Artículos de revisión
Review articles

Reading Durkheim through Galtung: Suicide and structural violence

Leyendo a Durkheim con Galtung: suicidio y violencias estructurales

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Abstract

Introduction: This study aims to explore the relationship between suicide and structural violence, using a theoretical approach grounded in Johan Galtung's theory of violence and Émile Durkheim's typology of suicide. Methodology: The study is situated within the interpretive paradigm and adopts a qualitative, exploratory-level design with discourse analysis. Documentary analysis was employed as the data collection technique. A total of 59 studies published in academic journals across different continents were reviewed.

Results: Structural and cultural violence, deeply rooted in social and economic inequalities, in line with Galtung's model, exert an influence on direct violence, which materializes in suicidal behaviors, particularly among marginalized populations. Conclusion: It is necessary to continue developing this line of research

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that depathologizes suicide and shifts the analytical focus away from clinical and individual determinants toward social interactions and structural violence, in order to build a genuinely interdisciplinary perspective that contributes to understanding suicide as a multidetermined phenomenon.

Keywords

Suicide; Suicide attempt; Structural violence; Direct violence; Cultural violence; Discourse analysis; Marginalized population.

Resumen

Introducción: este estudio pretende explorar la relación entre el suicidio y las violencias estructurales, utilizando un enfoque teórico basado en las teorías de Johan Galtung sobre la violencia y los tipos de suicidio de Émile Durkheim. Metodología: estudio situado en el paradigma interpretativo, el enfoque es cualitativo de nivel exploratorio y análisis de discurso. Se empleó como técnica de recolección de información el análisis documental. Se revisaron 59 estudios publicados en revistas académicas de diferentes continentes. Resultados: las violencias estructural y cultural, profundamente arraigadas en las desigualdades sociales y económicas, siguiendo el modelo de Galtung, inciden en la violencia estructural, lo cual se materializa en los comportamientos suicidas, especialmente en poblaciones marginadas. Conclusión: es necesario continuar con la línea de investigación que despatologiza el suicidio y desplaza el interés de las determinaciones clínicas e individuales hacia las interacciones sociales y las violencias estructurales, para construir una auténtica perspectiva interdisciplinaria que aporte a la comprensión del suicidio como un fenómeno multideterminado.

Palabras clave

Suicidio; Intento de suicidio; Violencia estructural; Violencia directa; Violencia cultural; Análisis de discurso; Población marginada.

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Introduction

Discussing suicide necessarily requires adopting a multifactorial perspective, given that this phenomenon, in its vast complexity, cannot be effectively or adequately understood or addressed from a single theoretical or disciplinary framework. Instead, it calls for a multidisciplinary and intersectoral approach (Zhang, 2019). This issue engages multiple social sectors due to its increasing prevalence, which has positioned it as a global public health problem. Accordingly, the World Health Organization (June 17, 2021) states that suicide can occur at any age and represents the fourth leading cause of death among individuals aged 15 to 29 years.

Nevertheless, most suicide prevention manuals and guidelines adhere to an approach that places the individual at the center and, by extension, prioritizes individual-level factors most commonly associated with suicide, such as depression, anxiety, and identity-related life crises—frequent within the aforementioned age group. While this individual-centered approach is legitimate and contributes meaningfully to understanding and intervening in the phenomenon, it also produces a narrow perspective that obscures other relevant dimensions of the issue, some of which may play a more decisive role in the consummation of suicide, such as structural violence.

The concept of structural violence was introduced by sociologist Johan Galtung (1989), who conceptualizes violence as a triad of manifestations ranging from a superficial level to the intricate depths of the social fabric, which can only be revealed through an analysis of its constituent elements. Galtung proposes a triangle of violence that may be illustrated through the iceberg analogy: direct violence represents the most visible dimension, manifesting in acts as varied as insults, slander, defamation, homicide, suicide, and war; cultural violence is expressed through the naturalization and even glorification of violent means of conflict resolution; and structural violence manifests in social injustices (classism, sexism, racism) that inequitably favor certain social groups at the expense of others' effective access to both material and immaterial goods, including subsistence, identity, and dignity.

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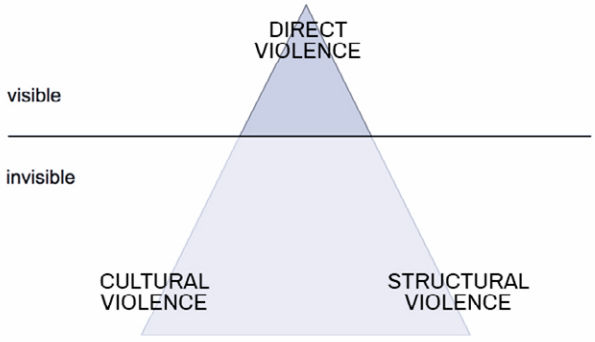
Figure 1. *The violence triangle proposed by Johan Galtung*



Source: Galtung (1989).

The triangle depicted in Figure 1 can rotate such that, at different moments, the upper vertex and the two lower vertices shift positions. When direct and structural violence are located at the base, cultural violence occupies the upper vertex and becomes the most visible element of the relationship. Conversely, when direct and cultural violence insidiously occupy the base, structural violence emerges at the upper vertex (Galtung, 1989). Thus, not only do socioeconomic structures anchor and promote these coercive dynamics, but other dimensions also participate, including kinship structures, territorial identities, and processes of sexuation.

The latter, for example, when expressed through incestuous violence, may lead to a wide range of physical and psychological consequences, fostering depression and suicide (Rassenhofer et al., 2022). Another case concerns sexual minorities, who exhibit higher rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts compared to heteronormative populations (Santoyo et al., 2021), often exacerbated by limited access to health care services due to persistent stereotypes (Argento et al., 2019), which not only endure but may worsen in older age (Wing et al., 2022). This preliminary outline thus underscores the need to address the question of the role played by structural violence in the social forces that propel individuals toward suicide.

Approaching suicide as a multidetermined phenomenon from an interdisciplinary perspective that transcends the boundaries of traditional psychology requires, first and foremost, acknowledging the contributions of other social sciences to its understanding. Sociology occupies a privileged position in elucidating the forms of violence that emerge from social interactions and become sedimented and legitimized within the social fabric. In this regard, reference to Johan Galtung's theoretical framework must necessarily be articulated with another foundational figure in sociology, Émile Durkheim, whose work made significant contributions to the study of violence, particularly self-inflicted violence culminating in self-annihilation.

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Suicide by Émile Durkheim is one of the most influential works in the history of sociology and is also regarded as one of the author's emblematic texts, as well as the most important work on suicide ever written in the history of the social sciences. In this book, Durkheim proposes a taxonomy that remains valid and useful more than a century after its first publication. He initially identifies three types of suicide linked to social dynamics: egoistic suicide, primarily associated with forced or voluntary isolation that separates individuals from their significant others; altruistic suicide, which arises from a radical self-alienation resulting from a symbiotic relationship between the individual and a reference group; and anomic suicide, which derives from a crisis in the symbolic universe that enables individuals to construct their identity and formulate an answer to the question of their own being.

This crisis of the symbolic universe may be influenced or triggered by a positive or negative material crisis: both economic ruin and sudden enrichment may operate as suicidogenic factors. In another section of his work, Durkheim adds a fourth typology, which he terms fatalistic suicide, referring to cases in which suicide emerges as a response to what is commonly described as a "no-exit situation," in which a human being feels "caught between a rock and a hard place." As an example, the author cites individuals and communities who opt for individual or collective suicide in the face of the imminent threat of enslavement or subjection to living conditions they perceive as unbearable.

It may be argued that Johan Galtung's triangle of violence provides a theoretical framework through which Durkheim's proposal can be re-signified and updated. To understand this connection, it is important to approach both authors not merely through the theoretical schemes that confine their contributions to one typology or another, but rather as thinkers committed to understanding the human problems emerging from their respective contexts. From this perspective, it is both possible and illuminating to interrogate the four types of suicide proposed by Durkheim in light of the three types of violence articulated in Galtung's triangle, as a first step toward understanding how relational forms of violence derived from social bonds may become internalized and, in turn, suicidogenic—without necessarily implying that their origin lies within the individual.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to conduct a documentary analysis of recent research on the phenomenon of suicide in order to examine the relationship between relational forms of violence embedded in social contexts and the four types of suicide developed by the French sociologist, as a contribution from two major sociological thinkers to the psychosocial understanding of suicide.

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Methodology

This study is grounded in the interpretive paradigm. To address this proposal, a qualitative documentary research approach and descriptive discourse analysis were employed (Guirao et al., 2008). In the first phase, keywords were validated using the UNESCO Thesaurus: suicide, suicide attempt, completed suicide, violence, social exclusion, and minority groups. Although Johan Galtung's concepts of structural violence, direct violence, and cultural violence could not be validated under their literal denominations, they were nevertheless used due to their relevance to the subject matter of the study.

In a second phase, a search was conducted in the Scopus database, and the selected articles were assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) to evaluate their methodological quality (Pace et al., 2012; Hong et al., 2019).

This tool comprises five methodological categories—qualitative studies, randomized controlled trials, non-randomized studies, quantitative descriptive studies, and mixed-methods studies—each consisting of five evaluation criteria. It was decided to retain those studies that met at least four criteria, a decision that, as the instrument itself clarifies, remains at the discretion of the researchers. In the third phase, the information was synthesized through analytical reading summaries, resulting in a document structured as follows: APA citation, general objective, methodology, population and sample, results, keywords, textual excerpts relevant to the objective of the proposal, and a summary.

Results

Below, we present some relevant findings from the documentary research, which was guided by the analysis of a sample of 59 studies on suicide. These studies illustrate the possible dialogue between Émile Durkheim and Johan Galtung regarding the ways in which social forms of violence are internalized and thereby become suicidogenic.

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Egoistic Suicide and Structural Violence

Egoistic suicide, as proposed by Durkheim (2018), is characterized and distinguished from other types by a particular factor: isolation. For the French sociologist, "suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of the social groups to which the individual belongs" (Durkheim, 2018, p. 176); thus, in this type of suicide, "the bond that ties a person to life is loosened, and it is because the connection that unites them to society has been weakened that society has made them a force inclined toward suicide" (p. 181). Durkheim thus clearly identifies the relationship between isolation and suicide. Some suicides committed by scientists and artists at the peak of their careers fall within this category. In certain cases, it is the individual who withdraws into isolation, even against the efforts of close others to prevent it.

Social life daily demonstrates that, within every community, there are individuals and groups who arrive at isolation through the pathways of structural violence (Kirmayer, 2022). Some studies identify these forms of violence as determinants of external causes of suicide in low- and middle-income countries and seek to define a reference framework for analyzing suicide as a social phenomenon (Weber et al., 2020). Research has also examined specific and unique sociocultural and environmental factors that may increase the risk of suicidal behaviors among vulnerable groups (Vijayakumar et al., 2021). These are the populations of interest for this initial stage of reflection: individuals and groups who generally belong to minorities (Soto, 2017), which may be territorial (Donath et al., 2019), ethnic, sexual (Smith & Reidy, 2021), religious (Lawrence et al., 2016; Poorolajal et al., 2022), ideological, or even aesthetic in nature.

In this regard, migration is a phenomenon that may constitute a risk factor for suicide or intensify a preexisting risk linked to other factors. Migrants who, in their context of origin, may be fully integrated and part of hegemonic majorities within their social group, are placed in a minority position upon migrating, which may lead to isolation and trigger suicidal ideation and self-destructive actions (Montesinos et al., 2013). Added to this is the phenomenon of globalization, which has increased the mobility of young people across countries in search of educational and employment opportunities (Lester et al., 2011). In some prestigious universities that receive students from other regions, student welfare services have documented an increase in suicide risk among this population, indicating that migrant youth exhibit higher rates of self-harm and suicide attempts (Basu et al., 2022; Carmona-Parra et al., 2021).

Among economic migrants who leave their country in search of employment, suicide risk also increases. This risk may be further reinforced by the concurrence of other forms of structural violence derived from factors inherent to migration, such as language barriers, limited access to health care systems, socioeconomic disadvantages, and discrimination (Brennecke et al., 2020).

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This risk tends to decrease when strong family and social ties exist in the territory of origin, which in many cases constitute both the motivation and the emotional support that enable migrants to endure the adversities of economic migration.

In more extreme cases, individuals displaced by war—who in some contexts are euphemistically referred to as "displaced persons" (Cogoid et al., 2022)—or by other forms of political violence experience what Ignacio Martín-Baró described as psychosocial trauma (Carmona, 2013). The long-term consequences of such trauma within a human group include multiple manifestations of self-destructive behaviors, including suicidal behavior (Ager et al., 2021; Carmona et al., 2021). According to a study conducted in Colombia, of 1,754 adolescents surveyed, 5.3% reported having changed their place of residence due to violence. Among them, 38.5% lived in poverty, compared to 23.6% of adolescents not displaced by conflict. Suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts were reported by 19.8% and 9.1% of displaced adolescents, respectively, compared to 5.8% and 2.1% among non-displaced adolescents (Marroquín et al., 2020).

Refugees, for their part, face additional stressors during both the forced departure from their country of origin and their arrival in the host country, including discrimination, detention, and linguistic and cultural barriers, as well as losses such as family members, friends, homeland, social status, community connections, language, financial assets, income, and financial security (Colucci et al., 2017). Parallel to this, numerous studies have examined suicide among refugee and immigrant populations, broadening their scope to include behaviors such as suicidal ideation, suicide mortality, suicide attempts, and suicide planning, as well as analyses of gender-related factors and first- and second-generation immigrants (Amiri, 2020). This expanded analytical framework allows host countries to implement more effective interventions. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the collective character often associated with this phenomenon, along with its link to direct violence, tends to foster strong bonds of solidarity and the identification of the agents of violence, which may mitigate suicide risk.

The case of Indigenous communities, which are exposed to multiple forms of violence in their interactions with other ethnic groups that are more numerous and more powerful militarily and economically, is particularly illustrative and deserves special attention in this reflection on the relationship between structural violence and suicide. Throughout human history, there are emblematic cases of peoples who opted for collective suicide in the face of imminent invasion. One such case is Numantia, a Spanish settlement that, in 143 BCE, chose collective suicide in the face of the inevitable subjugation by the Roman army (Santos de la Morena, 2020). Historical studies of slavery also frequently recount individual and collective cases of human beings who preferred to take their own lives rather than submit to enslavement. During the European colonization of the Americas, there are abundant references to individual and collective suicides within Indigenous communities as acts of resistance to colonization (Weber et al., 2020).

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In contemporary contexts, suicide rates among minority Indigenous cultures are often significantly higher than those observed in hegemonic majority cultures. Indigenous peoples in Canada exhibit suicide rates three times higher than those of the non-Indigenous population; among Native Hawaiians, death by suicide is a relatively frequent phenomenon among adolescents and young adults, with higher prevalence rates compared to non-Native students (Anderson, 2021; Else et al., 2007; Forte et al., 2018); and in Australia, Aboriginal peoples are more likely to die by suicide than non-Aboriginal Australians (Heard et al., 2022).

In Latin America, suicide rates among Indigenous populations are significantly higher than among non-Indigenous populations (ECLAC/PAHO, 2011). For example, in the municipality of Alto Biobío in Chile, where 74.1% of the population is Indigenous and of Mapuche descent, suicide is a recurrent phenomenon (Azuero et al., 2017). Thus, Indigenous studies provide insight into the evolution of critical suicide research that centers on resistance to structural violence (Ansloos & Peltier, 2021).

In Colombia, a particularly illustrative case was documented in the documentary La selva inflada (The Inflated Jungle) (Tapia, February 26, 2016), directed by Alejandro Naranjo, which addresses the suicide of Indigenous adolescents in the city of Mitú, the capital of the department of Vaupés. This municipality lies in a transitional zone between the plains of the Orinoquía region and the Amazon rainforest, located in the southeastern part of the country near the border with Brazil. Since the second decade of the twenty-first century, the department of Vaupés and its capital have led Colombia's suicide rates. In particular, suicide among Indigenous adolescents has reached such magnitude that it motivated the young filmmaker to travel with his cameraman to produce a 1-hour-and-30-minute documentary on the subject. In several interviews, the documentary's director states:

> During the first days, I sat in class with them, listening and observing. In those days, I realized that there was a kind of invisible, self-imposed apartheid, in which half of the class is Indigenous and the other half is 'white.' Those who are Indigenous speak in their own language, which partly ends up segregating them from the rest. In addition, you can see a gap in the academic performance of Indigenous students, because they come from a different culture, and their command of Spanish is different. (as cited in Tapia, February 26, 2016, para. 7)

The filmmaker's commentary highlights the link between structural violence associated with racism and isolation—which he refers to as *apartheid*—and the suicides of Indigenous adolescents. Moreover, the testimony also illustrates how self-exclusion may function as a response by an individual or a group subjected to the pressure of exclusionary structural violence. This situation is replicated in other regions of the world, such as Nepal, where cases of caste-based discrimination continue to occur within families that refuse to accept certain marriages for fear of becoming social pariahs. This reality led to the documentation of a tragic case in which a young couple in their twenties made a pact to end their lives by jumping from the highest suspension bridge in Nepal. Preliminary police investigations suggested that their inter-caste relationship was the motivating factor behind this decision (Atreya et al., 2017).

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With regard to racism as a form of structural violence associated with suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, one may cite, among others, a study conducted by the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research at New York University, which warns that since 2001, suicide rates among African American adolescents have begun to rise, currently becoming the third leading cause of death in this population. Such data indicate that the suicide mortality rate among Black youth is increasing more rapidly than that of any other racial or ethnic group in the country (Coleman, 2020; Robinson et al., 2022; Rudes & Fantuzzi, 2022).

Similarly, the link between structural violence associated with sexism and suicide can be observed in the fact that completed suicide rates among sexual minorities are higher than among individuals belonging to heteronormative majorities. Other population groups become vulnerable to structural violence due to the intersection of gender and occupation, such as young women engaged in street-based sex work. Research indicates that suicidal behavior has a higher prevalence among young women involved in sex work than among their male counterparts (Flynn et al., 2018).

In Taiwan, a referendum conducted in 2018 examined factors influencing suicide attempts among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Taiwanese adults. The findings revealed that not only belonging to this population group, but also other structural problems such as age, low income, and living conditions, were associated with a higher risk of suicide attempts (Wang et al., 2022).

The studies cited thus far as illustrative examples allow for the formulation of a general proposition: practices of social exclusion are expressions of structural violence and increase suicide risk among individuals and social groups who experience them. Racism, xenophobia, sexism, and the various forms of exclusion affecting minority or vulnerable groups are manifestations of structural violence that intersect with the tendency of human groups to push individuals belonging to such collectives—or those who, due to particular contingencies, find themselves in minority positions within a given relational context—toward suicide (Posada & Carmona-Parra, 2018).

Altruistic Suicide and Structural Violence

The altruistic suicide is characterized by an individual who identifies so strongly with the cause of a group that they are willing to give their life for it. This typology includes extreme versions, such as that of the kamikaze pilots (Allen, 2019; Mori, 2017; Ozaki et al., 2020), who during World War II carried out suicide missions in which their aircraft became manned missiles. However, there are also less radical forms that are particularly relevant to the present analysis because they connect

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with suicidal behaviors in everyday life that may go unnoticed. These involve individuals—often deeply self-sacrificing—who consistently place the interests of the group to which they belong above their own needs.

This group may be a family, a company, a political party, a community, or others. The transition from vital self-sacrifice to self-destructive behavior occurs when, in the name of love for others, devotion, commitment to "the cause" or "the jersey," individuals begin to neglect their health and sacrifice the satisfaction of certain needs, such as adequate nutrition and rest, as well as symbolic aspects such as recognition and self-affirmation. What Durkheim articulated regarding this second typology of suicide is as follows:

> For society to be able to compel certain of its members to kill themselves, individual personality must count for very little. For the individual to occupy such a minimal place in collective life, they must be almost entirely absorbed by the group, and the group itself must be very strongly integrated. For the parts to have so little independent existence, the whole must form a compact and continuous mass … the altruist is one in whom the self does not belong to itself, in whom it is confused with something other than itself, and in whom the center of conduct lies outside the individual, in one of the groups to which they belong. It results from intense altruism and has the character of being carried out as a duty. (Durkheim, 2018, pp. 186–187)

It is at this point that Galtung (1989) introduces a distinction that helps explain how structural violence becomes internalized to the extent that it produces this type of suicide, so functional to the operation of most human groups. Structural violence may be external or internal: external structural violence manifests primarily through repression exercised by state security forces and through economic exploitation legitimized by social structures, whereas internal structural violence arises from each individual's personal equation. This distinction is crucial, as it connects the social domain with the individual sphere and demonstrates how a person may come to enact lethal forms of structural violence against themselves (Galtung, 1989).

Durkheim (2018) distinguishes between two types of altruistic suicide that can be associated with Galtung's (1989) distinction between external and internal structural violence. Within altruistic suicides, there are what Durkheim refers to as obligatory altruistic suicides, characteristic of highly religious societies or institutions with very strict traditions, such as the military, which under certain circumstances establish suicide as a mandate for some of their members. This is the case in certain so-called primitive societies in which, upon the death of a husband, the widow was expected to commit suicide as a mandate dictated by tribal tradition (Durkheim, 2018).

Another type of altruistic suicide does not possess this compulsory character and is therefore termed facultative altruistic suicide. In these cases, the individual chooses to take their own life in response to having suffered humiliation, loss of honor, radical shame, or guilt associated with the transgression of a fundamental moral precept of their community. It may be argued that obligatory altruistic suicide is more closely linked to external structural violence, whereas facultative altruistic suicide is more strongly connected to internal structural violence. In other

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words, morality—which is a social phenomenon—once internalized and assumed as one's own by an individual, becomes the vehicle through which structural violence is internalized and, under certain circumstances, may constitute a suicide risk for the individual (Abrutyn & Mueller, 2016, 2018; Graitl, 2009).

Anomic Suicide and Structural Violence

The etymology of the word anomie refers to the absence of norms. In the social sciences, this concept is most commonly used to denote a state of crisis or significant disruption of the symbolic universe that serves as the foundation for organizing the life of an individual or a human group. Thus, a state of anomie may arise within a society as the result of a crisis that shakes its foundations, but it may also emerge at the individual level as the result of an abrupt change in the context within which one constructs their being and self-image. Consider Durkheim's (2018) reflections on anomic suicide:

> If industrial or financial crises increase suicides, it is not because they impoverish, since crises of prosperity produce the same result; it is because they are crises, that is, disturbances of the collective order … When profound reorganizations occur as a result of an unexpected movement of growth or an unforeseen cataclysm, human beings kill themselves more readily. (pp. 210–211)

For this reason, human groups and individuals caught in the midst of wars or armed conflicts that materially and symbolically destroy their worlds are exposed to an increased risk of suicide due to anomie. At the same time, structural violence derived from socioeconomic conditions becomes another factor that may either amplify or reduce this risk. Among lower social classes, structural violence increases suicide risk, whereas among middle- and upper-class groups, economic stability tends to reduce it (Lutter et al., 2019; Sanauddin et al., 2022). A case that may be considered in this regard is the global health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which will likely result, in the medium term, in an increase in suicide rates, adding to the upward trend already observed prior to the pandemic (Ando & Furuichi, 2022; Brenner & Bhugra, 2020; Haase et al., 2022; Kuriala, 2021; Mamun & Griffiths, 2020).

Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that anomie is a phenomenon that may also affect an individual or a small group as a result of a sudden and more or less radical change in their living conditions and, consequently, in the symbolic universe that serves as a reference for identity construction. Such changes may arise from a wide range of circumstances, such as an economic collapse that abruptly shifts an individual or family from one social class to another, but also from sudden economic success that produces a similar effect. Migration or confinement within institutions governed by life regimes radically different from one's original symbolic references may also generate such conditions (Pope, 1975; Jackson & Sadler, 2022; Bearman, 1991).

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Fatalistic Suicide and Structural Violence

This category refers to cases in which a human being takes their own life as a result of experiencing a situation perceived as a dead end—that is, a condition that generates such unbearable suffering or distress that death is preferred:

> When a person's future is pitilessly blocked and passions are violently constrained by excessive and oppressive discipline, as in the suicides of very young spouses, childless married women, or slaves [...] suicide occurs where the rules to which individuals are subjected are so rigid that they cannot conceive the possibility of escaping the situation in which they find themselves. Slave societies would be examples of contexts in which this type of suicide occurs. (Durkheim, 2018, pp. 240, 244)

Accordingly, it may be argued that this typology is the one most directly articulated with Johan Galtung's concept of structural violence. The relevance of this category for the present analysis lies in its capacity to shed light on many suicides that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to lockdowns in most countries worldwide in 2020 and caused many families to lose their means of subsistence (Ando & Furuichi, 2022). Contingencies related to natural disasters—such as pandemics, volcanic eruptions, floods, or hurricanes—consistently strike individuals and social groups more severely when they are already subjected to one or more forms of structural violence (Odabas & Hartarska, 2021). In such cases, hasty causal reasoning may attribute suicide to the natural disaster itself, whereas a more in-depth analysis reveals that the natural phenomenon was merely the tip of the iceberg, or the trigger that precipitated the self-destructive effects of one or more latent forms of structural violence that the event brought into full view (Evans, 2016; Köhler & Alcock, 1976; Lester, 1991).

Discussion

The reflective dialogue between Galtung's theory of violence and Durkheim's approach to suicide allows, first and foremost, for confirming the continued relevance of the propositions advanced by the French sociologist at the end of the nineteenth century. This dialogue constitutes a substantive contribution to the construction of an interdisciplinary perspective on the phenomenon of suicide, one that decisively contributes to its depathologization. Both authors warn that violence is consubstantial with social life, and, based on the bibliographic review conducted, several studies suggest that tensions such as frustrated aspirations and the disarticulation of different population groups or minorities within social structures may lead individuals to perceive their particular circumstances as dead ends, resulting in suicide as a response to unbearable suffering.

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Similarly, other studies that were not included within the categories of analysis of structural violence nevertheless document other forms of violence exercised against population groups diagnosed with illnesses such as HIV/AIDS (Farmer et al., 2006) in impoverished countries such as Rwanda and Haiti. On the one hand, these contexts often lack adequately trained medical professionals capable of addressing the phenomenon from a structural perspective; on the other hand, poverty prevents affected individuals from accessing quality medical treatment, generating suffering and pain to the extent that suicide may be perceived as a solution.

Thus, both authors provide essential theoretical tools for understanding that, within every human group, there exists a social force that pushes individuals toward suicide, which in most cases takes the form of various dynamics of exclusion and harassment exerted by some groups over others. This leads to the urgent need to incorporate collective determinants into a phenomenon that, in recent decades, has been addressed primarily from individual-centered approaches. In this regard, several studies reviewed propose strengthening the design of public policies capable of addressing structural violence by influencing the surrounding normative context, promoting intersectoral collaboration, and expanding evidence-based interventions. Such an approach could contribute to reducing suicide rates by addressing shared risk factors and placing greater emphasis on protective measures within communities, particularly with respect to population groups identified as vulnerable minorities, as discussed in this study.

For its part, Durkheim's typology of egoistic suicide clearly identifies isolation as a suicide risk factor. However, it is by reading Durkheim through Galtung that the suicidogenic power of different forms of exclusion associated with structural violence becomes evident. In some cases, experiences of exclusion are linked to large-scale social phenomena of structural violence such as classism, racism, and gender-based violence; in other cases, they are related to contextual phenomena, such as those affecting upper-class students with high academic performance who migrate to other countries to pursue higher education. In such cases, changes in context and migration may generate experiences of temporary exclusion that increase suicide risk. Nevertheless, this risk is often counterbalanced by other forms of symbolic capital possessed by these individuals and their reference groups.

To this historical dimension is added research on numerous collective suicides that have occurred over time, such as that of the Spanish population of Numantia during the siege by the Roman Empire, suicides among Afro-descendants as acts of resistance to slavery, and suicides among Indigenous peoples as resistance to colonization. These cases raise, at the very least, questions regarding the political dimension of collective suicide. Galtung's concept of the internalization of structural violence contributes to the construction of a dialectical perspective on the subject–society relationship and highlights the continued relevance of what Durkheim termed facultative

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altruistic suicide. This phenomenon involves the self-destructive enactment of structural violence by one or more individuals. When it takes on a collective form, it corresponds to what Ignacio Martín-Baró described as psychosocial trauma.

Furthermore, articulating structural violence with fatalistic suicide sheds light on a form of suicide that became particularly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many individuals lost their means of subsistence, leading to the breakdown of intimate relationships, the loss of their place within the family and social group, forced migration, and other forms of exclusion. Economic loss precipitated other significant, immaterial, and invaluable losses, ultimately leading some individuals to take their own lives. Thus, a key conclusion of this review is the confirmation of the social push toward suicide among individuals belonging to excluded minorities. This finding may serve as a psychosocial principle that can be instrumentalized for prevention purposes: everything aligned with social exclusion increases suicide risk, whereas everything aligned with inclusion supports suicide prevention and the affirmation of life.

Conclusions

The theoretical frameworks developed by Émile Durkheim and Johan Galtung contribute to illuminating the findings of studies on the phenomenon of suicide, including those not explicitly grounded in their theories, such as epidemiological research that empirically correlates suicide rates within a given context with the presence of one or more psychosocial factors.

The dialogue between Galtung's three major categories of violence and Durkheim's four suicide typologies, as applied to recent studies on suicide across diverse contexts, not only demonstrates their power and relevance for understanding how social violence becomes internalized and suicidogenic, but also illustrates how disciplinary and interdisciplinary dialogues may be constructed. These dialogues move beyond rigid frameworks that confine authors to classificatory models intended to organize knowledge production, and instead center on critical problems such as suicide—phenomena that resist unidisciplinary, reductionist explanations derived, for example, from individual psychology or psychopathology. Suicide demands an interdisciplinary approach in which the contributions of major sociologists such as Durkheim and Galtung enable a sociological dialogue that illuminates how social violence is internalized through four pathways, generating behaviors that pose a risk to human life—often greater than that posed by many organic pathologies and certain disorders of individual origin.

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Author contributions

Ana María Hincapié Zuleta: conception, data collection, data analysis, manuscript preparation, critical revisions for important intellectual content, and final approval of the manuscript.

Jaime Alberto Carmona Parra: conception, data collection, data analysis, manuscript preparation, critical revisions for important intellectual content, and final approval of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest with any institution or commercial association of any kind.

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