

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY

Soc 1101: Summer 2023

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Social facts and sociological questions

Lecture 4

People commit suicide because of their idiosyncratic personal miseries and trajectories.

- A) Strongly agree**
- B) Agree**
- C) Disagree**
- D) Strongly disagree**

According to the sociological imagination, the current high numbers of college graduates moving back in with their families reflect

- A) individual choices.**
- B) social forces impacting private lives.**
- C) failed socialization.**
- D) faith-based choices.**

TODAY'S LECTURE OUTLINE

- **Durkheim**
 - **What is a social fact?**
- **Suicide as a sociological question**

FOUNDING FATHERS OF SOCIOLOGY

- Aguste Comte (1798-1857) [positivism]
 - Methods
- Karl Marx (1818-1883) [class conflict]
 - What divides us
- **Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) [social cohesion]**
 - **What unites us as large groups**
- Max Weber (1864-1920) [interpretivism]
 - Methods
- Georg Simmel (1858-1918) [social networks]
 - What unites us as individuals

ÉMILE DURKHEIM (1858-1917)



- Very much a positivist
- Fought to establish legitimacy of sociology as a science
- **Argued that “social facts” were the distinctive subject matter of the discipline**

WHAT IS A SOCIAL FACT?

- **Social facts:**

“...consist of manners of acting, thinking and feeling, external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him.” (Durkheim 2)

“...exist where there is a well defined social organization.” (Durkheim 3)

“...are beliefs, tendencies and practices of the group taken collectively.” (Durkheim 4)

EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL FACTS

- **Institutions (education, families, religion, economy, political)**
- **Laws (rules)**
- **Status (position, roles)**
- **Population dynamics (births, marriages, deaths)**
- **Norms (actions, behaviors)**
- **Moral beliefs (values)**

THINK OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE AS THE SUM OF SOCIAL FACTS

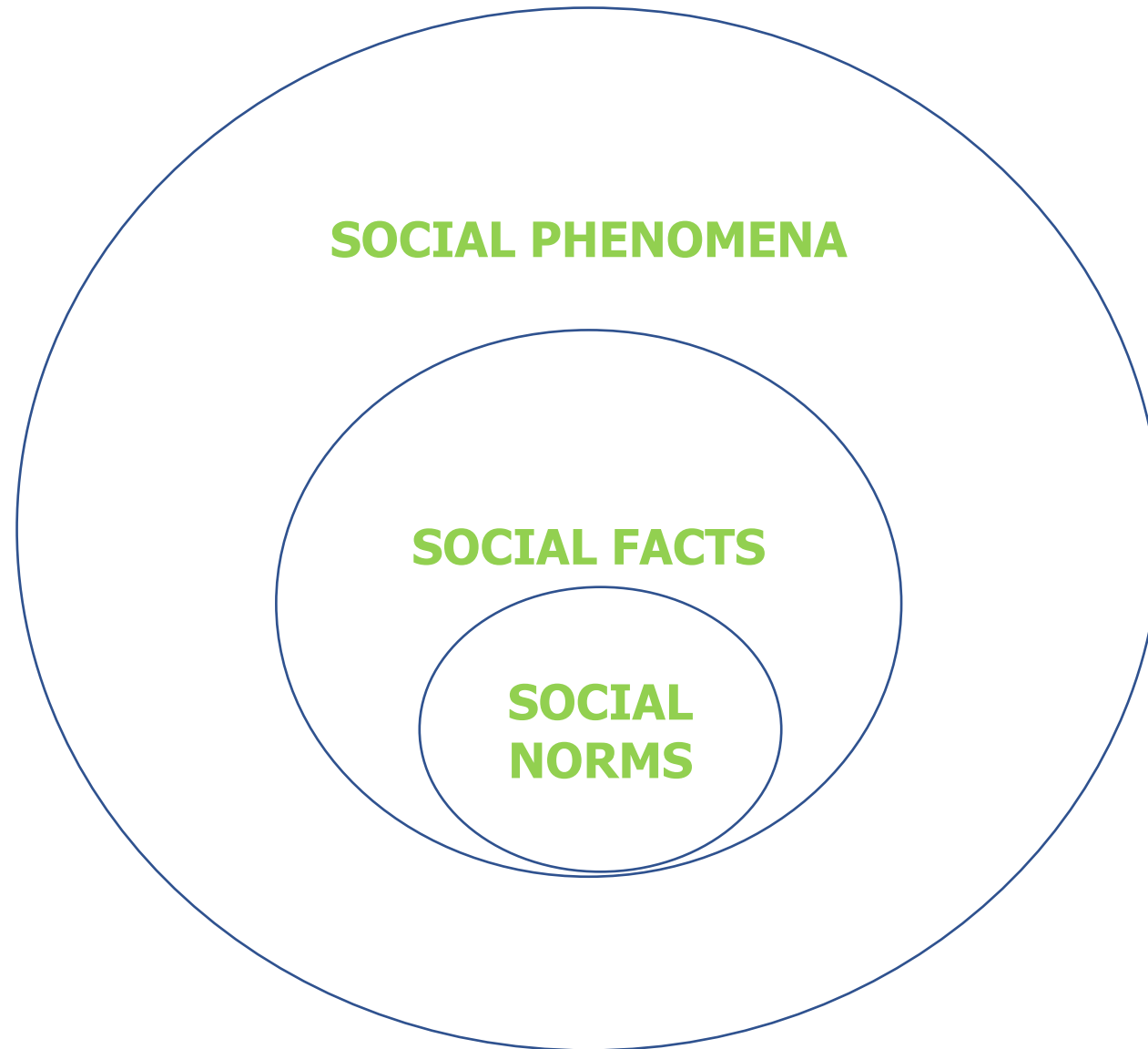
Social phenomenon vs social fact

“Collective”

- **Social meaning/purposes/functions**

Contrast

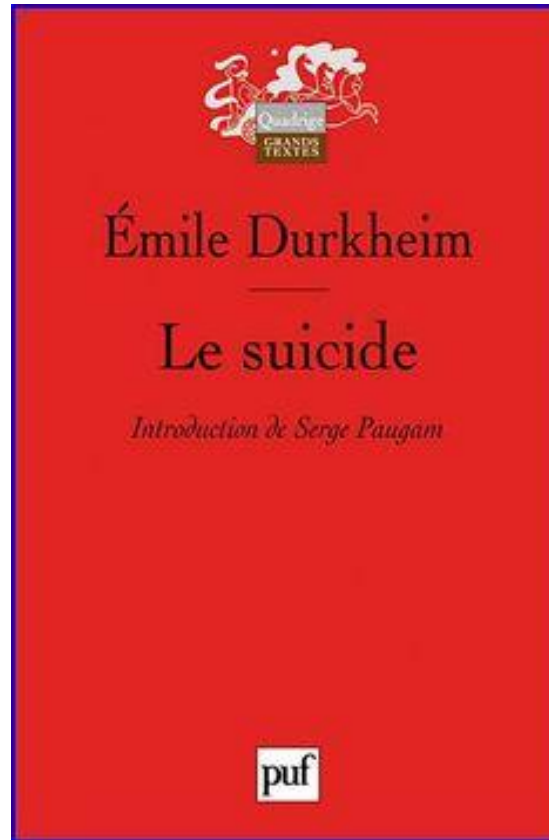
- **Umbrella for the rain**
- **Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong**



Which of the following IS NOT a social fact?

- A) Fertility rates drop as societies industrialize.**
- B) Many people take out umbrellas when it starts to rain.**
- C) When a pastor declares, "I now pronounce you man and wife," a couple is then married.**
- D) Americans stand at attention when their national anthem is played.**

SUICIDE AS A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY



Durkheim, 1897

WHY SUICIDE?

A SOCIOLOGICAL QUESTION

- Self-harm is often thought of as a deeply individualistic act, with intrapersonal causes
- Durkheim wondered whether there were (also) broader social factors or processes that affected the likelihood of individuals to commit suicide
- Durkheim concluded that in industrial societies, suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of the (religious, domestic, political) group of which the individual is a part

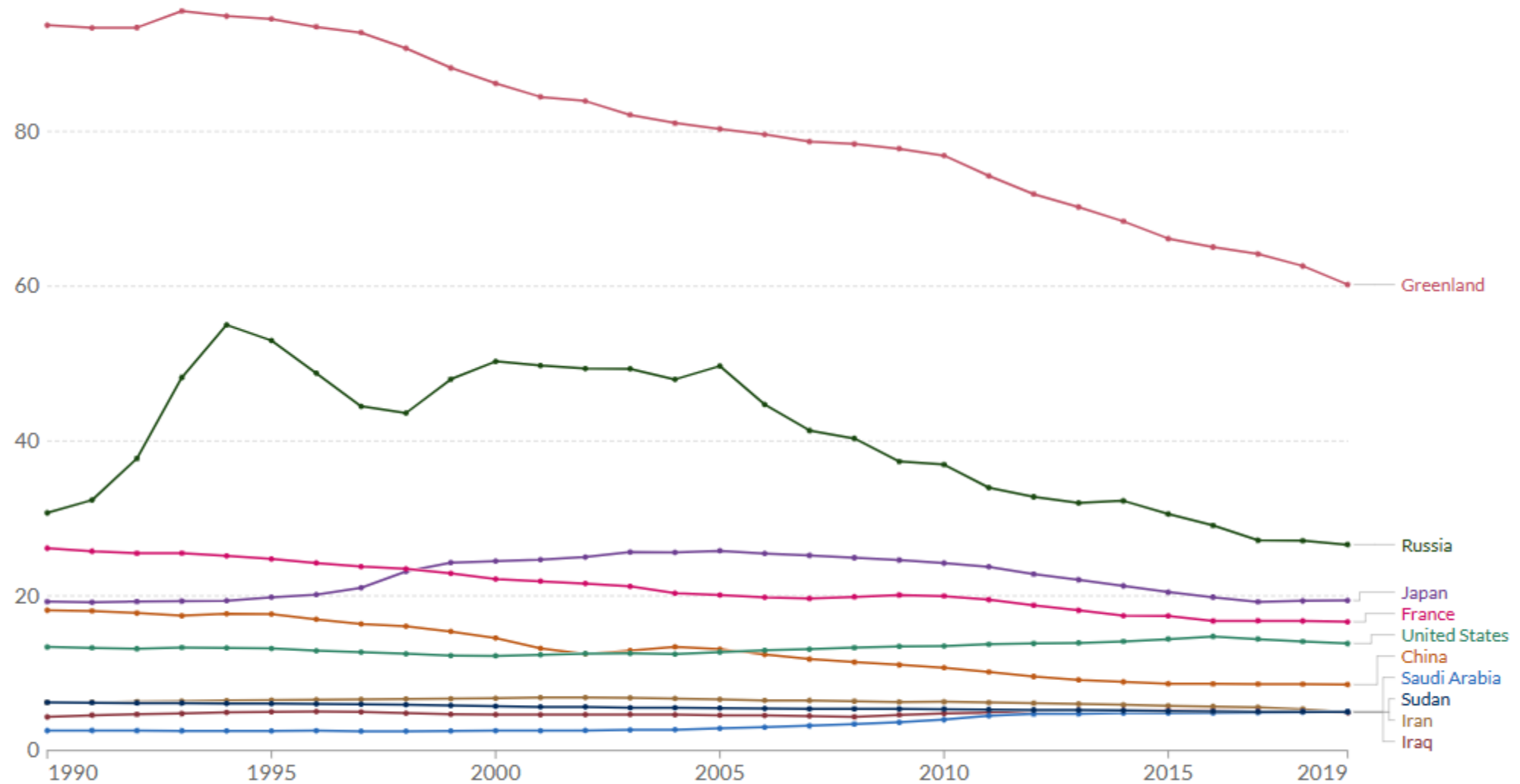
1897

Suicide death rate, 1990 to 2019

Annual number of suicides per 100,000 people

+ Add country

All together



Source: IHME, Global Burden of Disease (2019)

OurWorldInData.org/suicide • CC BY

Male vs. female suicide rate, 2017

Annual number of suicides per 100,000 males or females. Suicide deaths are underreported in many countries due to social stigma and cultural or legal concerns. This data is adjusted for this underreporting to estimate the actual rate of suicides.

Our World
in Data

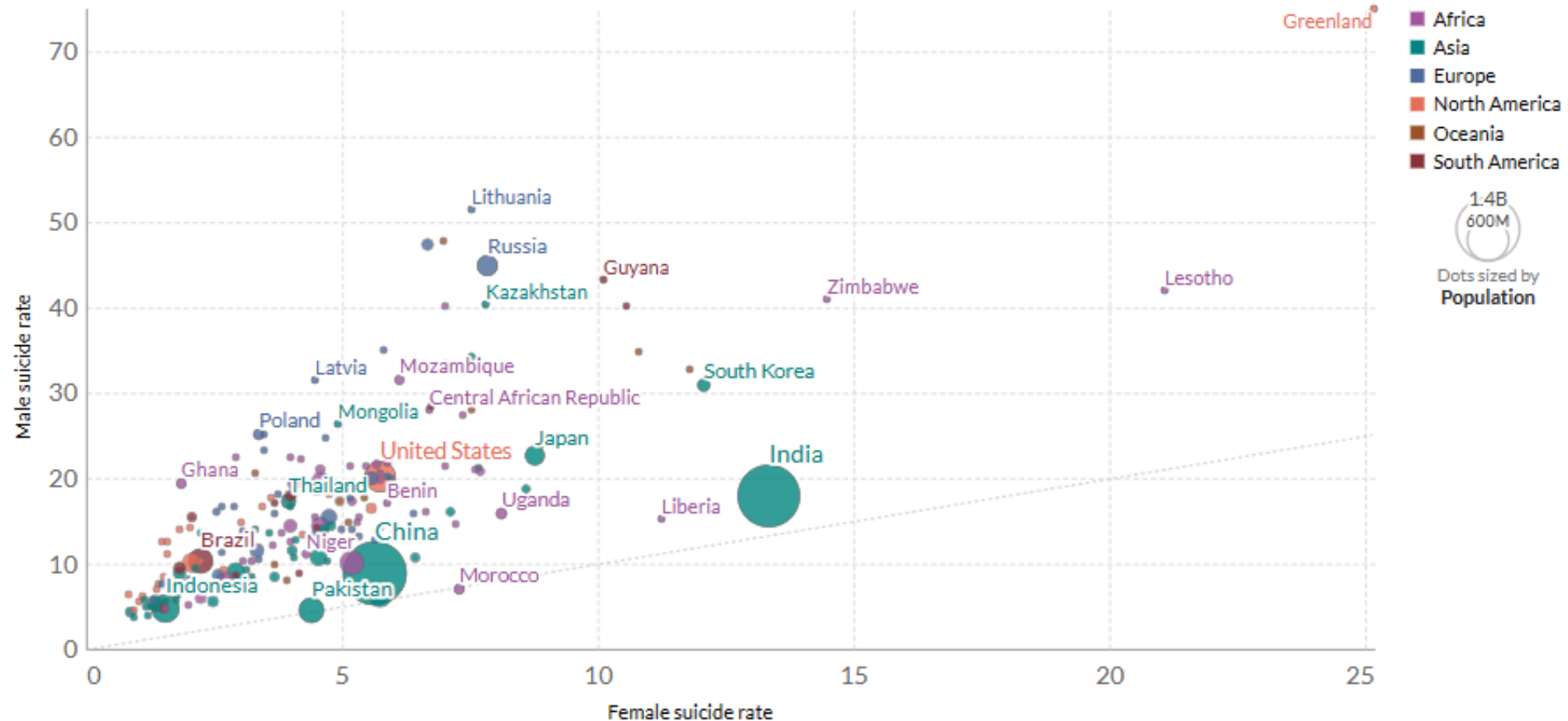
Y: LINEAR

Y: LOG

X: LINEAR

X: LOG

Select countries



Source: IHME, Global Burden of Disease (2017)

Note: To allow for comparisons between countries and over time, this metric is age-standardized.

OurWorldInData.org/suicide • CC BY

1990

2017

[Male vs. female suicide rate, 2017 \(ourworldindata.org\)](https://ourworldindata.org/male-vs-female-suicide-rate)

NEXT CLASS

- **Research Methods**
- **Readings**
 - **Conley 2013**
 - **“Chapter 2: Methods”**