

Suicide Cultures Research Project Team

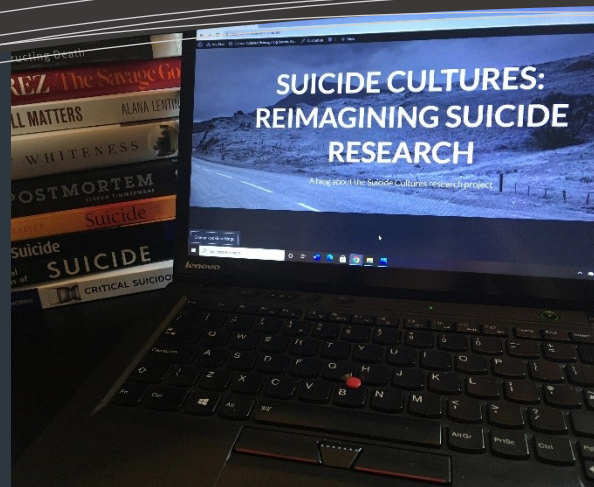
The Suicide Cultures project is a Wellcome Trust funded project which is using multiple innovative, qualitative methods to research meanings and practices of suicide across diverse communities and regions of Scotland.

You can join our mailing list by sending an email to:

suicidecultures@ed.ac.uk

Suicide Cultures is a multidisciplinary research project, with researchers who have backgrounds in sociology, geography, anthropology, gender studies and critical psychology.

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



September 2022

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Updates Suicide Cultures: Reimagining Suicide Research

There has been a LOT of activity since our last newsletter (February 2022).

Ethics approvals and fieldwork – ethnography and interviews

Earlier in the year we were granted ethical approval to start face-to-face, and online, fieldwork. Research Fellows Joe Anderson, Rebecca Helman and Sarah Huque have now been able to start working more closely with individuals and communities across Scotland, exploring how suicide is understood and responded to in different places.

So far, the team have been spending time with a number of community-based organisations, and have held one-to-one interviews with many individuals. We expect to be even busier over the coming year, as altogether we hope to speak with 60 people who have lost someone to suicide, 60 people who have attempted suicide, and 30 people who support those who are affected by suicide – 150 in total!

Phd research with second-generation “migrants” and suicide

Emily has also started interviews towards building a counter-archive of suicide knowledge. Find more on her blog <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/emilyyue/#> or email her on e.l.m.yue@sms.Ed.ac.uk to contribute.

Working with reviews of suicides

Alongside our fieldwork, the team are also conducting analysis of reviews of suicides that have happened in Scotland. These include a package of work (introduced in Newsletter 3) focusing on Fatal Accident Inquiries into suicides in Scottish prisons. Secondly, we were granted final approvals to access and analyse reviews conducted by the NHS following suicides of patients, as well as the multi-agency reviews of suicides that some Healthboards conduct.

Experiences of suicide among first-generation Scots/second-generation 'migrants'

Emily Yue is the Suicide Cultures PhD Researcher

Emily's PhD project is exploring experiences of suicide among people who identify as 'mixed' ethnicity and are first-generation Scottish, or second generation migrant to Scotland (where at least one parent was born outside of the UK).

Emily's project builds on a long-standing interest in the complex relationships between suicide, race, ethnicity and migration. Emily has written about these issues in a number of publications, showing how more often race, ethnicity and migration have not been a big part of conversations about suicide. She is now keen to work collaboratively with others to further explore these issues.

Emily is recruiting contributors now – further details are on her website:

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/emilyyue/>



Ethnography in the Suicide Cultures Project

Suicide Cultures Research Fellow, **Joe Anderson**, introduces one of our key research methods - ethnography.

Here at the Suicide Cultures project we are excited to announce that the next phase of our data collection has now started. We are utilising the **ethnographic method**, often used to understand the day-to-day social life of communities. In this method researchers actively engage with the communities they study, and we will be spending time in different locations across Scotland to capture the complexity of experiences with suicide as it appears in particular places.

An important component of ethnography is the collection and recording of fieldnotes following the situations or conversations we take part in. As part of our ethnographic research we will be attending suicide related events, volunteering with organisations that deliver services related to suicide, as well as getting to know our participants beyond what is possible in an interview. This will allow us to understand how local ways of interacting, talking, and being together might shape experiences of suicide, as well as looking at how services are organised and delivered across Scotland.

Research Fellows Sarah, Rebecca, and myself (Joe) will be living on-site for the next year to engage with participants, organisations, and events giving us a comprehensive view of suicide in Scotland. The data generated by this approach will give us unique insights and will inform future outputs from the project

Key question – where are you working?

Keen-eyed readers will have picked up by now that we have not mentioned specifically where we are doing our fieldwork. An important part of our approach is that the research is focused on specific places across Scotland – these reflect some of the diversity of Scotland, and include rural, isolated, and urban communities, areas that are more affluent, and areas where people are more likely to struggle financially.

However, in order to protect the identities of those who take part in interviews, we will be pseudonymising the places we work, and the people who take part in interviews. This is an important part of conducting research ethically – so that we do not inadvertently expose stories or experiences that people might prefer to keep private. Keeping people anonymous in the research allows them to share stories about suicide, help improve understanding and awareness, whilst also maintaining their privacy.

We are always reflecting on the ethics of doing the work we do, and you can read more about this over on our blog. <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/suicide-cultures/>



Publication Spotlight: “An autopsy of the coloniality of suicide: Modernity’s completed genocide”

Emily Yue introduces a paper by Tisha X and marcela polanco, part of a Critical Suicide Studies special issue of *Health*, published earlier this year:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/hea/26/1>.

“Psychological autopsy” refers to the practice through which the majority of people who die by suicide in the Westernised world are diagnosed post-mortem with a causal mental illness. My dad a “native migrant” in Britain, was one among many “patients” to receive a diagnosis of mental illness after death, despite no medical history. The practice of psychological autopsy has been strongly critiqued in critical suicide writing (for example [Hjelmeland et al. 2012](#); [Mills 2018](#)) for removing a person’s suicide from the circumstances of their life, and locating the reason for their death inside their brain.

In their paper, X and polanco further develop this disobedient critique of psychological autopsy, by writing about suicides in relation to the globally designed inhospitality of our modern/colonial world system. In doing so they transform the focus of autopsy from the patient – removed from their context – towards the social and cultural conditions outside of our minds that might produce or invite suicidality.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/13634593211038517>

By centring coloniality, the authors emphasise the continuing impact of colonisation on us all today, not only “the colonised” in “the past”. They offer their own life stories in Spanglish in critique of Eurocentric scientific approaches to suicide, writing from within but against our contradictory modern colonial world. Amidst increasingly mainstream calls for decolonisation, X and polanco don’t offer universal answers, but rather encourage us to know and question the monopoly of Western knowledge on suicide, if we are to build “pluriversal hospitable worlds of life and death” in which to coexist.

Suicide Cultures Podcast

On the 1st of April Joe, Rebecca and Sarah launched the Suicide Cultures Podcast. The podcast explores different perspectives on suicide, through interviews with guests as well as discussions between Sarah, Joe and Rebecca about their research in various communities across Scotland.

You can access all the episodes – and subscribe for future ones – here:

<https://open.spotify.com/show/4Sm7QjdN21eyMweOjpTHxN>

Each episode features a conversation about suicide, often – but not always – with guests. We hope this podcast will offer a further way of opening up different types of conversation about suicide.

If you are interested in being interviewed for a future episode of the podcast please contact us: rhelman@ed.ac.uk.

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 is now holding interactive, arts-based workshops where they are sharing findings from their analysis of suicide prevention policies, and parliamentary debates about suicide. The workshops started in August 2022, with a workshop tailored for LGBTQ+ people, and a second focusing on suicide

prevention in prisons and in relation to the police. Further workshops will be running throughout 2022 tailored for specific groups, or focusing on specific topics.

More information – including about joining a workshop (many are online) - on the Suicide in/as Politics blog:

<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

- **Conference Presentations**

Amy is attending the British Sociological Association Medical Sociology Conference in Lancaster in September – ‘Diagnosing Disorder: reimagining suicide in fatal accident reports’. Joe is attending the American Anthropological Association Conference in Seattle in November – ‘Landscapes of suicide prevention in Scottish prison: developing a critical, social justice approach to suicide’. Sarah will attend a conference on Carceral Geographies, in Melbourne – ‘Prison as a suicidescape: At the intersection of hostile environments and suicide discourses’

- **Ongoing fieldwork**

Rebecca, Joe and Sarah are all doing fieldwork in different areas of Scotland. If you or an organisation you work with is interested in exploring potential collaboration, please contact suicidecultures@ed.ac.uk to find out if we are working near you!

- **Writing – blogs, reports and papers**

The team submitted our first publication for review, and are working together on a number of other papers. We are also continuing to blog, and currently exploring publishing short reports on our ongoing analysis.

- **Suicide Cultures Seminar Series**

Recordings from all of our 2021-22 seminars are available on the blog; and a new programme for 2022-23 is available for booking on Eventbrite - <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/suicide-cultures-34021316761>

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