



# Comparison of Interpersonal Theory of Suicide Contributing Factors between Active Duty Army and Army National Guard

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## INTRODUCTION

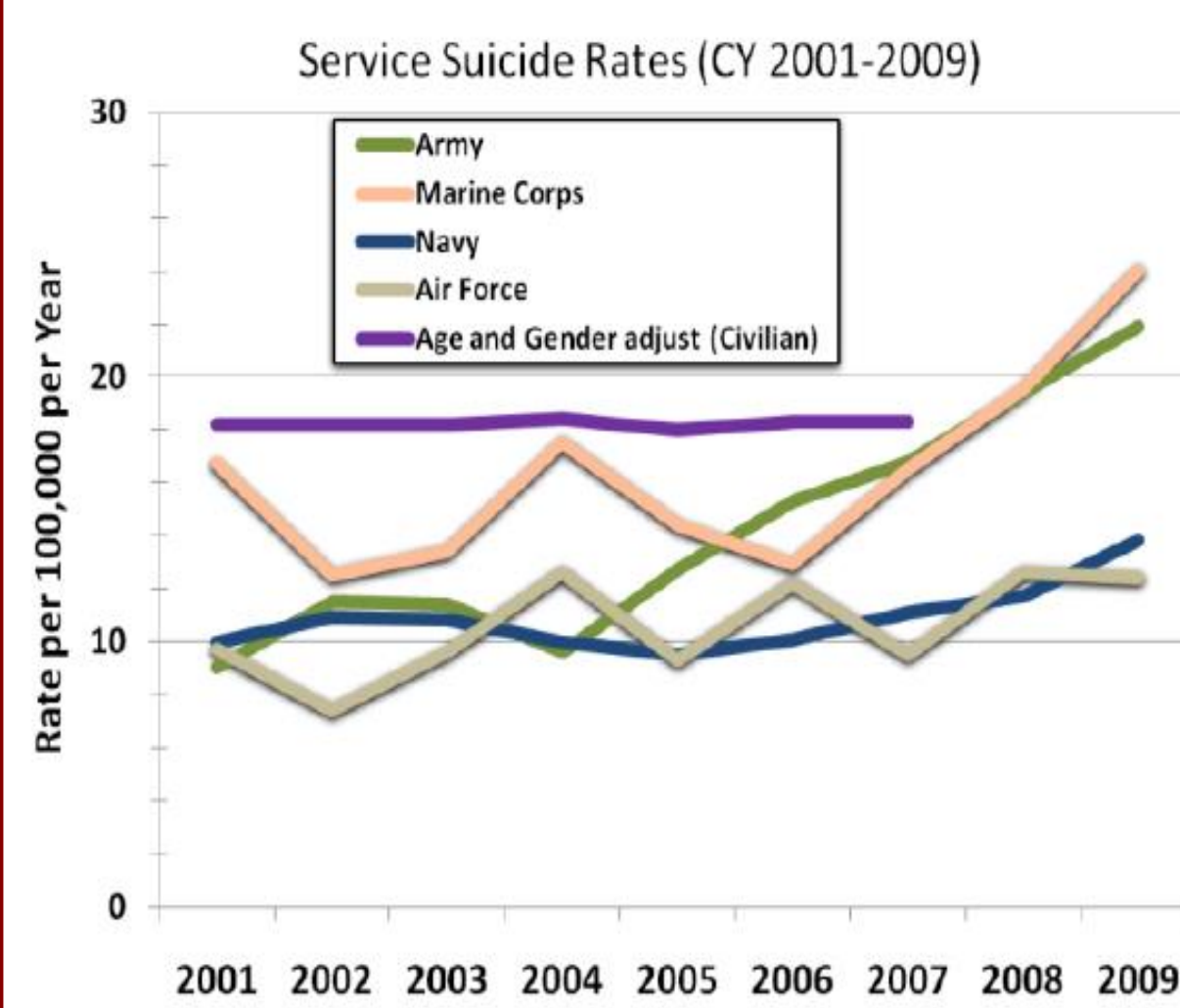
Historically the suicide rate has been lower than age matched civilian counterparts. Typically, during times of conflict, the suicide rate within the US Military trends lower (Griffith, 2010).

Beginning in 2004, the suicide rates for Active Duty Army began to increase steadily, exceeding age matched civilian counterpart rates in 2008 (Army Health Promotion, Risk Reduction, and Suicide Prevention Report, 2010).

In 2006 the suicide rates for the Army National Guard surpassed the rates of both their age matched Active Duty and civilian counterparts (Army Health Promotion, Risk Reduction, and Suicide Prevention Report, 2010).

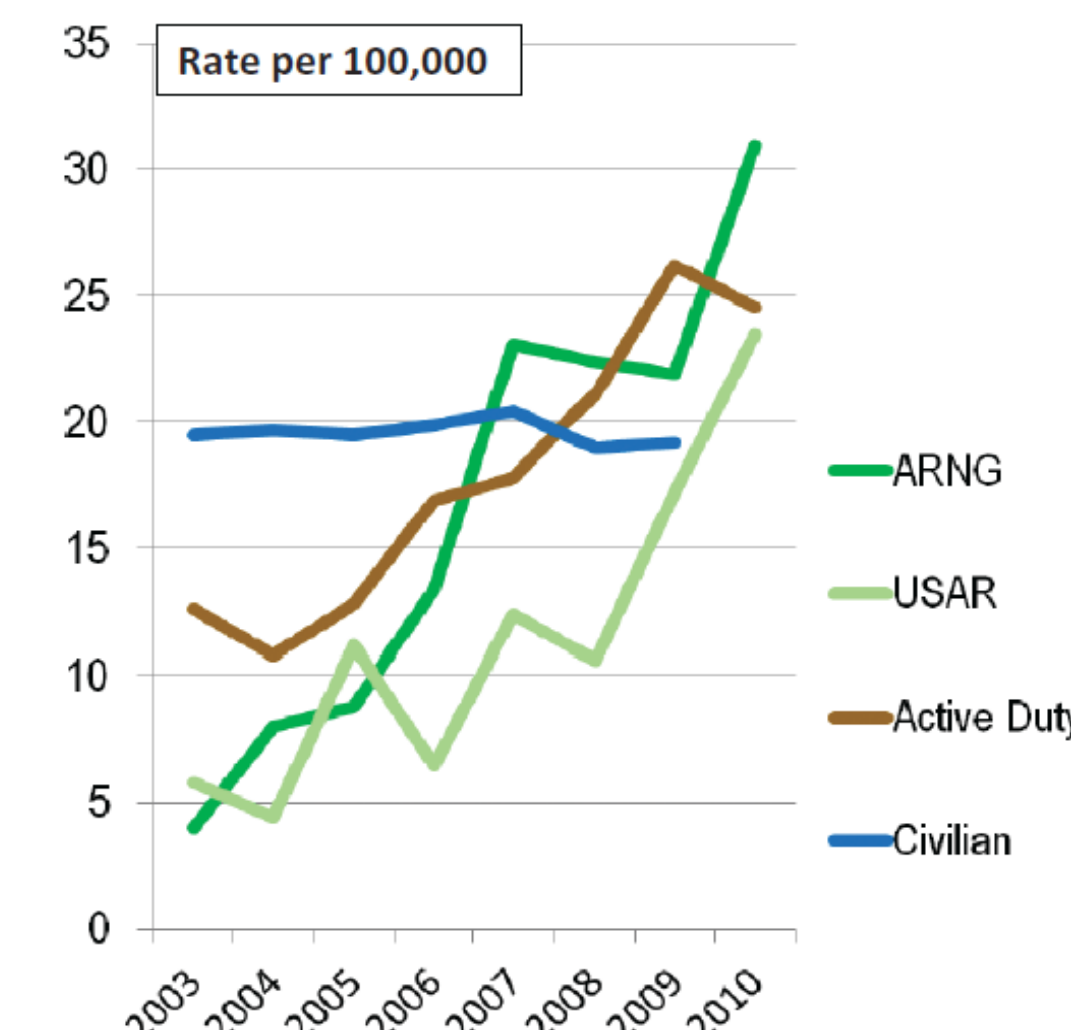
The Interpersonal Theory of Suicide posits that Perceived Burden, Thwarted Belongingness, and Acquired Capability are most significant factors when predicting suicidal behavior (Van Orden, Witte, & Braithwaite, 2010)

### Suicide Rates for All Services



Source: Army Health Promotion, Risk Reduction, and Suicide Prevention Report, 2010

### Army Specific Suicide Rates



Source: Griffith, J. (2012). Army suicides: "knowns" and an interpretative framework for future directions

## OBJECTIVES

Test whether levels of Acquired Capability are the same between the National Guard and Active Duty components of the US Army.

Test if the levels of Perceived Burdensomeness, and Thwarted Belongingness differ between the National Guard and Active Duty components of the US Army.

## METHOD

Participants: 2,151 Army soldiers (1,416 Active Duty; 735 National Guard)

Descriptives for Age, Gender, Race, Marital status, and Level of education

Measures:

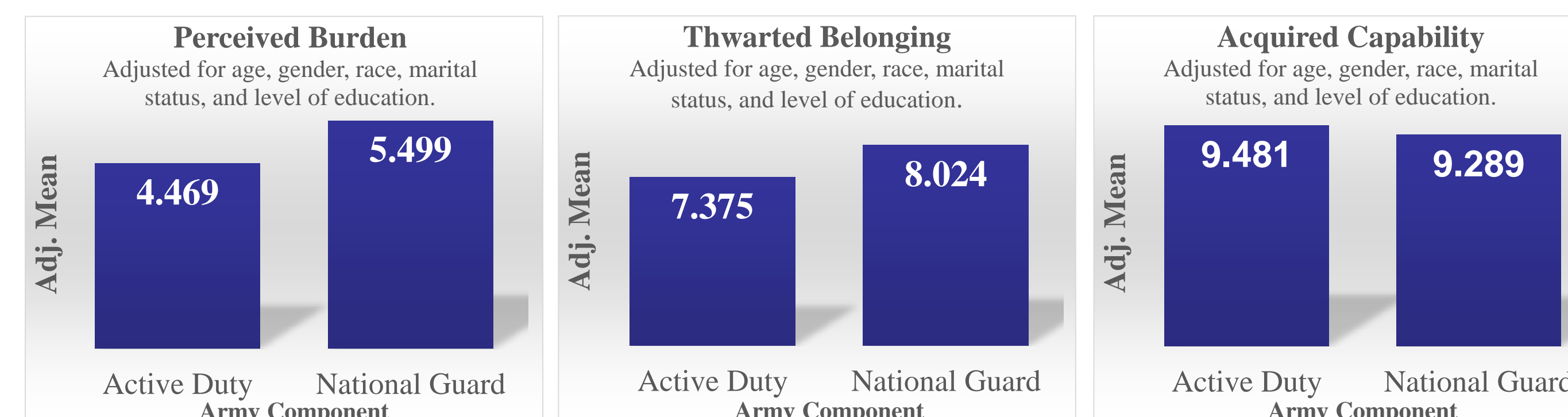
- 4-Item Thwarted Belongingness scale (e.g., "These days I feel like I belong")
- 4-Item Perceived Burdensomeness scale (e.g., "These days I feel like a burden on the people in my life")
- 4-Item Acquired Capability scale (e.g., "I am not at all afraid to die")

Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) will be used to compare mean levels for each of the three interpersonal theory of suicide measures between Army Active Duty (AD) and National Guard (NG) soldiers, controlling for effects of Age, Gender, Race, Marital status, and Level of education

## RESULTS

	Sample Descriptive Statistics				t / $\chi^2$	p	Total (n = 2151)	
	AD (n = 1416)	SD / %	NG (n = 735)	SD / %			M / n	SD / %
Age	29.75	(4.848)	26.11	(7.237)	12.264	<.001	28.87	(6.337)
Gender					59.680	<.001		
Male	1321	93.3%	607	82.6%			1928	89.6%
Female	95	6.7%	128	17.4%			223	10.4%
Race/Ethnicity					136.259	<.001		
Caucasian/White	958	67.7%	471	64.1%			1429	66.4%
African American	203	14.3%	196	26.7%			399	18.5%
Hispanic/Latino	172	12.1%	23	3.1%			195	9.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	66	4.7%	14	1.9%			80	3.7%
Native American	17	1.2%	9	1.2%			26	1.2%
Other	0	0.0%	22	3.0%			22	1.0%
Marital Status					566.500	<.001		
Never	189	13.3%	446	60.7%			635	29.5%
Engaged/Married	1108	78.2%	209	28.4%			1317	61.2%
Separated/Divorced/Widowed	119	8.4%	80	10.9%			199	9.3%
Level of Education					7.969	0.047		
High School/GED	390	27.5%	240	32.7%			630	29.3%
Some College	736	52.0%	364	49.5%			1100	51.1%
College Degree	269	19.0%	117	15.9%			386	17.9%
Graduate Degree	21	1.5%	14	1.9%			35	1.6%

Note. AD = Army Active Duty; NG = Army National Guard



Three separate Analyses of Covariance (ANCOVAs) were conducted between Army National Guard soldiers ( $n = 699$ ) and Army Active Duty soldiers ( $n = 1412$ ) to determine group mean differences on measures of acquired capability, thwarted belongingness, and perceived burdensomeness; controlling for group differences in age, race, gender, marital status, and educational status.

Results indicated that no significant difference existed with regard to Acquired Capability (Adj.  $M_{AD} = 9.481$ , Adj.  $M_{NG} = 9.280$ ;  $t(2109) = 1.056$ ,  $p = .291$ ).

The National Guard showed significantly higher means than Active Duty with respect to Thwarted Belongingness (Adj.  $M_{AD} = 7.375$ , Adj.  $M_{NG} = 8.024$ ;  $t(2085) = -2.513$ ,  $p = .012$ ).

The National Guard showed significantly higher means than Active Duty with respect to Perceived Burdensomeness (Adj.  $M_{AD} = 4.469$ , Adj.  $M_{NG} = 5.499$ ;  $t(2105) = -7.887$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

These results suggest that higher scores of Perceived Burdensomeness and Thwarted Belongingness, rather than Acquired Capability, may contribute to the higher rates of suicide within the National Guard compared to Active Duty.

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### Mean Differences between Army Active Duty and National Guard for Each Dependent Measure

	Mean	SD	Adj. Mean (a)	SE	F	p	Cohen's d
Thwarted Belonging					6.314	<.001	-0.868
Active Duty	7.179	4.581	7.375	0.132			
National Guard	8.427	4.881	8.024	0.201			
Perceived Burden					62.211	<.001	-0.465
Active Duty	4.447	1.814	4.469	0.067			
National Guard	5.543	3.176	5.499	0.101			
Acquired Capability					1.115	0.291	0.127
Active Duty	9.556	3.230	9.481	0.094			
National Guard	9.137	3.599	9.289	0.141			

a. Means adjusted for age, gender, race, marital status, and level of education

## DISCUSSION

Study limitations:

- Only one National Guard and one Active Duty unit was studied.
- The data sets are from two distant geographical locations. Since National Guard members live within the civilian community when not performing military duties, different geographical areas may present different data with respect to perceived burden and thwarted belonging.

Higher rates of Perceived Burden within the Army National Guard may be due to civilian obligations that may not be possible to meet due to military service. Examples of these obligations may be: family, civilian work, and social obligations. Additionally, when integrated into Active Duty units, National Guard members may feel that they are a burden to their unit due to unequal training.

Higher rates of Thwarted Belonging may be a result of transitioning from an individualistic civilian society to a collectivist hierarchical military society. Active Duty units train more frequently and are in more frequent contact with one another than National Guard members. Active Duty members may not assimilate the National Guard member into the established social structure.

Acquired Capability for Suicide should be equal among both groups due to military members being conditioned to physically tolerate pain, and to have a fearlessness of death. Physical tolerance of pain and the fearlessness of death are the most significant factors with regard to the capability to kill one's self.

Future studies should include multiple units from varied geographical locations, determining if the type of suicide awareness training received by National Guard and Active Duty impacts the rates of suicide, and what impact Stop Loss has had on the sudden rise in suicide rates for both National Guard and Active Duty.

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