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## The society's perception of suicide

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** On account of its radical character, suicide is differently perceived by the society. The consequence of this phenomenon is the issue of moral evaluation by the society in the practical aspects of daily life, such as religious, psychological and social ones. Regarding society's complexity, it is understandable that the knowledge and the evaluation of this act amongst people are different.

**Materials and methods:** In the study a method of the diagnostic survey was applied. The questionnaire was conducted amongst 168 individuals ranging from 18 to 49 years of age. The study involved 69 women and 99 men. The arranged personal data questionnaire served as the evaluation of perceiving the suicidal act and people's knowledge about this occurrence.

**Results:** Respondents claim that suicidal behaviours affect 72.5% of young people, and 22.7% of adult men. Large group of the study participants had personal experience with individuals after a suicide attempt (41.92%). As many as 49.7% of individuals are fierce opponents of suicidal acts while 46.1% are of an opinion that 'the one who commits suicide should not be condemned or judged'.

**Conclusions:** Respondents present vast knowledge about the universality of suicide phenomenon and its most frequent causes. They are against such behaviour, but do not condemn individuals who committed this act. The study participants show understanding of ways to prevent suicide.

**Keywords:** suicide, a suicide attempt, public evaluation, questionnaire survey

### Streszczenie

**Wstęp:** Ze względu na swój radykalny i ostateczny charakter, samobójstwa wzbudzają w społeczeństwie wiele emocji. Konsekwencje samobójstw podlegają moralnej ocenie w trzech głównych kontekstach: religijnym, psychologicznym i społecznym. Ze względu na złożoność społeczeństw, zrozumiałym jest, że poziom wiedzy oraz ocena moralna aktu samobójczego są bardzo zróżnicowane.

**Materiały i metody:** Badanie ankietowe przeprowadzono wśród 168 respondentów w wieku 18-49 lat. W badanej populacji znajdowało się 69 kobiet i 99 mężczyzn.

**Wyniki:** Ankietowani wskazywali, że najczęściej samobójstwa popełniają ludzie młodzi (72,5%) oraz mężczyźni (22,7%). Znaczna część badanej populacji miała osobiste doświadczenia z osobami po próbach samobójczych (41,9%). Spośród ankietowanych, większość (49,7%) jest zdecydowanie przeciwna samobójstwom, natomiast 46,1% uważa, że nie można osądzać ani potępiać takich osób.

**Wnioski:** Respondenci dysponowali szeroką wiedzą na temat samobójstw i ich najczęstszych przyczyn. Choć sami nie popierają tego zachowania, nie potępiają go i znają sposoby zapobiegania aktom samobójczym

**Słowa kluczowe:** samobójstwo, próba samobójcza, ocena społeczna, badanie ankietowe

### Background

The contemporary world creates various challenges we face on a daily basis. Not everyone is able to cope with chronic mental strain caused by career strive, unfulfilled ambitions, etc. Despite using diverse methods of dealing with such condition, many individuals fail in this challenge and seek radical solutions which may result in suicide attempt.

Many researchers and psychologists have dealt with the problem of suicide. According to Emil Durkheim "every case of the death being direct or indirect result of a calculation or omission, presented by the victim realizing effects of his behaviour may be called a suicidal attempt

"[1]. Suicides are result of the disintegration of the social life and more often appear

in communities in which weaker social bonds exist. In Poland there are 6 male suicide killers in one female suicide killer. Most frequently committed acts of suicide are those committed by people being 25-34 and 50-59 years old. Amongst elderly people who committed suicide the majority suffered from somatic chronic diseases, what definitely increases the risk of suicide. Also individuals who are divorced, separated, widows/widowers are more prone to suicidal attempt [2]. It was also proven that such factor as the lack of sleep may be associated with suicidal risk [11].

Suicide statistics in Poland in the years of 2009-2014.

Table. 1 Number of suicidal attempts resulting in death (statistical data according to Main Police Headquarters.)[3]

Year	Total	Men	Women
2014	6.165	5.237	928
2013	6.097*	5.193	903
2012	4.177	3.569	508
2011	3.839	3.294	545
2010	4.087	3.517	570
2009	4384	3739	645

\* in one case – no available data concerning sex.

An issue of moral evaluation is strongly connected with the occurrence of suicide, as it is an act which is publicly condemned. From the religious standpoint, only God may take away human life. According to psychological view, suicide does not lie in the frames of natural human instinct to protect life and this act causes deep emotional harm to the relatives. From the social viewpoint, suicidal act is a form of an escape from the public duties and a lack of loyalty to a social group.

The aim of the study was to establish the factors leading to the willingness of taking away own life. Moreover, the way the society perceives suicide as the act and how it perceives the individuals committing it was studied as well. It was also attempted to establish, how one should prevent suicide attempts and deal with individuals having suicidal thoughts. The study also showed the percentage numbers of participants who had a direct and indirect contact with the issue of suicide.

### Materials and methods

In the study, a method of the diagnostic survey was used in the form of the questionnaire and there was a random selection of the study participants. The number of 168 individuals was chosen for the study. Respondents' age ranged between 18 and 49 years. Amongst the examined, there were 69 women and 99 men. 60% of cases respondents had secondary education, 38% - higher education and the 2% - vocational secondary education. 60% of the participants were city dwellers, and 40% - country dwellers.

The author's questionnaire was divided into 4 thematic blocks:

- I. Epidemiology of suicidal phenomena
- II. Social groups in which suicidal phenomena most frequently appear.
- III. Causes, life situation and factors pushing to the act of suicide
- IV. Emotions and attitudes of the participants facing the problem of suicide.

### Results

Thanks to the conducted analysis of personal questionnaire forms filled by 168 individuals (58.9% of men

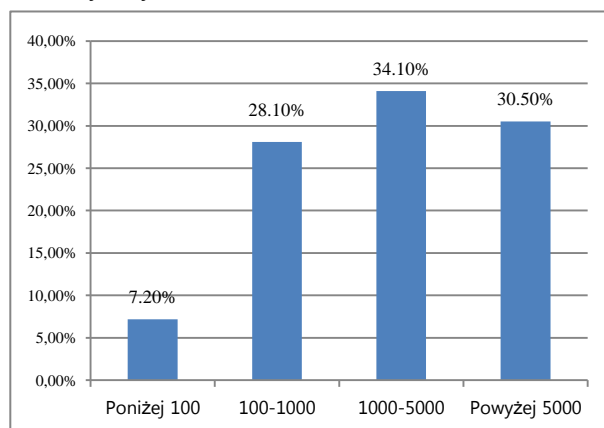
and 41.1% of women) the data enabling the evaluation of the perception and the general knowledge of the society about the occurrence of the suicide were obtained.

Over one third (34.1%) of respondents think that annually in Poland 1000 to 5000 individuals attempt suicide. Similar number, 30.5% of respondents, claim that this number is larger than 5000. The remaining part of respondents (35.3%) holds a view that the number of annual suicide attempts is smaller than 1000.

Table2. The number of individuals in Poland attempting suicide yearly.

The number of individuals attempting suicide	Number of given answers
Below 100	7.2%
100-1000	28.1%
1000-5000	34.1%
Above 5000	30.5%

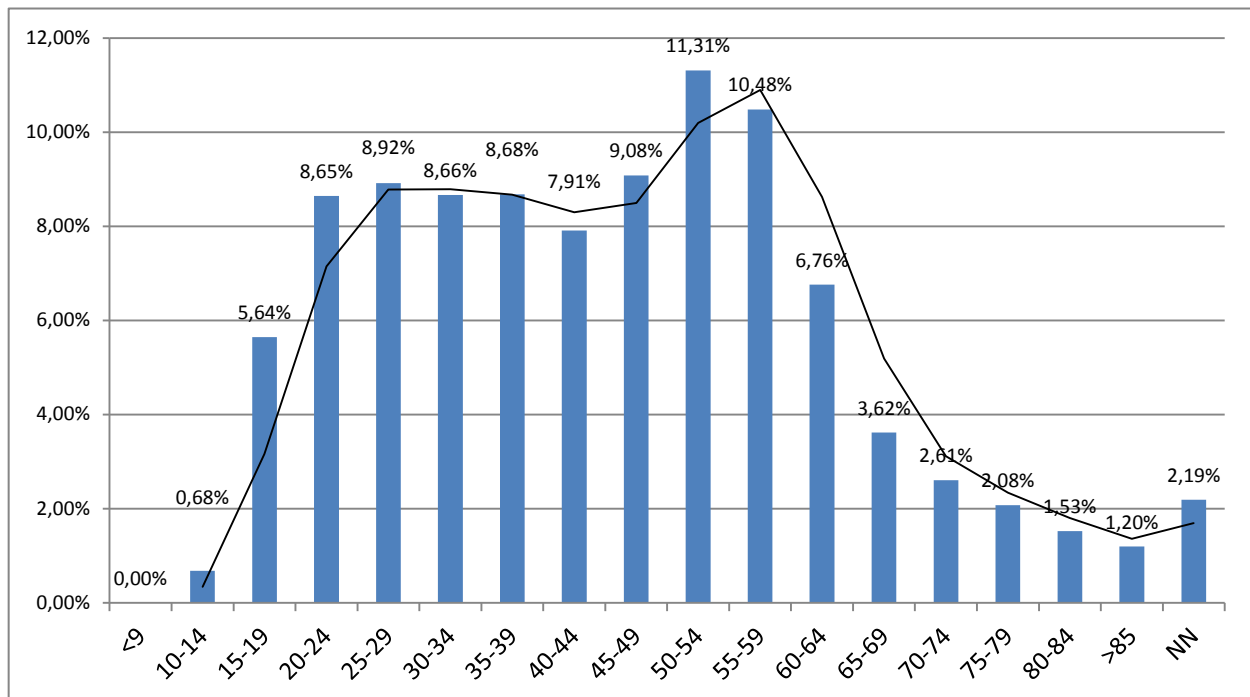
Figure 1. The number of individuals in Poland attempting suicide yearly.



In the opinion of experts, the attempted suicides are most frequently committed by 72.5% of young people and by 22.7% of adult men. However, according to the division into social groups, once again individuals in young age are being indicated and these are the pupils and students accounting for 53.3%. However, this is diverging from real data presented by the Main Headquarters of Police. It turns out that the largest percentage of individuals taking a suicide attempt are people aged 40-59 (almost 40%).

The survey covered the aspect of most frequent causes of suicide given by the society and the given answers were quite uniform. The most frequent answer among respondents was the "heartbreak" (78.4%), next "depression or other psychic disturbances" (73%) and "lack of peers' acceptance" (69.5%). In addition, women as the most frequent cause selected the "disappointment in love", and men "depression or other psychic disturbances".

Figure 2. Percentage of individuals with certain age range of all the individuals making a suicide attempt within one year (average for Poland in 2009-2013).



There also exists a proven connection between publishing information about committing suicide in mass media and the number of suicides committed. The studies conducted at University of California confirmed this hypothesis in 1974. As in the book of Johann von Goethe "Young Werter's suffering", this effect was classified as the extreme example of the functioning of an individual according to the rule of social evidence of the rightness. The fact of committing suicide by the important person is enough of a reason to assume that taking life is justified [4].

The problem remains whether media should announce suicides, as apart from potential suicides, also individuals who would never make such decision decide on taking their own life. Making information about someone's suicidal death public in the media leads to permanent increase of the level of committed suicides in the given population. It seems that the best here would be a "golden means", that is in this case reasonable cooperation of media and suicidologists aimed at not encouraging to suicide, but dissuading from it (through e.g. popularization of information about the functioning of institutions helping people at risk for the suicide) [5].

It is possible to reach similar conclusions by analysing the opinion of suicidal tendencies on the substantiality of the influence of media on forming suicidal tendencies amongst the society. As many as 37.7% of respondents were 'connected' to the phenomenon of the suicide because of mass-media, simultaneously, almost half of them (47.9%) think that bringing up the subject matter of sui-

cides in the media can induce committing suicides. In addition, the mental illness isn't an essential condition here, because according to the opinion of 68.3% of respondents, a healthy person is able to commit the suicide. Out of all respondents - 49.7% of individuals definitely consider suicide as a negative act, the remaining part of the examined assume that suicides or individuals who committed them should not be condemned nor judged. The small number of respondents judge suicide as the positive act (1.8%) only in justified cases, other respondents seem to be indifferent to that issue.

Both women and men similarly regard suicide as the negative act or they suggest that one should refrain from evaluation. However, the positive aspect of the suicide can be noticed by 2% of men, while none of women decided to come out with such a response.

## Discussion

Suicide rate has been booming alarmingly in the group of children and teenagers. It doesn't confine itself only to children from pathological environment but regards all social circles and social layers. This results from the fact that suicide can be a final effect of the long incipient chain of events already taking place in the childhood. Suicides often come from pathological environment in which a drinking problem and the child abuse appeared, as well as the family breakdown. Such experiences give in children rise the feeling of the minimum value of selves and evoke the inability of the problem solving and also

incite the lack of hope in normal life. Feeling of being hurt from the start can project on the entire adult life [6]. This danger regards abused children and the orphans mainly, but also children coming from wealthy families who more and more often take a suicidal attempt on their own lives [7]. Also there is big role of public and individual stigma, which can lead to an increased suicidality [12].

Amongst young people, such problems as depression, alcohol or drug abuse and behavioural disorder can be reasons for the increase suicide rate. Another reason may be a fact that teenagers are more sensitive to the feeling of the lack of control of the situation. Moreover, they have limited knowledge of solving problems and possibilities of improving the living conditions. Making suicides public in the media also contributes to the increase of the number of these acts, since young people are susceptible to suggestions and to imitating behaviours [8].

Amongst students, a particularly rapid growth of motivation for suicide is visible. Merging stress causing factors, requirements of the college, problems with social relations and with the choice of an occupation, in the evident way, make it impossible to cope with accommodating oneself to changes. In most cases an inability to establish close contacts with others or losing contacts is considered as the main stress factor [9]. The change in student's behaviour and mood can be a signal raising an alarm which can manifest itself as withdrawal, lowered self-esteem, neglecting personal hygiene. Total loss of an interest in learning accompanies these symptoms, as the student stops coming to classes and for the majority of the day doesn't go out. When there comes to a suicide attempt, one mostly looks into the failures in learning. Sometimes the reason of the suicide may be too high expectations towards oneself and the feeling of self-failure. [10]

## Conclusions

Summing up, it is possible to state that the society realizes the size and the seriousness of the suicides problem. The respondents notice this problem particularly in young individuals, as well as in individuals burdened with mental illnesses or with major somatic diseases. Respondents regarded widely understood interpersonal misunderstandings as the main cause of suicides - lack of acceptance on the part of other people or the unsuccessful or abruptly finished relationships. Many reasons for suicidal acts also exist in the line of parents - children, if physical or emotional rejection appears from the rest of the family, the mutual incomprehension or too great demands posed on children who are not still enough adapted to executing all duties of the adulthood.

In their answers the respondents also point to the important issue of mental health in preventing suicides. Apart from interpersonal conflicts, psychic disturbances,

including depression, are an important reasons for suicides. The majority of the respondents said that compulsory psychiatric treatment of individuals would be the best way to prevent unsuccessful suicide attempts. A good solution to the problem of suicides, especially in mostly exposed to it young people, is some work on developing the ability of coping with stress, acting in conflict situations, increasing the self-assessment and getting rid of pathological feeling of worthlessness, relieving inner tensions in oneself and aggression. Arousing in oneself some positive values and emotions should be held usually in a family, at school, and in some cases also with the assistance of the specialist in field of the psychology.

Suicide is judged negatively in the society, as the act, striking into the core value of what life is, but in this situation the aggrieved parties are also the family or the closest individuals. Therefore, noticing the first symptoms predicting suicide, it is of utmost importance to undertake adequate means to prevent it. Not in every case one can make it. Therefore, a better way is the support and the concern of individuals from risk groups at early stages, before they allow to think that the suicide is the best way out of a difficult situation.

It is worthwhile to think about training for general practitioners as for recognizing, detecting and dealing with patients whose behaviour raises doubts and suggests that they could attempt taking away their own lives. Undoubtedly, it allows granting not only the support to endangered person, but also to their family and close environment, and in consequence would allow to reduce the worrying statistics.

## Conflict of interest

The authors have declared no conflict of interest.

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