

this is that where there are no children widowhood produces far lesser effects. A million childless widowers show 1,258 suicides, a number related to 1,504, the contingent of sixty-two-year-old unmarried men, as 100 is to 119. Thus the coefficient of preservation is still about 1.2 which is little below that of husbands also childless, 1.5. The former of these figures is only 20 per cent less than the second. Accordingly, when a wife's death has no other effect than to break the conjugal bond, it has no strong repercussion on the suicidal tendency of the widower. Marriage during its existence must therefore only slightly aid in restraining this tendency, since the latter shows no greater increase with the end of marriage.

The reason why widowhood is relatively more disastrous when the union has been fruitful must be sought in the existence of the children.²⁶ Of course in a way the children attach the widower to life, but at the same time they make the crisis through which he is passing more intense. For not only is the conjugal relation destroyed; but precisely because a domestic society here exists, there is an impairment of its functioning too. An essential element is lacking and the whole machine is thrown out of gear. To reestablish the lost equilibrium the husband has to shoulder a double burden and perform functions for which he is unprepared. Thus he loses advantages which were his throughout the duration of the marriage. It is not because his marriage is ended but because the family which he heads is disorganized. The departure, not of the wife but of the mother, causes the disaster.

But the slight effect of marriage appears with special clarity in the woman's case when it does not find its natural fulfillment in children. A million childless wives show 221 suicides; a million unmarried women of the same age (between 42 and 43 years) only 150. The first of these numbers is to the second as 100 is to 67; the coefficient of preservation thus falls below unity and equals .67, that is, it has really become a coefficient of aggravation. In France, then, married but childless women commit suicide half again as often as unmarried women of the same age. We have already noticed that in general the wife profits less from family life than the husband. Now we see

²⁶ What Durkheim seems to mean here is that widowers with children compared to husbands with children are relatively worse off than widowers without children compared to husbands without children.—Ed.

the cause of this; in itself conjugal society is harmful to the woman and aggravates her tendency to suicide.

If most wives have, nevertheless, seemed to enjoy a coefficient of preservation, this is because childless households are the exception and consequently the presence of children in most cases corrects and reduces the evil effects of marriage. Even so these effects are only reduced. A million women having children show 79 suicides; comparing this figure with the one giving the suicide-rate of unmarried women of 42 years of age as 150, the wife is found to benefit, even when she is also a mother, only by a coefficient of preservation 1.80, 35 per cent lower,²⁷ therefore, than that of fathers. With respect to suicide, we must therefore disagree with the following proposition of Bertillon: "When woman enters the conjugal state she gains from the association more than man; but she necessarily suffers more than man when she leaves it."²⁸

III

The immunity of married persons in general is thus due, wholly for one sex and largely for the other, to the influence not of conjugal society but of the family society. However, we have seen that even if there are no children, men at least are protected in the proportion of 1 to 1.5. A reduction of 50 suicides from 150, or 33 per cent, though considerably below that achieved when the family is complete, nevertheless is not a negligible quantity and its cause should be understood. Is it due to the special benefits bestowed by marriage on the male sex, or is it not rather a result of matrimonial selection? For although it has been shown that the latter does not play the dominant role attributed to it, it has not been proven to be wholly without influence.

One fact at first sight even seems to prove this hypothesis. We know that the coefficient of preservation of childless husbands partially survives marriage; it falls merely from 1.5 to 1.2. Now, this

²⁷ A similar difference exists between the coefficient of childless husbands and childless wives; it is much greater. The second (0.67) is 66 per cent lower than the first (1.5). The existence of children thus causes the wife to regain half the ground she loses by marriage. That is, if she benefits from marriage less than the man, she profits more than he from the family, that is, the children. She is more sensitive than he to their happy influence.

²⁸ Article *Marriage*, *Dict. Encycl.*, 2d series, vol. V, p. 36.

immunity of childless widowers evidently cannot be attributed to widowhood, which in itself does not tend to reduce the proclivity to suicide but on the contrary to confirm it. It thus results from an anterior cause, though this seems unlikely to be marriage, since it continues to act even when marriage is dissolved by the wife's death. May it not then consist in some inherent quality of the husband which conjugal selection makes prominent but does not create? As it existed before marriage and is independent of it, it might well outlast the latter. If the population of husbands is an elite, the same must be true of widowers. To be sure, this congenital superiority has less effect upon the latter, since they are less protected against suicide. But the shock of widowhood may be considered as partially neutralizing this preventive influence and blocking its full results.

But for this explanation to be acceptable, it must be applicable to both sexes. Some trace at least of this natural predisposition should accordingly be found among married women, which, other things being equal, would preserve them from suicide more than the unmarried. Now the very fact that they commit suicide, if childless, more than unmarried women of the same age, is opposed to the hypothesis that they are endowed from birth with a personal coefficient of preservation. One might, however, grant that this coefficient exists for women as well as for men, but that it is wholly annulled during marriage by the unfortunate effect of marriage on the wife's moral constitution. But if its effects were only restrained and concealed by the sort of moral decline of women on entering into conjugal society, they should reappear on the dissolution of this society, or in widowhood. Freed from the depressing influence of the matrimonial yoke, women should then recover all their advantages and finally assert their inherent superiority to those of their sisters who have not achieved marriage. In comparison with unmarried women, in other words, the childless widow should have a coefficient of preservation at least approaching that of the childless widower. This is not so. A million childless widows show annually 322 suicides; a million unmarried women of 60 (the average age of widows) show only between 189 and 204, or about 196. The first is to the second number as 100 to 60. Widows without children thus have a coefficient below unity, or a coefficient of aggravation; it is 0.60, slightly lower even than that of childless wives (0.67). It is therefore not

marriage which prevents childless wives from showing the natural indisposition to suicide attributed to them.

Perhaps it will be objected that the obstacle to the complete re-establishment of the fortunate qualities whose expression is interrupted by marriage, is that widowhood is, for women, an even worse status. Indeed the idea is widespread that a widow is in a more critical position than a widower. The moral and economic difficulties are stressed which face her when she is compelled to provide all by herself, for her own existence as well as for the needs of an entire family. This opinion has even been considered proved by facts. According to Morselli,²⁹ statistics prove that woman, during widowhood, is closer to man in her aptitude for suicide than she is during marriage; and since, when married, she is already nearer the male sex in this respect than when unmarried, therefore widowhood results in placing woman in the most disadvantageous position. Supporting this thesis, Morselli cites the following figures relating only to France, but to be found among all European peoples with slight variations:

Years	Share of Each Sex in 100 Suicides of Married Persons		Share of Each Sex in 100 Suicides of Widowed Persons	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
1871	79	21	71	29
1872	78	22	68	32
1873	79	21	69	31
1874	74	26	57	43
1875	81	19	77	23
1876	82	18	78	22

Woman's share in the suicides committed by both sexes in the state of widowhood seems in fact much greater than in the suicides of married persons. Does not this prove that widowhood is much more difficult for women than marriage? If so, it is not astonishing that, once a widow, the good effects of her qualities are even more prevented from appearing than before.

Unfortunately, this supposed law is based on an error of fact. Morselli has forgotten that there are everywhere twice as many widows as widowers. In France, there are in round numbers two million of the former to only one million of the latter. In Prussia, according to the census of 1890, 450,000 widowers are found and

²⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 342.

1,319,000 widows; in Italy, 571,000 and 1,322,000 respectively. Under these conditions the share of widows is naturally higher than that of wives who are obviously of the same number as husbands. To obtain information from the comparison the two populations should be set up as equal. But if this precaution is taken, results contrary to those of Morselli are obtained. At the average age of the widowed or 60 years, a million wives show 154 suicides and a million husbands 577. Woman's share is therefore 21 per cent. It diminishes perceptibly in widowhood. Indeed, a million widows show 210 cases, a million widowers 1,017; whence it follows that of 100 suicides of widowed persons of both sexes women contribute only 17. The share of men on the contrary rises from 79 to 83 per cent. Man thus loses more than woman in passing from marriage to widowhood, since he does not preserve certain of the advantages which he owed to the conjugal state. There is thus no reason to assume that this change of situation is less trying or disturbing for him than for her; the opposite is the case. Besides, we know that the mortality of widowers far exceeds that of widows; and the same is true of their marriage rates. That of widowers is at every age three or four times as great as the rate of unmarried men, while that of widows is only slightly above that of unmarried women. Women are therefore as reluctant to face second marriage as men are eager.³⁰ It would not be so if the state of widowhood sat lightly upon men and if women, on the contrary, had in that state to face as many difficulties as has been said to be the case.³¹

But if nothing in widowhood particularly paralyzes woman's natural advantages that pertain to her solely as matrimonially elect, and if these advantages do not manifest themselves by any definite sign, there is no reason for assuming their existence. The hypothesis of matrimonial selection is therefore wholly inapplicable to the female sex. Nothing justifies the supposition that a woman entering marriage has a constitutional advantage which preserves her to a certain degree

³⁰ See Bertillon, *Les célibataires, les veufs, etc.*, Rev. scient., 1879.

³¹ Morselli also mentions in support of his thesis that on the morrow of war the suicides of widows show a much greater rise than those of unmarried women or wives. But it is merely that then the population of widows increases disproportionately; thus it naturally produces more suicides and this rise naturally persists until the restoration of equilibrium and the return to their normal level of the different sorts of marital status.

from suicide. Consequently the same supposition is just as unfounded for men. The coefficient of 1.5 of childless husbands does not result from their belonging to the healthiest portion of the population; it can only be an effect of marriage. Conjugal society, so disadvantageous for women, must, even in the absence of children, be admitted to be advantageous for men. Those who enter it are not an aristocracy of birth; they do not bring to marriage, as an existing quality, a temperament disinclining them to suicide, but acquire it by living the conjugal life. At least, if they have some natural advantages these can be only very vague and indeterminate; for they are without influence until the advent of certain other conditions. So true is it that suicide does not principally depend upon the congenital qualities of individuals but upon causes exterior to and dominating them!

There is, however, a final difficulty to be solved. If this coefficient of 1.5, independent of the family, is due to marriage, how does it survive marriage and reappear at least in attenuated form (1.2) in the childless widower? If the theory of matrimonial selection which accounted for this survival is rejected, with what shall it be replaced?

It is sufficient to assume that the habits, tastes, and tendencies formed during marriage do not disappear on its dissolution; and nothing is more plausible than this hypothesis. If the married man, then, even if childless, feels a relative security from suicide, he must inevitably preserve some of this feeling when a widower. Only, as widowhood does involve a certain moral shock and since, as we shall see later, any loss of equilibrium inclines to suicide, this disposition, though remaining, is weakened. Inversely, but for the same reason, since a childless wife more often commits suicide than if she had remained unmarried, once become a widow she retains this stronger propensity for suicide, even slightly reinforced by the distress and loss of equilibrium always accompanying widowhood. But, since the ill effects that marriage had upon her make this change of status more acceptable, the aggravation is very slight. The coefficient is lowered by only a few per cent (0.60 instead of 0.67).³²

³² When there are children, the lowering of coefficient incident to both sexes due to widowhood is almost the same. The coefficient of husbands with children is 2.9; it becomes 1.6. That of women in the same circumstances from 1.89 becomes 1.06. The diminution is 45 per cent for the former, 44 per cent for the latter. That is, as

This explanation is confirmed by the fact that it is only a particular instance of a more general proposition which may be formulated thus: *In an identical society, the tendency to suicide in the state of widowhood is for each sex a function of the suicidal tendency of the same sex in the state of marriage.* If the husband is highly protected, the widower is too, although of course to a lesser degree; if the former is only slightly protected from suicide, the latter is not thus protected at all or only very little. To assure ourselves of the accuracy of this proposition we need only refer to Tables XX and XXI and the conclusions drawn from them. We there found that one sex is always more favored than the other in both marriage and widowhood. Now, the one more privileged in the first of these conditions preserves its privilege in the second. In France, husbands have a higher coefficient of preservation than wives; that of widowers is similarly higher than that of widows. In Oldenburg the opposite is true among married couples: the wife has a higher immunity than the husband. The same inversion occurs between widowers and widows.

But as these two single cases might with some justice be considered an insufficient proof and as, on the other hand, statistical publications do not give us the necessary data to verify our proposition in other countries, we have resorted to the following procedure to extend the scope of our comparisons: we have calculated separately the suicide-rate for each age-group and marital status in the department of the Seine on the one hand, and on the other in all the rest of the departments combined. The two social groups, thus isolated from each other, are sufficiently different for us to expect their comparison to be instructive. And family life actually does have very different effects upon suicide in them (see Table XXII). In the departments the husband has much more immunity than the wife. In only four

we have said, widowhood produces two different effects; it disturbs 1. the conjugal society, 2. the family society. The former disturbance is much less felt by the woman than by the man, just because she profits less from marriage. But the second is felt far more by her: for she often finds it harder to take the husband's place in the direction of the family than he does to replace her in her domestic functions. When there are children, therefore, a sort of compensation occurs which makes the suicidal tendency of the two sexes vary, as a result of widowhood, in the same proportions. Thus it is especially when there are no children that a widowed woman partially recovers the ground lost in the state of marriage.

age-groups does the former's coefficient descend below 3,³³ while the wife's never reaches 2; the average is in one case 2.88, in the other 1.49. In the Seine the reverse is true; for husbands the coefficient averages only 1.56 while it is 1.79³⁴ for wives. The very same inversion is found between widowers and widows. In the provinces the average coefficient of widowers is high (1.45), that of widows much lower (0.78). In the Seine, on the contrary, the second is higher, rising to 0.93, close to unity, while the other falls to 0.75. Thus, *whichever the favored sex, widowhood regularly corresponds to marriage.*

More than this, if the key is sought to the variation of the coefficient of husbands from one social group to another and if the same study is then made for widowers, the following surprising results are obtained:

$$\frac{\text{Husbands' coefficient in provinces}}{\text{Husbands' coefficient in the Seine}} = \frac{2.88}{1.56} = 1.84$$

$$\frac{\text{Widowers' coefficient in provinces}}{\text{Widowers' coefficient in the Seine}} = \frac{1.45}{0.75} = 1.93$$

and for women:

$$\frac{\text{Wives' coefficient in the Seine}}{\text{Wives' coefficient in provinces}} = \frac{1.79}{1.49} = 1.20$$

$$\frac{\text{Widows' coefficient in the Seine}}{\text{Widows' coefficient in provinces}} = \frac{0.93}{0.78} = 1.19$$

The numerical proportions are for each sex pretty nearly equal; for women, the equality, in fact, is almost absolute. Thus, not only does the coefficient of widowers follow suit when that of husbands rises or sinks, but it even increases or decreases in exactly the same measure. These relations may be expressed in a form still more clearly confirmative of the law we have stated. They imply, in fact, that

³³ From Table XXII it appears that in Paris, as in the provinces, the coefficient of husbands below 20 years is below unity; that is, for them there is aggravation. This confirms the law formulated above.

³⁴ Evidently, when the female sex is the one more favored by marriage, the disproportion between the sexes is much less than when the husband has the advantage; a new confirmation of a remark made above.

TABLE XXII—Comparison of the Suicide Rate per Million Inhabitants of Each Age-group and Marital Status in the Seine and the Provinces (1889-1891)

Ages	Men (Provinces)		Women (Provinces)		Coefficient of Preservation with Respect to Unmarried Persons	
	Un-married	Wid-ows	Un-married	Wid-ows	Hus-bands	Wives
15-20	100	400	67	36	1.39	1.86
20-25	214	95	95	52	1.39	1.82
25-30	363	103	122	64	0.97	1.25
30-40	590	203	101	74	1.15	1.90
40-50	976	295	147	95	1.34	1.36
50-60	1,445	470	178	136	1.70	1.54
60-70	1,790	582	163	142	1.69	1.30
70-80	2,000	664	200	191	1.59	1.14
Above 80	1,458	762	160	108	1.29	1.04
Averages of coefficients of preservation			Averages of coefficients of preservation		2.88	1.49
			Men (Seine)	Women (Seine)		
15-20	280	2,000	224	64	0.14	3.06
20-25	487	128	196	64	3.80	3.18
25-30	599	298	328	103	2.01	1.10
30-40	869	436	281	156	1.99	3.18
40-50	985	808	357	217	1.21	1.80
50-60	1,367	1,152	456	353	1.18	1.29
60-70	1,500	1,559	515	471	0.96	1.09
70-80	1,783	1,741	326	677	1.02	0.80
Above 80	1,923	1,111	508	277	1.73	1.83
Averages of coefficients of preservation			Averages of coefficients of preservation		1.56	1.79

everywhere, whichever the sex, widowhood decreases the immunity of the surviving partner in a constant proportion:

$$\frac{\text{Husbands in provinces}}{\text{Widowers in provinces}} = \frac{2.88}{1.45} = 1.98$$

$$\frac{\text{Husbands in Seine}}{\text{Widowers in Seine}} = \frac{1.56}{0.75} = 2.0$$

$$\frac{\text{Wives in provinces}}{\text{Widows in provinces}} = \frac{1.49}{0.78} = 1.91$$

$$\frac{\text{Wives in Seine}}{\text{Widows in Seine}} = \frac{1.79}{0.93} = 1.92$$

The coefficient of widowed persons is about half that of married persons. It is thus no exaggeration to say that the aptitude for suicide of widowed persons is a function of the corresponding aptitude of married persons; in other words, the former is in part a consequence of the latter. But since marriage adds to the husband's immunity, even without children, it is not surprising that the widower should retain a portion of this fortunate disposition.

At the same time that it solves the question we had asked ourselves, this result casts some light on the nature of widowhood. In fact, it teaches us that widowhood in itself is not a hopelessly disadvantageous condition. It is very often better than bachelorhood. To be truthful, the moral constitution of widowers and of widows is not at all specific, but depends on that of married people of the same sex and in the same country. It is only a prolongation of this. If you will tell me how marriage and family life in a given society affect men and women, I will tell you what widowhood does for each. Although the crisis of widowhood is more grievous where marriage and domestic society are both felicitous, by fortunate compensation people are better equipped to face it; and, inversely, this crisis is less grave where the matrimonial and family constitution leave more to be desired, but in return people are less equipped to resist it. Thus, in societies where man benefits more from the family than woman, he suffers more when left alone but is at the same time better able to endure it, because the salutary influences which he has undergone have made him more averse to desperate resolutions.

IV

The following table summarizes the facts just established:

INFLUENCE OF THE FAMILY ON SUICIDE BY SEX

	Men		Coefficient of Preservation in Relation to Unmarried Men
	Suicide-rate		
Unmarried men 45 years old	975		2.9
Husbands with children	236		1.5
Unmarried men 60 years old	644		
Widowers with children	1,504		1.6
Widowers without children	937		1.2
	1,258		

M. Bertillon (article cited in the *Revue scientifique*), had already given the suicide-rate for the different categories of marital status with and without children. He found the following results:

Husbands w. children	205 suicides per million	Widowers w. chil.	326
Husbands w. no chil.	478 suicides per million	Widowers w. no chil.	1,004
Wives w. children	45 suicides per million	Widows w. children	1,104
Wives w. no children	158 suicides per million	Widows w. no chil.	238

These figures refer to the years 1861-68. Given the general increase in suicides, they confirm our own figures. But as the lack of such a table as our Table XXI allowed