

How to Talk About Suicide in Prisons: Speaking through Stories

Invited lecture · Meta Lavrič

Dr. Meta Lavrič has been a member of the Slovene Centre for Suicide Research at the University of Primorska, Andrej Marušič Institute since 2019. Her work focuses on the development and evaluation of psychological and public mental health interventions in the areas of suicide prevention and postvention. She has contributed to several national and international projects and has a particular research interest in storytelling as a supportive intervention for individuals affected by suicide.

Abstract. Correctional officers who are exposed to suicidal behavior in prison settings face an increased risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder, burnout, and sleep disturbances. This highlights the need for interventions that can reduce the negative psychological impact of such encounters. One promising approach is psychological storytelling interventions. The primary aim of the presented study was to explore how correctional officers experience the process of sharing written stories-both from the perspective of the storyteller (writer) and the story recipient (reader) – with a particular focus on perceived effects on mental health and overall wellbeing. Specifically, we examined how correctional officers narrate their experiences of encountering suicidal behavior in their line of work, and how participation in a storytelling-based psychological intervention influences their mental health, both through the act of writing and reading stories. The intervention and study included 10 male correctional officers from five different prison facilities across Slovenia. Each participant wrote one personal story. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted twice with each participant: first, as part of the storytelling intervention to support the creation of their story, and second, to explore their experience of participating in the intervention. The findings-through story analysis and interview data-provide insight into the psychological experiences of correctional officers when confronted with inmate suicidal behavior. Moreover, the interviews guide the development of tailored psychological interventions aimed at supporting correctional officers and offer an initial understanding of the potential appropriateness and impact of storytelling-based approaches in population of gatekeepers.