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Discourse on Suicide among Students at Yogyakarta Universities

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:
Suicide, Student, Discourse Analysis.

This research examines how the discourse on suicide occurs among university students in Yogyakarta. It also investigates how several mass media outlets—such as *Detik.com, Tribunjogja.com, Beritabaru.co, Republika. co.id, Kumparan.com, and Kompas.com*—reported on student suicide cases in Yogyakarta during 2022–2023. The study adopts a descriptive-qualitative approach, utilizing Michel Foucault's discourse analysis model. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the discourse on suicide among students in Yogyakarta is biased towards a psychological perspective, which has several implications. *First of all*, suicide is framed as an individual problem, portraying victims as people who are mentally ill due to a personal inability to cope with life challenges. *Secondly*, the psychological framing of suicide cases relies heavily on psychologically oriented sources. *Finally*, this approach neglects perspectives that consider suicide within a broader social context.

Introduction

The increasing number of suicide cases among students in the Special Region of Yogyakarta has shocked many people. Various stakeholders, including the police, the community, the academic group, and the government—particularly the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology—have expressed their concerns about these incidents. Most comments have pointed to mental health issues as the primary cause of suicide. Ova Emilia, the Chancellor of Gadjah Mada University (UGM), stated, "If UGM students face problems, they should not keep them to themselves; there must be a channel to find solutions." Emilia emphasized that UGM has long provided counselling services that students can access (Umah, 2022). Similarly, Nizam, the Director General of Education, Research, and Technology, argued about the importance of fostering a supportive campus environment. He said, "Psychological well-being is crucial, and on campus, there must be friendliness, care, and mutual support. Caring is a key element in preventing suicides" (Ihsan, 2023).

Focusing exclusively on the mental health of victims can lead to an individualistic view of the problem. This perspective aligns with the social constructs in Indonesia, where suicide is often observed as an individual issue rather than a social one. In 2003, official statistics reported five student suicides in Yogyakarta (KumparanNews, 2023). However, this number is likely inaccurate because many cases go unreported. Research by Onie et al. explains that culture was one of the biggest obstacles, which encourage people to see suicide as a taboo subject and discourage families from reporting such deaths. In addition, the absence of records if the suicide attempt does not result in the victim dying or being hospitalized also plays a major role as an inhibiting factor (Onie et al., 2024).

However, Onie et al. explained that there was an increase in suicide cases in Indonesia. In 2021, there were 613 recorded cases, which rose to 826 in 2022, with Central Java accounting for 380 of these cases. Most incidents involved men aged 16–51 (Anugerah, 2023). Yuslely Usman, a researcher from the Health Development Policy Agency, suggested that the actual number of suicides is likely higher than official data indicates, as the Sample Registration System (SRS) records more deaths than the Population Administration System (Anugerah, 2023).

The difficulty in obtaining accurate data has led many researchers to conclude that social issues play a significant role in the phenomenon of suicide. Social stigma, reluctance to report cases, and a lack of attention to the issue in society contribute to the tendency to view suicide as a personal problem. Theoretical approaches to suicide broadly fall into two categories. The North American psychological perspective views suicide as an individual act driven by poor mental health (Shneidman, 1985). On the other hand, the sociological approach considers suicide as a social phenomenon that can be analyzed using statistical methods (Durkheim, 1952). Combining these perspectives often results in a quantitative approach that emphasizes individual pathology (Alwiantara & Mahendra P., 2022; Chandler et al., 2022; Marsh, 2010). Critics like White (2016) argue that such approaches are overly focused on pathological and medical aspects, neglecting influences like historical politics, gender, cultural identity, media influence, and power dynamics.

White's critique underscores the limitations of psychological frameworks in addressing suicide. He contends that societal contexts, rather than individual tendencies, are at the root of the issue. This perspective is supported by global studies, such as Rob Cover's study, *Queer Youth Suicide, Culture, and Identity: Unliveable Lives?* which examines how societal stigma against queer youth creates hostile social conditions. Cover advocates for an emancipatory approach that addresses gender identity within social systems (Cover, 2016).

From a sociological perspective, understanding suicide requires focusing on "social suffering" rather than individual psychological conditions. This shift has led to the emergence of Critical Suicide Studies (CSS), an alternative academic approach developed by scholars frustrated with the limitations of pathological and medical frameworks. CSS challenges dominant quantitative, positivist, and pathological approaches while expanding the discussion to include insights from the humanities and social sciences (Marsh, 2010).

In Indonesia, much of the research on suicide remains centered on psychological factors. Studies such as *Suicide Attempt Ideas in College Students* (Idham et al., 2019) and *Students' Mental Resilience During Thesis Work* (Purwanti & Rohmah, 2020) focus on mental health challenges. Similarly, works like *Social Support in Suicide Prevention* (Salsabhilla & Panjaitan, 2019) highlight social support but ultimately prioritize mental health.

Research in communication studies often examines how suicide is reported in the media. For instance, Laksono's *Framing Analysis of News Reporting on Novia Widyasari's Suicide Case* (2022) analyzes media narratives without delving into underlying causes. Similarly, studies like Murniati and Hasfi's *News Framing Analysis of Suicide Acts and Attempts on Tribunnews.com* (2021) focus on media portrayal rather than societal factors. These works primarily address the psychological impact of media on victims' families, neglecting broader social contexts.

These studies primarily examine how media coverage impacts the psychological well-being of victims' families or how suicide is framed in an individualistic manner. The research proposed here aims to go beyond psychological aspects, focusing on uncovering the social discourse surrounding student suicides in Yogyakarta.

Research Methods and Theoretical Approaches

This type of research employs a qualitative methodology. According to Djamba and Neuman, qualitative research is research that attempts to capture aspects of the social world that are difficult to measure with numbers (Djamba & Neuman, 2002). The data for this study consists of news articles reporting on student suicides in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY), published on platforms such as Detik.com, Tribunjogja.com, Beritabaru.co, Republika.co.id, Kumparan.com, and Kompas.com over a one-year period from 2022 to 2023.

The data analysis is based on Michel Foucault's discourse model, which treats text as discourse—structured statements with 'regulated statuses' (Foucault, 1980). This approach involves examining how a set of statements constructs an object, identifying the enunciative modality (who is speaking and in what capacity), developing the associated concepts, and implementing strategies (Foucault, 1980).

According to Foucault's perspective, discourse can be understood as the common domain of all utterances, sometimes as statements from a group of individuals and sometimes as some policy practices for some statements. Therefore, a code of "truth" is needed to be able to legitimize power. Furthermore, Foucault sees a close relationship between truth and discourse. The truth established by science determines how discourse will be created, disseminated, circulated, and determined (Foucault, 1980).

Conceptual Study: Discourse and Truth

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002), Foucault defines discourse as "the general domain of statements." He elaborates: "Finally, instead of gradually reducing the somewhat fluctuating meaning of the word 'discourse,' I believe that I have added to its meaning: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as a group of statements that can be individuated, and sometimes as a regulated practice that takes into account a certain number of statements," (Foucault, 2002b). Foucault's explanation could be understood that discourse is sometimes the general realm of all statements, the statements of a specific group, or policy practices derived from these statements.

To legitimize power, Foucault argues that a "code of truth" is necessary. He highlights the close connection between truth and discourse, asserting that scientific truth shapes how discourse is created, disseminated, circulated, and governed (Foucault, 1980). The establishment of truth brings with it the power to determine which discourses are allowed within a regime of truth. Power, according to Foucault, permeates the entire social structure, connecting all social groups in a network of influence. This perspective dissolves the notion of hierarchical power, emphasizing instead that hegemonic power infiltrates every layer of the social fabric (Tew, 2002a).

This research is based on several critical theoretical assumptions: (a) discourse operates through discursive formations consisting of groupings of statements that have a certain consistency, which are historically and contextually contingent (e.g., religious discourse); (b) discourse extends beyond linguistic boundaries and essential meanings; (c) discursive formations are productive because they both enable and limit actions while determining subject positioning; and (d) it is impossible to exist entirely outside or inside discourse. The discourse analysis applied in this study aligns closely with what is commonly referred to as "Foucauldian discourse analysis."

Results and Discussion

Media Reports on Yogyakarta Student Suicide Victims

This study analyzes news reports related to student suicides in Yogyakarta published in Detik.com, Tribunjogja.com, Beritabaru.com, Republika.co.id, Kumparan.com, and Kompas.com in the 2022-2023 editions.

Key Cases Highlighted in the Media:

1. **UGM Student Suicide (October 2022)**

On October 10, 2022 Detik.com published an article titled *"UGM Student Jumps from the 11th Floor: Alleged Suicide"*. The report began with an explanation of the chronology of the incident by the police (Bulaksumur Police Chief). The news flow then led to the discovery of a certificate from the hospital indicating that the victim had psychological problems. The article also stated that the hotel had reprimanded the victim for entering the rooftop area, which is an area only allowed for hotel workers. The news published by Detik.com quite clearly explains the suicide incident. This can be seen from the title to the content of the news which explains the chronology of the suicide incident. In addition, the article provided a clear account of the incident, focusing on the psychological struggles of the victim as the primary context (Detik.com, 2022).

2. **UIN Sunan Kalijaga Student Attempted Suicide (December 2022)**

On December 29, 2022, the mass media reported massively about the attempted suicide case of a UIN Sunan Kalijaga student. Beritabaru.co released an article titled *"UIN Sunan Kalijaga Disability's Student Falls from the 4th Floor, Rectorate Asked to Pay Attention to Building Security."* While the article discussed campus building safety and raised questions about whether the incident was an accident or a suicide, it also highlighted the victim's psychological state. This news seemed to encourage readers to focus on the security side of the campus building where the accident occurred. Moreover, there is also information about the victim who experienced heartbreak. From the WhatsApp story uploaded, the victim often expressed the desire to commit suicide. Here, it appears that an article emphasized the victim's mental health over resolving the debate about the incident's cause (accident or suicide) (Beritabaru.co, 2022).

3. **UGM Student Suicide in Boarding House (September 2023)**

The next suicide case that was in the spotlight was the suicide of a UGM student that occurred on September 16, 2023. Tribunjogja.com published a report about this incident with the title *"Facts about Student Committing Suicide in a Boarding House Room in Pogung Sleman, this is the Campus Statement."* This case

occurred one year after the suicide of a UGM student who jumped from a hotel roof. The news began with a statement from UGM Secretary confirming that the incident happened to a UGM student and was related to a motive for suicide that was unknown to the campus. Furthermore, UGM explained that there was a consultation service on campus and hoped that students who needed it could access the service. In this news, readers were also invited to flashback to a similar suicide case a year earlier. The news content then reviewed the chronology of the student's suicide at the hotel and a statement from a psychologist from the hospital was found. The news linked the two incidents, suggesting a shared cause rooted in psychological challenges, thus framing a narrative that indirectly blamed the victim's mental state. The victim was considered to have the same motive (psychological disorders) as the previous case (Tribunjogja.com, 2023).

4. UMY Student Suicide (October 2023)

After that, there was another case of suicide committed by a student of Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta (UMY) on October 2, 2023. Republika. co.id reported it with the title *"UMY Student Who Committed Suicide Known as an Achievement Figure"*. The opening of the news explains the chronology of the suicide and its cause, namely depression. Then this news tries to tell the side of the victim who is active and has achievements, so that he was chosen as the head of OSIS. usroh (head of family/dormitory) in the UMY female dormitory (Republika.co.id, 2023).

Analysis of Coverage:

These news reports predominantly focus on the psychological aspects of the victims, often framing their mental health challenges as the primary cause of their actions. While some reports explore broader contexts—such as building safety or the provision of campus counseling services—the narratives tend to individualize the issue rather than addressing systemic factors that might contribute to such incidents.

Suicide Is an Individual Problem

Nowadays, suicide incidents are often associated with mental health problems (Hjelmeland et al., 2019; Shneidman, 1985a). This association frequently leads to the psychological aspects of suicide victims dominating media narratives. These psychological problems are often related to personal problems (love, poor academic grades, or depression). This can be seen from the news written by *Detik.com*:

> "There is a psychological problem. There is also a letter from the doctor. To avoid similar incidents, UGM has provided consultation services. The victim who fell from the fourth floor is known to have experienced heartbreak because of love. The victim is known to have committed suicide...... because of depression," *(Detik.com, 2022)*

In this narrative, *Detik.com* implicitly constructs a perception that suicide victims are people who are not strong enough to face their life problems. The victims decide to solve the problem by committing suicide. In other words, suicide is considered an individual problem, not a social problem. So far, researchers who are struggling with the issue of suicide have linked suicide to mental health. When an individual has suicidal thoughts, he will be directed to get treatment from a psychiatrist or professional to overcome his suicidal thoughts, Marsh calls this "obligatory pathological ontology" (Marsh, 2010).

The implication of this perspective creates a dichotomy between those considered "mentally ill" (fragile, disturbed) and those who are not. This dichotomy also encourages a hegemonic perspective on suicide victims as merely a psychological problem. Without belittling the importance of mental health, the problem of suicide is related to the social dimension, which in Cover's language is an unbearable living condition (Cover, 2016). Such conditions can be exemplified by social problems such as patriarchy, heteronormativity, discrimination, colonialism, or violence.

Addressing suicide solely through a mental health lens is insufficient in these contexts. A more comprehensive approach that incorporates social dimensions alongside psychological care is essential for tackling the root causes of suicide effectively.

Psychologization by News Sources

Various reports about suicide among students always presents various sources, including police, campus officials, hotel employees, government representatives, researchers, and psychologists. Despite the diversity of their professional backgrounds, these sources frequently align in attributing the causes of suicide to psychological issues. In news reports sourced from the police, the police talked about the discovery of a letter from a psychologist linked to one of the suicide victims. Similarly, this also happened to sources from the campus representatives who emphasized the importance of accessing psychological services provided by the campus. These statements collectively reinforce the dominant narrative that poor mental health is the primary factor associated with student suicides.

This focus on psychological explanations is unsurprising, as institutional policies addressing suicide prevention on campuses are often rooted in mental health frameworks. For example, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) has issued psychological guidelines to address suicide attempts. These guidelines detail various measures for managing individuals with suicidal tendencies, emphasizing psychological approaches (CPMH UGM, 2020).

In alignment with these policies, UGM academics also advocate for psychological interventions in addressing suicide cases. For example, Diana Sestiyawati, the Head of UGM's Center for Public Mental Health (CPMH), stated during a forum that the rise in suicide rates could be linked to mental health disorders exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (KumparanNews, 2023). This emphasis on mental health perspectives reflects a broader institutional and societal trend of framing suicide as primarily a psychological issue.
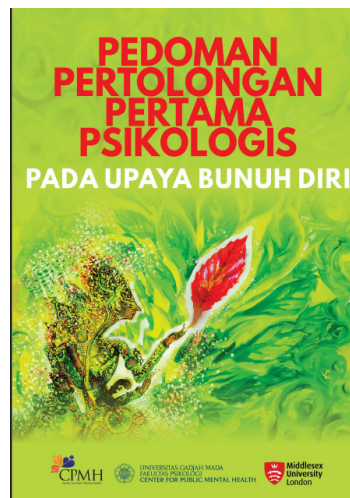
Figure 1.1. Guidebook issued by UGM

The inclusion of psychologists or psychiatrists in the reporting of suicide cases aligns with the guidelines issued by the Indonesian Press Council. As the authority on journalistic ethics in Indonesia, the Press Council provides guidelines that frame suicide predominantly as a psychological issue. For instance, Guideline 2 on reporting acts and attempts of suicide states: *"Reporting on suicide cases must position them as mental health issues, not criminal issues"* (Dewan Pers, 2019). The guidelines established by the Press Council are the basis for reporting suicide that is very psychological. This perspective places suicide as an individual problem. This position means that suicide is only a psychological problem rather than a multifaceted phenomenon.

Reducing Suicide Problems

Critical suicide studies (CSS) initiated by Ian Marsh, presents a critique of the hegemonic psychological approach in suicide studies. CSS advocates for a broader, multidisciplinary approach to understanding suicide, incorporating factors such as gender, economics, power dynamics, and cultural influences. This perspective challenges the notion of suicide as solely an individual psychological problem and calls for a more nuanced, systemic understanding.

According to Nizam, solving suicide cases cannot only be seen from

psychological health, but also to physical, spiritual, emotional, financial and social well-being (Kompas.com, 2023). However, Nizam's perspective only highlights the campus as the main actor in realizing suicide analysis with a social approach, overlooking the need for cross-sector collaboration to analyze and address suicide comprehensively.

The complexity of the suicide problem can be exemplified in various studies. Research on suicide and gender that occurs in Guarani women in South America highlights how the impact of hegemonic Western beauty standards causing Guarani women to experience decreased self-confidence and led to body rejection. This, combined with increased family responsibilities due to male migration for work, makes Guarani women particularly vulnerable to suicide (Martínez, 2019).

White and Morris' research on suicide by queer people can also be used as an illustration that queer people often experience stigmatization, bullying, or homophobia, which makes them vulnerable to suicide (White & Morris, 2010). In the context of cultural issues, the suicide cases that occurred among the Inuit youth in Canada can also be used as an example. The increasing suicide rate in the Inuit tribe occurred because of the failure of the tribe's acculturation process after being influenced by the Canadian government. The poverty of the Inuit tribe which resulted in a culture of violence in the family made the younger generation of the tribe feel neglected. This problem created unhealthy conditions for the younger generation of the Inuit tribe, so they chose to commit suicide (Kral, 2003). The psychological approach that views suicide news among college students narrows down the problem of suicide, which is in fact a very complex problem. By only considering the psychological side, reading suicide cases becomes limited.

Table 1. Analysis of Statement Rules for Reporting Student Suicide

Statement rules	Student suicide
Object (talked about)	Personal problems and the psychological state of students are the subject of discussion.
Construct	Psychological and mental health.

Subject (who speaks)	Ministry officials, academics, campus officials, psychiatrists, and police.
Strategy	It is displayed as a result of reporting.
Knowledge	*Suicide* in college students is defined as a psychological phenomenon. The psychological condition of students who are not strong enough to face life's problems (economics, studies, friendships, romance, and others) is the most potent cause of suicide. This approach fosters the view that suicide is an individual victim's problem.

Source: Research Results, 2023

The analysis above reinforces the notion that contemporary suicide cases are predominantly framed within the discourse of mental health (Marsh, 2010). This marks a shift from earlier periods, which interpreted suicide through the lenses of morality or criminality. In the mental health discourse, suicide is viewed through the medical framework of psychiatry, emphasizing the importance of psychological awareness in society. However, this perspective also leads to a reductive understanding of suicide.

Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that the discourse on surrounding student suicides in Yogyakarta, as presented in the mass media, is heavily biased towards a psychological perspective. This bias results in several significant consequences.

1. **Individualization of Suicide:** Suicide is framed as a personal issue, portraying victims as psychologically "sick" or unable to cope with life's challenges. This narrow narrative, often presented superficially, fails to provide a comprehensive understanding of the motives behind suicide.

2. **Psychological Orientation of Sources:** The mass media relies on sources who adopt a psychological framework, a choice influenced by existing

guidelines from authoritative institutions, such as campuses and the Press Council. These guidelines promote psychological awareness, shaping how sources interpret and discuss suicide cases.

3. **Reductionist Approach to Suicide:** The dominance of a psychological perspective excludes broader social dimensions, resulting in an oversimplified interpretation of suicide. This hegemonic approach ignores the complex interplay of social, cultural, and structural factors that contribute to suicide, leading to a diminished understanding of the issue.

This article presents findings highlighting psychological discourse in the reporting of suicide among Yogyakarta students. Further research is recommended, focusing on different subjects such as films or social media. Additionally, exploring other perspectives, including gender, ethnicity, and youth studies, could yield more diverse insights into suicide-related research.

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