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The Consequence of Freedom: A Sociological Analysis of the Suicide Epidemic in Lithuania

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Introduction

With suicide rates remaining high in many countries of the world, it demands that research be done to determine possible causes. With large numbers of people committing suicide in countries with high suicide rates, it seems more efficient for the suicide rate to be analyzed sociologically. Sociology can take a big-picture vantage point that other disciplines in the social sciences do not. Macro-level sociological theories can be applied to studying suicide in order to establish relationships between a society and the individuals living in it. Individuals are affected by society, and vice versa. To understand why so many people are committing suicide in a given country, and to subsequently attempt preventing more from occurring, it is necessary to find which facets of a society are negatively affecting its people.

The country with the present highest suicide rate in the world belongs to Lithuania. The suicide rate in Lithuania is 40.2/100,000, according to the international suicide statistics provided by WHO (2004). Lithuania's suicide rate is over 2.5 times more than the global average. The top five countries in terms of suicide rate are Lithuania, Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Hungary (Ibid). All of these countries were previously under the Soviet Union's control from the end of World War II to the end of the Cold War in 1989. Lithuania has not always been at the top of the rankings for global suicide rates. Lithuania's suicide rate spiked almost 20 percent during the years of 1990-1995, which happened to be when Lithuania was transitioning from being a previous communist nation (Ibid). Sociological research on this phenomenon has been insufficient. How we can use previous research and theory to sociologically understand the high suicide rate in Lithuania? How well does Durkheim's concept of suicide apply to the case in Lithuania? What further research can sociologists do to enhance understanding of the phenomenon in Lithuania? This research paper delves into the economic, political, and social

transition in Lithuania after gaining independence from the Soviet Union. In doing so, this paper will determine whether the transitional period after the fall of the Soviet regime could have correlations to the dramatic increase of the suicide rate in Lithuania. A literature review compiling relevant interdisciplinary studies as well as the application of Durkheim’s theories on suicide will also be used. Examples of further research studies on this topic will be also be discussed.

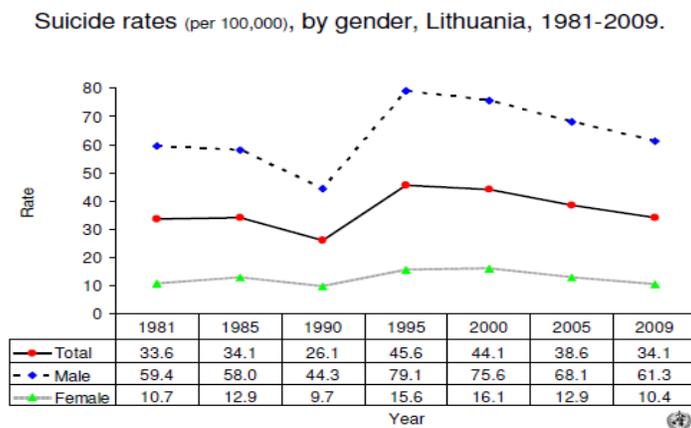


Figure 1. Suicide trend in Lithuania. Provided by WHO (2009).

Research methods include analyzing existing statistics from the WHO database of international suicide statistics, as well as using comparative historical research from archives and past sociological studies. These research methods, specifically statistics, provide data for a large number people. Using past sociological studies and historical research provides specific data on the phenomenon studied. This paper will add to the research by providing an application of Durkheim’s theory on suicide rate in Lithuania. However, a limitation of primarily using quantitative data includes missing out on information that could be gathered from interviews with those who knew of people that committed suicide, which could have added to the information gathered regarding the suicide phenomenon. When studying the effects of a society

in transition, it is important to obtain a full picture from a variety of sources to determine its possible causes. This paper used the available resources to show how theory and statistics can attempt to explain the suicides in Lithuania.

Lithuania

The fact that this paper's research and audience is in America makes it necessary to provide background information on Lithuania, accounting for how little Lithuania and other Eastern European nations are regularly discussed in the media and everyday conversation. In order to better understand the problem facing Lithuania in terms of its society and suicide rate, it is important to be familiar with general information about the country.

Geography. Lithuania is located in Eastern Europe, between Latvia and Russia, and bordering the Baltic Sea on part of the northwest border. Lithuania's total area is 65,300 km, which is comparable to that of West Virginia in the United States (CIA World Factbook, 2014).

History. At the end of the 14th century, Lithuania was the largest nation in Europe, due to expanding its territory through alliances and conquests. In 1569, Lithuania and Poland united into a single state, named the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which lasted until 1795 when parts of it were divided up by surrounding countries. Lithuania regained its independence after World War I, but was annexed by the USSR in 1940, which was never recognized by the US. In March of 1990, Lithuania became the first of the Soviet satellite nations to declare independence, but it was not recognized by the Soviet Union until September of 1991. After gaining independence from the Soviet Union, Lithuania restructured its economy in order to integrate into Western European institutions, which led to joining NATO and the EU in 2004.

Government. The capital city of Lithuania is Vilnius, which houses its parliamentary democratic government. The chief of state in Lithuania is President Dalia Grybauskaitė, and the

head of government is Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevicius. The President of Lithuania is elected by popular vote for a five-year term. The President then appoints a prime minister, based on approval from the parliament.

People. Lithuania has a population of 3,505,738 (CIA World Factbook, 2014 est.); the dominant ethnic group being Lithuanian at 84.1%, as well as the major, official language, which is spoken by 82% of its population. The major religion in Lithuania is Roman Catholic, which 77.2% of its population practices. Other religions include Russian Orthodox 4.1%, Old Believer 0.8%, and Evangelical Lutheran 0.6%. Those unspecified in religious following include 10.1%. Lithuania's median age is 41.2 years (CIA World Factbook). The divorce rate for Lithuania has fluctuated between 3.4/1,000 from 1990 to 2011, decreasing from 3.1/1000 in 2000, to 2.8/1,000 in 2009, to increase to 3.4/1000 in 2011 (European Commission, 2011). Lithuania's divorce rate in 2011 at 3.4/1000 is second highest in Europe to Latvia, with 4.0/1000 (Ibid., 2011).

Economy. In regards to Lithuania's economy, Lithuania joined the European Union in May 2004. Lithuania was part of three former Soviet Baltic nations that were hit the hardest by the 2008-2009 financial crisis. However, since the crisis, Lithuania has been one of the fastest growing economies in the EU, due to attracting foreign investment, developing exports, and successful economic reforms. Even though the economy is growing, Lithuania's unemployment rate remains high at 12.4% (CIA World Factbook, 2013 est.).

Data collected from the World Health Organization for international suicide statistics show that there is a significant jump in the suicide rate in Lithuania after 1990. Suicide rates by gender in Lithuania, from the years 1981-2009, are shown in figure 1. It is essential to note the rate of suicides before and after the 1990 and 1995. From 1981-1990, while Lithuania was still under the Soviet Union's communist regime as one of its satellite nations, the overall suicide rate

in Lithuania decreased from 33.6/100,000 to 26.1/100,000. From 1995-2009, which includes the years after Lithuania's recovery from the transition to a free market economy and democratic government, the overall suicide rate decreased from 45.6/100,000 to 34.1/100,000. The graph shows the striking increase of suicides from the year 1990 to 1995, which were the initial years that Lithuania was undergoing a societal transformation from communism to a form of democracy. The suicide rate increases 19.5/100,000 in just five years, compared to the 7.5/100,000 decrease over the nine-year span from 1981-1990, and the 11.5/100,000 decrease over the fourteen-year span from 1995-2009. The fact that there is this difference can possibly show the negative effect of the transition on Lithuanian citizens during the first years of change.

To be noted in the literature review, there are several researched indicators of social integration that have been found to occur during the transition in Lithuania. Social indicators such as crime, unemployment, and alcoholism can show the effects of the transformation as well as a possible display of social disintegration during that time period. Durkheim's theory on suicide will also be discussed, in order to explain the nature of Lithuanian society that led to the high rates of suicides during the transitional period of the 1990s.

Theoretical Foundation

Durkheim's ideas on suicide are particularly useful for this paper. In *Suicide* (1897), Durkheim legitimates the study of suicide sociologically, stating that when suicides occur in a given year, they should be taken as a whole, since the consequences of suicide are social in nature. Durkheim disagrees with the potential phenomenon of imitation being an explanative factor in people committing suicide. When discussing how the media reports suicide, Durkheim disagrees with those who state that the media doing so causes more suicides to occur. Durkheim

believes in the strength of the collective group in society, and that prohibiting the media from reporting suicide may only slightly decrease the annual rate. Durkheim believes it is how suicide is discussed between people, rather than by merely its discussion that may lead to an increased rate. The major focus of *Suicide* is the classification of suicide into different types. These types are based on varying states of society that provide stages for suicides to occur. Based on a certain stage that a society is set, different reasons for suicide occur. Durkheim says that societies are predisposed for a number of voluntary deaths each year, just that the reasons for suicide change given the state of society at a given time (Durkheim 1897/1951).

Types of Suicide

The different types of suicide that Durkheim names include egoistic, anomic, and altruistic. Durkheim states that there is a collective inclination for suicide in each social group in society. The nature of society itself consists of the currents of egoism, altruism that run through society, which results in tendencies of melancholy, active renunciation, or exasperated weariness. These tendencies, in turn, affect individuals, and cause some to commit suicide. According to Durkheim, feelings that an individual has come from social groups that one belongs to. Ultimately, Durkheim states that committing suicide depends on the “intensity with which suicidogenic causes have affected the individual,” (Durkheim, 1897/1951, p. 300).

In regards to the types of suicide, Durkheim states that egoistic and anomic suicides are similar. Both types develop from an insufficient presence of society on the individuals in it. Altruistic suicide is the opposite of both egoistic and anomic suicides. All of which will be summarized in the following paragraphs.

Egoistic suicide, which Durkheim states as the most common and contributes most to raising the total of suicides, results from an individual no longer feeling attached to groups to

which he or she belonged. When a society disintegrates, groups to which people belong become weak, resulting in an individual having to depend on him or herself. The individual then recognizes the way of behaving as pertaining to his or her own private interests, becoming excessively individualized, instead of his or her actions reinforced by the groups to which he or she previously belonged and felt attached to. When an individual no longer has anything to attach him or herself to, or in other words, when life no longer has any purpose, he or she commits suicide, according to Durkheim's egoistic suicide (Durkheim, 1897/1951).

According to Durkheim, suicide inversely relates to the degrees of integration of political, religious, and domestic groups in society. Therefore, in the case of the individual, an individual is no longer attached to his or her employment, political group, or family. The individual solely depends on the interests of his or herself to determine how to live. As a result, the suicide rate increases due to individuals no longer able to face living based on their own private interests. It seems as though it is near impossible to live without attachment to the social groups once belonged to.

The more integrated a society, the less suicide occurs, and the less integrated a society, the more suicide occurs. Durkheim also notes the importance of the individual and his or her impact on the overall collective force of society. Durkheim says that there cannot be disintegration of society without first being the individual simultaneously becoming unattached from his or her social life. Without the individual's goals and personality, there would be no effect on the collective personality. So, for egoistic suicide to be acknowledged in a given society there has to be a number of individuals who are simultaneously placing their own goals above those of their communities, and consequently detaching from their social lives, which in turn creates social disintegration (Durkheim, 1897/1951).

A second type of suicide that Durkheim creates is anomic suicide. Durkheim begins his discussion of anomic suicide with the individual in society. For an individual to exist, his or her needs must be sufficiently proportioned to his or her means. Durkheim says that having hope for the future may be sustainable, but when hope is constantly being set back by disappointments, which are a natural part of life, hope cannot last. Durkheim believes that only society can act as the authority to set the means for the individual's needs. Since individuals accept society's position, each individual is in agreement with his or her position in it, and subsequently only hopes for the set, normal, reward for his or her activity. Now, according to Durkheim, when "society is disturbed by some painful crisis or beneficent but abrupt transitions, it is momentarily incapable of exercising this influence; thence come the sudden rises in the curve of suicides," (1897/1951, p. 252). When society becomes disturbed and put off balance, an individual's needs and desires are no longer controlled by society, so he or she no longer is aware of the limits put up against those desires. Durkheim believes that this disturbance of equilibrium in society, leads to the impulses of voluntary death to its citizens. When the social order and the proportion of means to needs are unknown, individuals are more inclined to commit suicide. In the case of an economic crisis, Durkheim states that a type of declassification occurs, where individuals are placed in lower classes than they are accustomed to. In order to adjust throughout the crisis, individuals must reconfigure their needs and have better self-control. However, society cannot simultaneously adjust and set the new limits and conditions for its individuals. Due to this, individuals are not adjusted to the new ways of life that become forced on them, and suffer accordingly. Individuals, then, become detached from a reduced way of life even before they become accustomed to it. Similar to those committing egoistic suicide, those who commit anomic suicide are on their own, but as a result of the involuntary absence of the social groups in

society. In egoistic suicide, one detaches oneself from weakened social groups. In anomic suicide, one has no social groups to belong to (Durkheim, 1897/1951).

The third and final type of suicide that Durkheim classifies is altruistic suicide. In contrast to egoistic suicide, where the individual becomes detached from society and sees no goal to attach him or herself to, in an altruistic suicide, the individual commits suicide when social integration is too strong. One has no goal to attach oneself to but one outside from life, making life seem as a mere obstacle in the way of achieving that goal. An individual becomes to feel that it is his or her duty to commit suicide, because the weight of society is too strong to deal with. In this environment, society acts as the author of an individual's behavior, compelling a person to end his or her life in hope for a better one beyond the present life. In this circumstance, an individual's personality has little value.

Durkheim chooses altruistic for this type of suicide because "the goal of conduct is exterior to itself...in one of the groups in which [the individual] participates," (Durkheim, 1897/1951, p. 221). As with altruism, the individual is concerned with ideas beyond him or herself. An individual is behaving in a way that serves an exterior motive. Durkheim provides examples of situations in which altruistic suicides occur, which include suicides of men on the verge of old age or suffering from sickness, suicides from women due to their husband's death, and suicides of followers on the deaths of their chiefs. Durkheim states that these types of suicides may be commonly called heroic suicides, since individuals who commit suicide in this way are doing so to preserve dignity or to enter into the afterlife and consequently seen as martyrs. However, Durkheim disagrees that one type of suicide should be deemed as more praiseworthy than others. Durkheim states that every type of suicide is the exaggerated form of a virtue (Durkheim, 1897/1951).

Religion

Durkheim also discussed religion and its potential influence in acting as a protective factor against individuals committing suicide. Durkheim states that any beneficent influence religion has, it is not due to the ideas of a particular religion. Instead, Durkheim believes that religion is a society in and of itself that can protect individuals from suicide. According to Durkheim, this type of society consists of a number of obligatory beliefs and practices common to the faithful who follow the religion. Durkheim states that the more numerous and strong the collective mind is in the society of the religion, the stronger the integration of the religious community. Durkheim believes that the specific dogmas and rites of the religion are secondary, and that the key factor is whether the beliefs can support the collective life. According to Durkheim, the only reason religion keeps individuals from suicide is because it is a society. During the time of writing *Suicide*, Catholicism was found to be especially integrated due to its obligatory practices and strong collective mind, so Durkheim posed that Catholicism was a protective factor against suicide, since those who belonged to Catholicism participated in it and reinforced the collective nature that it had at the time (Durkheim 1897/1951).

Family

Durkheim believes there is a relationship between divorce and suicide, since during the time of his research, divorced individuals of both sexes committed suicide three to four times as often as married individuals. Durkheim states that a state of marital anomie, which is produced by the institution of divorce, explains the relationship between divorces and suicides. Durkheim states that in a society that has laws and customs that permit divorce, marriage is but a weakened version of itself. Since marriage is more easily upset, it controls passions less. A weakened state of marriage may mirror anomie, which, according to Durkheim, is why there is a parallel

between rises of divorced individuals and those who commit suicide. Durkheim also reasons that women kill themselves less than men because women feel the collective influence of society less strongly, and consequently are less affected by it than men (Durkheim 1897/1951).

Literature Review

Social Factors

Pridemore, Chamlin, and Cochran (2007) researched the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the effects on the Russian society in their article, "An Interrupted Time-Series Analysis of Durkheim's Social Deregulation Thesis: The Case of the Russian Federation." Using Durkheim's theory, Pridemore et al (2007) found that during times of rapid social change, such as the aftermath of the Cold War, people are freer to follow their individual desires whatever they may be. As a result, it is expected that higher rates of deviance will occur until a new social system is constructed. When the new social system adapts methods of control, society will climb back to equilibrium (Pridemore et al., 2007).

Cao & Zhao (2010) examine social change in anomie using a cross-national study. Cao & Zhao (2010) look at the concept of in 30 countries in the world, 16 being from Europe. Cao & Zhao (2010) say that the transition from a communist to democratic system creates a temporary disequilibrium in society, where new norms and values disrupt older social patterns, and where economic well-being deteriorates. Cao & Zhao (2010) found that ten countries with a higher than average score of anomie also were countries undergoing democratic transition. They specifically found a high level of anomie in the Eastern European countries that were undergoing a democratic transition. Cao and Zhao (2010) also reference that Durkheim's theory is empirically supported by the data, stating how anomie is the byproduct of rapid sociopolitical change (Cao & Zhao, 2010).

Genov (1998) also looked at anomie due to societal transition in “Transformation and Anomie: Problems of Quality of Life in Bulgaria”. With the addition of quality of life, Genov looked at an indicator that relates to suicide. Genov (1998) found the quality of life to be low in Bulgaria because of the anomic situation of the time period. The author states that political instability was the major reason behind the state of anomie in Bulgaria in the mid-1990s. The transformation from an overly-integrated society into a society where political integration dissolved shows how instable the political climate was in Bulgaria (Genov, 1998).

Hesli & Miller (1993) research gender and its institutional support in Lithuania, Ukraine, and Russia, also examining attitudes toward institutions just prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The authors expected that women in the Soviet Union would be more accepting towards established institutions. Even though women were underpaid, underemployed, and underrepresented, the authors believed that women had a minimum amount of security within the socialist system of the Soviet Union. The authors note how women were experiencing a gradual improvement in material well-being, at least until the late 1980s, when the Soviet Union was close to collapsing. However, after research, Hesli & Miller found that Lithuanian women appeared to be as critical of the established order as Lithuanian men. Possible reasons include the fact that the standard of living was generally higher in Lithuania than Ukraine and Russia, there was a strong orientation to the West in Lithuania, and the influence of communism was somewhat muted by Lithuania’s late incorporation into the Soviet Union (Hesli & Miller, 1993).

Hesli & Miller (1993) also noted Lithuanian women’s fear concerning the transition after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The authors found that a basic concern of Lithuanian women was the potential for increased economic inequalities that may accompany a change to privatization and market economy. When women do seem to be having conservative views about

institutions, the authors state that this is because women are seeking to maintain the few advances they have made within the communist structure of the Soviet Union, and “they are realistically assessing the possibility of future deterioration in their economic, social and political position,” (Hesli & Miller, 1993, p. 526).

The authors seem to nod towards a state of anomie in a society when the equilibrium of a society becomes disrupted. Hesli & Miller (1993) state that a period of transition can be worse than the present status quo when there is no safety net and no expectation of improving conditions. The authors also state that market reforms can be threatening to people because reforms lead to large numbers of people being let go of their jobs. According to the authors, when a society is dealing with a transition, the leadership is usually more focused on economic and political reform, leaving gender-specific issues going unnoticed. The authors state that a change to a democratic society would be unlikely to improve women’s lives economically or politically, in terms of their representation (Hesli & Miller, 1993).

Hesli & Miller (1993) also examined religion among the three countries studied. The authors found that among Catholics, there were no gender differences in terms of institutional evaluations given by men and women. The authors note how historically, the Catholics in Lithuania have provided to core of the resistance to the communist regime. Catholicism in Lithuania represented feelings of anti-status quo, feelings of change and resistance to the communist regime of the Soviet Union. In comparison to Russian and Ukraine, the authors point out that Orthodoxy was the major religion, and even though Orthodoxy and communism are not complementary in their worldviews, they both supported a strong Russian nation.

Grigoriev and his colleagues (2010) examined trends and possible explanations for mortality rates in three Eastern European countries. Grigoriev et al. (2010) delved into the

possible reasons for the different outcomes of Belarus, Lithuania, and Russia after the end of the Cold War, to understand why Lithuania's attempt at restructuring society was not as successful as those of Belarus and Russia. Grigoriev et al state that these three countries were comparable before the fall of the Soviet Union in terms of their economies and living standards. The authors also state that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, all three countries experienced an economic crisis, hyperinflation, increased unemployment, and a dramatic decline in well-being of their respective populations. The article pointed out that Lithuania's desire to transform their economy very rapidly caused the unemployment rates, accidental alcohol poisoning, and suicide to increase. The authors note that the male standardized death rate from accidental alcohol poisoning increased almost 4-fold in 1990- 1994. Comparing Lithuania to Belarus, another post-Soviet nation, disparities in income distribution increased tremendously in Lithuania but not Belarus, who chose to limit their economic reforms in an attempt to "insulate its population from the pain of reforms," (Grigoriev et al, 2010, p. 261). According the Grigoriev et al. (2010), the faster the change of economy and the less systematic the reforms are, there are more negative effects on the population. The authors state that economic reforms can influence health due to macroeconomic instability, changes in prices, and poverty, erosion of social security, and weakening of public health infrastructure. According to the article, stress and anxiety may be cause by instability of the economy. Belarus' slower mortality rates during 1990-1994 suggests to the authors that less radical and slower economic reform are associated with less mortality (Grigoriev et al., 2010).

Yur'yev, Värnik and colleagues' (2010) article researched employment and suicide in Europe. Yur'yev et al. (2010) found that a higher expectation for the possibility of becoming unemployed is positively correlated with suicide mortality. Yur'yev et al (2010) state that there

is an inverse relationship between suicidal behavior and employment. Out of the countries studied in the article, the Eastern European countries had higher correlations, which the authors note that it may be because of the fundamental socioeconomic changes that occurred after the collapse of the USSR. The disruption of economic activity resulted in high unemployment and labor-market insecurity. The authors also state that significant labor-market changes occurred in Finland and Sweden during the early 1990s, but there was a less marked effect on mortality (Yur' yev et al., 2010).

Stankunas and his colleagues (2006) looked into the social indicators of depression and unemployment in order to draw conclusions about the suicide rate. These authors found that the sudden change of economy in Lithuania, from communism to a market economy, had a considerable impact on employment. The change in economy also brought about a change in environment. The previous environment in Lithuania under the Soviet Union was totalitarian, and after gaining its independence, Lithuania sought to become a democratic state that gave freedom and private property back to its citizens (Stankunas et al, 2006).

In Juska, Johnstone, & Pozzuto's (2004) article, crime as a social indicator of the societal transition in Lithuania was examined. Juska et al. (2004) found that the crime rate rose dramatically during the years 1988-1995, which include the years of Lithuania's independence and transition. It was found that total reported crime increased from 21,337 in 1988 to 60,819 in 1995 (Juska et al., 2007, p. 165). According to Juska et al. (2004), there was a transformation of criminality taking place, which may suggest an increase in anti-social and criminal conduct by marginalized youth. The authors also state that many young men in Lithuania have also shown to have pathologies indicative with disaffection, self-abuse and social regression. Juska et al. (2004) also note the increases of petty criminals, those who are homeless, jobless, and

consequently engage in crime to live on the margins (Juska et al., 2004). Overall, the authors believe that the state of crime in general changed in Lithuania to a “potentially deep-rooted and long term social problem” that will take efforts of Lithuania’s social institutions to fix (Juska et al., 2004, p. 174).

Dobryninas and Sakalauskas (2011) also researched crime in their country survey of Lithuania. The article details the post-Communist climate of Lithuania. The authors note how the crime rate was increasing after independence, due to social, political, and economic changes. The article notes how the crime rate over the past 20 years in Lithuania has more than doubled. The role of the Lithuanian public and media is also stated in the article. The authors state that the Lithuanian public may be prone to favor a law-and-order approach to the rising crime problem, instead of supporting new socioeconomic policies that may examine the factors actually causing the increased crime rate. This opinion of the public, according to the authors, is added to with the national press and electronic media had been exaggerating the prevalence of crime and distorting public perception in order to exploit the need for security. (Dobryninas & Sakalauskas, 2011).

Weir’s (1994) newspaper article noting the increase of crime in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 1994, also shows the impact of the transition on crime. The article says, “the tidal wave of crime is an unexpected and unwelcome side-effect of Lithuania’s stumbling transition from communism to market economics, which has produced industrial stagnation and cause living standards from most people to deteriorate sharply,” (Weir, 1994). Sociologist Artashes Gazaryan also quoted in the article argues that crime and the economy are related. “Unless we can create normal conditions for business in this country, it will be impossible to turn the economic decline around,” (Weir, 1994).

Kalediene and Petrauskiene (2004) looked into other risk factors that lead to suicide in their article, "Inequalities in daily variations of deaths from suicide in Lithuania: identification of possible risk factors". The authors found that the rates of suicide are the highest among middle aged men, who experienced the period of the transition of Lithuania in the early 1990s. This large group of people were exposed to the Lithuanian society in rapid change, which brought about economic instability as well as social instability due to the fact that the Soviet norms and ways of living were being abandoned for a return of the traditions of Lithuania that people kept hidden for so long, as well as a democratic and capitalistic lifestyle. The authors also thought that the frequent use of alcohol was a risk factor for suicide.

Kalediene, Petrauskiene, & Starkuviene's (2007) article discusses inequalities in mortality concerning marital status during Lithuania's socioeconomic transition. Kalediene et al. (2007) used survey based statistics as well as census data for the period of 1989-2001 to examine contribution of causes of death to marital-status differences in terms of overall mortality in Lithuania. The authors note how mortality rates increased dramatically for divorced populations over the decade. The authors state that the greatest differences by marital status are for mortality stemming from external causes, which could be attributed to Lithuania's high suicide rate, mortality from traffic accidents, increase in overall alcohol consumption, or daily smoking.

Kalediene et al. (2007) also discuss potential explanations for the fact that unmarried men had a higher rate of mortality than unmarried women. According to the authors, these explanations include that inequalities in socioeconomic mortality are more pronounced among men than women, and the possibility that divorced women retaining a parental role. The authors pose an alternate hypothesis that the negative economic and social factors affected divorced

women due to the increased mortality rate over the decade, but state that there was not available data to elaborate (Kalediene et al., 2007).

Cultural Factors

Gailiene and his colleagues (1997) researched historical cultural attitudes pertaining to suicide in Lithuania. Gailiene et al. (1997) revealed that the newspapers of Lithuania, when writing about the vast number of suicides occurring, painted them as heroic, as a tragedy and as a type of political protest. It was found that out of four European countries, Lithuania and Hungary had accepting attitudes toward suicide. Lithuania and Hungary were also Soviet satellite nations. The reinforcing nature of the newspapers could have been a factor in the reasons behind the suicide rate increasing in Lithuania (Gailiene et al., 1997).

The ethnography by Charles Woolfson (2010) detailing life in post-Soviet Lithuania examines the problem Lithuania was facing, obtaining first hand attitudes of Lithuanians during that time. After the amount of national pride that took place during gaining independence from Soviet Union after forty years, a complete turnaround of sentiment toward the Lithuanian government occurred. The failure of the economy led to alienation of the citizens as well as emigration. Woolfson states that the outcome of the transition led to a feelings of despair and disappointment throughout Lithuania. The country was in such a bad state that its many of its citizens left, desiring a better life elsewhere, just after being promised one by their own government (Woolfson, 2010).

Discussion

The unemployment rate, crime, alcoholism, and divorce rates all increased during the first half of the 1990s as noted from the literature review. As the government was transitioning to a free market economy from communism, unemployment increased due to the rapidity of the

transition. Lithuania took the path of rapid economic reform to change their economy. This resulted in a high unemployment rate during the 1990s. Possibly in an attempt to deal with being unemployed, many Lithuanians took to alcohol. Studies have shown that alcoholism increased during this time period perhaps to tranquilize the effects of political, social, and economical instability. Crime also increased during the first half of the 1990s. Disillusioned Lithuanian youth as well as adults had to deal with the unstable political situation, the unrealistic aspirations of the economy and the structural changes in social institutions.

These previous studies have provided insightful information on the sociological aspects of the phenomenon in Lithuania as well as other Eastern European countries in the early 1990s after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Several articles have stated how several social indicators correlate to a state of anomie after a transition from the influence of the Soviet Union, but none have stated that the suicide increase in Lithuania was specifically due to the state of anomie that had developed. Articles have shown that crime, unemployment, alcohol consumption, and the mortality rate of divorcees increased during this time period in Lithuania, but one has yet to examine suicide and how suicide relates to these other phenomena. Due to Lithuania still having the highest global suicide rate, future research should take a more in-depth look into the culture of Lithuania to understand how committing suicide is still being reinforced, as well as how suicide is being interpreted by Lithuanians. Sociopolitical explanations provide evidence for anomie and egoism as a result of a nation in transition, but cultural psychological explanations, such as specific explanations for why men commit suicide at a rate far higher than women. Necessary and additional in-depth research can provide a look into why suicide was the path chosen to deal with feelings of anomie and egoism, and what feelings were presented

towards fellow citizens choosing to commit suicide. This period in Lithuania was much of a cultural phenomenon as a sociopolitical one.

Feelings of anomie and egoism, it appears, can be related to a number of behaviors, such as taking to alcohol, committing crimes, and most severely, committing suicide. The results collected suggest a correlation to the increased suicide rate in Lithuania during the first half of the 1990s. The statistics provided by WHO detail the thirty point increase from 1990 to 1995, giving Lithuania the highest suicide rate in the world at that time, which is a rank they still hold today. Risk factors such as unemployment, alcohol, and depression were found to possibly have a relation to a state of anomie and egoism in Lithuanian society. Macro sociological data do not provide individual reasons for suicide, but it does provide societal reasons for the rate of suicide. Theories of social integration and regulation can attempt to provide the societal relationships behind the existence of anomie and egoism. When there is an economic, political, social, and cultural transformation that a society goes through, as Durkheim states, all of its members bear the effects. Society cannot disintegrate without people's lives being disturbed. Society suffers, its people suffer. The amount of suicides taking place during this time period shows statistically how Lithuanians were being affected by the transitional period.

In terms of religion's effect as a protective factor on suicide, as Durkheim suggests in *Suicide*, it is important to note that Lithuania is predominantly Roman Catholic, with 77.2% of its population following it. Since Lithuania has the highest suicide rate, it suggests that Catholicism as a social group in Lithuania is very weakly integrated, and is not acting as a strong protective factor. It appears that religion in Lithuania has little influence on individuals committing suicide.

The statistics on the divorce rate supported Durkheim's findings that the divorce rate runs parallel to the suicide rate in a given society. Both divorces and suicides were high in the 1990s in Lithuania, with the divorce rate fluctuating around 3.4/1000 (European Commission, 2011) and the suicide rate reaching 45.6/100,000 in 1995 (WHO, 2004). Even though the suicide rate for men and women increased, the suicide rate was remarkably higher for men than women. This finding may also reinforce Durkheim's theory that women are less affected by society than men. Hesli & Miller's (1993) also provides useful insight into the perceptions of women towards societal institutions during this time period. Hesli & Miller's (1993) hypothesis was that women were realistically assessing the possible deterioration of their social, political, and economic positions in society given that the Soviet Union was collapsing. It is possible that Lithuanian women, by already being accustomed to living in a powerless state, that they were more prepared to deal with the disruption of equilibrium in society. Even though Lithuanian women were vocal in advocating for change from the Soviet Union, the Hesli & Miller (1993) pointed out that they had apprehensions towards the transition to a market economy and democracy, since there was a potential for increased economic inequalities. It could be possible that Lithuanian women being accustomed to reduced way of living and being mentally prepared for shortcomings of the transition from communism to democracy assisted them deal with the negative effects that did actually occur.

Conclusion

This paper reveals that there are sociological reasons, using the theory on suicide proposed by Durkheim, to potentially explain the increase of the suicide rate for Lithuania in the early 1990s. After gaining its independence in 1991, there were more Lithuanian men taking their lives than ever before and more than anywhere else in the world. The societal readjustment

that the Lithuanian government was trying to accomplish harmed its citizens, by weakening social groups and disrupting the equilibrium of social roles, when it was trying to assist them in giving more freedom by turning to a form of democratic government and free market economy. Since the most recent data provided by WHO show that Lithuania still owns the highest rate in the world, new studies analyzing the current sociopolitical and cultural environment in Lithuania, as well as an attempt to devise preventive programs, must be started to find ways for its suicide rate to decrease.

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Appendix

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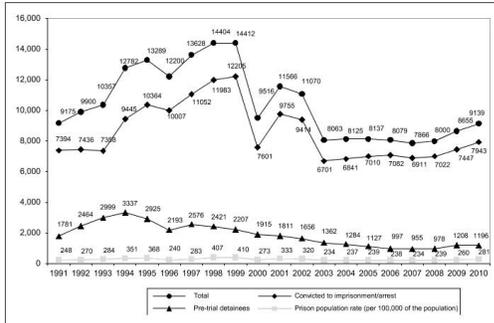


Figure 2. Imprisoned persons in Lithuania from 1991-2010. Provided by Dobryninas & Sakalauskas (2011).

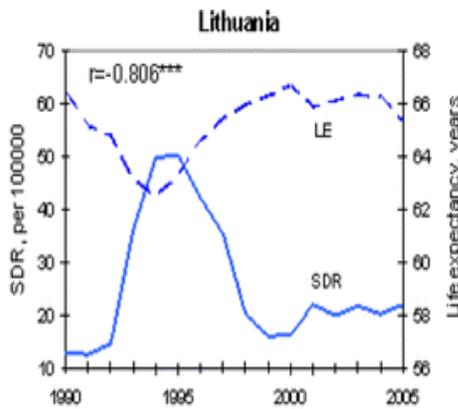


Figure 3. The association between male life expectancy and standardized death rate due to accidental alcohol poisoning. Provided by Grigoriev et al (2009).



Figure 4. Map of Lithuania. Courtesy of the CIA World Factbook.