



# **Sorrows of a Century: Interpreting Suicide in New Zealand, 1900-2000 (McGill-Queen's/Associated Medical Services Studies in the History of Medicine, Health, and Society)**

*John C. Weaver*

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In *Sorrows of a Century*, John Weaver describes how personal relationships, work, poverty, war, illness, and legal troubles have driven thousands to despair. His study is set in twentieth-century New Zealand where - in spite of high standards of living and a commitment to social welfare - citizens have experienced the profound losses and stresses of the human condition.

Focusing on New Zealand because it has the most comprehensive and accessible coroners' records, Weaver analyzes a staggering amount of information to determine the social and cultural factors that contribute to suicide rates. He examines the country's investigations into sudden deaths, places them within the context of major events and societal changes, and turns to witnesses' statements, suicide notes, and medical records to remark on prevention strategies. His extensive survey of twelve thousand cases also provides an insightful assessment of psychiatry and psychology in the last century.

In reviewing the motives and methods of suicide, Weaver points out the complications facing deterrence. Moving beyond the timeless present of the social sciences and the irrationality emphasized in psychology, *Sorrows of a Century* marshals testimony to highlight the historical context and rational conduct behind suicide.

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