

Suicide Cultures Research Project Team

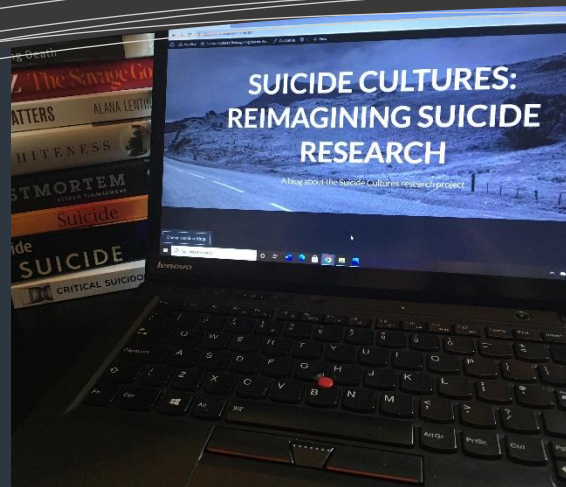
The start of 2021 was very busy with recruiting four new members of the Suicide Cultures Team, as well as PhD student Emily Yue joining the project officially in January.

Asia Podgorska joined in May 2021 as the new Suicide Cultures Project Administrator. Asia will be a key point of contact for the project via our new project email address:

suicidecultures@ed.ac.uk

From July 2021 three full-time Research Fellows will be joining. Each Researcher will be based in one of three broad areas of Scotland.

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



June 2021

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Updates Suicide Cultures: Reimagining Suicide Research

Once again, Covid-19 has impacted some of our progress over the last few months. This is the third attempt at a newsletter!

Since the last Project Newsletter (way back in October 2020), activity on the Suicide Cultures Project has been focused on a few key issues: planning for the analysis of suicide reviews; supporting new PhD student Emily Yue; recruiting the 3 new Research Fellows and a new Project Administrator.

Ongoing Analysis of Pilot Study Data

Alongside lots of admin and planning, Amy has been working on further analysis of data generated during the 2018-2020 pilot project. She will present some of these findings at the British Sociological Association Medical Sociology Annual Conference, September 2021. The presentation is part of a panel with Suicide in/as Politics Researcher Hazel Marzetti, and University of Exeter PhD student, Veronica Heney. We are developing a joint blog post about the presentation, which will be shared towards the end of

summer.

Publication news

Amy has had two new papers published recently. One of these is featured in the 'Publication Spotlight' on page 3. Another reports findings from an arts-based project Amy undertook with Zoi Simopoulou, which helped to inform some of the approaches we will be using in the Suicide Cultures project.

The paper is called 'The Violence of the Cut: Gendering Self-Harm' and is open access:

<https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/9/4650>

As well as giving a sense of some of the challenges of researching gender in relation to self-harm (and suicide), the paper gives a flavour of how art can be used in research about self-harm and suicide.

A study of intergenerational suicide in families: opportunity to take part in a study

Kelly Stewart is working towards a PhD in Counselling Studies in the School of Health in Social Science.

While Kelly's PhD is not formally part of the Suicide Cultures project (she started her part-time PhD before the project got going) her work is closely aligned with the approaches and aims.

Kelly is now recruiting a small number of participants to take part in her PhD study. She is looking for people who have experienced the loss of two or more family members to suicide across different generations.

You can contact Kelly by email at K.R.Stewart-1@sms.ed.ac.uk and also check out a paper based on some earlier work, where she reflects on her own experience of suicide bereavement:

<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kelly-Stewart-8>



Migrant Suicide: an alternative analysis

Suicide Cultures PhD Researcher, Emily Yue, introduces herself and her embedded PhD study.

I joined the Suicide Cultures project in January 2021 and alongside taking taught modules I have been developing my thinking from the Masters Dissertation I wrote while studying for a year at SOAS in London. There I reviewed literature finding higher rates of suicide among ethnic minority and migrant communities. I theorised that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) recording age and sex, but not ethnicity and migrant status, excludes these populations. I argued that suicide prevention's focus on the male suicide crisis generated by gaps in ONS data, assumes a white universal male (in crisis) and as such excludes men who don't fit this version of reality. I called for more intersectional suicide reporting to better reflect the diverse reality of suicide in the United Kingdom.

Having now further developed my literature review, I am now more attuned to the potential dangers of simply 'adding' migrants to the crisis of suicide. In addition to the potential for creating suicide clusters by associating ethnic minority status with suicide risk; I realise that it should not be a surprise that migrants and ethnic minority people are more likely to die by suicide, since 'labelling theory' tells us social deviants (rule breakers of normality) have historically been those more likely to be diagnosed with mental illness which suicidology's compulsory pathology of suicide (see Marsh 2010, 2020) equates to suicide risk.

Therefore, a large part of my project will involve reflexively deconstructing the colonial legacies and continuities of suicidology's methodologies (see Tuhiwai Smith, 2013), asking who is excluded by existing perspectives to studying suicide. In addition to participating in interviews next year I will continue to critically analyse the UK's globalised mainstream suicide prevention: focusing especially on the way that a focus on prevention assumes an agent responsible for preventing their suicide, and how prevention being concentrated on stigma 'forgets' a history of diagnosing social deviants with mental illness.

Marsh, I. (2010). *Suicide: Foucault, History and Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marsh, I. (2020). The Social Production of Psychocentric Knowledge in Suicidology. *Social Epistemology*, 34, 544-554.

Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2013). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books.



This month our publication spotlight is from the project team. PI Amy Chandler published this article earlier in 2021, based on a study that was funded by Alcohol Change UK, and which informed the Suicide Cultures project.

Publication Spotlight: Masculinities and suicide: Unsettling ‘talk’ as a response to suicide among men

This paper reports on a small, qualitative study which held life-story interviews with 10 men aged 35-61 who lived in Scotland, and had experience with self-harm. The study was designed to:

- Test the use of a ‘life-grid’ and more generally life story approach to studying suicide and self-harm among men
- To explore the role of alcohol use in men’s stories about their experiences with mental health, self-harm and suicide.

In the paper, Amy argues that common calls for men to ‘speak up

more’ about their problems or emotions run the risk of simplifying what are often very complex lives and issues that affect how men come to feel distressed, or suicidal.

The men who took part often agreed that men struggled to ‘talk’ about their feelings, or seek help for their problems. In some cases, they reported benefits to talking with trusted people. However, they also told stories which highlighted a number of limitations to the idea that ‘talking’ more would help reduce distress:

- Attempts to seek help – to talk – that were thwarted by lack of services, or rejection by services (sometimes because of alcohol use)
- Trouble talking about certain potentially shameful issues, even in ‘safe spaces’.
- That no amount of talking could fix long-term and structural problems with housing, (un)employment, and disability.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09581596.2021.1908959> (paper is free to access until mid-July)

Critical Suicide Studies International Roundtable

On June 17-18th Amy took part in a roundtable discussion originally planned for June 2020 in Vancouver, Canada. The roundtable was generously funded by the Peter Wall Foundation, and the organisers reworked the event into an online discussion across multiple timezones (from Canada, to the UK, to Australia and New Zealand)!

Points of discussion across the two days included:

The importance of spaces to discuss suicide which do not assume what it means.

The importance and role of structural and cultural factors that shape and perhaps produce suicide – including economic and gender inequalities, marginalisation, and oppression.

Look out for a blog post on this event soon!

<https://critsui.pwias.ubc.ca/>

Suicide in/as Politics Update

Suicide in/as Politics is a sibling project to Suicide Cultures, funded by the Leverhulme Trust 2020-2023

The Suicide in/as Politics Project has been focusing on an analysis of UK suicide prevention policies. Research Fellows Hazel Marzetti and Alex Oaten have completed initial analysis of 8 policies from Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2010-2019).

Alex presented some initial findings at the June 2021 Early-Mid Career Researcher Forum, hosted by the Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour Research Lab at the University of Glasgow.

Hazel and Alex are now hard at work on two papers, as well as an analysis of the use of ‘suicide’ in parliamentary debates in the Scottish Parliament and Westminster.

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



Suicide Cultures Mailing List

The Mailing List is a great way of staying up to date with the Suicide Cultures project.

To join, simply email

suicidecultures@ed.ac.uk

Upcoming activity on the project

- **New Research Fellows**

July 2021 will see our 3 new Research Fellows join us – Joe Anderson, Sarah Huque, and Rebecca Helman.

- **Meetings and (maybe) travel**

Once the Research Fellows are in post, they will begin making links and – hopefully – visiting different areas of Scotland, where we will be planning fieldwork towards the end of 2021.

- **Analysis, writing and presenting from Suicide Cultures Pilot Study**

Slightly delayed due to Covid-19 and associated disruptions. As well as supporting new staff on the project, Amy will be returning to analysis from the 2019-2020 pilot study – watch this space.

- **Suicide Cultures Seminar Series.**

From September 2021 we will be hosting a free monthly seminar. Each month will feature one or two presenters sharing research or insights relevant to thinking about suicide from social or cultural perspectives. Details will be shared via the mailing list.

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