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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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Communities as Sources of Meaningful Connections: Insights from Individuals with Lived Experience of Suicidality

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Some authors argue that suicidality is a manifestation of community ties. However, how these ties manifest in an individual's experience of the suicidal process remains unclear.

This study adopts a qualitative perspective and aims to investigate personal perceptions of the influence of communities on the emergence of suicidality. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted at the Vilnius City Mental Health Centre in Lithuania with patients who had lived experience of suicidality. A total of 14 participants (4 men and 10 women) took part in five small focus groups, sharing their experiences and insights. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data.

Eighth themes were formed. Communities are experienced as having specific functions. Communities are connected with suicidality through atmosphere and applied pressure, shaping how openly one can be themselves. At the end, connections with specific people matter most. As suicidal crisis approaches, communities and people fade from awareness — connections weaken. Weakening ties increase loneliness and force confrontation with an unpleasant inner self. Suicidality may become a crisis of meeting oneself, while meaningful connections can soften or cloak this experience. To receive closeness and support, one must be ready to accept it. Often, individuals feel unprepared. Shared experience of suffering can foster deeper bonds with the community as a whole and with its members.

These findings support the idea that individuals with lived experiences tend to focus more on the experience of connection when reflecting on how suicidality and communities are linked. The study's findings suggest that the primary role of communities in the context of suicidality is to provide individuals with opportunities for meaningful connection. However, as a crisis approaches, communities and people may fade from awareness, and connections might weaken.

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