

Memorialization and Attitudes Toward Suicide in H̄alutzi-Era Burials

Efrat Kantor and Michael J. May
Kinneret College on the Sea of Galilee

Halutzim in the Land of Israel

Second Aliyah
(1904-1914) and
Third Aliyah (1918-
1923)

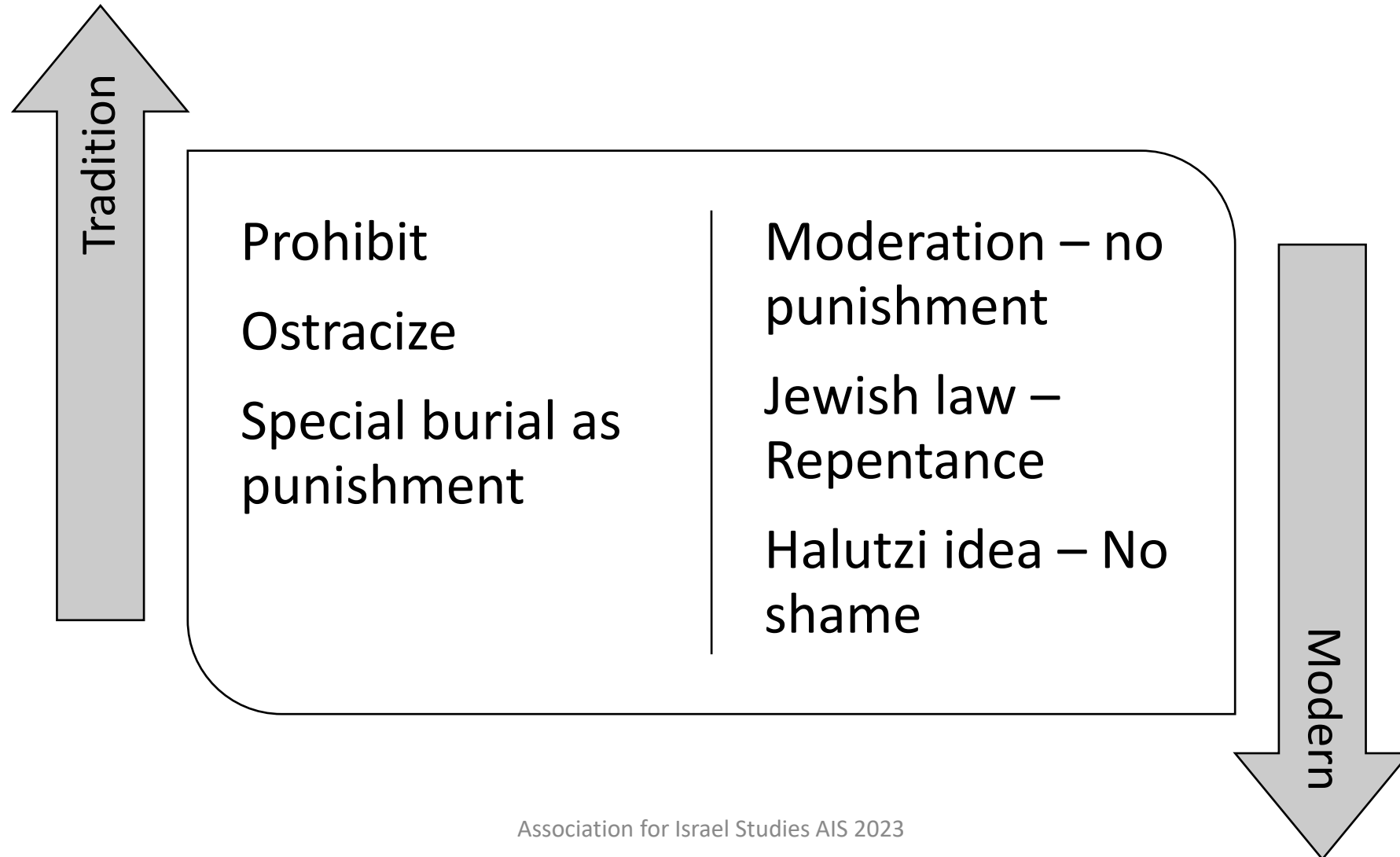
Primarily from
Europe

Most came young,
lacking adult role
models and
supervision

Kibbutzim,
Moshavim

Hard life

Suicide in Judaism and Halutzi Zionism



Analytic and Data Driven Study: Data

Halutzi Era Suicides

- Based on Elroi (1999) list (59 names)
- Deaths 1910-1924
- Searched for graves on CemōMemo, Gravez, BillionGraves, Findagrave
- Found 29 gravestones +1 from 1924

Halutzi Era Control Group

- Northern Israel burials in Jewish cemeteries
- People who lived and died during the Halutzi period
- Deaths 1905-1940
- 132 burials
- Graves from CemōMemo

Methods

Transcribe

Copy complete
gravestone text

Categorize

Vital statistics
Age
Year of birth
Place of birth
Cause of death

Sentiment

Sacred vs
Secular
Family
Social Group
Emotion
• Lament
• Accusation

Sample gravestones



Sample gravestones

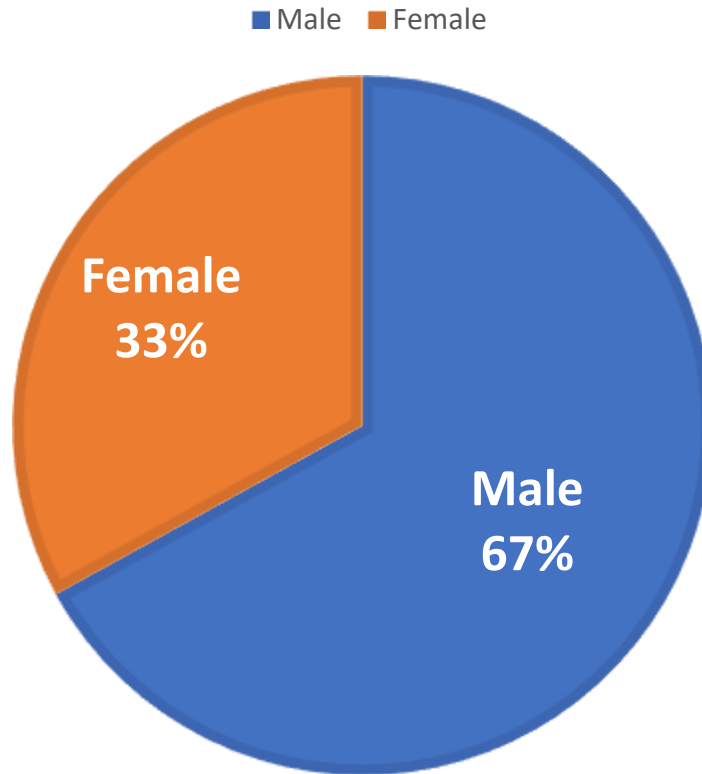


Sample gravestones

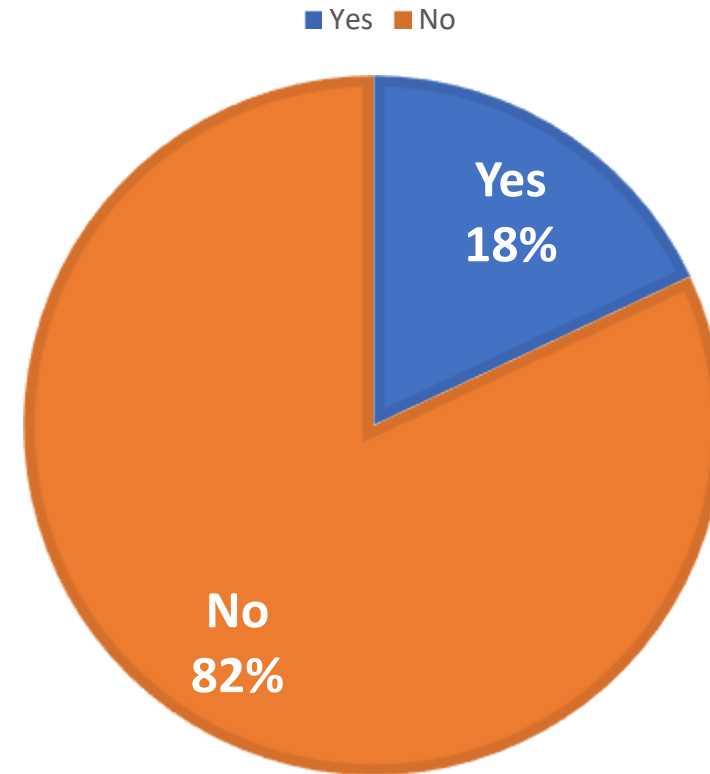


Vital Statistics

GRAVESTONE COUNT BY GENDER



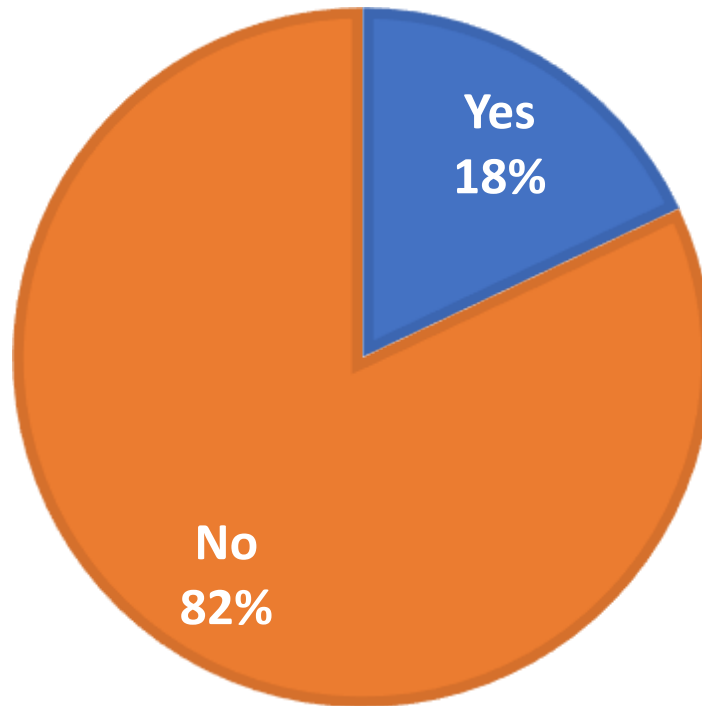
HAVE YEAR OF BIRTH



Vital Statistics

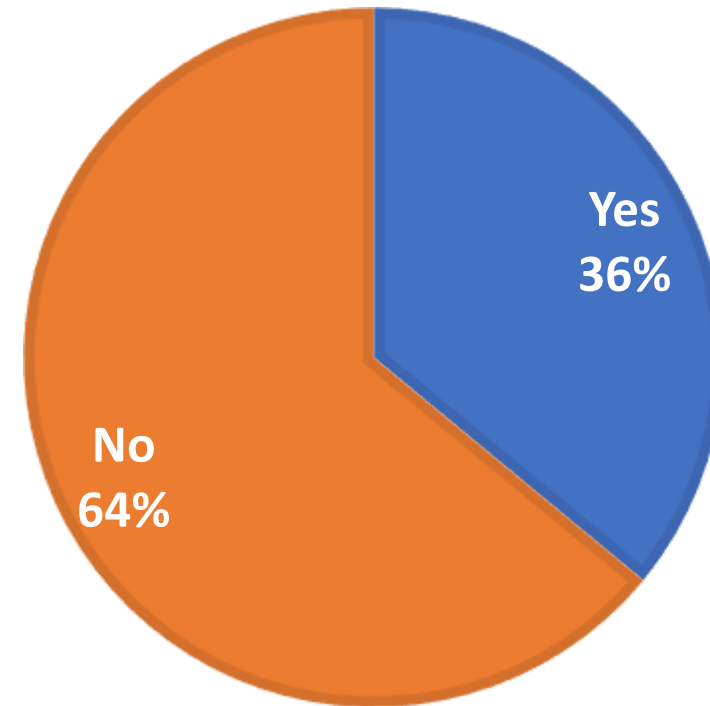
HAVE PLACE OF BIRTH

■ Yes ■ No



MENTION CAUSE OF DEATH

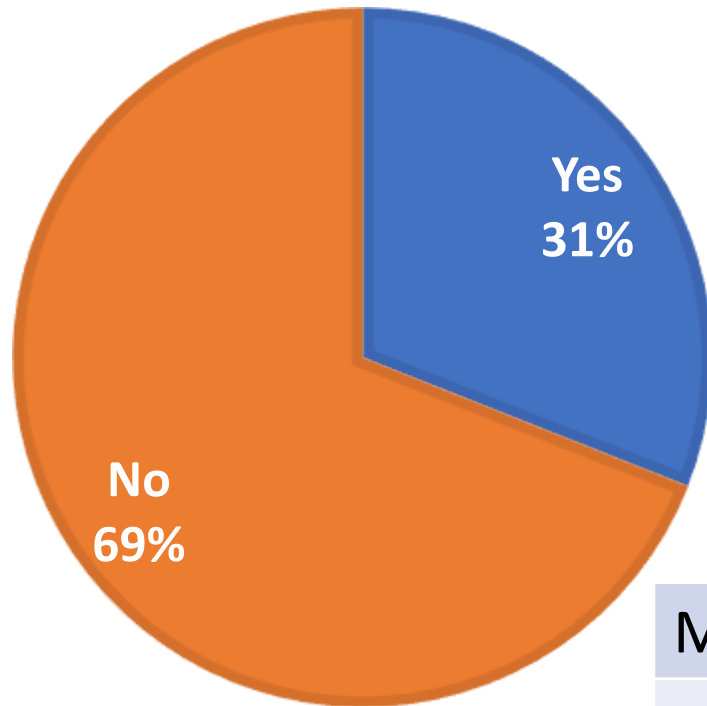
■ Yes ■ No



Vital Statistics: Age

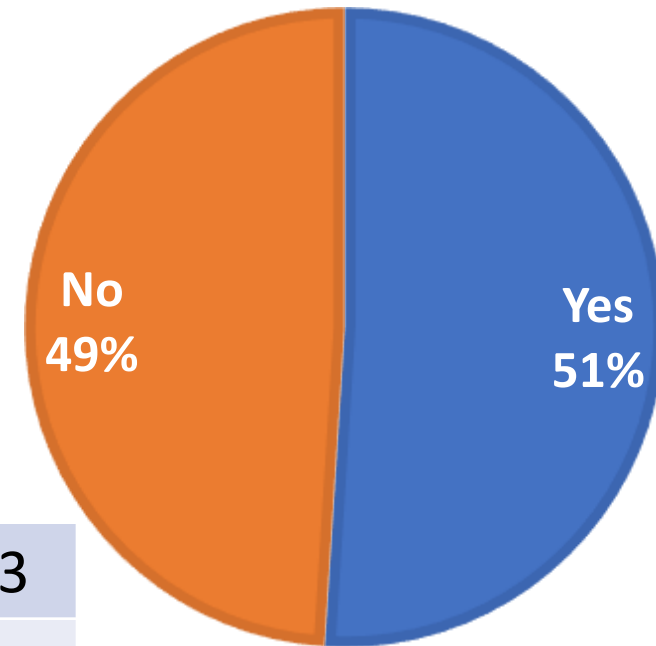
INCLUDE AGE

■ Yes ■ No



CAN DETERMINE AGE
(TABLES/CALCULATION)

■ Yes ■ No



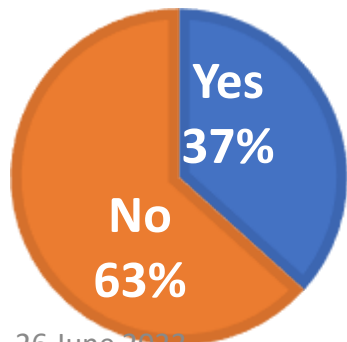
Mean Age at Death	28.3
Median Age at Death	24

Causes of Death: Suicide Gravestones

Samples with Causes

- Completed her life
- Vanished on the shores of the Kinneret
- Destroyed himself by gunshot
- Ended his life at age 30

MENTION CAUSE OF
DEATH



26 June 2023

Samples with Hints

- 23 years old, agricultural worker in the tenth year of his work in the Land, volunteered for the Workers kvutza, died on his watch
- 21 years old, fell in the quarry
- Among the first of the Third Aliyah, died on Mount Kinneret

Causes of Death: Control Gravestones

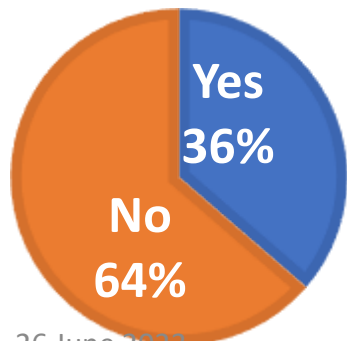
Common Causes

- Drowning: 17
- Murder: 12

Samples Causes:

- Murdered in Degania
- Fell dead by murderers...on his way from Tiberias to Kinneret
- Killed
- Killed by a donkey kick
- Died in a fire
- Suffocated on the train

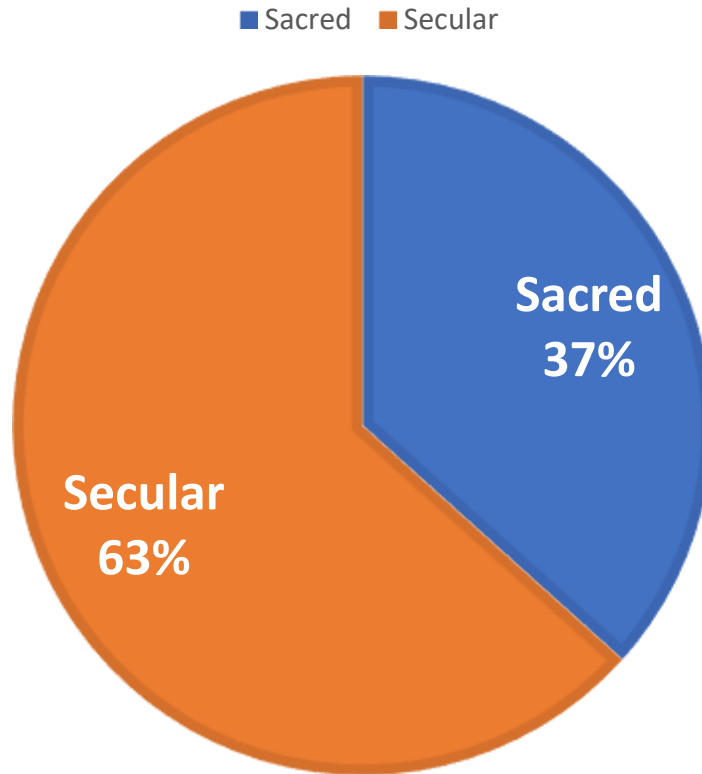
MENTION CAUSE OF
DEATH



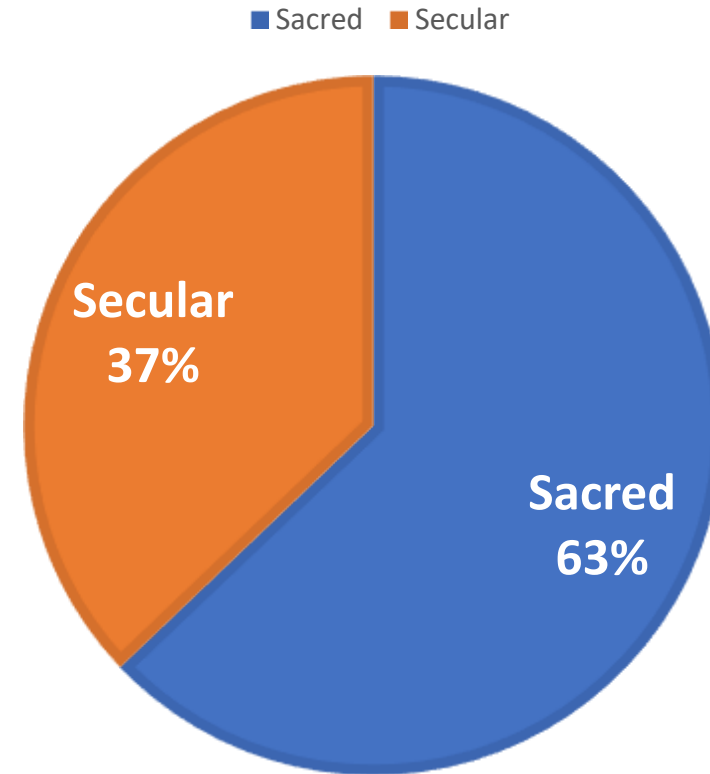
26 June 2023

Secular vs Sacred

SUICIDE GRAVESTONES

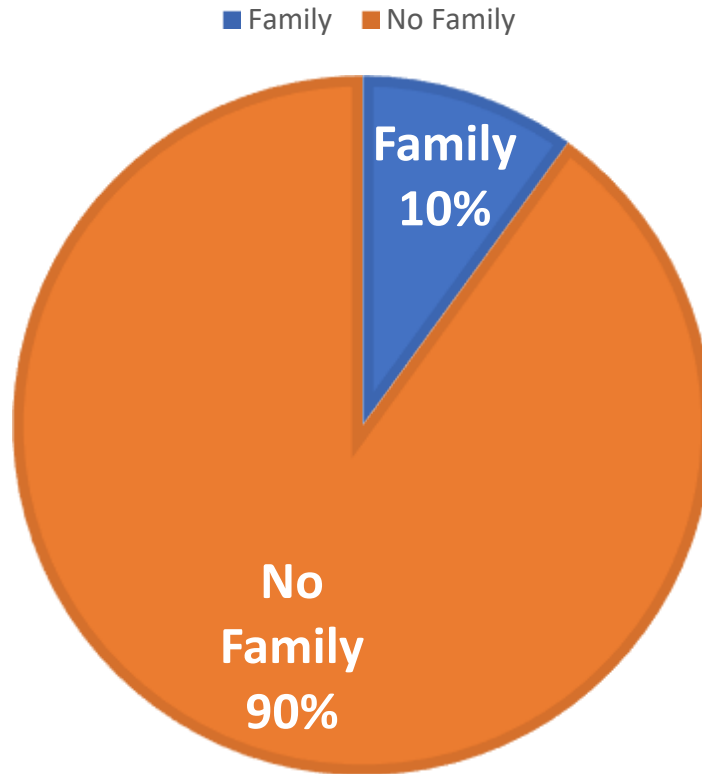


CONTROL GRAVESTONES

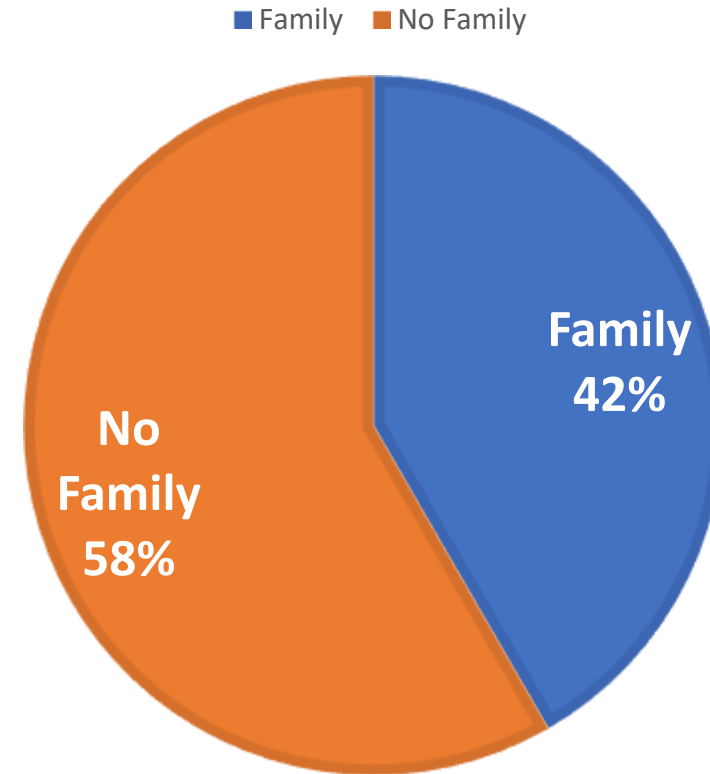


Family

SUICIDE GRAVESTONES

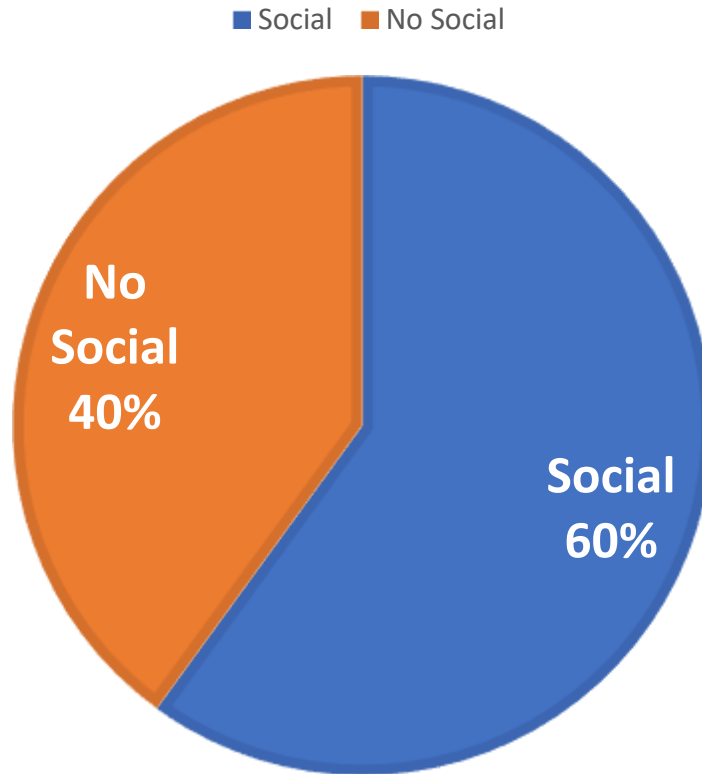


CONTROL GRAVESTONES

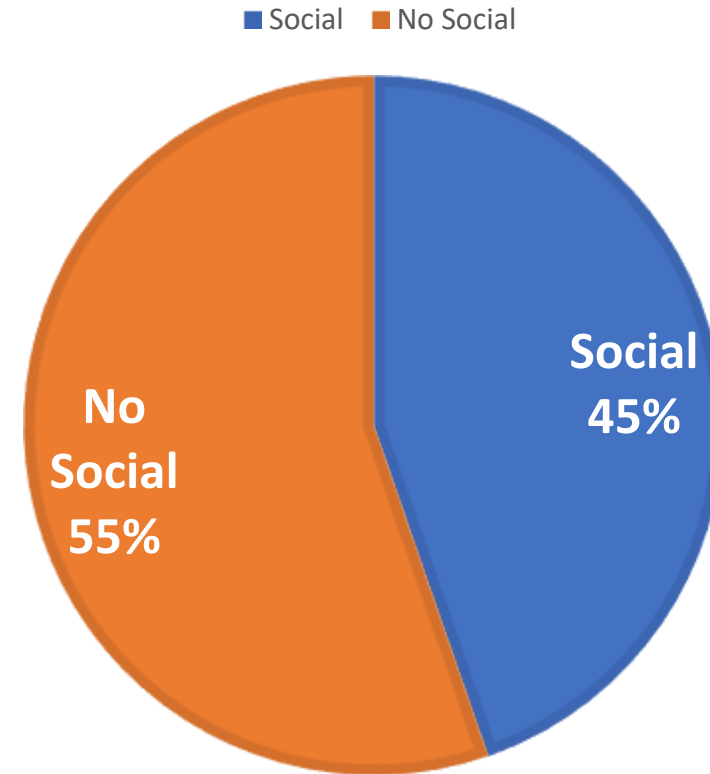


Social Group

SUICIDE GRAVESTONES



CONTROL GRAVESTONES

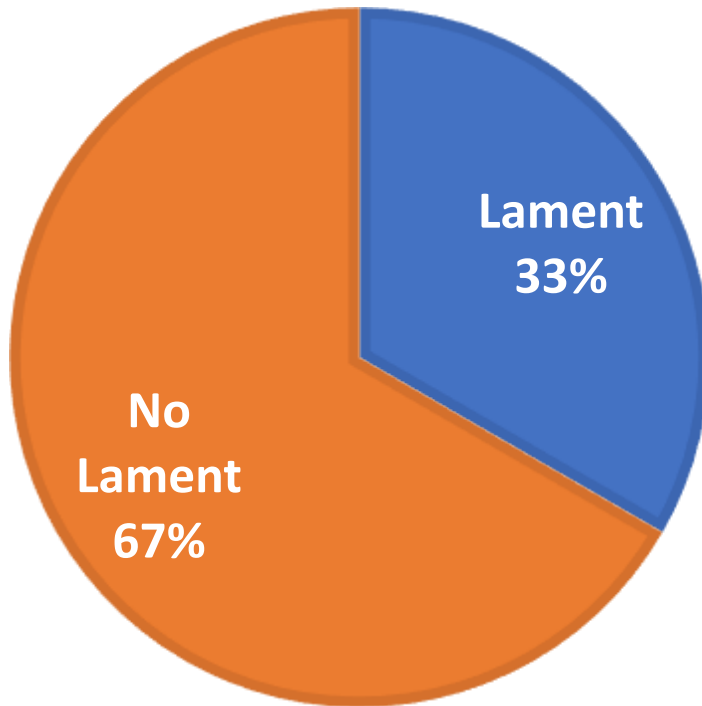


Difference not statistically significant

Epitaph Sentiments: Lament

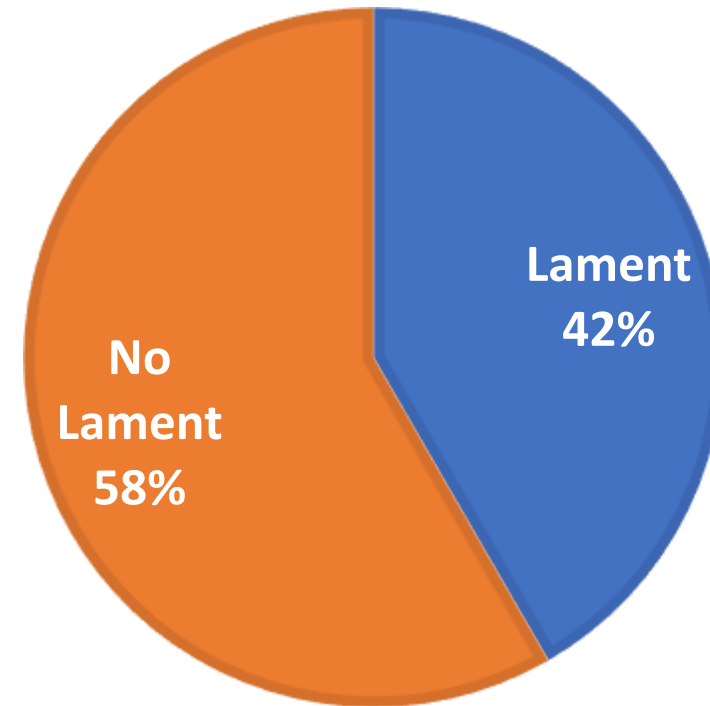
SUICIDE GRAVESTONES

■ Lament ■ No Lament



CONTROL GRAVESTONES

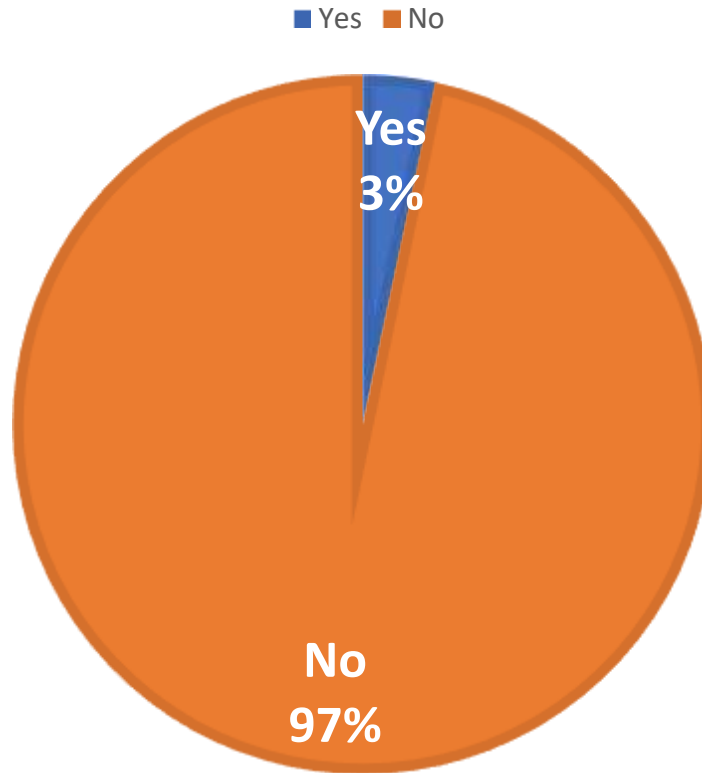
■ Lament ■ No Lament



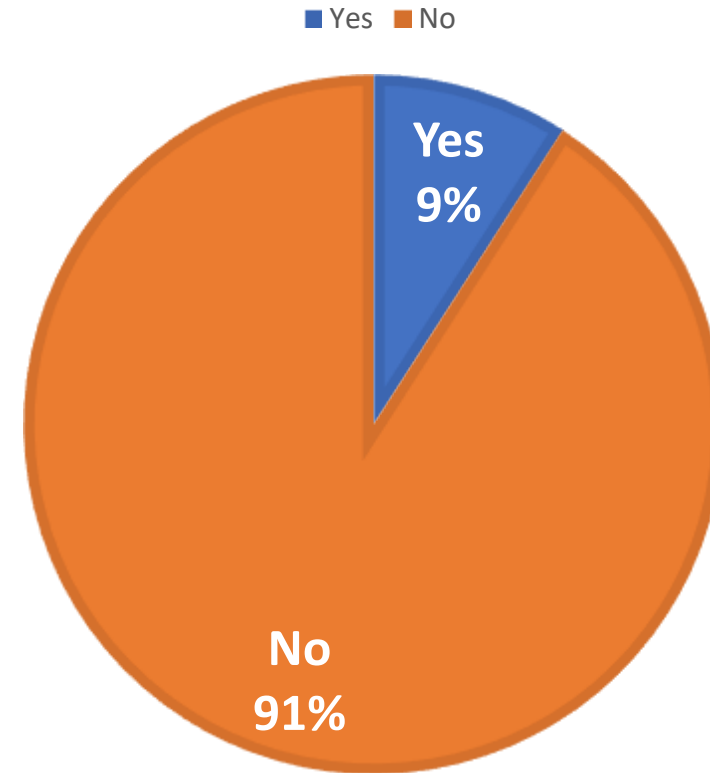
Difference not statistically significant

Epitaph Sentiments: Accusation

SUICIDE GRAVESTONES



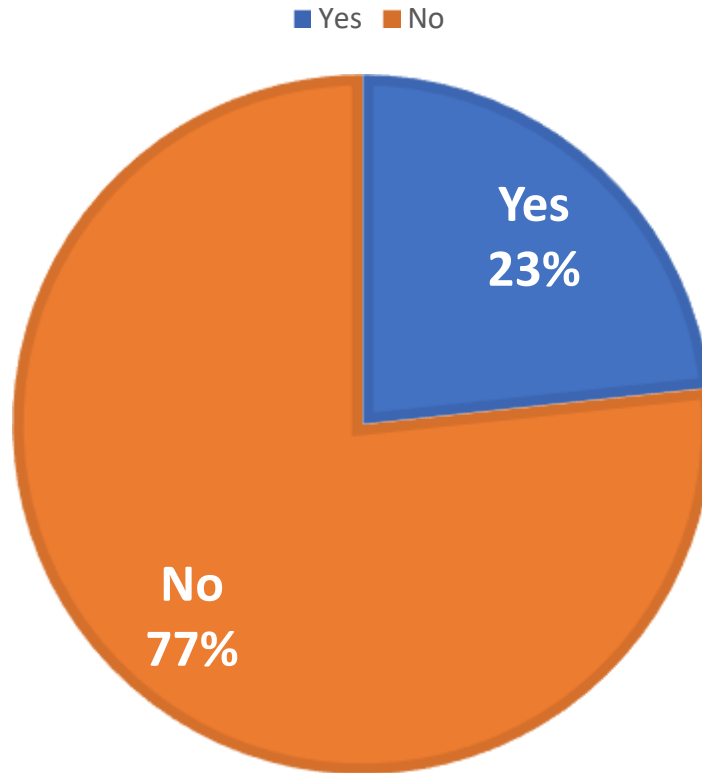
CONTROL GRAVESTONES



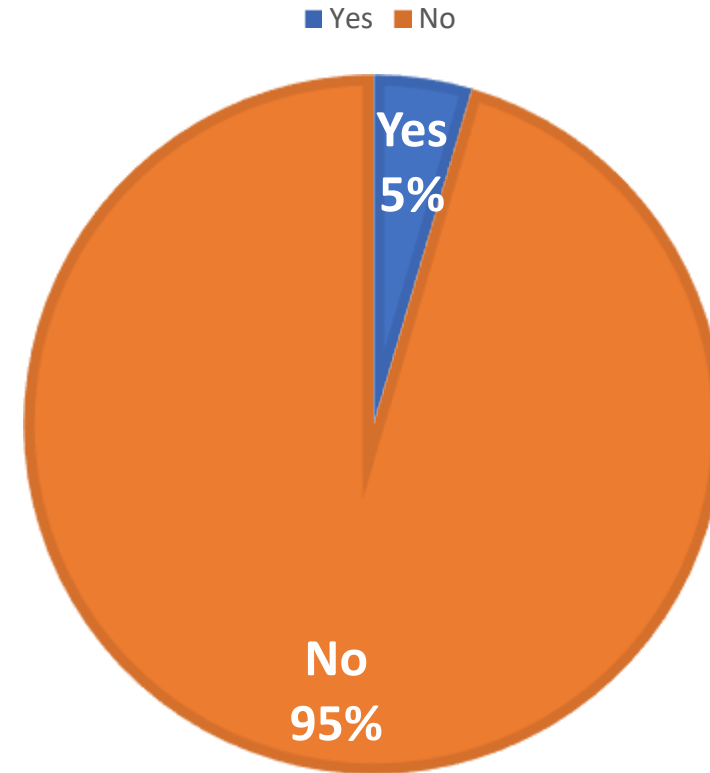
Difference not statistically significant

Epitaph Sentiments: Acceptance

SUICIDE GRAVESTONES



CONTROL GRAVESTONES



Interesting Correlations

Writing cause of death correlates positively with youth

Secular language correlates with later birth and death years

Family positively correlates with age

Accusation only appears with cause of death

Acceptance correlates with suicide

Discussion

Suicide gravestones
are typical for the
period

Suicides had more
acceptance, less
family

Sacred text was
norm in Europe, so
does not necessarily
mean religiosity

Secular text
dominated suicide,
but maybe just
terse?

Cause of death was
commonly written

- Other places elide
- Rare nowadays

Thank you!

- Michael J. May
- <http://www2.kinneret.ac.il>
- CemoMemo
- <https://www.cemomemo.org>

