

TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE IN THE MASS MEDIA: FROM HARMFUL TO PROTECTIVE EFFECTS

T. Niederkrotenthaler

Center for Public Health, Medical University of Vienna,, Vienna, Austria

Background: Media reporting of suicide has repeatedly been shown to trigger suicidal behavior, with evidence being most consistent for reports on celebrity suicide. Very little is currently known about preventive ways of reporting on suicidality that allow for destigmatization of suicide without harm for those at highest risk.

Objectives and aims: This presentation will review what we currently know about the relationship of suicide and media reporting and underlying mechanisms. Public health interventions currently used to prevent copycat behavior will be reviewed, including interventions that restrict media reporting on suicide, and interventions that focus on changing the quality of reporting. Recent findings on a possible preventive effect of media reports on constructive coping in adverse circumstances will be presented and discussed with regard to implications for suicide prevention, in particular for suicide awareness campaigns and the prevention of copycat behavior.

Methods: The presentation will include a selective literature review of research on the relationship of media and suicide, intervention studies to prevent imitation effects, and studies at the interface with suicide awareness campaigns. Particularly experiences gained in the translation of the Austrian Suicide Prevention Plan will be presented and contextualized with international developments in the topic area.