



BRIEFING IN CONNECTION WITH THE NETFLIX SERIES '13 REASONS WHY'

In response to the recent Netflix series *'13 Reasons Why'*, the National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF) has prepared a briefing expressing concern about the risks and negative impact on young people, in particular for those who are vulnerable and currently thinking about suicide.

The Netflix series *'13 Reasons Why'* was released in the US in March 2017 and is based on the novel by Jay Asher (2007). It shows the fictional story of a teenage girl who leaves behind 13 audio recordings on tapes after taking her life. She addresses each recording to a person who she says played a role in her tragic decision to end her own life, representing a 'revenge suicide'. The clip in which she ends her life, which is portrayed in great detail, is freely available on YouTube.

Internationally, there is consistent evidence of the negative impact of detailed and graphic portrayals of suicide in terms of an increased risk of copycat suicides, in particular among young vulnerable people.

Across the series of *'13 Reasons Why'* there is violation of media guidelines for suicide reporting, including:

- The graphic nature of reporting and the reporting of specific details of the methods involved can trigger copycat cases; the effects of exposure on suicidal behaviour and violence are well-documented.
- There is no consideration of young vulnerable people who may over-identify with the teenage girl in *'13 Reasons Why'* who ends her life.
- There are elements of glorifying and romanticising suicide, which may further impact on people who are considering suicide or self-harm.
- The protagonist is memorialized throughout the episodes and her locker at school is decorated and students take selfies in front of it. This is an example of memorialization that could be misinterpreted by young people as something they too will get if they die by suicide. Media should steer away from melodramatic depictions of suicide or its aftermath.

It would be important for media professionals to include information on help services for adolescents and concerned parents when reporting about the series, and to adhere to principle 5.4 of the Press Council of Ireland code of practice: *'In the reporting of suicide, excessive detail of the means of suicide should be avoided'*.

A further issue of concern is that *'13 Reasons Why'* does not take into account existing evidence of positive mental health promotion and effective strategies to improve mental health difficulties and prevent suicide when topics such as depression, anxiety, and bullying are covered.

Parents, guardians, teachers and others should be aware of the need to talk with adolescents and children who are using Netflix or watching the series, and to discuss their emotions and thoughts.

Since the release of '13 Reasons Why', mental health professionals and national suicide prevention agencies across other countries, such as the US, UK, Australia and Belgium, have consistently expressed their concerns about this series, and ask for wider implementation and more intensive reinforcement of the media guidelines.

Relevant helplines that can be accessed by people in distress include: Childline: 1800 66 66 66; Aware: 1800 80 48 48; Samaritans: 116 123.

Relevant websites: www.reachout.com; www.aware.ie; www.yourmentalhealth.ie; www.jigsaw.ie

Department of Education and Skills Guidelines for mental health promotion in schools:

- Primary - <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Well-Being-in-Primary-Schools-Guidelines-for-Mental-Health-Promotion.pdf>
- Post-Primary - <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Resources-Guidance/Well-Being-in-Post-Primary-Schools-Guidelines-for-Mental-Health-Promotion-and-Suicide-Prevention-2013.pdf>

For guidelines on best practice consult Samaritans and IAS' Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide at: <https://www.samaritans.ie/mediaguidelines>

National Suicide Research Foundation,

28th April 2017

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The National Suicide Research Foundation is in receipt of funding from the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention and the NSRF's research is linked to Connecting for Life, Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020.
