

# Sociological perspective



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A complete state of one's physical, mental and emotional well-being can be defined as health. A healthy environment or society is a factor that determines the health of an individual. From a sociological point of view, a functioning society comprises of healthy people and individuals who are able to control diseases (Durkheim, 1982). In view of murder and suicide, this research paper looks into sociological theories and sociological perspective on murder and suicide.

### **Introduction**

There are various sociological perspectives that define how society views different actions taken by an individual. The various sociological perspectives are as a result of either macro sociology or micro sociology. The macro sociology examines and individual behavior; in this note, an individual behavior can thus be as a result of the society he/she has lived in. On the other hand, micro sociology defines the way one looks at things. Sociologists have defined suicide as an act done in private and lacking approval from the society. According to the study conducted by Durkheim the level at which individuals may involve themselves with suicide acts is not determined by their level of insanity. In his study, he found out that men were more likely to get into suicide acts than were female. The rates of suicide acts were also in the increase when compared to wealthy and unmarried people. This in other words is to mean that some people are more prone to committing suicide than others. The above noted level of differences in committing suicide corresponds to an individual level of social integration. In simpler terms, individuals with greater social commitment have are less inclined to committing suicide than individuals who had little or no any commitment in the society (Durkheim, 1982).

**The sociological perspective: Social factors**

Emile Durkheim postulated “ that suicide occurs as a result of the kind of “ fit” that an individual experiences in his or her society” (Stillion & McDowell, 1996, p. 65). Durckheim (1982) uses integration theory to show how an individual suicide acts relates to his/her involvement in the society. In his elaboration of social integration theory, the author has used two variables, that is, social integration and social regulation. In view to social integration, individuals are susceptible to egoistic suicide.

Social integration variable measures the level of an individual acceptance to the shared beliefs in the society. In this case, there are those individuals who have accepted and those who have not accepted the set social beliefs. The author has distinguished this in terms of altruistic suicide and egoistic suicide. In this case, individuals who have accepted the laid down social beliefs are susceptible to altruistic suicide. Such individuals have a strong bond with the society or are deeply integrated into the society. An individual who happens to be over-integrated into the societal norms may have an ingrained tendency to kill themselves in an effort to abide to the set social imperatives.[1]On the contrary, those individuals who lack a bond between them and the society become distanced from the social life and eventually become a victim of excess individualism leading to egoistic suicide (Stillion & McDowell, 1996). In his explanation of these social factors, Durkheim argued that,

“ The suicide rates of his time were higher among Protestants than among Catholics; his explanation was that Catholics received more support from their church while Protestants were left more to their individual devices. At

the same time, more single people committed suicide than married people and fewer married women with children committed suicide than unmarried women. Durkheim believed that the incidence of egoistic suicide is inversely related to family density” (Stillion & McDowell, 1996, p. 65).

Social regulation variable “ refers to the degree of social control imposed by society on the individual’s motives and feelings” (Cutter, 1998, para. 4). In his explanations, the author has argued that those individuals who have a strong belief in social regulation are prone to fatalistic suicide while those on the contrary are susceptible to anomic suicides. Fatalistic suicide usually comes about when an individual is over-regulated and is oppressed by the society. In most cases, such oppression may be directed to a certain group of people in the society.[2]Individuals who commit anomic suicides usually lack society regulation.[3]The author has also observed that individuals who are at the middle of these two variables or who are neither in the two categories are less prone to suicide. In other words, such individuals tend to die from other causes apart from suicidal mode.

Cutter (1998) in support of social regulation have argued that when the external societal restraints are not accepted or are weak, individual aggression may be directed towards self and as a result, individuals may result into suicidal behaviors/acts. In his explanation, the author quotes the work of Gibbs and Martin (1964) arguing that the rate of suicide “ of a population varies with the stability and durability of social relations within that population” (Cutter, 1998, para. 5).

According to Stillion and McDowell (1996), a “ suicidal behavior cannot be viewed outside of the context in which it occurs” (Stillion & McDowell, 1996, p. 64). In his explain, the authors point out that individuals in their varying cultures have their unique psychological problems at varying times. An augmented increase in the understanding of how the body functions in relation to the prevailing literature on psychoanalytic literature have resulted to a decreased value in the number of individuals with this artificial physiological problem.

### **Sociological perspective on murder**

Criminological theories may either be classified in the social structure or in social process theory. The social structure theory assumes that some individuals are more susceptible to delinquency and criminality as a result of their status in the society or on the community.[4]According to the social process theory, criminal behavior results from social learning and socialization process. The society in which an individual lives in or has been brought up affects greatly his social understandings or groupings. For instance exposing a child to violent acts in the society may serve as a valuable input to later violence behaviors. In support of this insight, Ronald Holmes and Stephen Holmes argues that “ the basic development of the person in society is predicted in no small part on the unique experiences that each person is exposed to in the course of living a normal life” (Holmes & Holmes, 2009, p. 65).

### **Conclusion**

It's of great value if suicide is viewed from a sociological perspective. This will enable individuals to look at suicide deaths from different cultural

environments at varying times in history. Such factors may help the suicidal students to understand their risks and thus offer the necessary advice. One may also observe that the society in which we live in clearly defines our behaviors or the expected behavioral acts in our life.

### References

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[1]A good example can be drawn from an Indian ritual suicide acts named as Suttee. In this case, Indian widow would through themselves on their husband’s funeral pyre, and thus committing suicide. Another example can also be drawn from the Japanese Kamikaze pilots of World War II. In this case, some young boys less than 15 years of age volunteered to fly planes on a mission to destroy U. S Ships. The planes provided for use unfortunately did not have enough fuel for their trip back home. The mechanisms on the plane were also tampered with such that they would not have a safe landing

at any time. this indicates that the young boys had the love of their country such that they were ready to commit suicide in exchange.

[2]Fatalistic suicide may be found among slaves or prisoners subjected to barbaric and punitive environments. For instance, in concentration camps.

[3]Evidence to support anomic suicide can be drawn from the fact that the rates of suicide tends to be in the increase in economic depression and in times of greater prosperity. In this case, since the individual lacks social regulations, he/she therefore feels alienated from the society (irrespective of societal wellbeing) and subsequently commits suicide.

[4]In this regard, poor people are assumed to be more criminally inclined since they have actually do not have access to the path leading to prosperity. However, although this is true to some extent, there is no evidence pointing out that murderers are poor or rich, black or white. In this regard therefore, one may argue that such killers may not have a material gain motive but rather, act on psychological gains.