

Press Representations of Internalized Violence of Suicide during the Greek “Crisis”

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Abstract

Internalized forms of violence have been attributed by the Greek media to the economic crisis that began in 2010. We examine how internalized violence is represented in the press in 2013 and 2017. In 2013 the number of articles related to suicide was much higher than in 2017. The presence of word “suicide” in the title, the number of informational/historical as opposed to news articles, articles attributing suicide to financial cause as opposed to psychological, and mentions of the impact of economic crisis were higher in 2013 than in 2017. Conversely, the odds that the article refers to suicide of a famous person were higher in 2017 than in 2013. The suicides attributed to financial problems were less than 5%.

Keywords: Content analysis; Internal violence; Social influence

Introduction

Sociological discourse began approximately a century ago with the work of Durkheim (1897) “Suicide” one of the seminal works in the field. Today, many of Durkheim's views have been revised; for example, Breault [1], Chandler and Yung-Mei [2], and Graeff and Mehlkop [3]. It is important to mention that sociology began as a separate discipline by considering suicide

as a social object. Suicidal behavior is connected to social representations [4]. The same was also noted by Moscovici in the context of social psychology while revisiting Durkheim's theory of social representations.

Our research was motivated in response to the increased publicity of cases of suicide, which began with the onset of the 2010 economic crisis in Greece. During the decade of 2010, an increase in suicides [5] and suicidal indicators [6] associated with GDP decline [7] economic crisis in Greece, more widely [8], while increasing the visibility of suicides by Greek media [9]. The interrelationship between suicide and media exposure [10] does not allow for safe conclusions on the causality between suicide and suicidal acts. But also, the recognition of the economic crisis is under dispute. The crisis is a complex phenomenon that still persists; the discussion about the causes and effects of the “crisis” begins early on [11] and continues unabated to this day [12].

In this study, we present and compare the representation of suicide in the Greek media at two time periods, in 2013 and 2017.

Method

Content analysis was conducted to capture the media characteristics of the suicide articles that were collected from selected news media in Greece in the years 2013 and 2017.

In 2013, we analyzed the content of the most influential daily and Sunday newspapers and news websites (**Table 1**).

Table 1: News sources researched in 2013.

www	Daily Press	Sunday Press
news247.gr	Ta Nea	To Vima
newsbeast.gr	Eleutheros Typos	Proto Thema
skai.gr	Ethnos	Ethnos
zougla.gr	Espresso	Kathimerini
in.gr	Efemerida ton Syntakton	Real News
newsit.gr		

capital.gr

A criterion sampling strategy was applied on the basis of highly representative websites and newspapers without political party affiliation. For the articles the inclusive criterion was that the news article must include the keyword "suicide." We examined over 5500 news items. We isolated about 800 instances of representations of suicide explicitly relating to the "crisis."

In 2017 we analyzed the content of zougla.gr, the only website with high visitation of the sites that we used in 2013 that was still operational in 2017. Most of the content was kindly provided by Dinos Adrianopoulos¹

In both years, the nominal measurement variables included year of publication, type of article (news or historical/informational), type of suicide, attribution to a cause, connection to the economic crisis, presence of the word

"suicide" in the title, presence of a photo or picture of the deceased person, notability of the deceased person (famous versus inconspicuous), use of word-mongering or sensationalism, and information for help (e.g. helpline number). Chi-square statistic or a fisher exact test was used to detect the statistical differences between the categories of nominal variables.

Results

Between 2013 and 2017 there appear to be both qualitative and quantitative differences. Specifically, comparing the amount of suicide-related articles for every year, a statistically significant difference has emerged. In the year 2013 the number of articles was much higher than in the year 2017 in the same website (**Table 2**).

Table 2: Frequencies (expected counts) of articles about suicide.

Year	Number of articles
2013	326 (198)
2017	71 (198)
$\chi^2 (1)=163.79$ $p<.001$	

There was a significant association between years and naming act as 'suicide' in the title. This seems to represent the fact that, based on the odds ratio, the odds of presence of

word 'suicide' in 2013 were four times higher than in 2017 (**Table 3**).

Table 3: Counts (expected counts) of naming act as 'suicide' in the title.

Year	Absence of word 'suicide'	Presence of word 'suicide'
2013	61 (78)	264 (247)
2017	34 (17)	37 (54)
$\chi^2 (1)=27.09$ $p<0.001$		

There was also a significant association between years and the type of the article. Based on the odds ratio, the odds of news articles in 2013 were 29 times higher than in 2017, and

conversely the odds of informational/historical articles in 2017 were 29 times higher than in 2013 (**Table 4**).

Table 4: Counts (expected counts) of article type (News or Historical).

Year	Information/Historical Article	News Article
2013	3 (14,8)	322 (310,2)
2017	15 (3,2)	56 (67,8)
$\chi^2 (1)=54.82$ (Fisher's Exact Test $p<0.001$)		

A significant association has emerged between years and notability of the person committing suicide. Based on the odds

ratio, the odds that the article refers to the suicide of a famous person in 2017 were 18 times higher than in 2013 (**Table 5**).

¹ Chairman of Touch Point Strategies, subsidiary of Ogilvy Greece, one of the pre-eminent public relations firms in Greece.

Table 5: Counts (expected counts) of notability of the person committing suicide (Famous/Inconspicuous).

Year	Inconspicuous	Famous
2013	322 (314.3)	4 (11.7)
2017	55 (62.7)	10 (2.3)
$\chi^2(1)=31.46$ (Fisher's Exact Test $p<0.001$)		

Attribution to a cause is significantly associated with year. Based on the odds ratio, the odds of financial cause in 2013 were 22 times higher than in 2017 (**Table 6**).

Table 6: Counts (expected counts) of attributed to a cause (Psychological or Financial).

Year	Psychological	Financial
2013	8 (14.8)	52 (45.2)
2017	10 (3.2)	3 (9.8)
$\chi^2(1) =23.26$ (Fisher's Exact Test $p<.001$)		

Finally, there was a significant association between year and connection with the economic crisis in Greece. This seems to represent the fact that the odds of mentioning the impact of

economic crisis in the year 2013 were five times higher than in the year 2017 (**Table 7**).

Table 7: Counts (expected counts) of connection with financial crisis.

Year	Mentioned the impact of financial crisis	Without any mention of financial crisis
2013	60 (51.7)	265 (273)
2017	3 (11.3)	68 (59.7)
$\chi^2(1) =8.83$ (Fisher's Exact Test $p<0.001$)		

Discussion

In interpreting the results, we should keep in mind that there is a dark number of suicides. Also, that suicide is an internalized violence that is classified along with crime, as is generally accepted in psychology and social psychology. In Greece, suicide is taboo. People don't like to speak about or even mention the suicide of a friend or a relative. One of the reasons is that Greek Orthodox church considers suicide a sin.

By its very nature, suicide is unfamiliar. Death is unfamiliar, and suicide even more so. Because suicide is taboo in Greece, and because suicide is underreported, it is even more alien, and its representation is detached. Suicide is contrary to the social value system. This is possibly associated with the increase in reporting of suicides of famous people.

What we see from the comparative study between 2013 and 2017 is a qualitative and quantitative differentiation in the presentation of suicide by the press. In 2013, suicide articles were almost five times higher than in 2017. At the same time, the title contained the word "suicide" much more often than in 2017, and attributed either directly or indirectly to the economic crisis. In contrast, in 2017 we have an increase in historical/informative articles, references to famous and not

anonymous people are multiplying, and increasing the efficiency of the cause of suicide to psychological reasons while reducing economic ones.

The "crisis" generated a lot of anger among the population. This anger was in part the result of a reported increase in suicides. Anger was a justified sentimental reaction on the part of the press. This sentimental reaction decreased by 2017. Although the "crisis" is by no means over, public interest in suicide has diminished. Perhaps the shock value has lessened. It is also possible that the rate of suicide has declined, although statistics for 2017 have not been published yet.

Contrary to what we expected, the suicides attributed to financial problems were less than 5%. The presumed effect of economic crisis on suicide is overrated.

Do we really have a qualitative and quantitative change in suicide or not? Observing the data from Hellenic Statistical Authority (**Figure 1**), we can see a reduction in the number of suicides from 2014 onwards. But the observed decline is not as spectacular as it is recorded in the media. The type of suicide issue is such that it does not allow an in-depth analysis of its causes. Also, the interdependence of the suicidal rate with media exposure complicates the issue. Are high suicide rates the product of naturalization of suicide by the media (Werther

effect) or do they reflect reality? Furthermore, issues of pure political significance are involved both in accepting the concept of economic crisis, and in accepting it as a cause of suicide. Finally, we cannot rule out that this change in the representation by the media is the result of harmonization with international standards of suicide presentation.

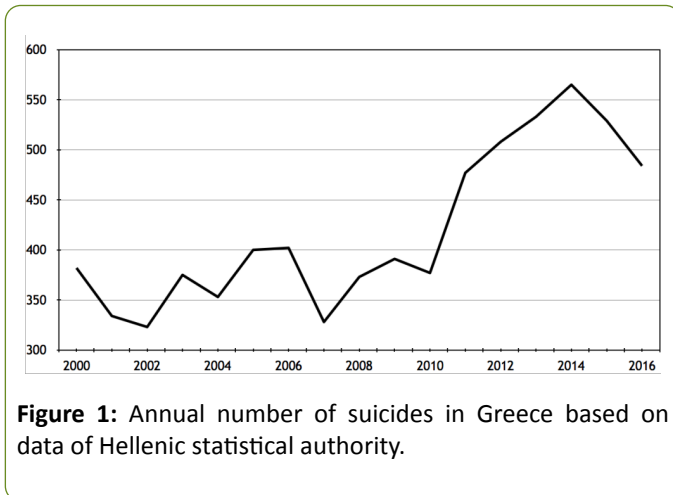


Figure 1: Annual number of suicides in Greece based on data of Hellenic statistical authority.

Conclusion

Although the public and the press perceive a connection between “crisis” and suicide, the actual number of suicides attributed to financial causes that are reported in the media is small. The anger toward the “crisis” generated a lot of publicity in 2013. Apparently, by 2017 the shock value has lessened. The social representation of suicide as internalized violence as expressed by the media presents a quantitative and qualitative change between 2013 and 2017. However, the question of the relationship between social representation and suicidal acts remains open.

Disclosure Statement

No financial interest or benefit has arisen from the direct applications of our research.

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