

1

Suicide Investigations

STEPHEN T. HOLMES
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes
10/27/2021

About Myself....

- ▶ I received a PhD. from the University of Cincinnati in Criminal Justice
- ▶ A Masters Degree in Sociology from the University of Louisville
- ▶ I have served in a variety of administrative posts here at UCF including Associate Dean and Vice President
- ▶ And now I am back on faculty at UCF



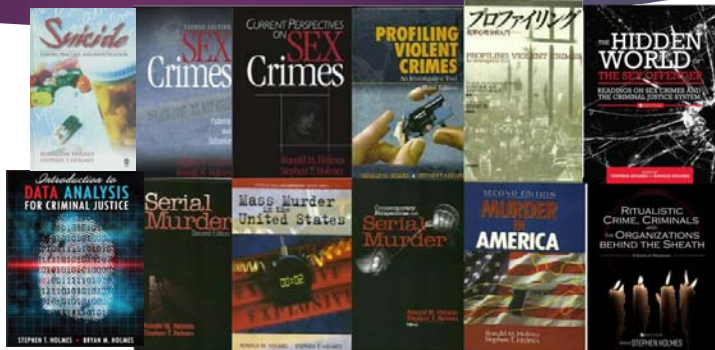
©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

3

I have Written or Coauthored

- A couple books on this topic so I should know what I am talking about.
- Notice I say "I should."
- But there are a lot of questions that I just cant answer.



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

But Most of You

- ▶ Are here not to listen about me.
- ▶ You are here to hear about the topics of profiling violent crimes.
- ▶ More specifically you want to learn a little more about how to read crime scenes and the motivations of those that engage in these illicit activities.



10/27/2021

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

5

Most of My Research....

- ▶ Centers around the odd side of homicide.
 - ▶ More specifically the weird and strange things that people do.
 - ▶ In a nutshell....I get calls when there is an suicide, homicide or other accidental death involving some type of sexual play or other type of behavior that people just don't understand.
 - ▶ Or I get the call when the police or some other investigative agency wants to narrow down the pool of possible suspects



10/27/2021

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

6

For Instance....

- ▶ I once got a call in the middle of the night from the local police jurisdiction about a young 13-year-old girl who went to the local hospital because she had a JIF jar stuck in her cervical canal.
 - ▶ The police were convinced she was abused.
 - ▶ The girl said she did it herself.
 - ▶ I agreed with the young girl.
 - ▶ To her, this was a sure form of birth control.
 - ▶ You often have to take into account the age of the victim and potential offender



10/27/2021

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

7

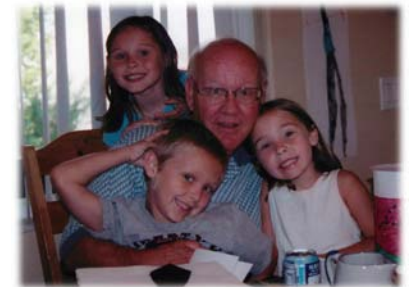
My Interest in Suicide

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes
10/27/2021

8

My Interest in Suicide Investigations

- ▶ Began long ago
- ▶ As the son of a coroner, I went on a lot of calls with my father.
 - ▶ Sometimes because they were interesting cases, and sometimes just because they needed extra help lifting a body
 - ▶ Those were strange times.
- ▶ I never understood how he could come from a crime scene involving children and then come right back to my house



10/27/2021

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

He Always Told Me

- ▶ That those were the hardest cases.
 - ▶ But that he felt he had to do them.
 - ▶ He thought the families needed to hear it from him.
- ▶ That as someone with kids and grand kids, he often could best understand their grief.
- ▶ And I think he was right.



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

But Then Suicide Struck Home

- ▶ One of my cousins who suffered from mental illness took her life shooting herself with her father's pistol
 - ▶ She did it in the garage, where she knew her father would come in through on his way home from work.
 - ▶ Kristen couldn't have been any more than 20.
 - ▶ Beautiful girl
 - ▶ Everyone looked up to.
 - ▶ No one had any idea what she struggled with except her mother and father.
 - ▶ And they never told anyone.



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

Chip

- ▶ Then about 5 years ago, my cousin that was closest in age to me took his own life.
 - ▶ We knew he was struggling.
 - ▶ But he refused help.
 - ▶ He wanted to stay home and help my aunt out
- ▶ Then one morning she heard a shotgun blast and made her way up the step.
 - ▶ Chip had shot himself.
 - ▶ And left himself for her to find.



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

It Was Unexplainable

- ▶ How could a person that loved his 85 year old mother so much leave himself for his mother to find.
 - ▶ None of it made any sense.
 - ▶ Yes, taking his life made sense to those of us that knew him, but not in such a way for his mother to be the one to find him.



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

The Stories Are Timeless

- ▶ It doesn't matter where you live
- ▶ It doesn't matter how close of a family you live in.
 - ▶ Mental illness and unfortunately suicide touches us all.
- ▶ As investigators you likely see this everyday



We All Try to Make Sense Out of It

- ▶ Sometimes it is predictable
- ▶ And other times it just is not.
- ▶ Some are able to hold things together for a while
 - ▶ And others just let it all hang out.



For Many of Us...

- ▶ We will never know or understand the pain and suffering that the decedents loved ones have gone through.
- ▶ Nor will we ever understand just why or how they choose to end their life the way they did or using the method they did.
 - ▶ But that is after all a good part of your job



That Is...

- ▶ It is your job to make sense of the irrational.
 - ▶ It is your job to not only determine the cause and manner of death but often to speak to the relatives of the departed and try to provide some comfort.
 - ▶ This might just be the hardest part of what you do



This Lecture Today

- ▶ Is not intended to tell you how to do your job.
- ▶ You know how to do that.



It Is Not Intended

- ▶ To show you how to determine manner or cause of death
 - ▶ You know how to do that.



I am Not Going to Go Over Numerous

- ▶ Cases of suicide that I have consulted on.
 - ▶ What is after all the point of that?



Instead, I am Going to Talk About

- ▶ Suicide as a social phenomenon
 - ▶ We are going to cover the different types of suicide
 - ▶ Discuss some of the alarming stats
 - ▶ We are going to look at suicide historically and understand the stigma that has been attached to it.
 - ▶ How the church has viewed it
 - ▶ How the state has viewed it
- ▶ And then try to understand the suicidal mind.
 - ▶ If that is indeed possible.



Suicide as a Social Phenominton

Suicide as a Social Phenomenon

- ▶ Has perplexed researchers since the dawn of mankind.
- ▶ Why is it that man is capable of taking their own life, but no other animal engages in a final self destructive act?
- ▶ And what does it mean that we are capable of just such acts.
 - ▶ That is something we may never know.



Overall

- ▶ We would like to think of suicide as an impulsive act.
 - ▶ That is one where the person is just not thinking clearly and decides to take their life in a moment.
 - ▶ After all this is what we are led to believe.
- ▶ But the facts seem to indicate otherwise
 - ▶ Suicide ideation is pervasive
 - ▶ And on the average: a person attempts suicide 2.5 times before they are successful



One of My Best Friends

- ▶ Is a Catholic priest.
 - ▶ And I cant tell you how many long and deep discussions we have had about this specific topic.
 - ▶ While recognizing the role that mental illness plays, he believes that the ability to thought to take one's own life is part of the defect of humanity that came about through origin sin.
 - ▶ And that is that man can perform the same and solemn act as God.
 - ▶ And that is ending one's own life.



He Likes to Quote Aristotle and Augustine

- ▶ And claim that life is a God-Given gift and whoever takes their own life sins against him.
 - ▶ In the same way that anyone who kills a cow sins against his owner.
- ▶ Aristotle goes on to state that man is endowed with free will and may dispose of himself and is free to choose his own actions. But only as it pertains to this world.



Then I Often Reply to Him

- ▶ That his belief and possibly the church as a whole is culturally relative.
 - ▶ That is how do you explain the kamikazes during WWII?
 - ▶ How do you explain the cultural permissiveness of suicide bombers?
 - ▶ How do you explain the early church martyrs?
- ▶ Then we just give up and agree that there is no way to understand the concept of suicide universally.



Suicide Statistics

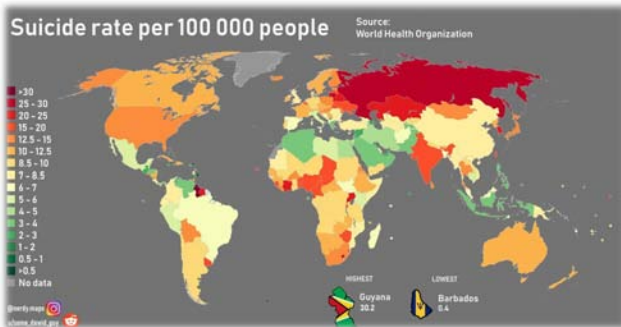
AND RECENT TRENDS

Just For a Moment

- ▶ Lets talk about suicide in general and just how pervasive it is both here at home and around the world.
 - ▶ But I am not just concerned about successful attempts.
 - ▶ Every year, there are approximately 250,000 failed suicide attempts.



Across The World



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

Suicide rates are highly variable

I always thought that Japan would have the highest suicide rate in the world because of their cultural traditions.

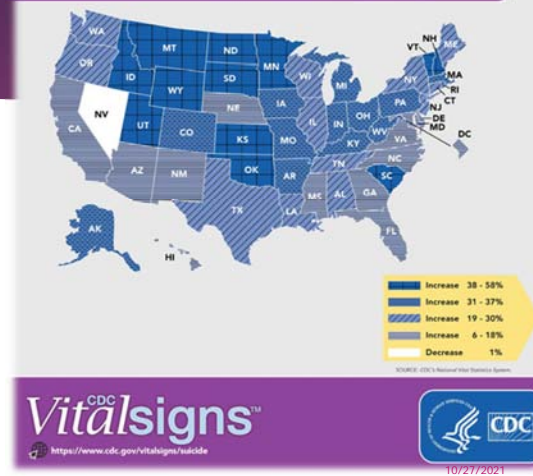
But theirs is not very different than out own.

Just Within the United States

- Look at the rise of suicides in the central region of the country.
- The largest percentage increases where in the central region and (SC, VT & CT)
- Remember, this is before COVID.

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

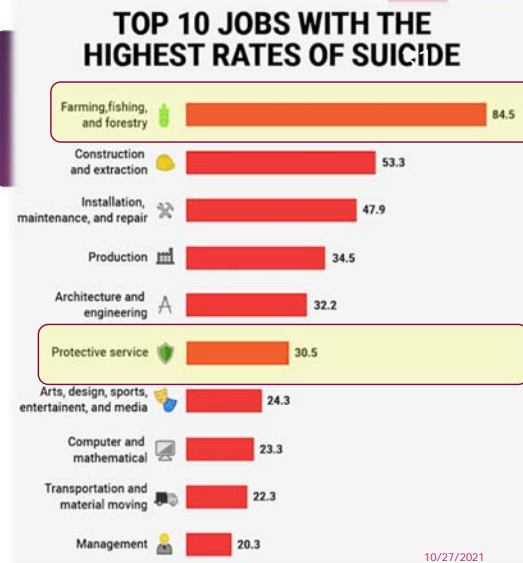
Suicide rates rose across the US from 1999 to 2016.



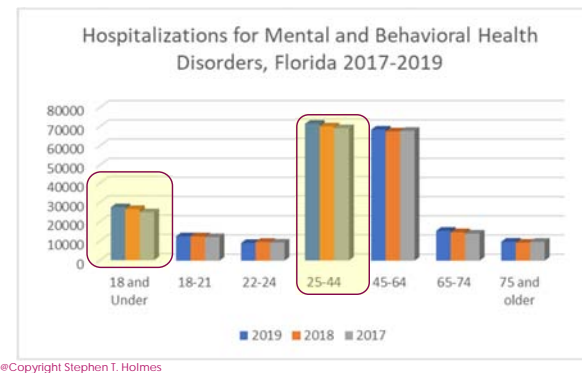
And When We Think of Occupations

- With the highest suicide rate, we expect it to be police officers and others in the protective services because of what they see and deal with every day.
- But they fall somewhere in the middle.
- Who would have though it would be those that are into farming, fishing or forestry.
 - Unless of course they are loosing their family farms.

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes



Hospitalizations for Mental Health Issues Increased from 2017-2019



These are data from the State of Florida.

Unfortunately, we don't have data from 2020 yet, but one can expect that the trends shown here would only get worse.

And hospitalizations for mental health issues are a great proxy measures for potential number of suicides.

33

National Statistics on Suicide

- Overall suicide rates increased 28% (44% Iowa) from 2000 to 2015.
 - And in Iowa, since 2000, the number of suicides has increased 87 percent.
 - These however are conservative estimates because these data are only for counties where there were 5 or more suicides

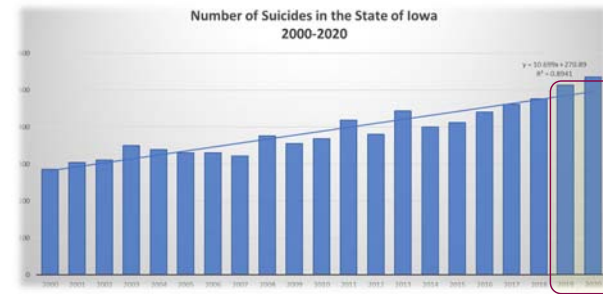
Year	Suicides	Percentage Change
2000	286	
2001	304	
2002	311	
2003	350	
2004	339	
2005	331	
2006	330	
2007	322	44%
2008	376	
2009	356	
2010	369	
2011	419	
2012	381	
2013	444	
2014	400	
2015	412	
2016	441	
2017	462	
2018	477	
2019	514	
2020	536	87%

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

34

The Increase in Suicides in Iowa



* Remember, the suicide rate might actually be higher considering the reporting requirements for the state
 ©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

Has been fairly steady since the year 2000

Overall, the numbers are increasing about 10 per year

We expected to see a larger increase between 2019 and 2020 but that didn't really appear

- Or did it?
- According to Dr. Klein that increase was about 38%

10/27/2021

35

The State Medical Examiner

- Dr. Klein states in his 2019 Annual Report that there were 415 suicides in 2019 and current data show 576 on 2020.

- That is a percentage increase of **38.6 during the past year**
- Or the year where COVID restrictions took hold.

$$PctChange = \frac{576 - 415}{415}$$



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

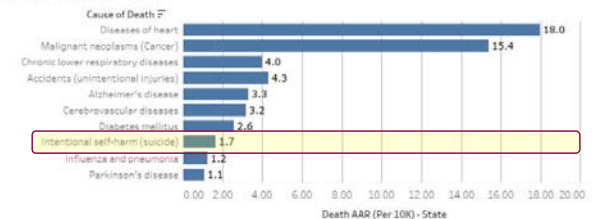
10/27/2021

36

In Iowa

- Suicide is the 8th leading cause of death

State Top 10 Causes - 2020



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

Causes of Death by Age Group

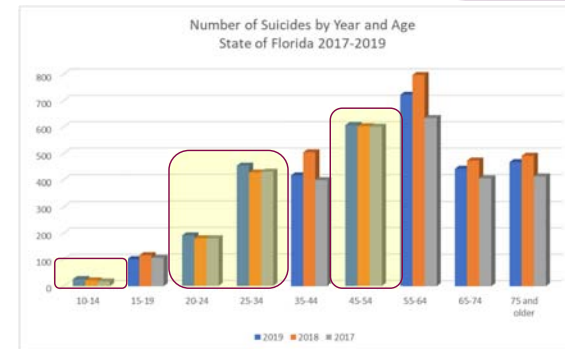
• Suicide is a problem throughout the life span; it is

Suicide is the Leading	
Cause of Death	Age Group
3	10-14
2	15-34
4	35-44
5	45-54
8	55-64

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

Number of Suicides by Age Grouping



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

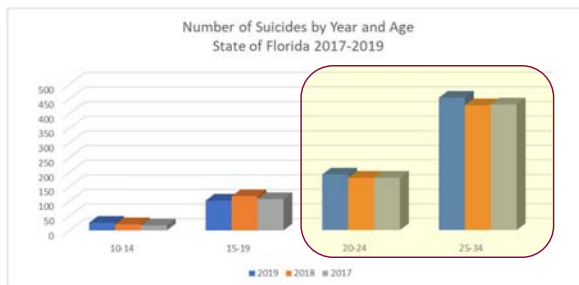
10/27/2021

The problem we have in Florida is that our data always lags behind a couple of years.

But anecdotal evidence seems to be suggesting that we are seeing increases for the younger population, likely attributed to COVID

This After All What Many Mental Health Counselors Were Telling Us

39



Was likely to happen if we kept our schools shut down and the younger generation out of work with limited ability to find a job

Data for the year 2020 is really going to be telling

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

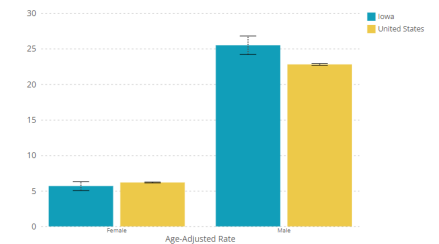
10/27/2021

In Iowa

40

► Even before COVID, the suicide rate was higher than the national average

Suicides per 100,000: by Sex (2018)

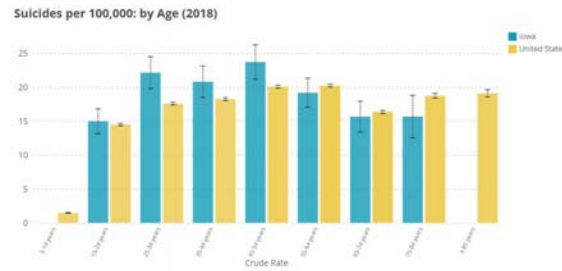


©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

In Iowa

- ▶ We are seeing that a substantial number of those that are committing suicide are younger than the national average.
- ▶ Again, this is before COVID
- ▶ But we would expect these patterns to hold, but just at elevated levels.



Suicides in Custody

ACROSS LOCAL, STATE AND FEDERAL INSTITUTIONS

Suicides in State Custody

- ▶ From 2001 to 2019 the number of suicides has increased **85 percent in state prisons**, 61 percent in federal prisons and 13 percent in local jails
- ▶ During 2010-2019, about suffocation, including hanging and self-strangulation accounted for about 90 percent of suicide deaths in local jails.



When Due Suicides Occur in Custody

- ▶ From 2015-2019, about 12 percent of deaths by suicide in local jails occurred within the first 24 hours of incarceration
- ▶ This is about half of what it was 10-15 years earlier



Who Does It?

- ▶ The average suicide rate for whites in local jails was custody 93 per 100,000 from 2015-2019
 - ▶ That is five times the rate for black males
 - ▶ And 3 times the rate for Hispanic males.

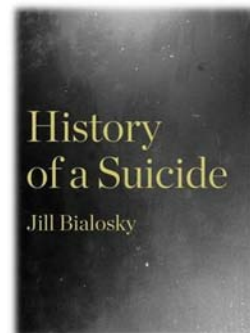


Quick History of Suicide

OR SELF MURDER

Suicide Has Been Around

- ▶ As long as man kind has been able to think and reason on his own.
 - ▶ The word suicide however has not.
 - ▶ It is a combination of two Latin words.
 - ▶ Sui meaning "of oneself."
 - ▶ And Cide is derived from the word caedere which translated means to "chop, cut or kill."



Historically

- ▶ Suicide has almost universally been condemned.
- ▶ In Ancient Greece, it was condemned because of the belief that humans owed their life in homage to the Gods.
 - ▶ And committing suicide circumvented this special obligation.
 - ▶ And therefore the Gods might take it out on the people and/or family's for this ultimate act of betrayal.



Others Like Pythagora

- ▶ Believed that this world could only hold so many souls.
- ▶ And that suicide (the taking of souls away) would disrupt the delicate balance on earth.
- ▶ Hence, the whole world we be in jeopardy.



Even Plato Gave Some Thought

- ▶ To the idea of suicide.
 - ▶ He felt that it was an affront to the state since every man was a citizen and soldier for the state.
 - ▶ Thus, taking one's own life was akin to desertion from the military or killing a state soldier.
 - ▶ His belief was so strong that he said that a man who commits suicide should be buried with no honors or ceremony.

"one who kills the person that is most of all his own, and is said to be dearest to him", therefore the suicide, from 'lack of effort and unmanly cowardice', should, 'off by themselves without a single companion tomb ... be buried without any fame, in uncultivated and nameless boundary regions' without 'tablets or name markers indicating the tombs'



Plato

- ▶ Did however give thought to those that suffered from incurable or painful diseases.
 - ▶ He said in specific circumstances, that suicide may be acceptable.
 - ▶ But these situations were rare



In Sardinia

- ▶ The most severe penalty was to leave the corpse unburied.
- ▶ Here the decedents body was hung from a gibbet on the exact spot where he had died, and it was left dangling in the wind to be eaten by carrion crows'



Any Any Event

- ▶ Ancient Greek tradition was that anyone who committed suicide was to be burned on the outskirts of town, far away from town, outside of the town limits.



Citizens of Ancient Rome

- ▶ Also condemned suicide.
 - ▶ That is in except in the case where there was an incurable disease or the individual brought dishonor to the state by losing in battle.
 - ▶ Roman legions who killed themselves in this way were allowed to be buried within the city with honors.
 - ▶ Those soldiers who were caught and considered prisoners of war were also permitted to take their lives and be buried with honor



In Roman Society

- ▶ Members of the aristocracy were also permitted to kill themselves much more freely than those at the lower end of the social scale.
- ▶ Just like in the early Catholic Church, indulgences could be bought by individuals for their family members.
 - ▶ Death with honor
 - ▶ Burial
 - ▶ Family cemeteries
 - ▶ Being able to keep and pass down property



Manner of Death in Ancient Rome

- ▶ There was also a difference in how members of the aristocracy took their lives from the working class.
 - ▶ Aristocracy
 - ▶ Poison
 - ▶ Their own weapons (sword or dagger)
 - ▶ Working Class
 - ▶ Drowning
 - ▶ Hanging



Christianity and Suicide

- ▶ Early Christianity followed the traditions of Ancient Rome until around the 4th century.
 - ▶ It was then stated that those who committed suicide turned away from God
 - ▶ Because life was God's gift to mankind.
 - ▶ And to reject life, was to reject God.
 - ▶ Thus harsh penalties were established for those that rejected God.



St. Augustine

- ▶ In the fifth century stated that the Fifth Commandment also pertained to suicide.
 - ▶ So not only would those that commit suicide reject God (and his gift) but they also committed an act against God's solemn commandments.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

➤ MORAL DUTIES

- No right to over ones life even his own
Our body is not our own, it God's
- Take care of our Body= it also affect the soul
Prudence
- Imprudent action is a high risk for taking life
Must be avoided
- To take care of our body. Eat properly, avoid things that can hurt the body

Funny... (Is it the 5th or 6th Commandment)



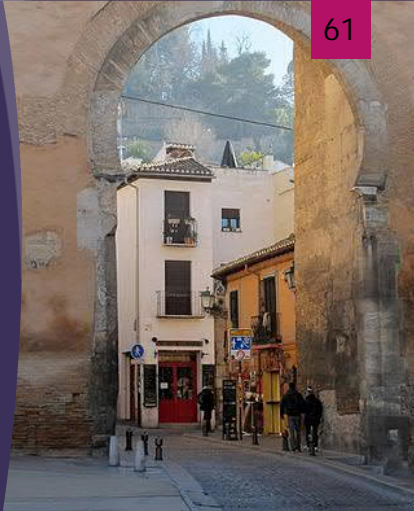
Thus, Under Christianity

- ▶ And the control it had over western civilization, suicide became the worst sin, and the person committing it became the worst sinner.
- ▶ The suicidal participant therefore was damned to spend the rest of their eternal life in the fires of hell.



The Church Synods

- ▶ Synod at Aries – Suicide was an act of murder
- ▶ Synod of Braga – the rites of the church would not be extended to those who took their life
- ▶ Synod of Toledo – Excommunication and last rites and burial in consecrated ground was forbidden
- ▶ Synod of Nîmes – burial outside of church yard and city



61

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

Other Local Customs

- ▶ The bodies of those who committed suicide be stripped and drug throughout city.
- ▶ A stake shall be driven through the heart so they can never rise again
- ▶ Body could not be taken outside of a house through a door
 - ▶ Had to be removed through a window
- ▶ Some German traditions stated that the body had to be buried outside the house under a window so to endure the harsh elements of winter



62

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

In Scotland

- ▶ In Scotland, suicides were buried immediately outside the cemetery, in a grave marked by a small mound of earth.
- ▶ And those that passed the site were obliged to throw a stone at it



63

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

Modern Explanations of Suicide

AND SELF MURDER

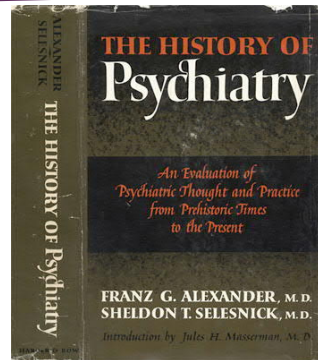
64

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes
10/27/2021

And It Wasn't Until the 18th and 19th Centuries

65

- ▶ That suicide began to be viewed and explained through the medical model.
 - ▶ That it is not an act of religious rebellion but rather an act to relieve oneself of pain or mental anguish
- ▶ It was believed that no one would commit suicide if their life was fulfilling and enjoyable.



10/27/2021

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

And During the 20th Century And Beyond

66

- ▶ We are beginning to look at suicide even more humanely
 - ▶ It is now believed that people commit suicide to upgrade their current living conditions.
 - ▶ So instead of focusing on the negative conditions, those participants focus on the positive.
 - ▶ And how much more pleasurable eternal life could be than the physical life that they now endure.



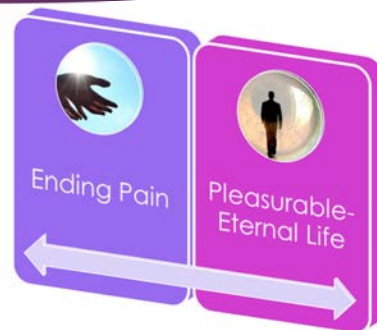
10/27/2021

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

The Question Is..

67

- ▶ Regardless of a person's faith, why do they decide to take their own life?
 - ▶ We assume that most of those who do are suffering from some type of pain and they want to end.
 - ▶ Or what Edwin Scheidman stated:
 - ▶ Unbearable psychological pain
 - ▶ Sense of aloneness and isolation
 - ▶ Realization that death is the only solution
 - ▶ And this all makes sense with our current understanding of the psychology of the suicidal participant.



10/27/2021

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

But Many Add To This...

68

- ▶ That is many psychologists will say that the suicidal participant or those that express suicidal intentions suffer from inflexible thinking.
 - ▶ That is to say they do not or are unwilling to focus on the good things in their life and not the bad.
 - ▶ This is probably true to some extent.
 - ▶ Because even those that engage in counseling, say they never lose the suicidal ideation.
 - ▶ It is always there.



10/27/2021

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

Our Modern Thought

- ▶ Is that man/people fear getting old.
 - ▶ They fear the deterioration of our bodies through illness and disease
 - ▶ They fear losing or trying to regain social relationships
 - ▶ Some fear the loss of cognitive ability
 - ▶ They fear being labeled as a failure
 - ▶ Loosing or not being able to get a job
 - ▶ They develop severe anxiety about their deficiencies and suicidal ideations develop.



Can You Imagine

- ▶ Once being viewed as a scholar, a professional.
 - ▶ And now just trying to remember where you put your keys
 - ▶ Where you put your wallet
 - ▶ And getting lost in your train of thought



My Mother In Law

- ▶ Is one of the sharpest people I know.
- ▶ She is 91.
 - ▶ She is in chronic pain due to her knees
 - ▶ Everyone she knew has now passed on but her kids
 - ▶ And even they are starting to have serious health issues.
 - ▶ Even she on some days wants it to end.
 - ▶ This is all normal.



Schniederman

- ▶ States that when cognitive functioning diminishes so do feelings of depression, hopelessness and personality problems.



Others Believe....

- ▶ Or I should say have lost faith that everything will go right in the future.
 - ▶ They have lost their chance at love
 - ▶ At success
 - ▶ And things will only get worse



And Hopelessness

- ▶ Sets in.
- ▶ In fact, many claim that hopelessness is one of the most important factors in a person's decision to commit suicide.
- ▶ And that this hopelessness leads a person to believe that there is no escape from the pain.



Even Great/Gifted Athletes

- ▶ Have these fears and anxieties.
- ▶ Some have talked openly about their issues and others have not.

Dak Prescott sought help for anxiety, depression in the offseason

Based by Charles Williams on September 10, 2019, at July 19th 2017



One of the Greatest Triggers

- ▶ For suicidal ideation is depression.
 - ▶ 2/3's of people suffering from depression do not seek treatment
 - ▶ And 1 in 5 Americans will suffer a bout of depression during their lifetime.
 - ▶ But 80 percent of those that are treated showing an improvement in symptoms with four to six weeks.



Depression is a Such a Major Issue

- ▶ That it is considered the leading cause of disability within the United States for people 15-44



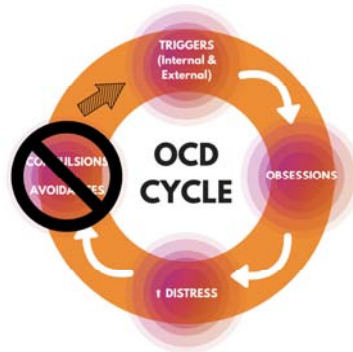
Comparing Depression to Breast Cancer

- ▶ We lose about as many people due to depression each year as we do to breast cancer
 - ▶ But it only 1/100th of the research funding



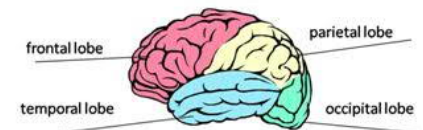
But Its Not Just Depression

- ▶ Other common symptoms that can lead to suicidal ideation include:
 - ▶ PTSD
 - ▶ Severe Cases of OCD
 - ▶ Not being able to turn your brain off
 - ▶ And always coming back to a pivotal moment and not being able to flush a thought
 - ▶ Some will even report thinking they did something horrible like killing someone if they can't remember every second of every day.



The Problem with Suicide

- ▶ Is that even for those who study this phenomenon, we have not been able to model who does it and who does not.
 - ▶ In fact the majority of people that suffer from depression, anxiety or severe OCD do not commit suicide or even try
 - ▶ So what do we really know about the subject matter?
 - ▶ Some would argue not a whole lot



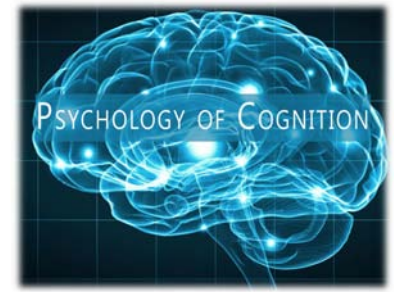
While Other Would Say That

- ▶ The human mind is extremely complicated and beyond our understanding at the current time.
 - ▶ And when that gets coupled with free will the problem is only exasperated.



But There Are Those

- ▶ That believe that there is some promise on trying to understand how suicidal participants organize their thought processes.
- ▶ These are better known as cognition studies.
 - ▶ These studies focus on hopelessness, perfectionism, burdensomeness, low belongingness and unbearability.
 - ▶ And it is how the participant perceives these cognitive contents that separates them from the "normal" population.



Populations at High Risk of Suicide

- ▶ 22 Veterans lose their life to suicide each day
 - ▶ Veterans aged 50-59 have the highest rate of suicide
 - ▶ Only 50 percent of veterans who return that need treatment ever receive it
 - ▶ The rate of PTSD for veterans is 15X that of civilians.



But Its Not Only the Police or Veterans That Suffer From PTSD

- ▶ Anyone can suffer from it that has a stressful experience, trauma, mental illness or a family history of mental illness
- ▶ Risk Factors Include:
 - ▶ Long lasting trauma, childhood sexual abuse, lack of or solid support system, seeing someone get hurt or a history of substance abuse.

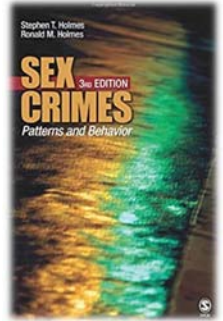


Broad and General Types

OF SUICIDE

When Discussing Any Type of Social Phenomenon

- ▶ I find it much easier to differentiate it into types.
 - ▶ Maybe that is the sociologist in my liking to deal with typologies.
 - ▶ But I think it makes it much easier to conceptualize the phenomena.
 - ▶ And suicide is no different than say Sex Offenders, serial murderers or just about any other type of criminal.
 - ▶ There are a variety of reasons that people engage in suicide.



Generally Speaking

- ▶ Suicide can take one of two forms.
 - ▶ The first form consists of killing oneself for personal reasons. It can be the killing of oneself for social, health related or mental illness (and they see suicide as the only way out)
 - ▶ The second form is institutional suicide.
 - ▶ In this form, there person is almost commanded to take their life because of his or her life station.
 - ▶ Like a soldier in battle
 - ▶ Or a person that has brought shame to their family
- ▶ But most of you are only concerned about the first type.



The Focus on the Manner of Death

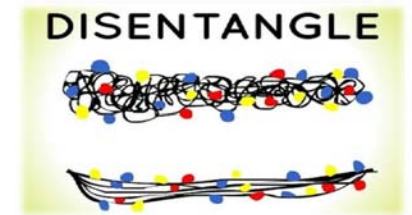
And Personal Suicide is a Painted

- ▶ With a very broad brush.
 - ▶ There are so many reason for this type of behavior that this type of distinction really doesn't help us that much.



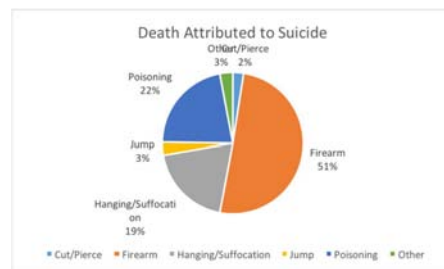
So Sometimes it is Easier

- ▶ To focus on the method of self death
 - ▶ That being the manner of death
 - ▶ But that doesn't always help explain it either.
- ▶ Instead, we like to focus on a combination of the two.
 - ▶ Its not perfect
 - ▶ And there are some permeable boundaries, but it does help is making sense of out of many cases.
- ▶ With the goal being to disentangle the manner, means and reason for the act.



In General, I See Suicides as One of Four Different Types

- ▶ These include
 - 1.) Those that engage in self-destruction
 - 2.) Those that use alcohol and/or drugs
 - ▶ These include poisoning deaths
 - 3.) Accidental Deaths
 - 4.) Those that are deliberate, premeditated and planned.
 - ▶ Remember these boundaries are permeable so they might include types for 1 and 2

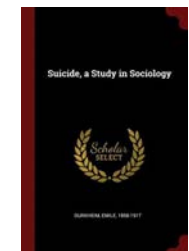


And Don't Worry...

- ▶ I am not talking about Durkheim's four different types.
 - ▶ While fascinating stuff and a great societal focus, it does little to help the front-line investigator.
 - ▶ And focusing on other issues, helps keep you awake for a little while longer.

The Four Types of Suicide

From his findings, he was able to generalize that there were four basic types of suicide:



Each Type of Suicide

- ▶ Is a little different from each other.
 - ▶ And to be honest so is each case.
 - ▶ But it helps us understand the incident by grouping suicide into different types
 - ▶ We are likely to see different types of indicators.
 - ▶ Different types of motivators
 - ▶ Different types of anticipated gain
 - ▶ And really different types of crime scenes.



In Some Cases

- ▶ It really doesn't matter which type it was.
 - ▶ You know if was a suicide when you see it.
 - ▶ But if you are going to investigate the facts around an individual case, it does help you conceptualize the reason behind the decision of the participant
 - ▶ And sometimes why they chose the manner of death that they did.



The First Type ...

- ▶ Is the person that engages in self-destructive behavior.
 - ▶ While they all do if you really want to be technical about it, but those that we consider the self-destructivist usually are suffering from some type of terminally ill situation.
 - ▶ Or they may live their life in constant pain that they want to get out of.



The Interesting Part of the Self-Destructivist

- ▶ Is that their pain may be physical pain or it may be mental anguish.
 - ▶ Mentally ill patients may just want to voices in their head or the pain/guilt or other issues that they suffer from to stop.
- ▶ So this is a fairly broad category.
- ▶ The individual can also be suffering from a relationship breakup and just not see how they can go on.
- ▶ But either way, the suicide is a way for them to end the pain.



Often We Learn

- ▶ Of their pain with the notes they leave or from talking to their close friends and neighbors.
 - ▶ In the case of my cousin Chip, he felt great pain in his abdomen.
 - ▶ Evidently, he looked it up and he and Dr. Google decided he must have pancreatic cancer.
 - ▶ We never knew this until his neighbor came to the funeral home and told us that she didn't know how far along his pancreatic cancer had progressed.



The Self-Destructivist

- ▶ Will engage in a final act that they know will result in their death.
- ▶ That is there will be no doubt that they will survive the attempt.
 - ▶ Shot gun blasts
 - ▶ Carbon Dioxide poisoning
 - ▶ Jumping from cliff, building or boat are all classic examples
- ▶ The key is that there is no way the individual can survive the act



Self Destructivist

- ▶ In this case took great pains in researching how to do it.
 - ▶ He knew the effect that CO2 would have on him.
 - ▶ He drank a little liquid courage
 - ▶ He thought it would be painless.
- ▶ He thought he would loose consciousness and then pass away
 - ▶ And he even blocked the door to make sure the gas was concentrated in the garage.



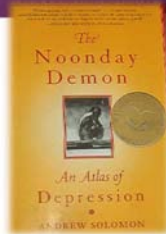
2.) Involves The Use and Abuse of Drugs and Alcohol

- ▶ Those that take an overdose of alcohol or drugs so they can pass away with little to no pain.
 - ▶ This is after all the way that I would want to go.
 - ▶ Once life is not worth living, and the fear of death is gone, this makes a lot of sense.



The Problem in Investigating These

- Types of suicides is that you have to look closer at the individual.
 - You have to find out what was going on in their lives
 - You have to look for root causes
 - And you can not assume that the death was a suicide and not an accidental overdose.
 - Even if it is obvious to the naked eye



3.) Accidental Deaths (Not Involving Alcohol or Drugs)

- Then we have those that involve accidental deaths.
 - Some of these can look like suicides.
 - Some may involve autoerotic behavior
 - Cross dressing, pornography in view, placement of knot, naked male or escape mechanism
 - And others may involve "dare devil" type activities.
 - We must always assume them to be "accidental" unless you can prove otherwise.
 - There is just too much at stake for the families to do otherwise.



Combination Activities

- You will see weird or deviant sex play
 - And the interesting thing is that sometimes they will leave a note because they know just how dangerous it is.
 - Escape mechanisms
 - Doing it in a child's room



Rough Sexual Play Gone Wrong

- Sometimes you will see this and think that it is a suicide
 - But putting the pieces together you realize she couldn't have done this herself and her partner got spooked and ran
 - In this case she had her hand behind her back and a towel around her neck
 - The towel of course was a soft restraint device so it wouldn't leave any bruises



Suspension Play

- And accidental asphyxia
 - Again, you will notice that they couldn't have done this on their own
 - And bruises and escape wounds



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

"Suicide Case" from 1939

- And this good thing is that we have such good training today that people are able to recognize suicides from accidental deaths like autoerotic behavior.
- It wasn't always that way

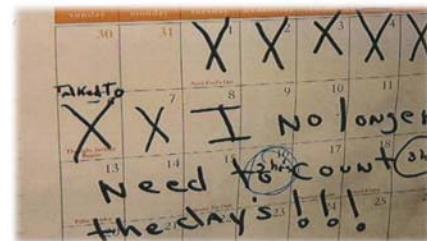


©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

4.) Those that are Preplanned and Motivated.

- These are some of the easiest to clear and dismiss because of the clues left at the crime scene.
 - You can see life swirling down.
 - You may see them holding a picture of a loved one
 - You may see a person mark off days on a calendar
 - And the date they choose is almost always something very important in their life.
 - Birthday
 - Anniversary
 - Date of spouse or child's death



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

Ways in Infer a Suicide

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes
10/27/2021

Being Totally Despondent

- ▶ Claiming that your life and yourself is a total failure.
 - ▶ Not knowing what else to say
 - ▶ Saying they just can't live anymore
 - ▶ Its like you can see they are in a deep whole and can not get out.
 - ▶ I like to think of it as a person falling in a well and looking at life from the bottom of the well.

THIS TIME I'M GOING
TO DO IT RIGHT I CAN'T
GO THROUGH LIFE BEING A
TOTAL F*CK-UP. SURE
FOR THE CRAVE LANGUAGE BUT
THAT IS HOW I FEEL
I LOVE YOU TONE CARE
OF SUICID

PS: I KNOW THAT
YOU & I LOVE ME. I CAN'T
KNOW WHY BUT YOU DO
I JUST CAN'T LIVE WITH
MYSELF & I HOPE PRAY
YOU UNDERSTAND I CAN'T
WRITE ANYMORE I DON'T
UNDERSTAND IT
MYSELF LOVE

PS: ONE
MORE TRYING I
DON'T KNOW WHAT
ELSE TO SAY

10/27/2021

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

Quick But Dated Example

- ▶ If you saw Abbott and Costello's "Hold That Ghost" (1941) it was about two individuals that were killed and thrown in a well.
 - ▶ Melody and Horatio
 - ▶ The look at life from the bottom of the well to see the outside world until they come out and haunt the mansion on the outside.



10/27/2021

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

Handwritten Suicide Notes

- ▶ Often are more meaningful.
- ▶ Usually that means that the incident was impulsive.
- ▶ That this was not planned for a long time.
- ▶ And that the incident that caused this came to a head.
 - ▶ Notice the term usually.
 - ▶ But remember, you only find notes in about 20 percent of suicidal incidents



ANGEL
F
U!!!
DO NOT BLAME HER!!!

10/27/2021

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

Sometimes the Notes

- ▶ We will be on tape.
 - ▶ Just make sure you look for audio recorders
 - ▶ And then make sure it is the decedents voice on tape.
- ▶ Today you almost have to go through the person's phone as well.
 - ▶ But you shouldn't usually have to go back too far



10/27/2021

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

113

A Reliable Conversation with Another Person

- ▶ Is another way to infer a suicide.
 - ▶ That person often can attest to their mental state and if they mentioned that life was just not worth living.
 - ▶ Or a call to a suicide helpline
- ▶ But remember, just because they talked about it, or had ideations does not mean that absolutely meant to go through with it.



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

114

If The Suicide is Result of a Gunshot Wound

- ▶ You might see a recent firearm or ammunition purchase.



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

115

Previous Suicide Attempts

- ▶ These can usually be confirmed by the family or those closest to the individual.
 - ▶ This is often the most reliable signal



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

116

If Suicide Runs in the Family

- ▶ While we are not sure if there is a hereditary link, depression, anxiety and OCD may.
 - ▶ Plus it is awfully easy for unwanted obtrusive thought to enter your mind if you had a family member who committed suicide.



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

117

My Father For Example

- ▶ Was always very worried about living past his 58th birthday because he father and grandfather died before 58.
 - ▶ Not the same I know.
 - ▶ But imagine if your father or mother committed suicide.
 - ▶ That thought will always be in your head.



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

118

Financial or Domestic Problems

- ▶ Financial problems
 - ▶ Or loss of job and means of support
- ▶ The Breakup for a Marriage



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

119

You May Also See

WAYS A FAMILY MAY TRY TO COVER UP A SUICIDE

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes
10/27/2021

Oftentimes The Determination

- ▶ Of a suicide is made more difficult by the alterations of a scene caused by:
 - ▶ Crime scene techs
 - ▶ Crime scene photographers
 - ▶ The news media
 - ▶ Police/Investigative Personnel (esp. if it is a private business where it occurs)



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

Body is Moved to Conceal a Suicide



- ▶ This is actually quite common because many families do not want the stigma attached to their family members.
- ▶ Further, there is a real fear and many life insurance policies will not pay out if the participant killed themselves.

Relatives Who Find the Decedent



- ▶ Are usually the largest culprit
- ▶ Sometimes they want to help
 - ▶ Other times they want to cover the act up to avoid the real or imagined stigma
 - ▶ This can include religious reasons

Removing Notes from the Crime Scene



- ▶ This is fairly common too.
 - ▶ Often this is done to protect other family members because many suicide notes can be vicious.
 - ▶ They may tell the family that they are a failure, they are ugly, no one would ever want to live their lives with them or they were homosexual.
 - ▶ This last area was more popular in years past than it is today.
 - ▶ Or it is their fault that they were never accepted.

Removing a Knife or Other Weapon



- ▶ Is also fairly common.
 - ▶ It could be a family members weapon.
 - ▶ Or the

125

Changing the Crime Scene

- ▶ Relatives may change a crime scene.
 - ▶ This may include disposing of drugs or alcohol
 - ▶ Or in some cases placing a firearm cleaning kit near the body if it is a gun shot wound.



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

126

So What Does This All Mean

FOR THE SUICIDE INVESTIGATOR

©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes
10/27/2021

127

The Suicide Investigator

- ▶ The coroner or the medical examiner has one of the toughest jobs in the criminal justice and public health system.
 - ▶ True, their job is different every day
 - ▶ But they are forced to confront the worst outcome of the human condition day in and day out
 - ▶ There is nothing more humanizing than seeing a lifeless vessel that took their life needlessly (our perception of course)



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

128

The Decisions and Determinations

- ▶ Have monumental consequences for the family.
 - ▶ The determination of the cause or manner of death can have a tremendous on the family for years to come.
 - ▶ It can bring significant social stigma
 - ▶ Family shame
 - ▶ Or financial hardships.



©Copyright Stephen T. Holmes

10/27/2021

However, the Investigator

- ▶ Must remain true to the science.
- ▶ They must take care in their assessments
- ▶ And only determine a death to be a suicide when they are absolutely sure.
 - ▶ Because there are times when the families may dispute their findings.



They Must Be Careful

- ▶ When looking into a decedents life or their background
 - ▶ Many families will want well enough to be left alone
 - ▶ But the calls have to be made
 - ▶ The inquiries have to be done



However, the One Thing

- ▶ That they must always remember is who they are and what they represent.
- ▶ They must always understand there for the grace of god, they could be standing on the other side of the investigation.
 - ▶ It may be a member of their family that is being investigated
- ▶ They must be careful with whom they share their work stories with.
- ▶ And most importantly, they must be able to act with kindness, compassion and empathy to each family member they come into contact with

