# Suicide on Screen: Shifting Portrayals of Suicide and Suicidality on Dutch Television, ca. 1950–2000

Worldwide, more than 720.000 persons die by suicide each year, with many more persons who attempt suicide or have thoughts or plans of doing so. [1] Whereas the field of suicidology has been instrumental in identifying individual risk factors and protective factors for suicide, and in developing screening tools and treatments for suicidal persons, [2] the field has been relatively inattentive to the complex interplay of societal forces that shape the way people conceive of and even *do* suicide and suicidal behavior. [3] In this paper, I analyze the changing depictions of suicidality on Dutch television between 1950 and 2000. [4] I will particularly explore how media depictions of suicide and suicidality reflected broader cultural, political and economic changes during the second half of the twentieth century, particularly changing views on personal freedom versus social responsibility. By addressing the dynamic, contingent and constructed nature of suicide and suicidality, I will argue that suicide and suicidality should be viewed as a "complex social problem" that should be addressed as such by practitioners, researchers and policymakers alike, thereby providing a counterweight to the individualistic and quantitative approach to understanding suicidality that currently prevails.

**References**


1. "Suicide," World Health Organization, accessed January 25, 2025, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide.
2. What is Suicidology," American Association of Suicidology, accessed January 25, 2025, https://suicidology.org/what-is-suicidology/.
3. Jennifer White, Ian Marsh, Michael J. Kral, and Jonathan Morris, "Introduction: Rethinking Suicide," in *Critical Suicidology: Transforming Suicide Research and Prevention for the 21st Century*, ed. Jennifer White, Ian Marsh, Michael J. Kral, and Jonathan Morris (Vancouver: UPC Press, 2016), 2.
4. In this project, I draw on my previous research on the relationship between medicine and the media in the second half of the twentieth century, see Bart Lutters, "Specialists on Stage: Neurosurgeons, Mass Media, and the Performance of Expertise in the Dutch Welfare State," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 98 (2024), 587-619.