

political
reports

15 March
2022



المعهد المصري للدراسات
EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES

About the phenomenon of suicide in Egypt

Sherif Hilali



WWW.EIPSS-EG.ORG

 Eipss.EG  Eis_EG

TURKEY- ISTANBUL

Bahçelievler, Yenibosna Mh 29 Ekim Cad. No: 7 A2 Blok 3. Plaza D: 64
Tel/Fax: +90 212 227 2262 E-Mail: info@eis-eg.org

March 15, 2022

About the phenomenon of suicide in Egypt

Sherif Hilali

The suicidal behavior is frequently associated with conflict, disaster, violence, abuse, or loss and isolation, with reports about increasing suicide rates among vulnerable groups that may experience discrimination such as refugees and migrants, ethnic and religious minorities, and those who are exposed to discrimination on the basis of gender, color, or any other factors, in addition to spread of the phenomenon among prisoners. In general, statistics indicate that suicide is the second leading cause of death in the 15-24 age group, and the fourth cause of death among the 18-65 age group.

Suicide in Egypt

A study on the phenomenon of suicide in Egypt indicates that the society's view of suicide ranges between negative and positive, but it tends to be a largely negative phenomenon. The Egyptian society has recently realized escalation of the phenomenon of suicide, especially among the youth category, however, people sympathize with those who commit suicide, in light of the decline in the culture of the significance of psychiatry, and infiltration of suicidal thoughts among many individuals in a large proportion.

To seriously confront this phenomenon, it is necessary to start from addressing the society itself and the culture of its members, not just relying on giving advice based on religion or including potential suicides in social activities.

The state should also play a major role in addressing the suicide phenomenon, including monitoring the places of its spread, the causes that lead to it, especially the social causes, and how to confront these causes, whether in the education system, or in provision of jobs and appropriate housing, in addition to monitoring the methods used in suicide and the role of state agencies in facing the phenomenon. Since the aspects of the suicide phenomenon are complicated and overlapping, the solution must be comprehensive of different dimensions of the phenomenon, psychologically, socially, culturally and economically.

With regard to social factors, the factors of bullying, violence and family disintegration represent the most prominent motives for suicide, according to the study, and that bullying may constitute a major

factor leading to suicide, especially in light of its spread on social networking sites, which may expose victims to psychological pressures and loss of self-confidence, pushing them to ending their lives to get rid of such psychological fatigue. Also, family disintegration or the widespread use of violence within the family, especially in raising children, may also constitute a motive for committing suicide.

Among the most prominent factors leading to suicide are psychological factors, which come as a result of the exacerbation of other social, economic and religious factors, noting that social factors have the most influence, followed by religious factors, and finally economic factors.

One of the causes of suicide is blackmail, especially of young females, as happened with the girl "Basant" last January in Gharbia Governorate, when two boys fabricated sexual-related images of her and posted them on social media, which prompted her to resort to suicide due to the social pressures she was subjected to.

One of the causes of suicide is escalation of psychological pressure on employees, especially when an employee is exposed to threats of dismissal from job, as happened in the Fifth Settlement area, Cairo, when an employee committed suicide inside the company where he works.

The economic pressures are also among the significant causes of suicide, including financial hardship and the rise in debts, resulting from the low income or unemployment. Sometimes, the pressures on the breadwinner in pursuit of provision of the daily needs his household may also lead to suicide.

To sum up, causes of suicide can be summarized as follows:

- 1- Psychological crisis
- 2- Marital disputes
- 3- Family disputes
- 4- Fear of stumbling in school or failing exams
- 5- Failure in emotional relations and marriage
- 6- Financial hardship

- 7- Mental illness
- 8- Death of a relative
- 9- COVID-19 infection
- 10- Illness/disability
- 11- Addiction
- 12- Overweight and exposition to bullying
- 13- Feeling lonely
- 14- Problems at work
- 15- Electronic games or movie simulations
- 16- Blackmail of the victim
- 17- Prevalence of live suicide / suicide in public places
- 18- Some households deny and cover suicides

The number of suicides has significantly increased in Egypt over the past few years, according to various statistics. For example, a statistic of the World Health Organization indicates that suicide is the fourth cause of death among young people aged between 15-19 years.

According to the World Health Organization report issued at the end of 2019, there is a suicide case every 40 seconds around the world; and that more than half of the suicides are under the age of 45, as well as the category of young people between the ages of 15 and 29.

Egypt ranks first in suicide rates across the Arab world, followed by Sudan, Yemen and Algeria. In 2019, 3,022 people committed suicide in Egypt alone, according to the WHO statistics; while Egypt witnessed 3,799 suicides in 2016.

March 15, 2022

However, the Egyptian cabinet underestimates the phenomenon, and sometimes even denies its existence. In 2019, the cabinet issued a statement commenting on what it described as "rumors" regarding reports that Egypt ranked first in the Arab world in suicide rates.

In its statement, the cabinet relied on the latest official statistics issued by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) issued in 2017, stating that during the same year (2017), only 69 suicide cases occurred. CAPMAS considered that "everything circulating in this regard (especially about the increase in suicide rates) is mere rumors aimed at undermining societal stability." This contradicts the number of suicides issued by the World Health Organization referred to above, as well as the reality of suicides published in Egyptian newspapers and websites.

This figure (69) is so limited that can be recorded within only one month, as the figure per month stated by the report in 2019, 2020, 2021, close to this number. This confirms the contradiction of the announced numbers with the real numbers recorded, which can be accessed through reports of the Ministry of Health and the records of police departments, where these cases are recorded daily and periodically.

Various estimates also indicate that in 2021 the number of suicides in Egypt reached 2,584, according to a research study that was debated during a workshop held by the Egyptian National Center for Social and Criminal Research, which was devoted to discussing "The Problem of Suicide in Egyptian Society: Dimensions and Prevention Mechanisms". Despite the magnitude of this number, the cases documented in this report represent only 16% of this statistic.

Also, the international statistics do not include suicide attempts, which reach large numbers at the level of Egypt's governorates.

Poison departments in different hospitals can be can also be reviewed, where there are huge numbers of suicides by ingesting toxic pills, pesticides, or others.

Some specialized physicians point out that the recorded numbers of suicides in many Arab countries have exceeded suicide safety limits, that is, less than 10 people per 100,000 of the population.

The following table includes a statistic of suicides in the period from 2005 to 2021, where it appears that the lowest number of suicides ranged between 1150 and 1264, while the highest rate of suicide

cases was in 2008 and 2009, exceeding 5000 cases a year. the last one. While it reached 2584 cases in 2021, it is slightly less than in 2016 and 2019, in which suicide cases exceeded 3,000 cases.

No.	Year	Suicides	Source
01	2005	1150	Cabinet Information Center
02	2006	2355	Cabinet Information Center
03	2007	3700	Cabinet Information Center
04	2008	4200	Cabinet Information Center
05	2009	5000	Cabinet Information Center
06	2012	1264	World Health Organization
07	2016	3799	World Health Organization
08	2019	3022	World Health Organization
09	2021	2584	Seminar of the National Center for Social and Criminological Research

Number of suicides during the period from 2005 to 2021

It is remarkable that there is a rise in suicide rates through taking the so-called "poisonous grain", especially in the countryside, where the grain is basically used by farmers to preserve their crops of wheat, legumes, and palms, from decay. However, this means of suicide has recently become popular among women, in addition to hanging.

The Mansoura Emergency Hospital's Toxicology Unit alone in 2018 and 2019 received about 400 cases of suicide and attempted suicide using insecticides, but the most notable cases were by use of the "poisonous grain". Not to mention other hospitals, about 118 cases were received by the same hospital in 2020, i.e. 518 cases in just 3 years, where the death rate exceeded 90%.¹

¹ The views expressed in this article are entirely those of the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Egyptian Institute for Studies