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# Suicide as a public health problem

**El suicidio como problema de salud pública****O suicídio como um problema de saúde pública****ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** To analyze and reflect on the high rates of deaths by suicide. **Method:** This is an integrative literature review. The search for articles was carried out between the months of September and October 2020. The following inclusion criteria were used: articles available in Portuguese and English, published in full free of charge between the years 2017 and 2020, with repeated articles being excluded, inconclusive, experience reports, reflective studies and studies not relevant to the theme. **Results:** Six articles were selected to prepare the review. It became evident that despite being a very controversial and relevant topic, there are still taboos that hinder prevention in dealing with this event. **Conclusion:** Finally, it becomes necessary to strengthen the creation of strategies for the management of people at risk in order to reduce the incidence of deaths caused by this act.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Suicide. Public health. Preconception. Suicidal ideation

**RESUMEN**

**Objetivo:** Analizar y reflexionar sobre las altas tasas de muerte por suicidio. **Método:** Se trata de una revisión bibliográfica integradora. La búsqueda de artículos se realizó entre los meses de septiembre y octubre de 2020. Se utilizaron los siguientes criterios de inclusión: artículos disponibles en portugués e inglés, publicados íntegramente de forma gratuita entre los años 2017 y 2020, excluyéndose los artículos repetidos, inconclusos, informes de experiencias, estudios reflexivos y estudios no relevantes al tema. **Resultados:** Se seleccionaron seis artículos para preparar la revisión. Se hizo evidente que a pesar de ser un tema muy controvertido y relevante, aún existen tabúes que dificultan la prevención para enfrentar este evento. **Conclusión:** Finalmente, se hace necesario fortalecer la creación de estrategias para el manejo de personas en riesgo con el fin de reducir la incidencia de muertes por este acto.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Suicidio. Salud pública. Preconcepción. Ideación suicida.

**RESUMO**

**Objetivo:** Analisar e trazer uma reflexão sobre os altos índices de óbitos por suicídio. **Método:** Trata-se de uma revisão integrativa da literatura. A busca dos artigos foi realizada entre os meses de setembro e outubro de 2020. Foram utilizados como critérios de inclusão: artigos disponíveis em português e inglês, publicados na íntegra de forma gratuita entre os anos de 2017 e 2020, sendo excluídos os artigos repetidos, inconclusivos, relatos de experiência, estudos reflexivos e estudos não pertinentes à temática. **Resultados:** Foram selecionados 6 artigos para elaboração da revisão. Evidenciou-se que apesar de ser um tema bastante polêmico e relevante, ainda existem tabus que dificultam na prevenção para lidar com esse evento. **Conclusão:** Por fim, torna-se necessário fortalecer a criação de estratégias para o manejo de pessoas em risco com o objetivo de reduzir a incidência de óbitos causadas por esse ato.

**DESCRIPTORIOS:** Suicídio. Saúde Pública. Preconceito. Ideação suicida.

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## INTRODUCTION

Death has always intrigued and amazed humanity, even though it is a social marker from which no human will be spared. With regard to voluntary death, such as suicide, it is even more intriguing, so that it could have been postponed or avoided. Suicide is a worldwide social occurrence that constitutes a serious public health problem, observed since antiquity and occurs in all cultures and genders.<sup>1,2</sup>

Suicide is understood as a multifactorial and multidimensional phenomenon as a result of the complex relationship between several factors, such as environmental, physiological, biological, genetic and social, however it is still considered a topic with a lot of prejudices and taboos in many societies.<sup>3</sup>

According to the World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>4</sup>, suicide is based on the intentional act to end one's life. It is a public health priority, presenting itself as the third leading cause of death worldwide. Nowadays, every 40 seconds a person commits suicide, and for each suicide there were between 10 and 20 attempts. Data show that about 800.000 people take their own lives each year and an even greater number of individuals attempt suicide, making it the second leading cause of death among young people aged 15 to 29 years.

Between 2007 and 2016, 106,374 deaths from suicide were registered in the Mortality Information System (MIS). The most used way to put an end to one's life is through exogenous intoxication.

In 2016, the national average suicide rate was 5.8 deaths per 100 thousand inhabitants, with 11.433 deaths from this cause being reported, 79% of suicides occurred in low and middle income countries.<sup>5</sup>

Still considered an event full of puzzles by society, we seek answers to understand it, prevent it, sensitize the population and remedy this episode, since suicides can be avoided in due time, based on evidence and interventions by low cost, requiring a broad multisectoral strategy. It is a phenomenon where everyone is vulnerable, and it has been affecting all social strata. This fact confirms that suicide should not be considered a pathology, but a social problem.<sup>6</sup>

Even in the face of data and the recognition of its severity and complexity, suicide is still a taboo subject, full of stigmas. There is an increase in communication on the subject, but still in a restricted and cautious way. Thus, the taboo makes it impossible for the topic to be widely addressed by society, resulting in negative consequences, since raising awareness is one of the ways to prevent it.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, in the attempt of interventions focused on individuals with suicidal ideations, in Brasília, in 2015 the campaign "Setembro Amarelo" was created by the Centro de Valorização da Vida (CVV), the Federal Council of Medicine (CFM - Conselho Federal de Medicina) and the Brazilian Association of Psychiatry (ABP - Associação Brasileira de Psiquiatria). Created with the aim of informing the population about ways of preventing suicide and alerting everyone about this problem,

not only in Brazil, but worldwide.<sup>8,9</sup>

Given this context, the objective is to analyze and reflect on the high rates of deaths by suicide. With the intention of, through this writing, to sensitize the population of the importance of approaching and understanding this subject, getting rid of prejudices and beliefs that are still present in our society, since it is misleading anyone who thinks that talking about the subject will stimulate someone to commit such an act, and thus showing the need for intervention.

Given this context and the need for knowledge of the problem, the study has the guiding question: what is the view in relation to suicide today?

## METHOD

It is an integrative literature review, a methodology that consists in the elaboration of an extensive analysis of the literature, thus cooperating for discussions on research methods and results, as well as reflections on the conduct of new studies. This research method has as its initial objective to obtain a greater understanding on the investigated theme based on previous studies.<sup>10</sup>

The search for the articles was carried out between the months of September and October 2020, in the databases Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) and Virtual Health Library (VHL) with articles from the Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE) and Literature Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences (LILACS). The

following inclusion criteria were used: articles available in Portuguese and English, published in full, free of charge between the years 2017 and 2020, excluding repeated, inconclusive articles, experience reports, reflective studies and studies not relevant to the theme.

The preparation of this research originated with the consultation of Health

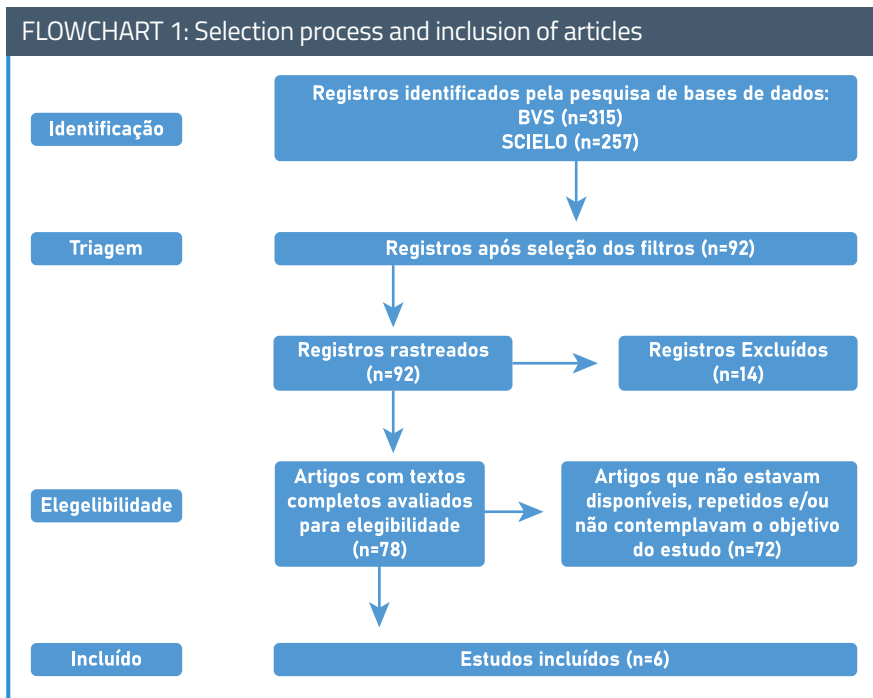
Sciences Descriptors (DeCS) and Medical Subject Headings (MeSH). Therefore, the following descriptors were used in Portuguese and English, respectively: “Suicídio”/“Suicide”, “Saúde Pública”/“Public Health”, “Preconceito”/“Prejudice” e/ou “Ideação suicida”/“Suicidal ideation”. The Boolean operator AND is also used to cross the terms.

In the first junction 572 articles were found, referring to 257 in SciELO and 315 in the VHL. In the second junction after choosing the article filters between the years 2017 and 2020, in Portuguese and English, there were 92 articles for analysis and final selection, of these only 78 were available, 23 were not originals, 8 were repeated and 41 did not contemplate the objective of the study, leaving 6 articles to compose the study. The script proposed in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA)<sup>11</sup> methodology was used for the development of the study in order to organize the selected articles and lead to a better targeting of the data obtained.

RESULTS

The article was constructed based on the guidelines of the PRISMA methodology. The selection of articles for the composition of this integrative review was organized in Flowchart 1, which followed the PRISMA recommendations.

The 6 selected articles were organized in table 1, where they are presented: journal/year, title, objective and main results of each of the studies, in a succinct way.



SOURCE: PRISMA 2009 Flow Diagram

Table 1: Synthesis of studies included in the research.

| Periódico/Ano   | Título  | Objetivo   | Principais Resultados  |
|---|---|--|--|
| Revista Sociedade e Estado – Volume 35, Número 1, Janeiro/ Abril 2020               | A desesperança do jovem e o suicídio como solução   | avaliar a interdependência entre as complexas relações sociais da contemporaneidade, sua influência na construção identitária dos jovens e a morte intencional como saída para dores emocionais. | Ao considerar o suicídio como uma preocupação mundial, observa-se a realização de muitas ações para o seu enfrentamento e solução, porém ainda encontramos muitas dificuldades na prevenção e protocolos para lidar com esse evento. |
| Revista Psicologia em Foco, Frederico Westphalen, v. 11, n. 16, p. 19-32, nov. 2019 | A dor do viver: o suicídio e seu impacto na Saúde Pública                                       | Analisar o suicídio na atualidade e seu impacto na saúde pública, considerando os fatores de risco e o luto “daqueles que ficam”.  | O comportamento suicida é uma tragédia familiar e pessoal, e ainda um grave problema de saúde pública. Visto que compreender é bastante complexo no contexto que estamos inseridos, onde a morte é algo que aterroriza a sociedade.  |
| Saúde Soc. São Paulo, v.27, n.1, p.185-200, 2018                                    | Aproximações e distanciamientos ao suicídio: analisadores de um serviço de atenção psicossocial | Investigar a atenção ao suicídio de um serviço de atenção psicossocial em um município de São Paulo  | Compreendido atualmente como um fenômeno multidimensional e multifatorial, o suicídio ainda é considerado um tema tabu em muitas sociedades.   |

|   |   |  |   |
|---|---|--|---|
| Tendências e contravérsias nas pesquisas em ciências sociais e saúde, 2020.               | Desmistificando os muros do silêncio: tendências dos estudos sobre o fenômeno suicídio e o impacto na saúde pública | Compreender as tendências dos estudos que analisam o suicídio, bem como desmistificar o silêncio que permeia a presente temática.                    | Com dados epidemiológicos assustadores, uma pessoa comete suicídio a cada 40 segundo; atingindo todas as faixas etárias e classes sociais, não tem como ignorar os dados, os fatos confirmam o grande desafio que estamos enfrentando.        |
| REVISTA M. 44 João Fernando Marcolan Rio de Janeiro, v. 4, n. 7, p. 31-44, jan./jun. 2019 | O comportamento suicida na realidade brasileira: aspectos epidemiológicos e da política de prevenção                | Analisar dados epidemiológicos sobre o comportamento suicida e a política de prevenção ao suicídio.  | Os fatores de risco relacionados ao comportamento suicida devem ser levados em conta em toda a sua extensão, do planejamento até o ato consumado. Vale ressaltar, que a tentativa de suicídio é um fator de risco para uma próxima tentativa. |
| Revista Eletrônica Acervo Saúde / Electronic Journal Collection Health, 2020              | Série temporal do suicídio no Brasil: o que mudou após o Setembro Amarelo?  | Analisar a prevalência das notificações de suicídio no Brasil antes e após o lançamento da Campanha Setembro Amarelo (CSA) pelo Ministério da Saúde. | A campanha Setembro Amarelo tem o intuito de levar conhecimento a população sobre suicídio e alertar-los a respeito desse problema, para que busquem ajuda e intervenções de profissionais qualificados.                                      |

Source: The authors, 2020.

There is a high incidence of deaths from suicide and difficulties in prevention to deal with this event. In addition to being a personal and family tragedy, it is an important public health problem, where everyone is vulnerable to this phenomenon. It is necessary to talk about the subject and remove the taboo prejudices present in society.

## DISCUSSION

Suicide rates increase annually. In Brazil, there were 183.484 deaths registered by suicide between 1996-2016, an increase of 69,6% in suicide cases in that period, and represent a serious public health problem.<sup>12</sup> The numbers, even underestimated, are frightening, and warn of the possibility of these numbers being much higher, as some suicides are considered and often registered as accidents or as death of undetermined cause.

In relation to self-harm, the Brazilian database of the Ministry of Health, through the Information System for Notifiable Diseases (SINAN), and the Department of Informatics of the Unified Health System (DATASUS), recorded, in the period from 2009 to 2016, 186.891 notifications, of which 3.941 in 2009, 6.739 in 2010, 14.940 in 2011, 21.164 in 2012, 25.468 in 2013, 29.707 in 2014, 39.464 in 2015, and 45.468 in

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2016.<sup>13</sup> Although the increase in the number of reported cases draws attention, there is still a lack of a program to monitor suicidal behavior, as the attempted suicide is an important risk factor for the act to be repeated.

Considered a complex phenomenon, difficult to understand and multifactorial, the analysis of factors related to suicide are essential and can help health professionals to consider the risk and outline strategies to reduce it and prevent the act from occurring. Among the risk factors, we can highlight mental disorders, social isolation, psychological issues, disabling clinical conditions and previous suicide attempts. Attempts must be treated seriously and as a warning sign, since in each suicide consummated, there were at least between 10 and 20 attempts.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the recognition of the seriousness and complexity of this phenomenon, suicide is still treated as a topic with a lot of taboo and erroneous beliefs, since it makes it difficult to talk openly about the subject with society.

It is necessary to seek a better understanding that goes beyond the prejudices of society, where it is still thought that talking about suicide is to stimulate its incidence. But far from it, health strategies must be created and implemented through the CVV, as well as the "Yellow

September", for an association between sectors and society to occur, in order to act in the prevention of suicide and provide comprehensive assistance to the population, this is because suicide is a social issue.<sup>6</sup>

When analyzing suicide, we can see how complicated it is to deal with such problems, and this phenomenon currently kills more than homicides, health problems and traffic accidents, not to mention the flaws in the system. For example, not all occurrences are recorded and such information would be extremely important in terms of prevention, as we would have more real data on the situation.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, as it is a complex and multifaceted event, actions must be focused on risk and protection factors, as well as the appropriate reception to the population. It is worth mentioning the limitation of data collection, since the system

is still fragile and under construction, and with problems in relation to under-reporting and omission of data.<sup>14</sup>

This theme raises questions and analyzes necessary to define prevention and support strategies for both notification and network care. It is essential to remember the importance of sensitizing and qualifying professionals to work with the identification and monitoring of people at risk or with a history of attempted suicide, as well as their families. It is important that professionals have knowledge about preventive measures against suicide and act in the early identification of people who are vulnerable, thus seeking to reduce the incidence of deaths from this cause.

## CONCLUSION

In view of the epidemiological data presented in the research, talking

about suicide becomes relevant and current, configuring it to be a public health problem that requires greater attention and the creation of strategies to reduce its incidence. Ordinances, recommendations and laws are created, but it is necessary to take integrated actions in the different socio-psychic spheres that involve the whole of society.

Finally, it should be noted that because it is a very controversial, challenging and with a strong impact, people who have already attempted suicide should not be judged, but treated with empathy and support, in order to provide protection factors to these people. Strengthening the creation of strategies for the management of people at risk of suicide through the identification of warning signs, and from these, the development of interventions to minimize this outcome. ■

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