

A SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS OF ALL STUDIES THAT AMBIGUOUSLY PROVE COPYCAT SUICIDES AFTER MEDIA COVERAGE OF SUICIDE

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**Introduction:** Research on the impact of suicide reports is traditionally focussed on two possible outcomes: On the one hand, there is ample evidence for additional copycat effects after media coverage of suicides referred to as 'Werther-Effect', on the other hand, suicide rates decrease after appropriate media depictions of suicides referred to as 'Papageno-Effect'. In contrast, studies that only limitedly support these imitative or preventive effects – i.e. all ambiguous findings – are hardly regarded.

**Objectives/Aims:** The present study exclusively focuses on all studies ( $n = 28$ ) with equivocal findings on the connection between media coverage of suicides and factual suicides and aims to systematically analyse central characteristics of these studies.

**Methods:** A qualitative content analysis of identified studies has been conducted whose results are systematized in *Table 1*.

**Results:** The analysis shows that a lion's share of ambiguous studies draws on aggregate data and unidirectionally hypothesises harmful media effect, which only insufficiently describes reality.

**Conclusions:** Future hypotheses on the imitation of suicides should be formulated in a more differentiated (bi-directional) way and studies should include content analyses of media coverage as far as possible.

Table 1

Analysis of all studies that ambiguously prove copycat suicides after media coverage of suicides

	Miles (1987)	Burrows & Latham (1971)	Phelps (1976)	Jacobson & Pridgen (1976)	Baker (1985)	Wasserman (1984)	Holtz & Burt (1984)	Kaplan & Spitz (1984)	Latham (1985)	Phelps & Pagels (1987)	Phel (1987)	Kramer et al. (1988)	Berman (1988)	Kramer et al. (1989)	Phelps et al. (1989)	Brown & Fergus (1989)	McDonald & Fergus (1990)	Baker (1990)	Baker (1992)	Berman et al. (1996)	Higgins & Budge (1998)	John et al. (1998)	Morris & Aho (1997)	Holzer (2000)	Neurowissenschaftler et al. (2002)	Rudolph (2002)	Tsai (2010)	Quaranta et al. (2011)
<b>Theoretical framework and formulation of hypotheses</b>																												
investigation hypothesis	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
basic theoretical theory			X													X												
additional theoretical aspects				X		X		X									X		X									
bidirectional hypothesis																									X	X		
<b>Study design</b>																												
aggregate data	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
individual data				X											X	X		X	X									
experimental design				X											X	X		X										
content analysis					X							X													X	X		
<b>Medium</b>																												
newspaper	X	X	X			X		X		X				X					X	X				X	X	X	X	X
TV						X	X				X	X		X					X				X				X	X
factual movies										X	X		X		X	X												X
others				X											X	X											X	X
no medium used					X																		X	X				X
<b>Key variables of studies analysed</b>																												
independent variable: non-fictional			X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
independent variable: fictional			X				X	X	X						X	X	X	X	X	X								
dependent variable: suicidal behaviour				X			X			X					X	X	X	X	X	X								
control variables mentioned	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
number of dimensions covered	4	4	5	7	6	6	6	6	5	4	7	6	4	6	5	7	6	5	6	7	6	7	6	5	6	6	6	

Note: X = true for study/dimension