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Are suicidal thoughts reinforcing? A preliminary real-time monitoring study on the potential affect regulation function of suicidal thinking

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**Abstract**

**Background:** Theoretical work and clinical observation suggest that many patients experience relief from negative affect after thinking about suicide, which may increase the likelihood of future suicidal thoughts. Accordingly, our objective was to examine whether the occurrence of suicidal thinking was followed by decreased negative affect and increased positive affect.

**Methods:** Participants were 43 adults who attempted suicide at least once in the past year (78% female, 78% White,  $M$  age = 23.28 years,  $SD$  age = 4.38 years) who completed 28 days of smartphone-based real-time monitoring, where they were signaled four times/day to report on current affect and whether they were having suicidal thoughts. Participants could initiate a survey whenever they had a suicidal thought.

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