

Case Study 5: Issues Management Journal

Lecturer notes

A note for lecturers

This case study is designed to give students some practice in considering issues associated with reporting or communicating about mental illness and suicide so they will be better prepared to deal with such a situation, should it arise, when they are working as journalists or public relations practitioners. Mental illness and suicide are very sensitive and complex issues, and it is natural that some people may feel uncomfortable talking about them. Usually, these feelings are temporary and do not cause serious distress. Talking about mental illness or suicide in an educational and supportive environment provides lecturers with an opportunity to advise students about counselling and other services available on campus, and to encourage students experiencing problems to seek professional help by talking to a GP, health professional or call a crisis counselling service such as:

- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 (5-25 years)
- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467

For online information visit: www.headspace.org.au and www.reachout.com

For further information and advice about preparing your class for this case study, you should refer to the document 'Discussing sensitive issues' which can be found on the *Mindframe* for journalism and public relations education website at www.mindframe-media.info

Public relations practice will have an impact on health and social issues, just as important social issues will inevitably have an impact, either directly or indirectly, on public relations practice. Mental illness and suicide are two of these important social issues. Mental illness and mental health problems are common in the Australian community. Research suggests that 1 in 5 Australians will be directly affected by mental illness during any 12-month period, with many more people indirectly affected by the illness as a family member, friend or colleague. Suicide is a prominent public health concern in Australia. When a person takes their life it can have devastating effects on family, friends, colleagues and potentially the whole community. The amount of information available about mental health issues is increasing, along with the sectors, organisations and people who are willing to share their opinions. This exercise will allow students to investigate a particular mental health issue from a number of perspectives and reflect on how they might manage that information.

Implementing the Exercise

Provide students with Handouts 5A and 5B and have them choose from the 2 topics listed below. Students will then need to review at least 3 of the media articles provided to determine what is being reported about the issue. Following this, students should undertake more detailed research on the topic including interviewing 2-3 class mates to assess their views and opinions on the topic as well as a thorough investigation of the relevant websites that have been provided. In considering the exercise and questions, you should refer students to the document *Issues and Impact: Communicating mental illness and suicide* for an overview of key ethical and public relations issues involved in managing communication about suicide.



This resource and further reference materials are available on the *Mindframe* for Universities website (www.mindframe-media.info).

This Case Study can be used as the basis for a class exercise in subjects such as Campaign Strategies, Event Management or Community Development.

The Activity

This task involves undertaking desk top research on an issue relating to mental health or mental illness. Your research will include a review of relevant media articles and specialist internet sites as well as interviews with class mates to assess current views and opinions.

STEP 1: Choose one of the topics of interest below:

- A. Are Australian mental health services being stretched too far? What are some solutions?
- B. Are the strains on the economy and the resulting unemployment impacting on the mental health of Australians?

STEP 2: Review media articles

Using Handout 5A or 5B (based on your topic selection), review at least three of the media articles before beginning a more detailed desk topic research using the relevant websites provided.

STEP 3: Interview class mates

Interview 2-3 of your class mates about your topic assessing their views and opinions on the issue.

STEP 4: Develop an issues journal

Complete the discussion questions below to assist you in pulling together your issues journal.

Journal Questions

Your journal should record details about the following:

1. What is being said about the issue?
2. Who commenting on the issue and why are they involved?
3. Is it a local, national or international issue?
4. Did your initial perspectives of the issue change as you conducted more topic research?
5. Did you find contrasting opinions depending on the source of the information?
6. Did media reports match information obtained from other information sources?
7. Did the media report on mental illness in an appropriate manner?
8. Did the class interview assist you in further understanding of the issue?
9. What theories of public relations and communication are important to the management of your issue?
10. Select a client that is relevant to your issue and suggest options for a public relations plan to manage that issue.