

The phenomenon of suicide considered from criminological, sociological and legal perspectives.

Case study – Warmia and Mazury Voivodship

Феномен суїциду з кримінологічної, соціологічної та правової позицій. Практичний приклад – Вармінсько-Мазурське воєводство

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Purpose: is to characterise the phenomenon of suicide and to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon, reaching to its aetiology, characterising its symptomatic forms, confronting it with the norms of Polish criminal law, and assessing the symptomological tendencies in the area in question.

Method: the formal-dogmatic method, the historical-legal method, and the comparative method and method based on the analysis of statistical data.

Findings: Analysing the phenomenon in question, it was found that the approach to it was and still is conditioned by historical, civilisational circumstances. It is also reflected in legal codifications, in which the legislator departs from punishing potential suicides. At the same time, when considering the phenomenon on a regional scale, no significant deviations from the general trends are noticeable. However, taking into account the social territorial dissimilarity, the local specificity should be taken into account in the creation of support for persons at risk of various dysfunctions that may be the cause of suicide.

Practical implications: The presented analysis of the phenomenon in a regional context will undoubtedly contribute to further research on suicidal behaviour. The local perspective of the article fosters a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the decision to take one's own life. Thus, it may influence the creation of a system of support for people in this regard, taking into account the specifics of the region and social problems resulting from economic and living relations.

Value: The article integrates contemporary knowledge on the symptomology, phenomenology of suicide, allows to identify the main causes of this phenomenon and characterises the legislation in this field. The following article analyses the phenomenon of suicide on a regional scale. The local perspective makes it possible to know in more detail the problems causing negative social behaviour. At the same time, it adequately identifies the problems oscillating around the phenomenon in question. It can be a useful tool for researchers and decision-makers looking for answers to questions in this area and indicate directions for the development of social policy instruments in this area.

Research limitations: The phenomenon of self-harm is a very interesting process or moment in the life of the person who commits it. Although suicide has received a great deal of attention in the specialist literature, it still remains completely unexplored. The phenomenon itself touches the realm of the mysterious on the borderline between life and death. Hence the interest in it by many scientific disciplines. In statistical terms, the Polish Police collect detailed data on suicides. Research limitations in this area result from ethical and moral aspects of the issue, the lack of direct contact with the suicide's

Мета роботи: охарактеризувати явище самогубства та провести комплексний аналіз явища, досягнувши його етіології, охарактеризувавши його симптоматичні форми, зіставивши його з нормами польського кримінального права та оцінивши симптомологічні тенденції у відповідній сфері.

Метод: формально-догматичний метод, історико-правовий метод, порівняльний метод і метод, заснований на аналізі статистичних даних.

Результати дослідження: Аналізуючи розглянуте явище, виявлено, що підхід до нього був і залишається зумовленим історичними, цивілізаційними обставинами. Це відображено і в правових кодифікаціях, в яких законодавець відходить від покарання потенційних самогубців. Водночас, якщо розглядати явище в регіональному масштабі, суттєвих відхилень від загальних тенденцій не помітно. Проте, враховуючи соціальну територіальну несхожість, місцеву специфіку слід враховувати при створенні супроводу для осіб із ризиком виникнення різноманітних дисфункцій, які можуть бути причиною суїциду.

Практична цінність дослідження: Представлений аналіз явища в регіональному контексті, безсумнівно, сприятиме подальшим дослідженням суїцидальної поведінки. Локальна перспектива статті сприяє всебічному розумінню факторів, що впливають на рішення покінчити з життям. Таким чином, це може вплинути на створення системи підтримки людей у зв'язку з цим, враховуючи специфіку регіону та соціальні проблеми, що випливають з господарсько-побутових відносин.

Цінність дослідження: Стаття об'єднує сучасні знання щодо симптомології, феноменології суїциду, дозволяє виявити основні причини цього явища та характеризує законодавство у цій сфері. У наступній статті аналізується феномен суїциду в регіональному масштабі. Місцева перспектива дає змогу більш детально пізнати проблеми, що викликають негативну соціальну поведінку. Водночас він адекватно ідентифікує проблеми, що коливаються навколо розглянутого явища. Він може бути корисним інструментом для дослідників та осіб, які приймають рішення, які шукають відповіді на запитання в цій сфері та вказують напрямки розвитку інструментів соціальної політики в цій сфері.

Обмеження дослідження: Феномен самоушкодження є дуже цікавим процесом або моментом у житті людини, яка його вчиняє. Незважаючи на те, що самогубству приділено багато уваги в спеціальній літературі, воно все ще залишається абсолютно невивченим. Саме явище зачіпає сферу дослідників та осіб, які приймають рішення, які шукають відповіді на запитання в цій сфері та вказують напрямки розвитку інструментів соціальної політики в цій сфері.

environment. The research results themselves are socially internalised and significantly influence the perception of reality. Technically, the use of research is not always morally acceptable. At the same time, research fulfils social needs and expectations for the creation of instruments to prevent suicide attacks.

Paper type: theoretical.

аспектами проблеми, відсутністю безпосереднього контакту з оточенням самогубця. Самі результати дослідження соціально інтерналізовані та суттєво впливають на сприйняття дійсності. Технічно використання досліджень не завжди є морально прийнятним. Водночас дослідження задовольняють суспільні потреби та очікування щодо створення інструментів для запобігання нападам смертників.

Тип статті: теоретичний.

Key words: suicide, phenomenon, identify, Police

Ключові слова: самогубство, феномен, ідентифікація, поліція.

Introduction

Death is inherently woven into human nature. However, in certain cases, it raises considerable controversy and evokes contrasting emotions. The circumstances that accompany death and make it very difficult to understand the meaning of a person's actions include suicide. This phenomenon is not an intensive social process, but due to its psychological impact and the taboo surrounding it, it presents a significant problem that has to be dealt with both by individuals and the community as a whole. Over the course of human history, specific cultures or philosophical systems have sought to respond to the challenges posed by suicidal acts. Legal doctrines have also voiced their opinions on this subject. Some of them condemned suicide, while others ordered that those whose suicidal attempts failed should be punished. If the suicidal attempt ended in death, it was ordered to burn the corpses or confiscate the property.

The science with suicide as its research subject is suicidology. This science attempts to determine what has caused the suicide, draw a profile of the suicide and design prevention activities in this area or to define assistance programmes for people who have made unsuccessful suicidal attempts. Human civilisation is evolving and thus providing new impulses for potential suicides. A clear example of the new challenges is the virtual world being transposed into the real world. Nonetheless, suicide represents a very interesting research area for lawyers, psychologists, psychiatrists and sociologists.

Results

The historical background of the approach towards suicide

Philosophical and religious systems have approached the issue of suicide in various ways. The issue was examined in the context of life, the right to die with dignity and fundamental human freedoms. In pre-Christian times, in Greece and Rome, a great impact on the solution of this issue was exerted by various philosophical schools. Adam Świeżyński emphasises that the Epicureans and Stoics represented the view that suicide is a natural act. The representatives of Epicureanism, although they represented a hedonistic lifestyle, accepted the possibility of committing self-destruction when a person suffered difficult experiences. On the other hand, the Stoics, who took a distanced approach to life, regarded "suicide as an action in harmony with nature, a simple and final consequence of following the rules governing the universal order and the creation of things". Zeno of Citium reserved the right to choose one's own death to the circle of sages (Świeżyński, A., 2002). As Jacek Sieradzan observes, ancient Greeks didn't explicitly condemn suicide. They accepted honour-based suicides committed for the common good, although condemned suicide resulting from cowardice. According to the author, they considered honour suicides to be a "conscious and deliberate decision taken, for example, as a result of chronic illness and inability to bear pain, old age or a sacrifice for the homeland" (Sieradzan, J., 2009). Socrates accepted suicide only in cases of higher necessity. Tadeusz Ślipko emphasised that "Socrates himself committed suicide but he did so because this is what is commanded by Athens. But he took this step bravely and without fear of death since he was guided by the conviction that in this way, he would sooner free himself from the bonds of the flesh and the senses, in order to possess the truth, already pure and immaculate"

(Ślipko, T., 2020). Plato, by contrast, did not approve of such behaviour. The philosopher accepted suicide in the following circumstances

- an immense and irreversible tragedy,
- a disgrace from which there is no recovery, and which does not allow one to live
- when it was demanded by the state under a legal decision (Ślipko, T., 2020).

In turn, according to Aristotle, suicide is “a morally evil act because it results from cowardice and a desire to avoid difficulties, it violates the rights of the state over the person of the citizen, and it is finally a consequence of the wrongdoings committed in life” (Ślipko, T., 2020).

According to Andrzej Zwoliński, the ancient law approach to suicide was quite liberal. The author notes that “the Romans saw suicide as a chosen evaluation of one’s life following careful consideration. Therefore, the law did not provide for retribution and degradation, nor did it evoke fear or terror. Taking one’s own life was tolerated and justified under the law, and it was punished in exceptional cases – when committed “without reason”, as irrational behaviour or in the case of suicide by a soldier (as he was the property of the state) or a slave (as the owner had invested some of his capital in the slave)” (Zwoliński A., 2020).

Christianity condemned self-destructive behaviour from the very beginning. At this point, the decisions of the synods of Arles (452), Orléans (533) and Nimes (1248) should be referred. The resolutions of these synods condemned suicide and also prohibited burial in hallowed ground (Czabański, A., 2020). While the views of the Church hierarchy unequivocally condemned such behaviour, Christian philosophy struggled to explain certain behaviours, especially when suicide involved people who had been disgraced by pagans. Situations of this type were analysed by St. Augustine and they concerned women who committed suicide facing rape. According to Tomasz Sahaj, St. Augustine, balancing reason with emotion, expressed the view that “suicide is clearly wrong, regardless of the motives behind it. The Doctor of the Church argued that suicide had no place in Christianity, let alone justification or approval of the act in canonical writings” (Sahaj, T., 2020). Another great philosopher of the Church, St. Thomas Aquinas, just as St. Augustine, prohibits suicide. St. Thomas in his *Summa Theologica*, provides three reasons for the uncompromising position regarding the act of suicide:

- theological,
- sociological,
- personalistic (Michalska – Suchanek M., 2011).

In this context, St. Thomas expresses the opinion that man is a social being and, in this sense, he excluded his independence to decide on his presence in it. Furthermore, he emphasises the fact that man is the property of God, and this means that God decides on man’s life and death. Finally, St. Francis states that suicide is against the nature of man, thus it violates the commandment to one’s neighbor (Marx, J., 2003). In the opinion of Tomasz Ślepko, “St. Thomas construes the prohibition of suicide as strictly as St. Augustine”. The author points out that St. Thomas “expanded the motivational aspect of the issue. In the essential part of the article, he elaborates on three arguments. On this point, he no longer follows Augustine, but constructs his own arguments or borrows them from Aristotle and Plato. He, therefore, proves that suicide is an absolute evil because it is an act against self-love, against society and finally against God. Suicide compromises all these values and thus commits a cardinal sin” (Ślipko, T., 2020).

Under the influence of Christian thinkers, secular legislation stigmatising suicidal behaviour also developed along the same line. Andrzej Zwoliński provides examples of such legislation:

- “in Geneva, if a suicide attempt failed, the would-be suicide was publicly flogged;
- an order from Lille in 1340 said that the most scurrilous crime is when someone hangs himself or drowns himself out of desperation;
- In 1411, the ‘Coutumier d’Anjou et du Maine’ defined someone who assassinates another

person or kills himself as a murderer;

- in medieval Zurich: whoever stabbed themselves had a wooden wedge driven into his head, the drowned were buried in the sand, and whoever jumped from a height was also buried in the sand;

- In England, from about 1000 a suicide was described as “a felo de se”, a criminal to oneself. Such a person was ordered to be punished by stabbing his corpse. He would lose all his property to his master. It was forbidden to bury a suicide either in a church or in a cemetery unless the act was prompted by bodily or mental illness;

- In the mid-13th century, Bracton brought together existing laws and customs, which were very diverse. If the suicide was committed on suspicion of a crime, it was considered a confession and the entire perpetrator’s property was then confiscated. On the other hand, anyone who killed himself out of an excess of life, pains or worries, had his movable property confiscated and his real estate inherited;

- In English towns in the 16th century, would-be suicides were hanged. Even at the beginning of the 17th century, unfortunates who tried to hang themselves were dragged by horses. As an additional punishment, the body was forbidden to be removed from the rope until it had visibly decomposed” (Zwoliński, A., 2020);

- in Austria, *Constitutio Criminalis Theresiana* of 1768 provided for the burning of the corpse of a suicide or the hanging of the body of the deceased;

- another Austrian code from 1787 provided for the punishment of potential suicides, the aim of which was to arouse in them the desire to promise to mend their ways

- The Polish Code of Zamoyski in 1778 established a sanction against suicide – hanging the body (Tokarczyk, R., 2004).

The approach to suicide didn’t change until the Renaissance. Over time, European legislators began to depart from a restrictive approach to suicide.

- In France, legislation changed under the influence of Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu, Denis Diderot, Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In 1790, “a resolution was passed abolishing all sanctions against the corpse and property of the suicide, which until then had been subject to confiscation. Also, suicides were no longer classified as serious crimes. Although the formal permission for burial in cemeteries was still a long time coming, still the unyielding, restrictive position was slowly being liberalised” (Michalska – Suchanek, M., 2011);

- “In 1751, direct and indirect criminal laws against suicide were abolished in Prussia, and two years later new legislation was applied to military suicides;

- In England, the practice of piercing the corpse of a suicide was stopped in 1851, the confiscation of property was discontinued in 1873, and the punishment of attempted suicide was only abolished by the Suicide Act of 3 August 1961. Previously, the ‘Homicide Act’ of 1957 introduced a change in the classification of the act of attempted suicide from murder to homicide;

- in 1931 Italy abolished the penalties for suicide and suicide attempts” (Zwoliński, A., 2020).

In 1897 Émile Durkheim published his work titled *Le suicide*. The work gave rise to sociological reflections on the theory of suicide (Kołodziej-Sarzyńska M., Majewska M., Juchnowicz D., Karakuła – Juchnowicz H., 2019). É. Durkheim presented a theory of integration and disintegration of society Relationships between cohesion and social disintegration affect suicidal behaviour. Based on his considerations, he distinguished the following types of suicides

- altruistic, resulting from a strong integration with the society;
- egoistic, resulting from a poor integration with the society;
- fatalistic, resulting from a tragic situation of an individual;
- anomic, resulting from social disintegration (Albański, L., 2010).

Maria Jarosz points to other directions of research into suicides: the philosophical approach based on reflections on the essence of the human being, the clinical approach which sees the cause of suicides in inappropriate human anatomy and the psychological approach which refers to destructive attitudes, feelings of alienation and suffering of a physical or ethical nature (Jarosz M., 1997).

In contrast, Iwona Sierpowska notes that the dilemmas of moral and legal evaluation of suicide can be reduced to two attitudes:

- condemning this act, which violates the fundamental human right to life,
- recognising suicide as an act of freedom and as a right to self-determination (Sierpowska I., 2020).

Suicides in Poland based on the statistical data of a selected regional police headquarters

Suicides are that category of social events that evoke particular emotions among individuals. The effects of such an event directly affect the immediate environment of the deceased. Issues relating to broken interpersonal ties, financial matters or legal security of assets arise. Indirect effects are triggered by information about suicides published in the mass media.

Małgorzata Kuć observes that “suicide is an act of extreme destruction, resulting from frustration on the ground of a serious conflict, which, according to the suicide, cannot be resolved except by taking his or her own life”. In this context, the author defines the following features of the suicidal person’s mental state: helplessness, disbelief in the positive results of efforts made to solve existing problems, feeling of hopelessness, unsatisfied needs, and awareness of limited options (Kuć M., 2015).

The National Police Headquarters keeps fairly detailed statistics on committed suicides or suicide attempts. The data covers the following statistical categories: gender, age, place of work, education, method of committing the act and day of the week. This study analyses data concerning the area of operation of the Regional Police Headquarters in Olsztyn. This police department supervises the area of the province of Warmia and Mazury.

In examining the statistical data, it should be noted that 563 suicides were recorded in 2017 in the area of the Regional Police Headquarters in Olsztyn, with the vast majority concerning men. Death was reported in 192 cases. This category was also dominated by men. A slight downward trend was observed in 2018. In contrast, an increase in suicides was observed in 2019, with 611 reported cases. As in previous periods, a prevalence of men was recorded. A higher number of identified suicides was reflected in the number of deaths. During this period, 211 male and 31 female deaths were recorded (The statistics analysed) (table 1).

Table 1 – Suicide attacks resulting in death

Year	Police Dpt. (PD)	Total number of people in suicides	Of which men	Of which women	Number of people whose suicide acts resulted in death	Men	Women
2017	Olsztyn (PD)	563	426	137	226	192	34
	Poland	11139	8515	2623	5276	452	751
2018	Olsztyn (PD)	546	440	106	215	193	22
	Poland	11167	8364	2803	5182	4471	711
2019	Olsztyn (PD)	611	481	130	242	211	31
	Poland	11961	8782	3177	5255	4497	756

Source: own study based on <https://statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/zamachy-samobojcze/63803,Zamachy-samobojcze-od-2017-roku.html>, accessed 29.12.2020.

Piotr Wojnicz observes that for years, men have also dominated among missing persons. Of

the 206 reported missing persons in 2015 (statistic data Municipal Police Headquarters in Olsztyn), as many as 63% were men and only 37% were women (ill. 1).

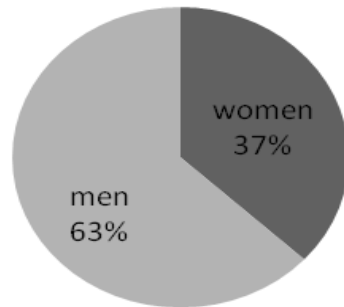


Illustration 1 – Missing persons cases by gender closed by the Municipal Police Headquarters in Olsztyn in 2015

Source: own study based on: P. Wojnicz, *Zaginienia osób. Studium prawne, kryminalistyczne i kryminologiczne*, Olsztyn 2021, pp. 27.

The research conducted by the author in 2015 revealed “that the leading cause of disappearances of young people under the age of 40 is related to illness and suicidal thoughts. In the area of the City of Olsztyn and the Olsztyn District, 67 disappearances of this nature were reported, of which two ended in the death of the missing person. 86% of the total missing persons who committed suicide were men, most of them at the working age, namely between 18 and 25 years (26%) and between 26 and 40 years (42%). The experience of officers investigating cases of disappearances shows that most often, suicidal intentions were realised within a radius of about 1 kilometre from the place of the incident. This is the distance where people are most agitated and emotional” (Wojnicz P., 2015) (ill. 2).

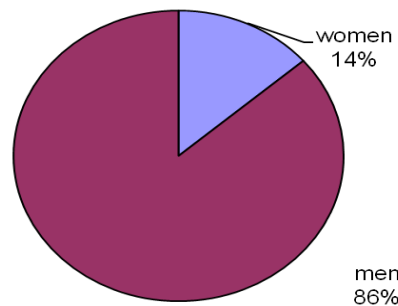


Illustration 2 – Missing persons cases caused by suicidal intentions, by gender, by the Municipal Police Headquarters in Olsztyn in 2015

Source: own study based on: P. Wojnicz, *Zaginienia osób – charakterystyka zjawiska na przykładzie działań wybranej jednostki Policji* in: *Meandry nauk społecznych*, J. Mrozek, M. Fierek (eds), Gdańsk 2015, pp. 226.

However, when analysing the phenomenon of suicide, it should be noted that the most vulnerable age group are people in the 60-64 age group. In addition, attention should also be paid to young people. People between the ages of 19-24 and 25-29 also continue to be at the same level. Each of these groups has its own problems and reasons for resorting to this particular act of desperation (Zamachy samobójcze, 2020). In this case, the first age group mentioned, i.e. 60-64, seems to be very interesting. This age group is dominated by men and increasingly more often

affected by various types of disease: alcohol, drug and gambling addictions, but also mental illnesses and diseases associated with old age, such as Alzheimer's disease. Suicide is most often committed under the influence of alcohol and drugs. In this case, The Regional Police Headquarters in Olsztyn in 2017 recorded 223 cases of committing suicide under the influence of alcohol and 21 under the effect of drugs out of a total of 563 cases. However, there are increasing trends toward self-destruction among persons who carry out this act consciously. In both 2017 and 2018, there were 61 such cases, while 82 such cases were recorded in 2019 (tab. 2).

Table 2 – Suicide - state of consciousness

Year	Police Dpt.	State of consciousness					
		Sober	Under influence of alcohol	Under influence of intoxicants	Under influence of drugs	Under influence of substitute agents/substances (legal highs)	No data / not established
2017	Olsztyn Police Dpt.	61	223	6	21	3	257
	Poland	1306	3635	79	734	31	5575
2018	Olsztyn Police Dpt.	61	241	3	33	1	219
	Poland	1342	3634	92	809	21	5526
2019	Olsztyn Police Dpt.	82	233	5	32	1	274
	Poland	1571	3804	98	929	22	5777

Source: own study based on <https://statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/zamachy-samobojcze/63803,Zamachy-samobojcze-od-2017-roku.html>, accessed 29.12.2020

Health status considerably impacts the decision to commit suicide. According to statistics from the Regional Police Headquarters in Olsztyn, people who have psychiatric problems or are addicted to alcohol belong to that category which is more likely to carry out suicide acts. This is followed by people with physical deficiencies. A large group comprises individuals whose health status was not established. They account for almost 50% of revealed suicides (tab. 3).

Table 3 – Suicide – Health status information

Year	Police Dpt. (PD)	Health status information										
		Physical disease	Permanent disability	Under psychiatric treatment	Under treatment for alcohol addiction	Alcohol abuse	Under treatment for drug addiction	Detained in a sobering station	With a previous case at the alcoholism prevention committee	Used illegal drugs	Used legal highs	No data / not established
2017	Olsztyn (PD)	14	1	101	9	89	2	7	2	3	1	360
	Poland	404	76	2562	465	2129	59	116	24	123	60	5890
2018	Olsztyn (PD)	17	2	116	25	119	4	14	0	5	4	285

Year	Police Dpt. (PD)	Health status information										
		Physical disease	Permanent disability	Under psychiatric treatment	Under treatment for alcohol addiction	Alcohol abuse	Under treatment for drug addiction	Detained in a sobering station	With a previous case at the alcoholism prevention committee	Used illegal drugs	Used legal highs	No data / not established
2019	Poland	450	94	2648	451	2052	45	119	19	131	61	5796
	Olsztyn (PD)	27	5	111	24	100	5	11	2	6	2	361
2019	Poland	477	77	2840	448	2060	65	112	20	130	41	6372
	Olsztyn (PD)	27	5	111	24	100	5	11	2	6	2	361

Source: own study based on <https://statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/zamachy-samobojcze/63803,Zamachy-samobojcze-od-2017-roku.html>, accessed 29.12.2020

When characterising suicides in terms of educational background, it should be noted that the act of self-annihilation is most frequently committed by persons with primary and vocational education. Additionally, individuals for whom education has not been established constitute a large group (tab. 4).

Table 4 – Suicide – Education

Year	Police Dpt.	Education								No data / not established
		Primary incomplete	Primary	Lower secondary	Basic vocational	Secondary	Post-secondary	Higher		
2017	Olsztyn Police Dpt.	2	20	6	19	7	0	4	168	
	Poland	31	392	93	558	378	3	132	3689	
2018	Olsztyn Police Dpt.	2	14	5	13	7	0	2	172	
	Poland	29	324	78	467	380	3	130	3771	
2019	Olsztyn Police Dpt.	1	10	4	10	9	0	9	199	
	Poland	20	312	59	465	356	4	138	3901	

Source: own study based on <https://statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/zamachy-samobojcze/63803,Zamachy-samobojcze-od-2017-roku.html>, accessed 29.12.2020

On the other hand, when analysing suicides considering marital status, it is important to note that this is not a factor in the decision. People in stable relationships (married, cohabiting) as well as single people (single, widowed, divorced) equally often commit this act (tab. 5).

In contrast, the source of income affects the decision to commit suicide. In the area of operation of the Regional Police Headquarters in Olsztyn, in 2017, the statistics mention 45 persons who committed suicide and did not have a regular source of income. In subsequent years, this category dominated the suicide data. On the other hand, those with regular sources of income accounted for almost half of the number of reported suicides.

Table 5 – Suicides in the area of the Regional Police Headquarters in Olsztyn – marital status

Suicides in the area of the Regional Police Headquarters in Olsztyn marital status			
marital status	2017	2018	2019
unmarried	30%	28%	31%
married	35%	32%	41%
cohabitee	6%	7%	2%
widow/widower	7%	8%	5%
divorced	11%	6%	6%
in separation	0%	0%	0%
no data / not established	11%	19%	15%

Source: own study based on <https://statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/zamachy-samobojcze/63803,Zamachy-samobojcze-od-2017-roku.html>, accessed 29.12.2020

As regards the locations where suicides occur most frequently, these are invariably dominated by the place of residence and its immediate vicinity, i.e. garage, cellar, attics and utility buildings. In 2017, there were 310 reported suicides in residential areas, in 2018 – 322, while 355 such incidents were reported in 2019 (tab. 6).

Table 6 – Suicide – Location of suicide

Year	Police Dpt. (PD)	Location of suicide															
		Total number of people in suicides	place of legal isolation	street, road,	Apartment/house	Park, forest	Garage / cellar/attics	Care and educational facility	Treatment facility or sanatoriums	Military facility	Police facility	River / lake / other water body	Railway area / rails	Utility buildings	Work establishment	School / university	Other
2017	Olsztyn (PD)	563	27	3	310	54	42	2	3	0	1	5	8	48	5	3	52
	Poland	11139	541	28	5956	771	994	48	107	2	23	154	267	982	70	57	1139
2018	Olsztyn (PD)	546	36	1	322	37	40	2	6	0	2	6	9	46	2	1	36
	Poland	11167	603	26	6164	832	903	44	91	1	13	132	250	910	63	48	1087
2019	Olsztyn (PD)	611	38	1	355	39	44	4	4	0	0	4	13	53	2	1	53
	Poland	11961	680	27	6775	858	920	43	103	0	14	134	284	917	56	80	1070

Source: own study based on <https://statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/zamachy-samobojcze/63803,Zamachy-samobojcze-od-2017-roku.html>, accessed 29.12.2020

Other locations include:

- place of legal isolation;
- urban agglomeration - street, road, pavement;
- park, forest;
- care and educational facility;
- treatment facilities, sanatoriums;
- military facilities;
- work establishments;
- schools, universities;
- police facilities;
- water bodies – rivers, lakes;
- sites near railways

The method by which people commit this act is also a very important issue. Those modes include:

- poisoning by chemical agents;
- use of sleeping pills, psychotropic drugs;
- poisoning by intoxicants;
- poisoning by legal highs, damage to the blood system;
- self-mutilation;
- jumping from a height;
- drowning;
- hanging;
- throwing oneself under a vehicle;
- shooting oneself;
- asphyxia;
- self-immolation.

Traditionally, the most common way of committing suicide is by hanging and strangulation. Jumping from a height is the second mode in terms of frequency, but suicides also decide to take drugs or to use firearms (tab. 7).

Table 7 – Suicide – Modes

Year	Police Dpt.	Modes															
		Poisoning with gas/exhaust fumes	Poisoning with chemical/toxic agents	Use of sleeping pills/psychotropic drugs	Use of other drugs	Poisoning with narcotic drugs	Poisoning with legal highs	Damage to the blood system	Superficial self-injury	Jumping from a high	Drowning	Hanging	Throwing oneself under a moving vehicle	Shooting oneself / use of firearms	Asphyxia	Self-immolation	Other
2017	Olštyn (PD)	1	0	1	3	0	0	1	2	9	1	200	1	4	1	1	1
	Poland	29	17	44	58	4	0	75	46	342	57	4 313	105	72	49	12	53

Year	Police Dpt.	Modes															
		Poisoning with gas/exhaust fumes	Poisoning with chemical/toxic agents	Use of sleeping pills/psychotropic drugs	Use of other drugs	Poisoning with narcotic drugs	Poisoning with legal highs	Damage to the blood system	Superficial self-injury	Jumping from a high	Drowning	Hanging	Throwing oneself under a moving vehicle	Shooting oneself / use of firearms	Asphyxia	Self-immolation	Other
2018	Olsztyn (PD)	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	10	2	192	1	2	2	1	1
	Poland	38	12	48	61	3	0	83	36	330	46	4 211	105	79	45	15	70
2019	Olsztyn (PD)	1	1	2	5	0	0	4	2	16	0	198	4	6	0	0	3
	Poland	41	24	50	63	4	0	96	38	330	45	4 240	132	86	44	11	51

Source: own study based on <https://statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/zamachy-samobojcze/63803,Zamachy-samobojcze-od-2017-roku.html>, accessed 29.12.2020

Another interesting question is the day of the week on which suicides occur. Based on the data collected, suicides occur most frequently on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays (ill. 3).

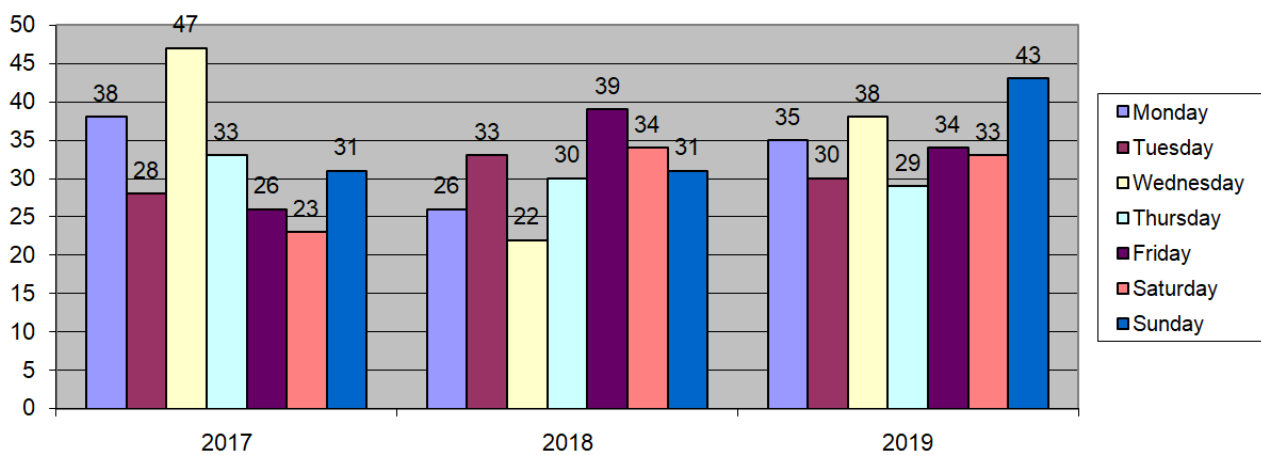


Illustration 3 – Suicides in the area of the Regional Police Headquarters in Olsztyn– days of the week

Source: own study based on <https://statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/zamachy-samobojcze/63803,Zamachy-samobojcze-od-2017-roku.html>, accessed 29.12.2020

At the same time, it should be noted that this is also a large area with a lack of data required to analyse the situation regarding health, disorders or social and living situations. Thus, it

encourages the possibility of a high degree of interpretation of human behaviour and analysis of the factors and stimuli influencing a particular decision.

Based on the statistical data presented above, it should be concluded that the phenomenon of suicides belongs to the category of multifaceted events. The accumulation of such events in a human life results in a decision being made to stop existing. As Małgorzata Kuć rightly notes, it is a combination of negative environmental stimuli with particular consideration of the individual characteristics (Kuć, M., 2015, p. 150). Maria Jarosz, in turn, states that such a decision is affected by a number of social, demographic, employment-related and economic factors. The author points to the occurrence of a specific suicidogenic situational syndrome (Jarosz M., 2013). Brunon Hołyst also expresses a similar view. According to this author, “suicide is not just a case of tragic self-destruction, but a series of interrelated thoughts and actions, sometimes lasting for years”. The author introduced to the doctrine the term “suicidal behaviour, which is a sequence of reactions triggered in a person at the moment when suicide appears in his or her consciousness as an anticipated, desired state of affairs, i.e. as a goal” (Hołyst B., 2016). In this context, Brunon Hołyst distinguished three types of suicides:

- true suicides, with the intention of taking one’s own life,
- pseudo-suicides, in which death is only permitted, not chosen,
- suicidal gestures, in which the person fears of death, does not want to die, but wants to gain an advantage by this gesture (Hołyst B., 2012).

Undoubtedly, it is a whole series of events occurring over a longer or shorter period of time that contribute to the act of self-destruction. These events are determined by socio-economic factors. Nevertheless, for a suicide to be committed, an impulse must occur – an event that definitively determines the decision. Regardless of scientific considerations, it must be acknowledged that suicidal behaviour is characterised by a high degree of individuality. Although it is possible to categorise suicides, their attitude is autonomous and, in many situations, dependent on their personal experiences. It was also observed by Konrad Harasim, that “when analysing the causes of suicides one can only be interested in the direct motives that prompt an individual to commit suicide and are subjectively the most important and the most painful reasons that have the greatest role in the decision to take one’s own life. On the other hand, the author notes that it is also possible to look at a given suicidal behaviour from a broader perspective by analysing the context of a given situation, i.e. the whole set of circumstances providing the background of the suicide” (Harasim K., 2017).

Before the final act of self-destruction takes place, the potential suicide goes through stages along the way. These stages often remain unnoticed by the people around them. They take place in a dynamic way, by informing the community of one’s intention, threatening to take one's own life or in silence, accompanied by a loss of self-esteem. In 2019, 11,961 suicide acts were reported in Poland. In the area of operation supervised by the Regional Police Headquarters in Olsztyn, 611 such cases were recorded.

Analysis of Article 151 of Polish the Penal Code

The punishment for suicide has undergone a very long evolution. As Lech Gardocki remarks, so far there have been two views on this subject:

- a liberal view, which treats suicide as a personal matter, and
- a restrictive view, which treats it as an act detrimental to the interests of society, which may and should fight it by all means (Gardocki L., 2019).

The Polish criminal law system has abandoned the punishment of potential suicides. However, persuasion and provision of assistance are punishable, which results from Article 151 of Polish the Penal Code (Penal Code Act of June 6, 1997), stipulating as follows: “Whoever, by

persuasion or by rendering assistance, induces a human being to make an attempt on his own life shall be subject to the penalty of the deprivation of liberty for a term of between 3 months and 5 years". In criminal law doctrine, the view is expressed that life as a social value is the object of protection. Jacek Giezek also emphasises that the fundamental object of protection is not only life, but also the freedom to choose how to manage it (Giezek, J. 2014). The article under discussion defines the causative act as follows: induces a human being to make an attempt on his own life. This activity has two forms: persuading and rendering assistance. According to L. Gardocki, "it is a substantive offence, but the effect required by the regulation is the attempted suicide itself, which must be successful". Furthermore, the author adds that this crime can only be committed with direct intent (in the form of persuading) or with both forms of intent (in the form of rendering assistance) (Giezek, J. 2014). In the opinion of Justyna Kosonoga – Zygmunt, "persuasion within the meaning of Article 151 of the Penal Code may take the form of a request, suggestion, advice, proposal or recommendation. However, according to the author, it should be considered unjustified to qualify under the above-mentioned regulation any behaviour consisting in leading another person to suicide by means of blackmail, extortion, order, etc. It seems that all forms of coercive pressure on another person do not fall within the meaning of persuasion" (Kosonoga – Zygmunt, J., 2015).

Table 8 – Encouraging or assisting suicide – article 151 of the Penal Code

Encouraging or assisting suicide – article 151 of the Penal Code, "Whoever by persuasion or by rendering assistance induces a human being to make an attempt on his own life shall be subject to the penalty of the deprivation of liberty for a term of between 3 months and 5 years."		
Year	Number of proceedings initiated	Number of crimes recorded
2019	3548	18
2018	3406	20
2017	3385	27
2016	3024	11
2015	3193	11
2014	3535	21
2013	3180	15
2012	2638	8
2011	2459	4
2010	2452	10

Source: own study based on *Namowa lub pomoc do samobójstwa*, <https://statystyka.policja.pl/st/kodeks-karny/przestepstwa-przeciwko/63420,Namowa-lub-pomoc-do-samobojstwa-art-151.html>, accessed 30.06.2021.

Zuzanna Gądzik points out that assistance in the victim's attempt to take his or her own life can take two forms:

- material assistance, which consists in *deliberately providing the would-be suicide with the means to enable or facilitate making an attempt on his or her life, e.g. a weapon, poison, knife, rope or to create the necessary conditions;*
- intellectual assistance, which is based on providing a person who plans to take his or her own life with guidance, advice or information on how to implement his or her plan (Gądzik Z., 2020).

Robert Fluder states that "it is certainly beyond dispute that the offence of leading a person to attempt suicide is in principle a common offence, i.e. it can be committed by any person capable of criminal liability" (Fluder R., 2020).

Conclusion

Suicide is an act of self-destruction, tragically ending human existence. Over the centuries, philosophical and legal systems have approached this problem in a variety of ways. Some of them condemned this act, while others justified it. Medieval law prescribed that the corpses of suicides should be tried, hanged and even that the property of suicides should be confiscated. With the development of knowledge about the human psyche and behaviour, the approach to this issue has also evolved.

Modern lawmakers have abandoned punishing would-be suicides for such acts. The Polish penal system criminalises only encouraging and providing assistance in the commission of suicide, regardless of whether the act was carried out or not.

Regardless of legal assumptions or philosophical approaches, this is an individual decision of the respective person. This act is often driven by a sequence of independent events but, in some cases, it is triggered by a single event. Nevertheless, it is always destructive and leads not only to the tragedy of the suicidal person, but also of loved ones who have often failed to notice the symptoms leading to the act.

In analysing statistical data on suicide, it is important to highlight the hidden numbers of the phenomenon. Repeatedly, the statement – “no data, other” is found in the data. This indicates that the phenomenon is still completely unexplored and, consequently, there is a need for further research into its nature.

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The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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