

SIN, SHAME, SYMPTOM:

SUICIDE AND
SOCIAL CHANGE
(1850-2000)

International Conference

10–11 September 2024

Institute of Contemporary History,
Ljubljana, Slovenia

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

Throughout centuries, suicide has had different connotations in different cultural environments. From the historical perspective it is interesting as it reflects values, fears and prejudices of the societies in each period. In the period under consideration those who would commit suicide transformed from criminals and sinners into patients: suicide was decriminalised in accordance with the civilizational norms and moved into the area of social pathology (along with alcoholism, idleness, adolescent unrest, and certain sexual deviations), only to later finally become a choice that enabled people to take the process of dying into their own hands instead of surrendering it to fate or coincidence. Over the course of centuries, suicide has undergone diverse conceptualizations with indistinct cultural contexts. A historical examination of suicide proves intriguing, as it serves as a reflective mirror showcasing the values, fears, and prejudices prevailing in societies during each epoch.

The symposium provides us with the opportunity to discuss how attitudes towards suicide have changed and how the phenomenon of suicide was perceived by the different segments of society: how did psychiatrists, social scientists, jurists, theologians, politicians, the media and the public opinion search for and interpret the various reasons for the increasing suicide rates through the period under consideration. We also seek to determine whether and to which extent the suicide data became a mean of manipulation and proof that a personal crisis could be linked to broader social and national events and circumstances and who were the alleged culprit for that.



CONFERENCE



PROGRAMME



DAY 1

Tuesday,
10 September
2024

8.30 Registration

9.00 Introduction

Meta Remec: Suicide as a historical phenomenon

KEYNOTE LECTURES

9.15 Udo Grashoff: Perception of high suicide rates in times of crisis and in periods of political stability

10.00 Julie Gottlieb: Suicides which are committed daily by people terrorised at the thought of a war: An epidemic of 'crisis suicides' in Britain's War of Nerves, 1938-1940

Break

11.00–12.45 PANEL 1:

Centres and peripheries through suicide statistics

Carlos Watzka: Suicide statistics – what cannot, and what can be learned from them: a problem-centred and plural-methodological approach

Nathan Marcus: Suicides and Hyperinflations in Germany and Austria after WWI

Dóra Patarciza: Sorrows and shifts: Suicidal schemes in the Szeged Jewish Community between 1850-1950

Dunja Dobaja: Suicides in Slovenia in the period between the two wars 1919-1940

Discussion

Lunch break

13. 45–15. 30 PANEL 2:

Understanding why

Dragica Čeč: Between sin and insanity: decriminalisation and pathologisation of suicide

Urška Bratož: „Suicide mania“: discourses on the moral and physical causes of suicide at the turn of the 20th century

Jelena Seferović: Do we understand why people take their own lives by committing suicide? Is it possible to identify the reasons for that final decision?

Ana Cergol Paradiž: Postpartum Suicide and Infanticide in Early 20th-Century Slovenia: Media, Judicial, and Psychiatric Responses

Discussion

Break

15. 45–17. 00 PANEL 3:

National martyrs and Romanesque heroes

Irena Selišnik: National martyrdom or sacrifice for love: Gender and the perception of suicide between 1850-1941 in Carniola

Pandeleimon Hionidis: „Suicide of a well-known scholar at the bottom of the Skaramagas gulf“: Pericles Giannopoulos' transformation from a romantic eccentric into a „prophet of Hellenism“

Luka Kropivnik: The motif of suicide in the literature of Ivan Hribar, the mayor of Ljubljana (1896–1910)

Discussion

18.00 Social dinner

DAY 2

Wednesday,
11
September
2024

KEYNOTE LECTURE

9. 00 Milan Radošević: „Silenzio stampa“: Media and suicides in Fascist Italy (1922-1943)

10.00–11.45 PANEL 4:

Between trauma and heroism

Peter Leese: Silence, suicide, and the question of trauma

Ljubinka Škodrić: Suicide in occupied Serbia 1941-1944

Matteo Perissinotto: „For fear of punishment“: Suicides in Trieste 1943-1945

Ivan Smiljanić: The concept of heroic partisan suicide in socialist Slovenia

Discussion

Break

12. 15–13.30 PANEL 5:

Suicide and the socialist society

Marko Zajc: Suicide as a Slovenian metaphor: Towards an intellectual history of suicide as a metaphor in socialist Slovenia

Gábor Csikós: Suicide and Ideology: how crisis was explained under Hungarian socialism?

Željko Oset: The films „*Samomorivci, pozor!*“ and „*Bele noči*“: The first thematic depictions of suicide on the Slovenian screens

Discussion

Lunch Break

14. 30–16. 15 PANEL 6:

Preventing it

Diego De Leo: History of Suicide Prevention

Alexander Obermueller: Suicide Prevention and First Aid in *Fin-de-Siècle* Vienna

Vanja Gomboc, Polonca Borko, Nuša Zadavec Šedivy and Vita Poštuvan: Reporting on Suicide in Slovenian Media Amidst Socio-Political Shifts, 1959-1999

Nuša Zadavec Šedivy, Polonca Borko, Vanja Gomboc, Vita Poštuvan: Paradigm Shift in Media Coverage of Suicide: A Four-Decade Analysis of Risk and Protective Factors in Slovenia

Final discussion



KEYNOTE



LECTURES



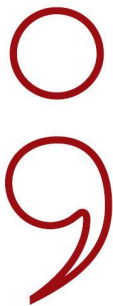
Julie V. GOTTLIEB

University of Sheffield, UK



„Suicides which are committed daily by people terrorised at the thought of a war“: An epidemic of 'crisis suicides' in Britain's War of Nerves, 1938-1940"

As contemporaries noted, the long months from the Munich Crisis (autumn 1938) through to the end of the Phoney war (spring 1940) felt like a 'war of nerves' in Britain. The battlefields were physical and material as much as psychological and imagined. Turning to sources that reveal visceral experience, in this paper I explore the internal and internalised history of the international crisis, exhume the causalities of this war of nerves, a group of people who exercised their bodily autonomy and self-determination to free themselves from the world in crisis. Based on a dataset of over 200 cases, the 'crisis suicides' --"committed daily by people terrorised at the thought of a war"--constituted an apparent epidemic. This body of evidence of bodily experience makes a case for reframing and renaming the period, and identifying the first battle of Britain's 'People's War'.



Udo GRASHOFF

Hannah-Arendt-Institut für Totalitarismusforschung
Dresden, Germany

Perception of High Suicide Rates in Times of Crisis and in Periods of Political Stability

In the 19th century, the rise of statistics as a scientific discipline induced a new perception of suicide as both a mass phenomenon and a symptom of social pathology. High suicide rates were considered to be an indicator of flawed social cohesion.

In the first part of my keynote lecture, I will be analysing social discourse in view of temporarily high suicide rates in times of upheaval. Be it world economic crisis, deportation of Jewish citizens, end of world war two, building or fall of the Berlin Wall, all these times of crisis were characterised by extraordinarily high suicide rates. In those times, many people committed suicide who wouldn't have taken their lives under normal circumstances. By use of examples from 20th century German history I will be showing how social meanings of suicide were generated and sustained. In this regard, I will point to bias and misinterpretations, too.

In the second part, I will be discussing social reactions to high suicide rates in times of political stability. In contrast to politicised discussions of suicide in crisis periods, the discourse on long term causes conceives suicide not only as a social but also as a medical problem. As part of a global suicide prevention movement, by the end of the 1960s both in East and in West Germany institutions of suicide prevention were founded. I will be comparing these facilities created under very different political conditions and will be discussing achievements as well as misperceptions.



Milan RADOŠEVIĆ

Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Zagreb, Croatia

„Silenzio stampa“: Media and suicides in Fascist Italy (1922-1943)

In the years following the rise of the fascists to power in the Kingdom of Italy (1922), a significant portion of both local and national daily newspapers continued the widespread 19th-century trend of regularly filling their columns with detailed reports on suicide cases. These reports, styled as short crime stories and reconstructions of the social and emotional backgrounds of the main protagonists, captured the interest of the public.

Towards the end of the 1920s, as fascism became fully institutionalized and a totalitarian corporate state was established, the media began to reflect a stronger and more sophisticated fascist narrative. The term “suicide” became a target of politically imposed censorship as an unwanted element directly opposed to the Duce’s vision of demographic policy and the greatness of the Italian nation and spirit. Benito Mussolini clearly explained his views on this issue in the essay “The Doctrine of Fascism” (second part: “Political and Social Doctrine”)—a key political document of fascist philosophical thought, first published in 1932. In it, he emphasized that “The Fascist accepts and loves life; he rejects and despises suicide as cowardly. Life as he understands it means duty, elevation, conquest; life must be lofty and full, it must be lived for oneself but above all for others, both nearby and far off, present and future”.

However, the topic of suicide did not completely disappear from newspaper columns; it was largely redirected as an instrument of subtle political messaging intended to show that such tragedies only occurred in other countries, particularly those with which fascist Italy had poor political relations. In this way, the topic of suicide became an object of fascist ideology.



CONFERENCE



ABSTRACTS



Carolos WATZKA

Sigmund Freud Private University, Lienz, Austria

Suicide statistics – what cannot, and what can be learned from them – a problem-centred and plural-methodological approach

Suicide was and is still a highly emotional and intensely ideologically framed topic in all of Europe. From a standpoint of sociology of knowledge, talking about self-killing – and equally analysing it within the framework of scientific discourse – entangles the actor in debates of ethical and political nature.

Thus, quantitative inquiries into suicide repeatedly – foremost within non-democratic countries – were objects of conscious manipulation efforts. Moreover, results often are biased. Particular prejudices of individual researchers or research teams may have subordinate effects in this, compared to multitude of perceptual filters, that influence the classification of a single death case as caused by suicide, or not, because usually experts calculating statistics heavily rely on pre-categorisation processes conducted by subordinate public servants, police officers, medical professionals and the like on local level. Therefore, what eventually comes to be considered a potential suicide case is a quite pre-selected sample, and usually there are limited resources to perform scrutiny into 'dubious' cases. This relates to both potential kinds of error, that is falsely overlooking a self-killing or, inversely, incorrectly counting some other death cause as a suicide case.

This taken into account, the question remains what to do about research interest in the quantitative dimension of suicide as a social phenomenon (and maybe, a 'social problem'): For sure, there is no chance to establish totally 'objective' suicide numbers – but we should keep in mind, that this is equally the case for any somewhat complex issues. For many research topics related to epidemiology of suicide, there is no need for aiming towards unrealistic levels of certainty: When looking for secular trends driven by cultural change, for correlations of suicide frequencies with political alterations, with regional variations in social structures etc., valuable insights can be generated using data tainted with inaccuracies, too.



Nathan MARCUS

Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel

Suicides and Hyperinflations in Germany and Austria after WWI

The German and Austrian hyperinflations after WWI are often studied from a macro-economic point of view. In contrast, the impact of hyperinflation on the daily lives of individuals is generally not quantified and therefore left to anecdotal evidence. This paper looks at suicide rates in major German and Austrian cities to provide a quantitative analysis of the impact of hyperinflation on individual lives. It shows that during months of rapid hyperinflation, weekly suicide rates in major cities in Germany and Austria dropped significantly. The results provide quantitative proof that confirms the anecdotal evidence according to which individuals experienced periods of high inflation very differently from other periods.



Dóra PATARICZA

Szeged Jewish Community's Archive, Szeged, Hungary

Sorrows and shifts: Suicidal schemes in the Szeged Jewish community between 1850-1950

Founded in 1785, the Jewish community in Szeged, Hungary, embarked on a transformative journey that saw it become a vital economic and cultural hub in rural Hungary by the early 20th century. This remarkable evolution, spanning almost 100 years from the 1850s to the Holocaust, was shaped by the contributions of dedicated rabbis, industrious industrialists, passionate teachers, accomplished scholars, and talented artists. The Szeged Jewish community's invaluable archive safeguards official documents, private records, textiles, and objects spanning almost two centuries. This archive, one of the few surviving Jewish archives in the Hungarian countryside, bears witness to the historical events experienced by the local Jewish population.

The current paper utilizes recently digitized archival material to present unique case studies, delving into the complex historical trajectory of suicide within the Szeged Jewish Community. Through a detailed examination of these cases, the presentation aims to shed light on shifting attitudes and responses toward suicide within this specific cultural and historical context. The societal perception of suicides within the Szeged Jewish Community has shifted over time. Initially stigmatized as criminal or sinful acts, these cases are now viewed with a more nuanced understanding, recognizing individuals as patients. This change aligns with the broader societal trend of decriminalizing suicide.

My paper seeks to scrutinize various perspectives on suicide within the Szeged Jewish Community, exploring scientific, medical, moral, and media discourse surrounding these cases. I aim to investigate the impact of social and economic crises on suicidal tendencies among community members and the intricate interplay between suicide and literature within this cultural setting. By centering the analysis on the Szeged Jewish Community, the paper contributes nuanced perspectives to the broader discourse on suicide, highlighting the close relationship between personal crises and the historical and cultural context within this specific community.



Dunja DOBAJA

Institute of Contemporary History, Ljubljana, Slovenia



Suicides in Slovenia in the period between the two wars 1919-1940

According to the data of Ivo and Bojan Pirc, the founders of public health care in Slovenia in the interwar period, according to the late psychiatrist Andrej Marušič, as well as the pioneers of Slovenian suicidological epidemiology, Drava Banat was a suicide-prone country by European standards, with a suicide rate of 19 suicides per 1000 inhabitants. It was found that the highest number of suicides occurred near cities.

The contribution will focus on the question of the causes of the suicides as they can be found in the daily newspapers and archive material of the time. It will analyze the archive material of the Radovljica district administration in more detail, which "brings to life" the suicides with their stories and hardships that drove them to their deaths. Some of them left farewell letters that testify to a "planned" end of life, while others decided to die impulsively, in the heat of the moment, due to a stressful event for which they saw no solution.

The reports of suicides also testify to the attitude of the people around them towards suicides. The sources do not contain any accusations, but rather an understanding of the situation in which the individual found themselves, even if they were often criticized during their lifetime and stood alone in their distress.



Dragica ČEČ

Science and Research Centre of Koper, Koper, Slovenia



**Between sin and insanity:
decriminalisation and pathologisation of
suicide**

This paper will provide a brief overview of cultural, ideological (philosophical, political, theological and legal) attitudes towards suicide in the early modern period, the changes during the Enlightenment and the pathologisation and decriminalisation (but not destigmatisation) of suicide in the mid-19th century. In doing so, it will try to go beyond historical overviews that often focus only on fundamental philosophical shifts or that try to better situate contemporary phenomena of "high rates of suicidality" or to look for historical elements of voluntary end-of-life and euthanasia. The review will focus on a specific historical period, taking into account the complex legal, cultural, economic and social circumstances, as changes in attitudes towards suicidality have been the result of complex factors. In the second part, I will try to show, on the basis of legal, ideological and governmental treatments of suicide practices, the attitudes towards suicide from the end of the 18th century to the mid-19th century at the level of discourse and practice, and to answer the question to what extent the field of study has adapted political, cultural and legal treatments of suicide and the decriminalisation of suicide. It will also analyse some of the extant treatments of suicide in the years 1817-1840.



Urška BRATOŽ

Science and Research Centre of Koper, Slovenia



„Suicide mania“: Discourses on the moral and physical causes of suicide at the turn of the 20th century

In the debates on suicide that emerged from the end of the 19th century (when the suicide rate was also on the rise in Trieste), the causes of suicide were attributed mainly to physical causes on the one hand, and moral causes on the other. The latter were particularly often highlighted by the daily press, which was also criticised for the potential imitative effect that the death notices were supposed to have on the incidence of suicide.

If, on the one hand, suicide was perceived as the result of the corrosive effect of modern life and values (e.g. individualism, hedonism, materialism, atheism, etc.), which had challenged the security of the traditional embrace of family and social life, and was the least tolerated form of suicide, it could also be interpreted as the result of physical pathological changes.

The paper will observe in which cases suicide was understood as a moral problem (the impact of modernisation, urban life, bourgeois habits, changed values, etc.) and in which cases as a medical problem (f.e. a neurological consequence of a particular mental illness or condition, or other diseases, like pellagra). Although the two aspects were often intertwined, and the boundaries between them could be very blurred, the attitudes towards suicide in each individual case were also largely dependent on the motives and causes, that led to it.

Some examples will be given from a psychiatric hospital in Trieste, which can be traced in the diary of A.T., a hospitalised patient who, in the first decade of the 20th century, observed his (male) fellow-patients, some of whom attempted suicide. These notes reveal fragments of their life stories which, at least in part, give insight into personal hardships that statistics could not capture.



Jelena SEFEROVIĆ

Institute for Anthropological Research, Zagreb, Croatia/
Institute of Contemporary History, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Do we understand why people take their own lives by committing suicide? Is it possible to identify the reasons for that final decision?

The phenomenon of suicide is a profoundly intricate occurrence, influenced by a myriad of factors encompassing biological, biochemical, cultural, sociological, interpersonal, psychological, philosophical, conscious, and unconscious components. Through an examination of press publications, patient records from psychiatric institutions in Croatia, and scholarly discourse on suicide in medical literature dating back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it is evident that among the diverse perspectives proffered by journalists and psychiatrists of that era, it is evident that among the diverse perspectives proffered by journalists and psychiatrists of that era, there are visible variations in terms of defining the causes of suicide attempts and taking lives. The absence of consistent explanations underscores the enigmatic nature surrounding the ultimate resolve to end one's life. Although numerous experts and laypeople mostly claimed to know the exact motive behind someone taking their own life through suicide, some continued to seek the answer to that question in otherworldly forces or individuals who had supernatural powers. In essence, the multifaceted nature of suicide necessitates a nuanced and comprehensive approach, integrating various disciplines and perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.



Ana CERGOL PARADIŽ

Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana/University of Copenhagen,
Denmark

Postpartum suicide and infanticide in early 20th-Century Slovenia: Media, judicial, and psychiatric responses

This research aims to investigate from a historical perspective cases in which mothers attempted suicide (together with infanticide) after childbirth in the territory of present-day Slovenia during the first half of the 20th century. The study will explore how these cases were addressed by the media, the judicial system (including whether the mothers were criminally prosecuted), and psychiatrists.

Key questions include whether diagnoses such as postpartum depression were present in Slovenian scientific discourse at the time and whether such diagnoses influenced the leniency of courts toward infanticides. Additionally, the research will examine how psychiatrists explained the causes of these psychological reactions and which measures were implemented to help women facing these issues.

By analyzing historical records, media reports, court documents, and psychiatric literature, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the societal, legal, and medical responses to postpartum psychological distress and infanticide in early 20th-century Slovenia.



Pandeleimon HIONIDIS

Hellenic Open University/Model High School of Agii
Anargiri, Athens, Greece

„Suicide of a well-known scholar at the bottom of the Skaramagas gulf“: Pericles Giannopoulos’ transformation from a romantic eccentric into a ‘prophet of Hellenism’

In the 1900s the Greek political system was in crisis, with the succession of short-lived governments in power, an international commission controlled the country’s poor finances, while the prevalent national narrative of the Great Idea had lost its credibility. In this context, politicians, young scholars and public writers sought the ‘soul of the Greek people’, that eventually would regenerate the wounded state and nation. Pericles Giannopoulos (1871-1910), writer, translator, essayist and journalist, followed the current of Helleno-centrism, which he combined with an equally fierce attack against Christianity and Western civilization. However, during his lifetime he was best known for his eccentric life in the social circles of Athens than for the works he regularly published (*The Greek Line, The Greek Color, Toward the Greek Renaissance, Xenomania*). During his short life he was considered by some a ‘romantic’, a ‘harmless madman’, and by others an abuser of Orthodoxy, while some recognized the originality of his thought. In any case, he never had the wider acceptance he craved as a writer, let alone to reform Greek society according to his vision. On April 8, 1910, Giannopoulos, wearing a laurel wreath, rode a white horse into the sea, in the area of Skaramagas, and committed suicide with a revolver. Initially, his suicide was attributed to disappointed love or professional difficulties. Gradually, however, when the preparations he had made before the act began to come to light, the first hypotheses about the ‘true motives’ behind the suicide of Pericles Giannopoulos appeared in the Athenian press. This paper describes, firstly, the debate conducted through the press about Giannopoulos’ suicide and, secondly, tries to explain its transformation from an act of desperation to a voluntary sacrifice for the awakening of Hellenism by linking it to the concerns of political and intellectual circles of the period for the future direction of Hellenism.



Irena SELIŠNIK

Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia



National Martyrdom or Sacrifice for Love: Gender and the Perception of Suicide between 1850-1941 in Carniola

In the presentation I will explore the question of what role gender played in the perception of suicide in Carniola in the second half of the 19th century and in the interwar period. I will mainly use autobiographical sources, memories and letters, but also newspaper articles. I will show what the emotional regime of the 19th century was like and how suicide was explained. Who were the protagonists of suicide and in what environment did it take place (rural, urban). How contemporaries, family members and friends explained it. As we will see, suicides were contextualized very differently depending on gender, social class and political affiliation. The motives were diverse and ranged from love, morality and honor to personal bankruptcy and political ideals. At the same time, we will be interested in what the general understanding of society was: was suicide something that could be justified under certain conditions, or was it always seen as immoral?



Luka KROPIVNIK

Institute of Slovenian Ethnology at the Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia

The motif of suicide in the literature of Ivan Hribar, the mayor of Ljubljana (1896–1910)

The Mayor of Ljubljana, Ivan Hribar (1851–1941), is certainly one of the most famous Slovenian political figures who committed suicide. The narrative of his suicide took on mythical aspects during the occupation of Ljubljana and after the Second World War, and the fictional story of Hribar cloaked in the Yugoslav flag was only finally disproven on the turn of 21st century, on the basis of interviews conducted by Dr Irena Žmuc with his daughter, Dr Zlatica Hribar. Less well known is the literature of Ivan Hribar, which was written from 1868 to the 1930s and is preserved in the Manuscript Collection of the National Library of Ljubljana and the Ljubljana City Museum. Hribar's literary texts include the libretto *Kralj Matijaž* (1868), the historical drama *Dimitrij Ivanovič Donskoj* (1872), the poetry collection *Brstje* (1872), co-authored with Filip Haderlap, and the historical short story *Gospod Izidor Fučec*, a medieval tale of our days (1914–1929), two poems, *Njega ni* and *Na slovenskem Parnasu*, and a fragment of *An unknown short story*, in which we can find numerous allusions to the universe, questions of human existence, which the Slovenian literary historian Milena Mileva Blažič links thematically and motivically with Hribar's farewell letter to his daughter and his wife. In this paper, we present literary works by Ivan Hribar that contain the motifs of suicide and we try to contextualise the motif of suicide within Hribar's literature. In doing so, we categorise suicide according to the connotation (suicide as a political act, an escape, ridiculing the main character, etc.) it has in individual examples of Hribar's texts.



Peter LEESE

DNRF Center of Excellence for Culture and the Mind,
University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Silence, Suicide, and the Question of Trauma

In the taxonomy of suicide some causes seem clear and unambiguous, while in other instances there is radical unknowability. This paper considers two apparent self-killings to consider the link between traumatic event and self destruction. This is also an enquiry into the nature of traumatic memory, its ongoing effects, and the difficulty of establishing a link between supposed event and subsequent outcome. In the better known instance of Primo Levi (1919-87) the reading of a life through its most known themes—reflections on survival in the Nazi concentrations camps—has led biographers and others to assume a link to his sudden, unwitnessed death. The actual circumstances of Levi's end, though, leave grounds for doubt. In the death of Robert Vas (1931-78) the circumstances are also less than certain. The silence that accompanies both deaths, the absence of witness or explanation, creates a speculative void into which observers place their own assumptions of victimhood and loss. A similar logic is often applied to the originary traumatizing event which is assumed to cause ongoing mental suffering. Here I reflect on the radical unknowability of suicide in certain circumstances, and the ways in which this might help us to see those subjected to insufferable events and involuntary memories not only as victims. The tragic loss of suicide cannot be made good by reinterpreting its point of origin, but a reconsideration of causality, a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty, may also help us understand the true nature of traumatic memory.



Ljubinka ŠKODRIĆ

Institute for Contemporary History, Belgrade,
Republic of Serbia

Suicide in occupied Serbia 1941–1944

During the Second World War, Serbia was under a strict regime of German military occupation. Although there is no statistical data, numerous archival documents, newspaper reports, and memoirs provide insights into the various types of suicide during this period. They occurred among the civilian population as well as members of the armed forces and resistance movements and can be seen as a result of the stressful changes in the political and social environment.

During the war, in addition to increased social integration, extremely vulnerable groups in the civilian population became more susceptible to pressure and isolation. Two different age groups can be identified who choose suicide for different reasons. Older people, especially women, often committed suicide out of loneliness, lack of connection with family members, and material hardship. On the other hand, suicides among the younger generations were often an expression of protest against parental expectations and will. In times of war, people showed understanding and compassion towards individuals who ended their lives voluntarily. However, the suicides of young couples, whose relationships were prevented by their parents, were strongly condemned by the public and the press.

Among the members of the armed forces and resistance movements in occupied Serbia, suicides closely connected to a sense of patriotism, loyalty and honour can be identified. These suicides can be attributed to the nature of the movements they belonged to. In the National Liberation Movement, there was a high prevalence of heroic suicides, which arose from ideological pressure and usually occurred in hopeless situations, in order to avoid capture. Towards the end of the war, there were noticeable suicides among the members of the Ravna Gora movement and the collaborationist forces. These suicides emerged as a form of protest and unrest in response to the military defeat in the civil war.



Matteo PERISSINOTTO

University of Trieste, Italy

„For Fear of Punishment“: Suicides in Trieste 1943–1945

The paper aims to investigate suicides and suicide attempts in the city of Trieste during three distinct phases: the Nazi occupation (September 1943-April 1945), the liberation by the Yugoslav People's Army (May-June 1945) and the first months under Anglo-American occupation (June-December 1945). In the months between September 1943 and December 1945 some of the lowest suicide rates in the history of Trieste were recorded, but at the same time we can see that among the causes reported by the authorities the words 'for fear of punishment' appear in several cases, often associated with people who were in places of detention.

Such cases are of particular interest to historians because they reveal, on the one hand, the systematic violence used during the Nazi occupation, especially by local collaborators (e.g. the infamous „Collotti Gang“), and on the other hand, fears of possible punishment for the perpetrators in the early post-war period.

The research is based on the aggregated data in the Bulletin of the Statistics Office of the Trieste Municipality and on the files kept in the Trieste Municipality archive where the cases of suicide and attempted suicide for the years 1944-1945 are collected, where the medical and police authorities punctually reported the suicide data.



Ivan SMILJANIĆ

Institute of contemporary History, Ljubljana, Slovenia

The concept of heroic partisan suicide in socialist Slovenia

The partisan struggle during the Second World War represented a constitutive element of the nation-building of socialist Yugoslavia, and partisan sacrifices were considered the greatest display of self-sacrifice in the fight for freedom. Some partisans committed suicide in difficult circumstances, such as an ambush by a much stronger enemy or a severe wound. Reading monographs, newspaper articles and propaganda material published between 1945 and 1991 makes it clear that partisan suicides were considered one of the noblest heroic acts that a fighter could perform in the national liberation struggle, and the same opinion can be already traced among the partisans in the wartime. Many fighters who died in this way were given the title of national hero; there are about ten such partisans among Slovenians, and for some the circumstances of death have never been definitively clarified. Monuments were also regularly unveiled at the places of death of such partisans, although there was a certain element of discomfort in admitting that they had died by their own hand, since the inscriptions on the monuments almost never directly state that they committed suicide. The only example where this is more concretely indicated is the Okroglo Cave near Kranj, in which six partisans committed suicide during unequal clashes with the Germans in 1942; on the plaque next to the cave is engraved the inscription that "we ourselves proudly chose death". The very concept of partisan suicide was not explored in detail until the 1980s, when Vladimir Dedijer began to write about it in detail. He started the discussion about "heroic suicide" and tried to document cases from the Yugoslav partisan struggle, with which he was supposed to prove the heroic core of the entire movement. With his debates, he sparked some controversies in Yugoslav society. Partisan heroic suicide was therefore seen as a heroic act on the one hand, but at the same time there was also a certain discomfort in admitting that it was the highest possible act of a partisan, at least in relation to those executed by the occupier. The presentation will thus try to determine in more detail the place of heroic suicide in the Yugoslav state-building imaginary on the Slovenian example.



Marko ZAJC

Institute of Contemporary History, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Suicide as a Slovenian metaphor: Towards an intellectual history of suicide as a metaphor in socialist Slovenia

Between the 1960s and 1980s, suicide was frequently discussed as a major social issue in the Slovenian public sphere, leading to the establishment of the idea of Slovenians as a "suicide nation." In her book "Illness as Metaphor," Susan Sontag examines how society uses illness as a metaphor for moral, psychological and political conditions, often resulting in the stigmatisation of patients. This perspective is valuable for understanding the representations of suicide in socialist Slovenia. This paper analyses the influence of the metaphor of the "nation of suicides" on political thought and discourse in socialist Slovenia. It analyses how intellectuals used or rejected this idea in their debates and how they adapted expert discussions and statistics to their political agenda. The concept of suicide as a "Slovenian problem" emerged in the late 1960s and was supported by statistics and high-profile cases of suicide among young people from prominent cultural and political families. Among the prominent intellectuals who addressed suicide as a Slovenian problem were Jože Javoršek and Niko Grafenauer. Javoršek, an advocate of Yugoslav socialism, regarded suicide as a symptom of social pathologies that jeopardised the socialist project. He criticised phenomenological philosophy, neo-avant-garde art, petty-bourgeois values and the Catholic and Habsburg tradition as harmful to socialism. Conversely, Grafenauer used the metaphor of Slovenian suicide to criticise socialist authority and saw suicides as a consequence of the tension between socialist society and the individual goal. He criticised both the League of Communists and the Catholic Church for restricting individualism. Interestingly, both intellectuals shared a misogynistic attitude. Javoršek condemned contraception and abortion, while Grafenauer criticised the high employment rate of women, which in his opinion led to a lack of family upbringing. Despite their different political approaches, Javoršek and Grafenauer shared a critical attitude towards the Catholic Church and an ethnocentric interpretation of the suicide phenomenon.



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Suicide and ideology: how was crisis explained under Hungarian socialism?

Hungary has a long history of grappling with high suicide rates, regardless of political changes. By 1926, the rate had surged to over 300 per one million people, a trend continuing from the 1960s onwards and consistently exceeding 400 after 1976. Research on suicide, with its rich tradition in Hungary, resumed after a hiatus due to Hungarian Stalinism. However, researchers faced a dilemma: they could raise questions more openly than their Soviet counterparts but had to provide answers within a certain ideological framework.

Despite promises by the communist party to eradicate deviance by transforming social structures, political, social, and economic changes over decades only moderately affected suicide rates. Nonetheless, certain shifts were evident, such as the increasing contribution of rural suicides to overall statistics. My paper explores how these findings can be communicated within ideological frameworks while maintaining ideological premises. After 1945, the Communist Party pledged to eradicate deviance by reforming social structures. During investigations into social adjustment disorders, it was emphasized that studying deviance should not lead to socialism criticism.

Contemporary sociological literature offers various approaches: 1) Socialism's transitional nature implies differing decreases in deviance patterns. 2) Rapid development necessitates socialism addressing lagging modernization. 3) Individual responsibility, exemplified by slow mentality shifts or excessive materialism, is pertinent. 4) Only in the 1980s did sociological researchers highlight the correlation between exclusion from modernization and suicide, along with perceived disparities.



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The films „*Samomorivci, pozor!*“ and „*Bele noči*“: The first thematic depictions of suicide on the Slovenian screens.

The short film *Samomorivci, pozor* [Suicides Beware] (Ljubljana, 1967) and the film *Bele noči* [White Nights] (Ljubljana, 1971) focus on the socially sensitive issue of suicides in Slovenia, pointedly among youngsters. Both movies represent an early discussion of the issue, aired on public television in Ljubljana in the late 1960s and ensuing years. In the first film, statistics are interviews are used, while the second is centered around the role of an older, mature person who has corrupting influence on young vulnerable, on the brink people by promoting group suicide. The first film was shown several times and presented at festivals, while the second film was screened only once and then sent to the “bunker”. The only trace is the commented version of the script.



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Suicide prevention and first aid in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna

Suicide prevention has been a crucial concern for public health in nineteenth-century Vienna. Organizations like the Viennese Voluntary Ambulance Association (Wiener Freiwillige Rettungsgesellschaft), founded in 1882, took suicides as their *raison d'être* and highlighted the fact that saving lives meant preventing suicides. These early first responders worked at the intersection of both public health and order. While providing first aid and prehospital medical care, they interacted not only with city dwellers who attempted suicide but with journalists, police, physicians, and psychiatrists. Because first responders were often the first ones at the scene, their assessment of what had animated a suicide held particular significance. City officials also relied on the VVAA's case reports to get a sense of how frequent suicide occurred in turn-of-the-century Vienna. In line with the "transformative evolution of the perception of individuals contemplating suicide, transitioning from being branded as criminals and sinners to being regarded as patients", first responders approached suicides from varying perspectives. An all-male organization, the VVAA staff often interpreted suicides along gendered lines. They also held significant sway over the decision to declare a person who had attempted suicide mentally ill. Yet, first responders also depended on suicides. They touted their success in preventing suicides as proof for their professionalism. In sum, first responders occupied an important role in the prevention and interpretation of suicides in the Habsburg monarchy's capital. Using VVAA case records, annual reports, newspapers, and medical journals and building on existing scholarship (Leidinger 2012; Macho 2017), I trace first responders influence on the evolution of suicide between 1882 and 1914.



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History of Suicide Prevention

Suicide prevention has a complex history that reflects the evolution of our understanding and attitudes towards mental health. Views of suicide have varied greatly. In ancient Greece and Rome times, for example, suicide was sometimes accepted, as was the case with the Stoic philosophers. However, in many cultures, it was seen as an act of desperation or a religious taboo. With the spread of Christianity, suicide was condemned as a sin. The Church considered it an act against God and the community, leading to severe religious and social sanctions. The burial of suicides in consecrated ground was forbidden; they were often buried at crossroads (with a stake driven into the body) or at the edge of the city, or a deserted and remote place. If accepted in cemeteries, they were placed in a corner near the wall or under the gutter. The suicide's grave was not to be cared for. During the Renaissance the dominant religious view of suicide continued to influence society, but some intellectual challenges to these ideas began to emerge. Robert Burton, with his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), invited his contemporaries – in contrast to the dominant mentality – to mitigate the harsh judgment of condemnation towards suicide, especially in those cases in which people had shown to possess a profoundly melancholic character. The coining of the term suicide, which replaces the expression 'self-murder', comes shortly after Burton's work, and represents an important sign of change. The proposal came from Sir Thomas Browne, a physician and prelate, in his *Religio Medici* (1642): *suicidium* was referred to the Latin *sui* (of oneself) and *caedere* (to kill). The medical approach to the phenomenon of suicide was to end up acquiring a decisive importance in the criminal cases brought against suicides. In a historical context in which suicide was considered a crime (*felo de se*) against the state, the presence of a pathological condition (*non compos mentis*) represented, in fact, the only mitigating factor capable of protecting the suicide victim (and his family) from the legal and administrative consequences of the act (confiscation of his assets).

During the Enlightenment, thinkers such as David Hume began to approach suicide from a more philosophical perspective, challenging the religious view and seeking to understand the causes and implications of suicide. In the 19th century, Émile Durkheim, a French sociologist, published "Le Suicide" in 1897, a seminal work that analysed the social causes of suicide. Durkheim introduced concepts such as "anomie" and "social integration" to explain suicide rates. Later, Sigmund Freud and other psychoanalysts began to explore suicide from a psychological perspective, viewing it as an expression of internal conflicts and unconscious desires.

In the 1950s, the United States saw the creation of the first organizations dedicated to suicide prevention. Edwin S. Shneidman founded the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center in 1958, which is considered one of the first centres of its kind in the world. Crisis hotlines became an important prevention tool. The first telephone suicide prevention hotline was established in London in 1953 by Chad Varah, an Anglican minister, who founded the Samaritans.

Erwin Ringel and Norman Farberow founded the International Association for Suicide Prevention in the early Sixties. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) was founded in 1987, while the International Academy for Suicide Research was created by Rene' Diekstra and Diego de Leo in 1990. Research into the genetics, neurobiology, and psychology of suicide began to take off, leading to a better understanding of risk factors and warning signs.

With the advent of the Internet and social media, new intervention and prevention methods have emerged, such as online chats and mental health apps. Big Data and artificial intelligence are being used to identify and prevent suicidal behaviour through the analysis of behavioural patterns. After the landmarking creation of the World Suicide Prevention Day (2003), many countries have implemented national suicide prevention strategies, which promote a multi-sectoral approach involving health, education, and local communities together with the fight against stigma, which promotes awareness and public education, encouraging people to seek help.



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Paradigm shift in media coverage of suicide: A four-decade analysis of risk and protective factors in Slovenia

In every historical period, the perception and interpretation of suicide have been shaped by the prevailing beliefs, values, and socio-cultural norms of the time. Consequently, different risk and protective factors for suicide have been emphasised by the lay public in different historical periods, reflecting prevailing attitudes towards suicide.

Media reports, through their portrayal of these factors, offer insights into the evolving public narrative. This study, therefore, explores the evolution of Slovenian public attitudes towards suicide by analysing media coverage in two leading Slovenian newspapers from 1959 to 1999, examining how the portrayal of suicide risk and protective factors has changed over four decades, reflecting broader societal changes.

The quantitative analysis of 1,785 articles shows that the frequency of risk and protective factors has increased over time, suggesting that public and journalists' awareness of the complexity of suicide risk and prevention has increased. In addition, the qualitative analysis showed that media reports emphasised individual risk factors such as mental health problems and gender inequalities. In contrast, discussions on protective factors focused mainly on interpersonal relationships in the 1960s, while community-related factors were gradually included in the 1990s.

The findings highlight the central role of the media in shaping public perceptions and attitudes toward suicide, which has significant implications for health policy and prevention strategies. The study shows a clear shift in media narratives from a biomedical to a biopsychosocial approach that recognises the complex interplay of individual, interpersonal and societal influences on suicidal behaviour. This shift reflects global trends in public health strategies that are increasingly in favor of holistic and community-based suicide prevention interventions.

The evolution of media portrayal emphasises the need for continued, balanced media coverage that highlights risk and protective factors equally. This balanced approach can promote better public understanding and enhance community engagement in suicide prevention strategies.



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**Reporting on suicide in Slovenian media
amidst socio-political shifts, 1959-1999**

Suicide is a major public health problem with a profound impact on individuals, families and communities. The role of the media in suicide prevention is crucial, given its ability to influence societal attitudes and public health outcomes. This study examined the portrayal of suicide in the Slovenian media over four decades, from 1959 to 1999, examining 1,785 newspaper articles from *Delo* and *Večer*. The study aimed to understand whether and how the portrayal of suicide in the media has changed, while considering the general socio-political changes in Slovenia.

Our main findings suggest that the media often sensationalised suicide in the 1960s, which was, among other aspects, likely influenced by inadequate prevention strategies and a lack of systematic data on suicide rates, which hindered capturing the full impact of such reporting. Reporting on suicide during this period tended to focus on the dramatic aspects of suicide cases, potentially exacerbating public distress and contributing to suicide contagion. However, with Slovenia's independence in the 1990s and the subsequent liberalisation of the media, there was a notable shift in reporting. Articles began to include more preventative elements and emphasise mental health services. Despite these improvements, the 1990s saw an increase in provocative content as well, presenting a complex challenge of balancing editorial sensitivity and public health responsibility. The study findings highlight the media's dual role: they can both promote public health awareness and cause harm through sensationalism. The observed fluctuations in media reporting reflect not only the changing socio-political landscape but also a growing awareness within the media community of the impact of their reporting on public health. The findings underline the urgent need for ongoing training of journalists and the consistent application of guidelines for responsible reporting on suicide, which are critical to improving the quality of media coverage of this sensitive topic.

SIN, SHAME, SYMPTOM: SUICIDE AND SOCIAL CHANGE (1850-2000)

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