

# Media Monitoring Report

2024





## About

Shine's Media Programme, formerly known as Headline, is Ireland's national programme for responsible reporting and representation of mental illness and suicide.

Funded by the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention, the programme delivers quarterly media monitoring reports and training to assist journalists and media professionals in navigating complex mental health topics.

By analysing how suicide is reported on in Ireland, we hope these insights support Irish media in their coverage of suicide. For more information, visit [www.shine.ie](http://www.shine.ie).

## Our 2024 Media Monitoring

In 2024, Shine's Media Programme analysed 3,197 pieces of suicide-related media content across print, online, radio, and television platforms in Ireland. We examined not only what was said but how it was said, where harm emerged, and which reporting may have reduced harm.

This report brings together those quarterly findings into a single national overview. The results are both encouraging and challenging: the majority of media coverage was safe and followed best practice guidelines, but certain patterns particularly around helplines and language, are cause for concern.

We hope this report serves as a roadmap for media professionals committed to responsible, evidence-informed coverage of suicide and mental health.

Despite a majority of media coverage being responsible (with 84.3% of all monitored content containing no harmful elements), there were concerning trends, including:

- A year-on-year rise in the omission of **helpline information**
- The syndication of **agency content** containing harmful elements
- Themes of **bullying, inquests, and high-profile** cases were consistent sources of potentially harmful reporting.

Encouragingly, 2024 featured strong examples of best practice, demonstrating how lived experience, empathetic storytelling, and trauma-informed approach can inform audiences responsibly and safely.

# Did you know...

Real-world behaviour can be influenced by how suicide is reported in the media.

The **Werther Effect** describes how detailed or dramatic coverage of suicide can lead to an increase in similar deaths, particularly when the person involved is famous or the method is described. Decades of research have shown that certain types of reporting can unintentionally contribute to contagion, especially among vulnerable audiences.

The **Papageno Effect**, by contrast, highlights the protective power of media. Named after a character in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* who finds hope in the face of suicidal thoughts, it refers to the protective influence of stories that focus on overcoming crises. When stories focus on people finding support, navigating crisis, or choosing life, they can reduce suicidal thoughts in others. It's not just what is reported, but the tone, framing, and emphasis that matter. Media doesn't just reflect reality. It can quietly steer it.

## Audiences At Risk

Some groups of people are at higher risk of suicidal behaviour. These have been identified in Ireland's national suicide prevention strategy 'Connecting for Life' and are described as "priority groups".

For example:

- People with mental health challenges or challenges associated with alcohol and drugs;
- Minority Groups (Irish Travellers, LGBTQI+);
- Certain demographic cohorts (young, middle-aged people);
- People bereaved by suicide;
- Certain occupational cohorts (health care workers, farmers);

It's important for media to remember that 'audiences at risk' is a transient group, and people don't need to have a pre-existing mental health condition to fall into it.

## Lived Experience

People who have mental health challenges or are a family member, supporter or carer of someone using mental health services, have important insights into that experience. They are uniquely qualified to talk about those mental health challenges and should be seen as experts in their own experience.

## The Guidelines

In Shine, we align our media monitoring to the Samaritans' Media Guidelines and [The World Health Organization Guidelines](#).

Below is a summary:

- Avoid including details of the method or location of a suicide.
- Avoid speculating on reasons for a suicide or using sensational language and imagery.
- Suicide should be reported as a complex issue, using non-stigmatising terms like "died by suicide".
- All coverage should include clear helpline information that directs audiences to support.
- When including lived experience, stories should be handled with care, focusing on recovery and hope.

## 01 While most coverage avoided harm, worrying trends persist

Combined data across all four quarters showed:

- 84.3% of content followed the suicide reporting guidelines
- The highest adherence was recorded in Q2 (86.5%)
- The lowest was in Q4 (80.4%), during a spike related to one story.

While this suggests broad alignment with reporting guidelines, the drop in Q4 is significant. Notably, one story on the sentencing of Alexander McCartney accounted for over 60% of all harmful content during that period, driving a 10-point drop in overall guideline adherence.

### Key takeaway

While overall performance in Irish media is high, a single news event can skew the national picture and increase risk to audiences.

## 02 Syndicated agency content was a frequent source of harm, particularly when republished without modification. In Q3, where an analysis focused on agency content, we found that although only 13.7% of monitored content originated from agencies, it accounted for **nearly 25% of all harmful items**.

### Key takeaway

While agencies provide a valuable service to newsrooms across the country, it is important editors check that syndicated content matches their own organisation's high editorial standards.

## 03 Suicide is not given equal coverage across platforms

- **Online:** Represented the largest volume of suicide-related content (65%) and the platform with the highest number of harmful items (54.5%).
- **Print:** Just under a quarter (24.9%) of all content monitored came from print, which had the **highest rate** of harmful content proportionally (34.7%) when the total volume of coverage per platform is taken into consideration.
- **Broadcast (TV/Radio):** Combined, radio (8.9%) and TV (1.3%) accounted for just over 10% (10.2%) of all monitored content, and represented 10.8% of all harmful content (9.6% and 1.2% for radio and TV respectively).

### Key takeaway

While media organisations may utilise cross-platform publishing, it is evident that suicide coverage is most prominent in the online space. A newspaper's website may carry a story about suicide and choose not to carry it in their print edition.

Similarly, a media organisation with a television outlet may publish widely online about suicide, and rarely dedicate broadcast hours to it.

### Methodology

We analyse and code suicide-related items for 3 weeks every quarter. In 2024, that amounted to 3197 items. Outside of this 3-week period, we also monitor for suicide method on a daily basis, and monitor items related to high-profile suicides.

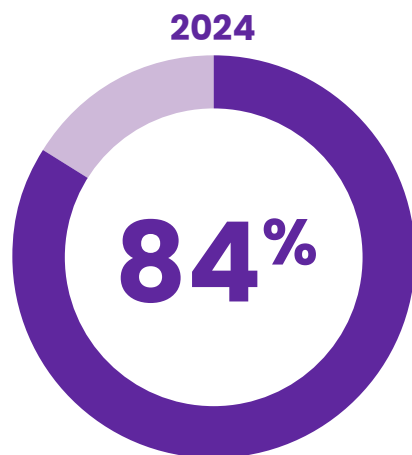
For further information on our methodology, please [visit our website here](#).

## 04 Most Common Harmful Elements

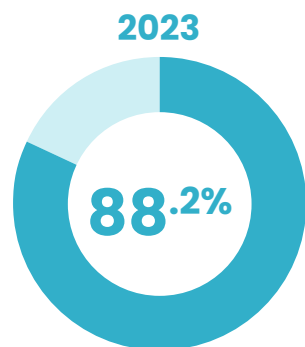
Harmful Element	2024 Trend
<b>Lack of Helpline Information</b>	<p>The most frequent issue in all four quarters. In 2024, <b>31.6%</b> of all harmful elements related to an absence of a helpline when one was needed.</p> <p>A helpline should include at least one direct way for someone to get in touch, such as a phone number or email. Helpline details ensure that anyone distressed by the content, especially those at risk of suicide, can access immediate, appropriate support. Including a clear helpline can be lifesaving.</p> <p><b>Note: 'www.broadcaster.ie/support' is not a helpline.</b></p> <p>Helpline information should include a phone number and/or SMS, email options. Including only a weblink may require multiple steps to find support, creating a barrier, especially for those in a distressed state or with limited capacity.</p>
<b>Implicit &amp; Explicit Suicide Reason</b>	<p>The second most frequent harmful element in 2024 (<b>17.9%</b>) was implicit suicide reason.</p> <p>An implicit suicide reason is when a story suggests a single cause or event for a suicide without stating it directly. This can oversimplify a complex issue and increase risk to audiences who are going through a similar event.</p> <p>Meanwhile, explicit suicide reason went from being infrequent in the first three quarters (6.8%, 6.7% and 0% of all harmful elements in Q1, Q2 and Q3 respectively), to representing <b>38.4%</b> of all harmful elements in Q4. This is largely linked to a single widely syndicated story, that of Alexander McCartney's trial.</p> <p>An explicit suicide reason is when a story indicates <b>direct causality</b> between a single event and a suicide. While this kind of coverage is rare, it can mislead audiences by oversimplifying multiple complex factors leading to a suicide.</p>
<b>Harmful / Stigmatising Language</b>	<p><b>17%</b> of all harmful elements in 2024 related to harmful / stigmatising language, e.g. 'commit suicide'</p>

# THE DATA 2024

## Overview of suicide coverage in Irish media

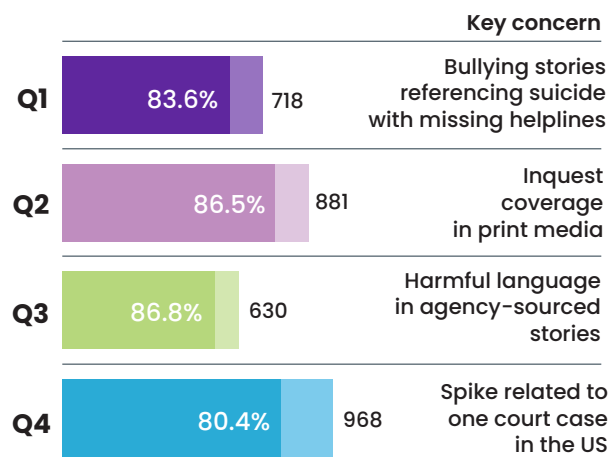


Of 3197 media items across online, print and broadcast, 2687 contained no harmful elements (84%)

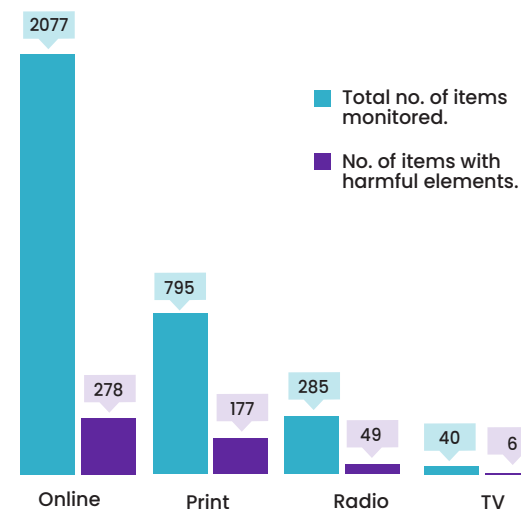


Of 3237 media items across online, print and broadcast, 2855 contained no harmful elements (88.2%)

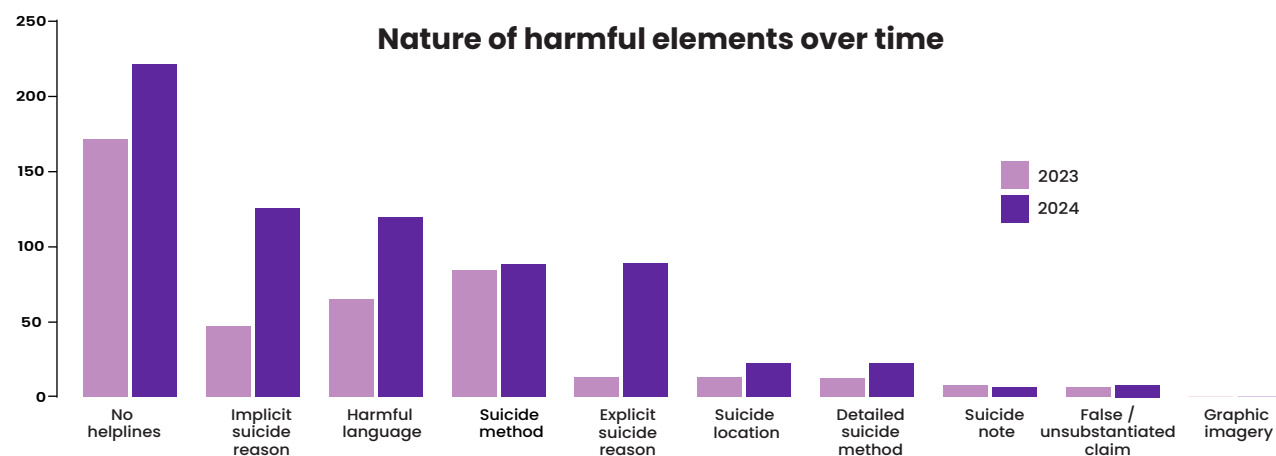
## Summary of Guideline Adherence by Quarter



## All monitored content and harmful content by platform

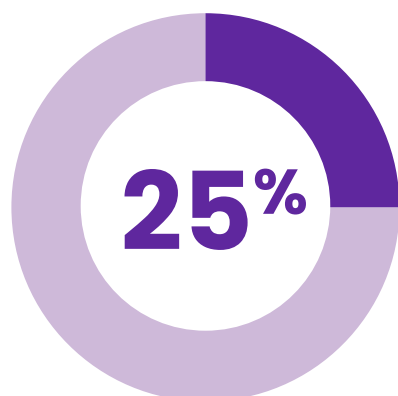


## Nature of harmful elements over time



## Challenging areas of suicide reporting

### Agency content



Across our 2024 monitored periods, a quarter of harmful content originated from an agency.

#### 473 In-house items



#### 75 Agency items

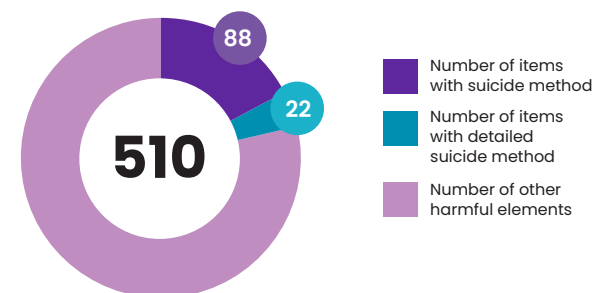


In Q3 for example, of the 586 print and online media items monitored, 473 items were produced in-house, and 75 items by a press agency (13.7% if excluding 38 items where the source cannot be identified).

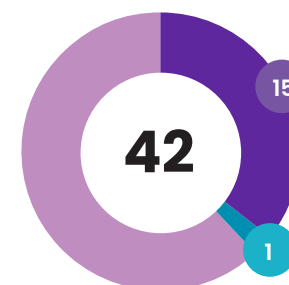
### Inquest Reporting & Suicide Method

Including the details of a suicide method in a media report has long been established as posing a greater risk to audiences at risk of suicide. In recent years, the suicide reporting guidelines were updated to reflect this risk. Previously, the guideline requested media professionals to avoid excessive detail of a suicide method. The current advice is to avoid any detail of a suicide method.

#### Overall harmful content



#### Harmful content dealing with an inquest



- Of all the media items with harmful elements, 110 (or 21.6%) contained a suicide method (22 of which were detailed method).
- Of all the inquest-related media items with harmful content, 16 (or 38.1%) contained a suicide method (1 of which was detailed method).



## Outlets with the highest coverage of suicide-related content

As a key issue of public health, it is crucial that media keep speaking about suicide and suicide prevention in Ireland. To get a picture of which media outlets are covering suicide the most, see the tables below.

### NOTE

These tables reflect the volume of stories outlets cover in relation to suicide and not the levels of adherence to the suicide reporting guidelines.

An outlet may frequently report on suicide and rarely breach the reporting guidelines, and an outlet may rarely report on suicide and frequently breach the guidelines. Also note that for consideration in our media monitoring, online outlets with a .co.uk domain are discounted and TG4 is not monitored.

## Overview

### All Media Outlets

thesun.ie | 384

ireland-live.ie | 216

The Times (Ireland Edition) | 128

independant.ie | 116

sundayworld.com | 109

irishtimes.com | 108

irishexaminer.com | 102

irishmirror.ie | 102

breakingnews.ie | 79

Irish Daily Mail | 76

Of the outlets speaking about suicide the most, 8 out of the 10 are online publications.

The Times (Ireland Edition) and the Irish Daily Mail were the only print publications to make this list.



## Television

Virgin Media Television | 20

RTÉ One | 18

Across our monitoring periods in 2024, the volume of television content related to suicide was so low that we did not break the numbers down to programme-level, as can be seen below in radio.

Most instances appeared in news and current affairs programming while a very small percentage came from standalone documentaries. The highest volume of items from any one programme came from Virgin Media Television's Ireland AM. TG4 is not monitored.

## Radio

Mid West Radio | The Tommy Marren Show | 22

Red FM | The Neil Prendeville Show | 22

Tipp FM | Tipp Today | 9

Cork 96FM | The Opinon Line | 9

LMFM | Alan Cantwell | 8

Newstalk | The Hard Shoulder | 8

South East Radio FM | The Morning Mix | 7

Newstalk | The Pat Kenny Show | 7

Shannonside FM | Joe Finnegan | 6

Newstalk | Breakfast on Newstalk | 5

Of the radio programmes speaking most about suicide, 7 out of 10 were from regional radio stations.

The remaining 3 radio programmes all came from 1 national outlet, Newstalk.

## Print

The Times Eire | 128

Irish Daily Mail | 76

Irish Examiner | 69

The Sun | 64

Irish Daily Star | 51

Irish Independent | 41

The Sunday Times - Eire | 37

Irish Times | 37

The Herald | 33

Evening Echo | 22

News organisations publishing both print and online versions of their stories often must make difficult decisions about what can be included in their print edition.

We observed multiple instances of organisations publishing twice or three times as much content about suicide on their online news site as they do in print. In one instance, a news organisation covered suicide six times more often on their news site than in their print edition.

## Online

thesun.ie | 384

ireland-live.ie | 216

independent.ie | 116

sundayworld.com | 109

irishtimes.com | 108

irishexaminer.com | 102

irishmirror.ie | 102

breakingnews.ie | 79

echolive.ie | 65

waterford-news.ie | 63

While stories may be published on an Irish news site, if a media organisation is owned by a larger UK company, much of the content may in fact originate from the UK.

While we continue to monitor the content, notable differences in editorial standards have been observed.



## The Power of Lived Experience and Best Practice

Included in the monitored content were exemplary stories of responsible journalism that model how suicide can be covered. Examples from our quarterly reports include:

### **Virgin Media's Ireland AM, May 8, 2024**

Cliona O'Hagan spoke about her suicidal ideation following miscarriage and postnatal depression. The segment was reflective, informed, and hopeful, combining lived experience, expert input, and clear signposting to support services.

### **RTÉ Radio 1 Today with Claire Byrne, August 1, 2024**

[www.rte.ie/radio/radio1/clips/22420237](http://www.rte.ie/radio/radio1/clips/22420237)

A survivor who had contacted Samaritans spoke alongside a representative from the organisation. Their conversation showed how radio can create space for lived experience without sensationalising, while reminding audiences that recovery is possible and supplying helpline numbers for audiences at risk.

### **Newstalk.ie Alexander McCartney Coverage, October 25, 2024**

[www.newstalk.com/news/northern-ireland-predator-to-be-sentenced-in-one-of-worlds-largest-catfishing-cases-1777308](http://www.newstalk.com/news/northern-ireland-predator-to-be-sentenced-in-one-of-worlds-largest-catfishing-cases-1777308)

While many outlets were challenged by this complex case, an article on Newstalk managed to avoid speculation, omit method, and include helplines. It demonstrated that news value and harm reduction can co-exist.

### **West Cork People "Coping with Depression", February 9, 2024**

This article normalised mental health struggles and promoted help-seeking in an accessible and non-stigmatising way. It showed the vital role local journalism can play in informed communities and challenging stigma.

These case studies are now used in Shine's media training and editorial workshops.

# Recommendations for 2025

## 01 Always Include Helplines

Helpline inclusion is still the most frequent gap in suicide-related stories and one of the easiest to resolve. Including helpline numbers is essential for audiences at risk of suicide.

## 02 Review Inquest Coverage

Inquest stories, although only representing 8.2% of all harmful content, often reveal details about the suicide method. Of all the pieces logged for harmful content in 2024 which related to an inquest, 38.1% included a suicide method. Coroners have said that including these details is at the journalist's discretion. We urge editors to assess their practices on including suicide method and whether the public's interest in it is of greater importance than the risk to public health.

## 03 Review Agency Content

Agency stories may contain harmful elements and should be reviewed before publication. Editing for helplines, language, or method detail can reduce harm and should be considered. Irish publications should ensure agency content meets their own high standards.

## 04 Embrace Lived Experience and Recovery Narratives

Stories, especially those that show recovery or help-seeking, can challenge stigma and foster hope. Including the perspective of those who have first-hand experience of mental health challenges can enrich stories and improve audiences understanding of and compassion towards those experiences.

## 05 Training

Shine offers tailored, evidence-based training on responsible suicide and mental health reporting. Workshops are free, interactive, and include contemporary case studies. For training enquiries, email [media@shine.ie](mailto:media@shine.ie).



This work is made possible with the support of the HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention and Ireland's national strategy for suicide prevention, [Connecting For Life](#).

To hear more about Shine's Mental Health Media Awards, Fellowship for Mental Health Journalism, free workshops, our stigma-reduction programmes in the workplace, Green Ribbon campaign, community peer-to-peer support groups and 1-1 work, visit [www.Shine.ie](http://www.Shine.ie)

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Connecting for Life