

# Understanding Suicidal Behaviour

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## Understanding the suicidal mind...

HATE  
PAIN  
FEAR  
HOPELESS  
FAILURE  
DESPERATION  
SHAME  
LET DOWN  
HURT  
BLAME  
NO WAY OUT  
TRAPPED  
OUT OF CONTROL  
SADNESS  
OVERWHELMED  
ALONE  
DISAPPOINTMENT

"I can't stop myself thinking, I wish I could turn off, I hate myself, I'm just not good enough, I am tired of life, I've had enough"  
Male, aged 19

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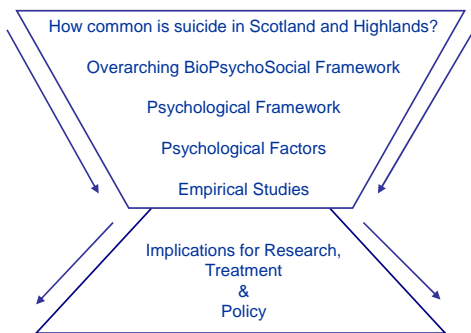
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## Structure of Presentation



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## Suicide: The scale of the problem

- As many as 1 million people kill themselves worldwide (WHO)
- In Scotland, 2 people die by suicide daily
- Suicide is biggest killer among the under 35 years
- Despite recent increase in recent decades in Scotland, 13% decrease since 2000 (2000-2002 vs 2005-2007)
- Suicide rate in Highland is greater than Scottish average (SMR=1.31)

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## Why do some of us kill ourselves? -some well known suicide risk factors

- Depression
- Alcohol / drug problems
- Personality disorders
- Child sex abuse
- Lack of prospects/unemployment
- Poverty/deprivation
- Stressors, e.g. Relationship crises
- Previous attempt
- Reduced social networks/isolation
- Bullying
- Issues around sexuality
- Etc....

Best predictor of suicide

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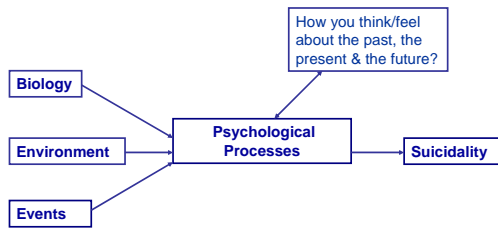
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## Overarching BioPsychoSocial Framework



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## Predominant Psychological Frameworks

- Diathesis-stress hypothesis (cognitive vulnerability; eg, Schotte & Clum, 1987)
- Self-regulatory theory (pursuit of goals; eg, Carver & Scheier, 1998)
- Escape theory (suicide as escape; eg, Baumeister, 1990)
- Entrapment/cry of pain model (defeat, lack of escape, no rescue; eg, Williams, 2001)
- Differential activation model of cognitive reactivity (reactivation of suicidal thoughts; eg, Williams et al., 2008)
- Interpersonal-psychological model (burdensomeness, belongingness, capability; Joiner, 2005)

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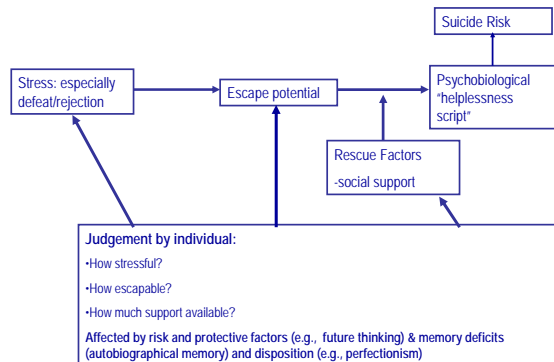
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## Cry of Pain (Entrapment) Model (Williams & Pollock, 2001)



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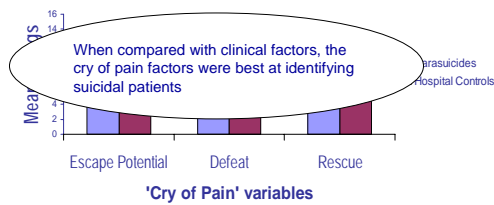
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## Cry of Pain: Test of a Model

Mean ratings of 'cry of pain' variables by group



O'Connor (2003). Archives of Suicide Research

All differences  $p < .001$

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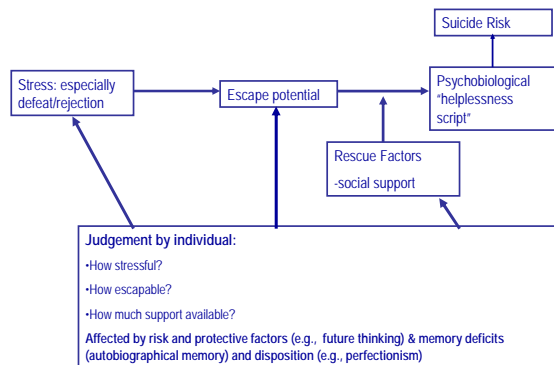
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## Cry of Pain (Entrapment) Model (Williams & Pollock, 2001)



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## Psychological Factors

- Autobiographical memory biases
- Interpersonal problem-solving
- Cognitive rigidity
- Impulsivity
- Group/Social influences
- Goal Reengagement
- Attributional/Cognitive style
- Resilience
- Belonginess
- Attitudes
- Neuroticism
- Shame
- Future thinking
- Hopelessness
- Perfectionism
- Self-criticism
- Rumination
- Goal Adjustment
- Self-esteem
- Coping
- Reactivation
- Lack of optimism/pessimism
- Attentional bias
- Thought Suppression
- Entrapment

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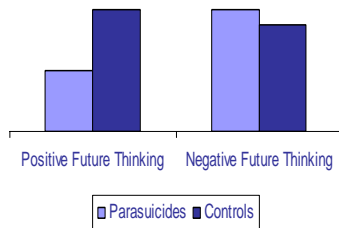
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## Thoughts about the Future

The Future Thinking Task (FTT, MacLeod et al., 1993, 1997)  
Specific future positive and negative expectancies



Suicidal patients report significantly fewer positive future thoughts (PFT) on Future Thinking Task (FTT) than controls but show no difference in the no. of negative events

(eg, MacLeod et al., 1993, 1997; O'Connor et al., 2007, 2008, Hunter & O'Connor, 2003)

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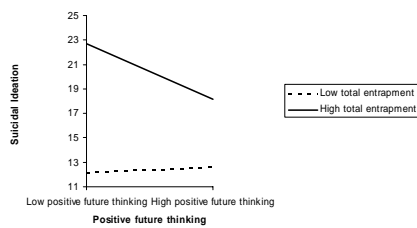
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## Entrapment and Future Thinking



Rasmussen, Fraser, Gotz, MacHale, Mackie, Masterton, McConachie & O'Connor (under revision)

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## Are specific positive future thoughts better predictors of suicidal ideation than global attitudes of hopelessness?

144 adults hospitalised following repeat suicidal self-harm completed range of clinical and psychological measures at Baseline (Time 1) and Time 2 (2.5 months following discharge)

YES

O'Connor et al. (in press)  
*J Affective Disorders*

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## Social perfectionism increases suicide risk

### Social perfectionism

- taps beliefs about excessive (often unrealistic) expectations we perceive significant others have of us

(e.g., “I find it difficult to meet others’ expectations of me”)

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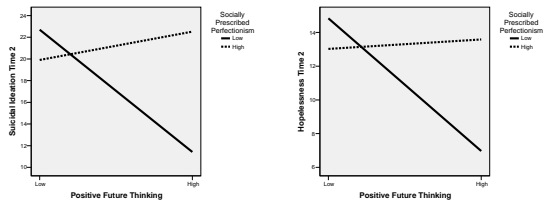
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## Do positive future thinking and social perfectionism together impede recovery following a suicidal episode?



*Evidence for pernicious effects of social perfectionism and positive future thinking*

(O'Connor, Whyte, Fraser, Miles, Masterton, Miles & MacHale, 2007)  
*Behaviour Research and Therapy*

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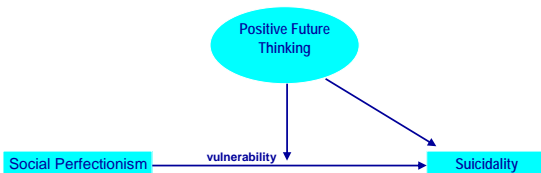
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## Conceptual Framework of Dominant Relationships



Described in O'Connor (2007). The relationship between perfectionism and suicidality: A systematic review. *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior*

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“Goals give meaning to people’s lives, [that] understanding the person means understanding the person’s goals”

(Carver, 2004, p.14)

What happens if you have a goal which you cannot achieve?

--failure to re-engage

O'Connor et al. (in press). *Behaviour Research & Therapy*

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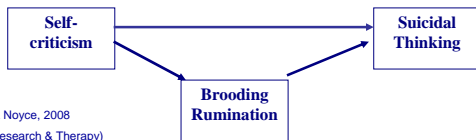
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### Self-criticism and brooding rumination are associated with suicidal thinking

**Brooding Rumination:** assess the extent to which individuals passively focus on the reasons for their distress

(e.g., “how often do you think about a recent situation, wishing it had gone better?”)



(O'Connor & Noyce, 2008  
*Behaviour Research & Therapy*)

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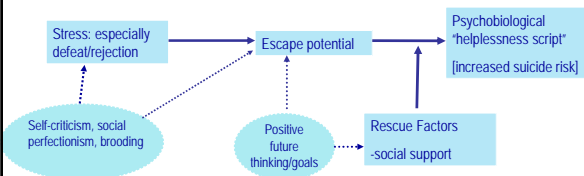
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### Cry of Pain (Entrapment) model (Williams & Pollock, 2001)



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## Implications for the development of treatments/interventions

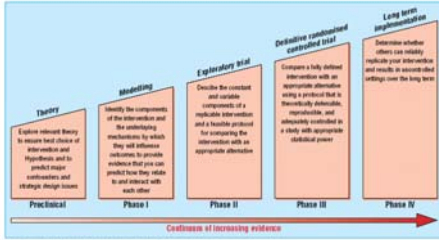


Fig 1 Sequential phases of developing randomized controlled trials of complex interventions

Campbell et al., (2000) *BMJ*

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## Promising Treatments?

- Treatment for perfectionism (Antony & Swinson, 1998) – almost no RCT evidence
  - Except Riley & Shafran (2007)
- Manual-assisted cognitive behaviour therapy (MACT; Evans et al., 1999)
  - Rate of DSH decreased as did depressive symptoms
  - Impact on future thoughts
- Problem-solving therapy (Cochrane review; Speckens & Hawton, 2005)
- Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (Segal et al., 2002)
  - Meditation & CBT
  - Evidence base for suicidality?
- Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (Linehan)
- Group-based interventions with young people (Harrington)

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Suicidal individuals are difficult to maintain in treatment, they are often hard to reach, so...

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**(Almost) Final Thoughts:  
Some other issues concerning prevention**

- Access to means (rural/highland issues)
- Prevention & education strategies (e.g., Choose Life)
- Destigmatising stress and psychological health (National Programme)
- Coping strategies and communication
  - Social roles: macho image, help seeking etc.
- Perception of suicidal behaviour and prevention
- Modelling effects (clustering in communities)
- Recognising risk
- Suicide prevention and The Internet
- Training in schools

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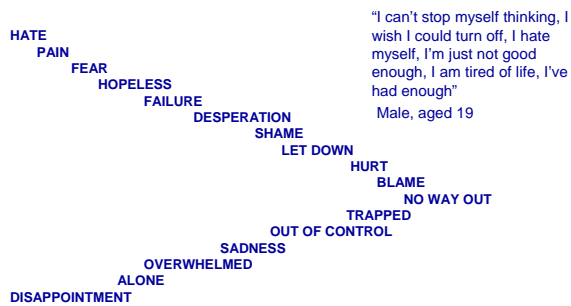
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**Understanding the suicidal mind...**



"I can't stop myself thinking, I wish I could turn off, I hate myself, I'm just not good enough, I am tired of life, I've had enough"  
Male, aged 19

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