



# Refining Measures of Suicidal Phenomena: Suicide Intent

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## Introduction

- This project aimed to investigate whether the Suicide Intent Measure is a reliable and valid measure of suicide intent.
- It is imperative to refine measures of suicide intent to validly assess a construct surrounded by so much definitional chaos, gain maximal information for predicting suicide-relevant outcomes, detect individuals at risk for suicide, and monitor treatment progress.
- It was hypothesized that the Suicide Intent Measure is a reliable and valid measure of suicide intent.

## Definitional Chaos

- As a result of definitional inconsistency across or within studies researching suicide intent, deleterious consequences have unfolded for clinical work and the constructive nature of suicide research. The occurrence of many jumbled definitions engenders inconsistent measures of suicide intent, ineffective communication of findings within suicide research, and inaccurate comparisons between studies using different operational definitions of suicide intent.
- Therefore, it's necessary to address this definitional chaos and create a consistent definition of suicide intent that can be used in research for ubiquity matters, accurate measures, and more clear communication between researchers, clinicians, and patients.
- It is especially important to differentiate between suicide ideation, suicide desire, and suicide intent as they indicate different levels of suicide risk. Without correct differentiation, accurate clinical practice and efficient treatment is nearly impossible.

Examples of Definitional Chaos for Suicide Intent:

- “[E]xplicit plans and intention to enact a suicide attempt and is distinct from suicidal desire” (Gallyer et al., 2020)
- “[A]ny self-reported thoughts of engaging in suicide-related behavior” (O’Carroll, 1996)
- Suicide intent is used interchangeably with suicide ideation (Power et al., 2021)

Problems with Existing Definitions:

- These definitions demonstrate how unclear the difference between thoughts, desire, and intent still is. Furthermore, these definitions are incomplete, as they do not consider an individual’s planned method(s) to die by suicide, access to methods, time frame for such plans, already enacted parts of such plans, and intent to attempt suicide or intent to die by suicide.
- The common conflation of suicide intent with suicide ideation makes a false equivalency between two terms that mean different things. Not only does this blur the line between the two, but this makes it increasingly harder to research and measure these two constructs as individual entities.

## Sample Revised Suicide Intent Items

- The revised suicide intent measure is a long-form measure with 12 items.

Sample Items:

- I will kill myself within 48 hours.
- I am confident I will die by suicide within 48 hours.
- I intend to stay alive for at least the next 48 hours. (R)
- I have NOT made a plan to kill myself. (R)
- I have a specific plan to die by suicide within 48 hours.
- I am preparing to die by suicide within 48 hours (for example, visting loved ones for the last time).
- My suicide plan will result in my death within 48 hours.

## Process of Measurement Refinement: Designing an Operational Definition

- Our operational definition of suicide intent is: “The nonfleeting desire to imminently (i.e., within 48 hours) die by suicide, paired with plans or preparations to imminently die by suicide.”
- “Nonfleeting desire”: Item distinguishes suicide ideation from fleeting, momentary thoughts or desires of suicide.
- “To imminently (i.e., within 48 hours) die by suicide”: Item distinguishes intent from mere consideration, ideation, or plans without intent.
- “With plans or preparations:” Item detects individuals who have made plans or preparations for the enactment of their perceived imminent suicides. Because plans are the basis of intent, this item’s specification further distinguishes intent from desire.

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## Process of Measurement Refinement: Gathering Existing Measures

- Next, this project gathered existing long-form and short-form measures of suicide intent to craft a reliable and valid measure of suicide intent.

Existing Long Form Measures:

- Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation, Items 12–18 (Beck et al., 1979)
- Self-Injurious Thoughts and Behavior Interview, Item 38 (Nock et al., 2007)
- Columbia–Suicide Severity Rating Scale, Items 5 & 8 (Posner et al., 2011)
- Modified Subscale for Suicide Ideation, Items 10–18 (Miller et al., 1986)
- Suicide Risk Assessment, Items 6, 9, 11–12 (Joiner et al., 1999).

Existing Short Form Measures:

- Suicide Risk Assessment, Items 9 & 11–12 (Joiner et al., 1999)

## Process of Measurement Refinement: Addressing Reliability, Validity, & Other Factors

- Each item designed to have high construct validity. Each item measures suicide intent rather than other constructs, like suicide ideation or suicide desire.
- Measure designed to have high content validity. Items collectively assess the full range of content of suicide intent.
- Measure designed to establish discriminant validity with regard to other suicide and suicide-relevant measures. For example, this measure can discriminate between suicide intent, a construct we want to measure, and suicide ideation, a similar-seeming construct we do not want to measure.
- Items designed to have high comprehensibility with individuals who speak different dialects, are nonnative English speakers, have low IQ, have low insight, are experiencing crises or acute psychological symptoms, are children/adolescents, etc.
  - Most common and comprehensible synonyms used.
  - Sentences rearranged to be as syntactically simple as possible.
  - Idioms replaced with nonidiomatic language.
  - Ambiguous parts and pronouns of items were rephrased.
- Items worded as succinctly as possible and potential misunderstandings of the items removed.
- Scaling designed to be consistent within measure. All items prompt the same sort of Likert-type scale response.
- Measure designed to use a mixture of regular- and reverse-scoring. Items designed so they could be scored in a way that responses on item would correspond with higher measure scores.