role in preventing suicide. The role media can play is to responsibly report on the problem.

Alexandra Fleischmann is a scientist in the WHO's department of mental health and substance abuse. Fleischmann tells VOA that people are often unwilling to talk about suicide because of the stigma.

She says journalists can help to overcome this taboo by encouraging people to seek help and to speak openly about their distress.

"It is also important to stress that the encouragement to work with the media and not just to talk about the don'ts. Don't put it in the headlines. Don't put the picture of the person who died. Don't sensationalize it. Don't glamorize it."

WHO also warns that when the media reports on suicide in an exciting or attractive way, it may put others at risk.

That's the Health & Lifestyle report. I'm Anna Matteo.

From Geneva, Lisa Schlein reported this story for VOA News. Anna Matteo adapted it for Learning English. Mario Ritter was the editor.