

First major study of suicide motivations to advance prevention

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A University of British Columbia study sheds important new light on why people attempt suicide and provides the first scientifically tested measure for evaluating the motivations for suicide.

Published in the official journal of the American Association of Suicidology, the work gives doctors and researchers important new resources to advance [suicide prevention](#), improve treatments, and reduce the [likelihood](#) of further attempts.

"Knowing why someone attempted suicide is crucial – it tells us how to best help them recover," says Prof. David Klonsky, UBC Dept. of Psychology. "This new tool will help us to move beyond the current "one-size-fits-all" approach to suicide prevention, which is essential. Different motivations require different treatments and interventions."

The study, based on 120 participants who recently attempted suicide, suggests many motivations believed to play important roles in suicide are relatively uncommon. For example, [suicide attempts](#) were rarely the result of impulsivity, a cry for help, or an effort to solve a financial or practical problem. Of all motivations for suicide, the two found to be universal in all participants were [hopelessness](#) and overwhelming [emotional pain](#).

The study also finds that suicide attempts influenced by [social factors](#) – such as efforts to elicit help or influence others – generally exhibited a less pronounced intent to die, and were carried out with a greater chance

of rescue. In contrast, suicide attempts motivated by internal factors – such as hopelessness and unbearable pain – were performed with the greatest desire to die.

"It may be surprising to some, but focusing on motivations is a new approach in the field of suicide research – and urgently needed," says Klonsky. "Until now, the focus has been largely on the types of people attempting suicide – their demographics, their genetics – without actually exploring the motivations. Ours is the first work to do this in a systematic way."

More information: The study, led by UBC PhD candidate Alexis May, was published by *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* – the official journal of the American Association of Suicidology.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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