A study of college students revealed that the fulfillment of basic psychological needs, including autonomy, competence, and relatedness, can buffer the effects of negative life experiences and protect people from suicidal behaviors. The authors suggest that their findings provide evidence that interventions to help students meet these needs can help prevent suicide even in the face of stressors such as academic and financial pressure, illness or injury, or the death of a friend or family member.

Negative life events were found to be significantly associated with the risk of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. However, of the students who reported negative events, those who also reported feeling autonomous (experiencing choice and volition in their behavior), competent (having an internal sense of effectiveness or efficacy), or connected (feeling closeness to others) were less likely to report suicidal behaviors than students who lacked these traits. This relationship held regardless of age, sex, and whether or not the students reported being depressed.

The authors suggest that the college students characterized by one or more of the personal traits that fulfill their basic psychological needs may be more motivated to act in ways that promote their well-being, even in the face of stress and negative events, and that they may thus be at lower risk for suicidal behaviors than peers who do not feel as independent, capable, or connected to others.


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