

THE SOCIAL STIGMA OF SUICIDE

Stigma is defined as “a mark of disgrace or infamy; a stain or reproach, as on one’s reputation.” Our society does a good job of saddling suicide with stigma. In an effort to make sense of it, perhaps, we label the person who ended his or her life. He was selfish. She was crazy. They took the easy way out. These sorts of things couldn’t happen to us.



Statistics say otherwise. In the United States, someone dies by suicide every 13 minutes, and each death intimately affects at least six others, according to the American Association of Suicidology. In 2019 there were 1.38 million suicides, leaving an estimated 8 million survivors behind, the AAS says.

Historical records show that during the Middle-Ages suicide corpses were regularly mutilated to prevent the unleashing of evil spirits; suicides were denied burial in church cemeteries; afterwards, property of surviving kin was usually confiscated, and families excommunicated for failing to pay the heavy tithes expected by the church.

Today analysts claim suicide stigma is more subtle with blame being cast upon survivors and survivors being subjected to informal isolation and shunning. Today it is often noted that stigmatization promotes more grief difficulties and mental health problems for survivors.

- Social stigma reinforces the negative feelings we may already be experiencing about ourselves.
- Social Stigma may encourage a survivor of a completed suicide to isolate and refuse to share feelings or ask for help.
- Social Stigma may encourage a survivor to “shade” the truth of the cause of death or the circumstances surrounding the death. In addition, it may cause friends or family to offer



more palatable explanations for why your loved one would end his or her life.

- Many people have trouble discussing suicide and might not reach out to you. This could leave you feeling isolated or abandoned if the support you expected to receive just isn't there.
- Some religions limit the rituals available to people who've died by suicide, which could also leave you feeling alone.
- You might also feel deprived of some of the usual tools you depended on in the past to help you cope.
- Social stigma themes:
shameful, sinful, weak, selfish, manipulative, loser, unable to cope, contagious, and want to harm others.

