

**Emile Durkheim**

- Emile Durkheim (French Sociologist) was one of the founding fathers of Sociology as a discipline.
- Some of his famous contributions are “On the Division of Social Labor”, “The Rules of Sociological Method”, “Suicide” and “The Elementary forms of Religious Life”.
- In The Rules of Sociological Method, he writes that the distinctive subject matter of sociology should be social facts.
- Social Facts are the social structure, cultural norms and values external to and coercive of the actor. They consist the ways of acting, feeling and thinking that are external to the individual with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him/her.
  - For example- If you do not care about the mode of dress customary in your tradition/country and in your social class then this might prove laughter and social distancing.

- Collectives reflect a density, regulation, birth rate and death rate. Thus, association is important and social facts emerge from the association.

### **Division of Labour (1893)**

- Modern complex society irrespective of declining significance of traditional moral beliefs is not tending towards disintegration.
- To Durkheim division of labour is a material social fact that involves degree to which tasks, responsibilities are specialized.
- Durkheim has proposed two kinds of social solidarity with different set of rules.
  - Mechanical solidarity – religion formed the source of common belief and sentiments of “collective conscience”. All laws were originally contained within religious framework and most primitive forms of society have laws which are repressive (repressive law is criminal in nature embodied in the state).

- Social Facts are to be treated as things and should be studied empirically not philosophically.
- Ideas can be known philosophically but things can not be conceived by purely mental activity. Thus, he propagated for empirical research.
- Social facts are external to and coercive of the actor – For him psychological facts were basically inherited phenomena (internal to individual) and social facts were things that were external.
- Social facts can be of two types:
  - Material social facts – are real, material entities, but are of lesser significance in Durkheim's work.
    - Example- Law, architecture, Church, State
  - Non-material social facts – Norms (informal guideline), values (principles/standard behaviour), mores (customs or ways of doing things) generally culture are example of non-material social fact.
    - Example – Morality, collective conscience, etc.

- In these societies cohesion is based on mechanical solidarity.
- Property is shared in common.
- Strongly formed set of sentiments and beliefs shared by all members of a community.
- Here less scope is there for differentiation between individuals and each individual is considered as a microcosm of the whole.
- Organic solidarity – Displacement of repressive laws by restitutive law as society develops.
  - Higher level of social development the relative proportion of restitutive laws (civil laws) within the judicial structure.
  - Difference in division of labour brings in the existence of restitutive law.
  - With growth of division of labour more individual interest will arise and contractual relations will expand.
- Acc. to Durkheim all contracts are regulated by different prescription. And however complex division of labour the society does not become reduced to chaos of short-term contractual alliances.

- Acc. to Durkheim division of labour is a material social fact as it is the pattern of interaction in the social world.

- In his work on suicide, Durkheim's focus is upon social bonds, which are never between individuals or groups but are always seen as regulating individual desires' and passions or attaching individuals to collective goals and meanings.
- Durkheim – Suicide is applied to all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself/herself which he/she knows will produce this result.
- He was interested in explaining the differences in suicide rates that is why one group had a higher suicide rate than the other.
- He was not interested in studying any specific case/individual who committed suicide (that is for psychologists).

- Acc to him, distribution of suicide in countries of western Europe showed a close relationship between suicide rates and religious domination.
- Predominantly Catholic countries had lower suicide rate than those predominantly Protestants.
- To him, in order to explain the pattern of suicide rates we must investigate the social fact and in this case the social organisation of the two Churches.
- Protestantism is founded upon the promotion of a free enquiry. Protestant is before God. Whereas, Catholic Church is formed around the traditional hierarchy of the priesthood whose authority is binding in matters of religious dogma.



- Acc to him, Catholics consider that all Churches are under one Pope and thus, Protestantism is less strongly integrated Church than Catholicism.
- The degree of integration in other sectors of society is related to suicide rates in comparable way.
- Durkheim finds that unmarried individual generally show higher rates of suicide than married persons of comparable age and there is an inverse relation between suicide and size of the conjugal unit – greater number of children in the family lower the suicide rate.
- Suicide decline in the times of national political crisis and in times of war (among armed forces and civilian population of both sexes).
- Political crisis and wars stimulate an increased level of involvement with a definite set of events – bring stronger integration of society.
- The greater the Church attendance the lower the approval of suicide.

- He demonstrated that social fact in particular social currents are external to and coercive of the individual.
- Acc. to Durkheim there are four types of suicide and he linked each type of suicide to integration or regulation of the society.
- Integration refers to the degree to which collective sentiments are shared and individual are subordinate to the group.
- Regulation refers to degree of external constraints on people.
  - Egoistic Suicide-
    - This form is found in societies where integration among individuals is low.
    - Here the individual is not well integrated into the society, collectives or groups/larger social unit.
    - Lack of integration leads to a sense of meaninglessness among the individuals.
    - Societies with strong collective conscience and the protective, enveloping social currents that flow from it are likely to prevent the widespread occurrence of egoistic suicide providing a strong sense of broader meaning of their lives.

- Egoistic Suicide-

- Acc to him when social currents are weak individual easily surmount the collective conscience and do as they wish.
- In large-scale social units with a weak collective conscience individual are left to pursue their private interests in whatever way they wish.
- Declining social and familial bonds.
- Unrestrained egoism leads to considerable personal dissatisfaction as all needs can not be fulfilled and this leads to generation of dissatisfaction and for some suicide.
  - Ex- Religious groups, families, etc. act as strong collective conscience and discourage suicide.
- In case of egoistic suicide even if the individual is surrounded by weak collective conscience Durkheim finds that social forces are considered as important for these suicides to occur.

- Altruistic Suicide-

- It is more likely to occur where integration is too strong. The individual is forced to commit suicide as needs of the individual are not important.

- Altruistic Suicide-

- Ex- Mass suicide of the followers of Reverend Jim Jones in Jonestown, Guyana (S.America).
- Here followers of the Peoples Temple in 1978 drank cyanide laced flavour aid drink and more than 900 followers died.



<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.insider.com%2Fjonestown-guyana-abandoned-photos&psig=AOvVaw2PGUWq-rMzaDHYYJbT6NQr&ust=1600750050844000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAIQjRxqFwoTCLi6uOS4-esCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAD> accessed on 11th September 2020.

## Altruistic Suicide-

- Individual commits suicide for the betterment/upholding the social integration and culture.
  - Ex- Ancient Egypt – Pyramids have Kings with their servants, pets and followers.
- In all cases, however, the suicides are condoned by the group. The individual commits suicide for something they love better than themselves (Durkheim, 1897/1966, p. 228).
- Excessively integrated groups tend to be relatively small in size. In the ideal type of over-integrated society, everyone is the same. Persons have the same religious beliefs, same culture beliefs and practices, and have similar occupations such as farmer or warrior.

## Altruistic Suicide-

- Further, the rate of interaction in such small homogenous groups is assumed to be high due to their small size. People are under relatively high surveillance. The greater surveillance in such small groups can nurture a higher degree of control (Durkheim 1897/1966, p. 221).
- The approved norms and values include those beliefs and practices regarding suicide acceptability. Under such conditions, any form of suicide that is acceptable may be the principle type of suicide.
- Its purer forms, is supported by public opinion. Unlike many suicides in urban industrial society, the suicides in primitive society, for example, are often supported and even praised by the public.
- Old persons are sometimes expected to suicide in times of scarcity of food. Suicides in modern societies could, in some situations or subcultures, also be supported by public opinion (Durkheim, 1897/1966, p. 222, 240)

## Altruistic Suicide-

- Altruistic suicides are perceived as characterized by energy whereas egoistic suicides are marked by apathy. On the one hand, there is a sense of purpose and on the other hand, there is a sense of defeat and melancholy.
- The key difference between altruistic suicides and nonaltruistic suicides rests more in their cultural context: that of high integration where there is little value placed on the life of an individual.
- First there are primitive societies. Second, the modern military represents a cultural climate conducive to altruistic suicide. There are additional loci that fit this scheme and include political altruistic suicide and the recent case of terrorist murder suicides. However, political altruistic suicides were not discussed at any length in Durkheim – (Steven Stack, 2004).

## Suicide in Primitive Society

- Durkheim discusses three subtypes of altruistic suicides in primitive societies: obligatory, optional, and acute.
  - **Obligatory Altruistic Suicide**
  - Obligatory altruistic suicide regards suicide as a duty. Herein under specific situations, the individual is expected by cultural norms of the group to suicide. Not to do so is viewed in negative terms and there are often punishments associated with declining to suicide.
  - Durkheim uncovers three major patterns of obligatory suicide through space and time.
  - The first pattern of obligatory suicides is that of men on the threshold of old age or stricken with sickness. For example, the ancient Goths believed that to die a natural death was a disgrace. Those who died in bed of various diseases and illnesses were believed to go to a terrible afterlife consisting of living in caves with venomous serpents.



- **Obligatory Altruistic Suicide**

- The second pattern of obligatory suicide is that of widows who commit suicide upon the deaths of their husbands. The Indian practice of Suttee is a prime example.
- According to Durkheim's (1897/1966, p. 219) sources, 2,366 widows committed suicide in this fashion in a single year, 1821.
- The third pattern of obligatory suicide consists of the suicides of followers and/or servants of a deceased chief or leader. For example, among the Ashantis on the King's death his officers must die. Ancient Egyptians also often had mass burials of the servants, pets, and other followers of a deceased King entombed in his pyramid.

- **Acute Altruistic Suicide**

- In acute altruistic suicide the person often commits suicides in order to achieve nirvana, or join a pleasant world after death. Renunciation of life itself is a value in itself and is praised by the group (Durkheim 1897/ 1966, p. 223).

- **Acute Altruistic Suicide**

- Among the Bhils, there was a record of a sacred rock from the top of which men leaped to devote themselves to Shiva. In the case of Japan, Charlevoix the explorer wrote of boatloads of religious 'fanatics' who would jump into the waters with stones tied around them, drowning while singing praises to their idol.
- In the case of acute altruistic suicides of religious zealots, the purest form of altruistic suicide, the individual rejoices in death by suicide mainly because it can be seen as an immediate avenue to nirvana. Persons who are left behind receive no apparent material benefits in this ideal type of altruistic suicide. However, to the extent that such suicides reinforce a value in cultural beliefs, they may benefit society's cultural system.

- Anomic Suicide –

- When regulative powers of the society is disrupted such disruption leave individual dissatisfied because there is little control over their passions, which are free to run wild in insatiable race for gratification.
- Rates of anomic suicide are likely to rise when the nature of disruption is positive (economic boom) or negative (economic depression).
- Such changes put people in new situations in which older norms no longer apply and new situations need new norms to be developed.
  - Ex- Periods of disruption such as closing of a factory may lead to job loss. With this the individual might be cut off from family, religion and state thus highly vulnerable to the effects of currents of anomie.
  - Economic boom- sudden success leads individual to quit their job, move to new place, find new spouse, etc. All these disrupt the regulative effect of existing structures and leave the individual in boom period vulnerable to anomic social currents.

- Fatalistic Suicide –
  - When regulation is excessive then this is the form of suicide found most.
    - Ex- Slaves taking his/her life because of hopelessness associated with the oppressive regulation of his/her every action.
  - Too much regulation and oppression leads individuals to fatalistic suicide.
    - Ex- Childless women are prone to suicide.