

Emile Durkheim is one of the founding fathers of sociology that is widely used in the modern era. He is famous for one of his classical texts, suicide, which up to date focuses on the modern social pathologies that are seen to be indicated by the extraordinarily high rates of suicide whose causes are social. Durkheim drew various conclusions on the causes of committing suicide and he came up with different types of suicides based on their degree of imbalance.

Society Structure & Social Facts

Emile Durkheim was a well-known sociologist famous for his views on the structure of society. His work focused on how traditional and modern societies evolved and function. Durkheim's theories were founded on the concept of **social facts**, defined as the norms, values, and structures of society.

This perspective of society differed from other sociologists of his era as Durkheim's theories were founded on things external in nature, as opposed to those internal in nature, such as the motivations and desires of individuals. According to Durkheim, collective consciousness, values, and rules are critical to a functional society. In this lesson, we will focus on Durkheim's theories of **functionalism**, **anomie**, and **division of labor**.

Functionalism

Functionalism emphasizes a societal equilibrium. If something happens to disrupt the order and the flow of the system, society must adjust to achieve a stable state. According to Durkheim, society should be analyzed and described in terms of functions. Society is a system of interrelated parts where no one part can function without the other. These parts make up the whole of society. If one part changes, it has an impact on society as a whole.

For example, the state provides public education for children. The family of the children pays taxes, which the state uses for public education. The children who learn from public education go on to become law-abiding and working citizens, who pay taxes to support the state.

Let's look at this example again. The state provides public education for children. But a disruption or disequilibrium in the system occurs - perhaps the education is subpar, and the children drop out and become criminals. The system adjusts to improve the education and attempts to rehabilitate (through jail or other means) the criminals for them to become law-abiding and taxpaying citizens.

Durkheim actually viewed crime and delinquent behavior as a normal and necessary occurrence in the social system. He proposed that crime led to reactions from society about the crime. These shared reactions were used to create common consensuses of what individuals felt were moral and ethical norms by which to abide. These commonly held norms and values led to boundaries and rules for the society.

Division of Labor

Durkheim's concept of the **division of labor** focused on the shift in societies from a simple society to one that is more complex. He argued that traditional societies were made up of homogenous people that were more or less the same in terms of values, religious beliefs, and backgrounds. Modern societies, in contrast, are made up of a complex division of labor, beliefs, and backgrounds.

In traditional societies, the collective consciousness ruled, social norms were strong, and social behavior was well regulated. In modern societies, common consciousness was less obvious, and the regulation of social behavior was less punitive and more restitutive, aiming to restore normal activity to society

The social cause mainly involves the breakdown of social norms ('anomie') that are seen to occur both in the sexual spheres and economic spheres. The high rates of suicide can also be caused by a form of social isolation (Luke, 1969). This is what is referred to as 'egoism'. This paper will seek to investigate Emile Durkheim's accuracy on what he says about suicide about being anomic and egoistic and the reasons why some states have higher rates of suicide compared to others.

Anomic and egoistic suicide

A look at the modern geographical map of Europe indicates that the rate of committing suicide was higher in areas that were occupied by the Protestants compared to areas that were occupied by the areas that were predominantly occupied by the Catholics. The geographical areas that were occupied by the Jews had the least number of committed suicides compared to both Catholics and Protestants.

Egoistic suicide

According to Durkheim, egoistic suicide results when an individual is not in connection with the society and people they live with. These individuals tended to have very little knowledge of norms, goals, traditions and well-defined values that bound and were followed by the social groups in the society. They had little guidance, moral and social support and therefore the rate at which they were prone to committing suicide was relatively high.

The individuals experience a feeling of loneliness or outsiders and the only people they can relate with is themselves. When they are under stress they often feel helpless and isolated as they have no people to talk to. In his geographical areas of study, he discovered that unmarried individual particularly the males is the group that committed the highest number of suicides among the unmarried people.

Anomic suicide

According to Durkheim, this kind of suicide is associated with very low levels of regulations in the society. It is normally committed by the individuals who attempt to normally deviate from their expectations socially in their times of death. This type of suicide was of great interest to Durkheim. Individuals commit this kind of suicide when they are greatly stressed or there is the change that affects their lives. This can also include economic change.

If people are not regulated, they will not be able to meet the goals that they have set which will result to anger or extreme frustration with themselves. They see life being too much for them to handle and become incapable of handling life issues and they view life as being meaningless. As a result, the people get themselves detached from society. Majorly, people are attached to the society by the roles they partake either to their family, community or other social groups. A weakening in these bonds can result in this kind of suicide as well.

Durkheim divided this kind of suicide into four types: acute anomic anomie which results from a decrease in the abilities of the institutions to fulfill an individual's social needs. Chronic economic anomie he identified with the industrial revolution. The industrial goals of gaining wealth became insufficient in creating happiness which led to higher suicide rates in the rich people as compared to the poor.

Acute domestic anomie gained from sudden changes in society that made individuals unable to adapt to the current situation. Chronic domestic anomie referred to how behavioral and sexual needs were regulated in the marriage kind of setting. On this kind, bachelors tended to commit more suicides than the married men due to a lack of regulations and their set established goals.

Why some states have higher suicide rates

Surveys that have been conducted globally have shown that Scandinavian countries as well as American states as being the happiest countries on earth. These countries have rich economies,

free access to Medicare and also lower levels of crime. However, this narrative of them being happy countries and states has them experiencing a high number of suicides that are committed by their citizens.

Research done by Hamilton University in America has ranked Utah being the highest in terms of life satisfaction but being ninth in the suicide rate in the United States. New York has been ranked 45th in terms of life satisfaction and has the lowest reported number of suicide cases (“Why the Happiest States Have the Highest Suicide Rates | TIME.com,” 2011).

Over the course of time, there has been an increase in the number of deaths committed due to suicides. In Curry County, the number of reported deaths is highest. In the years between 2003 and 2010, the number of reported deaths that arose from suicide was 61. This included Brookings and Gold Beach (David, 2013). This gave the county the highest number of suicides in the state.

Suicide in the western parts of the states is higher compared to any other states. Over the recent past, new figures have come up showing Americans of the middle-aged class have committed most suicides and Oregon is leading with the number of suicides that have been committed. In Oregon, the number of men and women aged between 35-64 from 1999-2010 was 49% compared to the national tally that was indicated at 28%.

The town for several years has been ranked between seventh and ninth in the country in the number of committed suicides. For instance, in the year 2011, 685 citizens in the town committed suicide. These numbers were twice the number of the citizens who died as a result of car crashes and close to six times the number of citizens that died from homicide.

Most states have been found to struggle with the suicide rates that are higher than that of the national level. These states include New

Mexico, Alaska, Wyoming and Nevada. A new name has even been coined for the states, 'Suicide Valley'. Among the reasons for an increase in the number of suicides is the access to guns for these states. According to recent studies, these states have more laws related to guns compared to other states making it rather easy for individuals to access guns. Connections have been made between economic crises and the rising number of suicides.

There is a geographical aspect of the occurrence of the increased number of suicides. Most suicides have been reported in the rural areas of the states. There has been a limited number of mental health care services and cultures that are mainly individualistic that don't offer to the individuals seeking out help. In the states, age also plays a factor in the resulting number of deaths resulting from suicide. Mostly, people aged 85 commit suicides as a result of changes in their health or the death of their spouse. Curry County reports the highest number of deaths for this older people.

Economic factors also play a role in the increased number of suicides in the states. In the Curry County, there has been a decline in the timber and fishing industry. These are among the major sources of income of the people living in this area. This, therefore, means that there is a decrease in incomes as well as unemployment in the area. Due to lack of jobs, people are prone to experiencing depression as well as using drugs and alcohol to decrease their levels of stress. They also tend to cut themselves from the society and any form of social group that they were in. These citizens have inadequate access to social services. This results in them experiencing higher levels of stress that results to them committing suicide.

Depression has also led to an increase in the number of suicides that are committed. Depression is part of the untreated mental illnesses including schizophrenia and the bipolar disorder ("Suicide Causes. Suicide.org. Suicide Causes. Suicide.org. Suicide Causes. Suicide.org"). a few individuals are genetically susceptible to occurrences of depression. They may not necessarily appear to show

any signs of negative experiences that they encounter from both social and economic aspects. However, they are prone to experiencing stress just like any individual in the society and as a result become depressed. As a result of this genetic factor that they do not portray people are not able to identify if they are stressed hence show little or no concern. This makes an individual retract from the social groups. This may lead to individuals having to commit suicide.

Social isolation is another cause of individuals committing suicide. This can take a heavy toll on an individual's decision to commit suicide. Taking part in the society through acts of socializing and interactions are important to an individual's well-being ("15 Common Causes of Suicide: Why Do People Kill Themselves?" 2014). People start feeling very lonely when they are not able to meet their social needs and this can set in suicidal thoughts in an individual's mind. A sense of belongingness to a social group such as a family is important in life. The isolation can also result from circumstances such as unemployment. The isolation mostly results to a series of problems such as drug and substance abuse low energy as well as mental health conditions in extreme cases.

Conclusion

Emile Durkheim is more than accurate on his definition of both egoism and anomic causes of suicide. They are caused as a result of isolation from social groups in the society as well as economic factors that individuals experience in their lives. It is therefore important that individuals identify themselves with values, norms and practices that relate to social groups to avoid acts of suicide.