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### ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# A descriptive analysis of suicide deaths and application of the Psychological Autopsy method during the period 2013–2015 in the region of Osona (Barcelona, Spain)<sup>☆</sup>



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#### KEYWORDS

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Forensic autopsy

#### Abstract

**Introduction:** The aim of the present study is to describe the pattern of suicide deaths in the region of Osona (Barcelona) during the period 2013–2015, and to analyse the use of the Psychological Autopsy (PA) method.

**Material and methods:** It is a retrospective design using the suicide deaths register (n = 31). The PA sample (n = 14) was composed of adult relatives and close friends, recruited from the *Consorti Hospitalari de Vic*. The PA method was performed using the Semi-Structured Interview for Psychological Autopsy (SSIPPA), adapted and validated to the Spanish language (García-Caballero et al., 2010).

**Results:** The main profile was of a male, married, with no psychiatric history, and used methods like hanging or being running over by a train. In the sub-sample on which the PA was carried out, it was observed that the main precipitating or motivating factors were those related to

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social, family, and health problems. The prevalence of diagnosed psychopathologies was not a majority profile, but vulnerable personality traits were found. As most of the cases showed previous preparations and verbalisations regarding their intention, it can be concluded that the decision was not impulsive but deliberate.

**Conclusions:** The PA method is an efficient tool to describe and obtain data about suicide that may be relevant and useful in the design and implementation of prevention programmes. Moreover, it may help to perceive the individual characteristics of each region promoting a better adjustment and individualisation of these programmes.

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## PALABRAS CLAVE

Suicidio;  
Autopsia psicológica;  
Riesgo de suicidio;  
Prevención del  
suicidio;  
Autopsia forense

## Análisis descriptivo de los suicidios y la aplicación del método autopsia psicológica durante el período 2013–2015 en la comarca de Osona (Barcelona, España)

### Resumen

**Introducción:** El objetivo del presente estudio es describir el perfil de las muertes por suicidio en la comarca de Osona (Barcelona) durante el período 2013–2015 y analizar la aplicación de la técnica autopsia psicológica (AP).

**Material y métodos:** El diseño es retrospectivo a partir del registro de suicidios (n = 31). La muestra de la AP (n = 14) estuvo formada por familiares y personas adultas próximas al fallecido, reclutadas a través del registro del Consorci Hospitalari de Vic. Se utilizó el método de la AP mediante la *Semi-Structured Interview for Psychological Autopsy* (SSIPPA), una entrevista semiestructurada adaptada y validada al español (García-Caballero et al., 2010).

**Resultados:** El perfil mayoritario de las muertes por suicidio corresponde a varones, casados, sin antecedentes psiquiátricos que utilizaron métodos como el ahorcamiento o el arrollamiento por tren. En la submuestra en que se realizó la AP se observa que los factores precipitantes o motivadores están relacionados con problemas a nivel social, familiar y de salud. La prevalencia de psicopatologías diagnosticadas no fue mayoritaria, pero se detectaron rasgos de personalidad vulnerables. En muchos casos hubo preparativos y verbalizaciones previas respecto a sus intenciones, por lo que se deduce que la decisión fue tomada de forma premeditada y no impulsiva.

**Conclusiones:** La AP representa una herramienta eficaz para la obtención de datos relativos al suicidio que pueden ser relevantes y útiles en el diseño y la implementación de programas de prevención, ayudando a detectar la idiosincrasia particular de cada región y permitiendo una mayor adaptación e individualización de dichos programas.

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## Introduction

Suicide, understood as the voluntary action of taking one's own life, is the second most common cause of violent death among individuals between 15 and 29 years of age worldwide, and the fifth most common among individuals aged between 30 and 49, constituting a major public health problem, as it accounts for more deaths per year than homicides, deaths in armed conflicts and road accidents.<sup>1</sup> According to the data presented by the World Health Organisation,<sup>2</sup> the suicide death rate globally is 11.4 per 100,000 inhabitants (15 males/8 females). The rate in Europe is slightly higher, at 11.6 per 100,000 inhabitants, probably owing to the more thorough recording thereof.<sup>3</sup> Spain is in 30th position among the 36 European countries studied, being one of

the geographic areas in Europe with the lowest suicide rate, at 8.41.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the rate in Catalonia is 7.06, accounting for 13.6% of the total number of suicides in Spain<sup>5</sup>; and, specifically in Osona, the region in which this study is conducted, a rate of 9.5<sup>6</sup> is observed.

The phenomenon of suicide and its high frequency across the world has led many countries to address this situation on 2 different levels; on one hand, by establishing healthcare policies aimed at prevention and the reduction of the suicide rate; and, on the other, by focusing on raising awareness of the non-stigmatisation of the problem through mental health information and promotional campaigns. The detection and description of the risk factors, the precipitating factors, as well as the protective factors, comprise a primary objective in the prevention of suicide globally.<sup>2</sup> Interest in

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