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The Role of Emotion Dysregulation: A Longitudinal Investigation of the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide

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**Abstract**

Emotion dysregulation is considered to be transdiagnostic in nature, given its association with a variety of problem behaviours. Of concern, emotion dysregulation also may be associated with key components of the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (ITS), namely suicidal desire and acquired capability for suicide (ACS; heightened fearlessness toward death and pain tolerance). ITS suggests that experiencing suicidal desire in conjunction with ACS leads to greater risk for suicide attempts. The present 4-wave longitudinal study tested bidirectional associations among emotion dysregulation, NSSI, ACS, and suicidal desire. Emotion dysregulation was associated with both *desire* and *capability* for suicide over time. Specifically, emotion dysregulation was associated with (1) higher levels of suicidal desire, (2) higher levels of NSSI, which in turn predicted higher ACS, and (3) *lower* ACS, suggesting that individuals with emotion dysregulation may find thoughts of death and pain more aversive. Thus, there are two separate paths for how emotion regulation leads to ACS, one path in which emotion dysregulation indirectly leads to ACS through NSSI, and one path in which emotion dysregulation protects against the development of ACS (note that higher levels of ACS alone are not sufficient to lead to a suicide attempt – suicidal desire also is required).

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