

Suicide: Theory And Clinical Aspects

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The Three-Step Theory (3ST): A New Theory of Suicide Rooted in the "Ideation-to-Action" Framework

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Klonsky and May (2014) argued that an "ideation-to-action" framework should guide suicide theory, research, and prevention. From this perspective, (a) the development of suicide ideation and (b) the progression from ideation to suicide attempts are distinct processes with distinct explanations. The present article introduces a specific theory of suicide rooted in the ideation-to-action framework: the Three-Step Theory (3ST). First, the theory hypothesizes that suicide ideation results from the combination of pain (usually psychological pain) and hopelessness. Second, among those experiencing both pain and hopelessness, connectedness is a key protective factor against escalating ideation. Third, the theory views the progression from ideation to attempts as facilitated by dispositional, acquired, and practical contributors to the capacity to attempt suicide. To examine the theory, the authors administered self-report measures to 910 U.S. adults utilizing Amazon's Mechanical Turk (oversampling for ideation and attempt histories). Results supported the theory's central tenets. First, an interactive model of pain and hopelessness accounted for substantial variance in suicide ideation. This result replicated in both men and women, and across age groups (i.e., 18-25, 26-35, and 36-70). Also as predicted, connectedness was most protective against ideation in those high on both pain and hopelessness. Finally, dispositional, acquired, and practical aspects of suicide capacity each predicted suicide attempt history over and above current and lifetime suicidal ideation. These initial findings support the 3ST. Implications for suicide prevention and future research are discussed.

Keywords: hopelessness, ideation, pain, suicide

Suicide is a leading cause of death worldwide, killing more than 800,000 people each year (World Health Organization [WHO], 2014a). A much larger number of people make suicide attempts, with some researchers estimating that approximately 25 attempts occur for every suicide death (Goldsmith, Pellmar, Kleinman, & Bunney, 2002). An even greater number of people consider suicide; a world-

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