

Editorial

Editorial Board of the *Social Work Journal* (RTS)

As every year, on 10 September World Suicide Prevention Day was commemorated. It constitutes an essential occasion for breaking the silence surrounding this issue and for urgently placing it at the heart of public and professional debate. The current figures are startling: in Spain, 11 people die due to suicide every day, making it the leading cause of non-natural death.¹ In Catalonia, in 2024 it became the second leading cause of non-natural death, having occupied first place until 2023.

The figures relating to children and adolescents are of particular concern. In 2024 alone, suicides among young people aged 15 to 19 increased by 20% compared with the previous year, while in the 10-to-14 age group deaths by suicide doubled. According to the Observatory on Suicide in Spain, 18% of adolescents have attempted suicide at some point, more than 50% have thought about doing so, and 29% of those who engage in self-harm did so for the first time at the age of 12.

These data reveal a reality we cannot brush under the carpet. Suicide confronts us with human suffering, often felt as a monster that cannot be defeated. Often, people do not want to die; they want the suffering to stop. Suicide is not merely a question of clinical diagnosis; it is the extreme expression of existential distress. Life entails moments of joy, but also of pain. When that pain is perceived as inseparable from existence itself, suicide may emerge as a way out.

What is more, suicide must be understood as the result of an increasingly unequal society. Experiences of exclusion, discrimination and precariousness form the roots of the suffering endured by many people who lose the will to live. The usual risk factors –unwanted loneliness, family breakdown, addictions, social vulnerability and unresolved grief– must be addressed from an intersectional standpoint that acknowledges the complexity of the inequalities that shape people's lives.

Suicide also speaks to us directly as social workers. As helping professionals, we can be key agents in detecting situations of risk, in prevention and in supporting both the families who face this reality and indeed the survivors. Although we do not work as therapists, our practice may nonetheless involve a commanding therapeutic dimension. Social work acknowledges the protective value of relationships in suicide prevention. It is through the relationships we build with the individuals and families we work with that we are able to contribute to prevention, detection and

¹ The data mentioned in the text come from various sources including the Observatory on Suicide in Spain 2023 (<https://www.fsme.es/observatorio-del-suicidio-2023/>) and were presented at the conference "Tools for Preventing and Addressing Suicidal Behaviour", organised by the Mental Health Board in Sant Cugat del Valles on 17 September 2025.

intervention surrounding this complex, multi-faceted issue. As was stated during the round table on youth suicide organised by the Official Association of Social Work of Catalonia (TSCAT) on 28 November, the role of social workers is not to offer quick answers, but rather to listen, provide support and offer safe environments.

What is more, at a time when the emotional suffering experienced by many children and young people is often manifested in muted or difficult-to-express ways, it is also crucial to acknowledge the value of narrative and cultural forums as channels that allow words to be attached to that which is so hard to articulate. Such settings pave the way for constructing meaning, sharing vulnerabilities and building a sense of community. Yet this potential can only be fully realised when it is interwoven with the professional intervention of social work: an intervention that works alongside children and teenagers within their family and community contexts, that sustains processes of attachment and protection, and that brings to light the social harm that lies behind many moments of emotional and health-related fragility. Social work has both the responsibility and the capacity to showcase the inequalities, silences and ruptures that feed distress, and to transform these spaces of expression into genuine opportunities for care, prevention and life.

Social work can also act as a bridge for creating group and community spaces where people living at the crossroads between multiple inequalities feel safe, listened to and accepted, and are able to express their distress without fear or stigma. Speaking about suicide is also speaking about life and about how to make it more liveable for everyone.

It is essential to be aware of the tools and channels available for action, such as the 024 suicide-prevention hotline (available 24 hours a day) or the *2025–2027 Suicide Prevention Action Plan* promoted by the Mental Health Commissioner of the Spanish Ministry of Health.² Schools are privileged settings for detecting emotional distress in children and adolescents and for acting quickly. Suicidal behaviour and self-harm already constitute a growing concern among this group. Along these lines, in 2022 the Catalan Ministry of Education and Vocational Training and the Catalan Ministry of Health drew up the *Guide for addressing suicidal behaviour and non-suicidal self-harm in educational settings*.³ Psychopedagogical support teams –composed of educational psychologists and social

2 Spanish Ministry of Health, Mental Health Commissioner (2025). *Plan de acción para la prevención del suicidio 2025-2027*. Retrieved on 10 November 2025 from https://www.sanidad.gob.es/areas/calidadAsistencial/estrategias/saludMental/docs/Plan_de_accion_para_la_prevenccion_del_suicidio_2025_2027.pdf

3 Sub-directorate General for Guidance, Participation and Student Well-being, Directorate General for Students, Catalan Ministry of Education; and Mental Health and Addictions Master Plan, Directorate General for Health Planning and Research, Catalan Ministry of Health, Government of Catalonia (2022). *Guia per a l'abordatge de la conducta suïcida i de les autolesions no suïcides en el centre educatiu*. Government of Catalonia, Catalan Ministry of Education. Retrieved on 10 November 2025 from <https://educacio.gencat.cat/web/.content/home/departament/publicacions/monografies/violencias/guia-conducta-suicida-autolesions/guia-conducta-suicida-autolesions.pdf>

workers– assist schools in applying this guide, which includes response pathways tailored for each case.

Lastly, as social workers we must be able to condemn this intense form of suffering that runs through the world around us. Through our journal, we aim to help lift the veil on suicide and dismantle the stigma that surrounds it, and to invite all professionals to speak about it openly in the various forums in which we intervene.