

Individuals with recent suicide attempts benefit from stories of overcoming suicidal ideation

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The role of individuals with own experience of suicidal ideation is an important topic in suicide prevention. In a study recently published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, Thomas Niederkrotenthaler and Benedikt Till from the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine at MedUni Vienna's Center for Public Health have shown, for the first time, that the preventive effect is particularly strong if vulnerable individuals—who have had suicidal ideation or even made a suicide attempt in the past year—read a personal report from someone who has already overcome a similar crisis.

Over the past few years, the two MedUni Vienna researchers had already studied the so-called "Papageno effect" in the media but never with a vulnerable group. The "Papageno effect" is named after the main character in Mozart's opera "The Magic Flute, in which Papageno, believing he has lost his beloved Papagena, experiences thoughts of suicide but is dissuaded by three boys from

actually attempting suicide.

Report of personal experiences helps vulnerable individuals

In this study, 266 participants were included, 51 of them had attempted suicide in the past year. After reading an article in which a person, who had experienced a similar crisis, reported their experiences and how they had overcome it, suicidal ideation in this group decreased by 20.3%.

Participants of another intervention group read an article by an expert offering advice for how to cope with suicidal thoughts—in this case suicidal ideation decreased by an average of 9.6% but this effect was not significant. In the control group, which read an article on flu vaccination, there was no effect on suicidal ideation.

"This shows quite clearly: featuring individuals with personal experience of suicidal ideation and disseminating media stories of their positive experiences and coping process is helpful to others who are potentially at risk of suicide. The results of our study are, in essence, a call to the media to take up stories of personal experiences with [suicidal ideation](#) and how to cope with it to help prevent suicide," says Niederkrotenthaler.

More information: Thomas Niederkrotenthaler et al. Effects of suicide awareness materials on individuals with recent suicidal ideation or attempt: online randomised controlled trial, *The British Journal of Psychiatry* (2019). [DOI: 10.1192/bjp.2019.259](https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2019.259)

Provided by Medical University of Vienna

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