

Definition: **suicide** from *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*

1

A person who intentionally kills himself or herself.

2

The act of taking one's life. Émile Durkheim, the first to study suicide systematically, distinguished three different types, depending on what motivates the act of self-destruction: *altruistic*, *anomic* and *egoistic*; definitions of each are found below.



Image from: [Women appear to be at a higher risk for... in Encyclopedia of Global Health](#)

Summary Article: **Suicide**

From *Black's Medical Dictionary, 43rd Edition*

Self-destruction as an intentional act. Attempted suicide is when death does not take place, despite an attempt by the person concerned to kill him or herself; parasuicide is the term describing an attempt at suicide that is really an act to draw attention to the perceived problems of the individual involved.

Although suicide rates in the UK have fallen over the last 15 years, it remains a serious public health problem. Worldwide, suicide is the second major cause of death (after tuberculosis) for women between the ages of 15 and 44, and the fourth major killer of men in the same age-group (after traffic accidents, tuberculosis and violence). The risk of suicide rises sharply in old age. Globally, there are estimated to be between ten and 25 suicide attempts for each completed suicide.

In the United Kingdom, around 6,000 suicides are reported annually in the UK, of which approximately 75 per cent are by men. The peak age range for suicide in men is 45–49, while in women it is 50–54. Attempted suicide has become significantly more common, particularly among people under the age of 25: among adolescents in the UK, for example, it is estimated that there are about 19,000 suicide attempts annually. Follow-up studies of teenagers who attempt suicide by an overdose show that up to 11 per cent will succeed in killing themselves over the following few years. In young people, factors linked to suicide and attempted suicide include alcohol or drug abuse, unemployment, physical or sexual abuse, and the fact of being in custody. (In the mid-1990s, 20 per cent of all prison suicides were by people under 21.)

Apart from the young, those at highest risk of dying by suicide include health professionals, pharmacists, vets and farmers. Self-poisoning (see POISONS) is the common method used by health professionals for whom high stress levels, together with relatively easy access to means, are important factors.

Physician-assisted suicide

Although controversial, a special legal exemption applies to doctors in a few countries who assist terminally ill patients to kill themselves. In the United States, Oregon legalised physician-assisted suicide in 1997, where it still occurs; assisted suicide was briefly legal in the Australian Northern Territory in 1996, but the legislation was repealed. (It is also practised, but not legally authorised, in the

Netherlands and Switzerland.)

In the UK, a legal distinction is made between killing people with their consent (classified as murder) and assisting them to commit suicide (a statutory offence under the Suicide Act 1961). The distinction is between acting as a perpetrator and as an accessory. Doctors may be judged to have aided and abetted a suicide if they knowingly provide the means – or even if they simply provide advice about the toxicity of medication and tell patients the lethal dosage. Some argue that the distinction between EUTHANASIA and physician-assisted suicide has no moral or practical relevance, particularly if people are too disabled to act themselves. In theory, patients retain ultimate control in cases of assisted suicide, whereas control rests with the doctor in euthanasia. (See also MENTAL ILLNESS.)

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