

Three-pronged approach could reduce suicide risk

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"Suicidal thought doesn't need to be fatal to be serious" is the mantra of a University of Queensland expert who has spent five years developing a new mental health test.

School of Psychology researcher Dr Keith Harris said his Suicidal Affect-Behaviour-Cognition Scale (SABCS) was a more accurate predictor of suicidality than other methods, and had the potential to save lives.

"There are countless [suicide](#) risk assessments out there, some of them very well-publicised but very poorly formatted or validated," Dr Harris said.

"For instance, there are some tests where the subject can simply answer 'yes' or 'no' to questions and that leaves a lot of room for error about that person's frame of mind.

"Then you have sliding scales where circling the numeral zero indicates a response of 'never' and circling the number one means 'not at all'. What is the difference?

"There are vague terms that can be interpreted differently by people, and who is to say that the difference between a response of zero and one is equal to the difference between one and two?"

In developing the SABCS method, Dr Harris spent countless hours breaking down statistical correlations between influencing factors, questions posed by other assessment models, and suicidal behaviours.

His three-pronged approach—considering emotions, behaviours and cognition (thoughts)—is one of only a handful of tests to use a tripartite intersection of data.

Raised in the USA, Dr Harris began his career in suicide research after he moved to Japan in 1989 and four of his colleagues killed themselves in the space of a year.

"I would like to see the SABCS adopted as I genuinely believe it may be the best measure of its kind, and improved accuracy will mean greater diagnosis and prevention," he said.

"Relatively, there is too much emphasis on death from suicide, as

opposed to intent to suicide.

"We know that most people who take a suicidal action do not die on their first attempt.

"If people even have moderate thoughts of wanting to kill themselves, they need serious help."

Dr Harris said there were cases of children as young as five intentionally killing themselves, while the Australian Bureau of Statistics reports suicide as the most common cause of death for people aged 15 to 24.

Dr Harris has published research on how the internet has affected [suicidal behaviour](#) and the impact of sexuality on suicide.

His most recent work, The ABCs of Suicide Risk Assessment, is published in the Public Library of Science journal *PLOS One*.

More information: "The ABC's of Suicide Risk Assessment: Applying a Tripartite Approach to Individual Evaluations." *PLoS One*. 2015; 10(6): e0127442. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0127442

"Suicidal and Online: How Do Online Behaviors Inform Us of This High-Risk Population?" *Death Studies* [DOI: 10.1080/07481187.2013.768313](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2013.768313)

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