

Suicide



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In this major new study Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet provide a timely and wide-ranging account of the changing nature of suicide in the world today. The suicide rate is soaring in the former Communist bloc, in India and in China, which now has the highest female suicide rate in the world. This rise coincides with those countries accelerated entry into a period of brutal modernization. In the developed countries of the West, suicide rates are rising fastest amongst young men and those social groups that are furthest down the social scale. How can we explain these trends and what do they tell us about modern societies? The social impact of suicide has preoccupied sociologists from Emile Durkheim onwards. For Durkheim, the rising suicide rate was an effect of the rise of modernity and the individualism, growing affluence and increased anomie that accompanied it. Baudelot and Establet draw upon Durkheim and his successor Maurice Halbwachs to argue that classic sociological theories of suicide require some modification. The link between suicide, affluence and individualism is more complex: suicide rates do reflect broad social trends but they are also influenced by the structural position and lived experience of small social groups. The notion of social well-being is demonstrated to be a key factor in changes in suicide rates. Whilst it is well-known that sociology cannot explain why individuals commit suicide, the suicide of individuals and the micro-groups to which they belong can tell

us a lot about the societies in which they live.

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