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**21st European Symposium on
Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour - ESSSB21**

Rethinking Suicide Research & Prevention

**August 26–29, 2026
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All members of the Organizing Committee are from the Suicide Research Centre at Vilnius University. More details: <https://www.fsf.vu.lt/en/institute-of-psychology/centre-for-suicidology>

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PS34. Phenomenology and Lived Experience of Suicidal Suffering

The Experience of Pre-Suicidal Suffering: The Perspective of People Who Have Attempted Suicide

Marcinkevičiūtė, Miglė; Gailienė, Danutė

Vilnius University, Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Psychology, Universiteto str. 9-202, LT-01513 Vilnius, Lithuania

This research aims to deepen the understanding of pre-suicidal suffering by exploring how suicidality emerges from the lived experiences of individuals. Rather than conceptualizing suicidality solely as a symptom of mental disorders, the study approaches it as a dynamic and cumulative process embedded in a person's life history and phenomenological field. The research seeks to examine how prolonged psychological suffering develops, how suicidal crises arise, and what individuals experience as most lacking during the pre-suicidal stage.

The study is based on 12 in-depth qualitative interviews with individuals who have experienced suicidality. Data were analysed using an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach, allowing close attention to participants' subjective meanings and experiential structures. The sample consisted of 12 participants (4 men, 1 person with a non-binary gender identity, and 7 women) who had attempted suicide no more than a year prior to the study and were receiving treatment at the Vilnius City Mental Health Centre.

The study identified 18 group experiential themes. The findings indicate that suicidality develops through a gradual process shaped by repeated traumatic and relationally violating experiences, leading to enduring feelings of profound lacking. To cope, individuals might form compensatory mechanisms that suppress psychache but become fragile over time. When these mechanisms collapse, an intense affective state emerges, in which suicidal thoughts arise rather automatically as an attempt to reduce unbearable suffering.

The findings indicate that pre-suicidal suffering closely corresponds to symptoms associated with complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD), including emotional dysregulation, negative self-concept, relational disturbances, and persistent threat perception. However, the study demonstrates that CPTSD symptomatology alone is insufficient to explain the trajectory toward suicidality. Instead, suicidality appears to emerge from the interaction between long-term traumatic suffering, collapsing psychological defenses, the meanings attributed to the ongoing events and suicide itself.