

# WERTHER SYNDROME

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## WERTHER SYNDROME: A DEFINITION, HISTORY, AND FURTHER READING

### Definition

The Werther Syndrome, also known as the copycat syndrome or copycat effect, is a phenomenon in which a person commits suicide after being exposed to media coverage about another person's suicide. This phenomenon is especially relevant in the context of youth suicide, as adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to the influence of media.

### History

The term "Werther Syndrome" was first coined in 1974 by David Phillips, a sociologist at the University of California, San Diego. Phillips studied the effect of a book published in 1774 called *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which tells the story of a young man who commits suicide due to unrequited love. Phillips found that following the book's widespread popularity, there was an increase in suicides in Europe. This finding suggested that media stories about suicide may contribute to copycat behavior.

Since then, numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the phenomenon of the Werther Syndrome. These studies have found that the media can have an influence on suicide rates, particularly in the case of adolescents, who may be more likely to be affected by media stories about suicide.

### Further Reading

Phillips, D.P. (1974). The influence of suggestion on suicide: Substantive and theoretical implications of the Werther effect. *American Sociological Review*, 39(3), 340-354.

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