

Factors Deterring and Promoting the Decision to Attempt Suicide at Coastal Locations

A Multi-Methodological Analysis

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Project Aims and Rationale

- There is **very limited international research** on suicides at coastal sites
- In particular, little is known about **why people consider taking their lives at coastal sites**, despite this question's key implications for preventative initiatives
- The related question of **why people choose *not* to attempt suicide at these sites** and by such means can also generate some important insights into the processes that lead to suicidal behaviour at coastal locations - but remains, to date, largely unexplored

Workstream 1

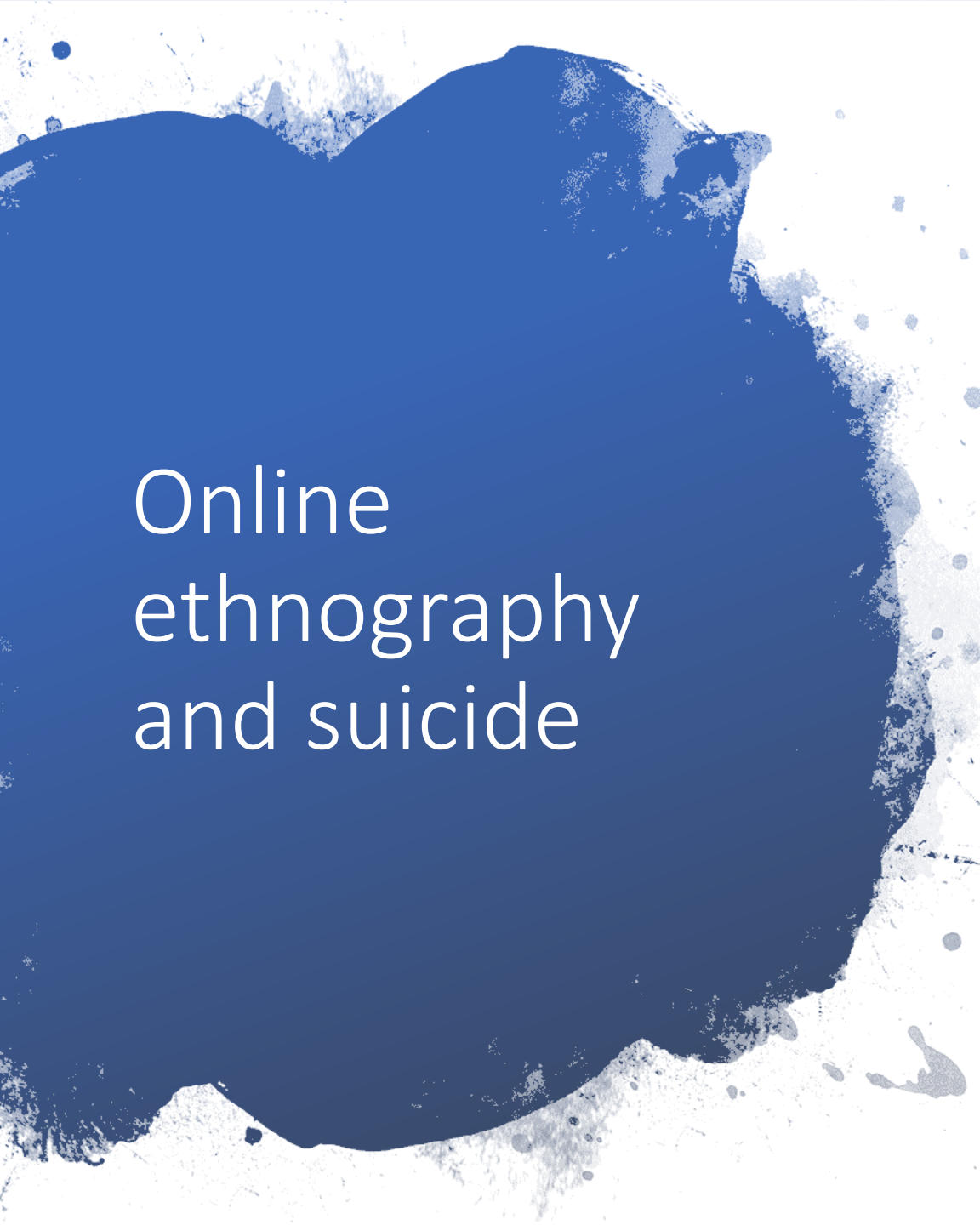
Understanding what motivates and dissuades individuals from attempting suicide at coastal locations.

- i. Analyses of the qualitative comments of a **national survey** carried out in 2016 to explore **choices of suicide methods and locations** in a range of settings (N= 1398, including **123** individuals who discussed contemplating or using a coastal location for suicide)
- ii. Qualitative survey of suicide attempts and **third-party interventions** in public places (N=2270, including **9** relating to coastal locations)

Workstream 2

Analysis of news and online content that may influence people's decisions to attempt suicide at coastal locations

- i. News coverage of suicidal behaviour at coastal sites
- ii. The range of online content available to those searching information about coastal-related suicide on the Internet.
- iii. Online portrayal, disclosures and discussions of suicidal behaviour at coastal locations on social networking sites such as Twitter and other online spaces, including **'pro-choice' suicide forums.**




Online ethnography and suicide

Online ethnography

This method takes online spaces to be places where communities gather and interact with each other. Through observation and listening to these interactions, an in-depth understanding can be gained about **how individuals in a community communicate around given topics.**

- The different ways that suicide is talked about online
- How and why users interact with content and other users at different points in their experiences of suicidality
- The different discourses and ‘cultural scripts’ that exist in relation to particular methods and locations



Online ethnography of 'pro-choice' suicide forums

Online ethnography can give an insight into:

- How suicide is discussed and understood by people who;
 - describe **high levels of intent** (and also some have experience of attempts),
 - are **generally well-informed** about different methods/locations
 - and who **might not normally get involved** in suicide prevention research
- Why particular **methods/locations** are chosen
- The **effects of increased knowledge** on people's choice of method
- The effects of **online social pressure**
- The **informal peer-to-peer support** that people both seek and provide online
- and **people's journeys** into, through and out of forums

'Pro-choice forum' - successor to 'alt.suicide.holiday' newsgroup & original Reddit forum. Created March, 2018

Forum statistics




Threads:	53,546
Messages:	1,012,832
Members:	17,200









ONLINE STATISTICS

Members online:	220
Guests online:	334
Total visitors:	554

Totals may include hidden visitors.

Information

-  **News & Announcements**
Stay up to date with the latest news and updates to the site. Threads 17 Messages 1.4K  **Community Poll: Political ...**
Today at 5:23 AM
-  **Forum Rules & FAQ**

-  **Suicide Discussion**
Share with the community any thoughts or feelings you may have, and ask those questions you can't ask anywhere else. Threads 39.1K Messages 609.9K  **U**  **Venting**
2 minutes ago
-  **Recovery**
Receive support, help others in need, form partnerships to get better, or just spend some time breathing in positivity. Threads 2.4K Messages 34.2K  **U**  **Story** **So, I almost got s...**
7 minutes ago
-  **Offtopic**
Let off some steam, talk about music, games, your day, or anything that comes to mind. Threads 11.6K Messages 356.5K  **U**  **Venting** **Stress/humans**
3 minutes ago

Meta

-  **Suggestions**
Do you have any good ideas or suggestions for the forum? Post them here. Threads 44 Messages 329  **M** **Delayed private messages**
Yesterday at 10:54 AM



The forum discussions

The pro-choice forum is a community of people who may have a history of suicide attempts, suicidal ideation, or currently planning on taking their own life. They have created a space where they can gather to talk openly about suicide, making it a unique community due to the less moderated nature of the site.

Discourses:

- **‘Pro-choice’** - individual rights and freedoms (contrasted with ‘pro-life’)
- Often **dismissive of prevention** and ‘pro-lifers’
- Suicide framed as **choice, escape** (rather than as loss)
- Many members describe being **‘post-help-seeking’**



Implications for prevention

- Central approach to prevention is to **encourage help-seeking**
- But people online frequently express that they have repeatedly sought help from MH services, friends, helplines and **have lost hope** that it will make a difference
- Online peer support from others who are suicidal often engaged with – strong identification with others in a similar situation / with a similar outlook – **‘communities of affirmation’** (Niezen, 2013)
- ‘Prevention’ is usually associated with notions of protection, intervention, and the primacy of life, but online it is **interference, an infringement of rights, and an unwarranted ‘external’ demand** for the continuation of suffering

Online ethnography – East Sussex cliffs

Reasons for choosing the location:

- Described as a **beautiful, peaceful, and romantic** location to end life
- An attempt at the cliffs is generally described as being 100% **lethal**, if the person chooses particular locations
- It is described as being **accessible** due to the ability to walk to the edge cliff edge and also getting there via transportation

Repeat visits and planning

- People discuss **scoping** out the site, saying that they went there for a day trip, and tested themselves by standing at the edge. This was done for several reasons including: testing if they 'really wanted to die', testing their **survival instinct** (SI) reaction at the edge, and looking to see for themselves **how sheer the drop** was
- There appears at times to be a high degree of **planning and timetabling**. This includes looking at hotels for the night before, planning a day in town, what they will do when they get to location (such as listening to music), and **what to wear** so as to not attract attention
- On the suicide forum, people sometimes ask if others want to join them either on a visit to scope out the location or to be their '**partner**' (meaning take their own lives together using the same suicide method)

Reasons for *not* choosing East Sussex cliffs

- With East Sussex, a prime reason for not choosing it is that people talk about the **survival instinct (SI)** and **not being able to overcome this**
- For others, although they wanted to die by suicide at that location, they spoke of its **inaccessibility** from a practical perspective - **living too far away or lacking funds/transportation to travel there**
- People were worried they **may survive**. This uncertainty about lethality was furthered with people sharing newspaper articles about people who had survived, as well as a documentary on YouTube
- People felt they were **more likely to be caught/intervened with** at the location than in other places.
- For some, spending time on the suicide forum had made them decide against the method/location and **choose a different method**

Assumption of online harm?

Railways...

Online, people well-informed about railway suicide methods ***generally advise against it***

Pro-choice forum members discuss in detail negative or aversive aspects of method;

- **traumatic effect on others (esp driver)**
- possibility of surviving with injuries
- possibility of intervention
- fear-inducing method so difficult to overcome survival instinct

East Sussex...

- People on the suicide forum **do not explicitly encourage** someone to go to the location
- They **do not discourage it** either
- Instead they say that they wish the individual peace whichever path they choose
- When someone returns to the site if they have not taken their own life at the location then people welcome them back, checking they are okay and say that they are glad they are still around
- Unlike the railway suicide research, we do not see the same degree of discussions about the **impact** that a suicide at BH may have **on others** (such as the coastguard, Police, RNLI, etc)

The extent to which online discussions could be said to have either **preventative effects or to encourage suicidal actions** does seem to **vary across methods**

Further work

Online ethnography;

- Map perceptions of impact on the lives of others – stories of people who are affected directly (families, RNLI, Coastguard, Police, etc)
- Misinformation – we will scope the extent of misinformation, and how people react to it, online
- We will scope how people online respond to ‘realistic’ representations of jumping / East Sussex cliffs deaths. We will also explore how people respond to other’s attempts to dissuade
- Impact of photos, messages of hope, & excessive detail of method

Media reporting

- Analysis of Samaritans’ Media Monitoring database re media reporting of coastal suicide. Map news reports of coastal suicide (at specific locations) against numbers of events at these locations

Phase 2

- Interviews with local agencies (RNLI, Coastguard, MH services, Chaplains, Birling Gap & White Cliffs National Trust staff, Police)
- Interviews with those who have thought about and/or attempted to end their life at Coastal locations