

Jelena Seferović\*

# Perspectives on Suicide: Bosnian and Herzegovinian and Croatian Views from the 1880s to the 1930s\*\*

## IZVLEČEK

### POGLEDI NA SAMOMOR: MNENJA V BOSNI IN HERCEGOVINI TER NA HRVAŠKEM OD OSEMDESETIH LET 19. STOLETJA DO TRIDESETIH LET 20. STOLETJA

*Samomor je izjemno zapletena tema, na katero vplivajo številni dejavniki, ki vključujejo biološke, biokemične, kulturne, sociološke, medosebne, psihološke, filozofske, zavestne in nezavedne komponente. Iz pregleda novinarskih objav, bolniških kartotek iz hrvaških psihiatričnih ustanov in znanstvenih razprav o samomoru v medicinski literaturi iz obdobja od osemdesetih let 19. stoletja do tridesetih let 20. stoletja je razvidno, da se pogledi novinarjev in psihiatrov iz tistega obdobja precej razlikujejo glede opredeljevanja razlogov za poskuse samomora. Odsotnost doslednih razlag poudarja nedoumljivost skrajne odločitve posameznika, da si vzame življenje. Čeprav so številni strokovnjaki in laiki trdili, da poznajo natančne motive za samomor, so nekateri še vedno iskali razlago v nezemeljskih silah ali posameznikih z nadnaravnimi močmi. Za bolj poglobljeno razumevanje samomora je zaradi njegove večplastne narave v osnovi potreben pretanjen in celovit pristop, ki vključuje različne discipline in poglede.*

*Ključne besede: zgodovina samomora, samomorilno vedenje, poskusi samomora, časopisne zgodbe o samomoru, Hrvaška, Bosna in Hercegovina*

\* PhD, Research Associate, Institute for Anthropological Research, Gajeva ulica 32, 10000 Zagreb / Assistant, Institute of Contemporary History, Privoz 11, 1000 Ljubljana, <mailto:jelena.seferovic@inantro.hr> / [Jelena.Seferovic@inz.si](mailto:Jelena.Seferovic@inz.si); ORCID: 0000-0002-6209-7114

\*\* The article was written in the context of the research project J6-3123 Sin, Shame, Symptom: Suicide and Its Perceptions in Slovenia (1850–2000), financed by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS).

## ABSTRACT

*The phenomenon of suicide is a profoundly intricate topic, influenced by a myriad of factors encompassing biological, biochemical, cultural, sociological, interpersonal, psychological, philosophical, conscious, and unconscious components. The examination of press publications, patient records from Croatian psychiatric institutions, and scholarly discourse on suicide in the medical literature from the period between the 1880s and the 1930s reveal that among the diverse perspectives of journalists and psychiatrists of that era, there are notable variations in terms of defining the reasons for suicide attempts. The absence of consistent explanations underscores the enigmatic nature of the ultimate resolution to end one's life. Although numerous experts and laypeople have claimed to know the exact motives behind someone resorting to suicide, some have continued to look for an explanation in otherworldly forces or individuals with supernatural powers. In essence, the multifaceted nature of suicide necessitates a nuanced and comprehensive approach, integrating various disciplines and perspectives to attain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.*

*Keywords: history of suicide, suicidal behaviours, suicide attempts, newspaper stories about suicide, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina*

## Introduction

The endeavour to identify the factors influencing suicides and suicide attempts is a topic of many scientific publications across various disciplines. The interpretations of this complex phenomenon are based on various theories that are undeniably scientifically based.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the question remains how certain can we be about the reasons why someone decides to resort to suicide? Some of the common factors mentioned as suicide triggers include material poverty, financial problems, relationship conflicts, the loss of loved ones, and other stressors in people's lives. Various suicide methods exist, and each suicide or suicide attempt is an individual and unique process, regardless of the widespread stereotypes. The frequently mentioned common suicide methods included poisoning, hanging, the use of cold weapons and firearms,

1 Ulrich Schnyder, Ladislav Valach, Kathrin Bichsel and Konrad Michel, "Attempted Suicide: Do We Understand the Patients' Reasons?," *General Hospital Psychiatry* 21(1) (1999): 62–69, [https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0163834398000644?fr=RR-1&ref=cra\\_js\\_challenge](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0163834398000644?fr=RR-1&ref=cra_js_challenge) (May 1, 2024). Matt Wray, Cynthia Colen and Bernice Pescosolido, "The Sociology of Suicide," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37 (2011): 505–28, [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Matt-Wray/publication/228173911\\_The\\_Sociology\\_of\\_Suicide/links/00b49516580f38289c000000/The-Sociology-of-Suicide.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Matt-Wray/publication/228173911_The_Sociology_of_Suicide/links/00b49516580f38289c000000/The-Sociology-of-Suicide.pdf) (May 1, 2024). James Staples and Tom Widger, "Situating Suicide as an Anthropological Problem: Ethnographic Approaches to Understanding Self-Harm and Self-Inflicted Death," *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, 36 (2012): 183–203, <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11013-012-9255-1.pdf> (May 1, 2024).

and drowning.<sup>2</sup> The phenomenon of suicide is subject to gender stereotyping, which often leads to unfair prejudices, such as claims that women attempt suicide only for attention or use less deadly methods because of their “weaker” nature.<sup>3</sup>

In their theories on suicide, some experts have even tried to distinguish between justified and unjustified suicides or suicide attempts. Thus, they actually took on the role of arbiters in determining the validity of these reasons and made moral judgments. In line with the perspectives of Islam and Christianity, the religions present in Bosnia and Herzegovina or the areas included in the present research, the only one who can make the final decision on an individual's life and death is God or Allah. These religious beliefs point to the transcendental power and authority over life and death, entrusting people's fate to God.<sup>4</sup>

Newspaper reporting on attempted and completed suicides plays a vital role in shaping society's opinions on these decisions. Changes in ethical journalism practices have led to a more subtle approach to suicide reporting. The earlier practices of describing explicit details and circumstances surrounding suicides are no longer acceptable, as they could encourage others to make similar decisions. Today, journalists respect ethical journalism guidelines and emphasise empathy towards those who commit suicide.<sup>5</sup>

This article encompasses all the previously mentioned aspects of analysing suicides and suicide attempts, taking into consideration the newspaper articles from Bosnian-Herzegovinian newspapers, medical theories, and personal testimonies of psychiatric patients who have survived such an act. The emphasis is placed on the period between the 1880s and the 1930s, with a single exception: the interpretation of a failed suicide attempt from 1951. This is because of the lack of similar examples from the period that this article otherwise focuses on.

The motivation to critically examine the phenomenon in question stems from the fact that the author of this article came across a newspaper article concluding with the statement that “some people claim that nothing can be understood without consulting a Gypsy.”<sup>6</sup> The article was about the suicide of a young man from Jasenjan, a village in Herzegovina near Mostar, who hanged himself from a pear tree in 1899. Some locals claimed he did this because his stepmother and father had mistreated him, while oth-

- 
- 2 Meerae Lim, Sang Uk Lee and Jong-Ik Park, “Differences in Suicide Methods Used Between Suicide Attempters and Suicide Completers,” *International Journal of Mental Health Systems* 8(54) (2014), <https://ijmhs.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1752-4458-8-54#citeas> (May 3, 2024). Kairo Kolves, Matthew McDonough, David Crompton and Diego de Leo, “Choice of a Suicide Method: Trends and Characteristics,” *Psychiatry Research* 260 (2018): 67–74, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165178117307667n> (May 5, 2024).
  - 3 Silvia Canetto, Sara Sakinofsky and Isaac Sakinofsky, “The Gender Paradox in Suicide,” *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behaviour* 28(1) (1998): 1–23, [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Silvia-Canetto/publication/13720598\\_The\\_Gender\\_Paradox\\_in\\_Suicide/links/59dd78c20f7e9b53c1979730/The-Gender-Paradox-in-Suicide.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Silvia-Canetto/publication/13720598_The_Gender_Paradox_in_Suicide/links/59dd78c20f7e9b53c1979730/The-Gender-Paradox-in-Suicide.pdf) (May 6, 2024).
  - 4 Nooria Mehraby, “Suicide: Its Pathway, Perception and Prevention Amongst Muslims,” *Psychotherapy in Australia* 11(2) (2005): 60–65, <https://search.informit.org/doi/abs/10.3316/informit.546604879663452> (May 2, 2024). John Warwick Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (New Reformation Publication, 2015).
  - 5 Sallyanne Duncan, *Reporting Suicide Responsibility: A Force for Good*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Routledge, 2023).
  - 6 “Svaštice – Samoubojstvo,” *Osvit*, May 12, 1899.

ers said he hanged himself because his father had refused to give him Easter eggs. In any case, the villagers believed that nothing would be resolved until they consulted a Gypsy – that is, someone allegedly well-versed in the supernatural could provide their insight into the situation. Of course, like everyone else, Gypsies cannot know for certain why someone had decided to end their own life. Nevertheless, the need to consult them suggests that no logical explanation may be sufficient to fully explain the reasons why someone attempts suicide or actually manages to take their own life. It is essential to delve deeper into the underlying factors and complexities of such situations to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Considering multiple perspectives and various factors is crucial in unravelling the intricacies of people's thoughts and actions. By acknowledging the limitations of logical reasoning alone and recognising the importance of exploring diverse viewpoints, we can better address the complexities of human behaviour, including the tragic act of suicide.

---

## The Journalistic Viewpoint

---

Some recent scientific publications highlight an increase in the number of suicide reports in the press over the past decades.<sup>7</sup> However, they do not specify the historical period that the numbers are compared to. Indeed, the research conducted as part of this project has shown the opposite. The analysis of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian newspapers *Jugoslavenski list*<sup>8</sup> and *Sarajevski list*<sup>9</sup> from the 1880s to the beginning of the 1920s has revealed many examples of journalistic reports on suicides. In this contribution, only some of these representative articles will be presented and interpreted. Their comparison to today's journalistic reporting on suicide reveals a noticeable, significant level of explicitness and naturalism in the descriptions of the potential reasons and the state of the suicide victims' bodies. The following example represents one of the many cases collected during this research.

"He hanged himself. The report from Travnik indicates that last year, on 17 November, Simo Đurić from Prečani left his village to gather firewood. On his way back home with the wood, he saw his neighbour, Jovo Mirković, hanging from a birch branch. He immediately

---

7 Thomas Niederkrotenthaler, Marlies Braun, Jane Pirkis, Benedikt Till, Steven Stack, Mark Sinyor, Ulrich S. Tran, Martin Voracek, Qijin Cheng, Florian Arendt, Sebastian Scherr, Paul S. F. Yip and Matthew J. Spittal, "Association Between Suicide Reporting in the Media and Suicide: Systematic Review and Meta-analysis," *BMJ: British Medical Journal (Online)* 368 (2022): 1, <https://www.bmj.com/content/368/bmj.m575> (May 3, 2024).

8 *Jugoslavenski list*, a Croatian political and general newspaper, was regularly published in Sarajevo every day except for Sundays and holidays. Its first edition was published on November 23, 1918, and it ceased publication on May 9, 1941. – Franjo Topić, "Hrvatski tisak u BiH od početka do 1941. Godine," *Vrhbosnensia: časopis za teološka i međureligijska pitanja* 7(2) (2003): 479, <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/425597> (May 4, 2024).

9 *Sarajevski list* started coming out after the cessation of "*Bosansko-hercegovačko novine*", the first official newspaper in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It continued the numbering and year of the previous newspaper but changed its name for practical reasons, as it needed to include both Latin and Cyrillic scripts. The first issue of the newspaper was published on 3 August 1881. Initially, it came out every three days, while later, it became a daily newspaper published every day except for Sundays and holidays. – Đorđe Pejanović, *Bibliografija štampe Bosne i Hercegovine: 1850–1941* (Sarajevo: "Veselin Masleša", 1961).

told this to Mare, Jovo's wife, and R. Crnjak, who had lived with his son-in-law for some time. The authorities were notified immediately. Both of Jovo's ears and the flesh around them had been eaten, his eyes gouged out, and his fingers nibbled on. During the investigation, it was discovered that Jovo had lived quite miserably and meagrely, supporting himself and his wife through day labour. He was otherwise very moral and loyal to his wife, though somewhat simple-minded and easily manipulated by others. After the body was reportedly examined in the presence of Jovo's brother Nikola, the neighbours, and the local religious leader, it was ordered for him to be buried."<sup>10</sup>

During the period covered by this research, the Werther effect, a concept coined by the sociologist David P. Phillips in 1974<sup>11</sup>, was not well known. Although this concept was not recognised as such for a long time, the adverse effects of public elaborations on suicides were written about even before they received any official definition. Almost a century after the first edition of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel "The Sorrows of Young Werther" and just as long before the formalisation of the Werther effect in 1885, the author of an article published in the Croatian Catholic weekly *Zagrebački katolički list*<sup>12</sup> wrote about the appearance of this phenomenon as follows.

"Throughout Germany, especially in Vienna, suicides happen so often that they have become strikingly apparent to everyone. People are racking their brains trying to identify the cause of this great evil. It is a wonder that this moral plague has not nearly reached such dimensions in Slavic cities. Therefore, we could suspect the reasons include excessive education, which German and French literature spreads in society."<sup>13</sup>

In the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first two of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the influence of newspapers and literature on the occurrence of suicides and their contribution to the normalisation of suicide through their content was already well understood. Nevertheless, this trend continued. It was followed by the Bosnian and Herzegovinian journalists of that time, whose suicide reports were researched as part of this project. However, it is possible that, back then, their influence was not as prominent as today, particularly due to the limited availability of newspapers, few sales outlets, and the widespread poverty that prevented a significant portion of the population from being

10 "Mali vjesnik – Objesio se," *Sarajevski list*, February 9, 1900.

11 In response to the Werther effect, the mental health and suicide prevention organisations worldwide, including the World Health Organization, have developed guidelines for responsible media reporting on suicides. These guidelines include specific recommendations on reducing contagion effects, such as avoiding sensationalism and detailed descriptions of suicide methods. – Jan Domaradzki, "The Werther Effect, the Papageno Effect or No Effect? A Literature Review," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18(5) (2021): 2396, <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/5/2396> (May 4, 2024). Francesco J. Acosta, Carlos J. Rodriguez, Maria R. Cejas, Yolanda Ramallo-Farina, Helena Fernandez-Garcimartin, "Suicide Coverage in the Digital Press Media: Adherence to World Health Organization Guidelines and Effectiveness of Different Interventions Aimed at Media Professionals," *Health Communication* 35(13) (2020): 16231632, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2019.1654176> (May 4, 2024).

12 *Zagrebački katolički list* is the original name of the Catholic weekly *Katolički list*, published between January 4, 1877 and May 3, 1945 by the Zagreb Archdiocese. – *Katolički list* – *Wikipedija*, [https://hr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katoli%C4%8Dki\\_list](https://hr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katoli%C4%8Dki_list) (July 17, 2024).

13 Pregled samoubojstvih. *Zagrebački katolički list*, "Overview of Suicides," 7 July 1855.

able to afford even the basic necessities.<sup>14</sup> Vlado Puljiz,<sup>15</sup> citing parts of the book “Kako živi narod: život u pasivnim krajevima” by Rudolf Bičanić, an economist and expert on the rural conditions in the passive regions of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1930s, vividly illustrates these circumstances. Bičanić emphasised: “There is one fact without which the economic life of passive regions cannot be understood: the spectre of hunger hovers over them!”<sup>16</sup> Another reason is that illiteracy was considerable in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the time, further reducing the influence of newspaper articles.<sup>17</sup> In short, the detailed reporting on the specific events and situations, such as the conditions in which the bodies of suicide victims were found, was probably not as significant as it would be today. Given the limited access to information and fewer people who could read, the influence of journalism was not as strong as it is nowadays when the media is much more accessible and can reach a larger number of people worldwide.

To return to the case of Jovo from Travnik. When discussing the attempts at explaining the reasons for suicides, we can notice certain speculations. Initially, it was suggested that poverty could be a crucial factor, while later, it was emphasised that Jovo was mentally unstable and under the influence of other people. In the relevant literature on suicide, it is possible to find various scientifically supported theories associating motivations for suicide with material poverty, submissiveness, and mental health of the perpetrators.<sup>18</sup> In other words, journalistic conclusions can now even be supported by scientific evidence. However, the question arises whether we can truly comprehend the truth about Jovo’s motive for suicide, or is the truth just a subjective interpretation that can vary depending on the circumstances and perspectives of the observer? The goal of this contribution is not to deny or challenge the results of numerous scientific studies on the causes of suicide<sup>19</sup> but rather to underline the potential limitations of

14 Vlado Puljiz, “Prilike u Hercegovini i spašavanje gladne djece u Prvom svjetskom ratu (Osvrt na socijalne i gospodarske prilike, uzroke gladi i ulogu hrvatskih organizacija u spašavanju hercegovačko djece),” in *Fra Didak Buntić – čovjek i djelo*, ed. Stipe Tadić and Marinko Šakota (Zagreb: Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, 2009).

15 Ibidem, 192.

16 Rudolf Bičanić was a Croatian economist and researcher who specialised in studying the rural conditions in the Croatian and Bosnian and Herzegovinian countryside during the 1930s. His research work titled “Kako živi narod: život u pasivnim krajevima” provided valuable insights into the local population’s socio-economic conditions and way of life. Bičanić was known for his analytical approach and detailed studies of the peasant communities, and he gained a reputation as an expert in rural sociology. – Vlado Puljiz, “Seljaštvo u radovima Rudolfa Bičanića,” *Socijologija sela* 34(1–2) (1996): 97–103, (May 3, 2024).

17 Hana Younis, “Otvaranje i rad muslimanskih čitaonica u manjim mjestima Bosne i Hercegovine početkom 20. stoljeća,” *Bosniaca: časopis Nacionalne i univerzitetske biblioteke Bosne i Hercegovine* 26(26) (2021): 89, 90.

18 Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Reprint (New York: Free Press, 1897 [1951]). Steven Stack, “Suicide: A 15-Year Review of the Sociological Literature. Part I: Cultural and Economic Factors,” *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behaviour* 30(2) (2000): 155, 156, [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Steven-Stack/publication/12431188\\_Suicide\\_A\\_15-Year\\_Review\\_of\\_the\\_Sociological\\_Literature\\_Part\\_I\\_Cultural\\_and\\_Economic\\_Factors/links/61d0b3c3e669ee0f5c7dad9b/Suicide-A-15-Year-Review-of-the-Sociological-Literature-Part-I-Cultural-and-Economic-Factors.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Steven-Stack/publication/12431188_Suicide_A_15-Year_Review_of_the_Sociological_Literature_Part_I_Cultural_and_Economic_Factors/links/61d0b3c3e669ee0f5c7dad9b/Suicide-A-15-Year-Review-of-the-Sociological-Literature-Part-I-Cultural-and-Economic-Factors.pdf) (June 1, 2024).

19 Rory C. O’Connor, “Towards an Integrated Motivational-Volitional Model of Suicidal Behaviour,” in Rory O’Connor, Stephen Platt and Jacki Gordon (eds.), *International Handbooks of Mental Health: Research, Policy and Practice*. Online (John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2011), 181–98, <http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/28339/2/161.pdf.pdf#page=187> (June 1, 2024). David E. Klonsky and May Alexis, “The Three-Step Theory (3ST): A New Theory of Suicide Rooted in the ‘Ideation-to-Action’ Framework,” *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy* 8(2) (2015):

our understanding and depth of knowledge when it comes to suicidal thoughts and acts. It is vital to recognise that while scientific research provides valuable insights into the complex factors influencing suicide, there may still be elements that remain elusive or subjective. Understanding the intricacies of suicidal behaviour requires a nuanced approach that takes into account individual circumstances, mental health factors, societal influences, and personal motivations. Therefore, while scientific studies offer the relevant knowledge, there is also a need for ongoing reflection and consideration of the multifaceted nature of suicide. By acknowledging the complexity of suicidal behaviour and motivations, we can strive to provide more comprehensive support, prevention, and intervention strategies that address the diverse needs of at-risk individuals.

Through the example of a suicide reported in the *Sarajevski list* newspaper in 1884, which follows below, the question arises whether we can understand and are willing to accept a situation in which a person has firmly decided to commit suicide without the possibility of preventing it. It is important to note that this is a newspaper report whose sources and methodology of gathering information are not clearly defined. It is unknown whether the journalist spoke with the hospital's medical staff or based his conclusions on the specific data mentioned in the article. Therefore, the question arises to what extent these journalistic reports are credible and based on facts.

“He drowned. Sarajevo beggar Salija Bošnjak (Muhamedovac) recently jumped from the Emperor's Bridge into the river Miljacka to drown himself. Due to the low water level, he had to push his head under the surface, where he held it until he fainted. However, two people managed to pull him out of the river and save him from death. When asked why he wanted to drown himself, Salija replied that he had been overcome by misfortune and hunger. He was taken to the Vakuf Hospital, where he kept stating he would still drown himself as soon as he got the chance – which he in fact did. Yesterday, he slipped away from the hospital and went to the goat's bridge, where he indeed drowned in the river Miljacka.”<sup>20</sup>

At this point, the intention is not to diminish the professionalism of journalism in the past but to encourage reflection on the accuracy and objectivity of news about suicides and their sensationalistic approach. Reporting on suicides in the past differs from the present in terms of the graphic descriptions of the bodies of suicide victims and the ways these acts were carried out. On the other hand, the practice of revealing names and surnames and specifying the locations where bodies were found, which was once common, would now be considered a gross violation of journalistic ethics (which does not mean journalists always adhere to these rules!). Today, the emphasis is on the importance of a sensitive approach to this topic, the respect for the privacy and dignity of the deceased and their family, and a careful choice of words to avoid encouraging further suicides. Nowadays, journalists have a greater responsibility and face potential legal consequences if they do not adhere to the journalistic ethics standards when

114–29, <https://www.suicidepreventiecentrum.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/The-Three-Step-Theory-3ST-A-New-Theory-of-Suicide.pdf> (June 1, 2024).

20 “Mali vjesnik – Utopio se,” *Sarajevski list*, August 13, 1884.

reporting on this topic.<sup>21</sup> In some countries in the 1930s, reporting on suicides was allegedly prohibited. This claim was made by the Croatian doctor Ivo Stančić-Rokotov in one of his articles on suicides.<sup>22</sup> However, as he did not specify which countries he was referring to, we can only trust his words. In the article, Stančić-Rokotov cautions that in the press, suicides are “analysed in impossible detail” and believes this represents a “temptation for those who contemplate it.” Furthermore, he adds: “It would not hurt if something was done in that direction here as well because these reports make absolutely no sense.” In conclusion, he argues that “the audience does not really like to read extensively and in-depth about it, as it only seems exciting, while in reality, nobody benefits from these articles.”

In the following example from 1884, the journalist did not make any definitive claims about the motives for the deceased person's suicide, unlike in most cases examined in this study. Specifically, he stated that “there is a suspicion” that the man had resorted to suicide out of fear because he had not been able to “give an account of the alms collected”.

“Body Found. On Sunday morning, a bloodied corpse of a middle-aged man was found in the city park near the exit towards Skerličeva street [...] The body was identified as the painter Svetozar Jerković from Himzarova street No. 1. It is suspected that Jerković committed suicide out of fear that he could not account for the alms collected for the committee aiding the victims in Serbia. The committee had already called on him several times to do so, and on Saturday, he was given the final warning. A knife, determined to be Jerković's property, was found next to the body. The deceased was taken to the County Hospital for autopsy, and the police department continues the investigation.”<sup>23</sup>

Epistemologically, when there is doubt about the assertion that something has indeed been done, an individual is encouraged to gather further information and find evidence to confirm or refute that assertion. Doubt is a part of the process of developing critical thinking and the ability to distinguish true claims from those not supported by evidence.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, someone expressing doubt about something that has occurred, such as a suicide, can result in a further investigation, discussion, and analysis to reliably confirm the truth or falsehood of that assertion. Newspaper articles, both in the past and present, often provide only partial information about suicides, as journalists are not experts in mental health and may overlook essential psychological and social factors or interpret them inadequately. Although newspaper articles can provide a contextual framework for understanding suicides, they are often insufficient for any deeper analyses of the motivations for such acts.<sup>25</sup>

21 Richard Keeble, *Ethics for Journalists*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Routledge, 2008), <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9780203698822/ethics-journalists-richard-keeble> (May 5, 2024).

22 Ivo Stančić - Rokotov, “Samoubojstvo u Zagrebu: Statistički pregled za god. 1931-1935,” *Liječnički vjesnik: glasilo hrvatskog liječničkog zbora* 59(3) (1937): 97, <https://library.foi.hr/dbook/cas.php?B=1&item=S01101&godina=1937&broj=00003&page=97> (May 19, 2024).

23 “Svaštica – Pronađeno tijelo,” *Jugoslavenski list*, March 18, 1919.

24 Harvey Siegel, *Education's Epistemology: Rationality, Diversity, and Critical Thinking* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

25 Benedikt Till, Teresa A. Wild, Florian Arendt, Sebastian Scherr, S. and Thomas Niederkrotenthaler, “Associations of Tabloid Newspaper Use with Endorsement of Suicide Myths, Suicide-related Knowledge, and Stigmatizing Attitudes



## Expert Perspectives on Suicide

As an act of self-destruction, suicide represents a profound existential theme. Through the lens of different cultures, beliefs, and scientific perspectives, people throughout history have tried to give meaning and explain the motivations behind it. Suicide has been – and still is – interpreted in various ways, taking into account the moral, religious, social, and psychological perspectives.<sup>26</sup> Interpreting suicide from various perspectives not only provides insight into the individual motives and circumstances leading to this ultimate decision but also raises questions about morality, free will, suffering, and the search for meaning in life. Suicide remains an intriguing topic that prompts us to reflect on eternal questions of life, death, and human tragedy.<sup>27</sup>

The positivist approach to life in the context of the medical interpretation of suicide at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was influenced by the belief in scientific explanations and the idea that natural laws governed human behaviour. At the time, medical experts viewed suicide as unnatural because they believed human behaviour could be explained by biological, psychological, and social factors rather than purely as a result of individual choice or willpower.<sup>28</sup> They considered suicide to be an anomaly because it deviated from the standard patterns of behaviour and established social norms. They believed that individuals who had resorted to suicide were not in their right state of mind and were suffering from underlying mental health issues that had led them to take their own lives. This belief stemmed from the positivist view that human behaviour could be studied and understood through scientific methods and that suicide was a symptom of an underlying psychological disorder rather than a rational decision.<sup>29</sup>

In one of his expert articles, the Croatian doctor mentioned in the previous chapter explained the act of suicide as follows, drawing on the positivism theories by Stančić-Rokotov: “On the contrary, suicide is a lack of self-preservation instinct resulting from extraordinary circumstances or more often from psychopathological conditions.”<sup>30</sup> His theory implies that people have a survival instinct that prevents them from hurting or killing themselves. In other words, when someone commits suicide, it can be considered that this instinct is lacking or that suicidal behaviour goes against natural laws.

Toward Suicidal Individuals,” *Crisis* 39(6) (2018): 428–39, <https://econtent.hogrefe.com/doi/10.1027/0227-5910/a000516> (May 8, 2024).

26 Scott J Fitzpatrick, “Re-moralizing the Suicide Debate,” *Journal of Bioethic Inquiry* 11(2) (2014): 223–32, <https://philpapers.org/rec/FITRTS-3> (May 22, 2024).

27 Jack D. Douglas, *The Social Meaning of Suicide* (Princeton University Press, 1967), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x0ts2> (May 22, 2024). Erminia Colucci and David Lester, *Suicide and Culture* (Hogrefe Publishing, 2013).

28 Paulo Drinot, “Madness, Neurasthneia, and ‘Modernity’: Medico-legal and Popular Interpretations of Suicide in Early Twentieth-Century Lima,” *Latin American Research Review* 39(2) (2004): 89–112, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1555402> (May 22, 2024). Denys DeCatanzaro, “Human Suicide: A Biological Perspective,” *Cambridge University Press*, 3(2) (2010): 265–72, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/behavioral-and-brain-sciences/article/abs/human-suicide-a-biological-perspective/3DF3B0106F0265AB9FC9022C64AB2FFC> (May 22 2024).

29 Jerry Jacobs, “A Phenomenological Approach to the Study of Suicide,” *Journal of Death and Dying* 4(2) (1972): 400–04, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.2190/7M3X-95J1-V0JG-F8Q2?journalCode=omea> (May 10, 2024).

30 Stančić - Rokotov, “Samoubojstvo u Zagrebu,” 97.

Both in Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>31</sup> and Croatia, the social atmosphere at the time, affected by religious dogmas, contributed to the reinforcement of the positivist outlook on suicide and the condemnation of this act. Such an approach could surely not have helped provide any support to individuals experiencing suicidal thoughts nor contribute to the potential prevention of this act. For example, in one of the more popular Croatian Catholic magazines, *Katolički list*, an article was published as early as 1886, explicitly stating that it was forbidden for a person to commit suicide. In the words of the author: “Every beast loves its life, even if it cannot express this. Why else does it shy away from man, or flee from the hunter [...] And a man who can understand the purpose of life rationally, to whom knowledge and intellect clearly tell that they did not give themselves life, knows that he must not take it from himself.”<sup>32</sup>

This quote reflects the idea that according to Catholic and Christian beliefs, people and animals possess a natural survival instinct that guides them towards preserving their own lives. This perspective emphasised the importance of appreciating and respecting life and the principle that no one should willingly take their own life, as this violates the natural law.<sup>33</sup> Religious sciences view life as a gift from God and consider God the owner of life, as he is believed to have created man and given him life and purpose. According to religious teachings, God is the source of perfection, love, and goodness, and people believe that their lives are in God’s hands and that God provides them with guidance on how to live a fulfilling life.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, cases of suicide have also been recorded among priests. Such was the case of the suicide of the Orthodox priest Vaso Odavić in Lugu in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian region of Trebinje in 1889. According to the records, Odavić passed away after stabbing himself in the left side of his chest with a knife in his house on 21 December of the previous year.<sup>35</sup> That same year, the *Sarajevski list* newspaper mentioned the suicide of a Capuchin friar in the Capuchin church in Osijek. The thirty-four-year-old man reportedly hanged himself for unknown reasons in a disturbed mental state. Consequently, the church was desecrated and temporarily closed but was soon reopened after a blessing.<sup>36</sup> Given that the article is partly based on the archival materials collected in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian archives, where the majority of the population is of Islamic faith, it is vital to clarify how suicide is approached in Islam. In Islam, suicide is considered a major sin because

31 “Listak - O samoubojstvu,” *Sarajevski list*, March 8, 1907. In an article about health conditions in Sarajevo, published in the “Sarajevski list” newspaper in 1907, it was emphasised that the lack of regular record-keeping of deaths and the absence of autopsies stem from the fact that people trust in religious authorities and practice traditional religious rites after death.

32 “Samokrv,” *Katolički list*, 29, July 19, 1866.

33 Stanislaw Adamiak and Jan Dohnalik, “The Prohibition of Suicide and Its Theological Rationale in Catholic Moral and Canonical Tradition: Origins and Development,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 62 (2023), 3820–33, <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s> (May 6, 2024).

34 John Potter, “Is Suicide the Unforgivable Sin? Understanding Suicide, Stigma, and Salvation through Two Christian Perspectives,” *Religions* 12(11) (2021): 987, [https://media.proquest.com/media/hms/PFT/1/cnkbL?\\_s=TaFqGxpeYriFjCQWjBRj%2FktbsCc%3D](https://media.proquest.com/media/hms/PFT/1/cnkbL?_s=TaFqGxpeYriFjCQWjBRj%2FktbsCc%3D) (May 7, 2024).

35 “Mali vjesnik – Samoubistvo sveštenika,” *Sarajevski list*, February 3, 1889.

36 “Mali vjesnik – Samoubijstvo kapucina,” *Sarajevski list*, May 6, 1889.

only Allah decides on life and death, and believers are encouraged to rely on His mercy.<sup>37</sup> In the context of the present research, no case of suicidal behaviour has been identified among Muslim religious leaders.

Ivo Glavan, a Croatian physician and assistant at the neurological-psychiatric department of the Zakladna Hospital in Zagreb in 1929, also wrote about suicides, focusing on the question of justifications for committing this act or the lack thereof. In his analyses, he clearly emphasised the possibility of justifying this act if the suicide was motivated by specific circumstances, such as material poverty. For him, for example, “unrequited love is a banal motive” for taking one’s life. Glavan believed that unrequited love should not be accepted as a valid reason for suicidal behaviour, as it is a subjective emotional situation lacking any objective basis.<sup>38</sup> Considering the frequent association of this motive with women and their perception as emotionally vulnerable or weaker beings, we can conclude that this phenomenon did not escape the influence of gender stereotypes. Although gender stereotyping of suicide was certainly present, some findings partially refute it. When analysing a statistical overview of suicides from 1931 to 1935 in Zagreb, Stančić-Rokotov highlights that in 1934, the number of female suicides exceeded that of the male suicides.<sup>39</sup> Although most statistics until then showed a higher number of suicides in men, it is clear that this was not always the case. Nevertheless, Stančić-Rokotov, like Glavan, argued that the higher number of male suicides stems from the assumption that women were physically and emotionally weaker and less energetic than men and that they more often chose less successful suicide methods. However, it is important to note that not all failed suicide attempts were likely reported, so it cannot be definitively stated how many such cases occurred among women and men at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In an article from 1919, published in the *Jugoslavenski list* newspaper, the author warned that only a small number of suicide attempts were reported to the police. The author stated that a doctor was immediately called to remove the risk without informing the authorities. This suggests that the true extent of suicide attempts, especially among women, may have been underestimated. The author stressed the need for more accurate reporting and monitoring of suicide attempts to effectively address and prevent such tragic outcomes.<sup>40</sup>

In the context of the discussion on the gender stereotyping of suicide, it is essential to highlight Glavan’s conclusions,<sup>41</sup> stating that “It is clear that women choose the means of suicide that do not guarantee a certain death. Instead, they often need to draw attention to themselves, which corresponds to their motive. A man, when he decides

37 Robin Edward Gearing and Dana Alonzo, “Religion and Suicide: New Findings,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 57(6) (2018): 2478–99, <https://www.iecj.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/religion-and-suicide.pdf> (May 6, 2024).

38 Ivo Glavan, “Problem samoubijstva,” *Liječnički vjesnik: glasilo Hrvatskoga liječničkog zbora* 51(9) (1929): 448, <https://library.foi.hr/dbook/cas.php?B=1&item=S01101&godina=1929&broj=00009&page=442> (May 18, 2024).

39 Stančić - Rokotov, “Samoubojstvo u Zagrebu,” 97.

40 “Epidemija samoubojstva,” *Jugoslavenski list*, June 23, 1919.

41 Glavan, “Problem samoubijstva,” 445.

to take such a step, chooses a method that corresponds to his masculine character, as well as one that is effective.” However, are women really always averse to the “masculine” methods of taking their lives? The following case definitely refutes his claim. From the following article from 1904, published in the *Sarajevski list* newspaper, it is evident that Glavan’s theories were debatable.

“On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of this month, we received a message from Mostar. That morning, a certain Agata Zeljina, a maid often reprimanded by her masters for her poor behaviour, met her death in the swift waters of the Neretva by jumping onto the rocks just below the new bridge. The waves and the force of the mighty waters pulled her into an eternal grave somewhere among the rocks at the bottom of the river, from where dead bodies rarely resurface.”<sup>42</sup>

Suicide is a deeply personal act that often remains unexplained to others, often motivated by a complex web of internal emotions, thoughts, and life circumstances of the person at the moment of the decision.<sup>43</sup> Consider the case of the maid who was overwhelmed by the pressure from her superiors to the point where she believed that suicide was her only way out. What exactly was going on in her mind that led to such a radical act? Was the decision impulsive or well planned and thought out? The answers to these questions remain unclear and difficult to fully understand, especially after all this time. Regardless of the potential expert analyses or assessments, there will always be a level of mystery and incomprehensibility to the act of suicide.

---

## What Do Individuals Who Have Attempted Suicide Say about Their Motivation?

---

This chapter will focus on the testimonies of individuals hospitalised due to suicidal attempts in two Croatian psychiatric hospitals in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the Neuropsychiatric Hospital “Dr Ivan Barbot” Popovača and the Psychiatry Department of the Royal State Hospital in Pakrac.<sup>44</sup>

Their explanations of the motivations for such actions will help us to better understand the internal struggles and emotions that led people to self-destruction.

---

42 “Mali vjesnik – Utopljenica,” *Sarajevski list*, March 3, 1904.

43 Jeanne Marecek and Chandanie Senadheera, “I Drank It to Put an End to Me’: Narrating Girls’ Suicide and Self-harm in Sri Lanka,” *Indian Sociology* 42(1–2) (2012): 53–82, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/006996671104600204> (May 6, 2024). Yvonne Bergmans, Evelyn Gordon and Rahel Eynan, “Surviving Moment to Moment: The Experience of Living in a State of Ambivalence for Those With Recurrent Suicide Attempts,” *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice* 90(4) (2017): 433–648, [https://www.suicideinfo.ca/wp-content/uploads/gravity\\_forms/6-191a85f36ce9e20de2e2fa3869197735/2018/06/Surviving-moment-to-moment-the-experience-of-living-in-a-state-of-ambivalence\\_oa.pdf](https://www.suicideinfo.ca/wp-content/uploads/gravity_forms/6-191a85f36ce9e20de2e2fa3869197735/2018/06/Surviving-moment-to-moment-the-experience-of-living-in-a-state-of-ambivalence_oa.pdf) (May 10, 2024).

44 These two psychiatric hospitals were chosen precisely because they are both located closer to the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and psychiatric patients from there were often hospitalised in the psychiatric hospitals in Pakrac and Popovača. Since the hospital in Popovača opened as late as 1934, there were no cases of suicide attempts that could be referenced from the time period of the suicide cases documented in the newspaper articles interpreted in the previous two chapters.

By analysing their testimonies, an attempt will be made to illuminate the factors that were crucial for their suicide attempts. After examining the journalistic approach to suicide and the views of experts on this phenomenon, it was considered important to give voice to those who have truly been on the brink of such an act. In other words, the individuals who have personally experienced suicidal thoughts and feelings best understand their motives and circumstances that led them to take that step.

Before delving into this topic, it is vital to keep in mind that the majority of individuals whose cases were discovered in the analysed psychiatric documentation did not actually know why they had attempted suicide, or provided nonsensical answers when asked about their reasons. There are many different reasons why some people attempt suicide, and some of these can be extremely complex and difficult to identify or understand, even for the person who attempted it. This underscores the need for caution when drawing firm conclusions about the motives behind suicidal behaviour.

One of the cases from the personal documentation of patients treated at the psychiatric ward of the General Hospital in Pakrac supports this statement. It involved a thirty-year-old female farmer from the eastern Croatian countryside, hospitalised in 1915 with a diagnosis of melancholia. According to her personal file, the patient was married and lived happily with her husband and children until her husband was arrested and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Afterwards, she and her children moved to her sister's house, and until April 1915, her mental health was stable. The following is an excerpt from the psychiatric notes:

"At the beginning of April, she became somewhat silent. According to her still unmarried sister and her daughter-in-law, she came down from the attic one day with her hair down and told them she wanted to hang herself. When they asked her why, she did not say anything but remained silent. She took a knife and pulled it towards herself with a cry but did not hurt herself. The two relatives went to the attic and found a rope tied to a beam. The next day, they took her for an examination, but nothing conclusive was determined except for a major mental depression."<sup>45</sup>

When faced with painful emotional wounds, our consciousness can become clouded and distorted, leading to a lack of clarity. In those moments, when a sense of helplessness overwhelms us, we may lose control over our actions, and suicidal thoughts and behaviours become a way of escaping that state. However, after "waking up" from that state of mind, we may be confronted with an inability to understand or define the reasons behind such actions. In many cases, the motivation for such behaviour remains hidden, both to ourselves and others.<sup>46</sup>

45 Psychiatry Departement of the Royal State Hospital in Pakrac. Patient files, 1915.

46 Troy Johnson and Holly Tomren, "Helplessness, Hopelessness, and Despair: Identifying the Precursors to Indian Youth Suicide," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23(3) (1999): 287–301, <https://escholarship.org/content/qt7p1610nf/qt7p1610nf.pdf> (May 25, 2024). Alexander J. Millner, Samuel J. Gershman, Aaron M. Bornstein, Hanneke E. M. den Ouden, Catherine R. Glenn, Jaclyn C. Kearns, Brian P. Marx and Terence M. Keane, "Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviours Are Associated With an Increased Decision-Making Bias for Active Responses to Escape Aversive States," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 128(2) (2019): 106–18, [https://nocklab.fas.harvard.edu/files/nocklab/files/millner\\_et\\_al.\\_2019.pdf](https://nocklab.fas.harvard.edu/files/nocklab/files/millner_et_al._2019.pdf) (May 23, 2024).

After a suicide attempt, individuals may suffer from event-related amnesia or dissociative symptoms that prevent them from thinking clearly and recalling details. Additionally, it is possible that the person was not fully aware of their thoughts or motives at the moment of the suicide attempt, which can lead to a lack of clarity when trying to specify the reasons for their actions. The emotional and psychological pain leading to the incident can be so intense that the person may be unable to rationally or clearly articulate their inner motivations.<sup>47</sup>

In some cases, it was only after several unsuccessful suicide attempts that the patient was able (or willing) to discuss the reasons that motivated them to take that step. It is sometimes questionable whether someone is unable or unwilling to discuss this topic. The following case dates back to 1951, outside the time frame covered by this article. However, due to its uniqueness and rarity, it is highlighted here. The case revolves around a twenty-four-year-old civil servant from an urban area in central Croatia who was hospitalised at the psychiatric ward in Pakrac in 1953, following previous hospitalisation at the Hospital for Mental Illness “Vrapče” and the Neuropsychiatric Hospital “Dr. Ivan Barbot” Popovača. He was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, divorced and childless. His father had been treated twice at the psychiatric ward at the Hospital Sv. Duh in Zagreb, while his siblings did not exhibit any known symptoms of mental illness. He first attempted suicide in 1951 by swallowing quicksilver in the mortuary at the cemetery, where gravediggers found him unconscious and transported him to the hospital for treatment. After recovering, about 10–12 days later, he attempted suicide again by jumping out of a first-floor window. The records in his file from the spring of 1951 indicate that, when asked about his disillusionment with life, he cited two main reasons: “One is disappointment with marriage, even though he claims to have married purely for speculative reasons, and the other is disagreement with the current order [...] In the end, he says he no longer thinks about suicide and has come to terms with his fate, willing to remain in the hospital for as long as necessary.” However, shortly after this statement, a psychiatrist’s note contradicts this, stating that he is “mildly depressed and ironic towards himself and his surroundings, clearly disillusioned and embittered by his fate.”<sup>48</sup> Is it possible to assess which claim is true, or are both valid? Should we believe the patient, who claimed he had made peace with his fate and had no suicidal thoughts, or should we rely on the assessment of his psychiatrist, who, after interviewing the patient, still maintained that he was embittered by his fate? How many interpretations can we draw about the patient’s mental state and his assessment of suicidal intentions? How do we reconcile the patient’s statement of acceptance with his psychiatrist’s observation of bitterness

47 Alexander E. Wong, Shrija R. Dirghangi and Shelly R. Hart, “Self-concept Clarity Mediates the Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Adult Suicide Behaviour, Depression, Loneliness, Perceived Stress, and Life Distress,” *Self and Identity* 18(3) (2018): 247–66, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15298868.2018.1439096> (May 28 2024). Michael J. Bostwick, Chaitana Pabbati, Jennifer R. Geske and Alastair J. McKean, “Suicide Attempt as a Risk Factor for Completed Suicide: Even More Lethal Than We Knew,” *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 173(11) (2016), 1094–1100, <https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ajp.2016.15070854> (May 28, 2024).

48 Psychiatry Departement of the Royal State Hospital in Pakrac. Patient files, 1951.

and depression? Can we trust the patient's self-reporting, or should we prioritise the psychiatrist's clinical evaluation?

For example, based on the medical report, it is possible to conclude that the primary reason for the following suicide attempt was the patient's relocation to another school for further education. However, when asked why he attempted suicide several times, he responded he did not know. The case involves a twenty-five-year-old transferred from Sarajevo's psychiatric department to the Neuropsychiatric Hospital "Dr. Ivan Barbot" in Popovača. This young man attempted suicide several times, though ultimately, he regretted it. Regarding this patient, a farmer from the Montenegrin countryside, it is crucial to highlight that the first signs of his mental disorder appeared in 1929 when he attempted to enrol in the third grade of a teacher's college quite far from his home. As soon as he arrived, he immediately attempted suicide by cutting his left arm. Afterwards, he became agitated and restless but still wanted to do something. Upon his admission to a hospital in Sarajevo in 1932, from where he was transferred to the abovementioned Croatian neuropsychiatric hospital in 1934, the following was noted:

"He responded readily and coherently to the inquiries. He says he does not know why they brought him here and considers himself healthy. He admits to attempting suicide three times but does not know the reason why. Smiling, he says he tried to hang himself the third time but could not go through with it and regrets the attempt. He often responds with his typical 'I don't know'."<sup>49</sup>

However, it is essential to acknowledge the impact of stigma when investigating the motives behind suicide attempts or suicide itself, as it makes understanding the phenomenon more difficult. Stigmatisation can lead individuals to avoid openly discussing the reasons for their suicide attempts due to fear of adverse reactions and societal judgment. It can evoke feelings of shame, guilt, and rejection. People often fear being viewed as weak or unsuccessful if they admit to suicide attempts or suicidal thoughts.<sup>50</sup> It is difficult to argue whether a young twenty-four-year-old honestly did not know why he attempted suicide multiple times or if he had deeper reasons that he did not want to reveal to the doctor. The statements of those who have attempted suicide are valuable for understanding these actions, just like the insights from the fields of humanities, social sciences, and medicine, based on numerous studies of motivations for suicidal behaviour. Furthermore, journalistic reports, although sometimes uncertain due to their unreliable sources of information, can enrich the understanding of motivations behind such actions in their own way. Ultimately, considering multiple perspectives is crucial for obtaining a comprehensive picture of this complex issue. Collectively, various approaches, such as scientific research, medical knowledge,

49 HR-DASK-161.2.: Hospital for mental illnesses in Popovača. Patient files, 1934.

50 Adelino A. G. Pereira and Francisco M. S. Cardoso, "Stigmatising Attitudes Towards Suicide by Gender and Age," *CES Psicología* 12(1) (2019): 3–16, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327190334\\_Stigmatising\\_Attitudes\\_Towards\\_Suicide\\_by\\_Gender\\_and\\_Age/link/5b7f26b3a6fdcc5f8b6371f5/download?\\_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxyY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxyY2F0aW9uIn91](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327190334_Stigmatising_Attitudes_Towards_Suicide_by_Gender_and_Age/link/5b7f26b3a6fdcc5f8b6371f5/download?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxyY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxyY2F0aW9uIn91) (June 1, 2024).

and journalistic reports, can contribute to understanding the motivations for suicidal behaviour and provide deeper insights into the internal processes and circumstances leading to such acts.

---

## Conclusion

---

Based on the analysis of Bosnian-Herzegovinian journalistic reports on suicides and the medical theses on this phenomenon, dating from the 1880s to the 1930s, it was established that the reasons for committing suicide are diverse and conditioned by various circumstances. Journalists would often explicitly describe methods of suicide attempts and completions, provide naturalistic depictions of the bodies of the individuals who died by suicide, and confidently draw conclusions regarding the reasons for the emergence of suicidal thoughts and the motivations behind the decision to commit suicide. Criticisms from the public emerged due to the sensationalistic approach of journalists that encouraged the development of suicidal behaviour. This style of reporting was criticised because of the perception that it could inspire others to engage in similar actions. Meanwhile, to understand and explain this complex phenomenon, medical theses approached suicide using objective and scientific research methods, analysing factors such as social environment, gender, economic conditions, social connections, and the individuals' mental health. As these theses tended to assess the reasons for suicide in relation to the prevailing moral, social, and cultural values of the time, some of them considered certain suicides unjustified and condemned them. On the other hand, patients who survived suicide attempts and were treated in Croatian psychiatric hospitals near the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina were unable or unwilling to identify the factors that had led them to such a decision. From all of the above, it can be inferred that suicide attempts and completions can be interpreted from various professional and non-professional perspectives. To draw precise conclusions about the motivations behind these actions, our limitations in terms of understanding and researching the human psyche should be taken into account.

---

## Sources and Literature

---

### Archival sources

---

- HR-DASK – State Archive Sisak:
  - HR-DASK-161.2.: Hospital for mental illnesses in Popovača. Patient files, 1934.
- The Museum of the City of Pakrac:
  - Psychiatry Department of the Royal State Hospital in Pakrac. Patient files, 1915, 1951.



## Literature

- Acosta, Francesco J., Carlos J. Rodriguez, Maria R. Cejas, Yolanda Ramallo-Farina and Helena Fernandez-Garcimartin. "Suicide Coverage in the Digital Press Media: Adherence to World Health Organization Guidelines and Effectiveness of Different Interventions Aimed at Media Professionals." *Health Communication* 35(13) (2020): 1623–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2019.1654176>. Accessed on 4 May 2024.
- Adamiak, Stanislaw and Jan Dohnalik. "The Prohibition of Suicide and Its Theological Rationale in Catholic Moral and Canonical Tradition: Origins and Development." *Journal of Religion and Health* 62 (2023): 3820–33. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s>. Accessed on 6 May 2024.
- Bergmans, Yvonne, Evelyn, Gordon and Rahel Eynan. "Surviving Moment to Moment: The Experience of Living in a State of Ambivalence for Those With Recurrent Suicide Attempts." *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice* 90(4) (2017): 433–648. [https://www.suicideinfo.ca/wp-content/uploads/gravity\\_forms/6-191a85f36ce9e20de2e2fa3869197735/2018/06/Surviving-moment-to-moment-the-experience-of-living-in-a-state-of-ambivalence\\_oa.pdf](https://www.suicideinfo.ca/wp-content/uploads/gravity_forms/6-191a85f36ce9e20de2e2fa3869197735/2018/06/Surviving-moment-to-moment-the-experience-of-living-in-a-state-of-ambivalence_oa.pdf). Accessed on 10 May 2024.
- Bostwick, Michael J., Chaitana Pabbati, Jennifer R. Geske and Alastair J. McKean. "Suicide Attempt as a Risk Factor for Completed Suicide: Even More Lethal Than We Knew." *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 173(11) (2016): 1094–1100. <https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ajp.2016.15070854>. Accessed on 28 May 2024.
- Canetto, Silvia Sara and Isaac Sakinofsky. "The Gender Paradox in Suicide." *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behaviour* 28(1) (1998): 1–23. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Silvia-Canetto/publication/13720598\\_The\\_Gender\\_Paradox\\_in\\_Suicide/links/59dd78c20f7e9b53c1979730/The-Gender-Paradox-in-Suicide.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Silvia-Canetto/publication/13720598_The_Gender_Paradox_in_Suicide/links/59dd78c20f7e9b53c1979730/The-Gender-Paradox-in-Suicide.pdf). Accessed on 6 May 2024.
- Colucci, Erminia and David Lester. *Suicide and Culture*. Hogrefe Publishing, 2013.
- DeCatanzaro, Denys. "Human Suicide: A Biological Perspective." *Cambridge University Press* 3(2) (2010): 265–72. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/behavioral-and-brain-sciences/article/abs/human-suicide-a-biological-perspective/3DF3B0106F0265AB9FC9022C64AB2FFC>. Accessed on 22 May 2024.
- Domaradzki, Jan. "The Werther Effect, the Papageno Effect or No Effect? A Literature Review." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18(5) (2021): 2396. <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/5/2396>. Accessed on 4 May 2024.
- Douglas, Jack D. *The Social Meaning of Suicide*. Princeton University Press, 1967. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x0ts2>. Accessed on 22 May 2024.
- Drinot, Paulo. "Madness, Neurastheneia, and 'Modernity': Medico-legal and Popular Interpretations of Suicide in Early Twentieth-Century Lima." *Latin American Research Review* 39(2) (2004): 89–112. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1555402>. Accessed on 22 May 2024.
- Duncan, Sallyanne. *Reporting Suicide Responsibility: A Force for Good*. 3rd Edition. Routledge, 2023.
- Durkheim, Emile. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Reprint. New York: Free Press, 1897 [1951].
- Fitzpatrick, Scott J. "Re-moralizing the Suicide Debate." *Journal of Bioethic Inquiry* 11(2) (2014): 223–32. <https://philpapers.org/rec/FITRTS-3>. Accessed on 22 May 2024.
- Gearing, Robin Edward and Dana Alonzo. "Religion and Suicide: New Findings." *Journal of Religion and Health* 57(6) (2018): 2478–99. <https://www.iecj.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/religion-and-suicide.pdf>. Accessed on 6 May 2024.
- Glavan, Ivo. "Problem samoubijstva," *Liječnički vjesnik: glasilo Hrvatskoga liječničkog zbora* 51(9) (1929): 442–52. <https://library.foi.hr/dbook/cas.php?B=1&item=S01101&godina=1929&broj=00009&page=442>. Accessed on 18 May 2024.
- Jacobs, Jerry. "A Phenomenological Approach to the Study of Suicide." *Journal of Death and Dying* 4(2) (1972): 400–04. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.2190/7M3X-95J1-V0JG-F8Q2?journalCode=omea>. Accessed on 10 May 2024.

- Johnson, Troy and Holly Tomren. "Helplessness, Hopelessness, and Despair: Identifying the Precursors to Indian Youth Suicide." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23(3) (1999): 287–301. <https://escholarship.org/content/qt7p1610nf/qt7p1610nf.pdf>. Accessed on 25 May 2024.
- Keeble, Richard. *Ethics for Journalists*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9780203698822/ethics-journalists-richard-keeble>. Accessed on 5 May 2024.
- Klonsky, David E. and Alexis May. "The Three-Step Theory (3ST): A New Theory of Suicide Rooted in the 'Ideation-to-Action' Framework." *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy* 8(2) (2015): 114–29. <https://www.suicidepreventioncentrum.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/The-Three-Step-Theory-3ST-A-New-Theory-of-Suicide.pdf>. Accessed on 1 June 2024.
- Kolves, Kairo, Matthew McDonough, David Crompton and Diego de Leo. "Choice of a Suicide Method: Trends and Characteristics." *Psychiatry Research* 260 (2018): 67–74. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165178117307667>. Accessed on 5 May 2024.
- Lim, Meerae, Sang Uk Lee and Jong-Ik Park. "Differences in Suicide Methods Used Between Suicide Attempters and Suicide Completers." *International Journal of Mental Health Systems* 8(54) (2014). <https://ijmhs.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1752-4458-8-54#citeas>. Accessed on 3 May 2024.
- Marecek, Jeanne and Chandanie Senadheera. "I Drank It to Put an End to Me': Narrating Girls' Suicide and Self-harm in Sri Lanka." *Indian Sociology* 42(1–2) (2012): 53–82. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/006996671104600204>. Accessed on 6 May 2024.
- Mehraby, Nooria. "Suicide: Its Pathway, Perception and Prevention Amongst Muslims." *Psychotherapy in Australia* 11(2) (2005): 60–65. <https://search.informit.org/doi/abs/10.3316/informit.546604879663452>. Accessed on 2 May 2024.
- Millner, Alexander J., Samuel J. Gershman, Aaron M. Bornstein, Hanneke E. M. den Ouden, Catherine R. Glenn, Jaclyn C. Kearns, Brian P. Marx and Terence M. Keane. "Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviours Are Associated With an Increased Decision-Making Bias for Active Responses to Escape Aversive States." *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 128(2) (2019): 106–18. [https://nocklab.fas.harvard.edu/files/nocklab/files/millner\\_et\\_al.\\_2019.pdf](https://nocklab.fas.harvard.edu/files/nocklab/files/millner_et_al._2019.pdf). Accessed on 23 May 2024.
- Montgomery, John Warwick. *The Suicide of Christian Theology*. New Reformation Publication, 2015.
- Niederkrotenthaler, Thomas, Marlies Braun, Jane Pirkis, Benedikt Till, Steven Stack, Mark Sinyor, Ulrich S. Tran, Martin Voracek, Qijin Cheng, Florian Arendt, Sebastian Scherr, Paul S. F. Yip and Matthew J. Spittal. "Association Between Suicide Reporting in the Media and Suicide: Systematic Review and Meta-analysis." *BMJ: British Medical Journal (Online)* 368 (2020), 1–17. <https://www.bmj.com/content/368/bmj.m575>. Accessed on 3 May 2024.
- O'Connor, Rory C. "Towards an Integrated Motivational-Volitional Model of Suicidal Behaviour." In Rory O'Connor, Stephen Platt and Jacki Gordon (eds.). *International Handbooks of Mental Health: Research, Policy and Practice* 181–98. John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2011. <http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/28339/2/161.pdf#page=187>. Accessed on 1 June 2024.
- Pejanović, Đorđe. *Bibliografija štampe Bosne i Hercegovine: 1850–1941*. Sarajevo: "Veselin Masleša", 1961.
- Pereira, Adelino A. G. and Francisco M. S. Cardoso. "Stigmatising Attitudes Towards Suicide by Gender and Age." *CES Psicologia* 12(1) (2019): 3–16. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327190334\\_Stigmatising\\_Attitudes\\_Towards\\_Suicide\\_by\\_Gender\\_and\\_Age/link/5b7f26b3a6fdcc5f8b6371f5/download?\\_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327190334_Stigmatising_Attitudes_Towards_Suicide_by_Gender_and_Age/link/5b7f26b3a6fdcc5f8b6371f5/download?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19). Accessed on 1 June 2024.
- Potter, John. "Is Suicide the Unforgivable Sin? Understanding Suicide, Stigma, and Salvation through Two Christian Perspectives." *Religions* 12(11) (2019): 987. [https://media.proquest.com/media/hms/PFT/1/cnkbL?\\_s=TaFqGxpeYriFjCQWjBRj%2FkbsCc%3D](https://media.proquest.com/media/hms/PFT/1/cnkbL?_s=TaFqGxpeYriFjCQWjBRj%2FkbsCc%3D). Accessed on 7 May 2024.
- Puljiz, Vlado. "Seljaštvo u radovima Rudolfa Bičanića." *Socijologija sela* 34(1–2) (1996): 97–103. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/177238>. Accessed on 3 May 2024.

- Puljiz, Vlado. "Prilike u Hercegovini i spašavanje gladne djece u Prvom svjetskom ratu (Osvrt na socijalne i gospodarske prilike, uzroke gladi i ulogu hrvatskih organizacija u spašavanju hercegovačko djece)." In Stipe Tadić and Marinko Šakota (eds.). *Fra Didak Buntić – čovjek i djelo*. Zagreb, 2009.
- Schnyder, Ulrich, Ladislav Valach, Kathrin Bichsel and Konrad Michel. "Attempted Suicide: Do We Understand the Patients' Reasons?." *General Hospital Psychiatry* 21(1) (1999): 62–69. [https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0163834398000644?fr=RR-1&ref=cra\\_js\\_challenge](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0163834398000644?fr=RR-1&ref=cra_js_challenge). Accessed on 1 May 2024.
- Siegel, Harvey. *Education's Epistemology: Rationality, Diversity, and Critical Thinking*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Stack, Steven. "Suicide: A 15-Year Review of the Sociological Literature. Part I: Cultural and Economic Factors." *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behaviour* 30(2) (2000): 145–162. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Steven-Stack/publication/12431188\\_Suicide\\_A\\_15-Year\\_Review\\_of\\_the\\_Sociological\\_Literature\\_Part\\_I\\_Cultural\\_and\\_Economic\\_Factors/links/61d0b3c3e669ee0f5c7dad9b/Suicide-A-15-Year-Review-of-the-Sociological-Literature-Part-I-Cultural-and-Economic-Factors.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Steven-Stack/publication/12431188_Suicide_A_15-Year_Review_of_the_Sociological_Literature_Part_I_Cultural_and_Economic_Factors/links/61d0b3c3e669ee0f5c7dad9b/Suicide-A-15-Year-Review-of-the-Sociological-Literature-Part-I-Cultural-and-Economic-Factors.pdf). Accessed on 1 June 2024.
- Stančić - Rokotov, Ivo. "Samoubojstvo u Zagrebu: Statistički pregled za god. 1931–1935." *Liječnički vjesnik: glasilo hrvatskog liječničkog zbora* 59(3) (1937): 97–99. <https://library.foi.hr/dbook/cas.php?B=1&item=S01101&godina=1937&broj=00003&page=97>. Accessed on 19 May 2024.
- Staples, James and Tom Widger. "Situating Suicide as an Anthropological Problem: Ethnographic Approaches to Understanding Self-Harm and Self-Inflicted Death." *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 36 (2012): 183–203. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11013-012-9255-1.pdf>. Accessed on 1 May 2024.
- Till, Benedikt, Teresa A. Wild, Florian Arendt, Sebastian Scherr and Thomas Niederkrotenthaler. "Associations of Tabloid Newspaper Use with Endorsement of Suicide Myths, Suicide-related Knowledge, and Stigmatizing Attitudes Toward Suicidal Individuals." *Crisis* 39(6) (2018): 428–39. <https://econtent.hogrefe.com/doi/10.1027/0227-5910/a000516>. Accessed on 8 May 2024.
- Topić, Franjo. "Hrvatski tisak u BiH od početka do 1941. godine," *Vrhbosnensia: časopis za teološka i međureligijska pitanja* 7(2) (2003): 469–84. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/425597>. Accessed on 4 May 2024.
- Wong, Alexander E., Shrija R. Dirghangi and Shelly R. Hart. "Self-concept Clarity Mediates the Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Adult Suicide Behaviour, Depression, Loneliness, Perceived Stress, and Life Distress." *Self and Identity* 18(3) (2018): 247–66. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15298868.2018.1439096>. Accessed on 28 May 2024.
- Wray, Matt, Cynthia Colen and Bernice Pescosolido. "The Sociology of Suicide." *Annual Review of Sociology* 37 (2011): 505–28. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Matt-Wray/publication/228173911\\_The\\_Sociology\\_of\\_Suicide/links/00b49516580f38289c000000/The-Sociology-of-Suicide.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Matt-Wray/publication/228173911_The_Sociology_of_Suicide/links/00b49516580f38289c000000/The-Sociology-of-Suicide.pdf). Accessed on 1 May 2024.
- Younis, Hana. "Otvaranje i rad muslimanskih čitaonica u manjim mjestima Bosne i Hercegovine početkom 20. stoljeća." *Bosniaca: časopis Nacionalne i univerzitetske biblioteke Bosne i Hercegovine* 26(26) (2021), 89–111.

### Online sources

- *Katolički list* – *Wikipedija*. [https://hr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katoli%C4%8Dki\\_list](https://hr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katoli%C4%8Dki_list). Accessed on 17 July 2024.

## Periodicals

---

- *Jugoslavenski list*, 1899, 1919.
- *Katolički list*, 1855, 1866.
- *Osvit*, 1899.
- *Sarajevski list*, 1884, 1889, 1900, 1904, 1907.

Jelena Seferović

---

### **POGLEDI NA SAMOMOR: MNENJA V BOSNI IN HERCEGOVINI TER NA HRVAŠKEM OD OSEMDESETIH LET 19. STOLETJA DO TRIDESETIH LET 20. STOLETJA**

---

#### POVZETEK

---

Za boljše razumevanje kompleksne narave samomora in poskusov samomora si prizadevajo različne znanstvene discipline. Na razvoj samomorilnih idej in dejanj vplivajo številni elementi, od bioloških vplivov do psihosocialnih dejavnikov ter od zavestnih razmišljanj do podzavestnih kognitivnih in senzoričnih procesov. Analiza ustreznih zgodovinskih virov, novinarskih poročil o samomorih s konca 19. in začetka 20. stoletja ter takratnih medicinskih doktrin, ki so temeljile na pozitivističnih načelih, razkriva, da so bili zagovorniki teh teorij trdno prepričani o vzročnih dejavnikih samomora. Kljub prizadevanjem za jasne razlage vzrokov samomorov in poskusov samomora ta pojav ostaja skrivnosten. To dokazujejo pričevanja posameznikov, ki so poskušali narediti samomor, in razkrivajo, da tudi oni ne razumejo razlogov za to odločitev ali pa o njih ne želijo govoriti. Ker nimamo popolnega vpogleda v vzroke za takšne odločitve, to navsezadnje poudarja, da smo pri razumevanju motivov, na katerih temeljijo samomorilna dejanja, omejeni.