

# Why it's 'homicide bomber' not 'suicide bomber'

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A University of Adelaide suicide prevention expert has called for the term "homicide bomber" to replace the widely used "suicide bomber", because he says people who kill themselves while murdering others have few similarities to actual suicide victims.

Emeritus Professor Robert Goldney, from the University's Discipline of Psychiatry, is an internationally regarded suicide expert and author of the book [\*Suicide Prevention\*](#).

He says the term "suicide bomber" has entered our terminology on the basis that the individual [perpetrator](#) dies, despite their main aim being to kill others.

"Past studies have generally shown that there is little in common between so-called 'suicide bombers' and those who die by suicide, using 'suicide' in its clinically accepted sense," Professor Goldney says.

"From the point of view of experienced clinical psychiatrists, suicide bombers have a range of characteristics that are completely different to those of the majority of [suicide victims](#).

"The usual feelings of hopelessness and unbearable psychic pain, along with self-absorption and restriction of options in those who are suicidal, are the antithesis of terrorist acts. Mental disorders also do not appear to be a prominent feature in so-called [suicide bombers](#)'."

Professor Goldney says a change in the terminology away from the use of the word "suicide" could have some [beneficial effects](#).

"It has long been recognised that media reporting on suicide promotes further suicide - there is a tendency for it to be normalised as an understandable and reasonable option. The repeated use of the term 'suicide bomber' runs the risk of normalising such behaviour," he says.

Professor Goldney says the more appropriate term "[homicide](#) bomber" is believed to have been coined by White House press secretary Ari Fleischer in 2002. "However, since then it has all but been ignored," he says.

"It's time to address this again. Although the word 'homicide' is not entirely accurate because of the political and military context in which these deaths occur, it is more appropriate than the continued use of the word 'suicide'.

"Clearly there is no simple answer to what has occurred increasingly over the last decades. However, by the use of the words 'homicide bomber', a gradual change in the worldwide interpretation and acceptability of these acts may occur. Representatives of the media are urged to consider this change," he says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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