NEW DIRECTIONS IN SAFETY PLANNING AND LETHAL MEANS SAFETY FOR AT-RISK, SUICIDAL VETERANS



New York / New Jersey MIRECC

RESEARCH AND PREVENTION IN SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS

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June 2, 2021 SPRINT Cyberseminar

Disclosures

Funding Sources

- VA RR&D
- VA CSR&D
- NY Health Foundation
- VISN 2 MIRECC

Conflicts of Interest

None to report

Disclaimer: The views or opinions expressed in this talk do not represent those of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States Government.

Suicide Specific Evidence Based Treatment (EBTs)



Evidence Based Treatments

10,000 foot view

- DBT
- CBT-SP
- Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality (CAMS)

Brief EBTs

- Safety Planning*
- Counseling About Lethal Means (CALM)*

^{*} Focus of today's seminar

Suicide Specific EBTs

Evidence Based Treatments

- DBT,
- CBT-SP
- Collabora e Asse smen de Ivia Suicidola (CAIVIS)

Brief

- Safe
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- Cour elip Abo

Today's cyberseminar is going to focus on Suicide Safety Planning (SSP)

Suicide Safety Planning

Best Practice

- Safety Planning PRISMA-Review (Ferguson et al, 2021)
- Search terms: safety planning, suicide
- n=565 articles screened
- → 26 articles eligible
 - 50% stand-alone safety planning,
 - 50% safety planning
 + other interventions
 - n=20 "in person" format
 - n=14 had suicidespecific outcomes
 - n=3 included groups

Outcomes

- Improvements in suicidal ideation & behavior, depression, hopelessness,
- Good acceptability and feasibility

Suicide Safety Planning: New Directions

2. Telehealth **Delivery** 1. Group **Settings** 3. Involving **Family**

Suicide Safety Planning: New Directions

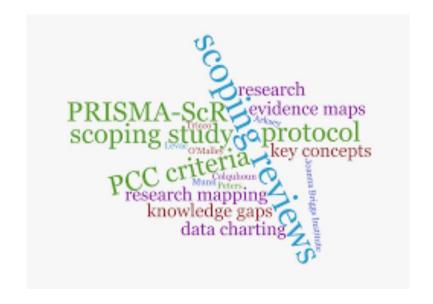




Suicide Safety Planning: Groups

PRISMA-Scoping Review Questions

- What research exists on group interventions with suicide-specific outcomes?
- What about the efficacy of these interventions?



3. Which of these interventions utilize safety planning?



Prisma Review: Suicide & Groups

- Restricted to "group only" modality, suicide openly discussed, research trial
- 1369 articles screened → 10 included
 - 1. n=8 included skills training, n=4 included reasons for living
 - n=5 included aspects of safety planning
 - 3. Weekly, 8-20 sessions
 - 4. Minimal rigor, most were open label (n=7)
 - 5. All 10 highlighted improvements in suicide related outcomes

(Sullivan et. al, under review)



Project Life Force (PLF)

Main Objective

 Keeping high-risk Veterans alive through a group safety planning intervention

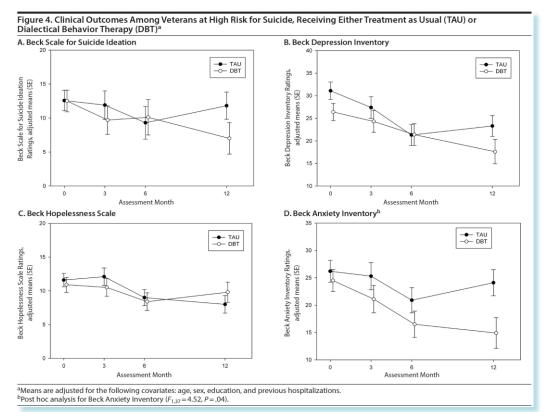
In collaboration with

- Greg Brown, PhD
- Barbara Stanley, PhD
- Michael Thase, MD





Project Life Force: Origins



Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) Trial in Suicidal Veterans (Goodman et. al, 2016)

Methods

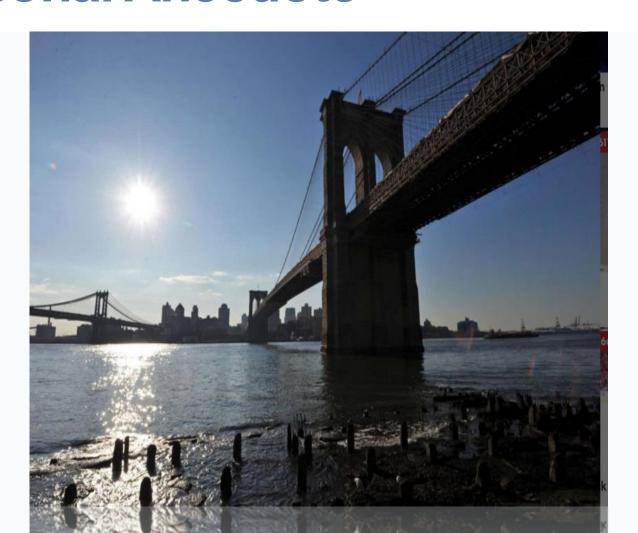
- 6-months of DBT vs. TAU
- 93 high-risk suicidal Veterans

Results

- Negative study
- Both groups improved in all outcome measures



Personal Anecdote





Suicide Safety Plan: Usage Study

Qualitative Study (Kayman et al., 2015)

- 20 Veterans interviewed after creating their SSP
- Follow-up interview 1 month later

Notable Findings

- Wide range of use (none-several times daily)
- Importance of clinician collaboration
- Both obstacles and facilitators of SSP use



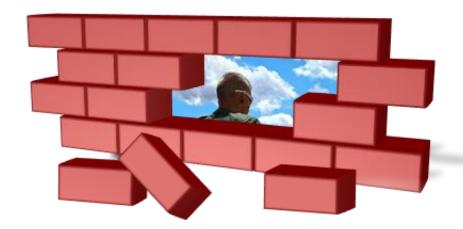
Suicide Safety Plan: Usage Study

Obstacles

- Lack of social network
- Social withdrawal/ depression
- Avoidant coping style
- Burden too great to carry out plan alone

Facilitators

- Sharing of plan with significant others
- Mobile format of SSP
- Individualized plans





Teaching distress tolerance and emotion regulation skills at each step of their SSP

Introduces use of a mobile SSP app

Helps Veterans identify those they can call for help, and **practice asking for help**

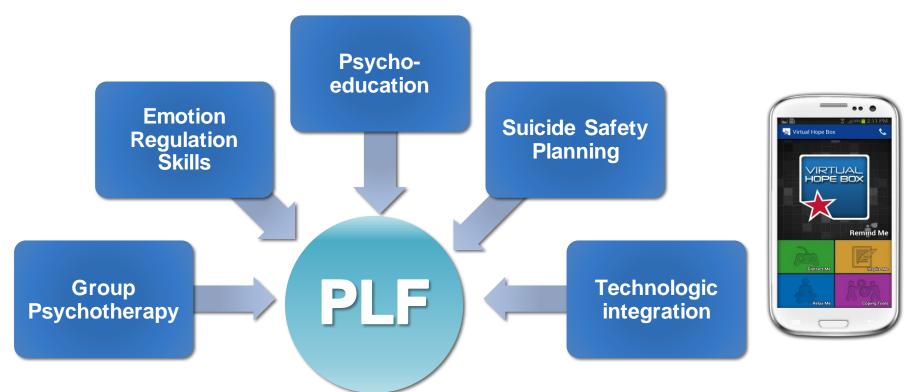
Aims to develop detailed, personalized, and meaningful SSPs

Delivered in a **group context** for offering peer support



Project Life Force: Overview

- Manualized group therapy
- 10 x 90-minute sessions
- From development to implementation of SSP





Project Life Force: SSP

Session 1

 Identifying crisis prevention services

Session 2

 Emotion recognition skills

VA Suicide Prevention Resource Coordinator Name
VA Suicide Prevention Resource Coordinator Phone
VA Suicide Prevention Hotline Phone: 1-800-273-TALK (8255), push 1 to reach a
VA mental health clinician

Step 1: Warning signs:						
	1					
	2					
	3					



Project Life Force: SSP

Step 2: Internal coping strategies - Things I can do to take my mind off my problems without contacting another person:			
1.			_
2.			_
3.			_
Step	4: People whom I can ask fo	or help:	
1.	Name	Phone	
2.	Name	Phone	
3.	Name	Phone	<u> </u>

Session 3

Distress tolerance

Sessions 4-5

Interpersonal communication skills with family members



Project Life Force: SSP

Session 6

 Interpersonal communication skills w/ clinical team

Session 7

Means restriction

1.	Clinician Name	Phone
	Clinician Pager or Emergency Contact #	
2.	Clinician Name	Phone
	Clinician Pager or Emergency Contact #	
3.	Local Urgent Care Services	
	Urgent Care Services Address	
Step	o 6: Making the environment safe:	
1.		
2.		



Project Life Force: Sessions

PLF is one
 of the only
 manualized
 outpatient
 group
 treatments
 for suicidal
 individuals

	Project Life Force Session Outline		
Session	Session Focus	Skill Covered	
1	Introduction, psychoeducation about suicide, SSP step #5 - crisis numbers, meet local SPC	Crisis Management skills Urge Restriction	
2	SSP step #1 - Identification of Warning Signs	Emotion, Thought or Behavior Recognition skills	
3	SSP step #2 - Internal Coping Strategies	Distraction skills	
4	SSP step #3 - Identifying people to help distract	Making Friends Skills	
5	SSP step #4 - Sharing SSP with Family	Interpersonal Skills	
6	SSP step #5 - Professional Contacts	Skills to maximize Treatment efficacy & Adherence	
6	SSP step #6 - Making the Environment Safe	Means restriction, psychoeducation about methods	
7	Improving Access to the SSP	Use of Safety Planning Mobile Apps and Virtual Hope Box	
8	Physical Health Management	Decreasing Vulnerability to negative Emotion	
9	Building a Positive Life	Building Positive Emotion	
10	Recap/Review		



Project Life Force: Pilot Outcomes

Feasibility/Acceptability Pilot Data

- N=45
- <2.0 total hours/week per clinician
- Veteran satisfaction 4.7 out of 5 point Likert scale
- 5.0 of 5 rating on recommending the treatment to others
- <17% attrition
- 100% of participants updated their SSPs and increased use patterns.



livan, Angela Page Spears, Lisa Dixon, Yosef langa C. Galfalvy, Erin A. Hazlett & Barbara



Project Life Force: In The News

Online group therapy keeps Veterans connected

VA CONNECT program helps Vets cope







Vet arranges flag honor for doc's life-saving work

Bronx VA psychiatrist-researcher cited for work in suicide prevention



Project Life Force helps Veterans cope with suicidal urges

"You often hear negative news about the VA, specifically related to suicide. We don't recognize the hard work and achievements of our providers, which is why I wanted to honor Dr. Goodman. Sometimes we need to recognize good work in the news."



Project Life Force: RCT Protocol



Contemporary Clinical Trials Communications



Volume 17, March 2020, 100520

Research paper

Group ("Project Life Force") versus individual suicide safety planning: A randomized clinical trial

Marianne Goodman ^{a, b} △ ⊠, Gregory K. Brown ^{c, d}, Hanga C. Galfalvy ^e, Angela Page Spears ^a, Sarah R. Sullivan ^a, Kalpana Nidhi Kapil-Pair ^{a, b}, Shari Jager-Hyman ^c, Lisa Dixon ^{e, f}, Michael E. Thase ^{c, d}, Barbara Stanley ^f



Project Life Force: RCT Protocol

Progress to Date*

Site	Total Enrolled
JJP VAMC (Bronx)	131
CMC VAMC (Philadelphia)	43
Total	174

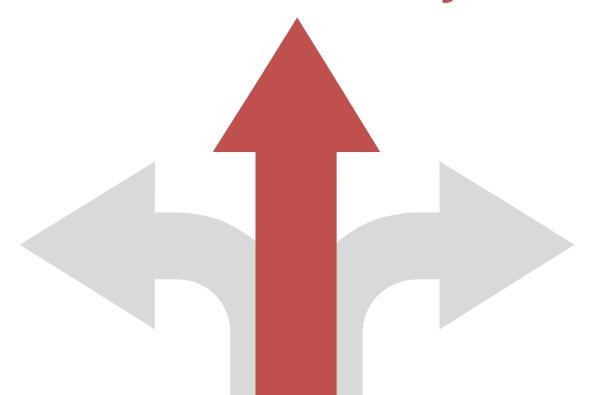


Of these, >60 were virtual groups



Suicide Safety Planning: New Directions

2. Telehealth Delivery





Importance & Rationale

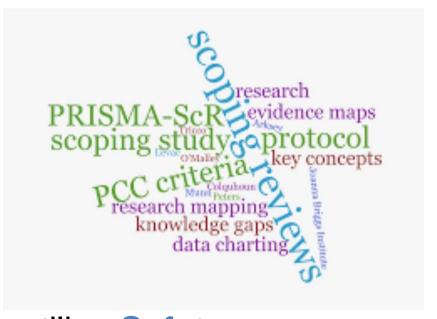
- Barriers to accessing in-person care existed even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic
- (Lee et al., 2015; Jacobs et al., 2019)
 Barriers included (Chen et al., 2020):
 - inflexible work schedules,
 - travel costs,
 - health issues,

- caregiving responsibilities and,
- physical disabilities



PRISMA-Scoping Review Questions

- What research exists on current "full" telehealth clinical interventions with suicide specific outcomes?
- What is known regarding the efficacy of these interventions?



 Which of these interventions utilize Safety Planning?



PRISMA-Scoping Review

Records identified through database searching (n = 1641)

Records after duplicates removed (n = 1053)

Records screened (n = 1053)

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 212)

Studies included in Scoping Review (n = 9)



Records excluded (n = 841)

Full-text articles excluded, with reasons

- 46 Not a suicide specific intervention
- 41 Wrong study design (e.g., support group without clinician)
- 27 Crisis Line
- 22 Review Paper
- 17 Protocol Paper or No Outcomes (of any kind)
- 12 Mobile App/Avatar
- 11 Duplicate
- 11 Suicide Monitoring (not treatment/intervention)
- 6 Does not include suicide specific assessments
- 5 Not fully telehealth
- 3 Participants were clinicians
- 2 Not in English

(under review)



PRISMA-Scoping Review: Results 1

- EBTs delivered via telehealth do NOT have empirical support yet
- Seven (77.8%) of the nine studies noted a follow-up intervention targeting patients discharged from the ED,
 - Telehealth session length ranged from 5-40 minutes; the average across studies was 22.6 minutes.

** Timing of review did not capture telehealth conversion prompted by pandemic



PRISMA-Scoping Review: Results 2

- Two studies reported incorporating Lethal Means Counseling
 - (Gabilondo et al., 2019; Rengasamy et al., 2019)
- Only one of these studies also provided safety planning
 - (Rengasamy et al., 2019)

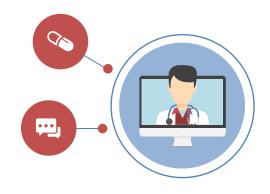
^{**} Timing of review did not capture telehealth conversion prompted by pandemic



Project Life Force: Telehealth (PLF-T)

In collaboration with

- Shari Jager-Hyman, PhD
- Sapana Patel, PhD



Adaptations

- Communication coordinator
- Tried multiple platforms
 - WebEx allows for both phone and video
 - Use share screen for manual & updating SPIs

Progress

- Teleworking began 3/17/2020
- First telehealth group was 3/18/2020
- >60 PLF sessions offered over telehealth to date





Project Life Force: Telehealth

Lessons Learned

- Creative in addressing barriers:
 - Issues with connectivity
 - Noise
 - Privacy
- Assessment and management of high-risk behavior
- Maintaining group cohesion
- Lack of smart phones, working with VA to attain tablets for group members





Project Life Force: Telehealth

Benefits

- Combine groups across sites
- Include patients across state lines
 - Reduces the barrier of travel
- Allows for expansion beyond initial recruitment sites





Acceptability, Appropriateness, and Feasibility of PLF over Telehealth: AIM/FIM/IAM Assessment

	M
Acceptability	17.22
Meets Approval	4.56
Appealing	4.11
Like Intervention	4.33
Welcome Intervention	4.22
Appropriateness	17.78
Fitting	4.22
Suitable	4.56
Applicable	4.44
Good Match	4.56
Feasibility	18.22
Implementable	4.44
Possible	4.67
Doable	4.67
Easy to Use	4.44

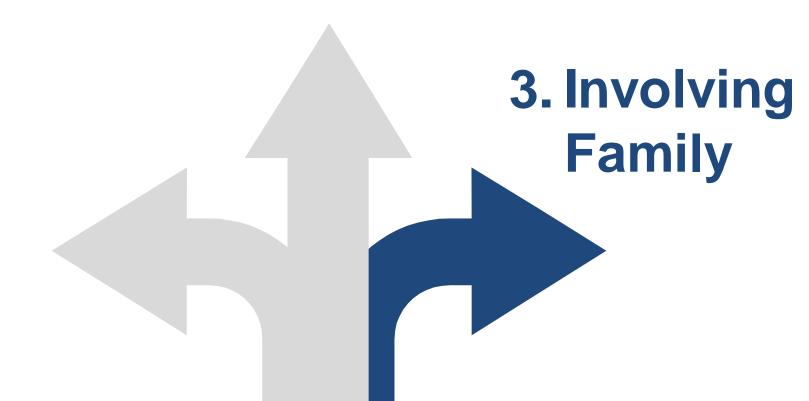
Note: *n*=9. Acceptability, Appropriateness, and Feasibility sum scores based on each 4-item scales. Each item is scored on scale of 1-5, with 5 indicating strong agreement. Each subscale score is calculated by summing the 4 corresponding items for a total range of 5 to 20.

Qualitative Interview for PLF group telehealth participants Currently funded with CSR Supplement for qualitative

- Tell me about your experience participating in PLF via telehealth.
 - What was it like for you to do PLF over VVC?
 - Only if needed:
 - What did you like best about doing it in this format?
 - What did you like least?
- Were there any obstacles you had to overcome in order to participate in PLF telehealth?
 - Would these same obstacles also get in the way of participating in in-person groups?
 - Are there any other obstacles that could get in the way of participation in in-person groups? Do these also apply to PLF telehealth?
 - Is there anything about PLF telehealth that made it easier for you to participate? What about things that made it easier for you to participate in groups that meet in person?
- Have you received any other care during COVID-19?
 - How did that care compare to PLF over VVC?
- In what ways did the PLF intervention impact your suicidal thoughts or actions during COVID-19?
 - Did it in any way affect feelings of isolation?
 - Did it help you get rid of any lethal means (or things you could use to harm yourself) in your living space?
 - What was it like to be in a group with people you have never met?
 - *Probe:* Both facilitator and group members AND particularly in other states
- How did participating via telehealth affect your openness to talking about suicide with the group?
 - How did participating via telehealth affect your openness to talking about suicide with other people in your life?
- Have you noticed any change in your usage of the safety plan?
 - *Probe:* If yes: Can you describe these changes? If no: Can you describe your baseline safety plan usage since there were no changes?
- In your opinion, would doing PLF over the phone or online (e.g., WebEx) for the entire treatment be of interest to you? Why or why not?
 - Would you recommend it to a friend/fellow Veteran?
 - If given the preference, what would you prefer WebEx or in person?
 - Would this still be the case if not for COVID?
- Do you have any suggestions for how we could improve PLF telehealth?

Currently funded with CSRD Supplement for qualitative study targeting telehealth group participation

Suicide Safety Planning: New Directions





Involving Family in Suicide Specific Care

Rationale:

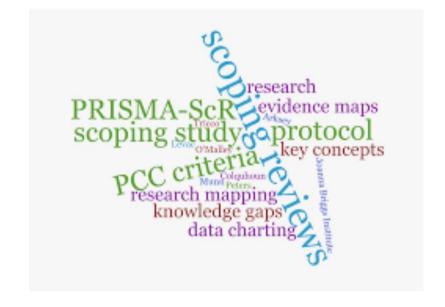
- The impact of family systems on suicide prevention remains largely unstudied (Frey, Hans, & Sanford, 2016)
- In addition to family as a suicide risk factor, it has also been found to be protective through cohesion, connection, and positive emotional support (Chioqueta & Stiles, 2007; Wagner, Silverman, & Martin, 2003).
- Spirito's (1997) review of clinical interventions, which integrate suicide prevention and family systems, concluded that the family is a promising target for intervention.



Suicide Specific Care with Families

PRISMA-Scoping Review Questions

- What exists regarding intervention research for family treatments for individuals at risk for suicide?
- What is the efficacy of these interventions?



Did any involve safety planning?

*We only considered joint treatments in which both members were present with the treatment provider.



Suicide Specific Care with Families

PRISMA-Scoping Review: Results 1

- 180 articles reviewed, Ten different interventions were identified.
- 40% of the interventions employed some sort of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- 20% examined Attachment Based Family Therapy (ABFT)
- 20% used Family-Based Crisis Intervention (FBCI)
- the remaining 20% of interventions were distinct from one another.

(Sullivan et al., under review)



Suicide Specific Care with Families

PRISMA-Scoping Review: Results 2

- 90% of studies pertained to treating children and adolescents at risk for suicide
 - (e.g., Diamond et al., 2019;
 Wharff et al., 2019).
- Only <u>one</u> article covered participants across the lifespan
 - (Anastasia, Humphries, Wadsworth, Pepper, & Pearson, 2015).

No articles focused on sibling-specific interventions.

Most 'family members' were parents or guardians

No articles focused on geriatric populations.



Where does the Safety Plan fit in?

 Although safety planning was integrated into some studies, none were exclusively focused on the safety plan or crisis response plan.

 Additionally, <u>none</u> of the studies specifically reviewed how family members could be involved with restricting access to lethal means.



Safe Actions For Families To Encourage Recovery (SAFER) PILOT RCT RESULTS

In collaboration with:

Dev Crasta, PhD

Shirley Glynn, PhD

Deborah Perlick, PhD

Barbara Stanley, PhD

RR&D MERIT (PI: GOODMAN)



Rationale for Family Involvement- Pilot Study

- Our research team conducted a qualitative interviews (n = 26 Veterans, 19 family members) to elicit perspectives on involving families/loved ones in Veteran's suicide prevention efforts.
- Veteran themes
- 1) Isolation: "I have a big family but it's like I have none"
- 2) Shame: "Deep down a part of it is shame"
- 3) Perceived burden: "I felt like a burden, I wanted to reach out but didn't"
- 4) **Mistrust**: "They'll flip out or won't understand"



Rationale for Family Involvement- Pilot Study cont.

- Family themes
- 1) Perceived inability to stop their loved on from hurting themselves: "it's hard for me to find out things that's going on with him; he keeps it to himself a lot"
- 2) Fear of triggering urges, "I never know how he'll react"
- 3) Feeling unsupported, "There's no real support" and
- 4) Feeling overwhelmed, "I didn't know what to do"
 - Overall, while Veterans felt alone and afraid to reach out to family members, family members also did not know how to support or react to their Veterans suicidality.
 - This data served as the basis for the SAFER intervention.



SAFER Protocol

- Aim: encourage discussion regarding suicidal symptoms and coping via the development of both a Veteran and a complementary family member safety plan
- 2. Approach: psychoeducation, facilitate disclosure, review of communication skills
 - SAFER is a novel, *manualized*, weekly, 90-minute, individual + 4-session family-based treatment
 - Builds complementary Veteran and "supportive partner" safety plan



S.A.F.E.R. Suicide Safety Plan for Veteran and Family Member

Veteran	Family Member		
STEP 1: Recognizing Warning Signs	STEP 1: Recognizing Warning Signs/Raising with Veteran		
STEP 2: Using Internal Coping Strategies	STEP 2: Coaching Veteran on Use of Coping Strategies		
STEP 3: Social Contacts Who May Distract from the Crisis	STEP 3: Facilitating Veteran's Use of Supportive Social Contacts		
STEP 4: Family or Friends Who May Offer Help	STEP 4: Providing Direct Support (e.g., Active Listening)		
STEP 5: Professionals and Agencies to Contact for Help	STEP 5: Facilitating Contact with Professionals/Agencies		
STEP 6: Making the Environment Safe	CTED 6: Making the Engrapment Cafe		
STEP 0. Waking the Environment Sale	STEP 6: Making the Environment Safe		



39 Veteran⇔Support Dyads

Veteran (n=39)

20 with last-month SI2 with lifetime attempt17 with <u>BOTH</u> SI/attempt

Support Partner (n=39)

14 romantic partners/spouses

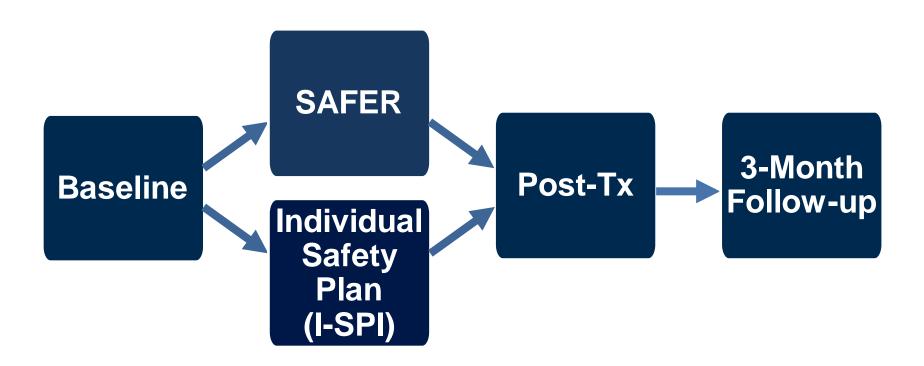
13 other family members

12 close friends

KEY DEMOGRAPHICS	%
Age	49 years
Male	62%
Hispanic/Latino	35%
Black/African-American	49%



Study Design: Pilot RCT



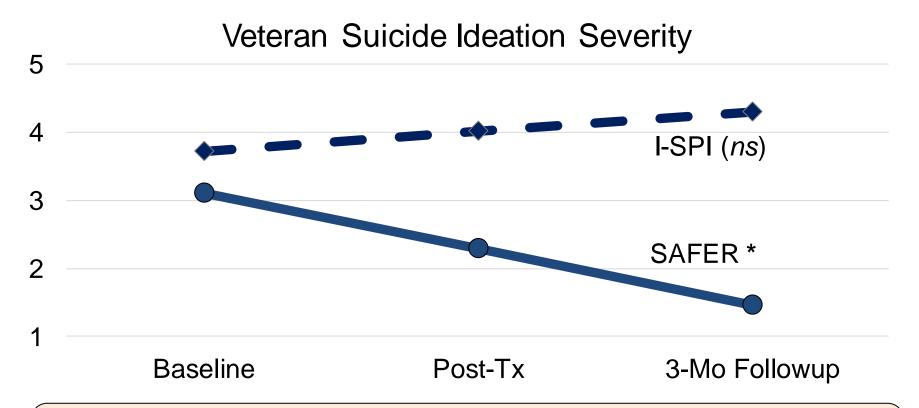


Study Hypotheses

Hypothesis#	Target Veterans in SAFER will report	Supporting Partners in SAFER will report
1 – Ideation		
		① Coping Support (Adapted SRCS)
3 – Interpersonal Cognitions		Caregiver Burden (CBI; Novak & Guest, 1989)



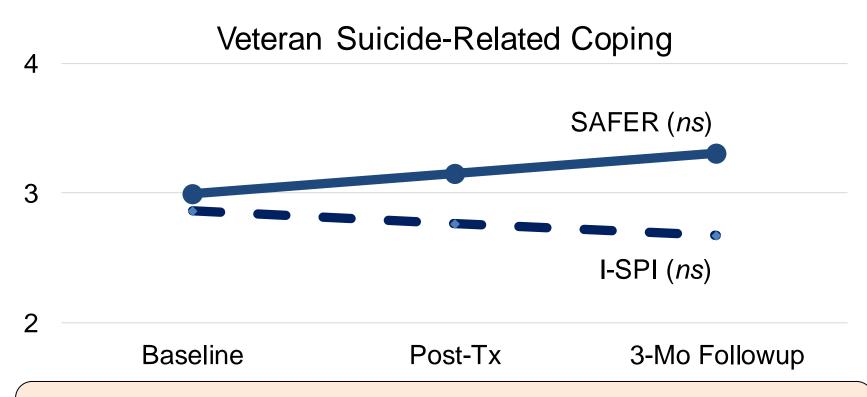
Hypothesis 1: Suicide Ideation



SUMMARY: Veterans in **SAFER** experienced significant reductions in SI severity while those in **I-SPI** did not



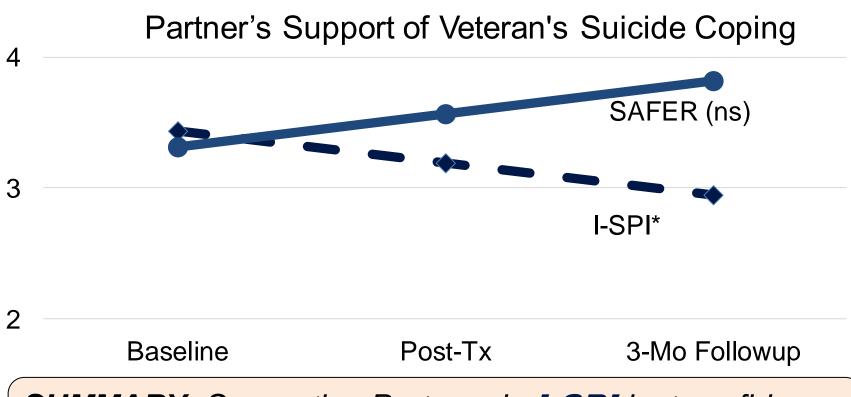
Hypothesis 2: Coping with Suicide



SUMMARY: Veterans in **SAFER** felt <u>relatively</u> more confident that they could cope with SI than those in **I-SPI**



Hypothesis 2: Coping with Suicide



SUMMARY: Supporting Partners in **I-SPI** lost confidence in their ability to support while those in **SAFER** did not.



Hypothesis 3: Interpersonal Cognitions



- No significant changes in feelings of burdensomeness, belongingness for Veterans
- No significant improvements in caregiver burden



Conclusions

First pilot RCT of manualized family-based suicide safety planning intervention

Hypothesis#	Target Veterans	Supporting Partners
1 – ↓ Ideation	✓	
2 – û Mutual Coping	~	✓
3 – ↓ Suicide-Related Interpersonal Cognitions	X	X



Changes in suicide risk are possible when supporting partners equipped with tools and support.



Limitations/ Future Directions

Limitations

- Arms not matched for treatment dosage
- Moderate suicide risk Veterans
- Recruitment and Attrition challenges (small N)
- Unable to examine moderators- gender, suicide status of Veteran, romantic partner vs spouse

Next steps

- Address how supporting partners contribute to stress
- Telehealth delivery



New Direction #3a:

 Lethal Means Safety targeted to FAMILY



Means Restriction Efforts

State legislation restricting firearm access

• Associated with reductions in suicide by firearms (Anestis & Anestis, 2015; Anestis et al., 2015, Crisfasi et al., 2015; Rodríguez, Andrés, & Hempstead, 2011)

VA-based means safety initiatives have included:

- Distributing free firearm cable locks upon request (Lemle, 2000)
- Providing firearm safe storage kits to VA clinic staff (Lemle, 2000)
- Together with Veterans (Monteith et al., 2020)

Means Safety Counseling Interventions: CALM

- CALM (Counseling on Access to Lethal Means)
 - Outline from the Suicide Prevention Resource Center web site:

https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/calm-counseling-access-lethal-means-0

- 1. Describing the problem: Youth suicide and access to lethal means
- Negotiation of means restriction (video presentation)
- 3. Conducting a family firearms assessment
- 4. Wrap-up and evaluation
- CALM studies with youth/parents of youth (Florez et al., 2019; Runyan et al., 2016)
- CALM training research (Johnson et al., 2011; Mueller et al. 2020; Pope et al., 2016; Rosen et al., 2020; Sale et al., 2018; Slovak et al., 2019)

Lethal Means Training for Family Members of Suicidal Veterans

- Being developed in collaboration with the NY State
 Governors Challenge Team to prevent suicide among
 Veterans and Servicemembers (In collaboration with Drs.
 Gamble & Lane, plus Garra-Lloyd Lester, Elaine Frank,
 Cathy Barber)
- Funded by the New York State Health Foundation (PI: Goodman)



Lethal Means Training for Family Members of Suicidal Veterans

- To date, to inform the prospective training we have interviewed 23 family members of service members and veterans in 3 groups:
 - 1. Family members of Veterans who died by suicide with a firearm
 - 2. Family members of Veterans who attempted suicide with a firearm
 - 3. Family members of Veterans who have firearms in their homes
- Estimated launch date interactive website is Fall 2021
- The project includes building capabilities and customization for dissemination/adaptation in other states in addition to NY.

Recap: Suicide Safety Planning: New Directions

2. Telehealth **Delivery** 1. Group **Settings** 3. Involving **Family**

Acknowledgements:

JJPVA Suicide Research Team:

Emily Mitchell, BA

Angela Page Spears, BS

Sarah Sullivan, MS-MHC

Rachel Harris, MA

Kalpana Nidhi Kapil-Pair, PhD

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