Team

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Roadmap

- Overview of the issue
- Discussion of past research
- Review of existing guidelines
- Examples of current reporting
- Next steps
Overview

- Media reporting about suicide, or specific suicide incidents, may have an effect on suicide rates.

  - **Werther Effect**: A subsequent rise in imitative, or copycat, suicides following a widely publicized suicide.

  - **Papageno Effect**: Any protective effects of media reporting which result in a reduction of suicide rates.
Past Research

- Following the suicide of Robert Enke, a German soccer star on the right-of-way, there was a spike in suicides on the German railway.¹

- These effects were found to be lasting, with an increased suicide rate on the rights-of-way still present 2 years after the initial incident.²

- Rates for other methods of suicide did not change during this time.³

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¹ Ladwig, Kunrath, Lukaschek, & Baumert, 2012
² Hegerl, Koburger, Rummel-Kluge, Gravert, Walden, & Mergle, 2012
³ Hegerl, Mergl, Doganay, Reschke, & Rummel-Kluge, 2013
Germany goalkeeper Robert Enke in train suicide

Robert Enke, a goalkeeper for the German national football team and club Hanover 96, has been found dead after jumping in front of a train.
Past Research

- Imitative effects are often most closely associated with individuals similar to the initial victim.
  - Germany: Incidents following the Enke suicide were generally male.
  - Japan: Imitative impacts are only seen after stories of Japanese victims.

- An agreement to abstain from media reporting of suicides on the Viennese subway in 1987 led to a 75% reduction in suicides on the subway.

- Reporting may also be helpful, if done correctly. Reports of suicidal ideation *not* accompanied with suicide behavior is associated with reductions in suicide rate.

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4 Hegerl, Mergl, Doganay, Reschke, & Rummel-Kluge, 2013
5 Stack, 2010
6 Sonneck, Etzersdorfer, & Nagel-Kraus, 1994
7 Niederkrotenthaler, Voracek, Herberth, Till, Strauss, Etzersdorfer, Eisenwort, & Sonneck, 2010
Current Guidelines for Media Reporting

- Different guidelines available in different countries.

- In the US, guidelines are available from multiple sources

- Two examples:
  - [www.reportingonsuicide.org](http://www.reportingonsuicide.org)
Examples from Current Guidelines for Media Reporting of Suicide

- AVOID:
  - big or sensationalistic headlines;
  - prominent placement of the story;
  - using the word “suicide” in the headline;
  - depictions of location or method of death;
  - depictions of grieving family, friends, memorials, or funerals;
  - glamorizing the individual or the act of suicide;
  - presenting suicide as an unexplainable act;
  - dramatized language, such as referring to a rise in suicide rates as an “epidemic” or as “skyrocketing”;
  - oversimplifying suicide, such as indicating that it was the result of a single event.
Examples from Current Guidelines for Media Reporting of Suicide

- Instead of:
  - “committed suicide”
  - “successful suicide”
  - “unsuccessful” or “failed” attempt
  - “epidemic”
  - “X left a suicide note saying...”

- Use:
  - “having died by suicide”
  - “suicide death”
  - “non-fatal attempt”
  - “rise”
  - “A note from the deceased was found and is being reviewed by the coroner/medical examiner.”
Examples from Current Guidelines for Media Reporting of Suicide

- **When possible, TRY TO...**
  - quote suicide prevention expert about causes or treatments;
  - inform readers about the causes of suicide, warning signs, or treatment options;
  - add statements about treatment options available and stories of those who overcame suicidal crisis;
  - Include up-to-date local or national resources where readers can find treatment, information and advice that promotes help-seeking.
Volpe Media Research – Ongoing

- Google News search for key words daily for one year
- Collected only reports from US
- Coded reports on various metrics:
  - Headline
  - Images
  - Wording in article body
  - Where published
  - Written by whom
  - Number of articles on same event
  - Etc.
Volpe Media Research - Ongoing

- **Preliminary** findings: March 2014
  - 76 unique incidents identified (both suicide and trespass)
  - 132 total articles written

- Examples of Four media guidelines:
  - Using the word “suicide” in the headline
  - Try not to include photographs with the news story
  - Avoid using sensationalistic language
  - Include up-to-date local/national resources where readers/viewers can find treatment, information and advice that promotes help-seeking (suicide prevention information)
“Suicide” in the Headline

Headline of News Story

- **86%**: Does not include "Suicide"
- **11%**: Includes "Suicide"
- **3%**: Describes a suicide (intentional, jumps in front of)

“New York financial worker jumps in front of train. Why are traders (literally) killing themselves?”

“Texas teen killed by train in suspected suicide posted goodbye on Instagram hours before”

“Woman hit by a train may have committed suicide, police say”

“Decatur Police: Man Stepped In Front of Train Intentionally”

**NOTE**: News stories were for both trespass and suicide incidents
Photographs with Report

- No Photo: 37%
- Photo of Individual: 35%
- Photo of map/location: 8%
- Photo of train/tracks: 7%
- Photo of emergency responder: 13%
Sensationalistic Language

- **Examples:**

  - Man lays head on train tracks, killed instantly in Paterson, NJ Transit says

  - “It’s a fatality 99.9 times out of a hundred.”

  - Grandparents Killed By Train Ruled Murder-Suicide

  - Texas teen killed by train in suspected suicide posted goodbye on Instagram hours before

  - New Jersey Train Accident Kills Man In New Brunswick, 3 Hurt By Flying Body Parts
Suicide Prevention Information

- Information about suicide included in 1 of 132 news stories

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (www.afsp.org)
  - Risk Factors and Warning Signs
  - Treatment Options
  - Education and Prevention Programs
  - Facts and Figures

- If in crisis, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) – National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
Next Steps

- Look at FRA suicide/trespass data and compare events
- Analyze 12 months worth of data (July 2013-July 2014)
- Recommendations for media guidelines when reporting fatalities on the right-of-way
  - For the railroad
  - For the media