The Impact of Self-Disclosure on Trust and Willingness to Share Information During

Suicide Crisis Negotiations

Zoe Burek

Psychology of Conflict, Risk, and Safety, University of Twente

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Supervisor: J.G. Schaaij

2nd Supervisor: Dr. M.S.D. Oostinga

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Abstract

Suicide is a major global health issue, with over 700,000 deaths and 20 million attempts annually (WHO, 2024; Turecki et al., 2019). Crisis negotiation, which focuses on trust-building, plays a critical role in addressing these suicide crises. This study explored the impact of negotiator self-disclosure on a person in crisis's (PiC) willingness to disclose information and examined whether these effects vary by participant gender. Participants (N = 50) were randomly assigned to a no-self-disclosure or moderate-self-disclosure condition, after which they completed a simulated crisis-negotiation scenario. Then they rated their willingness to disclose personal information and their trust in the negotiator on adapted scales. Results from an independent t-test, regression, and mediation analyses indicated no significant difference between the conditions in willingness to disclose, and trust did not mediate this relationship. Additionally, gender did not moderate the effect. These findings suggest that the role of self-disclosure in crisis negotiations may be less significant and its effectiveness more complex. This study shows how complex trust-building in high-risk situations is and highlights the need for further research on alternative communication strategies and more ecologically valid study designs. These findings suggest that self-disclosure from an unfamiliar negotiator is not a reliable trust cue in high-stress situations, underlining the need to test alternative communication strategies in more ecologically valid designs.

Keywords: crisis negotiation, self-disclosure, trust, suicide intervention, gender differences

The Impact of Self-Disclosure on Trust and Willingness to Share Information During Suicide Crisis Negotiations

Suicide is a serious public health problem. 726,000 people die by suicide each year, and many more attempt suicide (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2024). One of the reasons for this high death rate is related to the fact that many suicidal people do not seek help because of the shame and stigma that is often related to mental health problems and suicide, leaving crises often go unnoticed and unresolved (WHO, 2024). These crises affect all age groups and were, for example, the third leading cause of death among 15-29-year-olds in 2021 (WHO, 2024). Suicide attempts are often the result of emotional problems over a long period, personal crises, as well as untreated mental health problems (Levi-Belz et al., 2019). According to Levi-Belz et al. (2019), the consequences of suicide extend beyond the individual and have a prolonged emotional impact on the family, the community, and society at large. Survivors frequently struggle with the long-term effects of trauma and grief and live with high levels of psychological distress (Levi-Belz et al., 2019).

For every person who dies by suicide, about one hundred others attempt it and still need emergency help from first responders (Sikveland et al., 2019). In addition, nearly half of the situations that crisis-intervention teams attend involve individuals who are threatening to take their own lives (Sikveland et al., 2019). Early interventions are important in reducing suicide, but it is challenging because many people are hesitant to seek help before a crisis escalates (WHO, 2024). These negotiators are highly trained individuals who manage and resolve critical incidents by de-escalating these situations (Steele et al., 2023). These crisis negotiators work towards a safe outcome for the PiCs by using dialogue to promote rational thinking and together work on an alternative solution (Clugston et al., 2023). This allows them to gain extra time and keep the person from committing immediate self-harm attempts (Clugston et al., 2023). Thus, active

communication from both sides is important in order to resolve the crisis and work towards a safe solution.

The unpredictability and emotional intensity of suicidal crises make it essential to understand how communication strategies such as trust-building and self-disclosure function in these moments. Crisis negotiation strategies emphasise the importance of building trust. However, there is a limited understanding of the influence of the negotiator's self-disclosure on the development of trust and willingness to share information, especially in the context of gender differences. Despite the suggested benefits, it remains unclear whether and how a negotiator's self-disclosure promotes trust in crisis negotiations where the stakes are high and there is no prior relationship. This is especially important given that negotiators often have no prior relationship with the person in crisis, making the trust-building process more complicated and complex. Examining this relationship is crucial in order to understand how self-disclosure might enhance or hinder effective communication in life-threatening situations. Improving crisis negotiation strategies can be done by improving the understanding of these processes, which may then reduce suicide-related deaths. Thus, this paper investigates whether negotiator self-disclosure impacts trust and willingness to share information, and whether these effects vary by gender.

The next section outlines the theoretical basis for self-disclosure, trust, willingness to disclose, and gender differences in suicide-crisis negotiations, followed by the study's research questions and methodological approach.

Negotiators and Negotiations

Crisis negotiators are trained to manage high-risk scenarios, especially those where individuals experience suicidal thoughts or emotional distress (Steele et al., 2023). Thus, when individuals require immediate intervention because they have reached a point of severe psychological crisis, specially trained crisis negotiators are called on to manage the situation

(Steele et al., 2023). These crisis negotiations are a back-and-forth process where both the negotiator and the person in crisis are involved (Clugston et al., 2023). Handling these situations requires a different approach than standard law enforcement tactics (Steele et al., 2023). This is due to the fact that these situations often involve high-risk individuals, such as individuals who threaten violence, suicide, or barricade themselves, making standard police tactics ineffective (Steele et al., 2023). Unlike traditional police interventions, negotiation in these cases requires patience and psychological insight rather than control (Vecchi et al., 2019). Since these crises are highly unpredictable, trust plays a central role in determining whether the person in crisis (PiC) will engage in conversation or withdraw from the interaction (Grubb et al., 2019). The goal of a crisis negotiation is to achieve a positive outcome (Clugston et al., 2023). This is done by using communication to build trust and calm the person down in order to slow the situation down (Clugston et al., 2023). However, situations where individuals do not know much about their circumstances or perceive a power imbalance tend to reduce trust, making it harder to establish trust and cooperation (Weiss et al., 2021). Thus, high-risk scenarios such as suicide negotiations may hinder PiC´s ability to trust others because individuals often experience intense emotional distress (Sikveland et al., 2019). Establishing trust in these interactions is crucial, as it often forms the foundation for any meaningful negotiation and increases the likelihood of a cooperative and safe resolution.

Trust

Trust affects the PiC's willingness to participate in meaningful negotiations (Grubb et al., 2019). PiC´s may be hesitant to participate in meaningful dialogue if negotiators are unable to establish trust, which reduces the possibility of a successful resolution (Steele et al., 2023). According to Sikveland et al. (2019), a lot of people going through suicidal crises struggle with uncertainty about their choices, which can lead to feelings of hopelessness and resistance to help.

When people sense that the other party holds disproportionate power over them, trust declines and cooperation becomes less likely (Weiss et al., 2021). By making the PiC feel heard rather than under pressure, open communication and a non-coercive approach can help lessen this effect (Vecchi et al., 2019). Trust is a key factor in deciding whether or not to share personal information (Steel, 1991). Moreover, knowing the person's mental health history helps negotiators decide how to talk with them and what support to line up during and after the crisis (Clugston et al., 2023). Engaging in conversation with the PiCs is also a way to let emotions cool, restore clearer thinking, and lead to exploring safer options for the PiCs (Clugston et al., 2023). Thus, since successful crisis negotiations depend not only on communication but also on engaging in conversations and exchanging information. Hence, the PiC's willingness to disclose information is essential, meaning trust is important in order to encourage this disclosure and dialogue.

However, in a crisis situation, individuals can hesitate to share information when they feel unsafe or do not trust the negotiator (Grubb et al., 2019). Showing empathy and actively listening to the PIC can help the negotiator become a trusted confidant, which can encourage them to share personal information and emotions that they would usually withhold (Grubb et al., 2019). Therefore, strategies that build trust may increase a PiC´s willingness to disclose personal information.

Self-Disclosure and Trust

One way negotiators may build trust is through self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is the voluntary sharing of personal information with another person (Spence et al., 2020). Self-disclosure, the providing of personal information to establish a relationship, is a strategy used to build trust (Spence et al., 2020). It is often used to reduce uncertainty in interactions and make individuals feel more comfortable, which can heighten interpersonal attraction and create a sense

of trust and belonging (Spence et al., 2020). However, uncertainty about the negotiator's intentions can reduce cooperation and willingness to disclose information (Weiss et al., 2021). People who can communicate their feelings, meaning self-disclose personal information, are in a better position to solve their problems (Vecchi et al., 2004).

Additionally, self-disclosure can lead to individuals sharing personal information in return, especially when it serves as a form of emotional or informational support (Yang et al., 2019). This interaction can promote interpersonal connection and validate social comparisons (Yang et al., 2019). Evidence also suggests a bidirectional relationship between trust and self-disclosure, disclosing personal information can increase the receiver's trust, yet people are generally more willing to disclose once a base of trust already exists (Dianiska et al., 2024). Despite evidence for both, uncertainty persists over exactly which sequence dominates in suicide-crisis negotiations and whether self-disclosure leads to trust in crisis negotiation or functions only once initial trust exists.

Negotiators need to make sure that what they say is accurate and clear, because being unclear or misunderstood can hurt trust (Weiss et al., 2021). As crises can be emotionally intense for everyone involved and cognitively exhausting, trust needs to be built gradually rather than expected immediately (Sikveland et al., 2019). Once the negotiator has gained the PiC's trust, they can try to change their mind and get them to think about other options (Vecchi et al., 2019). If negotiators show that they really care about the well-being of PiCs, they may be more willing to listen to different points of view and solutions (Jelas et al., 2024). However, trust is fragile, and rushing into the relationship or skipping steps could make things harder (Weiss et al., 2021). This shows that building trust step by step is crucial for successful crisis negotiations and for encouraging people to disclose information.

Gender

Gender also plays an important role in how trust and self-disclosure function in crisis negotiations. According to Wu et al. (2020), women are more careful about demonstrating and extending trust because they are more sensitive to risk and betrayal, whereas males are inclined to trust others in order to demonstrate confidence in their social interactions. Emotionally, women also tend to experience fear more intensely than men, which may influence how they perceive high-stakes interactions, such as crisis negotiations (Agustí et al., 2022). Furthermore, differences in emotional expression may affect how men and women engage in conversations, as men are often socialised to express externalising emotions like anger, whereas women are more likely to show vulnerability (Chaplin, 2014). Moreover, communication styles often differ by gender in the way that men typically focus on stating their demands, whereas women more frequently share personal feelings and details (Dobrijevic, 2014). While women express themselves more emotionally and disclose more about themselves in order to strengthen their relationships, men typically do this in specific controlled settings with a strategic goal (Goldshmidt & Weller, 2011). Additionally, women tend to connect trust to a greater willingness to share personal information than men (Qiu et al., 2022). This connects to the fact that when women are asked who they trust, they are more likely than men to choose someone they can confide in (Qiu et al., 2022). The connection between feeling able to self-disclose and perceiving someone as trustworthy is stronger for women than for men (Qiu et al., 2022). Furthermore, men are less willing to disclose negative feelings such as hate or sadness, but both genders share the same amount of positive feelings, like happiness (Carbone et al., 2023). Thus, in suicide negotiations, where the conversation concerns distressing emotions, female PiCs might be more inclined than male PiCs to reciprocate a negotiator´s self-disclosure, as women tend to be less hesitant to voice negative feelings.

Current Study

This study aims to explore **how negotiator self-disclosure impacts a person in crisis's willingness to disclose information and the role trust plays in this process. It also aims to explore whether gender plays a role in shaping these effects.** Trust has been studied a lot in crisis negotiations, but self-disclosure has not gotten this attention. Despite trust increasing a person's willingness to disclose personal information, self-disclosure itself may also contribute to the development of trust (Spence et al., 2020; Dianiska et al., 2024). Since gender differences in trust, emotional expression, and self-disclosure may all shape communication in crisis negotiations, understanding these dynamics could help improve negotiation strategies and lead to more effective crisis interventions. Previous research has rarely examined how negotiator self-disclosure and the PiC's gender shape trust and willingness to disclose in suicide-crisis negotiations. This study aims to address that gap. Moreover, the findings of this study could potentially help train crisis negotiators and improve communication and intervention in real-life-threatening situations.

Hypotheses

H1: Moderate levels of negotiator self-disclosure will increase a person in crisis's (PiC) willingness to disclose information during a simulated crisis negotiation, compared to no self-disclosure.

H2: Trust in the negotiator will positively mediate the relationship between the negotiator's self-disclosure (moderate vs. none) and a person in crisis's (PiC) willingness to disclose information during a simulated crisis negotiation.

H3: The positive effect of negotiator self-disclosure (moderate vs. none) on trust and willingness
to disclose information will be stronger for female participants than for male participants
in a simulated crisis negotiation, with trust acting as a mediator in this relationship.

H4: Female participants will report a higher willingness to disclose information than male
participants in a simulated crisis negotiation, regardless of the negotiator's self-disclosure
condition.

Methods

Study design

This study used a between-subjects experimental design with three conditions. These were
No Self-Disclosure (NoSelf-D), Moderate Self-Disclosure (ModerateSelf-D) and High Self-
Disclosure (HighSelf-D), and participants were randomly assigned to one of these conditions to
ensure a balanced representation across groups. However, only the No and Moderate conditions
were included in the final analysis. The High Self-Disclosure condition was excluded, as the
focus of the study was specifically on examining the difference between the absence of self-
disclosure and moderate self-disclosure. This way, the effects of self-disclosure can be better
understood.

The independent variable was the level of self-disclosure by the negotiator, and the
dependent variables were perceived trust in the negotiator and willingness to disclose
information.

The survey was available in two languages, specifically English and German. The
German version was translated from the original English version through back-translation to
maintain the accuracy of the study.

The study received ethical approval from the relevant review board with the reference number 250557. This approval ensured that the study followed all relevant ethical guidelines. This includes informed consent, confidentiality and the participants' right to withdraw from the study at any given point. This way, the rights of the participant were protected, and the well-being was ensured throughout the research process.

Participants

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling using social media platforms, personal contacts and Sona. Fifteen participants were recruited through the Sona system, and the remaining participants were gathered via social media and personal contacts. Inclusion criteria required that the individuals had to be at least 18 years old, fluent in English, and able to complete the study digitally on a personal device. A total sample of 51 participants who did the German survey and 73 the English survey was collected. After excluding 44 incomplete responses, 17 non-consenting participants, 24 assigned to the High Self-Disclosure condition and 18 people under 18 years old, the final sample consisted of 50 participants.[1] Moreover, 21 participants completed the German survey, and 29 completed the English survey.

In the total sample of 50, 70% identified as female, 28% as male and 2% as prefer not to say. The average age was 27.24 ($SD = 10.83$), ranging from 18 to 61 years old. Nationalities of participants included 33 Germans (66%) and 10 Dutch (20%), but also one Greek (2%), one Croatian (2%), one American (2%), one French (2%), one Japanese (2%), one Indian (2%) and one Polish (2%). The participants' occupations included 25 students (50%), 23 being employed (46%), one person unemployed (2%) and one person saying other (2%). The education of

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[1] It is important to note that these groups overlap, as participants who did not complete the study also did not provide consent, and some participants may have met more than one exclusion criterion.

participants ranged from four having lower secondary education (8%), 23 having upper secondary education (46%), 13 having a bachelor's degree (26%), eight people having a master's degree (16%), and two people saying other (4%). Participants were also asked to fill out if they had prior experience with mental health, and 13 people (26%) said they had no prior experience, 17 people (34%) said they had indirect experience through friends, family or colleagues, 18 people (36%) had direct experience, meaning they had personal experience and two people (4%) preferred not to say.

Materials

The study was conducted using the online survey software Qualtrics, which enabled the random assignment of participants to conditions and the presentation of all study components. The survey was either presented in German or English based on user preference.

The scenario

The scenario describes a series of negative life events, including job loss, the end of a romantic relationship, and ongoing psychological distress, which all build up in the individual standing at the edge of a bridge, which makes the person contemplate suicide (see Appendix A). These topics were included as they are common themes in suicide related crises. In this imagined moment, a police negotiator named Alex approaches the person and initiates a conversation. The name Alex was chosen because it is a gender-neutral name, so it avoids any assumptions about gender, and the focus remains on the negotiator´s skills and actions.

Negotiator Dialogue and Conditions

The content from the negotiator of this chat varied depending on the condition to which the participant had been randomly assigned. The scripts were inspired by Van der Klok (2023). There are three self-disclosure conditions, these were: no self-disclosure, moderate self-disclosure and high self-disclosure. This study is binominal, meaning only the conditions of no

self-disclosure and moderate self-disclosure were investigated because the effect of the presence

versus absence of self-disclosure is the main focus. In the no self-disclosure condition, the

negotiator remained empathetic but did not reveal any personal experiences. In contrast, the

moderate self-disclosure condition included short statements in which the negotiator described

their own past emotional difficulties. One example sentence that was used for the no self-

disclosure condition is "Thank you for telling me that. I've documented what you've shared so

far. My goal here is to keep you safe and support you in making the next decision calmly and

clearly. We can approach this step by step.". The moderate self-disclosure condition employed

sentences such as "Thank you for telling me that. I've documented what you've shared so far. I

felt emotionally stuck as well, like nothing I did made a difference. It was hard to talk about it,

but when I finally opened up, it helped me find perspective. That's why I'm here, to help you if

you let me. We can approach this step by step.". The scripts were otherwise identical and

designed to reflect realistic crisis communication.

The scales

Trust Scale. The first was an adapted version of the Trust Measure by Mayer and Davis

(1999), which can be seen in Appendix B. Mayer and Davis (1999) describe trust as having three

parts such as ability, benevolence, and integrity. Ability refers to the skills and knowledge needed

to influence others (Mayer & Davis, 1999). Benevolence is the belief that someone cares about

your interests, and integrity is the trust that someone follows ethical principles to match your

values (Mayer & Davis, 1999).

This scale measured perceived trust and included items capturing the negotiator's ability,

benevolence, and integrity. All 16 items were reworded so that the target of the evaluation was

the negotiator (e.g., "The negotiator was very capable in performing their job"). Responses were

given on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher

scores indicate higher trust. The Trust Scale included one reversed item (item 14), and a mean

Trust score was created by averaging all 16 items. Cronbach's alpha for the Trust Scale was 0.81

(95% CI [0.73, 0.88]), with a mean of $M = 3.70$ ($SD = 0.39$).

Willingness to Disclose Scale. The second scale measured participants' willingness to

share information with the negotiator and was based on the Willingness to Provide Information

Scale developed by Beune et al. (2011; Appendix C). The original study reported a Cronbach's

alpha of .83 and a mean of $M = 4.13$ ($SD = 1.62$) for this scale (Beune et al., 2011). The

calculated Cronbach´s alpha showed adequate internal consistency for this study and

was 0.78 (95% CI [0.64, 0.87]) with a mean score of $M = 3.89$ ($SD = 0.90$). Like the trust scale, it

was adapted to refer specifically to the negotiator in the current context (e.g., "I would tell the

negotiator everything"). This scale used a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly

disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicated a higher willingness to disclose

information.

Manipulation, Attention and Immersion Check. To ensure internal validity and

attentiveness, additional measures were included. A manipulation check asked participants to rate

the extent to which the negotiator had shared no, moderate or high amounts of personal

information (correlating to the three conditions). An attention check focused on a detail from the

earlier scenario, such as identifying the presence of a cold breeze. A final immersion check asked

participants how well they had been able to imagine themselves in the role of the person in crisis

on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 represented 'not at all' and 10 represented 'completely'.

Procedure

The first part of the study was a briefing page that outlined the purpose of the study and

provided a short description of the study's focus, estimated completion time of 20 to 30 minutes,

and the sensitive nature of the content. After, participants were presented with an informed

consent form, which informed them about the voluntary nature of participation, the anonymity of their responses, data storage, and their right to withdraw at any time. The informed consent page also included the phone numbers of suicide hotlines for participants to contact if needed. Upon giving consent, participants answered a demographic questionnaire in which they provided information about their age, gender, nationality, current occupation, highest completed education level, and whether they had prior direct or indirect experience with mental health crises. Next, participants were shown the fixed suicide crisis scenario and were asked to take a moment to imagine themselves in the described situation. They were then introduced to the police negotiator and engaged in a chat-based dialogue, either with or without self-disclosure from the negotiator, depending on their assigned condition. Participants were instructed to remain in the role of the person in crisis while engaging in the interaction. They were able to choose from 4 answers each time they replied to the negotiator.

After the chat with the negotiator, participants completed the trust and willingness to disclose scales along with additional scales such as the rapport scale and willingness to cooperate, which are not relevant to the current study but were used by other researchers. This was followed by manipulation, attention, and immersion checks. The study concluded with a debriefing message, which explained the true purpose of the research and the self-disclosure manipulation of the negotiator. Participants were provided with helpline numbers for suicide prevention services in Germany and the Netherlands in case of distress. Finally, they were asked once more whether they agreed to the use of their responses for research purposes.

Data analysis

Data were exported from Qualtrics and analysed using R with the packages tidyverse, rstatix, dplyr, magrittr and psych. Data from both the German and English surveys were combined. Before analysis, all incomplete cases and participants who did not consent were

removed. Additionally, only those who were assigned to the no self-disclosure which consisted of 25 participants and the moderate self-disclosure condition, which also consisted of 25 participants, were included in the final analysis. Thus, the final sample consisted of 50 participants.

The scores for all scales per participant were computed by averaging the relevant items. One item, namely Trust Scale Item 14, had to be reverse-coded. Then, descriptive statistics were computed for all key variables and conditions.

Furthermore, to test the first hypothesis, which was the effect of self-disclosure on willingness to disclose, an independent t-test was conducted comparing the NoSelf-D and ModerateSelf-D conditions. Then, the second hypothesis was tested using a linear regression and mediation analysis to assess whether trust mediated the relationship between the condition and the willingness to disclose. Hypotheses 3 and 4 were explored using multiple linear regression models and independent t-tests, in order to test interaction effects and gender differences. Only the participants identifying as female or male were included in the gender-specific analysis, meaning one person was excluded from this analysis. Additionally, exploratory analysis included correlation tests and regression models examining age as a potential predictor of trust and willingness to self-disclose. All analyses used a significance threshold of $p < .05$.

Results

Descriptives Statistics

The final sample consisted of 50 participants, and more specifically, 49 participants were included for the binary gender-specific hypotheses.

Descriptive statistics for the Trust scale and Willingness to self-disclose revealed that participants generally scored relatively high on both scales. The trust scale had a mean of $M =$

3.70 (*SD* = 0.39) on a five-point scale, indicating a relatively high level of trust towards the

negotiator among all participants. The willingness to self-disclose scale had a mean of *M* = 3.89

(*SD* = 0.90) on a six-point scale, indicating a moderate level of willingness to disclose

information. The descriptives per condition can be found in Table 1. Additionally, an Attention

Check was done at the beginning, as well as an Imagination Check and Manipulation Check at

the end. The Attention Check was passed by 43 people out of 50, the proportion that passed was

86%. In the Imagination Check, the participants were asked to rate their ability to imagine

themselves as the person in the scenario on a scale from 1 to 10. The average score was *M* = 6.16

(*SD* = 2.12), with scores ranging from 0 to 10.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics trust scale and willingness scale (N=50).

Gender	n	Trust Moderate Self-D - M (SD)	Trust - NoSelf-D - M (SD)	Willingness Moderate Self-D - M (SD)	Willingness NoSelf-D - M (SD)
Female	35	3.72 (0.32)	3.62 (0.39)	3.90 (0.81)	3.93 (0.90)
Male	14	3.85 (0.45)	3.57 (0.45)	4.38 (0.89)	3.29 (1.00)
Prefer not to say	1	4.44 (NA)		3.67 (NA)	
Total	50	3.78 (0.38)	3.61 (0.40)	4.03 (0.83)	3.75 (0.95)

Note. Self-D = Self-Disclosure

Manipulation check

In order to assess the effectiveness of the self-disclosure manipulation in the survey, a

manipulation check was employed. In Table 2, the manipulation check accuracy can be seen,

sorted by the condition the participants were actually in.

Table 2

Manipulation Check Accuracy by Condition (N=50).

Condition	Total Participants	Correct Categorizations	Proportion of Correct Categorizations
Moderate Self-Disclosure	25	22	0.88
No Self-Disclosure	25	20	0.80

Note. Overall, 84% of participants correctly guessed their condition.

Manipulation Check Results

In the Moderate Self-Disclosure condition, the correct categorisation was significantly above the chance level, $p < .001$. This implies that participants were able to accurately recognise being in the Moderate Self-Disclosure group. Moreover, in the No Self-Disclosure condition, it was also significantly above the chance level, $p = .003$. This shows that participants were similarly accurate in identifying the No Self-Disclosure condition. Thus, participants reliably recognised the condition they were assigned to. This confirms the effectiveness of the self-disclosure manipulation in the study.

Manipulation Check Correct Categorisation Subsample Analyses

The manipulation analysis was done using only participants who accurately identified their assigned condition to ensure that only those who fully understood the manipulation were included in the analysis. This was done in order to improve the internal validity by focusing on the participants who were aware of the self-disclosure manipulation. The final subsample for this analysis included 42 participants. Despite narrowing the sample down to those with correct condition categorisation, the results remained consistent with the full sample, with no significant

differences in willingness to disclose or trust between these conditions. Given the similar findings and the reduction in statistical power due to the smaller sample size, the full sample was used for the main analyses. Detailed results for the subsample are available in Appendix D.

Attention and Imagination Subsample

The results from these subsamples, where the participants passed the attention check or had a higher score than 3 in the imagination check, were largely consistent with those from the full sample, with no significant differences in willingness to disclose, trust or interactions with gender. Those findings suggest that the exclusion of participants based on these checks did not substantially change the conclusions of the study.

Effect of Self-Disclosure on Willingness to Disclose

A t-test with two samples, being NoSelf-D and ModerateSelf-D, was conducted to examine whether the independent variable of self-disclosure influenced the dependent variable of willingness to disclose. The results indicated no significant difference between the NoSelf-D (M = 3.75, SD = 0.95) and ModerateSelf-D (M = 4.03, SD = 0.83) conditions, $t(47.14)$ = 1.11, p = .28, 95% CI [-0.23, 0.79]. The effect size for the difference in willingness to disclose between the self-disclosure conditions was small and not significant, Cohen's d = –0.32, 95% CI [–0.88, 0.24]. This suggests that self-disclosure did not significantly affect participants' willingness to disclose information. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Mediation of Trust between Self-Disclosure and Willingness to Disclose

Hypothesis 1 showed that there was no significant effect of self-disclosure on willingness to disclose. Accordingly, a mediation analysis for Hypothesis 2 tested whether trust mediated self-disclosure and willingness to disclose. First, a linear regression showed that the self-disclosure condition did not significantly predict trust (B = -0.18, p = .12). Trust, however, significantly predicted willingness to disclose (B = 1.16, $p < .001$). The direct effect of the self-

disclosure condition on willingness to disclose was non-significant (B = -0.08, p = .74). Although, the overall model explained 27% of the variance in willingness to disclose and was significant, R^2 = .27, $F(2, 47)$ = 8.80, p = .001, trust did not mediate the relationship between self-disclosure and willingness to disclose. This suggests that while trust played a significant role in predicting willingness to disclose, it did not mediate the effect of self-disclosure on willingness to disclose. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported

Effect of Gender on Trust and Willingness to Disclose in Relation to Self-Disclosure

In order to examine whether there was an interaction between self-disclosure (condition) and gender on trust and willingness to self-disclose, two multiple linear regressions were done with an interaction between conditions (NoSelf-D vs. ModerateSelf-D) and gender. The results indicate that neither the main effects of the self-disclosure condition (NoSelf-D vs. ModerateSelf-D) nor gender (male vs. female) nor their interaction significantly influenced the trust scale or willingness score. Multiple linear regressions showed no significant effects on trust, $F(4, 45)$ = 1.54, p = .21, or willingness, $F(4, 45)$ = 1.38, p = .26. For trust, self-disclosure condition (β = –0.10, p = .47), gender (β = 0.13, p = .47), and their interaction (β = –0.18, p = .46) were not significant. For willingness, condition (β = 0.02, p = .94), gender (β = 0.48, p = .23), and interaction (β = -1.12, p = .05) were not significant, although the interaction was marginally significant. These results suggest that the effect of negotiator self-disclosure on trust and willingness to disclose does not significantly differ by gender, meaning Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Differences in willingness to disclose between men and women

A t-test with two samples, namely men and women, was done in order to compare the willingness to disclose between men and women. The results showed no significant gender differences between men (M = 3.83, SD = 1.09) and women (M = 3.91, SD = 0.84), $t(19.43)$ =

0.25, $p = .81$. The effect size for the difference in willingness to disclose between men and women was negligible, Cohen's $d = -0.09$, 95% CI [-0.71, 0.53]. This indicates that there was no significant difference in the willingness to disclose information between male and female participants. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Exploratory Analyses

Several additional observations were made during the data analysis. Two simple linear regression models were conducted using age as the independent variable and TrustScore and WillingnessScore as the dependent variables. Specifically, age was examined as a predictor of trust and willingness to disclose in the regression models. This decision was based on the possibility that generational differences in communication style and comfort with sharing personal information could influence participants' responses. The results indicated that age was not a significant predictor for trust ($p = .159$) or willingness to disclose ($p = .416$). In regard to the TrustScore, the regression coefficient for age was $B = 0.0074$ ($SE = 0.0052$), suggesting a very small negative relationship between age and trust. The R-squared value was $R^2 = 0.041$, indicating that age explains only about 4% of the variance in trust. The F-statistic was $F(1, 48) = 2.051$, $p = .159$, confirming that age does not significantly predict trust. Regarding the Willingness to Disclose Scale, the coefficient for age was $B = 0.009736$ ($SE = 0.011876$), which points towards a very small negative relationship between age and willingness to disclose. The R-squared value was $R^2 = 0.01381$, which means that age explains less than 2% of the variance in willingness to disclose. The F-statistic was $F(1, 48) = 0.672$, $p = .416$, further supporting that age has no significant impact on willingness to disclose. This shows that age has no significant effect on participants' willingness to disclose information or trust in the negotiator.

Discussion

The study aimed to investigate how negotiator self-disclosure impacts trust and willingness to disclose information in crisis negotiations, and whether gender plays a role in shaping these effects. The key hypotheses involved the effects of negotiator self-disclosure on willingness to disclose, the mediation of trust in this process and the role of gender. There was no significant effect of self-disclosure on willingness to disclose (H1), which indicates that self-disclosure alone does not heighten participants' willingness to disclose in a simulated crisis negotiation. Moreover, trust did not mediate the self-disclosure and willingness to disclose (H2), which suggests that trust is not necessarily influenced by the negotiator's level of self-disclosure in this context. Additionally, gender did not influence the relationship between self-disclosure and willingness to disclose (H3) or the general willingness to disclose (H4). However, for hypothesis 3, one part of the results indicated one marginally significant finding, which means there might be some slight effect of gender interacting with self-disclosure.

Possible Reasons for No Significant Effects and Connection to Theory and Literature

The findings of the current study suggest that research linking self-disclosure to trust may not fully apply in crisis negotiation contexts. Specifically, trust may be more fragile and rely more on other forms of communication and needs to be built more slowly and steadily. Dianiska et al. (2024) claimed that people are more inclined to disclose personal information when they already trust the other person. Moreover, Grubb et al. (2019) mentioned that in real-life crisis situations, whether the individual opens up or withdraws depends heavily on how much they trust the person trying to help. Nevertheless, in the study, participants were asked to disclose early in the dialogue with the negotiator, which they had to do based on minimal interaction with a fictional negotiator. However, in the current study, this key dynamic may not have been present

in the simplified and imagined scenario, which in turn reduced the influence of self-disclosure. These results challenge theories that suggest self-disclosure enhances trust (Spence et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Audet & Everall (2010) found that moderate, well-timed self-disclosure helps clients feel at ease in therapy settings, perceive the therapist as human and take a greater willingness to disclose risks. The current study employed negotiator self-disclosure where the negotiator mentioned a past episode of hopelessness, similar to the background disclosures therapists found helpful in Audet & Everall (2010). However, Audet & Everall (2010) also found that disclosure can hinder trust when it feels excessive or irrelevant. Moreover, acute stress narrows cognitive resources and leads to decision making and causing people to make quicker, more instinctive decisions about risk (Porcelli & Delgado, 2009). Thus, in the situation of a suicide crisis and under this pressure, the hindering side of self-disclosure may dominate, and a personal remark from a negotiator may be regarded as irrelevant.

Moreover, the results showed no significant main or interaction effects of gender and self-disclosure conditions on trust or willingness to disclose. This indicates that men and women responded similarly in terms of trust and disclosure in the simulated crisis scenario. This may be related to research that has found that women generally disclose slightly more than men, but when the target is a stranger, men report disclosing at similar levels to women (Dindia & Allen, 1992). This pattern matches the present study, where the negotiator was a stranger as well.

Moreover, this study suggests that the influence of gender may be less pronounced in these high-stakes situations. Previous research and findings based on gender differences in emotions that were mainly based on regular life situations show, however, that there are pronounced differences between men and women (Chaplin, 2014; Wu et al., 2020). However, the results did not show significant gender differences in trust or willingness to disclose. This shows that men and women may behave more similarly in high-stakes situations and when they do not

know the negotiator. Additionally, the marginally significant interaction in Hypothesis 3 suggests a potential effect of gender and self-disclosure, though this effect was not strong enough to reach significance. Consequently, the fact that the negotiator is a stranger might have levelled the self-disclosure by both genders even more.

Limitations of the Study

Several factors discussed in the section above may help explain why the findings of the current study differ from what the existing literature suggests. The following section outlines additional methodological limitations that may have contributed to these results.

The use of a hypothetical scenario rather than a real-life crisis situation limits the generalisability of the findings to actual crisis negotiations. The lack of significant findings might be attributed to the hypothetical nature of the crisis scenario, which may not have captured the intensity of a real-life situation. Additionally, it should also be considered that participants were asked to imagine themselves as a person in a scenario and were not actual people experiencing these emotions. The design may have been too controlled, which in turn limited ecological validity because real crisis negotiations involve much more complexity and unpredictability, thus influencing the way self-disclosure impacts trust and willingness to disclose. Even though the results of the imagination check showed that people could imagine themselves as the person in crisis, the situation was simplified by only relying on a written scenario rather than the people being in a simulated situation. Additionally, Van Gelder et al. (2019) have shown that virtual-reality conditions led to stronger feelings of being immersed in the situation and made the experience feel more lifelike than the written scenario. Lab-based studies may not fully capture real-world conditions, which can make it difficult to apply the results to everyday situations (Kihlstrom, 2021).

Moreover, the sample size, especially for the gender-specific analysis, might have been insufficient to detect smaller effects. Although there is generally a slight difference in self-disclosure between men and women, the non-significant results in this study may be due to there being twice as many females as men in the total sample and the relatively small sample size, which could have influenced the gender-specific analysis because the sample was not balanced. In addition, a medium-sized gender main effect would require a sample of roughly 64 men and 64 women, and a medium gender and disclosure interaction would need about 256 total participants (Cohen, 1992). The present study had only 50 participants, more specifically, 34 women and 15 men. Consequently, the study was underpowered to detect anything but large gender differences.

There were also some limitations regarding the survey. In the first attention check, participants were asked about a small detail of the scenario. In the sample, seven people failed this. Therefore, the detail might have been too small or too insignificant for people to catch and remember. To see whether this mattered, the analyses were rerun without those seven cases, and the pattern of the results remained unchanged. This suggests that inattentiveness may have diluted the data slightly, but did not alter the study's overall conclusions. A similar issue was found for the manipulation check in the end, where people were asked if they knew how much the negotiator was self-disclosing. Although there was still a high rate of people guessing correctly their manipulation, the levels might not have been clear enough because seven people still failed the manipulation check. Moreover, if participants didn't recognise how much the negotiator self-disclosed, the manipulation may have been too weak or not clear enough. This posed the possibility of people not reading the scenario correctly, or it could also mean they didn't fully perceive the context or manipulation. Additionally, this could have also affected how participants interpreted the negotiator's behaviour and influenced their responses. These failed attention and manipulation checks raised concerns about the internal validity of the study. Thus,

this was accounted for by a subsample analysis without the participants who failed the checks, but the results stayed consistent with the analysis of the total sample, which suggests that the results were robust despite the issue. Although the number of participants who failed the manipulation check was small, the levels of self-disclosure could have been more pronounced to ensure that the difference was clearly noticeable for every participant. Furthermore, the study focused only on two levels of self-disclosure, potentially limiting the range of insights into how self-disclosure varies in real-world negotiations. Self-disclosure can differ between levels, meaning in real life, there could be a situation where it is somewhere between no self-disclosure and moderate self-disclosure. However, in this study, only "no self-disclosure" versus "self-disclosure" was investigated. The results show whether sharing anything at all makes a difference, and they do not tell us what happens if a negotiator shares a much longer personal story. The content of the self-disclosure by the negotiator might also be important for the effect.

Strengths of the Study

This study also has several strengths, for example, the study uses an experimental design with a clear manipulation of self-disclosure, random assignment and control for several variables. This strengthens the internal validity by making it more likely that any differences in trust and willingness to disclose are caused by the self-disclosure manipulation rather than other factors. Moreover, the study´s approach, which included the manipulation and attention check, helped ensure the internal validity of the results due to the fact that the majority had it right. This ensures internal validity because it confirms that participants carefully read the scenario and noticed all the details and were paying attention throughout the survey.

Additionally, the study contributes to an under-explored area in crisis negotiations by exploring the topic of negotiator self-disclosure and its combined effect with gender on trust and willingness to disclose in suicide crisis negotiations. The study aimed to address this gap, and

even without significant effects, it provides the first experimental data on how self-disclosure is perceived in a simulated suicide-crisis setting. It contributes to the limited research in this area by offering initial experimental evidence on how self-disclosure is perceived in simulated suicide crisis negotiations and by identifying possible challenges. These challenges are, for example, the scenario and how realistic it is, as well as the trust development that may affect how much they trust the negotiator and impact the willingness to disclose

Implications for Practice and Theory

Theoretical implications for this are that self-disclosure is not always effective. Especially when the negotiator is a stranger with whom the PiCs have no prior relationship and stress is high, the self-disclosing of personal details does not raise trust or willingness to disclose. Theories that treat self-disclosure as a universal trust cue need to include this limitation. Crisis negotiation theories should lean more on methods with stronger evidence to build trust rather than personal self-disclosures.

In terms of practical applications, the findings of this study suggest that self-disclosure is unlikely to serve as a reliable or effective trust-building tool for crisis negotiators. This study shows that there is little evidence to support including self-disclosure in training. It may be more beneficial to reinforce strategies that are already part of negotiation training, such as active listening, emotional validation and empathy (Vecchi et al., 2019). These techniques align with the Behavioral Influence Stairway Model (BISM) (Vecchi et al., 2019).

Future Research

Future research should explore alternative strategies to improve ecological validity, such as immersive simulations, for example, through virtual reality environments or role play, to better replicate the emotional intensity and complexity of real-life crisis situations and improve generalisability. Since crisis negotiations are highly interactive, future studies should use more

interactive formats such as live role-plays or chatbot-based simulations to better capture the dialogue nature of real-life communication. Considerations should also be given to environmental factors like time pressure and external distractions that might affect the success of crisis negotiations in real-life contexts.

Moreover, future studies should explore how the timing and context of self-disclosure affect its impact. Since participants were asked to disclose early on in a dialogue with an unfamiliar negotiator, it remains unclear whether it may be more effective to self-disclose once basic trust has already been established. Therefore, an investigation of how the timing of these concepts makes a difference in their effect, especially in emotionally intense settings, might provide more insight.

Furthermore, based on the failed manipulation check, future research could focus on testing stronger self-disclosure manipulations to ensure that participants perceive and differentiate the levels of personal information shared by the negotiator. Specifically, pre-testing manipulation strength could improve clarity. This pre-test could be done so that the manipulation might be tested with a small pilot sample, with a multiple-disclosure statement that depicts no or moderate levels of self-disclosure. Following this, participants rate how much personal information each statement contains, and then the wording could be revised until the ratings of the participants show clear differences between the two levels.

Lastly, even though gender showed no significant effects, one marginally significant interaction suggests that further investigation may be justified.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effects of negotiator self-disclosure on trust and willingness to disclose in simulated suicide crisis negotiations, as well as the potential influence of gender. The self-disclosure of negotiators did not affect trust or willingness to disclose. However, trust itself

was a strong predictor of willingness, because participants who felt more trust were more willing to disclose. Men and women showed comparable levels of trust and willingness to disclose, and the interaction of gender and self-disclosure reached only marginal significance. Thus, offering weak evidence that gender might influence responses to self-disclosure. Overall, a brief self-disclosure remark from an unfamiliar negotiator was not a reliable way to promote openness in stressful situations. This shows that trust remains an important component and may need to be built through other communication strategies.

Taken together, this study underscores the importance of using more ecologically valid designs and exploring when and how different communication strategies support trust-building in suicide negotiations. These insights can guide future research and help refine both theory and training practices in the field of crisis negotiation. Additionally, the results provide important information about the limitations of self-disclosure as a standalone strategy in crisis negotiations, where the situation is emotionally charged and the negotiator is unfamiliar.

Ultimately, the study makes three contributions. The first is that it offers the first experimental evidence on how self-disclosure is received in crisis negotiations. Secondly, it shows that trust and not the self-disclosure itself drives the willingness to talk, and thirdly, it identifies methodological challenges that future work must address.

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Appendix A

Scenario Text

You are standing at the edge of a bridge, looking down at the rushing traffic below you. A cold breeze is hitting your face and the passing cars cause loud noises. However, you barely notice it. Your mind is lost in the overwhelming weight of everything that has led you here. Just a year ago, your life looked very different. You had a stable job in a company where you always wanted to work, a stable relationship that you thought would last, and a group of close friends that you could always lean on in difficult times.

But then, one thing after another started to crumble. The pandemic hit, and the company you worked for faced financial struggles. After being able to work at your dream company, you are fired. After that setback, you desperately try to find another job as quickly as possible, as all your savings decrease in order to maintain your living costs. However, you are continuously confronted with rejections, and you feel increasingly hopeless about ever finding a suitable occupation again.

The stress you experience during that time has a lasting impact on your relationship. All of a sudden, one evening your partner packs their things and decides that they want to leave. For you, that totally comes out of the blue. Not comprehending what just had happened, you were left alone – feeling completely helpless and anxious about what the future would bring for you.

You reach out for help – first to your friends, later to a psychological counsellor. They listen and make an effort to help you, but nothing changes. The pain and the emptiness never leave as you start to continuously feel more and more hopeless and isolated. No matter what you have tried to keep going and see the positive things in life again, you are left in an endless spiral of hopelessness and sadness, causing you significant trouble to sleep at night. Until you decide that you cannot do it anymore.

Now, you are standing at the edge of this bridge, convinced that this is the only way to make the pain stop. Right before you are about to jump, you hear a voice behind you, indicating that someone must have seen you and called for help. As you turn around, you see a police officer approaching you.

Appendix B

Adapted Trust Scale (Mayer & Davis, 1999)

The following 16 items were adapted from Mayer and Davis's (1999) original Trust Scale to fit the context of this study. All references to a general target were reworded to refer specifically to the negotiator (Alex). Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

1. The negotiator was very capable in performing their job.
2. The negotiator was known to be successful at the things they try to do.
3. The negotiator had much knowledge about the work that needed to be done.
4. I felt very confident about the negotiator's skills.
5. The negotiator was well qualified.
6. The negotiator was very concerned about my welfare.
7. My needs and desires were very important to the negotiator.
8. The negotiator would not knowingly do anything to hurt me.
9. The negotiator really looked out for what was important to me.
10. The negotiator would go out of their way to help me.
11. The negotiator had a strong sense of justice.
12. I never had to wonder whether the negotiator would stick to their word.
13. The negotiator tried hard to be fair in dealings with me.
14. The negotiator's actions and behaviours were not very consistent. *(reverse coded)*
15. I liked the negotiator's values.
16. Sound principles seemed to guide the negotiator's behaviour.

Note. Scale adapted from Mayer, R. C., & Davis, J. H. (1999). The effect of the performance appraisal system on trust for management: A field quasi-experiment. Journal of Applied Psychology, 84(1), 123–136. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.84.1.123

Appendix C

Adapted Willingness to Provide Information Scale (Beune et al., 2011)

This 3-item scale was adapted from Beune et al. (2011) to assess participants' willingness to disclose information to the negotiator in the crisis negotiation context. The wording was modified so that all items refer to "the negotiator" as the target. Items were rated on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

1. I would tell the negotiator everything.
2. I would provide a lot of information to the negotiator.
3. I would give truthful information to the negotiator.

Note. Scale adapted Beune, K., Giebels, E., Adair, W. L., Fennis, B. M., & van der Zee, K. (2011). Strategic sequences in police interviews and the importance of order and cultural fit. Criminal Justice and Behaviour, 38(9), 934-954. doi: 10.1177/0093854811412170

Appendix D

Manipulation Subsample Analysis

Hypothesis 1: Effect of Self-Disclosure on Willingness to Disclose

A two-sample t-test showed no significant difference in willingness to disclose between the Moderate Self-Disclosure (M = 3.95) and No Self-Disclosure (M = 3.83) conditions, t(35.02) = 0.45, p = .65, 95% CI [–0.42, 0.67].

Hypothesis 2 Mediation of Trust between Self Disclosure and Willingness to Disclose

A linear regression analysis indicated that the condition did not significantly predict trust, B = -0.08, SE = 0.11, t(40) = -0.73, p = .47. However, trust significantly predicted willingness to disclose, B = 1.07, SE = 0.34, t(39) = 3.14, p = .003. The condition had no significant direct effect on willingness, B = -0.03, SE = 0.24, t(39) = -0.14, p = .89. The model explained approximately 21% of the variance in willingness (R^2 = .21, F(2, 39) = 5.06, p = .01).

Hypothesis 3: interaction of Condition and Gender on Trust and Willingness

After excluding "prefer not to say,", no significant interaction effects were found on trust F(4, 37) = 1.09, p = .38, or willingness, F(4, 37) = 0.70, p = .60. Neither condition, gender, nor their interaction significantly predicted trust or willingness.

Hypothesis 4: Gender Differences in Willingness to Disclose

After excluding "prefer not to say," a two-sample t-test showed no significant difference in willingness between men (M = 3.96) and women (M = 3.76), t(16.56) = 0.62, p = .54, 95% CI [-0.47, 0.87].

Manipulation Check Subsample

The analysis conducted with the subsample of people who passed the manipulation resulted in results largely consistent with those from the full sample. In both samples, no significant differences were found between the self-disclosure conditions in terms of willingness to disclose or trust. Moreover, the interaction effects also remained non-significant in both subsets. Although restricting analyses to correct guessers might theoretically improve internal validity by making sure that participants were aware of what the manipulation was, it would reduce sample size, diminishing statistical power and generalisability. Given the similar pattern of results and the loss of power in the restricted sample, the full sample should be used to interpret and report findings.