

THE INDUCTION PROCESS TO PREVENT SUICIDES AND SELF-HARM OF INMATES AND RELATED *LEARNING* *CONSEQUENCES*

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«Prisons: graveyards for the living» (*Filippo Turati, 1904*) (Edition 2021)

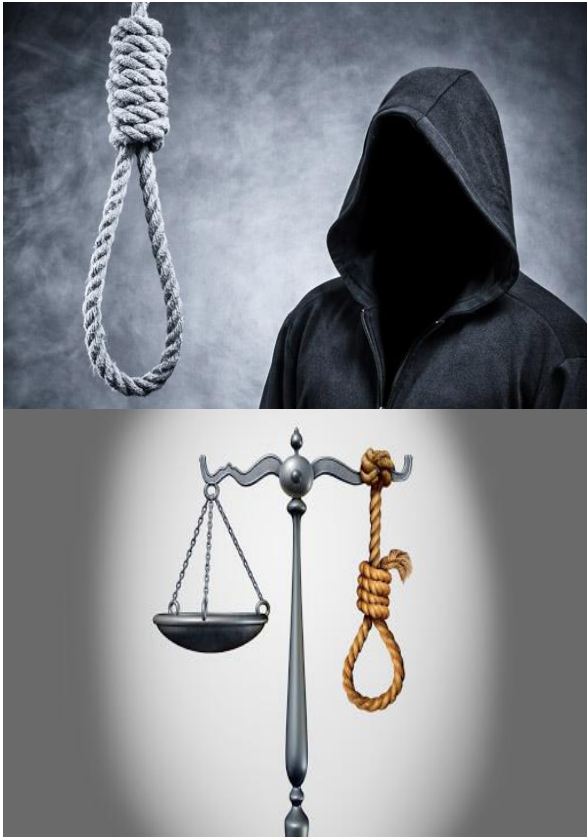
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Research on prisoners' suicide. Why?



- Being imprisoned is an ***INDUCED DEATH PENALTY.***
- This is **everywhere**, also in countries against death penalty, **borders do not make difference.**
- No connection with the declared function of prison: *rehabilitation, re-education*

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Suicide as a global issue. How many in the world



- Suicide is a serious global public issue. It is the leading cause of death worldwide. **More than 1 in every 100 deaths** (1.3%) in 2019 were the result of suicide.
- In 2019, an estimated **703.000 people** died by suicide

(WHO, 2019)

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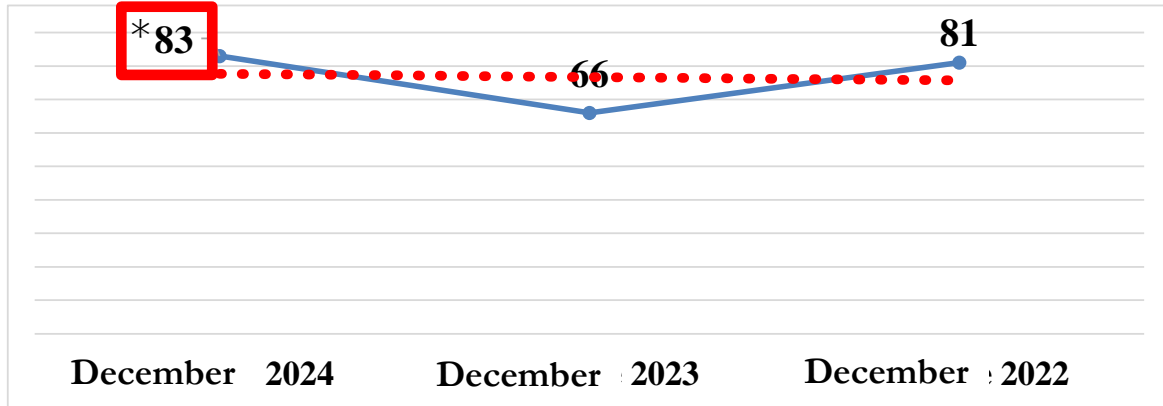



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Suicide during imprisonment. Drammatic numbers in Italy

* 88 for *Ristretti Orizzonti* (2024) * 90 for *Specialised Newspapers* (the last one in 31.12.2024)



Suicides in Italian prisons trends 2022-2024
(Ministry of Justice-National Ombudsman, 2024)

- **In prison, suicide rates are higher** than in the general population (WHO, 2021).
- This is dramatically true **in Italy** where the prisoner **suicide rate is approx 20 times** that of the non-incarcerated population (Esposito, 2017), one of the highest differentials in EU.
- Around 7 suicides/month. Around 2/week

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Suicide in Italian prisons. Trend for 2025?

- **Until 6 May 2025, 27 inmates** committed suicide. **21** inmates died for reasons that are under investigation: in the same period, in 2024 we had 33 suicides and **3** deaths under investigation (*source: Ministry of Justice*).
- **13 out of 27 were awaiting their trial** (around 50%).
- **8 out of 27 had a remaining period of imprisonment equal to less than 3 years.**
- In 2025, we already have a suicide rate equal to 7,3/month.
- We may expect **in the next 8 months (2025) more than 85 suicides** at national level if this trend is confirmed.

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s until the end of Dec.


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Suicide during imprisonment. Pre-trial detainees, Short-term and Long-term inmates (Italy)

Pre-trial detainees	Short-term inmates	Sentenced inmates
32	-	35

Waiting for judgements	Sentenced inmates with additional ongoing trials	Provisional internment
5	10	1

- **44,82%** of inmates who have committed suicide were **sentenced**
- **38,18%** of inmates who have committed suicide were waiting for trials or were in prison for security reasons (**pre-trial custody**)

Overview suicide in Italian prisons 2022-2024
(Ministry of Justice-National Ombudsman, 2024)

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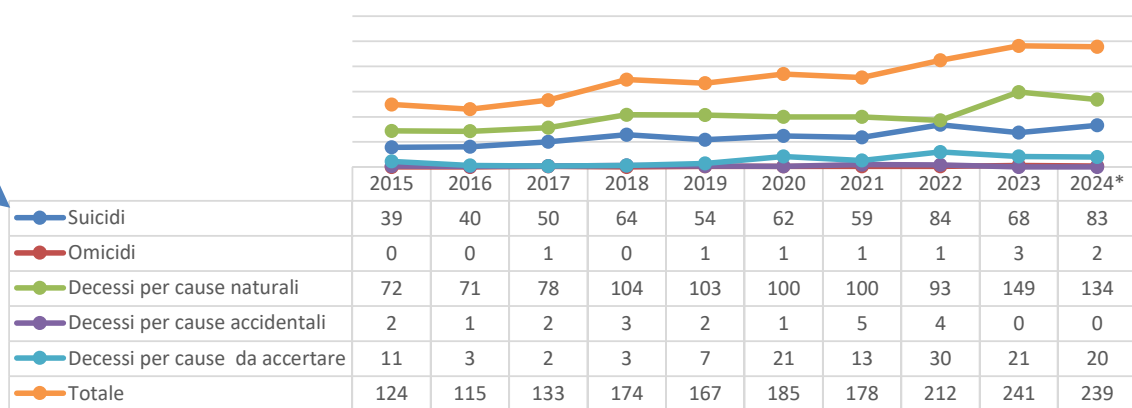
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Suicide during imprisonment. Where in Italy

Typology of prisons	Prisons (<i>case di reclusione</i>)	District prisons (<i>case circondariali</i>)
54 (28,42%)	6	48

- **48 (89%)** are the **District Prisons** where suicides occurred. They are for short-term detention for pre-trial detainees and for inmates servicing short judgements (up to 5 years)
- **6 (11%)** are the **Prisons** where suicides occurred. They are for long-term inmates with final convictions

Suicide during imprisonment. Time series data (2015-2024, Italy)



Suicide in Italian prisons. Time series data 2015-2024
(Ministry of Justice-National Ombudsman, 2024)

- Since 2015 there is an **increase of suicides equal to 53%** (39 in 2015 – 83 in 2024).
- The highest numbers of suicides are in **2022 (84)** and in **2024 (83)**.
- In 10 years there were **131 deaths with causes yet to be determined** (highest in the last 3 years).
- In 10 years **603 suicides**.

Suicide and final judgement.



- In 50% of suicide cases, individuals are people who would be eventually **acquitted**. They do not wait until then.



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When during detention are inmates most likely to commit suicide?

- Generally, 54% of suicides are within 6 months from imprisonment



- In Italy, in 2025, 3 persons died by suicide after 3 days of imprisonment.
- 5 persons after 1 month.
- 5 persons within the first 3 months of incarceration.

So:

- **Most people die by suicide even if they do not have a final judgement. They get suicide while being innocent by the Italian Constitution.**
- **A lot of inmates die by suicide by their first week until 3-6 months of incarceration.**

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Our research is based on these data and goes on:

- How is induction managed by each of the **penitentiary staff** (including the **healthcare personnel**)?
- Which are the **organisational rules and behaviours** taken and by whom, in this delicate phase of detention?
- Can **behaviours of penitentiary staff induce suicide** in persons at their first/or not incarceration experience?

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Reasons for suicide in prison

RISK FACTORS (NON-EXHAUSTIVE LIST)

Individual	Socio-cultural	Situational
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Previous suicide attempt• Mental disorder• Alcohol or drug abuse• Hopelessness• Sense of isolation• Lack of social support• Aggressive tendencies• Impulsivity• History of trauma or abuse• Acute emotional distress• Major physical or chronic illnesses, including chronic pain• Family history of suicide• Neurobiological factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stigma associated with help-seeking behaviour• Barriers to accessing health care, especially mental health and substance abuse treatment• Certain cultural and religious beliefs (for instance, the belief that suicide is a noble resolution of a personal dilemma)• Exposure to suicidal behaviours, including through the media, and influence of others who have died by suicide	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Job and financial losses• Relational or social losses• Easy access to lethal means• Local clusters of suicide that have a contagious influence• Stressful life events

(WHO, 2007)

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Suicide in prison. Protective factors

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

(i.e. WHO, 2007)

- Strong connections to family and community support;
- Skills in problem solving, conflict resolution, and non-violent handling of disputes;
- Personal, social, cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support self-preservation;
- Restricted access to means of suicide;
- Seeking help and easy access to quality care for mental and physical illnesses.

3 out of 5 are related to **relations** and **sensemaking processes**, the way (s)he learn to give meaning to any experience (s)he lives since the very beginning of incarceration.

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Suicide in prison.

Which actions are taken at the first entry in prison

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24hrs.

Actions related to the sensemaking process that may induce/prevent *critical events* in the induction phase (Torlone, 2021)

1. **Capture of the person** - Ie. How it is undertaken
2. Leading him/her in prison – Ie. What happens in the police car
3. Waiting for entering the induction area (where available) and knowing the procedural obligations to accomplish – Ie. Feelings, fears while waiting
4. Dialogue and first communications with penitentiary officers – Ie. Who is the one talking to him/her and what/how is being said
5. A physical (or body) search conducted upon admission to prison – Ie. Who explains what it is about
6. Data collection on the life in prison – Ie. Who is the first providing info and how it is delivered
7. Healthcare check with medical staff – Ie. What happens there
8. Assignment of the Welcome cell – Ie. Who tells it and explains
9. Integration of the «new comer» within the «cell team»
10. Preparation to the first night in cell
11. **First night in prison**

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Each of these actions has a „*learning potential*” for the person/detainee and for the way they perceive the induction experience.

Each can be „*adverse learning action*” or not (Federighi, 2016).

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Suicide during induction in prison. Aims of research



- ***Adverse*** learning actions can have an impact on the propension of detainees to commit suicide.
- To identify and reduce „adverse learning actions” by prison/healthcare staff and by the penitentiary institutions.
- Promote **transformative learning processes** at *organisational* level.

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Suicide & induction in prison. Open research issues/1



- **Induction** not deemed as a key moment to prevent or **induce suicide**.
- Common organisational mistake: **anxiety to search for „detainees at risk of suicide”** (medical protocols are excellent).

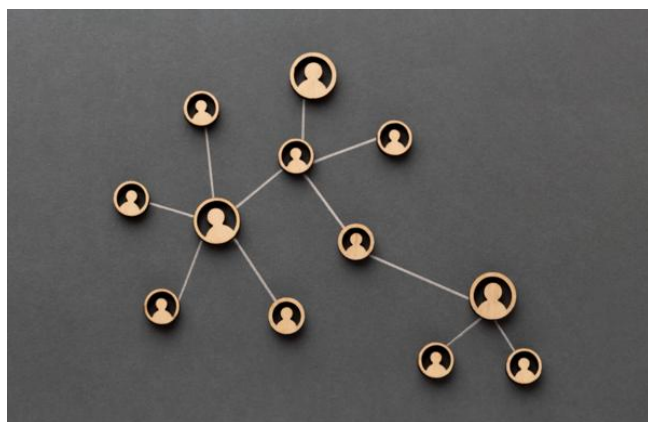
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Suicide & induction in prison. Open research issues/2



- Nobody cares about the „*invisible risk of suicide for inmates not at risk*”. This might be considered **the main function of induction process in prison.**
- **Complementary function of all** the penitentiary staff, no matter whether they depend on different public administrations (Penitentiary & Health).
- **Identify and build the penitentiary staff/team devoted to the induction** (who, tools, interoperability, etc....)

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Suicide in prison. Why research is needed and borderless cooperation in EU can help



- **Little research so far**, more is needed to **investigate on who creates „induction to suicide”** and which are the **organisational rules**.
- Research for **policy makers** of the Penitentiary Dep., Health Dep., etc.
- Research for **monitoring the outcomes of prevention** actions: does it work? (Seems not to)
- Research to **accompain penitentiary leadership** in suicide prevention.

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Ongoing research. Methodological hints

- Since 2018
- **Desk research, Secondary research, situated and participatory research**
- By **one-to-one interviews** with leaders from the *Regional Penitentiary Dep. (PRAP), Healthcare staff, Prisons leaders, Police officers, Prison educators, Inmates, Intercultural mediator*
- 67 interviews
- Data analysis and interpretation
- **Sharing interpretation** with Penitentiary Leadership (PRAP & Penitentiary institutions)

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