

Editorial

## Suicidology Online: Past, Present and Future

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Suicidology Online (SOL) is now entering its fourth year in existence and this is a good time to take a look at the journal's past, present and future.

A new journal faces a number of challenges. Due to current funding policies, researchers depend on publishing their papers in highly merited, high impact factor journals indexed in the main data bases. Yet, in order to become indexed in such data bases, a journal depends on a high number of good quality publications over years, which, in turn, depends on a high number of submissions. This, in many ways seems like a Catch 22: If we don't get submissions, the journal will not be indexed in the important data bases, and, if the journal is not indexed in the important data bases, many will be reluctant to submit papers to it. However, we are happy to report that SOL has been receiving a good number of submissions from many parts of the world and has published what we think is a good mix of original research, reviews, essays and commentaries of high quality. This reflects that researchers do see the need for another international journal in addition

to the already established ones in the suicide research field.

SOL is currently indexed in CINAHL, DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals), and Electronic Journals Library (EZB) Regensburg (the largest European network of libraries). And, because SOL articles are open-access, everyone can easily access them via search engines like Yahoo, Google or Google Scholar. Importantly, there have been a steadily increasing number of visitors to the journal website during these past three years. In the last three months of 2012, we had an average of 2176 visits by 1618 different persons each month and Figure 1 shows that the interest for SOL publications is continuously growing. We continue to work to be indexed in other important databases, such as PUBMED, ISI Web, and SCOPUS and therefore encourage authors to submit more papers to SOL to help us reach this goal faster. If/when we achieve this, more authors are likely to submit papers to SOL and we can continue to grow.

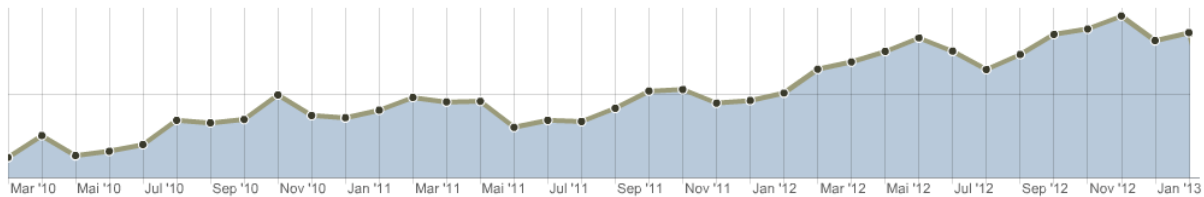
We believe that SOL represents a good addition to the more established journals. We encourage submissions of original research using qualitative and/or quantitative methods and welcome reviews, commentaries and essays. One of the "founding fathers" of Suicidology, Edwin Shneidman (1985) emphasised that suicidal behaviour can be studied from many different disciplines. In keeping with his view, we would like to emphasize that SOL welcomes submissions from all relevant disciplines, for instance, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, anthropology, (neuro)biology,

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**Fig.1. Growth of visitors to suicidology-online.com from March 2010 to January 2013**



philosophy, ethics, demography, etc. And, importantly, we welcome submissions from all parts of the world.

The journal also aims at being a forum for debates on various suicidological issues, be it on research, clinical issues or suicide prevention in general. And, as a purely online journal, it is particularly suited for that purpose. We especially encourage debates on controversial issues and also welcome comments to recently published papers, whether they are published in SOL or in other journals. See for example, Rogers and Apel's (2011) comment in SOL to a paper on qualitative methodology published in *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* by Hjelmeland and Knizek (2010), and Hjelmeland and Knizek's (2011) response to Rogers and Apel in SOL. You are all welcome to submit your contributions. We need more debates like that and therefore hope that more and more researchers, as well clinicians and people working with suicide prevention will see SOL as a good place for such scientific debates. We emphasize, however, that all submissions have to go through a review process to ensure high quality publications with high ethical standards. With regard to high standards, we should perhaps mention that SOL has a rejection rate of above 65%.

In one of the examples above, we mentioned qualitative methodology. It has been shown that qualitative studies are few and far between in the other main international suicide research journals, namely *Archives of Suicide Research*, *Crisis*, and *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* (Hjelmeland & Knizek, 2010, 2011a). In contrast to some of the other journals, for example, *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* (Joiner, 2011), SOL explicitly welcomes qualitative and quantitative submissions on equal terms. In fact, a relatively large proportion of the submissions to SOL are qualitative, probably reflecting the need for a journal explicitly positive to qualitative studies. However, our readers may have noticed that there are only a few qualitative publications in SOL. We are sorry to say that the quality of many of the qualitative submissions is so low that most of these papers could not be accepted.

Some clarifications as to the required standards for qualitative papers thus seem to be necessary. This is not the place to outline in detail what constitutes a good qualitative study. For that, we can only refer to textbooks in qualitative methodology. However, based on a number of the submissions we have received, a couple of rather basic problems need to be mentioned here.

As for quantitative studies, also qualitative studies should collect and analyse data systematically and rigorously by means of specific methods (to be named in the paper). For instance, it is not sufficient to say that a "qualitative analysis" was performed, just as little as it would have sufficed to say that a "quantitative analysis" was done. We need to know which method was used to analyse the data. Whereas in a quantitative paper it might suffice to say that the data were analysed by means of, for instance, regression analysis or ANOVA, some more detailed description is required for the chosen qualitative method(s) of analysis. Although some qualitative "purists" may argue that it should also suffice to say that the data were analysed by means of, for instance, Grounded Theory or Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, we will maintain, at least for now, that a more detailed description of how exactly the data were analysed is required in qualitative papers. This is important for a number of reasons. For example, this will explicate that a rigorous analysis has, in fact, been conducted, which, in turn, may contribute to fight the negative attitudes towards qualitative research still found in some circles. Moreover, just as issues of reliability and validity are important to discuss in a quantitative paper, the relevant equivalents, such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, are important to discuss in a qualitative one (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Above, we mentioned some of the advantages with SOL, namely that it is an open-access journal, and, that as an online journal it is a good forum for debates and comments. Another advantage is that being a purely online journal, we have no restrictions with regard to number of words, which makes it possible to submit more extensive papers

than would be accepted elsewhere. However, this must not be interpreted to mean that we have no limits with regard to the length of papers accepted. Although we think that a word limit of 3000-5000 words, as is common in many journals, sometimes gives too little space for complex studies or discussions, we think every paper should be as succinct as possible. Moreover, we don't think many reviewers would be willing to review a paper of 100 pages (or even much less than that), unless it is an exceptionally important and ground breaking study that really requires that much space. Unduly long papers are therefore routinely sent back to authors with a request to shorten them before they are sent out to reviewers. That said, particularly as we these days frequently see calls for more complex, multi-disciplinary studies in suicide research, there is clearly a need for a journal such as SOL that will accept papers longer than 3000-5000 words.

A vote of thanks to our Editorial Board members is in order. We have a high number of experienced researchers from various disciplines and different parts of the world in the EB. Their dedicated work contributes to ensure a high quality of the papers published. The EB will continue to develop as some members will be thanked off and new ones included. EB members' contribution to SOL is indeed a voluntary task, and we are therefore grateful to those who agree to review submissions within the given timeframe. We are at present particularly in need of experienced qualitative researchers in the EB, so if you have any suggestions, please send us a message.

SOL publishes on the basis of the most recognized Creative Commons License, which ensures a free and borderless dissemination of works, by securing the ownership of the works (which remains with the authors) at the same time. As more and more journals make their articles available online for free, this option remains very costly for many authors. Not so in SOL. Also dedicated to support publications from low income countries, we did not charge publishing or other fees from authors yet. However, demands for electronic journals grow

rapidly, for instance, with regard to electronic archives and membership fees in library networks. There is also the convenience of an electronic submission system and the importance of cross-referencing for the calculation of an impact factor. Thus, a reasonable fee per published article might become necessary in the future. We will aim to keep the fee considerably lower than in other journals and will allow applying for waivers, for example, for authors from low income countries or other researchers providing good reasons.

We believe that the last three years have shown that Suicidology Online indeed is a viable option to publish in. With the help of our authors and dedicated Editorial Board members, as well as our readers, we are confident that the journal will continue to prosper for many years to come.

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