

Tourist Suicide in Indonesia and Thailand: Findings from News Reports

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Background: This study aims to investigate the pattern of suicidal behaviours among the international tourists in Indonesia and Thailand by analysing the online contents of local newspapers. **Methods:** A content analysis of suicide news reports of the two countries was performed for the year 2019. Five newspapers of Indonesia and one English language online newspaper of Thailand were scrutinized to identify the reports of suicidal behaviours among tourists. **Results:** A total of nine cases in Thailand and fifteen cases in Indonesia were found among international tourists. The mean age was 45.5 (SD = 12.2) years, and most of the cases were male (83.3%). The common methods of suicide in Indonesia were hanging and fall from height. Mental disorders were found as a risk factor. **Conclusions:** Further psychological autopsy studies could be an important tool to explore the problem as well as to inform targeted suicide prevention strategies.

Keywords: Tourist Suicide; Indonesia; Thailand; news analysis

Introduction

Among the South-East Asian countries, Indonesia and Thailand are favourite tourist destinations. It was reported by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) that a total of 12,948,000 tourists visited Indonesia and 35,483,000 tourists visited Thailand in 2017 (UNWTO 2019). These countries attract international tourists due to the warm weather, unique cultures, and beautiful beaches and they have benefitted financially from the huge tourist influx. At the same time, tourism influx has also been associated with several undesirable issues. Suicidal behaviours among tourists have been reported by local media of the two countries (Nisa et al. 2020). However, there is a dearth of research focusing on suicidal behaviours among the tourists in these countries. Therefore, we aimed to see the pattern of suicidal behaviours among the international tourists in Indonesia and Thailand by analysing the online contents of local newspapers.

Methods

A content analysis of suicide news reports of the two countries was performed for the year 2019. Five newspapers of Indonesia and one English language online newspaper of Thailand were scrutinized to identify the reports of suicidal behaviours among tourists. We included the reports of suicides that were documented as the suicide of tourists and happened within the countries. The keywords used in the Thai newspaper were suicide, *suicidal*, *drink poison*, *gunshot*, *tourist*, while in Indonesian newspapers; the keywords used were *bunuhdiri*, *gantungdiri*, *Turisbunuhdiri* and *turis*. For every report, the content was scrutinized to extract the identity of the person, methods used for suicide and traceable risk factors responsible for the attempt.

Results

During the study period, a total of nine cases in Thailand and fifteen cases in Indonesia were found among international tourists. The mean age was 45.5 (SD = 12.2) years, and most of the cases were male (83.3%). The common methods of suicide in Indonesia were hanging (66.7%), followed by fall from height (27.7%),

and crash into a car (6.7%). In Thailand, the common methods were falling from height (33.4%), followed by hanging (22.2%) and other methods like cutting injury, and burned charcoal (each 11.1%).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the suicides among the tourists of Indonesia and Thailand (n=24)

Variable	Total (n=24) n (%)	Indonesia (n=15) n (%)	Thailand (n=9) n (%)
Mean age	45.5±12.2	43.5±12.6	48.4±11.7
Sex			
Male	20 (83.3)	12 (80)	8 (88.9)
Female	4 (16.7)	3 (20)	1 (11.1)
Type of Behavior			
Completed suicide	20 (83.3)	12 (80)	8 (88.9)
Attempts	4 (16.7)	3 (20)	1 (11.1)
Method			
Hanging	12 (50)	10 (66.7)	2 (22.2)
Fall from height	7 (29.2)	4 (26.7)	3 (33.3)
Others	5 (20.8)	(6.6)1	4 (44.5)
Risk factors			
Mental health			
Problem	8 (33.3)	5 (33.4)	3 (33.3)
Chronic disease	3 (12.5)	2 (13.3)	1 (11.1)
Not mentioned	11 (45.9)	6 (40)	5 (55.6)
Others	2 (8.3)	2 (13.3)	

Almost half of the reports (45%) did not mention the possible risk factors of suicidal behaviors (Table 1). Depression (20.8%) or psychiatric disorder (12.5%), a chronic disease (12.5%), relationship discord (fighting with a partner), and infertility (each country had one case, 4.2%) were reportedly found as the risk factors of suicidal behaviors. Among the suicidal deaths of the tourists, 20.8% were Australians, followed by South Korean (16.7%) and French (12.5%) (Figure 1).

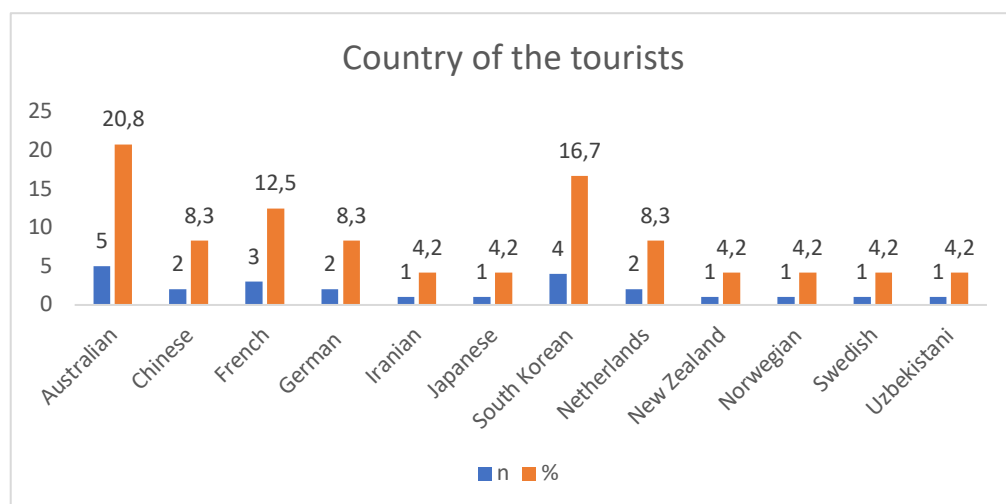


Figure 1: The citizenship of the tourists (n=24)

Discussion

We aimed to see the pattern of suicidal behavior of tourists in Indonesia and Thailand and to consider implications for prevention. We did a content analysis of suicide news reports of these two countries for the year 2019. The study revealed that older (after 40 years) male tourists commonly attempted suicide by hanging and psychiatric disorders were reportedly found as prominent risk factors. The mean age of tourist suicide was higher when compared with the mean age of the general population in Indonesia (Nisa et al. 2020). One study in Thailand assessed causes of mortality among foreign citizens which revealed suicide to be a leading cause of death among foreigners in Thailand. However, the actual proportion was small (Pawun et al. 2012). Another study conducted in Manhattan revealed different methods of suicide among tourists such as fall from a height, hanging, poisoning, drowning, and firearms. The study also found hotels, commercial buildings, bridges, parks, and streets as favored locations for suicide (Gross et al. 2007). Psychiatric disorders have been considered as a significant risk factor for suicide (Zalsman et al. 2016). The current study also revealed depression and other psychiatric disorders were a major risk factor for suicide among tourists.

Prevention of suicide among tourists is a challenging task and it has been an under-researched issue. Getting consultations with general practitioners or specialists such as psychiatrists or travel physicians may be a daunting task, while on holiday (Zhi et al. 2019). This paper could act as a catalyst for drawing the attention of stakeholders to conduct further studies to explore suicide prevention strategies among tourists.

Implications

The current study assesses the demography, methods, locations, and risk factors of suicides among the tourists to Indonesia and Thailand. As the studied countries have a good number of tourists, this research will help to understand the phenomenon. Future research could also assess the qualitative evidence such as suicide notes, forensic evidence, and interviews of survivors. Data from these will eventually help in formulating effective suicide prevention strategies for this niche group.

Little research has focussed, to date, on suicide among tourists in this region. Possibly, this is the first study assessing suicide among tourists in Indonesia and Thailand and could be an important initial study. However, the current study has several limitations. Firstly, the duration of data collection was one year. Secondly, vernacular newspapers in Thailand were not studied. Thirdly, the sample size is small. Fourthly, the study assessed media reporting which is not considered as strictly scientific data. Fifthly, from the contents of the reports, we cannot identify the nature of the attempt, whether planned or impulsive.

Conclusion

Tourist suicide in Indonesia and Thailand has been found as an under-researched problem. Common triggers for suicide in this group include personal psychological problems. Further psychological autopsy studies could be an important tool to explore the problem as well as to inform targeted suicide prevention strategies.

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Declaration of interest statement: None

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