

# The Characteristics of Suicide among Slovene Police Officers over the Past Seven Decades

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The present paper attempts to identify motives and mechanisms which cause or may cause suicidal behaviour among the members of the Slovene Police. We tried to identify such causes and mechanisms by comparing them to those of foreign police forces and to the information on suicidal tendencies of the general population, as well as to the archive data on suicides in the Slovene Police. We found that the data of our analysis does not deviate significantly from the findings of other analyses conducted with respect to this issue in the police forces of other countries.

**Keywords:** police, police officers, suicide, suicidal tendencies, suicide rates

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## 1 Introduction

Even though the issue of suicide is a serious problem, it often feels that discussions regarding the reasons and triggers of suicidal behaviour remain a partially tabooed subject. In hierarchically structured systems, such as the police or military, this seems to be a particularly justified thesis. This is why we decided to analyse the accessible and collected statistical data on suicide in the Slovene Police from the end of World War II until the end of 2016 with a view of establishing the threat of suicide for Slovene Police officers in comparison to other police forces by applying a comparative analysis of security authorities of other countries.

By comparing publicly available information, we tried to identify the potential primary and secondary causes of suicide among police officers in Slovenia, as well as abroad. We established that the results of this analysis in the Slovene Police do not deviate significantly from results obtained in similar analyses, conducted in police forces in comparable countries. The rate, however, in the Republic of Slovenia has been constantly decreasing in the past five years, while the number of suicides in the Slovene Police has remained at the same level since 1991 despite the implementation of preventive and curative programmes by the Slovene Police. We also found that the trends related to the suicide rate among Slovene police officers and the general population in the Republic of Slovenia were not statistically dependant.

Moreover, we identified the most common causes of suicide among Slovene police officers and, at the same time, defined the

time and territorial burden based on the incidence of suicide in the Slovene Police. We established that the highest number of suicides in the Slovene Police occurs in the spring months, while the majority of suicides happen in Ljubljana and Maribor, the two largest city centres with the highest rate of security issues and, at the same time, the highest number of police officers per unit. We upgraded the analysis by using the accessible sources from the archive of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Slovenia. The information obtained was then compared with that of the general population in Slovenia and abroad.

Thus, we gained an insight into the set of causes of suicide among the general population, which were then compared to the level of suicide threat to police officers in Slovenia in order to define a set of threats.

Suicidal tendencies in the police force can be found in trauma experienced by police officers contemplating suicide, which could be unravelled by the service or situations in which where police officers experience trauma due to psychological consequences of their involvement in “civil combat” (Violanti, 1999; 78–87). On the other hand, the real reason may also be found in their private life, i.e. as a consequence of long-term pressure, mental disorder or disease, long-lasting judicial proceedings or discontent due to events in their private life, such as disputes with a life partner, the loss of a loved one, loneliness or drug abuse (Miller, 2008: 11–13).

## 2 The Threat of Suicide among Police Officers at the Global Level and Its Main Characteristics

The members of exposed professions, who encounter “life-and-death situations” on a daily basis are, based on previous observations, are more prone to experience the threat

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of suicide than the rest of the population. This is particularly true for members of the army, first responders, rescuers, emergency services, disaster management or those who make decisions in critical situations (Miller, 2008: 21).

The causes of suicide can be divided into at least four groups: police officers' issues in their personal life, stress at the workplace related to police work, situational stress caused by short-term events at work or in private life, which can have long-term consequences, and "ongoing" stress, which is caused by a mental illness or disorder. These causes can be present individually or in combination with others (Miller, 2008: 13). The answer to the question as to whether police officers differ from the general population can provide us with some clarification with respect to the notion of "police personality". "We can assume that the police personality forms after entering the police force" (Meško & Areh, 2004: 364).

While performing their job, police officers are under constant surveillance and forced to make fast and correct decisions, which often puts them under a great deal of stress. "Police officers often feel the pressure to achieve better results or higher productivity. These pressures are usually a consequence of poor analyses, moral panic (presentation of an issue in a larger extent and intensity as it actually is) and trends in criminal statistics. Under the pressure of higher work productivity and, for example, higher rate of solved crimes, police officers can break the constitutional rights of individuals" (Meško & Areh, 2004: 363).

Suicidal tendencies in the police force is undoubtedly indirectly or directly linked to the satisfaction of police officers with the situation at the workplace. In this respect, "... we are talking about three groups of factors, which influence the satisfaction of employees, including those employed in the police force. Those factors are: 'personal characteristics of the leaders', their 'behavioural factors' towards subordinates and 'situational factors' of the organisation" (Gorenak, 2004: 268). The behavioural factor of the police unit leader was identified as the most common factor of police officers' satisfaction (Gorenak, 2004: 272).

Based on the scientific literature, we obtained information regarding the fluctuation in the number of suicides among the police population in selected countries and then compared this to data regarding suicides in these countries. In doing so, we tried to present the actual suicidal threat to the police population in comparison to the general population. The difference in the frequency of suicides is significant only in some countries, while certain methods used in order to commit suicide in the police population are typical for all analysed countries. Between 70 and 80% of police officers commit suicide by

using firearms, while in the general population, this method is chosen by less than 50% of individuals, where other methods of committing suicide, such as hanging, poisoning, jumping from high places, etc., are more prevalent. We established that the suicidal threat of Slovene police officers is lower than the threat in other countries and also a lot lower in comparison to the general population.

In Germany, the suicide rate<sup>2</sup> among police officers amounts to 25 suicides per 100,000 residents and 20 suicides per 100,000 residents (Schmidtke, 1999: 157–166). In Austria (Stein & Nestor, 2008: 4–14), the suicide rate among police officers in the 1996–2006 period stands at 30.2 suicides per 100,000 residents (28.6 suicides per 100,000 residents among the general population); while in Italy (Clerici, 2006), rate for officers working in security authorities, the suicide rate amounts to 11 per 100,000 residents (5.4 per 100,000 residents among the general population in the 1996–2006 period).

According to research results, the suicide rate in Slovenia in the period after its independence is lower than in the general population and also lower than in Norway (Hem, Haldorsen, Gjerlow Aasland, Tyssen, Vaglum, & Ekberg, 2004: 873–874), where rate in the 1960–2000 period, amounted to 19.5 suicides per 100,000 residents and 23.4 suicides per 100,000 residents among the general population. The fact that in 2005, the suicide rate among the New York police officers ( $N=40.000$ ) amounted to 14.9 suicides per 100,000 residents, which is a rather high number for a city of New York, since the rate of the general population in this city stands at 18.3 suicides per 100,000 residents (Marzuk, Nock, Leon, Portera, & Tardiff, 2002: 2069–2070).

We have to mention that the general population includes the entire urban population, which comprises certain marginal groups that stand out due to the number of suicides, such as vagrants and drug addicts, and particularly vulnerable groups of people who were diagnosed with psychopathological issues or are prone to psychoactive substance or medications abuse, behavioural disorders, psychosis and mood swings.

The age of persons who committed suicide is much lower among police officers than in the general population of New York, since the average age of police officers who committed suicide, is 33.5. It was also established that suicides rate among New York police officers varies significantly and that each year is substantially different from previous years, while the rate for the general urban population has remained constant over the past twenty years. The highest rise rate among New York police officers was recorded in 1994, when an extensive inter-

<sup>2</sup> Suicide rate is the coefficient of suicides per 100.000 residents.

nal investigation in the police was being conducted due to police officers' involvement in the abuse of illicit drugs (Marzuk, et al., 2002: 2069).

However, a different statistical ratio between the population of police officers who committed suicide, and the general population, can also be observed across the USA. An analysis from 2001 shows that the suicide rate among officers working in security authorities in the USA amounts to 18.1 suicides per 100,000 residents and only 11.4 suicides per 100,000 residents in the general population (Aamodt & Stalnaker, 2001: 383). A similar result indicating a higher level of suicide among police officers in comparison to the general population in the USA is also evident from an analysis conducted in the 2008-2012 period (O'Hara & Violanti, 2012: 11), when the number of suicides among security authorities officers did not vary much from one year to the next (from 141 cases in 2008, to 147 cases in 2010). A German survey from 1997 revealed that the suicide rate among officers working in German security authorities was higher than in the general population, i.e. 25 per 100,000 residents against 20 per 100,000 residents among the general population (Schmidtke, 1999: 166). The same goes for the findings of the Austrian Ministry of the Interior upon the examination of data regarding suicide among police officers for the period between 1996 and 2006, where the rate among police officers amounted to 30.2 suicides per 100,000 residents and 28.6 suicides per 100,000 residents among the general population (Stein & Nestor, 2008: 5). It can thus be concluded that a greater number of police force members die because of committing suicide than due to police interventions or work accidents (Berg, Hem, Lau, Loebb, & Ekberg, 2003).

Based on the information presented above, we can claim that the police profession is heavily burdened with the threat of suicide and that the suicide rate of police officers exceeds that of the general population in some countries. As the renowned American suicidologist Violanti discovered in 1996, the abundance of this phenomenon among police officers in all police forces around the world is growing into some kind of epidemic (Violanti, 1996). Another survey (O'Hara & Violanti, 2012: 24) further established the following essential characteristics of circumstances and causes of suicide among police officers in the USA:

- relationship problems,
- disciplinary and internal-protective procedures (internal investigations),
- stress, induced by the use of force in police procedures,
- alcohol or psychoactive drug abuse,
- depression,
- constant exposure to stressful and crisis events,
- chronic state of stress,
- access to weapons,

- unavailability of support and help for police officers with mental problems,
- police officers' fear to seek help, and
- distrust towards professional staff, who should offer psychological help to police officers in distress.

Following the examination of the incidence of suicide among police officers in the USA, it was established that 95% of all suicides occur among male officers performing field-work or patrol service. The largest share of suicides among police officers in the USA was committed between the ages of 35 and 44. In 94% of the cases, a service weapon was used for committing suicide (O'Hara & Violanti, 2012: 24).

Due to historical, cultural, geographical and organisational similarities with the Slovene Police, the data on suicide among Austrian police officers is particularly interesting for our survey. Based on the results of a detailed survey on the causes and circumstances of suicidality among Austrian police officers in the 1996-2006 period conducted by the Austrian Ministry of the Interior (Stein & Nestor, 2008: 5), it is evident that the suicide rate in this period amounted to 30.2 and that the Austrian Police recorded 8.2 suicides per year, on average. In the 1996-2006 period, the Austrian police recorded 91 suicides, which were committed by 90 male officers and one female officer. The average age of male officers who committed suicide in the Austrian police was 41.9, while officers had 19.3 years of service. Officers between 40 and 44 years of age, represent the most critical age group among Austrian police officers.

As far as the method of committing suicide is concerned, 78% of all recorded suicides were committed by using firearms (46.2% by using service weapons and 31.9% by using private weapons). In the general Austrian population, committing suicide by shooting was recorded in 22.3% of all cases (Stein & Nestor, 2008: 6). Based on suicides in the Slovene Police, we can summarise the results from the 1990-1999 period, when Vlasta Ritmanič Rusjan (2000), the psychologist of the Ministry of the Interior, established that the average age of police officers who committed suicide was 29.05. In this period, ten police officers committed suicide, which is one per year on average, however, the suicide rate among Slovene police officers in the 1990-1999 period was not included in her survey. In her research, Ritmanič Rusjan established that the suicide rate in the Slovene Police was lower in comparison to the general population, and that there were some common characteristics in police officers who committed suicide in the period from 1990 to 1999. There were ten cases altogether, which means that approximately one suicide was committed in the Police force per year. Police officers came from practically all Slovene regions. In 80% of all cases (8 police officers), they committed suicide by shooting themselves with their service gun, while 20% of all police officers (2 police officers)

ers) committed suicide by carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. The average age of persons who committed suicide was 29.05, ranging from 21 to 38 years of age, the majority occurring in the 30–34 age group. This is a fairly lower average age when compared to the average age of persons who committed suicide in the general population, which was 47–48 years of age.

The essential characteristics of police officers who committed suicide during this period included excessive drinking before committing suicide, and being single without children. In 60% of all cases (6 police officers), family disagreements were found to be the cause of suicide, in two cases, the cause of suicide was attributed to disagreements in the workplace, and in one case, the known cause included love problems or a poor material situation. After studying the medical records of officers who committed suicide, no abnormalities were detected, as they were all healthy, except one officer who suffered from cardiovascular disease. After examining the results of psychological tests performed at the time of entering the Police force, it was established that the officers who committed suicide had average intellectual capacities. Two had poor intellectual capacities, and two above average and others had average intellectual capacities. The questionnaires regarding the personal characteristics of officers who committed suicide established that mild forms of repressed anger and milder emotional disorders (emotional lability, anxiety) were detected in 50% of officers. It is presumed that the indicated deviations from the average could represent a potential risk factor of suicide among police officers.

The information regarding disciplinary violations in the time of their training and at work are also interesting. One-half of them had serious discipline problems at work (two because of drinking on duty, two due to the negligent attitude towards work and one due to the misuse of power). In the group of officers who committed suicide, four had prior disciplinary violations at the time of their police officer training. During their training, teachers evaluated four of them as popular and hardworking, one as opinionated and stubborn, one as lacking successful working habits, one as explosive and aggressive, one as lacking self-confidence, and two as problematic due to their failure to comply with disciplinary rules. This clearly shows that subsequent deviant actions of police officers in their private life and work environments could be indicated as early as in the period of their training (Rusjan Ritmanič, 2000: 315).

### 3 Methodology

In order to conduct an analysis of suicide in the Slovene Police, we examined and analysed the data on suicides for the 1995–2016 period, which included 25 cases among Slovene

police officers in the selected period. Based on these findings, we conducted an analysis of factors that influence the issue of suicide, an analysis of the results and a comparison between this analysis and the results of other analyses regarding suicide in the general population and in other police forces or security authorities, thus establishing the course of the development of this issue and the current situation in this area. In performing the aforementioned comparisons between different groups, such as the Slovene general population, the general population of men in Slovenia and the population of police officers, which included those who committed suicide, as well as other officers, we applied the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistical method. This method was used to establish the dependence or independence (statistical dependence) of various parameters and categories of the compared groups.

With permission of the Archival Commission of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia, we obtained information on all suicides in the Slovene Police occurring from 1948 to 1994 from the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia. The obtained data were statistically processed and compared with information on general trends regarding suicide in the Republic of Slovenia from that period.

In order to provide greater transparency, we divided the collected information into two parts, analysed them separately and then compared. The data in the individual set are the data for a specific time period, i.e. from 1948 to 2016, which also includes the post-war period in the Republic of Slovenia. The second part includes data regarding the period following Slovenia's independence, i.e. from 1991 to 2016. When comparing the available data regarding the fluctuation in the number of suicides and the suicide rate in police organisations across the world, we also used the comparative analysis method.

## 4 Representation and Interpretation of Results

### 4.1 Historical Perspective – Statistical Review and Interpretation of Data on Suicides in the Slovene Police in the 1948–1994 period

The insight into the archival material of the Secretariat of the Interior of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia was conducted in several technical units within the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia. We collected information on suicides from the authorities for internal affairs of the former Slovene Police, and the later modern Slovene Police, from 1948–1994. We found 139 cases of suicide among the members of the internal affairs authorities in the selected period, where the number of police officers fluctuated from 4,000 immediately

after the end of World War II, to 2,500 in the following twenty years. This had a massive impact on the suicide rate in the police organisation, since the rate was up to five times higher than in the Slovene general population. There are multiple causes for this, the most important being the five-year obligatory military service, during which young men who performed military service within hermetically sealed national borders, did not have any alternative but to stay in their job despite poor working conditions, often dangerous work and constant surveillance over their professional and private lives. Such indiscriminate employment of individuals without any psychological filtering and the elimination of those who were not suitable for this profession due to their personal characteristics or psychological disorders, was also a significant cause of suicide. We assume that the situation improved and the rate of suicide stabilised with the introduction of the Police Cadet School in Tacen in 1968, and with a more modern personnel approach, which most likely led to a drastic decrease in suicide among police officers in 1971, following the arrival of the first new staff members in the police ranks after the completion of their three-year training (Table 1).

Before this significant milestone in the Slovene Police, police employees had to undergo a great deal of hardship, particularly poor working and living conditions. Police officers were transferred across Slovenia against their will and were usually not posted in their home town. This is why there was a substantial difference in the frequency of suicide among the general population and among police officers within the same region or public safety administration/police administration. According to police yearbooks (RSNZ SRS, 1954a, 1954b) and a special report of 1954 submitted by Mitja Ribičič, the Secretary of the National Internal Affairs Secretariat to the leadership of the National Internal Affairs Committee of the Executive Council of the People's Republic of Slovenia Assembly (RSNZ SRS, 1954b), policemen, particularly in rural areas, frequently slept in barns, did not have regular meals or ate at farms, were poorly dressed and equipped, and could not even maintain their personal hygiene. Due to the hopelessness of their situation or in order to achieve a disciplinary transfer to another unit, they drank too much or committed disciplinary violations and morally questionable acts. Their private and professional lives were strictly monitored and controlled, and they even needed the consent of their superior or the appropriate service of internal affairs authorities to get married.

The report of Secretary Ribičič (RSNZ SRS, 1954b) also highlighted the same areas that remain problematic in today's police organisation, such as low pay, lack of high-quality personnel, who wanted to work for the former Slovene Police, but were unemployable at the time, understaffing at unit levels,

insufficient differences in pay between ordinary police officers and senior staff, as well as difficulties with the vehicle fleet, which was insufficient. The fact that there were unreasonable differences in the salaries of police employees is also interesting, since policemen were paid according to their rank and not according to the position they actually occupied, which caused a great deal of friction within police units.

In the same document, Mitja Ribičič, also stated that the police employed only 2,040 officers, which was insufficient and caused difficulties in the organisation of daily work. In the 1949–1953 period, as many as 1,245 policemen who served their military service in the police, requested that they continue their military service in the army instead of the police due to poor living and working conditions. There were as many as 120 such transfers in 1953 and 587 resignations in the 1953–1954 period. In the Ljubljana region alone, at least another 94 police officers were needed. There were 241 police stations at the time, three traffic units, a mounted police unit, 14 border crossings (blocks), one guard unit, four railway units, a communications unit and service dog unit.

There were also some areas and issues that were typical of the time, such as the general conclusion stating that police officers get married too young and without financial means necessary to support a family, which is why their units must take a stricter stance when issuing marriage permits. The head of the Secretariat also noted in his report that police officers were prone to excessive drinking, immoral behaviour and anarchy, particularly in wine-growing regions (Kras [the Slovene Karst], and Novo mesto), and that they intentionally violated work discipline just to get themselves transferred to another place.

Despite such violations, policemen were not laid off on account of understaffing, which was highlighted as a major problem and made out to be the reason for the bad reputation of the police. Another problem was the shortage of suitable candidates. In some areas, police officers slept in barns, did not have running water or any possibilities to maintain minimum personal hygiene. Some were separated from their families. There were also numerous issues, which are today considered uncommon "occupational" diseases and accidents, particularly tuberculosis, gastric and duodenal ulcers resulting from poor and irregular diet, injuries and deaths, especially due to drowning and traffic accidents, particularly those involving motorcycles. The Secretary recommended that the National Executive Council recruit candidates from other Yugoslav republics, as there was insufficient interest among the Slovene population in becoming a police officer. He also recommended that police officers be given a monthly pay top-up in the amount of one-third of their pay, and that policemen

working along the state border and in cities be equipped with bicycles and motorcycles (RSNZ SRS, 1954b).

Immediately after World War II, “firearm accidents” were very common among policemen, while on the other hand, there were very few recorded cases of suicide using firearms. It can be concluded that suicides were disguised as firearm accidents for various reasons. Therefore, we decided that we would consider 1948 as the first year relevant to suicide statistics. We analysed the collected data regarding suicide among

former policemen and later police officers, and compared them to the analyses of suicide among the general population in Slovenia, which were carried out by the Ljubljana Psychiatric Clinic at the time.

Detailed results of the analysis of data on suicides in law enforcement authorities after World War II until 1994 are presented below.

**Table 1:** Number of suicides in the Republic of Slovenia and in the Slovene Police in the 1948–1994 period (Source: RSNZ SRS, 1948–1991; MNZ, 1992–1995; Milčinski, 1979–1995)

Year	Total number of police officers	Suicide rate in the Police	Suicide rate in the general population in Slovenia	Number of suicides in the Police
1948	4100	0	0	3
1949	4430	0	0	0
1950	4179	191.4	20.4	8
1951	3477	230.1	20.4	8
1952	2744	182.2	20.4	5
1953	2445	286.3	20.4	7
1954	2615	191.2	20.4	5
1955	2576	0	23.3	0
1956	2404	83.2	23.3	2
1957	2433	369.9	23.3	9
1958	2500	240	23.3	6
1959	2855	105.1	23.3	3
1960	3967	75.6	26.2	4
1961	3152	190.4	26.2	6
1962	3131	127.8	26.2	4
1963	3016	99.5	26.2	3
1964	2980	134.2	26.2	4 <sup>3</sup>
1965	/	/	0	0
1966	2727	73.3	25.5	2
1967	2871	104.5	28.5	3
1968	2908	171.9	28.3	5
1969	2898	34.5	29.4	1
1970	2953	101.6	29.6	3
1971	2974	33.6	28.5	1
1972	/	/	27.4	0
1973	/	/	27.1	0
1974	4988	80.2	29.9	4
1975	5360	130.6	29.3	7 <sup>4</sup>
1976	/	/	30.6	2
1977	/	/	31.7	3
1978	5683	35.2	31.8	2

<sup>3</sup> female police officer

<sup>4</sup> female police officer

Year	Total number of police officers	Suicide rate in the Police	Suicide rate in the general population in Slovenia	Number of suicides in the Police
1979	5813	34.4	32.9	2
1980	4440	90.1	34.4	4
1981	/	/	32	1
1982	/	/	34.2	5 <sup>5</sup>
1983	7430	0	33.6	0
1984	6770	0	35.8	0
1985	4644	43.1	34.2	2
1986	4632	30.2	34.5	2
1987	4681	42.7	34.2	2
1988	5663	0	33.2	0
1989	5746	17.4	35.2	1
1990	5810	51.1	28.4	3
1991	6122	16.3	33.6	1
1992	6491	15.4	30.5	1
1993	6202	16.1	31.5	1
1994	6532	15.3	31.4	1
Total				137 <sup>6</sup>

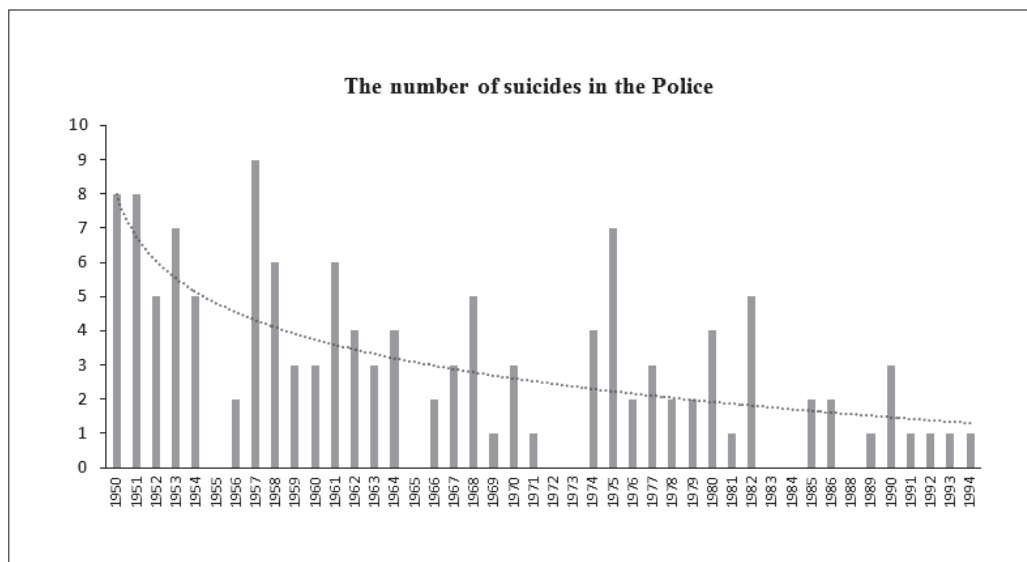


Figure 1: Graphic display of suicides in the Slovene Police in the 1950–1994 period  
 (Source: RSNZ SRS, 1948–1991; MNZ, 1992–1995; Milčinski, 1979–1995)

<sup>5</sup> 1 police woman

<sup>6</sup> 5 police woman

The above presentation of trends regarding suicide in the Police (Table 1 and Figure 1) clearly shows that the number of suicides increased in the 1950s, as there were up to 9 suicides per year among police officers. In general, the mortality in police ranks was rather high, especially due to traffic accidents, a number of other accidents, and as a result of illness. The situation regarding suicides in the Slovene Police stabilised during the 1960s at about 3 to 5 suicides per year, dropping further until 1983, when it stabilised once again. The reason for such a decrease in the number of suicides in the Police can be attributed to the selective recruitment of police officers based on their personal characteristics, the abolition of military service in the police, the introduction of secondary education for policemen, and the improvement of their working and living conditions. In 1968, a Police Cadet School was established

and gradually changed the personnel structure of the Police, as well as the system of recruitment, selection, education and training for the job. With respect to gender, only 5 cases of suicide committed by female police officers were recorded out of the total number of 137 suicides in the selected period, which represents only 3.6% of all suicides in the former Police.

**4.1.1 Known Causes of Suicide among Police Officers**

The following table presents results regarding the causes of suicide among Slovene police officers. The information was collected from the Archive of the Republic of Slovenia and the Organisation and Personnel Office of the Ministry of the Interior.

**Table 2:** Causes of suicide in the Slovene Police in the 1956–1994 period (Source: RSNZ SRS, 1948–1991; MNZ, 2016)

Year	Family	Illness	Loneliness	Economic	Criminal	Job-related	Relationship	Alcoholism	Mental	Disciplinary
1956 <sup>7</sup>		1		1				1		
1957	4			1				3		
1958	1			2				3		
1959			1							
1960	1	2						2		
1961	2									
1962	1					1				1
1987										2
1988		1								
1989										
1990	1	1								
1991	1									
1992										
1993	1									
1994	1									
<b>Total</b>	13	5	1	4	0	1	0	9	0	3

The analysis of known motives for suicide (Table 2) committed by police officers from 1956–1994 shows that a family or marital dispute (13 cases) was the most frequent suicide

<sup>7</sup> There are no available data for the time period before 1956.



motive in this group. This is followed by alcoholism and alcoholic psychosis (9 cases), physical illness (5 cases) and financial crisis (4 cases), and by disciplinary violations at work (3 cases). Problems at work (unspecified) and loneliness were recorded as the motive for suicide in only one case.

According to analysis by the Ljubljana Psychiatric Clinic on the motives for suicides committed during the 1970-1991 period, the actual motive for suicide could not be determined in 47.7% of all analysed cases. In the specified period, the most frequently recorded suicide motives among the general population in Slovenia included family and marital disputes (20%), followed by physical illness (15%), loneliness (5%), relationship conflicts (3%), court action or problems at work (2%), and financial problems, housing problems, and problems at school (1%). A more detailed break-down per individual year

does not show any major changes with respect to the motive, except employment problems (Virant, 1991). In partial annual analyses of suicide motives that were regularly performed by the Ljubljana Psychiatric Clinic, intoxication and alcoholic psychosis topped the list of the most frequent suicide motive, with a level of 20% or more (Milčinski, 1979a-1995, 1997; Milčinski; Zalar, & Virant, 1997; Virant, 1981).

**4.1.2 Age of Police Officers Who Committed Suicide in the 1948-1994 Period**

Table 3 provides an overview of statistical information on committed suicides among police officers of different age periods. The information was collected from the Archive of the Republic of Slovenia, fond AS 1931, and from the Organisation and Personnel Office of the Ministry of the Interior.

**Table 3:** Numerical overview of suicides within the Slovene Police by age in the 1948-1994 period (Source: RSNZ SRS, 1948-1991; MNZ, 2016)

Year \ Age	under 25	from 26 to 35	from 36 to 45	over 46
1948	3			
1949				
1950	6	2		
1951	7	1		
1952	10	1		
1953	6	1		
1954	3	2		
1955				
1956		1		1
1957	2	6	1	
1958	1	5		
1959	2	1		
1960	1	2		
1961	1	4	1	
1962	2	2		
1963	1	1		1
1964		2	1	
1965		1		
1966		1	1	
1967	1		2	
1968	1	3		
1969			1	
1970	2		1	

Year \ Age	under 25	from 26 to 35	from 36 to 45	over 46
1971			1	
1972				
1973				
1974	4			
1975	4	3		
1976	1			1
1977	1		1	1
1978	1		1	
1979	2			
1980	1	2	1	
1981		1		
1982	3	1	1	
1983				
1984				
1985	1			1
1986	1	1		
1987	2			
1988				
1989	1			
1990		2		1
1991	1			
1992	1			
1993		1		
1994		1		
<b>Total</b>	72	48	13	6

Table 4 presents the average age of Slovene police officers according to different decades of the post WW2 period and following Slovenia's independence in 1991.

of 75 cases) represent the most suicide-prone age group, followed by the 26–35 age group with 48 cases, the 36–45 age group with 13 cases and those over 46 with 6 cases. As for the

**Table 4:** Average age of Slovene police officers who committed suicide in different time periods (Source: RSNZ SRS, 1948–1991; MNZ, 2016)

1948–1960	1961–1970	1971–1980	1981–1990	1991–1994
24.9	32.1	31	28.5	27

According to the analysis of data obtained from the Archives on suicides among Slovene police officers from 1948–1994 period (Table 3), officers under the age of 25 (total

interim statistical ten-year periods, the highest frequency of suicide was recorded immediately after World War II, when as many as 39 suicides were committed by police officers young-

er than 25 until 1959, and 20 by police officers aged 26–35. A relatively high frequency of suicide continued in the following decade until 1969, though to a smaller extent than in the previous period. There were 9 suicides among officers under the age of 25 and 16 suicides in the 26–35 age group. In this period, it should be noted that the population of policemen between the ages of 26 and 35 is much more prone to suicide than the generation under the age of 25, which is repeated in the 1984–1994 decade.

The analysis of the Ljubljana Psychiatric Clinic on suicides from 1970–1991 shows that suicides were most frequent among the male population over 40 years of age, the average age being 47.4 (Virant, 1991), which is considerably older when compared to the population of police officers who committed suicides in the same period. Their average age was

29.2. As we already established, the under 25 age group represented those that was most prone to suicide in the 1948–1994 period, while the average age of police officers who committed suicide was 28.9. Based on these results, we can conclude that the causes of suicide among the general population and the population of police officers were obviously very different.

#### 4.1.3 Territorial Propensity to Suicide in the Police in the Republic of Slovenia

Table 5 shows the number of police suicides per police directorate in Slovenia after WW2 and following Slovenia's Independence in 1991. The data were collected from the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia and the archives of the Ministry of the Interior in Ljubljana.

**Table 5:** Suicides in the Slovene Police by police directorate in the 1948–1994 period (Source: RSNZ SRS, 1948–1991; MNZ, 2016)

Leto	Ljubljana	Maribor	Celje	Novo mesto	Koper	Kranj	Murska Sobota	Nova Gorica	Krško	Postojna	Slovenj Gradec
1948	2			1							
1949											
1950		3	4				1				
1951	2			1	3			2			
1952	3	4			2		1				
1953	1	1				1	1		1	2	
1954	1			1	1		2				
1955											
1956	1										
1957	4	2		1		1			1		
1958	2	1			1				1	1	
1959						1			1		1
1960	1	2									
1961	3	2				1					
1962	1			1	1						1
1963	1	1	1								
1964	2						1				
1965		1									
1966	1							1			
1967	3										

Leto	Ljubljana	Maribor	Celje	Novo mesto	Koper	Kranj	Murska Sobota	Nova Gorica	Krško	Postojna	Slovenj Gradec
1968		2					1				
1969		1						1			
1970											
1971											
1972											
1973											
1974	1	1					1				1
1975	4		1	1				1			
1976			1		1						
1977	2	1									
1978						1					1
1979						1	1				
1980	2	1			1						
1981							1				
1982	1	2		1			1				
1983											
1984											
1985											
1986											
1987	2										
1988											
1989											
1990	1	1				1					
1991	1										
1992											
1993		1									
1994	1										
<b>Total</b>	43	27	7	6	10	7	11	5	4	3	4

According to the obtained data (Table 5) for the 1948–1994 period, the majority of suicides among police officers were recorded in the area of the Ljubljana Police Directorate (the then Public Safety Administration), i.e. 43 cases, followed by Maribor with 27 cases, Murska Sobota with 11 cases, and Koper with 10 cases. There were 7 suicides in Kranj and Celje respectively, 6 in Novo mesto, 5 in Nova

Gorica, 4 in Krško and Slovenj Gradec respectively, and 3 in Postojna. The obtained data is provided for information purposes only, since they cannot be statistically evaluated due to the absence of information on the number of police officers employed in individual police units at the time. In our analysis, we also locally customised the data on suicides in former police units to the current organisation of today's po-

lice directorates or, in other words, placed them within the framework of the current organisation of police directorates. During the period of more than seventy years of post-war organisation, the structure of the Slovene Police, particularly its organisation on the regional (provincial) level, changed significantly and the acquisition of data on the number of police officers, as well as the mapping of that data into the current administrative structure of the police organisation, were extremely difficult or almost impossible.

According to the data of the Outpatient Psychiatric Treatment Centre of the Ljubljana Psychiatric Clinic, which was published in an article entitled "Suicide in Slovenia in the 1970–1991 period" (Virant, 1991), the police directorate (formerly known as the public safety administration) with the highest suicide rate was Trbovlje (54.8), followed by Novo mesto (44.2), Krško (39.8), Postojna and Maribor (38), Slovenj Gradec (37.5), Ljubljana – surroundings (36.6), Murska Sobota (34.4), Ljubljana (31.9), Celje (30.6), Kranj (29.3), Nova Gorica (19.9), and Koper (19.6) (Virant, 1991). At that time, information on suicide in Slovenia was collected by the police for the Ljubljana Psychiatric Clinic. A special questionnaire was completed for every suicide (excluding failed suicide attempts) and sent to the Psychiatric Clinic.

It is evident that in certain regions, there is no overlap between the suicide rate among policemen and that of the general population. The then Novo mesto Public Safety Administration, which topped the list of suicides in the general population with a rate of 44.2 during the investigated period between 1970 and 1991, came seventh in regards to suicide among policemen. On the other hand, the Ljubljana Public Safety Administration had the highest level of suicides among police officers, yet with a suicide rate of 31.9, it was positioned in the second half of all public safety administrations with respect to suicide in the general population.

A similar significant deviation also occurred in the case of the Postojna PSA, which was at the top of the list in Slovenia as far as suicide among the general population was concerned, with a rate of 38, yet at the very bottom of the list with respect to suicide among policemen. The only public safety administrations with comparable suicide rates among police officers and the general population were the ones in Maribor and Murska Sobota, where suicide levels were quite high in both groups, with the suicide rate of 38 in the Maribor area and 34.4 in Murska Sobota, and 27 suicides among police officers in the Maribor area and 11 in the Murska Sobota area. In the Ljubljana surroundings, which included the neighbouring towns of Vrhnika, Logatec, Cerknica, all the way to Kočevje and the state border with Croatia (except the municipal cen-

tre of Ljubljana), suicides were quite frequent both among the general population (suicide rate of 36.6) and policemen. The policemen were more suicide-prone here than anywhere else in the country. However, with respect to police officers, there is no differentiation in the statistics between the city of Ljubljana and its surroundings.

#### 4.1.4 Frequency of Suicides by Month

In the 1948–1982 period, the majority of suicides in the Police occurred in May and March (15 respectively), followed by June (14), and (after a considerable drop) by January and November (11 respectively), February, July and September (10 respectively), April and October (9 respectively), December (7) and August with the least recorded suicides (4). All suicides were committed by male officers (Table 6).

**Table 6:** Frequency of suicides in the Police by month in the 1948–1982 period (Source: RSNZ SRS, 1948–1991; MNZ, 2016)

Month of committing suicide I – XII												
Year	I.	II.	III.	IV.	V.	VI.	VII.	VIII.	IX.	X.	XI.	XII.
1948					1	1		1				
1949*												
1950	2	1	3		2							
1951	1	2	1		1		1				1	
1952			1		1	1			2	2	4	
1953			2					1	2		1	
1954	1			1		1			1	1		
1955												
1956												
1957	1		3	3			1			1		
1958		2	2				1			1		
1959		1					1				1	
1960		1			1				1			
1961	1				3			1		1		
1962					1	1	1	1				
1963				1		1			1			
1964				2	1					1		
1965									1			
1966						1			1			
1967	1		1								1	
1968		1	1			2				1		
1969	1	2										
1970											1	2
1971	1											
1972*												
1973*												
1974					1	1	1					1
1975	1				1		2				1	1
1976			1			1						
1977				1			2					
1978						1				1		
1979	1										1	
1980				1	2							1
1981						1						
1982						2			1			2
<b>Total</b>	11	10	15	9	15	14	10	4	10	9	11	7

\* no data available

The comparative data for the Slovene population (Table 7) include the statement of facts obtained from an analysis of the influence of seasons on the fluctuation of suicides in Slovenia. Those data were published in an article entitled *The Influence of Season and Calendar on the Frequency of Suicides in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (1971–1978)* by the Statistical Office of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (ZSRSS) in its publication no. 28 in 1983. It shows that there were 44 suicides per month on average during the 1971–1980 period, out of which 34 were committed by men and 10 by women (ZSRSS, 1983).

that there were no differences between the sexes as regards the frequency of suicides by month and that suicides were most frequently committed in the months of May and June. Her study included 680 cases of suicide during the 1970–1991 period (Virant, 1995: 15).

The same was established in a survey regarding the incidence of suicide in Slovenia by Zihel and Pregelj (2010: 559), who determined that in Slovenia, the majority of suicides were committed in spring, which is supposedly linked to sociologi-

**Table 7:** Average frequency of suicides in Slovenia by month – general population (Source: ZSRSS, 1983)

Month of committing suicide I – XII., from 1971 to 1980												
Month	I.	II.	III.	IV.	V.	VI.	VII.	VIII.	IX.	X.	XI.	XII.
<b>Total</b>	36	35	47	45	55	55	47	42	41	46	37	38
<b>Male</b>	28	28	37	34	43	44	37	31	32	34	27	29
<b>Female</b>	8	7	11	11	12	12	10	11	9	12	10	9

The highest frequency of suicide was recorded in May and June for men and May, June and October for women. An analysis of this trend shows that endogenous and exogenous factors affect the frequency of suicide from January to May and in November and December. Seasonal factors affecting the tendency toward suicide appear every year, while the climatic influence is also important (ZSRSS, 1983).

A comparison between the average values recorded for the general Slovene population from the above-mentioned survey in the 1971–1980 period, shows that the results for the general population and those for police officers are comparable (Table 6 and Table 7). The detailed data regarding the month of committing suicide in the Slovene Police are recorded in the 1948–1982 period. The data from the article published by the Statistical Office was compared despite the partially different time periods during which the surveys were conducted and the numerically different pop-up patterns of suicides in different countries. However, due to the same comparative period between 1971 and 1980, and the fact that the population of the Slovene police officers is, at the same time, part of the general Slovene population, the analysis of suicide prevalence per month in a particular year is neither meaningful nor feasible. In both cases, the majority of suicides were recorded in May, June and October. This enables us to conclude that the seasonal influence on the decision to commit suicide were probably identical in the general and the Slovene law enforcement populations. The same results were reached by an expert of the Ljubljana Psychiatric Clinic in her study entitled *Suicide in Slovenia in the 1970–1991 Period*, where she determined

cal circumstances (more intensive socialising or, on the other hand, feelings of loneliness and isolation) and physiological factors (lack of light and end of the winter period). We believe that studying data regarding the incidence of suicide in the Slovene Police and, at the same time, examining the data regarding the prevalence of suicide based on the month of committing suicide is particularly important for the provision and organisation of assistance and support to police officers in the sense of intensifying measures of psychological support and the planning of other preventive measures in the police organisation.

#### 4.2 Statistical Data on Suicide Trends in the Slovene Police in the 1995–2016 period

Twenty-five police officers committed suicide from 1995–2016, all were male aged 21–50. The average age of those who committed suicide in the 1995–2012 period was 32 ( $N = 21$ ), while the average age in the 2013–2016 period was higher, i.e. 41.2 ( $N = 5$ ). With respect to their level of education and role at work, 16 police officers had completed secondary police or cadet school, 7 completed other forms of education or training for police officers, while 3 obtained other qualifications (communications technician, two criminal investigators). Twenty-three were uniformed police and 3 criminal police officers, and three had management-level positions at the local level. The average number of years of service in the Police was 12. During the surveyed period, the average suicide rate in the Slovene police was 15.72, and on average, 1.13 police officers committed suicide per year during this period and there were 7279 police officers employed on average in the same period.

We also collected information on the number of employees by police directorates in the 1995–2016 period, noting that some directorates merged during this period. We calculated the average number and share of employees per individual directorate during the period under investigation and, based on the data on the number of suicides, we calculated the suicide rate per 100,000 employees in this organisation (Table 8). We then compared the share of employees by police directorate with the share of employees who committed suicide and worked for a particular police directorate. We wanted to determine whether there were more or less suicides at a particular police directorate or whether the probability of suicide was the same at all police directorates.

Table 9 shows the number and share of police officers who committed suicide and the average number and share of employees by police directorate. The comparison showed that among police officers who committed suicide, there was not a single person who worked at the General Police Directorate, even though this Directorate employs the highest number of police officers (19%). It must also be stressed that police officers employed at the General Police Directorate do not usually

deal with operational fieldwork, such as patrolling, addressing crime and violations, and are not subjected to the same pressures related to their working conditions, daily schedules and crisis situations, which are encountered by police officers working at other police directorates. We applied a likelihood ratio test to check whether there was a difference in the number of suicides between police directorates and determined that the difference was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.115$ ). Police directorates are comparable in terms of the number of suicides among their employees. According to the calculations, and taking into account the ratio between the number of employees and the number of committed suicides, none of the police directorates stood out, not even in any numerically/statistically positive or negative way.

Table 8 and Figure 2 show statistical information regarding the prevalence of suicides in the Slovene Police in comparison to the general population and the general male population in Slovenia. The information is referring to the period from 1995 onwards and was obtained from the Ministry of the Interior in Ljubljana and the National Institute of Public Health in Ljubljana.

**Table 8:** Statistical data on suicide rate trends in the Slovene Police in the 1995–2016 period (Source: NIJZ 2009, 2013, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; MNZ, 1996–2000, 2016; Policija, 2001–2016; Milčinski 1995, 1997, 1999)

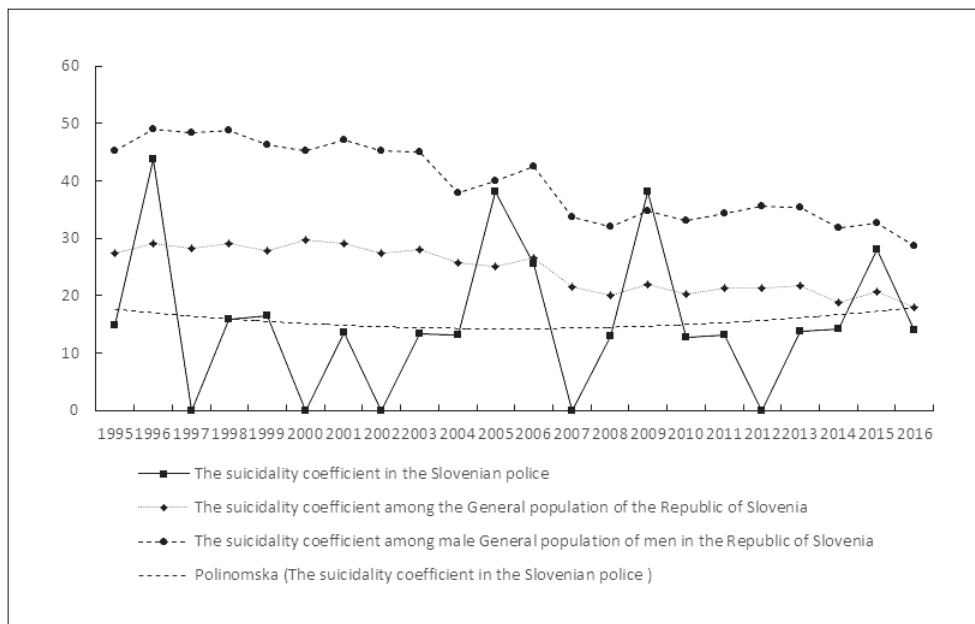
Year	The number of policemen and policewomen in the Republic of Slovenia according to the year	The number of suicides in the Slovenian Police	The suicide rate in the Slovenian police <sup>8</sup>	The suicide rate among the General population of the Republic of Slovenia	The suicide rate among male General population of men in the Republic of Slovenia
1995	6756	1	14.8	27.4	45.2
1996	6835	3	43.9	29.15	49
1997	6815	0	0	28.19	48.5
1998	6281	1	15.9	29	48.9
1999	6060	1	16.5	27.87	46.3
2000	6882	0	0	29.74	45.2
2001	7369	1	13.6	29.17	47.14
2002	7392	0	0	27.49	45.17
2003	7526	1	13.3	28.15	45.02
2004	7618	1	13.1	25.64	37.87
2005	7881	3	38.1	25.19	40.02
2006	7857	2	25.5	26.5	42.5
2007	7971	0	0	21.5	33.7

<sup>8</sup> The suicide rate is calculated as a ratio between the number of the police officers, employed at the police in the current year and the number of suicides in the police in the same year and the final

calculation is representing information on the number of suicides per 100.000 residents in the concrete considered group, which is the number of suicides per 100.000 residents in the current year.



2008	7779	1	12.9	20.05	32.11
2009	7842	3	38.2	21.94	34.69
2010	7776	1	12.8	20.3	33.11
2011	7631	1	13.1	21.29	34.27
2012	7371	0	0	21.40	35.67
2013	7212	1	13.8	21.76	35.42
2014	7014	1	14.2	18.81	31.79
2015	7127	2	28	20.60	32.57
2016	7159	1	13.9	17.97	28.71
<b>Average</b>	<b>7279</b>	<b>1.13</b>	<b>15.52</b>	<b>24.5</b>	<b>39.68</b>



**Figure 2:** Display of the suicide rate in the Slovene Police among the general male population and the general population of the Republic of Slovenia in the 1995–2016 period  
(Source: MNZ, 2016; NIJZ, 2009–2017b)

The above graph indicates a fairly consistent level of the incidences of suicide in the Slovene Police in the 1995–2016 period (Figure 2 and Table 8). Regardless of some annual fluctuations in the number of suicides, which had a slight effect on suicide rates, the number and frequency of suicides have remained at the same level since 1995. The linear constant shows that the fluctuations in the number of committed suicides in the selected period, which fluctuate from 0 to 3 suicides per year, do not, from a long-term perspective, represent any statistical deviation in terms of change in the suicide frequency in the Slovene Police in the period of 21 years. A

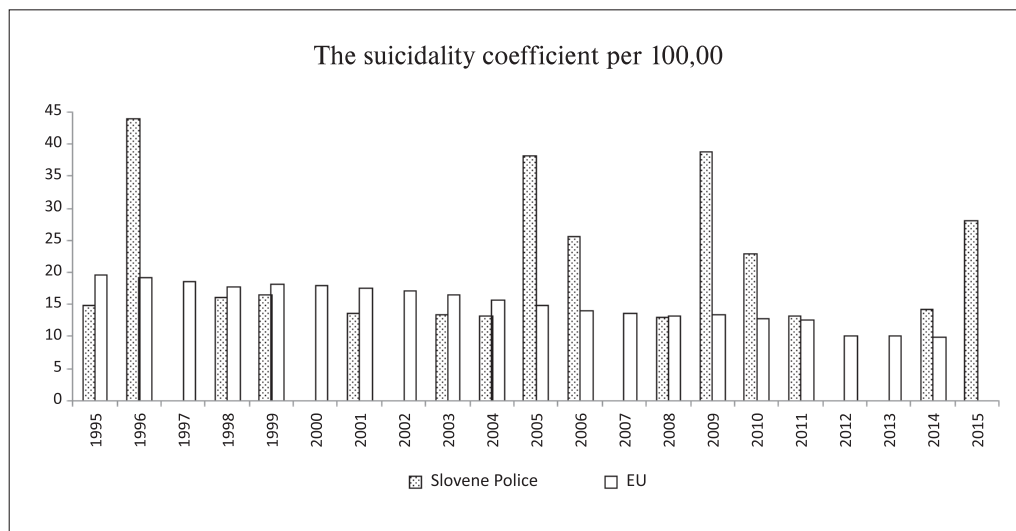
totally different situation may be observed among the general population and the general male population in Slovenia, where the suicide rate has decreased by approximately 6 points. In the 1995–2016 period, 1.13 suicides, i.e. 25 suicides in 21 years, were committed in the Slovene Police every year.

It could be said that the suicide rate among Slovene police officers has remained a constant over the past two decades, despite numerous preventive measures taken by the Slovene Police. On the other hand, the suicide rate in the Slovene general population has been visibly decreasing.

Table 8 clearly shows that the average suicide rate among Slovene police officers in comparison to the general male population was, on average, lower among the police officers (ratio 1:2.6) and it was also lower than among the general population in Slovenia (ratio 1:1.5).

Suicide among the male population in the general population was almost twice as high as the Slovenian general population, while the ratio of the suicide rate per 100,000 residents in between general population and police officers was 1:1.7 (Table 8). In both Europe and Slovenia, the suicide rate among men is approximately 3.5 times higher than in the female population (Ziherl & Pregelj, 2010: 562).

The trends showing the gradual approximation of the three rates are displayed as trend lines depicting all three categories of suicide rates (Figure 2). We should also emphasise that the suicide rate in Slovenia in the 2007–2010 period dropped to the level observed in 1965 (Table 8). If we compare the actual number of suicides in the police force with the expected number calculated on the basis of the share of suicides in the Slovene general population, we can see that the number of suicides in the Police is not statistically significant when compared to the number of suicides in the general population ( $\chi^2 = 14.8; p = 0.673$ ).



**Figure 3:** Comparative bar and linear graph of suicide rate trends in the EU, Slovenia and the Slovene Police in the 1995–2015 period  
(Source: WHO/Europe, 2016; MNZ, 2016; NIJZ, 2009, 2013, 2016, 2017a, 2017b)

The above graphic presentations (Figures 2 and 3) clearly show that the suicide rate in the Slovene police increased slightly since 2004, while the suicide rate of the EU’s general population has been constantly decreasing since 2005. On the other hand, it can also be observed (Figure 2) that the average suicide rate has been decreasing along with the suicide rate among the Slovene male population, which is currently much higher than the average police suicide rate. However, due to the constancy of the police suicide rate, both rates have been converging through the years and approaching the police rate, which has been pretty constant in the long-term perspective.

**Table 9:** Critical group and all employees by directorate in the 1995–2016 period (Source: MNZ, 2016)

Police directorates	All	Critical group
	f (%)	f (%)
<b>General Police Directorate</b>	1688 (19%)	0 (0%)
<b>Ljubljana</b>	1481 (16,7%)	6 ( 23%)
<b>Maribor</b>	1155 (13%)	5 ( 19.2%)
<b>Slovenj Gradec+Celje</b>	1011 (11,4%)	5 ( 19.2%)
<b>Postojna+Koper</b>	1037 (11.7%)	2 ( 7.6%)
<b>Krško+Novo mesto</b>	927 (10.4%)	3 ( 11.5%)
<b>Murska Sobota</b>	593 (6.7%)	2 ( 7.6%)
<b>Kranj</b>	563 (6.3%)	2 ( 7.6%)
<b>Nova Gorica</b>	421 (4.7%)	1 ( 3.8%)

#### 4.2.1 Education Level of Police Officers, Causes and Method of Committing Suicide by Police Officers during the 1995-2016 Period

Information was collected on the education of employees during the period under investigation and the average number and share of employees with a specific level of education was calculated. The education level among employees was compared with the education level in the critical group (Table

10). No police officer who committed suicide had a lower level of education or a level higher than a university degree. A comparison of the distribution according to education shows that there is a slightly higher share of police officers with secondary school education and a slightly lower share of police officers with college and university education within the critical group. The difference is not statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 0.1$ ;  $p = 0.74$ ).

**Table 10:** Critical group by education (Source: MNZ, 2016)

Education	All	Critical group
	N (%)	N (%)
<b>Master's /PhD</b>	76 (0.9%)	0 (0%)
<b>University/college</b>	2217 (25%)	5 (19.2%)
<b>Secondary</b>	6009 (67.7%)	21 (80.7%)
<b>Lower</b>	578 (6.5%)	0 (0%)

**Table 11:** Critical group by suicide method (Source: MNZ, 2016)

Suicide method	N (%)
<b>Shooting</b>	18 (69.2%)
<b>Hanging</b>	3 (11.5%)
<b>CO poisoning</b>	2 (7.6%)
<b>No data</b>	3 (11.5%)

**Table 12:** Frequency of cause/motive categories. More than one motive may be present in a single case (Source: MNZ, 2016)

Cause/motive of suicide*	N (%)
Partner/marital and family problems	11 (42.3%)
Financial problems	3 (11.5%)
Alcoholism	2 (7.6%)
Mental problems	3 (11.5%)
Disciplinary issues	5 (19.2%)
No data	7 (26.9%)

The notes found in the documentation (in five cases there were no notes) show that one person had attempted suicide in the past, three persons had been dealt with by the police health commission for mental health issues or addiction, while four persons had been treated by a psychologist (MNZ, 2016).

Table 11 shows that the most common method of committing suicide among police officers included the use of firearms (69%), followed by hanging (11.5%) and carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning (7.6%), while in 3 cases or 11.5% there is no information on the method of committing suicide. As we established previously, a similar ratio regarding the method of committing suicide was also present in other comparable countries, and Slovenia is no exception. Similar results regarding the method of committing suicide were recorded in Italian security authorities, i.e. 98% (Clerici, 2006), in the Austrian police, i.e. 74%, out of which 42.2% of suicides were committed by using service weapons and 31.9% by using privately owned firearms (Stein & Nestor, 2008). In the USA, in a whopping 94% of all cases according to some studies (O’Hara & Violanti, 2012), and in Germany, i.e. 77% (Schmidtke, 1999: 166), those police who committed suicide used service weapons.

Table 12 presents the causes and motives of committing suicide among police officers (in some cases, several motives or causes are intertwined). According to the Slovene Police Health Commission, the cause or motive for committing suicide in most cases, included problems in their family life (42%), followed by disciplinary proceedings at work (19%), or issues with partner or financial troubles in the same ratio, i.e. 11.5%, as well as psychological issues experienced by police officers. In 26% of all suicides, the cause or motive was unknown. The ranking of the most common causes and motives depicts an almost identical picture as observed in comparable police forces, such as in the USA, where most commonly established cause of suicide among police officers includes family disputes, followed by disciplinary violations at work, stress and alcohol abuse, as well as depression or psychological

health issues (O’Hara & Violanti, 2012). Similar results were also obtained in a study on suicides among Austrian police officers (Stein & Nestor, 2008), which found that the most common recorded cause or motive of suicide in the Austrian police involved troubles in officers’ personal life, especially family disagreements, such as the separation from the partner, and family or partner conflicts. The second place is occupied by psychological issues, followed by health problems. The study conducted in Austria established that personal and work-related causes are difficult to separate, which is why they remained unexplained. In 10% of all suicides, police officers experienced previous signs of depression and sought professional help from a psychologist (Stein & Nestor, 2008).

## 5 Findings

The findings of the analysis performed on the basis of information gathered on suicides committed by officers of the Slovene Police in the 1948–2016 period indicate that the circumstances surrounding the commission of suicide do not differ significantly from the circumstances of suicides committed by members of security authorities in other countries. We also established that suicide in the Slovene Police is less common when compared to the suicide among members of security authorities in other countries.

The most common causes identified as the main triggers of suicide point to issues in a police officers’ private life, either to problems with their life partner, financial issues or health issues and alcohol abuse. The attitude of the management of police units towards individual police officers has also proved to be of crucial importance for police officers’ satisfaction in the workplace. We established that in the 1948–2016 period, the share of female police officers who committed suicide is actually negligible, since there were only 5 women in the total of 172 suicide cases. This is why we can conclude that the phenomenon of suicide is a male domain.

The characteristics of suicide in the Slovene police show that the high number of suicides stopped with the termination of military service in the police and the introduction of cadet schooling for police officer candidates in 1968. In the 1991–2016 period, the suicide rate remained at the same level with a slight variation, i.e. 1.1 suicides per year. The comparison of the suicide rate with the general population showed suicide rate in the general population as constantly decreasing, while the suicide rate in the Slovene Police remained constant and has not changed significantly. The comparison of both populations showed that the general male population of Slovenia is approximately twice as burdened with suicide than the police population and that total suicides in the Slovene general population is approximately fifty percent higher. We can conclude that the situation in the Police regarding suicidal tendencies is stable and has not been changing through the years, and at the same time, police officers have not proven to be burdened with suicidal tendencies to a greater extent than the rest of the country's population.

## 6 Concluding Discussion

We are aware that the data used for presenting an overview of this issue and its developments over the past years are insufficient. In most cases, we did not have a detailed insight into the content of annual statistical data, since the archives were in poor condition. The participation in the survey, which includes the present time, was based on a voluntary basis, which is why the population sample that was later statistically evaluated is smaller than it could be. The third problem, which we encountered in the evaluation of collected information refers to the insufficient amount of comparative data related to other police forces. Despite the above mentioned difficulties, we believe this research study serves as a good starting point for a general discussion of the issue of suicides in hierarchically structured institutions, such as, in our case, the Slovene Police, and provides results, which would, according to our estimates, not be statistically significantly different, even if the number of respondents would be much higher.

The data we collected clearly shows that, particularly in the 1950s, suicides in the police were uncommonly frequent and the suicide rate has been constantly increasing until the late 1960s. Extremely high suicide rates were recorded particularly in the 1950s, i.e. 191 in 1950, 230 in 1951, 286 in 1953, 369 in 1957 and 171 in 1968. After 1968, the suicide rate dropped steadily and reached 15.3 suicides per 100,000 residents in 1994 and 13.8 in 2013. In the same period, the suicide rate among the general population in the Republic of Slovenia was noticeably higher (15.4 suicides per 100,000 residents in 1994 and 18.8 in 2013). The suicide rate in the general popula-

tion in Slovenia amounted to 20.4 suicides per 100,000 residents in the early 1950s, which shows that the level of suicides in the Police was markedly higher in the past and that the level of suicides in the Police dropped significantly in comparison with the general population and stabilised at the figures comparable or even lower than those of the general population. In general terms, it can be said that the number of suicides in the Police grew in the 1950s, reaching as many as 8 to 9 suicides among police officers per year. In the 1960s, the situation stabilised at between 3 to 5 suicides per year, then the number dropped significantly before stabilising and continuing to decrease in relative terms from 1983 onwards. A statistical comparison (chi square test) of statistical values revealed that in the period under investigation (1995–2016), there were no major differences between the suicide rates in the Police and the general Slovene population, despite an apparent deviation in figures. In other words, the number of suicides in the Slovene Police did not differ from the number of suicides in the general Slovene population to a statistically significant degree ( $\chi^2 = 14.8$ ;  $p = 0.673$ ). In 2013, the standardised level of suicide, also referred to as the suicide rate in the Republic of Slovenia, reached 18.8 suicides per 100,000 residents (448 suicides), which put Slovenia among the top five most suicide-prone European Union member states, while the suicide rate in the Slovene Police was only 13.8 suicides per 100,000 residents (1 suicide). Such a suicide rate is quite similar to the suicide rates in comparable police forces of some European countries (Hem, 2005; Schmidtke, 1999: 164–165), as well as of the USA (Marzuk et al., 2002; Aamodt & Stalnaker, 2001: 383). During the past ten years, 1.2 suicides was recorded in the Slovene Police per year on average. At the moment, the risk of suicide among Slovene police officers is much lower than that of the general population.

In general, the Slovene Police are less affected by suicide than police forces of some comparable countries, such as Austria, where the suicide rate is almost twice as high compared to the suicide rate in the Slovene Police. Austrian police officers who commit suicide are generally almost ten years older and have ten years more service than Slovene police officers (Stein and Nestor, 2008: 5). Police officers who commit suicide in the USA are also older, since most of them commit suicide at the age of 35 to 44 (O'Hara & Violanti, 2012: 17), while the majority of police officers in the Republic of Slovenia in the post-war period committed suicide when they were younger than 25 years of age (from 1948 to 1994), while those who committed suicide in the 1995–2016 period were between 25 and 35 years of age. In our survey, as well as in the surveys in the USA (O'Hara & Violanti, 2012: 18), Germany (Schmidtke, 1999), Austria (Stein & Nestor, 2008), Italy (Clerici, 2006) and Norway (Berg et al., 2003), the common denominator of causes for suicide among police officers

included work-related stress, psychological disorders and diseases, alcoholism, interpersonal problems and police officers' material financial situation. The most frequent cause of suicide in Slovenia in the post-war period and in the period after independence comprised problems in the relationship, while the secondary cause for committing suicide was related to police officers' private life. This was also confirmed by current surveys carried out in the USA (O'Hara & Violanti, 2012: 20). Firearms were the prevailing means of committing suicide among police officers in the aforementioned countries, since they were used in almost 80%; 77% in Germany (Schmidtke, 1999: 166), 94% in the USA (O'Hara & Violanti, 2012: 22), 98% in Italy (Clerici, 2006), 78% in Austria (Stein & Nestor, 2008: 10) and 69% in Slovenia in the 1995–2016 period.

We also identified factors that helped reduce suicide among police officers in the post-war era, which included the abolition of military service in the police, the improvement of police officers' social and financial situations, the establishment of the cadet school for police officers in 1968, and the recruitment of new staff trained at the cadet school in police units in 1971. In the post-war period, i.e. until 1994, five female police officers committed suicide, while there were no suicides among female officers from 1994–2016. The share of suicides in the total number of suicides among police officers in the 1948–1994 period was only 3.6% or 5 female police officers who committed suicide in the analysed period. Establishing the cadet-type secondary school marked a shift towards the professionalisation of policing and a positive move in the recruitment of personnel suited for the job. Currently, the majority of candidates for police officers, i.e. about fifty per cent, are turned away on the basis of a psychological test (MNZ, 2015). Within the Police, professional assistance for police officers who find themselves in distress, has been provided for several years. Such assistance has been formalised in the Rules on Psychological Assistance and Psychological Support to Police Employees (Police, 2013). Suicide prevention activities in the Slovene Police have been deemed adequate and effective. The majority of suicide motives, however, originate in a police officers' personal sphere and private life. Suicides appear to be evenly distributed across the country in accordance with the size of the staff working in individual police directorates.

The suicide rate was found to be gradually decreasing in the past twenty years and is lower than the suicide rate in the general population of Slovenia. In reality, it still corresponds to one suicide of a police officer per year on average (1.13 per year). This average value has persisted for over twenty years and has not changed despite the introduction of various preventive programmes in the Slovene Police. By way of conclusion, it is interesting to quote Durkheim, the famous

suicidologist, who stated: "Not merely are there suicides every year, but there are as a general rule as many each year as in the year preceding. The state of mind which causes men to kill themselves is not purely and simply transmitted, but — something much more remarkable — transmitted to an equal number of persons, all in such situations as to make the state of mind become an act..." (Durkheim, 1992: 20). Slovene police officers are part of the body of the nation and representative of the general population, which is affected by collective tendencies that are beyond the control of an individual and have a different nature than individual tendencies and opinions of each individual.

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## Značilnosti samomorov med slovenskimi policisti v zadnjih sedmih desetletjih

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V prispevku se osredotočamo na identifikacijo motivov in mehanizmov, ki povzročajo oziroma lahko povzročijo samomorilno vedenje med slovenskimi policisti. Na podlagi primerjave podatkov o slovenskih in tujih policistih ter podatkov o samomorilnosti splošne populacije ter arhivskih podatkov o samomorih v slovenski policiji smo poskušali identificirati vzroke in mehanizme, ki povzročajo ali lahko povzročijo samomorilno vedenje slovenskih policistov. Ugotovili smo, da naše ugotovitve bistveno ne odstopajo od ugotovitev študij o samomorilnosti policistov v drugih državah.

**Ključne besede:** policija, policisti, samomor, samomorilnost, stopnja samomorilnosti

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