

Durkheim's theory of suicide



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In *Suicide* (1897), Durkheim explores the differing suicide rates among Protestants and Catholics, arguing that stronger social control among Catholics results in lower suicide rates. According to Durkheim, Catholic society has normal levels of integration while Protestant society has low levels. Overall, Durkheim treated suicide as a social fact, explaining variations in its rate on a macro level, considering society-scale phenomena such as lack of connections between people (group attachment) and lack of regulations of behavior, rather than individual's feelings and motivations.[37] [56]

This study has been extensively discussed by later scholars and several major criticisms have emerged. First, Durkheim took most of his data from earlier researchers, notably Adolph Wagner and Henry Morselli,[57] who were much more careful in generalizing from their own data. Second, later researchers found that the Protestant-Catholic differences in suicide seemed to be limited to German-speaking Europe and thus may always have been the spurious reflection of other factors.[58] Durkheim's study of suicide has been criticized as an example of the logical error termed the ecological fallacy.[59][60]

However, diverging views have contested whether Durkheim's work really contained an ecological fallacy.[61] More recent authors such as Berk (2006) have also questioned the micro-macro relations underlying Durkheim's work. [62] Some, such as Inkeles (1959),[63] Johnson (1965)[64] and Gibbs (1968), [65] have claimed that Durkheim's only intent was to explain suicide sociologically within a holistic perspective, emphasizing that " he intended

his theory to explain variation among social environments in the incidence of suicide, not the suicides of particular individuals."[66]

Despite its limitations, Durkheim's work on suicide has influenced proponents of control theory, and is often mentioned as a classic sociological study. The book pioneered modern social research and served to distinguish social science from psychology and political philosophy.