

Chapter 3
Topic 3 Experiments
Page 111
Activity: Webquest
Testing Durkheim's theory of suicide

Learning objectives

At the end of this activity you should be able to:

- Apply the comparative method to researching a sociological topic.
- Evaluate the strengths and limitations of the comparative method.

Durkheim (1897) found that suicide rates were higher:

- (i) among men than women
- (ii) among single and divorced people than married people
- (iii) in some societies than others.

1. Use the following sources to test whether Durkheim's claims hold good nowadays:
 - A. First, go to <http://www.ons.gov.uk> Then for (i) and (ii) above, search for 'Health Statistics Quarterly - Trends in suicide by marital status in England and Wales, 1982-2005 - Spring 2008' and use the graphs.
 - B. Japan is usually considered a more integrated society than the UK - so for (iii) above, go to http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en/ to compare suicide rates for the UK and Japan.
2. Based on your findings from the above sources, does the evidence from the official statistics support each of Durkheim's three findings?
3. Having used the comparative method to study suicide, what do you feel are the advantages and disadvantages of this method for studying sociological topics?