

Reciprocal Associations between Defeat/Entrapment and Suicidal Ideation During the Transition to University

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University Transition

- The first year of university involves major life transitions that can cause distress (Conley et al., 2014)
 - Increased academic demands
 - Greater financial independence
 - Disruption of social networks
 - Separation from family
- 16% of Canadian undergraduates have experienced suicidal ideation in the past 12 months (ACHA, 2016)

Defeat/ Entrapment (DE)

- DE refers to perceptions of failure without a solution or way forward (Griffiths et al., 2015)
- The *cry of pain* model proposes that DE contributes to the perception that suicide is the only way to escape from negative circumstances (Williams & Williams, 1997)
- Suicidal ideation could exacerbate perceptions of DE, creating a vicious cycle of distress

Existing Research

- Systematic review of 8 studies showed an association between suicidality and defeat ($r = .51$) and entrapment ($r = .58$) (Taylor et al., 2011a)
 - No studies were longitudinal
- Taylor et al. (2011b) found that among university students who reported suicidality:
 - DE predicted more suicidal ideation 12 months later
 - Suicidal ideation did not predict DE 12 months later

Limitations & Future Directions

- Long time-frame (i.e., 12 months)
- Did not investigate a developmentally sensitive period (i.e., the transition to university)
- Did not disaggregate between- and within-person associations

Objective & Hypotheses

- **Objective:** To investigate the reciprocal, between- and within-person associations between DE and suicidal ideation during the transition to university
- **Hypothesis 1:** Positive, between-person association between DE and suicidal ideation
- **Hypothesis 2:** Within-person rises in DE would predict rises in suicidal ideation one month later
- The within-person association between suicidal ideation and subsequent DE was exploratory

Methods

Participants

633 first-year university students (73% female, Mage = 18)

Procedures

Participants completed monthly self-report surveys from September to April of their first year at university

Measures

DE (Short Defeat and Entrapment Scale), frequency of suicidal ideation (*"How many times in the past month have you thought about killing yourself"* rated from 0-3)

Data Analytic Strategy

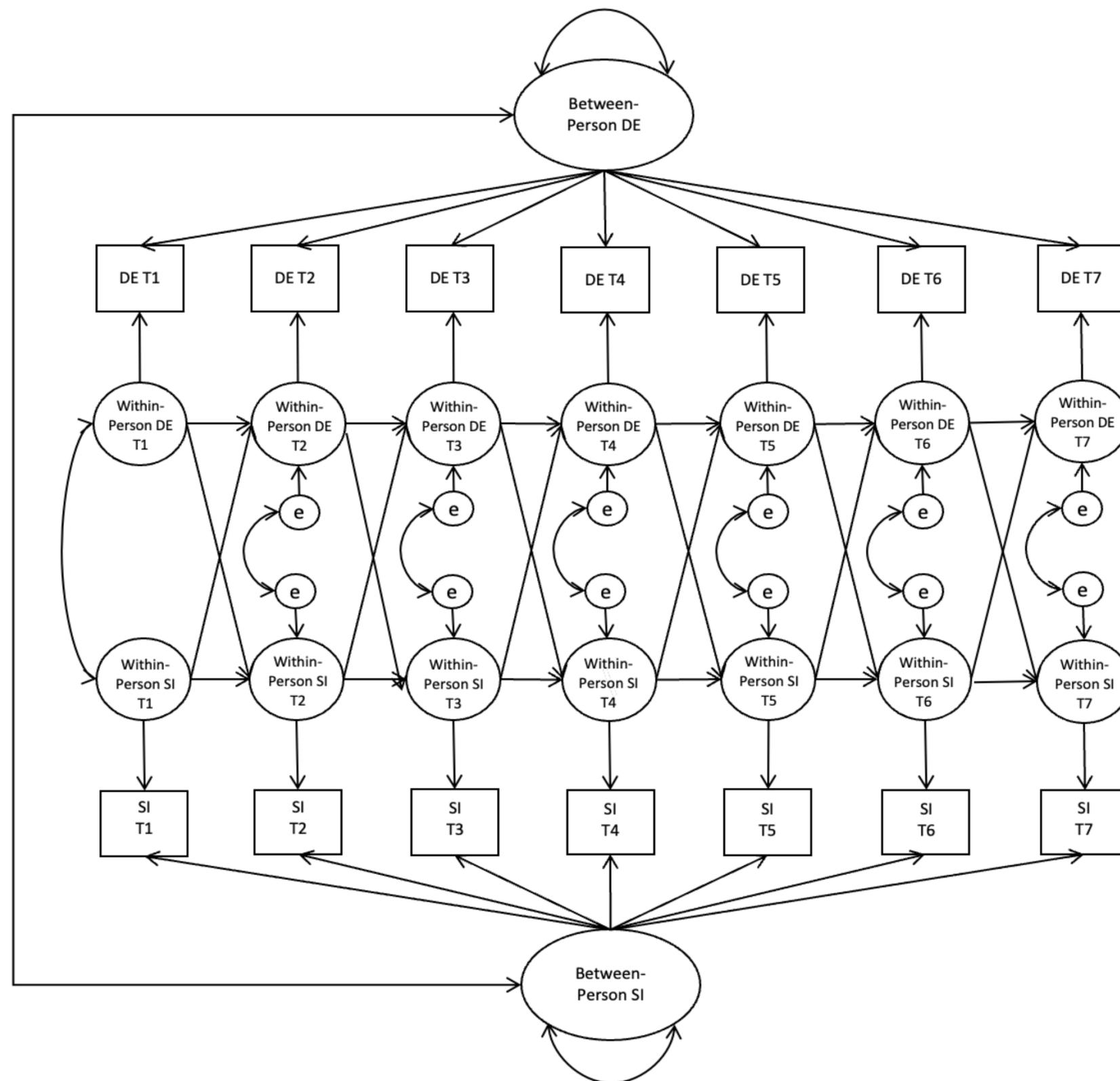
Random-intercept cross-lagged panel modeling (RI-CLPM) in MPlus Version 8.7 disaggregated between- and within-person associations between DE and suicidal ideation

RI-CLPM

Separates observed variance into:

- A stable, trait-like part (captured by the random intercepts)
- Within-person fluctuations from wave to wave around a person's own expected score (captured by the latent factor at each wave)

No equality constraints were used, allowing examination of how effects differed across the academic year



Results

- The model fit the data well
 - $\chi^2[57] = 76.97, p = .040$
 - RMSEA = .02 [90% CI .01, .04]
 - CFI = .98
 - TLI = .97
 - SRMR = .07
- Positive, between-person association between DE and suicidal ideation ($\beta = .41, SE = .06, p < .001$)
- Within-person increases in DE in March predicted more frequent suicidal ideation in April ($\beta = .343, SE = .08, p < .001$).

Results

| | β | <i>SE</i> | <i>p</i> | | β | <i>SE</i> | <i>p</i> |
|------------------------------|---------|-----------|----------|------------------------------|---------|-----------|----------|
| DE T1 → Suicidal Ideation T2 | .12 | .09 | .165 | Suicidal Ideation T1 → DE T2 | .10 | .07 | .115 |
| DE T2 → Suicidal Ideation T3 | .12 | .15 | .413 | Suicidal Ideation T2 → DE T3 | .02 | .09 | .784 |
| DE T3 → Suicidal Ideation T4 | -.17 | .13 | .228 | Suicidal Ideation T3 → DE T4 | -.06 | .13 | .675 |
| DE T4 → Suicidal Ideation T5 | .15 | .12 | .223 | Suicidal Ideation T4 → DE T5 | -.001 | .18 | .997 |
| DE T5 → Suicidal Ideation T6 | -.11 | .15 | .477 | Suicidal Ideation T5 → DE T6 | -.07 | .08 | .373 |
| DE T6 → Suicidal Ideation T7 | .34 | .08 | <.001 | Suicidal Ideation T6 → DE T7 | -.08 | .09 | .358 |

Discussion

- First-year students who felt more DE, relative to their peers, experienced more frequent suicidal ideation on average during the academic year
- When a given student reported higher DE in March, relative to their own mean, they had more frequent suicidal ideation in April
- This may be explained by approaching final exams and course grades, which elevate stress for students (Garett et al., 2017)
- Unclear why this pattern did not emerge during the December exam period

Clinical Implications

- University clinicians should continuously monitor DE in students
- University clinicians want to focus on re-building students' sense of autonomy and agency via:
 - Re-framing defeating situations
 - Setting attainable goals
 - Directing attention to other more positive dimensions of life
- Such techniques may be particularly beneficial for students as they approach final exams

Limitations

- Sample was predominately White and female. Targeted research is needed among first-years who identify as belonging to minority groups
- Did not measure constructs in September, when distress is known to be high (Conley et al., 2014)
- One-month lag between assessments may be too long. Microlongitudinal research should examine these associations over days and weeks

Thank you!

Please reach out to christinarobillard@uvic.ca if you have any questions.



References

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