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Q3(a)

Discuss distinct sociological method adopted by Emile Durkheim in his study of 'suicide'

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2017 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx

Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx - Historical materialism, mode of production, alienation, class struggle; Emile Durkheim - Division of labour, social fact, suicide, religion and society; Max Weber - Social action, ideal types, authority, bureaucracy, protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism; Talcott Parsons - Social system, pattern variables; Robert K. Merton - Latent and manifest functions, conformity and deviance, reference groups; Mead - Self and identity.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the distinct sociological method adopted by **Emile Durkheim** in his study of **suicide**
- Keep the discussion within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

Durkheim studied **suicide** rates as **social facts**, not as a heap of private cases.

Comparison and concomitant variation were the method.

Four types follow integration and regulation.

Psychological and racial accounts were judged insufficient for the pattern.

Official coding and meaning remain later limits of the same files.

Introduction

In **Suicide**, **Emile Durkheim** used official rates to show that even a lonely death is a social fact. The method was distinct because it treated rates as properties of groups, classified types by cause, and related them to integration and regulation rather than to private despair alone.

Body

Social facts as things

- The Rules of Sociological Method demanded that **social facts** be treated as external and constraining.
- **Suicide** rates, not individual cases, were the object. A rate belongs to a church, a family form, or an army, not to a mood.

Comparative statistical method

- **Durkheim** compared countries, religions, marital statuses, and wartime versus peacetime.
- **He sought concomitant variation:** as integration changes, the rate changes.
- Official records were constructed data, not raw truth. He still used them as the best available series.

Typology by social cause

- **Egoistic suicide:** weak integration, as in some Protestant and unmarried groups in his tables.

- **Altruistic suicide**: excess integration, as in obligatory military or caste-like duty.
- **Anomic suicide**: weak regulation when norms collapse in boom or crash.
- **Fatalistic suicide**: excess regulation, noted more briefly, as in oppressive discipline.

What made it sociological

- He rejected purely psychological, climatic, and racial explanations as insufficient for the pattern of rates.
- The method showed that a personal act tracks the moral density of groups.

Limits

- Official labelling of death is an office practice. Later ethnomethodology stressed that coding.
- **Max Weber** would still ask for the meaning of the act, which rates underplay.
- Gendered undercounting and Indian farmer and student suicides need extra institutional analysis, yet the rate-and-type method still travels.

Flow diagram

Social facts rates -> Comparative tables
Comparative tables -> Egoistic altruistic anomic fatalistic
Egoistic altruistic anomic fatalistic -> Integration and regulation
Private motive -> Insufficient for the rate

Conclusion

Durkheim's distinct method was to treat **suicide** rates as **social facts**, compare them, and classify types by integration and regulation. It founded a sociology of even the most private act. Later critiques of official coding and meaning qualify the files; they do not erase the method.

Facts & figures

Suicide (1897)

Durkheim's demonstration that rates vary with group structure.

Egoistic suicide

Linked to weak integration, illustrated with religious and family contrasts.

Anomic suicide

Linked to weak regulation in economic or marital disruption.

Social facts

External, constraining ways of acting; the rate is such a fact.