Suicide Risk: Against Prediction, Toward Normic Assessment

I argue that prevailing approaches to suicide risk are limited because they treat risk primarily as a matter of statistical prediction based on factors such as mental illness, prior attempts, or family history. Since these factors often generate high rates of false positives and false negatives, the paper develops an alternative, the Normic account of suicide risk. On this view, risk is not fundamentally a matter of probability but of normalcy within a framework of practical rationality. Drawing on a possible-worlds approach, the account holds that suicidal action counts as higher risk when it becomes easier to render intelligible in light of a person's reasons for living and dying. The paper then connects this theoretical proposal to clinical practice, especially Motivational Interviewing, where therapists already explore patients' life-sustaining and death-oriented reasons. This shows how the Normic account can illuminate assessment and intervention without relying on unreliable predictive models. The paper concludes that suicide prevention should focus less on forecasting behavior and more on identifying and strengthening reasons for living, thereby improving both the ethical orientation and practical distribution of clinical resources for suicide care and helping clinicians prioritize support for those whose lives appear least normatively anchored in practical deliberation.