

## **POSTER PRESENTATION**

### INVESTIGATION ON 789 SUICIDES COMMITTED BY ELDERLY PEOPLE IN MILAN, ITALY FROM 1993 TO 2008

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**Introduction:** From the time of the Ancient Greeks, the elderly used to be revered for their wisdom, but the respect that they commanded in the patriarchal societies of old has progressively faded away. A longer and longer life expectancy and a concomitant decline in the birth rates have given rise to an ageing society in which the elderly are no longer awarded the consideration and devotion they once enjoyed. Society now focuses on dynamism and productivity, and the elderly have no place, neither in the life of society generally, because they have retired from work, nor within the family, and they tend to live on the margins of society, alone in their own homes or in rest homes. Elderly people consequently suffer from a condition of physical and psychological decline that sometimes causes so much suffering that they even resort to self-destructive behavior. The aim of the present study was to conduct a retrospective analysis on the elderly people who committed suicide in Milan in the last 16 years.

**Materials and methods:** As part of the autoptic activities handled by the Forensic Medicine Unit in Milan on behalf of the legal authorities, we examined all deaths occurring in the last 16 years (1993-2008) in the elderly population (age range 65-100 years), identifying 789 cases of suicide (17591 postmortem analyses).

**Results:** Within the time interval considered, after a decline attributable to a general reduction in the number of cases considered by the authorities concerned, the number of suicides committed by elderly people settled on stable rates. The ages of the victims ranged between 65 and 96 years, with a prevalence of the male gender, who accounted for 63.4% of cases. People tended to commit suicide in their own homes (68% of cases). Falling was the most common method used (50% of cases), followed by hanging (15%), firearms (10%) and drowning (6.6%), while other methods were occasionally used.

**Conclusions:** In the time interval considered, elderly people emerged as still being vulnerable to suicide, though less so than in the past, and this mode of death accounted for 4.5% of all autopsies ordered by the legal authorities. Death was essentially achieved by falling, hanging and the use of firearms.