

## Motivations for Suicide in Algeria: Between Psychological and Social Factors

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### **Abstract:**

Since independence, Algerian society has been experiencing significant and rapid changes, affecting various areas of life. These changes have had an impact on social institutions and have given rise to numerous problems, including the emergence of certain social scourges such as suicide, particularly among the youth. Suicide is considered one of the most destructive social afflictions for both individuals and society, and its severity is evident in the increasing and multiplying numbers recorded annually. This phenomenon is both a social and personal issue. On the one hand, it represents a social problem due to the high number of young people resorting to suicide, indicating a disruption in social relationships, cultural aspects, and a lack of religious motivation. On the other hand, it reflects the intensity and speed of societal changes across all areas of life.

**Keywords:** suicide, suicide attempt, suicide threat, depression, family disintegration.

**Introduction:** By nature, humans tend to gravitate toward life and self-preservation. However, some individuals harm themselves, raising questions and confusion as they inflict injury upon themselves, or even take their own lives without any apparent or justifiable reason. Some voluntarily kill themselves, while others throw themselves into dangerous situations, and some even derive satisfaction from causing harm to themselves or exposing themselves to danger. All of this contradicts the human instinct for survival and the desire to live, making the desire for death an exception. However, when this exception becomes a widespread phenomenon, it necessitates an explanation to clarify the relationship between humans and life, and the disruptions that may push them towards suicide or contemplating it.

**1. Research Problem:** The alarming rise of suicide in society, especially among the youth, is a lived reality that warrants investigation into its causes. Is suicide a source of pleasure, a mere expression of the desire to withdraw from an unbearable life, or a fear of confronting life? The phenomenon of suicide reveals a daily tragedy experienced by humanity. This issue has been studied by researchers in psychology and sociology, and its dimensions and causes are becoming clearer. It is a human phenomenon, linked to human existence and location, happening despite the efforts of society, family, and sometimes even against the will of the individuals themselves. Suicide is a personal decision to

depart from existence, a form of violence directed towards the self. Sometimes, it is a warning signal to those surrounding the suicidal person or those who attempted suicide. Other times, it is an escape from a situation that the individual was unable to face or adapt to. Regardless of the motivation, the result is always the same—death. It is a complex behavior influenced by various factors, whether biological, social, psychological, or a combination of all these factors.

From a psychological perspective, feelings of guilt and conscience pangs, arising from internal conflicts between moral and religious values and the commission of sins or crimes, are significant. Other psychological factors include feelings of disappointment, loss, a lack of self-esteem, and a sense of inadequacy whether real or imagined which leads to feelings of worthlessness and discontent with life. These motivations may have deep roots, stemming from errors in upbringing or psychological issues formed during childhood. Psychological reasons also include intense anger and hostility towards others, where the individual fails to confront them and instead turns this anger inward, resulting in self-harm, ultimately leading to suicide. This is explained by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which suggests that it reflects a disintegration of personality and psychological health, caused by conflicts between personal rights and obligations, individual capabilities and social expectations, and between family problems and deprivation.

From a sociological perspective, suicide has become a widespread behavioral phenomenon, encompassing almost the entire world. This is due to the frustrations individuals face and their inability to cope with the unique characteristics of this era, whether directly or indirectly, leading to feelings of depression and despair, which drive them to consider suicide.

In Algeria, studies show that most suicides are committed by men, with 75% of them having previously expressed a desire to commit suicide. This phenomenon has increasingly dominated the media landscape in Algeria, as the number of cases and attempts has risen. A study by Mustapha Pasha University Hospital revealed that suicide cases are prevalent among people aged 15 to 45, with men accounting for a higher percentage than women. The study also indicated that the person who commits suicide does not necessarily show signs of distress, but suicide can affect family members for generations.

The study highlighted that common suicide methods include consuming large amounts of medication, ingesting toxic substances, using weapons, jumping from bridges or high floors of buildings, and hanging. The study identified key reasons behind the spread of this phenomenon, including mental disorders, personal and family history, the early loss of one or both parents, social isolation, divorce, unemployment, and financial factors.

The report pointed out that the phenomenon is particularly widespread among young people due to social, economic, and psychological conditions, failed relationships, unemployment, issues of injustice and marginalization, and the individual's feeling of a lack of purpose in society. Drug use was also mentioned as a factor, with "53% of suicides committed by unemployed individuals, 30% by those in unstable or freelance jobs, and 11% by employees." The phenomenon also stems from psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, physical anxiety, and obsessions, which

contribute to suicidal tendencies by disrupting both the ego and mental health, and leading to behavioral deviance.

Professor of psychology at the University of Algiers, Abdel Karim Amraoui, believes that suicide is no longer a means of expressing a loss of hope due to emotional crises, family problems, or academic failure. Instead, it has become a tool for rejecting social realities, including economic and political dimensions, among others. He added that suicidal behavior has become a global phenomenon that is spreading rapidly in many societies. He explained that "the increasing prevalence of the phenomenon in recent years is an indication of social disintegration and represents both an individual and collective failure to adapt to social norms and regulations, highlighting a detachment of the individual from their community and a rejection of the social system."

Based on all these findings, we pose the following question:

## 2. Questions:

- Do family and psychological circumstances play a role in driving individuals to attempt suicide? This main question branches into the following:
  1. Do social and economic conditions push individuals to attempt suicide?
  2. Do psychological factors play a role in individuals committing suicide?
  3. Are suicide attempts more prevalent among males or females?

## 3. Study Objectives:

1. This study aims to identify the reasons behind the spread of this phenomenon, which is far removed from the teachings of our religion and traditions.
2. Attempt to uncover the mystery surrounding this phenomenon and its impact on the collapse of social balance.
3. Highlight the uniqueness of the topic, considering it a taboo subject that is rarely discussed.
4. Address the seriousness of the spread of this phenomenon among youth and adolescents.
5. Attempt to identify the characteristics of individuals who attempt suicide.
6. Desire to uncover the psychological, social, and economic reasons that drive individuals to contemplate suicide.

**4. Methodology:** Suicide is a human phenomenon directly related to people's lives and behaviors. Therefore, the descriptive method was used by accurately and qualitatively describing the phenomenon, as suicide is a real phenomenon existing in society. We will strive to clarify the true reason behind this phenomenon and examine its effects on both the individual and society.

**5. Content Nature:** We will address this phenomenon in human society, including modern, Western, Arab, and Algerian societies, explaining the differences. We will also discuss the types of suicide and clarify the reasons for suicide in Algeria and the groups that engage in it, while exploring the psychological and social causes.

## 6. Research Concepts:

- **Concept of Suicide:**

Suicide is any case of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act carried out by the victim themselves, who was necessarily aware of the outcome of their actions. Therefore, a suicide attempt is the specific act determined in this way, but one that is premeditated before death becomes its consequence<sup>1</sup>.

Suicidal behavior is defined as a dynamic and complex process rather than a fixed, isolated event. It involves multiple stages that begin with latent suicidal ideation, progress through phases of active suicidal contemplation, followed by planning for active suicide, and culminate in actual suicide attempts. An individual's position in this process may fluctuate due to the influence of psychosocial and biological factors<sup>2</sup>.

- **Concept of Suicide Attempt:**

According to Schneider, a suicide attempt is any failed suicide in which the individual remains alive, regardless of the reason for failure. Durkheim described it as moving toward action without death being the outcome, which is often expressed openly, unlike suicide, which is typically done in secret. The reasons for such attempts are usually emotional or family conflicts, and they aim to draw others' attention to the individual's problems<sup>3</sup>.

- **Concept of Depression:**

Depression is a word frequently used in everyday life by both specialists and non-specialists. It refers to various symptoms that affect an individual and make them different from how they normally are in their daily life, whether at work, within the family, with friends, or in relation to social life in general<sup>4</sup>. Depression may manifest as a clear illness or appear in different forms, such as sadness, bitterness, and a tendency to adopt a pessimistic view of life. Most people see depression as a normal response triggered by painful experiences, such as relationship failure, disappointment, or the loss of something important like a job or the death of a loved one. It encompasses a set of symptoms that researchers refer to as a "depressive syndrome." It is known that the symptoms of depression vary from person to person. Some people experience severe feelings of guilt and self-blame, while others may have depression accompanied by physical complaints and illnesses, blurring the line between them. Some individuals express depression through feelings of hopelessness, boredom, pessimism, and a quick sense of dissatisfaction with life and people. All these symptoms may sometimes coexist in a single individual<sup>5</sup>.

- **The concept of suicide threats:** The term refers to the process in which individuals tend to signal their desire and intention to commit suicide to others. These individuals are often characterized by the fact that their suicidal tendencies have not gone beyond the verbal level, such as through speech. They are classified into two types:

1. Those with serious threats.
2. Those with non-serious threats<sup>6</sup>.

• **The concept of family disintegration:** It refers to the collapse of family unity and the breakdown of the social roles' fabric when one or more family members fail to properly and cohesively fulfill their assigned roles. Family disintegration also refers to the death of one or both parents, or cases of divorce, abandonment, or separation<sup>7</sup>. It can also be defined as a state that indicates tension or a rift within the family structure, leading to its complete collapse, resulting in crises and problems that take over the family and cause its fragmentation, leaving family members to live separately<sup>8</sup>.

• **Types of suicide:** The types of suicide vary depending on the circumstances that lead to suicidal behavior. Some of these types include:

- **Egoistic suicide:** This type is characterized by a low level of integration within society and occurs when an individual experiences isolation or weakens or cuts ties with their community. For example, suicide rates are lower among Catholics, due to the high degree of social cohesion and unity within the community. In contrast, the personal and moral freedom of Protestants means that one stands alone before God. Durkheim observed that marriage reduces suicide rates because it integrates individuals into a network of ongoing social relationships, whereas unmarried individuals live in relative isolation. Durkheim argues that low social cohesion can invade and that there is a relationship between various forms of social disintegration and suicide rates. The model he proposed focuses on two social variables: integration and regulation<sup>9</sup>. This type of suicide results from excessive individualism, leading people to commit suicidal behavior. Durkheim refers to this as the weakening or destruction of the bonds that tie a person to life, as social ties between the individual and others become loose or broken<sup>10</sup>.
- **Altruistic suicide:** Altruistic suicide refers to the opposite model, where the individual's self is not dominant, and they are fully integrated into something other than themselves. Their behavior's guiding force lies outside of themselves<sup>11</sup>. Durkheim calls this altruistic suicide because it stems from an altruistic tendency, which is compulsory and imposed on individuals by society. Examples provided by Durkheim for this type of suicidal behavior include men who commit suicide after reaching old age or falling ill, women who commit suicide after their husbands die, or servants and retainers who commit suicide following the deaths of their masters. In these cases, the individual does not commit suicide because they have the right to do so, but rather because suicide is imposed on them. If they fail to carry out this duty, they face shame and disgrace, often accompanied by religious punishment. The reasons are boredom, fatigue, or the usual pains that afflict individuals, and if there were no other reasons, an individual killing themselves solely to escape an unbearable life would not be compelled to do so. If someone insists on this, they lose the enjoyment of privileges and are deprived of all customary honors in the afterlife. Thus, altruistic suicide is obligatory, imposed by the society to which the individual belongs, which determines the conditions and circumstances that make this obligation deserving of fulfillment<sup>12</sup>.
- **Anarchic suicide:** This type is also known as normless suicide, which results from the disorder that prevails in the dominant social systems due to sudden and rapid social changes that shake the established norms, values, and social standards. It also reflects the social disintegration occurring at the level of social ties, as individuals think about suicidal behavior when there is a breakdown in their relationship with society, such as the loss of a spouse, lover, or job<sup>13</sup>. This type of suicide occurs as a result of social corruption, deteriorating

conditions, and the abundance of crises (economic, moral, and the absence of social balance). It can occur among wealthy individuals, not just the poor. Material wealth cannot serve as a shield against suicide in the midst of social and moral chaos<sup>14</sup>.

This type of suicide occurs due to the loss of social controls that govern individual behavior. The weakening of social norms in the individual's environment leads them to commit this act against themselves, meaning the individual loses their sense of order, creating chaos in the closest social environment<sup>15</sup>.

- **Fatalistic suicide:**

This type of suicide results from excessive regulation. It is committed by people whose social fate is relentlessly sealed, and their emotions are violently suppressed by oppressive discipline<sup>16</sup>. This type of suicide is more prevalent in industrial societies, reflecting the fragility of the social fabric, the weak relationships between individuals, and the lack of a sense of belonging. According to Durkheim, individuals live isolated from the social framework, doing as they please and only seeking to satisfy their own needs. When they face financial, emotional, or social crises, they tend to withdraw from life because they feel disconnected from any social group, as their relationship with society was built solely on self-interest and extreme individualism<sup>17</sup>.

- **Mass suicide:**

This type of suicide occurs in two ways: either each individual kills themselves, or a key member of the group is appointed to carry out the killings. This can resemble cases where a mentally ill mother kills herself along with her children, or a religious cult leader who kills his followers and then commits suicide<sup>18</sup>.

Some of the known cases of mass suicide include:

- In 1915, many Armenian girls committed suicide by throwing themselves into the Euphrates River to avoid rape and torture by Ottoman authorities during the widespread genocide against hundreds of thousands of Armenians.
- In the Battle of Berlin in 1945, German pilots carried out several suicide missions on bridges constructed by Soviet forces over the Oder River.
- We also find during the Spanish Civil War, which lasted from 1936 to 1939 and claimed the lives of 600,000 people, that both warring sides engaged in mutual suicide operations, resulting in hundreds of deaths.
- Mass suicide in India between 1975 and 1999: 319 young people from the Guarani-Kaiowá tribe committed suicide in protest against the seizure of their lands by new settlers<sup>19</sup>.

## 8. Factors Driving Suicide:

There are many factors that lead to suicidal behavior, some related to the individual ("psychological factors") and others linked to the social environment in which the person lives. These include:

- **Psychological factors:**

These factors influence a person's behavior and personality, affecting their ability to adapt to their external environment.

- **Depression:**

Depression affects individuals internally and manifests in various types, depending on its causes. Reactive depression occurs in response to external circumstances such as the death of a loved one, loss of wealth, or the threat of a scandal. There is also neurotic depression, which arises from unconscious psychological factors, where a person feels sad or distressed without knowing the source. In some cases, depression appears without any apparent external or internal cause and is due to central nervous system disorders. This is known as true psychotic depression, often seen in individuals with mental illness or those with highly fluctuating moods<sup>20</sup>.

- In Durkheim's work, he emphasized the role of losing social solidarity and mutual support as key causes of suicide. A person feels they are experiencing collapse, isolation, and pathological loneliness, seeing their world filled with tragedies. Their resilience weakens, and they resort to suicide as a means to escape these inner tragedies, which they project onto their relationships with others. This highlights the absence of a supportive environment where the person can fulfill their emotional and existential needs. Suicide thus becomes a way to transition from a state of existence to one of oblivion<sup>21</sup>.

- **Schizophrenia:**

Schizophrenia is the most widespread mental illness, with a higher incidence than other mental disorders. It affects the brain's natural balance, interfering with a person's ability to think, act, and feel. Schizophrenia usually develops gradually, sometimes over years, before symptoms like isolation, lethargy, and insomnia become apparent. These issues often lead the person to contemplate ending their life, particularly when they reach a stage of isolation and withdrawal, feeling unwanted by society. This sense of detachment may drive them to the point where they decide to end their life, as life becomes tasteless and they lose their sense of self and connection to others<sup>22</sup>.

- **Social factors:**

These are the surrounding circumstances, reflected in the social relationships in which an individual interacts throughout their life.

- **Family disintegration:**

Family breakdown is one of the causes of suicidal behavior. It occurs when shared goals between spouses disappear, mutual interests fade, and individual goals and conflicts become more important than family goals. Cooperative efforts to establish and maintain the family quickly dissolve, especially in low- or no-income families<sup>23</sup>. Family disintegration can manifest in divorce, which leads to the dissolution of social and familial bonds, or separation,

where one spouse leaves home without a formal divorce. It may also take the form of abandonment, where one spouse leaves without prior agreement.

Family breakdown has become a social problem contributing to the emergence and spread of suicidal behavior within society. Constant or severe conflicts within families, especially between parents, or a child living with a harsh stepparent, experiencing abuse, emotional deprivation, or lack of psychological and material needs, can lead to severe depression and eventually suicidal thoughts<sup>24</sup>.

Durkheim explained the increasing rate of suicide through various forms of social disintegration, seeing family breakdown as a crucial contributing factor. This situation, he argued, leads to "anomic suicide," one of its causes being marital instability. Suicidal behaviors began to appear in Algeria after independence, as a result of social changes, such as the shift in the Algerian family from an extended family structure to a nuclear, individualistic one<sup>25</sup>.

- **Economic factors:**

The economic level is considered one of the significant drivers behind an individual's decision to commit suicide. In economically underdeveloped societies, the accumulation of economic pressures pushes individuals toward suicide as a means of escaping their situation. Feelings of unemployment and the inability to secure a job, especially without connections, contribute to a sense of hopelessness and despair. This leads the individual to contemplate suicide as a result of the instability and frustration they experience due to their inability to meet their needs<sup>26</sup>.

- **Environmental and social factors:**

Environmental factors include issues related to school and work. Absenteeism from school increases the risk of suicide, as deviant and non-integrated children in schools or workplaces appear to be at greater risk of suicidal behavior. Many suicide cases have been observed among children under the age of 15 after prolonged school absences, indicating that social isolation linked to absenteeism may facilitate suicidal behavior. Additionally, sexual orientation and homosexuality are considered risk factors for suicide. A survey conducted among students at the University of Minnesota revealed that suicide rates among homosexual and bisexual males were significantly higher than among heterosexual males<sup>27</sup>.

## **9. Suicide in Modern Societies:**

The perception of suicide has changed in modern societies. What was once seen differently has now become a serious issue that raises fear and concern on social, moral, and religious levels worldwide.

- **Suicide in foreign countries:**

In the mid-19th century, no country outside of the Germanic civilization of Central Europe was unaffected by suicide, with the following rates observed per 100,000 people annually:

Russia: 20 cases, United States: 15 cases, England: 9 cases, Germany: 20 cases, Japan: 19 cases, France: 22 cases Hungary saw a sharp rise in suicide rates during the Soviet invasion in 1956 and during the political resurgence in the 1980s, with the rate reaching 45 suicides per 100,000 people annually<sup>28</sup>. Austria also experienced a high suicide rate, reaching 41 cases per 100,000 people between 1931 and 1938 after the collapse of the empire. Central and Eastern Europe have historically seen the highest suicide rates in the modern era. In recent years, 10,000 suicides were recorded in 2007, and during an annual suicide attempt conference held in France in 2008, it was reported that there were three suicide attempts every three seconds.

In 2012, an estimated 804,000 people died from suicide globally, which represents the annual global suicide rate. These statistics, however, are not always accurate due to various factors, with many suicides often being mistakenly classified as accidents or deaths caused by other reasons.

- **Suicide in Algeria:**

The phenomenon of suicide in Algerian society has seen a dramatic increase in recent years, to the point where daily reports of suicides by the media have become commonplace. Some key historical milestones indicating the development and rise of suicidal behavior in Algeria are as follows:

- **Suicide during the colonial era:**

Suicide was not non-existent among Algerians during the colonial period. According to some available statistics, between 1827 and 1882, 84 suicide cases were recorded over four years. However, only four of these were linked to poisoning by ingesting plant substances, as determined by analyzing the contents of the victim's stomach. There was a conscious effort not to keep suicide cases among Algerians hidden, as some took pleasure in the idea that suicide was not known among Algerian people, given that Islam and the Quran forbid suicide. Algerians adhered to divine will as a principle of life, and it was said that suicide was unknown among illiterate and primitive peoples who were ignorant of the demands of modern life. The fear that Algerians exhibited regarding suicide was also seen as a sign of their modesty and temperance<sup>29</sup>.

Between 1942 and 1949, 1,507 people committed suicide, with 1,086 being men and 421 women, meaning that 72% of suicides were male, while 27% were female. In the colonial period from 1950 to 1955, 1,476 suicides were recorded, based on French reports. However, the actual numbers may have been much higher, reflecting the difficult conditions faced by Algerians during the colonial period<sup>30</sup>.

- **Suicide Post-Independence:**

Statistics indicate a continuous rise in suicide rates after Algeria's independence. From 1962 to 1969, around 300 suicide attempts were recorded, with a rate of 0.83 per 100,000 people. In 1983, the number of suicides increased to 600, and by 1988, it had risen to 775 cases. Between 1990 and 1993, 1,031 suicide attempts were reported, averaging 275 cases annually, representing a rate of 1 per 100,000 people. The majority of these suicides were among young people, prompting significant concern from authorities to find solutions and mechanisms to combat this alarming trend<sup>31</sup>.

Recent national statistics from studies conducted between 2003 and 2006 show that 70% of suicides occurred in the eastern regions, particularly in local communities like Mila (33.8%) and Constantine (27.7%). The highest percentage of suicides was among men, primarily due to unemployment<sup>32</sup>.

The rising suicide rates in Algeria are linked to various factors, including personal psychological issues resulting from social and economic conditions. Social changes within the Algerian family, especially the shift from extended families to nuclear families, have left individuals feeling isolated, lacking the familial cooperation and solidarity that once existed. Many people feel overwhelmed by the burdens of life without family support. Television interviews broadcast on public channels reveal a connection between suicide and the housing crisis, with some suicidal individuals or those attempting suicide hoping to send a message to authorities, or sacrificing themselves so their family can benefit from housing.

Other causes of suicide in Algeria include the mismatch between individuals' purchasing power and their daily income, which leads to depression and despair. Unemployment, which has become a major concern for the youth, is another key factor. Family conflicts, particularly among young women, failed romantic relationships, and in some cases, the fear of legal or penal consequences also contribute to suicidal behavior. Some individuals, after committing a crime, fear the punishment awaiting them and resort to suicide. Additionally, the impact of globalization and its influence on the social and cultural fabric, especially through modern media broadcasting films, TV shows, and other content with specific agendas, cannot be overlooked.

Finally, the weakening of religious values plays a significant role, as individuals who commit suicide often struggle with accepting God's will and divine decree.

### **Conclusion:**

In summary, suicide attempts share common underlying social, psychological, and economic conditions. Among the key causes are emotional factors, particularly for the youth, and family disputes, in addition to issues faced by some families, such as family disintegration, divorce, the death of a parent, and parental treatment styles. Other contributing factors include the difficult circumstances individuals experience, such as poverty and unemployment.

We also cannot overlook the influence of technological and cultural mediums, such as films and the

internet, which contribute to the emergence of suicidal thoughts by promoting values and customs that differ from our own values and religious teachings.

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