

Educative input from others who have had their own suicidal experiences can reduce suicidal ideation

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The role of people with their own experience of suicidal ideation is an important topic in suicide prevention work. This role is corroborated by

the recently conducted study, which is the largest so far with a total of 545 participants. Working with colleagues from Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich and Leuven University in Belgium, study authors Benedikt Till and Thomas Niederkrotenthaler from the Institute for Social and Preventive Medicine at MedUni Vienna's Center for Public Health have now shown that expert interviews about suicide prevention can reduce suicidal ideation, irrespective of whether the expert in question mentions their personal experiences of suicidal ideation in the article or not.

It has long been known in [suicide](#) research that, when reporting on suicidal tendencies, it is all comes down to the "how." For example, sensational articles about suicides can encourage imitation. This phenomenon is referred to in medical literature as the "Werther effect."

"However, when the media focus on strategies for overcoming suicidal thoughts, this has a positive effect and can increase knowledge about [prevention](#) and reduce suicidal ideation," say Till and Niederkrotenthaler. The Papageno effect is named after one of the principal characters in Mozart's opera "The Magic Flute, in which Papageno, believing he has lost his beloved Papagena, entertains thoughts of suicide but is dissuaded from committing the deed by three boys.

Experts as prevention workers?

It is often discussed whether and to what extent experts, who have themselves previously had [suicidal thoughts](#) and have overcome their suicidal crisis, bring their own personal experience to the table and can speak openly about it and how helpful that can be for prevention. "Our question is therefore: can one bring about a Papageno effect by means of newspaper articles, in which an expert is interviewed about suicide? And is this effect stronger or weaker depending upon whether the interviewed

expert speaks about suicidal ideation from personal experience?" This is the researchers' premise.

Five hundred forty-five adults were asked to read a newspaper article. Group No. 1 read an article in which an expert spoke educatively about suicide and suicide prevention, without mentioning any personal experience of suicidal ideation. Group No. 2 read the same article, but this time the [expert](#) talked about overcoming a suicidal crisis in her youth. Group No. 3, on the other hand, read an interview about a health-related topic not connected with suicide. Psychological tests were performed immediately before and immediately after reading the newspaper article.

The result of the study, which has now been published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*. In line with the "Papageno effect," suicidal ideation was reduced by this newspaper article and knowledge about suicide prevention increased. It was found that educative input from experts with and experts without personal experience of [suicidal ideation](#) was equally effective.

The Papageno effect in suicide research

Since Thomas Niederkrotenthaler's team first described a possible Papageno effect in 2010, it has intensified its collaboration with the media on the subject of [suicide prevention](#) as part of the Austrian Suicide Prevention Plan (www.bmgf.gv.at/home/suizid) by media recommendations for reporting about suicide. Since 2017, the Papageno [effect](#) has also been part of the WHO media recommendations. MedUni Vienna's Center for Public Health recommends the new website www.suizid-praevention.gv.at in the Austrian health portal operated by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection to affected individuals or other interested parties.

More information: Benedikt Till et al. Effect of Educative Suicide Prevention News Articles Featuring Experts With vs Without Personal Experience of Suicidal Ideation, *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* (2018). [DOI: 10.4088/JCP.17m11975](https://doi.org/10.4088/JCP.17m11975)

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