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Suicide in Sociological Perspective: From Classical, Modern to Postmodern Views

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Abstract

Suicide is a psychological issue that affects individuals, but it also represents complicated societal dynamics and integration issues in contemporary society, which makes this research significant. This study's goal is to examine the phenomena of suicide from a sociological standpoint, drawing on Emile Durkheim's classical ideas as well as contemporary sociological theories including conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, and critical sociology. The methodology is qualitative library research using a variety of primary and secondary materials from national and international books and scientific journals. According to the study's findings, societal factors that greatly influence suicidal behavior include social stigma, structural inequity, inadequate social cohesion, and the pressures of consumerist culture and social media. In conclusion, a sociological perspective offers a more thorough comprehension of suicide as a social occurrence, indicating that preventative tactics ought to concentrate on societal structural and cultural shifts in addition to focusing on people.

Keywords: ***Critical Sociology, Social Inequality, Suicide, Symbolic Interactionism***

INTRODUCTION

The social phenomena of suicide is frightening and extremely complicated. Suicide rates have risen worldwide during the last 20 years, in both developed and developing nations. This phenomena involves broader social, cultural, economic, and societal ideals in addition to having an impact on people's psychological health. According to World Health Organization (WHO) data, there is a worrying trend in Indonesia alone, especially among adolescents and young adults who frequently deal with high cultural expectations that aren't always realistic, social isolation, and major life stressors (WHO, 2023; World Health Organization, 2019).

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Up until now, mental illnesses or individual psychological stress have frequently been the only explanations for suicide. This method has been prevalent in psychiatry and psychology, which see suicide behavior as a symptom of personality problems, depression, or other mental illnesses. Sociology, on the other hand, presents suicide as a social occurrence that may be explained by the dynamics and structure of society, providing an alternative viewpoint. In this situation, sociology sees the individual as a component of a broader social system rather than the individual as the main cause. Emile Durkheim, one of the pioneers of contemporary sociology, was a key player in the creation of this way of thought. In his enormous work (Durkheim, 1898), The first person to thoroughly examine suicide as a social reality was Durkheim. He maintained that suicide is a reflection of the societal circumstances surrounding the individual as well as an expression of personal pain. Durkheim therefore underlined that a society's degree of social integration and moral regulation might be used to examine its suicide rate (Durkheim, 2005).

Based on the social relationships between people and society, Durkheim divided suicide into four categories: fatalistic, anomic, altruistic, and egoistic suicide. Each kind represents a distinct interaction between the person and society, including egoistic (poor social integration), altruistic (strong social bonds), anomic (weak normative control), and fatalistic (extreme social pressure) (Dohrenwend, 1959). This idea highlights that suicide is not just a human choice, but rather a reflection of social system imbalances. Later, Durkheim's ideas served as a crucial basis for the growth of sociological theories regarding suicide in the next era. More intricate and contextual viewpoints were subsequently developed by contemporary sociologists like Zygmunt Bauman, Howard Becker, and C. Wright Mills. The conflict theory approach, for instance, sees institutional injustice, social marginalization, and economic inequality as possible causes of suicide conduct, especially among the designated vulnerable groups or lower classes by Mills (Staubmann, 2021). The symbolic interactionism approach, on the other hand, emphasizes the value of social interaction and the significance that people place on their life experiences. In this situation, societal stigma, unfavorable labeling, or feelings of social group rejection can all lead to suicide (Goffman, 1974). Furthermore, social media has emerged as a new arena in the current digital era where identity building and social pressure have a significant impact on a person's mental health. According to recent research, social comparison, cyberbullying, and one's online persona all enhance feelings of loneliness, low self-worth, and anxiety, all of which can result in suicide, particularly in young people (Wray, Colen, & Pescosolido, 2011).

Therefore, the sociological approach enables us to see suicide as the outcome of intricate interactions between people and the social institutions in their environment rather than just as a

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symptom of personal deviance. In-depth analysis of the ways in which sociological viewpoints—from Durkheim's classical theory to modern and contemporary sociological thought—explain the phenomena of suicide is the goal of this essay. It is believed that with a more thorough knowledge, this article might support preventive initiatives that aim for both individualistic and more significant social change.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study combines a library research method with a qualitative approach. Because the study intends to investigate and comprehend the theoretical frameworks and analytical techniques employed in sociology to explain the phenomena of suicide, this approach was used (Synder, 2021; Xiao & Watson, 2019). To acquire a thorough grasp of the social dynamics underpinning suicidal conduct, researchers can use literature studies to examine a variety of scientific sources, including books, journal articles, organizational reports, and scholarly publications. Primary and secondary literature pertinent to the research issue served as the study's data sources. Classic books like Emile Durkheim's Le Suicide were included in the primary literature (Durkheim, 2005), while secondary literature includes writings from modern and contemporary sociologists such as C. Wright Mills in (Staubmann, 2021), (Goffman, 1974), as well as papers published in scholarly publications like Social Science Quarterly and the Annual Review of Sociology. Keywords like "suicide in sociology," "Durkheim suicide typology," "sociological theories of suicide," and "social causes of suicide" were used in a methodical manner to collect data. In order to compare how different sociological theories—from Durkheim's theory of social integration to the viewpoints of symbolic interactionism and conflict theory—explain the causes of suicide, data analysis was done utilizing comparative and interpretative methodologies. Three primary criteria served as the foundation for the source selection process: (3) publications from reputable journals or scholarly works that are well-known in the scientific community; (2) the author's authority in the field of sociology; and (3) relevance to the topic of suicide in a sociological context (Danandjaja, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Durkheim and the Concept of Social Facts About Suicide

In his 1897 essay Le Suicide, renowned French sociologist Emile Durkheim presented a groundbreaking theory of suicide. Durkheim stressed in this work that suicide is a social phenomena impacted by the dynamics and structure of society rather than only the product of an

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individual's psychological state. He popularized the idea of "social facts," which are ways of feeling, thinking, and acting that are external to the individual but have the ability to influence conduct (Marson & Lillis, 2019). Durkheim classified suicide into four types based on the level of social integration and regulation in society:

1. Egoistic Suicide

People who feel socially isolated or unattached to social groupings commit egoistic suicide. According to Durkheim, people who have inadequate social ties—that is, no supportive families or communities—are more likely to commit suicide. Social isolation and a lack of affiliation with family, community, or religious organizations might raise the risk of suicide, as exemplified by egoistic suicide. As social creatures, humans need ties and purpose in social connections to deal with life's challenges, according to Durkheim. People are more prone to despair when these ties deteriorate For example, students from remote areas who move to large cities without family or community support often face significant mental stress. Isolation, adaptation difficulties, and the absence of a social network leave them feeling isolated (Chu et al., 2021). If they do not have access to counseling services or communities, the risk of depression and suicide increases. Such cases are often reported in large cities such as Jakarta, Tokyo, or Seoul.

2. Altruistic Suicide

Conversely, altruistic suicide occurs when individuals are overly integrated into social groups, so that individual interests are considered less important than group interests. In this situation, individuals may feel obligated to sacrifice themselves for the group. Altruistic suicide arises in societies where loyalty to the group is very dominant and individuals have no room to consider their personal interests. Such actions are often seen as noble sacrifices, although from a sociological perspective, they reflect the loss of individual autonomy due to extreme social integration pressures. Durkheim emphasized that a balance between social integration and regulation is crucial for maintaining mental health and the survival of individuals within society. Historical examples include the practice of Sati in India, where widows would immolate themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres (Contributors, 2025), know the soldiers who sacrificed themselves in battle for the honor of their country.

3. Anomic Suicide

Anomic suicide occurs as a result of weak social regulation, especially when society experiences drastic changes that cause confusion about norms and values. For example, an economic crisis or rapid social change can cause individuals to feel lost and without a sense of purpose in life. Durkheim noted that suicide rates increase during periods of significant economic

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change, whether during prosperity or recession. During the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis that affected countries such as Indonesia, South Korea, and Thailand, there was a significant increase in suicide cases (Chang, Gunnell, Sterne, Lu, & Cheng, 2009). In a short time, many people lost their businesses, employment, and social standing. The prior rules that promised security and prosperity abruptly stopped applying, causing them to experience value confusion. This led to anomie, or regulatory uncertainty, which made some people feel helpless and that they had no control over their life.

4. Fatalistic Suicide

Fatalistic suicide happens when people feel oppressed and despondent about the future due to excessively rigid social regulations. When someone is subjected to severe and harsh social regulations and has no other option except to take their own life, this is known as fatalistic suicide. In contrast to anomic suicide, which happens when there are no rules, fatalistic suicide happens when there are too many rules that drive people to lose their sense of hope and autonomy. Durkheim taught that a healthy society must maintain a balance between freedom and social control, so that individuals do not feel too free (anomic) or too constrained (fatalistic). Examples include slaves or prisoners living under extreme oppression, where they feel they have no control over their own lives. Durkheim emphasized that suicide rates in society can be explained through an analysis of social structure, not just individual factors (Amnesty International, 2014). He demonstrates how societal shifts, such the breakdown of religious principles or financial crises, can make suicide more likely. Suicide must therefore be viewed as a complicated social phenomenon that is impacted by societal integration and control.

Suicide in the Perspective of Conflict Theory

In sociology, conflict theory emphasizes how social inequality, unequal power distribution, and elite groups' dominance over subordinate groups can lead to a variety of social tensions, including suicide. This method highlights the notion that oppressive and unfair social structures are a contributing factor in suicide in addition to personal psychological considerations (Prayogi, 2023).

1. Contributions by C. Wright Mills and Ralf Dahrendorf

The term "power elite" was used by renowned American sociologist C. Wright Mills to refer to a select few people who have societal authority in the areas of politics, the economy, and the military. According to Mills, this elite's dominance leads to serious structural inequality, which makes those from lower socioeconomic groups feel alone, helpless, and despairing. This can

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eventually push them to despair and take their own lives (Adler, du Gay, Morgan, Reed, & Barratt, 2015).

Meanwhile, Ralf Dahrendorf emphasizes that social conflict is an inherent part of social structure. He argues that tensions between groups that have authority and those that do not can generate significant social pressure. When individuals feel trapped in rigid social structures and have no opportunity for social mobility, they may experience deep feelings of frustration, which can contribute to the decision to end their lives.

2. Social inequality As a Risk Factor for Suicide

Various studies show that social and economic inequality correlates with higher suicide rates. Individuals living in poverty, unemployment, or marginalized social conditions often face significant psychosocial stress. Lack of access to resources, mental health services, and social support can exacerbate this situation, increasing the risk of suicide (Shamsaei, Yaghmaei, & Haghighi, 2020). Various studies show that social and economic inequality correlates with higher suicide rates. Individuals living in poverty, unemployment, or marginalized social conditions often face significant psychosocial stress. Lack of access to resources, mental health services, and social support can exacerbate this situation, increasing the risk of suicide.

3. Case Study: Suicide in Gaza

A clear example of how structural conflict and socioeconomic injustice can fuel an increase in suicide rates is the situation in the Gaza Strip. Residents of Gaza have experienced incredibly harsh living conditions, such as widespread unemployment, extreme poverty, and restricted access to essential services, ever since exterior authorities imposed a blockade and limitations. The suicide of 22-year-old student and gifted writer Mohanned Younis is one prominent example. In August 2017, Younis committed himself, expressing the hopelessness that many young people in Gaza were experiencing as a result of the worsening social and economic circumstances. This instance demonstrates how people might become deeply depressed due to systemic pressures and a lack of hope (“The Guardian – International Edition,” 2025).

In order to lessen inequality and give vulnerable people the help they need, the conflict theory approach to suicide highlights the necessity of structural reforms in society. Suicide rates can be decreased through policies that build social support networks, increase access to mental health and education services, and lessen poverty. Governments and civil society groups should also prioritize identifying and addressing the underlying causes of socioeconomic disparity. People will have greater chances to attain well-being and stay away from the hopelessness that might result in suicide if a more just and inclusive social environment is established.

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Symbolic Interactionism and Social Meaning

The foundation of symbolic interactionism lies in the ideas of George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, who highlighted how social interactions involving symbols and meanings help people develop their identities and behaviors. Individuals use these symbols—which include language, gestures, and social norms—as a basis to comprehend their social environment and decide what behavior is suitable. Negative societal meanings, such stigma and labeling, can cause people to feel alone and lose their sense of purpose in life when it comes to suicide (Oexle et al., 2017). This method emphasizes how social meanings created through everyday encounters also have an impact on suicide. People who experience negative labeling and social stigma may feel rejected and lose their sense of purpose in life. A victim of bullying or discrimination, for instance, could feel hopeless since society does not accept their identity.

In sociology, the symbolic interactionism method highlights how social interaction and collectively generated meaning impact human behavior, even extreme behaviors like suicide. According to this interpretation, suicide is not only the outcome of a person's psychological state but also a reaction to the social meaning that the environment around them assigns through everyday encounters. Howard S. Becker's labeling theory is one of the key ideas of symbolic interactionism. This idea holds that labels imposed by society are what cause deviance rather than an action's intrinsic qualities. Negative labels, such "deviant" or "abnormal," might cause someone to internalize them and behave in ways that are congruent with them, even taking their own life (Wenz, 1978). Social stigma also plays an important role in this process. Stigma can cause individuals to feel ashamed, isolated, and unaccepted by society. In the context of mental health, stigmatization of mental illness can prevent individuals from seeking help, which can ultimately worsen their condition and increase the risk of suicide. Another significant factor in this process is social stigma. People who are stigmatized may experience feelings of shame, loneliness, and social rejection. Because mental illness is stigmatized, people may be discouraged from getting treatment, which can exacerbate their condition and raise their risk of suicide.

Another significant factor in this process is social stigma. People who are stigmatized may experience feelings of shame, loneliness, and social rejection. When it comes to mental health, the stigma associated with mental illnesses can keep people from getting treatment, which can exacerbate their condition and raise their risk of suicide. Several cases of suicide resulting from bullying and social stigma highlight how negative social interactions can drive individuals to despair:

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a. Rehtaeh Parsons (Kanada, 2013): After pictures of Rehtaeh, a 17-year-old teen, being sexually assaulted became viral online, she was subjected to extreme bullying. No legal action was taken despite her family reporting the event to the authorities. Rehtaeh felt alone and despondent as a result of the ongoing bullying and the court system's lack of support, which finally caused her to commit herself (Wikipedia Contributors, 2023).
b. Sladjana Vidović (AS, 2008): Sladjana, a 16-year-old student, experienced bullying due to her accent and ethnic heritage. Her family informed the school about the bullying, but nothing was done about it. Sladjana eventually committed herself, drawing worldwide attention to her school's bullying culture (Contributors, 2024).
c. Hamed Nastoh (Kanada, 2000): A 14-year-old kid named Hamed was the target of bullying because his peers thought he was different. Hamed wrote in a note he left behind that he could no longer put up with the bullying he was going through. This instance demonstrates how persistent bullying may make someone feel unworthy and lead them to consider suicide (Contributors, 2023).

According to the Symbolic Interactionism approach, recognizing and altering the harmful social meanings created by everyday encounters is crucial to preventing suicide. Among the actions that can be performed are: (1) Anti-Stigma Education: Spreading knowledge about how stigma and labeling affect people, especially those with mental health issues, (2) Social Intervention: Creating initiatives that aim to lessen bullying behavior and create a welcoming and inclusive social environment (3) Psychosocial Support: Offering therapy and psychosocial support services to people who are being bullied or stigmatized in order to assist them in finding purpose in their life (4) School Policies: Putting in place strong anti-bullying guidelines in classrooms and educating school personnel on how to deal with bullying situations.

Critical Sociology and Contemporary Culture: Examining Suicide in Modern Society

High living standards, social media pressure, and consumerist culture all have an impact on people's mental health, according to critical and postmodern sociology. Because success, looks, and productivity are often idolized in modern culture, those who can't meet these expectations feel inadequate and alienated from others (Mueller, Abrutyn, Pescosolido, & Diefendorf, 2021). Consumerism has taken over as the predominant standard of living in modern society. This culture is reinforced in large part by social media, where users frequently showcase their opulent lifestyles and individual accomplishments. This can cause tension and anxiety by putting societal pressure on others to adopt similar practices (Halopos, 2025; Liţan, 2025). According to research, those

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who feel like they can't live up to the social norms set by social media typically have worse self-esteem and are more likely to suffer from mental illnesses. People may have feelings of worthlessness if they are unable to live up to the demand to seem flawless and prosperous. In addition to promoting materialism, social media can be detrimental to people's mental health. Depression, low self-esteem, and jealousy can result from continuously being exposed to the seemingly ideal lives of others. Negative remarks on social media and cyberbullying can also make someone's mental health issue worse. The live-streamed suicide cases on social media highlight just how significant the influence of these platforms can be on an individual's decision to end their life (Imhoff, Bertlich, & Frenken, 2022) This situation emphasizes the necessity of more stringent oversight and control over content that may be detrimental to users' mental health. A number of critical sociological evaluations of suicide instances.

a. The Case of a Junior High School Student's Suicide in Cikarang (2020): Two days after jumping from the fourth story of his school, a student at SMP 147 Cikarang passed away. Although the cause of this suicide case is still unknown, several theories have been put forth, including sadness brought on by the loss of a parent, spousal abuse, and bullying at school. Internet users are talking about the victim's last chat with his pals and his posts on social media (Rizka, 2020).
b. The case of Molly Russell in the United Kingdom (2017): Molly, a 14-year-old teen, was discovered dead following a period of despair that was purportedly brought on by offensive material on social media. The British government requested that social media companies remove content that is unsuitable for children and teenagers as a result of this case (Swastiningrum, 2025).
c. Live Suicide Case in Palembang (2022): In Palembang, a 23-year-old man committed suicide via live-streaming it on social media. The public was stunned by this case, which sparked worries about social media's detrimental effects on mental health (Kurniawan, 2022).

Understanding the social and cultural factors that shape people's behavior is crucial, according to critical and postmodern sociological perspectives. Several actions can be performed to address the problem of suicide brought on by social and media pressures, such as: (1) Media Literacy Education: Educating the public about the detrimental effects of social media and the significance of using it responsibly; (2) Social Media Content Regulation: Pressing social media companies to take down content that might endanger the mental health of their users, particularly children and teenagers; (3) Mental Health Support: Making mental health services more easily accessible to those who are suffering from psychological disorders and social pressure; and (4)

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Anti-Stigma Campaigns: lowering the stigma associated with mental illnesses and empowering people to seek help without feeling ashamed or afraid. High living standards, social media pressure, and consumerist culture all have an impact on people's mental health, according to critical and postmodern sociology. Success, attractiveness, and productivity are often idolized in modern society, making people who fall short feel inadequate and socially ostracized.

CONCLUSION

Suicide is a complicated social issue that defies easy explanation from a psychological perspective. Suicide is a reflection of social tensions, the breakdown of values, and structural stressors in society, according to sociological viewpoints that range from Emile Durkheim's classical theory to contemporary thought and postmodernism. According to Durkheim, a significant factor influencing suicide is the degree of social integration and regulation. Conflict theory, meanwhile, emphasizes how social exclusion and inequality contribute to hopelessness. Symbolic interactionism describes how social meanings, stigma, and labeling push people to their breaking point. Social media creates additional pressures for identity creation in the digital age, which makes these situations worse. In order to create a welcoming and enabling social environment, suicide prevention strategies must be multifaceted and include social transformation, media literacy, anti-stigma education, and psychosocial support.

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