



**UNIVERSITAT  
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# **MISTAKEN BELIEFS ABOUT SUICIDE IN THE SPANISH POPULATION: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY**

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## RESUMEN

El suicidio es una conducta universal y específica del hombre que ha estado presente a lo largo de toda la historia de la humanidad, pero que ha ido variando según la época y las consideraciones sociales. Actualmente es una de las principales causas de muerte a nivel mundial, alrededor de 703.000 personas se quitan la vida anualmente. El estigma que existe hacia las enfermedades mentales y el suicidio dificulta la búsqueda de ayuda. El objetivo principal del presente trabajo fue identificar y analizar las creencias erróneas sobre el suicidio en la población general española. Se elaboró un cuestionario con escala tipo Likert (1 = totalmente en desacuerdo y 5 = totalmente de acuerdo) de 27 ítems con la herramienta Qualtrics basado en mitos y creencias erróneas sobre el suicidio. También se recogieron datos sociodemográficos. La muestra obtenida fue de 87 participantes, 57 mujeres y 30 hombres con una media de edad de 25.2 años. Los ítems 2, 5, 12 y 17 fueron los que obtuvieron una puntuación más elevada y tenían que ver con creer que las personas que se suicidan lo hacen porque están sufriendo y quieren dejar de hacerlo, así como que estas están la mayor parte del tiempo tristes. También se piensa que el suicidio es siempre un acto premeditado y que la persona que haya intentado suicidarse alguna vez, lo hará de nuevo. En estas creencias no se encontraron diferencias significativas en las puntuaciones obtenidas en función del sexo o del rango de edad (de 18 a 21 años o de 22 a 58 años). El bajo nivel de estigma generalizado encontrado en la población estudiada podría deberse al pequeño tamaño de la muestra, así como a otras características de la misma (p.ej., elevado porcentaje de estudiantes). Es necesario replicar los resultados obtenidos en una muestra más amplia y heterogénea.

**Palabras clave:** suicidio, creencias erróneas, estigma, mitos.

## ABSTRACT

Suicide is a universal and specific human behavior that has been present throughout the history of mankind, but has varied according to the time and social considerations. It is currently one of the leading causes of death worldwide, with about 703,000 people taking their own lives annually. The stigma attached to mental illness and suicide makes it difficult to seek help. The main objective of the present study was to identify and analyze the erroneous beliefs about suicide in the general Spanish population. A 27-item Likert-type questionnaire (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree) was elaborated with the Qualtrics tool based on myths and erroneous beliefs about suicide. Sociodemographic data were also collected. The sample obtained was 87 participants, 57 women and 30 men with a mean age of 25.2 years. Items 2, 5, 12 and 17 were the ones that scored the highest and had to do with believing that people who commit suicide do so because they are suffering and want to stop, as well as that they are sad most of the time. It is also thought that suicide is always a premeditated act and that the person who has attempted suicide once will do it again. In these beliefs, no significant differences were found in the scores obtained according to sex or age range (18 to 21 years or 22 to 58 years). The low level of generalized stigma found in the population studied could be due to the small sample size, as well as to other characteristics of the sample (e.g., high percentage of students). It is necessary to replicate the results obtained in a larger and more heterogeneous sample.

**Key words:** suicide, erroneous beliefs, stigma, myths.

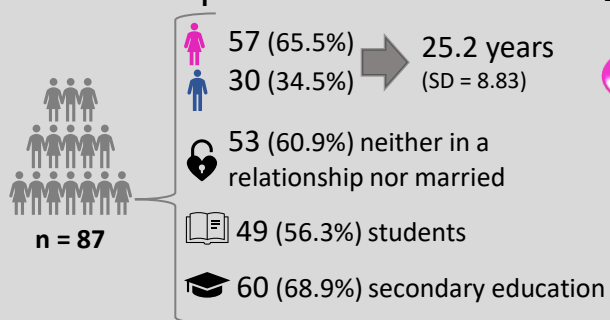
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## 1. Introduction

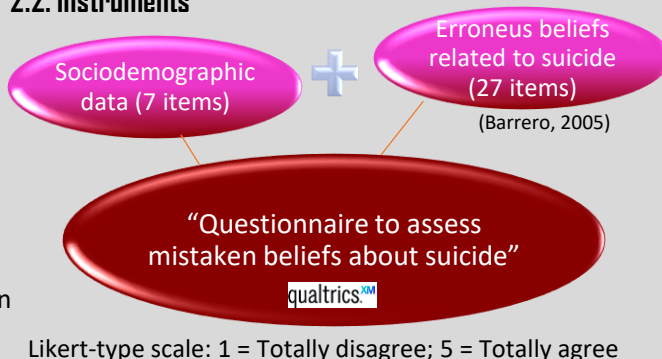
**Suicide** is a universal and human-specific behavior that has been present throughout the history of mankind, but has been changing according to times and social considerations (Daray, Grendas & Rebok, 2016). Suicide attempt or ideation is currently classified as a symptom of a mental disorder (DSM-5, 2013.) and is **one of the leading causes of death worldwide**. Each year 703,000 people take their own lives and for every completed suicide, there are another 20 attempts (WHO, 2021). During 2020, a total of 3,941 people committed suicide in Spain (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2020), so there could have been close to 80,000 attempts. The **stigma** that is created around suicide and mental illness **makes it difficult to seek help**. It is essential to put an end to myths and taboos to achieve progress in suicide prevention and to normalize talking about suicide, although it is sometimes difficult, especially in the case of survivors (Rudestam et al., 1987.) The main **aim** of this work is to **identify and analyze the erroneous beliefs about suicide** in the general Spanish population.

## 2. Method

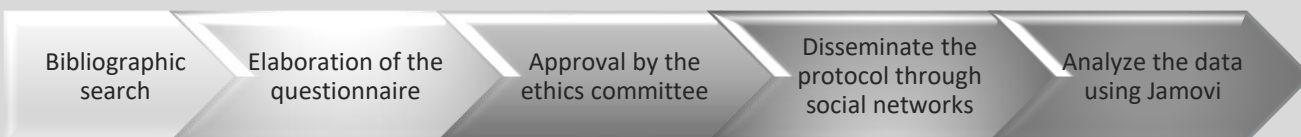
### 2.1. Participants



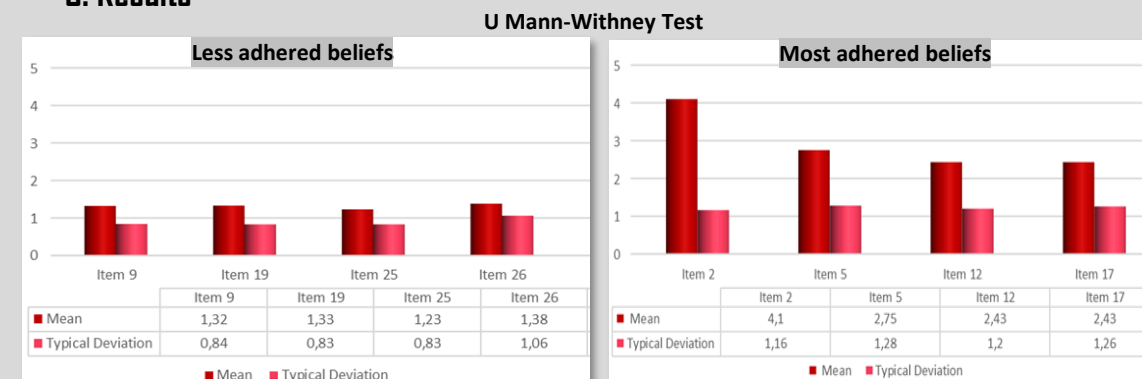
### 2.2. Instruments



### 2.3. Procedure



## 3. Results



MOST HELD BELIEFS	Mean (Standard deviation)			
	Women (n=57)	Men (n=30)	18-21 years (n=40)	22-58 years (n=47)
Item 2	4.21 (1,09)	3,90 (1,27)	4.28 (1,13)	3.96 (1,18)
Item 5	2.77 (1,28)	2,70 (1,29)	2.48 (1,15)	2.98 (1,34)
Item 12	2.44 (1,21)	2,40 (1,19)	2.25 (1,38)	2.57 (1,25)
Item 17	2.39 (1,26)	2,50 (1,28)	2.50 (1,13)	2.36 (1,17)

U Mann-Withney  $p > 0,05$  → There are no significant differences between groups

## 4. Discussion

- ✗ No generalized stigma was found in suicide beliefs in the studied population. This may be due to the small sample size.
- ✗ No statistically significant differences were found in the scores obtained for the most adhered beliefs according to gender or age.

### 4.1. Limitations

- ✗ Small sample size. Sample composed mostly of women.
- 📖 Sample with a high percentage of students. Lack of previous studies related to suicide myths and stigmatization to compare the results obtained...
- 😊 Self-reported data that may have been misreported due to social desirability.
- 🔍 Lack of information on whether participants know people who have committed/attempted suicide or whether they themselves may have been in that situation.

••• In other studies, less stigma was found in women (Batterham, Calear & Christensen, 2013).

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