



“Uluchay” Social-Economic Innovation Center

## **DETERMINANTS OF SUICIDE IN AZERBAIJAN**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

As it is known, suicides have become the main problem of modern societies. Many countries are setting several policies to reduce the suicide rates; however, the issue does not lie in fundamental policy lack. Suicides are the peak reflections of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. That is why the issue exceeds the limitation of person and turns to territorial and geographical movement. As a result, some nations place at the apex of suicide rate ranking regardless of the country's development level. For instance, according to World Population Review statistics, Lithuania, Russia, Guyana, South Korea, and Belarus are placed in the top 5.

From this perspective, a question arises what the possible determinants of suicides are? For answering the question, many researchers focus on economic, psychological, social, and cultural impacts. Under psychology's scope, some studies (for example, Lee et al. (Lee, Oh, Jeon, & Roh, 2017) reveal the significant relation of suicide with the low socioeconomic backgrounds. On the contrary, suicide also has a significant link with high income (Agerbo, Mortensen, Eriksson, Qin, & Westergaard-Nielsen, 2001). Besides the economic ties, Maharajh and Abdool (Maharajh & Abdool, 2005) explain the impact of culture and law on suicides. In their analysis, researchers suggest that Muslim, Jew, and Latin American nations display a low rate of suicide.

The point that becomes interesting is the six post-soviet countries are placed in the top 10 in the suicide world ranking. Being one of the post-soviet countries and having a Muslim-weighted population, Azerbaijan attracts attention to its suicide rates. Unlike other post-soviet counterparts (except Tajikistan), Azerbaijan displays a significantly low suicide rate. According to World Population Review, Azerbaijan has a yearly 2.6 total suicide rate, which is 12 times lower than Lithuania and 5 times higher than the country with the world's lowest suicide rate.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the relatively better suicide position of Azerbaijan, young suicide cases are keeping their threat to society. The changing psychology of youth is getting deeper due to future concerns on education or work, social isolation, the importance of public opinion, and family pressure. As a

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<sup>1</sup> The data obtained from World Population Review, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/suicide-rate-by-country>, accessed: 23.02.2021

result, each young suicide case generates shock to the community because of the letter they left behind. Besides that, similar to other countries, men's suicide cases are keeping their dominance in Azerbaijan.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, having a relatively low suicide rate is not entirely assumable as a success. The low rates could result from non-trackable suicide rates from governmental organizations. Besides the data-related issue, having relatively low suicide rates (assumed to be confirmed) is also not a perfect success, while considering increasing young suicide cases generally resulted from family and community pressure. More clearly, unpredictable decisions of choosing suicides could be linked with economic background, family pressure on being highly educated or unemployed in the long-run, mentality-related restrictions, gender-related restrictions, discrimination, public opinion on divorced women, lack of social life, lack of education that prepares pupils to live, and more.

In general, suicide decisions are significantly linked with child-rearing in an early stage, and the ties continue to education and the social environment. From this perspective, the research focuses on determinants of suicides across all age groups and genders. After finding the determinants, the paper suggests relevant policies to suicide prevention, which contains reshaping from the smallest but most potent impact factors of the family to the largest society factor.

## 2. REASONS BEHIND SUICIDES

Twenty years old girl's (S.A.) suicide on February 20 and written messages she left behind was the primary motivation to preparing this research. According to her messages, the suicide act was significantly linked with family pressures. On the other hand, reporters' interview with her family also displays several gender and mentality-related restrictions, which aimed to prevent negative public opinion on their girl. According to the family<sup>3</sup>, all parents have a right to love and reprove

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<sup>2</sup> The significant difference between genders' suicide rates mostly links with the obligations associated with men by communities.

<sup>3</sup> The interview obtained from Big.az, <https://big.az/427431-intihar-eden-seviliin-ailesi-danisdi-video.html>, accessed: 24.02.2021

their children, regardless of the "age".<sup>4</sup>

Considering that the families claiming to have the right on pressuring the social life restriction, especially on girls, the free western lifestyle that comes from social media or other web sources could be the reason for structural breaks. Moreover, due to the lack of social integration and cultural exchanges between societies, local cultural and mentality structures become non-integrated to "modern" lifestyles. As a result, non-integrated lifestyle or new cultural adaptation difference between families and children causes suicides in extreme cases.

Another impacting factor could be the early marriage divorces effects on women. What is the public opinion on divorced women?<sup>5</sup> One more time, public opinion obtains a decisive role in decision making, which could be the reason for young girl suicides in Azerbaijan.

*Table 1 Number of suicides by age group and gender. AZERBAIJAN, 2007*

Age (years)	5-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	All
Males	4	3	8	10	5	5	3	3	41
Females	0	5	2	3	2	1	0	1	14
Total	4	8	10	13	7	6	3	4	55

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The only reliable statistics on gender and age-based suicide made by World Health Organization in 2007 for Azerbaijan, displayed in Table 1. According to World Health Organization, the age group of 15-24 has the highest suicide cases for women, which seems to remain unchanged until 2021. However, the total number of suicide cases increased approximately 4.7 times from 2007 to 2021.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the highest suicide having age group is 35-44 for men.

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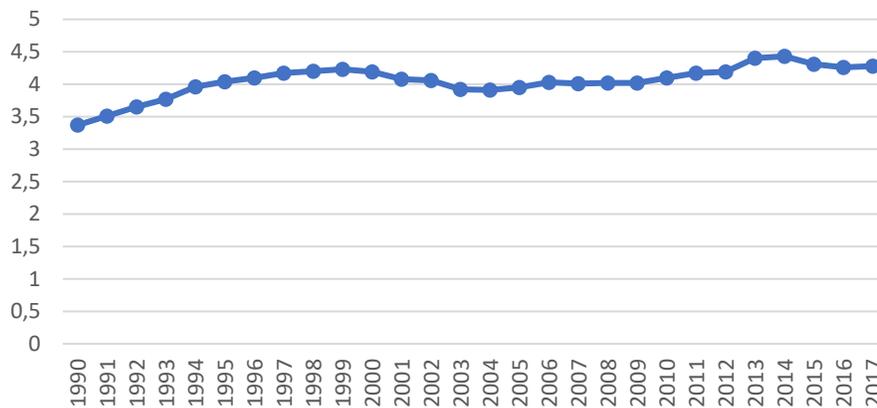
<sup>4</sup> The age is quoted because it significantly depends on a cultural perspective. For example, the age of 20 is linked with independent and robust adulthood in general. However, 20 years old girl has to get permission from her family on her social life choices in Azerbaijan.

<sup>5</sup> For detailed information on the impact of divorce on women; <http://uluchay.org/divorce-struggles-challenges-and-social-stigma-women-face/> , accessed: 24.02.2021

<sup>6</sup> According to World Population Review statistics (latest suicide statistics published in 2021), the total number of suicide cases within the year is 259 in Azerbaijan. For detailed information; <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/suicide-rate-by-country>, accessed: 24.02.2021

Moreover, the men suicide rates are significantly higher than women, contrary to public perception and news flash on suicides. For example, during this part is being writing, four men and one woman committed suicide, and one woman was saved from suicide within a day in Azerbaijan. The latest research made by Our World In Data displays the history of men to women ratio of suicide rates from 1990 to 2017 in Azerbaijan as below:

*Chart 1 Male to Female Ratio of Suicide Rates in Azerbaijan*



As seen from Chart 1, men's suicide rates are averagely four times higher than women's suicide in Azerbaijan. From this result and assuming that the family pressure on social life restrictions on men is not significant as pressure on women, the revealed question is: What are the determinants of men suicide cases?

Considering the social position of Azerbaijani men, who are burdened with caring for the family, the economic conjuncture carries significance on men's suicide rates. Due to not having relevant suicide case data for men, finding at least a correlation between suicide and income become impossible. As a result, the analyze only limited to giving reference to researches that made for different countries. For example, Lee et al. (Lee, Oh, Jeon, & Roh, 2017) displayed that low socio-backed men tend to commit more suicide than women in South Korea. Moreover, they revealed the different tendencies of age groups to suicide by emphasizing the age group of 40-59. In another research, Daly et al. (Daly, Wilson, & Johnson, 2010) found that %10 income differences increase suicide by %3.17 in the U.S.

Besides the significant economic impacts, men's suicide in Azerbaijan could be linked with rising narcomania and post-war psychology. Narcomania<sup>7</sup> is increasing with the speed of 3.5 from 2000 to 2019, which carries a strong possibility to cause suicide among men. Moreover, post-war psychology impacts could be seen from the veterans' suicide news.

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The suicide determinants revealed as family pressure on social life, education, employment; a public opinion or pressure that affect both individual decision-making and family pressure on children; economic issues such as income; narcomania; psychological impact factors such as war. Henceforth, the suggestions to reduce the suicides had to include decreasing the power of all impact factors. Therefore, the policymakers should set policies to affect:

- Families' child-rearing over Family Psychology Counseling Centers,
- New generations' cultural integration to new "modern" lifestyle via Cultural Exchange programs across countries,
- Gender-based discriminations in general (including post-divorce life) by increasing public awareness via social education programs,
- Unemployment and income-related problems via encouraging small businesses or direct government investments,
- Narcomania and other psychological issues over free Psychology Counseling Centers.

Additionally, the government should transparently display the suicide cases to emphasize their size. The relevant data could be used to generate a model for the future of suicides and could be beneficial for forwarding research to reduce the suicide rate. Moreover, the data will prove the effectiveness of government actions on suicide policies.

In conclusion, having relatively low suicide rates does not mean success because suicides

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<sup>7</sup> The data obtained from The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/healthcare/>, accessed 23.02.2021

increased 4.7 times between 2007-2021. Oppositely, the government should take immediate actions to reduce the increasing speed of suicide. In this way, well-founded families and society will raise more intellectual, open-minded, and innovative youth, which will build the country's future.

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