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Role of media reports in completed and prevented suicide: Werther v. Papageno effects.

Niederkrotenthaler T, Voracek M, Herberth A, Till B, Strauss M, Etzersdorfer E, Eisenwort B, Sonneck G.

Department of General Practice and Family Medicine, Center for Public Health, Medical University of Vienna, Austria. thomas.niederkrotenthaler@meduniwien.ac.at

Abstract

BACKGROUND: Media reporting of **suicide** has repeatedly been shown to trigger suicidal behaviour. Few studies have investigated the associations between specific **media** content and **suicide** rates. Even less is known about the possible preventive effects of **suicide**-related **media** content.

AIMS: To test the hypotheses that certain **media** content is associated with an increase in **suicide**, suggesting a so-called Werther effect, and that other content is associated with a decrease in **suicide**, conceptualised as a Papageno effect. Further, to identify classes of **media** articles with similar reporting profiles and to test for associations between these classes and **suicide**.

METHOD: Content analysis and latent class analysis (LCA) of 497 **suicide**-related print **media** reports published in Austria between 1 January and 30 June 2005. Ecological study to identify associations between **media** item content and short-term changes in **suicide** rates.

RESULTS: Repetitive reporting of the same **suicide** and the reporting of **suicide** myths were positively associated with **suicide** rates. Coverage of individual suicidal ideation not accompanied by suicidal behaviour was negatively associated with **suicide** rates. The LCA yielded four classes of **media** reports, of which the mastery of crisis class (articles on individuals who adopted coping strategies other than suicidal behaviour in adverse circumstances) was negatively associated with **suicide**, whereas the expert opinion class and the epidemiological facts class were positively associated with **suicide**.

CONCLUSIONS: The impact of **suicide** reporting may not be restricted to harmful effects; rather, coverage of positive coping in adverse circumstances, as covered in **media** items about suicidal ideation, may have **protective** effects.

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