There are many reasons why people commit suicide. People can decide to commit suicide themselves or be pushed to do it. Most of the factors, in reality can be explained by the Cost/benefit theory of Economics of Human Behaviour which says that people will do anything until Marginal costs will exceed Marginal benefits.

RELIGIOUS FACTOR - One of the most powerful social factors determining a level of suicides is the religion. Since according to Cost/benefit theory people try to minimize their costs while maximizing benefits and will only do something if Marginal benefits exceed Marginal costs. We can assume that if religious leaders would promise better life and god’s forgiveness of all sins people committed, some people under psychological stress would believe them and commit suicide since for the expected benefits would exceed expected costs. This is widely practiced in Islam. According to Islam to die for Allah is the greatest thing a living Muslim can do.

In Judaism on the other hand, value of life is emphasized, and consequently for the sake of preservation of life the devout Jews are allowed to break all religious laws, except for refusal of the god, murder and sexual relationship between relatives. The benefits of life are emphasized in Judaism and for Jews costs of suicide are large than benefits since belief in afterlife is not practiced.

In Christian countries it is a shame to attempt to destroy yourself according to the words of Bible. People who attempted suicide faced refusal of society to accept them and were buried on the edges of cemeteries or by the roads when died. Thus social and religious costs of committing suicide in those countries is very high and are greater than benefits of facing God in Heaven. This is one of the main reasons of the lowest level of suicides now in Italy, Spain and number of the Latin American countries - the huge influence of Catholicism in these countries. It is established by the modern researchers, that as a whole in countries, where the influence of religion is weaker and religious norms connected in particular with suicide are more humanely , the percentage of suicide attempts is higher. Because in countries with high religious influence God’s punishment for killing yourself is much higher and people are afraid to “sin” by even thinking about suicide.

In World History there were a lot of people who had the gift of persuasion. These people could persuade anyone to do anything and even commit suicide. These individuals often gathered citizens under some idea, attacked these citizens emotionally to break their will in order to gain full control over the minds of these people. These evil masterminds often attempted mass suicide in connection to some important “religious” date or even public holiday. People believed these individuals because of the promises of great benefits of dying or of simply belonging to some particular religious group and rejecting the rest of the world. After some time the perception of persuaded people was so greatly distorted that the benefit of simply seeing ‘the master’ was unsurpassed by any of the cost they might have incurred.

The cost of suicide also increases when considering public opinion about suicide: “What will other people think of me? “. Traditional thought would include God as one of “the other persons” who might have and express disapproving attitudes[[1]](#footnote-1). Finally, attendance at religious services potentially gives individuals access to a support network. Those without a support network are most likely to commit suicide.[[2]](#footnote-2) The support network brings a lot of benefits to people, things like new friendships, affiliation, understanding. This increased benefits of life compared to benefits of suicide and made people change their mind to stay alive.

THE SOCIAL FACTORS - Other kind of suicide factors is directly connected to the social reasons, is this case, public situation of any group of people or concrete individual for many independent or personal reasons is so hard and intolerable, in other words the cost of living through another day becomes so high and exceeds benefits by such a great amount that the suicide becomes the only real way to get free from sufferings. Things that raise thoughts of suicide can be: Need of money and work, need for affiliation, death of a beloved person, realization of being unable to change things and never-ending struggle for existence. The rate of suicide in the world can be reflected by the world economic stability. During recessions many people loose their jobs and businesses and have to sell their homes and are forced to follow poor style of life. In 1840-1850 the claim that suicide was an urban phenomenon in Paris and that it was related to poverty and occurred more frequently among laboring poor were repeated by many writers[[3]](#footnote-3). For these people not only emotional but also monetary costs were enormous. This might have caused depression, sorrows and have led to suicide attempts. It has also proven that in big cities rate of suicide is much higher than in countryside. According to St. Thomas Aquinas “Every man belongs to the community. Hence by killing himself he injures the community”[[4]](#footnote-4). Thus, suicide of person imposes high marginal cost on his friends and relatives. It is very important to us what other people think of us and thus we will weight costs and benefits of dying before attempting suicide.

Costs and benefits of love may be another social factor of suicide. In Johann Goethe’s "The Sorrows of Young Werther" the main character decides to die because the woman that he loves does not love him back. For him the cost of realization that his expected benefits of being together with her is very high and in addition to that the cost of seeing her happy with someone else made the character to shoot himself, for him that was the only way to stop his sorrows and the benefit of dying was much higher for him at that point. Unfortunate love of Romeo and Juliet for example led to their suicide, or in “Ethan Frome” the main character decides to slide into a tree with his beloved woman when his wife refused to let him go. For these characters the cost of living apart from each other was so high that they decided to die to be together in another life.[[5]](#footnote-5) Finally many young people kill themselves every year because of their love to some celebrity. Many attempt suicide after their object of affection died or also committed suicide. They do so because of a high expected benefit of being with him/ her in the afterlife and high cost of living without that person in their lives. E.g. watching that person on TV and realizing that he/she is gone. In the past, a person had to kill himself/herself when his/her spouse died. Examples are: wife of a well-known in the Roman history Caesar Brut swallowed pieces of burning coal when she found out about death of her husband. In India the custom “sati” - self-burning of the widow together with a body of the husband down to XIX of century was not simply sample for imitation, but also obligatory ritual[[6]](#footnote-6)

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS - such as depression and panic. Several studies in recent years have suggested that people with panic disorder are more likely to attempt suicide than patients with other psychiatric conditions. One explanation was that panic disorder, when combined with clinical depression, made people more prone to suicide[[7]](#footnote-7). "Depression is a very significant predictor of whether or not a patient with panic disorder will engage in some kind of suicide behavior. But depression alone doesn't account for it all" said professor Brad Schmidt of University of Ohio[[8]](#footnote-8). The study also proved positive relationship between level of expected anxiety and suicide attempts rate. For these people the cost of doing virtually anything is risen by the level of worry and if for a long time, marginal cost of living through another day is much higher than benefits, people can decide to voluntary leave this world.

Another factor is human pride and self-honor. In some countries like Japan and Korea honor is very important self perception, especially for men. There is still a tradition of “hara-kiri”, voluntary self-destruction because of failure to complete some family or social obligation. For men who “failed” the cost of living with their “failure” was too high. They couldn’t look into the eyes of people who they failed and the only solution that was considered was “hara-kiri”. The benefit of escaping from shame was so high that these men ( mostly soldiers- samurai) did not even think about physical pain and pain of their friends and relatives. During war times high ranked soldiers were given a chance to kill themselves in order to save their honor and die like a hero.

METHODS AND TRENDS OF SUICIDE

Methods used to commit suicide vary on sex and regional bases. E.g. death by firearms is more common in rural areas where the availability of guns is higher.[[9]](#footnote-9) People attempt to lower the cost of the actual effort, thus use methods that are available to them immediately instead of spending time and money and other resources. The most common non-fatal suicide attempts in both sexes are drug overdoses and poisonings[[10]](#footnote-10). There are differences in the spread of rate of suicide depending on age: The facts about senior people are clear: the illnesses and loneliness, decline of vital forces and absence of iridescent hopes better condition of a body and spirit cause dramatic emotions "of socially active old age ". At this age the choice is between battling an increasing avalanche of diseases and illnesses or intentional death. Eventhough there are some benefits (e.g. watching grandchildren grow), the cost of living is much higher. Thus the tradeoff between life and death is not so large. Factors such as social pressures, rejection of people in the same social group, e.g. classmates, work partners, etc. are major causes of suicide among middle age and youth. Young people can sometimes commit suicide just because of a disagreement inside family.

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3. “A Handbook of the study of suicide” edited by Seymour Perlin, pg. 22 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “A Handbook of the study of suicide” edited by Seymour Perlin, pg. 67 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Conclusions are based on the stories of “Ethan Frome”, “Romeo and Juliet” and “The Sorrows of Young Werther” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Information is taken from Ancient history books [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
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