

New home for Suicide Cultures website and blog

With funding now secure for 5 years, it was time to move the old wordpress blog to a more secure home.

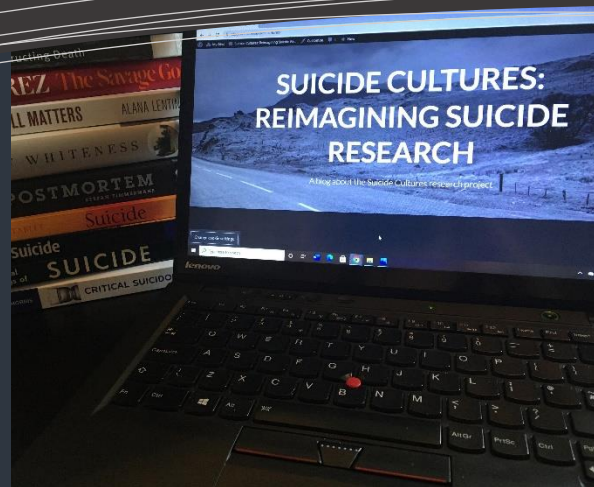
The project website can now be found on the University of Edinburgh's web pages:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/suicide-cultures/>

BLOGGING ABOUT SUICIDE CULTURES

The project blog has also moved. All of the old posts are still available. Over the 5 years you can expect to see much more activity on the blog, as new team members join and there is more news to report. There will also be opportunities for guest bloggers to contribute.

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/suicide-cultures/>



October 2020

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Introducing Suicide Cultures: Reimagining Suicide

Suicide Cultures: Reimagining Suicide Research is a Wellcome Trust funded project exploring meanings and practices of suicide from social and cultural perspectives.

The project will run over 5 years, and during that time the team will use several different methods of research to develop a rich, complex picture of suicide in diverse communities and places across Scotland.

The project was designed and will be led by me, Amy Chandler, a sociologist at the University of Edinburgh. In January 2021 I will be joined by a PhD student, Emily Yue. From Spring 2021 three Research Fellows will be recruited. The Research Fellows and Emily will be doing much of the fieldwork, which we expect to start in Summer 2021.

The first stage of fieldwork will involve studying reviews of suicides that have happened in certain areas of Scotland. This will provide the research team with a picture of how suicide is explained in formal reviews, what social and

cultural factors are common, or less common.

They will also work across different areas of Scotland, spending time with people, holding interviews with those who have lost someone to suicide, or who have self-harmed

Later on in the project, we will hold group discussions, using art (of all kinds, this might be painting, drawing, poetry, music) to further explore what suicide means in different places and for different people.

Finally, part of the research will involve ethnographic fieldwork. We will identify and work closely in areas to understand how the social and cultural life of particular communities and places can help us understand how and why suicides happen there.

This type of research is relatively rare in suicide research. In Scotland there have been very few studies such as this one, so the Suicide Cultures project hopes to contribute a lot to our knowledge of suicide, and in turn to contribute social and cultural perspectives to efforts to reduce suicides.

Pilot interviews with people bereaved by suicide

In February 2020, just before the whole world changed with Covid-19 and a nationwide lockdown in the UK, I completed two pilot interviews with people who had been bereaved by suicide.

Originally, I'd hoped to hold a few more interviews in order to test out different approaches to interviewing about this topic.

Unfortunately, due to lockdown, and in particular the impact this had on my own ability to work alongside caring for my children, I decided to pause these interviews.

I will be working on an analysis of the two interviews, discussing this further with the interviewees, and these findings will inform how we approach the interviews in the 5 year project.



Update from the Suicide Cultures Pilot Project

From 2018-2020 the Suicide Cultures Pilot Project ran, providing vital groundwork for the current 5 year project

Securing 5 years funding for the current project was a huge task, and was only possible because of work carried out during a pilot stage of the project. During this time I was helped and supported by many, many people across Scotland, and further afield.

Piloting Arts-based Workshops

One of the novel methods that the Suicide Cultures project will use are what we are calling 'arts-based workshops'. These involve getting together a group of people to spend time talking about suicide and making art. In the pilot stage we got to test out this approach with four different groups of people. We learned a lot, and made plenty of mistakes! Overall, though, we found that working in a group setting, where art (in some form) was available and around created a context where lots of different types of stories about suicide could be told.

In the first year of the project, Sarah Wright (Research Fellow during the pilot stage) and I will be writing up findings and insights from the workshops for publication.

Sharing findings and hearing from others

In collaboration with many project partners, we held a series of events across Scotland. These were all unique events, designed with local stakeholders to meet the needs of local communities.

Inverness – with Samaritans Highland, and NHS Highland 10th September 2019

Shetland – with NHS Shetland October 2019

Fort William – with Ewen's Room and NHS Highland 12th November 2019

Dundee – with Dundee City Council 3rd March 2020

Events at Inverness and Fort William were also supported by the National Suicide Prevention Leadership Group (NSPLG).

In Inverness we were joined by Rose Fitzpatrick, chair of the NSPLG. The event coincided with Suicide Prevention Day, and Rose shared some of the plans the NSPLG had for the coming year – including the plan (which we are seeing launched now) to start a 'social movement' around suicide prevention.

<https://unitedtopreventsuicide.org.uk/>

Over 150 people attended these events, representing a wealth of experience and expertise. Many practitioners attended – working in the NHS, police and multiple third sector organisations, as well as people bringing lived experience of bereavement or self-harm. These initial insights and conversations are – I hope – just the start of many more to come over the next five years.



In each Suicide Cultures Newsletter, we will summarise a recent publication. Sometimes this may be from the project team, other times (including this month), it will be a relevant study by someone else.

Publication Spotlight: low rates of suicide in a disadvantaged area

““There Is So Much More for Us to Lose If We Were to Kill Ourselves””: Understanding Paradoxically Low Rates of Self-Harm in a Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Community in London” by Catherine Pollings and colleagues in *Qualitative Health Research*.

In this study, the researchers carried out a qualitative study – using group discussions and interviews – in a diverse area of London. They were interested in this area because it had quite high levels of poverty and disadvantage,

but surprisingly low rates of hospital treated self-harm. Using qualitative methods (speaking to people in the area) they wanted to find out why this might be.

The community they studied was in a historically black area, but one that was experiencing high migration in, with 50% of the population in the area born outside the UK.

To explain low rates of self-harm, participants talked about the importance of community spirit and solidarity, but also a sense that this was changing.

Alongside this, the researchers identified strong stigma against mental illness and, distrust of mental health services. Many participants spoke of the importance of self-reliance, resilience and ‘toughness’ as also important in explaining low rates of self-harm.

This is a complex picture, and points to the importance of using qualitative methods to understand statistical findings about self-harm (or suicide). The article is free to read and can be accessed here:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1049732320957628>

Project Advisory Groups

Drawing on advice and guidance from others will be essential throughout the lifetime of the project.

The Suicide Cultures project benefits from a Research Advisory Group, currently made up of 8 researchers and people with lived experience of suicide.

As the project develops, we will invite more people to join this group, in order to ensure we draw on a range of expertise.

In addition, as we prepare for fieldwork in 2021, we will establish local advisory groups in each of the areas of Scotland that we will work in. The project is focused on looking at local cultures and practices relating to suicide and suicide prevention/response. Therefore it is vital that our study is guided by people living and working in these areas.

Suicide in/as Politics – Another Project!

Alongside the Suicide Cultures project, I am also involved in another related study

The Suicide in/as Politics study has been funded by a Leverhulme Trust Project Grant. It is a collaboration with Ana Jordan, of the University of Lincoln. Although focused on suicide, the project is quite different in focus. We will be looking at how politicians and national charities talk about suicide – in parliamentary debates, and in

written policy from governments and third sector organisations.

The project will be exploring how suicide is used in politics and how political organisations respond to suicide. We will be taking findings from our analysis of ‘formal politics’ to a range of community groups for further discussion and debate.

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/suicide-in-as-politics/>



New Mailing List

Another change has been made in how we keep people up to date with activity on the project. Our MailChimp mailing list is being retired, and going forward we have a University owned (and therefore more secure) list.

To join, you just need to email me (see below).

Upcoming activity on the project

- **Emily Yue: New PhD Student**

Emily's PhD is funded by the Suicide Cultures project, and starts in January 2021. Emily's project will look at migrant suicides in Scotland.

- **Ethics applications**

To ensure that the research is carried out carefully and ethically, a huge focus in these early months is preparing applications for ethical review.

- **Reconnecting**

Covid-19, and just simply the passage of time, has meant that it has been a long time between updates and connections. I will be having conversations (virtual or on the phone, sadly no visits for now) with as many people as possible to discuss the project, and how people can get involved.

- **Recruiting staff: Research Fellows and an Administrator**

The Suicide Cultures team is set to grow a lot in the coming months. We will shortly be hiring a part-time administrator, to help with the logistics of running the study.

Then, early next year we will begin hiring three postdoctoral Research Fellows, who will join us in April/May 2021.

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<https://www.ed.ac.uk/suicide-cultures/>

Contact Amy:

a.chandler@ed.ac.uk

Suicide Cultures: Reimagining Suicide
Research
School of Health in Social Science
University of Edinburgh
EH8 9AG



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

