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## Artículo de revisión

# Suicide in the Indigenous Population of Latin America: A Systematic Review

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Due to the high rates of suicide reported among many ethnic minorities, a systematic review is presented on suicide in indigenous populations of Latin America.

**Methods:** Systematic review in PubMed, Scopus, PsycNET, Scielo and Scholar Google.

**Results:** From an initial total of 1862 articles, 41 were included for data extraction. They include 21 from Brazil, 13 from Colombia, 2 from Chile, 1 from Peru, and 4 articles grouped from different countries. Suicide is a public health issue in many communities. Lifestyle changes, industrialisation, environmental degradation, and alcohol have led the indigenous population experiencing what has been described as “cultural death.”

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### Suicidio en la población indígena latinoamericana: revisión sistemática

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Se han reportado altas tasas de suicidio en algunas minorías étnicas, entre ellas comunidades indígenas en Latinoamérica. Este fenómeno se considera un problema de salud pública. Realizamos una revisión sistemática para describirlo.

**Métodos:** Se realizó una búsqueda sistemática en las bases de datos de PubMed, Scopus, PsycNET, Scielo y Google Scholar.

**Resultados:** Se encontró un total inicial de 1.862 referencias; de estos artículos, se incluyeron 41 para extracción de datos según los criterios de inclusión, de los que 21 hacen referencia

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a Brasil, 13 a Colombia, 2 a Chile, 1 a Perú y 4 artículos a diferentes países agrupados. Las comunidades indígenas están pasando por un fenómeno de «muerte cultural» en el que los cambios en las culturas, los estilos de vida, la industrialización, la invasión del medio ambiente y el consumo de alcohol se convierten en desencadenantes del suicidio.

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## Introduction

High rates of suicide have been reported among ethnic minorities world-wide, including the Scandinavian Sami in Europe<sup>1</sup>, different North American natives<sup>2,3</sup> as well as Australian aboriginals.<sup>4,5</sup> Despite geographical differences, there are some common risk factors for mental disorders and self-injury, most of them associated with cultural disruption. Several anecdotal cases of suicide among indigenous people of Colombia and Brazil have been reported in the press, one of them the self-immolation of Maobe in 2006, the young leader of the Nukak ethnic group, which has been considered the last Amazonic ethnic group to be “discovered” in Colombia, as recently as 1998.<sup>6</sup>

Mental disorders have not been fully studied in Latin American indigenous groups. Common stressors include high rates of alcoholism,<sup>7-9</sup> or culturally-related dissociation-like syndromes sometimes labeled as “*ataques de nervios*”.<sup>10,11</sup>

Despite some isolated publications on suicide in Latin America,<sup>12,13</sup> we did not find a general review of this topic. The objective of our study was to perform a systematic review of both peer-reviewed articles and grey literature on the incidence, the geographic and ethnic distribution, and the risk factors associated with suicide in indigenous Latin Americans.

## Methods

We performed a systematic review of the literature in PubMed, Scopus, PsycNET and Scielo (the Latin American database), as well as in Scholar Google, using the following high sensitivity and low specificity search strategy which included the free-text terms (“Latin America” OR “Central America” OR “South America” OR any of the countries in the region, individually) AND (indigenous OR Indian OR aboriginal OR ethnic OR ethnia) AND (“suicide” OR suicid\* OR “self-injur\*” OR “self-harm” OR “self-destructive” OR parasuicide OR “self-immolation”).

An additional search for “grey literature” was done in Scholar Google using suicide (and Spanish or Portuguese equivalents) associated with each Latin American country. The first 10 pages (i.e. 100 references) of each search were analyzed. The reference lists of all included articles were reviewed for any additional articles. Searches were carried out on March 2016. Following usual systematic review practice, after eliminating duplicates, a first screening step involved two separate reviewers selecting potentially useful articles and excluding those clearly irrelevant. The remaining articles

were obtained in full text. Articles were eligible for inclusion if they were published in a scholarly journal or if a “Methods” section and reference list were included in a “grey” document. No language or time limits were applied. Only articles centered on or considering indigenous population were used for data extraction. Due to the differences in methodologies used in the articles, and their narrative nature, we did not apply any specific tool to evaluate their quality. Meta-analysis was not attempted due to heterogeneity of study characteristics, including study populations, study designs, and research methodology. Narrative synthesis was therefore used to analyze the extracted data.<sup>14</sup> Data obtained from each included article were geographical location, ethnic group(s) studied, control group (if any), number of subjects considered, type of study, and causes and mechanisms of suicide.

## Results

Figure 1 summarizes the article selection process. Initial searches identified 1862 potential references, of which 75 were selected for full-text review, 2 of which were not available. Reasons for excluding 32 of these articles were: no direct reference to indigenous groups, no figures presented in the text, or not related to any Latin American country. In total, 41 articles published between 1980 and 2015; 21 of the total articles referred to Brazil, 13 to Colombia, 2 to Chile, and 1 to Peru, while 4 additional articles included data from several Latin American countries.

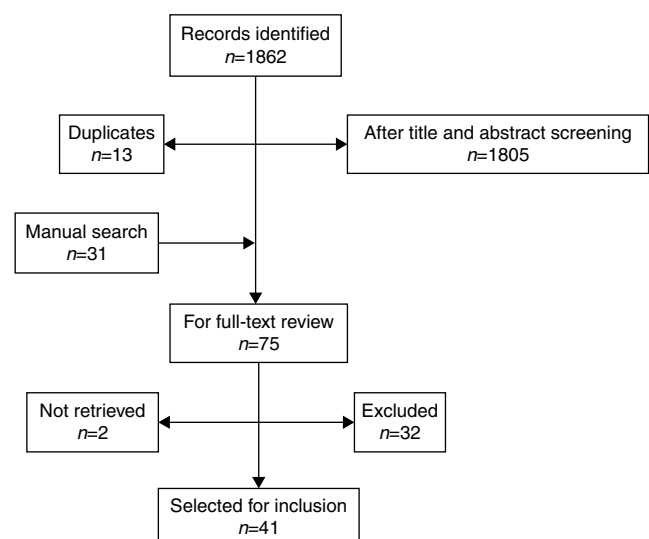


Figure 1 – Search and retrieval process.

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