

Religion in Suicide Research

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The vast majority of international research within the field of suicide behaviour seeks to find the factors of risk, and so far focus has been on the protective conditions only to a small extent. In the light of this a large triangular research project has been launched at the Centre for Suicide Research in Denmark. It is a register based study, a study based on questionnaires and a qualitative study which all of them seek to isolate, uncover and illustrate which conditions may be protective for thoughts of suicide being realized and attempts of suicide being repeated.

The theme of religion is part of the project, since religion is very rarely examined in international suicide research. Furthermore, the research which has been carried out causes a number of considerations and questions:

- How is the concept of religion defined in each study? Can one distinguish between religion and spirituality?
- Internationally, the predominant suicide research has been trying to document the connection between spirituality, religion and health through empirical research. What does evidence-based research – which is founded on questionnaires and rating scales – have to say about the complexity that religion and spirituality pose?
- The empirically based suicide research seeks to isolate the concrete (for example being together through a social connection with the church). Certain forms of spirituality presuppose that the individual can be alone, be solitary, be preoccupied with meditation or prayer. What scientific considerations give this rise to?
- The empirically based suicide research seeks to measure behaviour. If the unconscious spiritual dimension in a human being is rooted outside the human being, what might the consequences be in research?
- In the empirically based suicide research the concepts of hope and meaning often enter as a scientific explanation of the significance of religion in the prevention of suicide. Seen from the perspective of the research on religious psychology there is reason to question, where the lines are drawn in the violation of the private spheres when dealing with religious life, guilt and shame.
- Can we know, through research, anything about how religion and spirituality affect the individual on the psychological level at all? And is it possible scientifically to prove that religiousness is a protective factor and not a strain on people with suicidal thoughts?
- What visions for suicidal research are necessary, if we want knowledge about the qualities and the effects of religion on each individual?