



# Poor Sleep is Associated with Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors & Improving Sleep Decreases Suicidal Ideation

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# Disclaimer & Disclosure

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

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“Without enough sleep, we all become  
tall two-year-olds.”

-- JoJo Jensen,

*Dirt Farmer Wisdom*, 2002

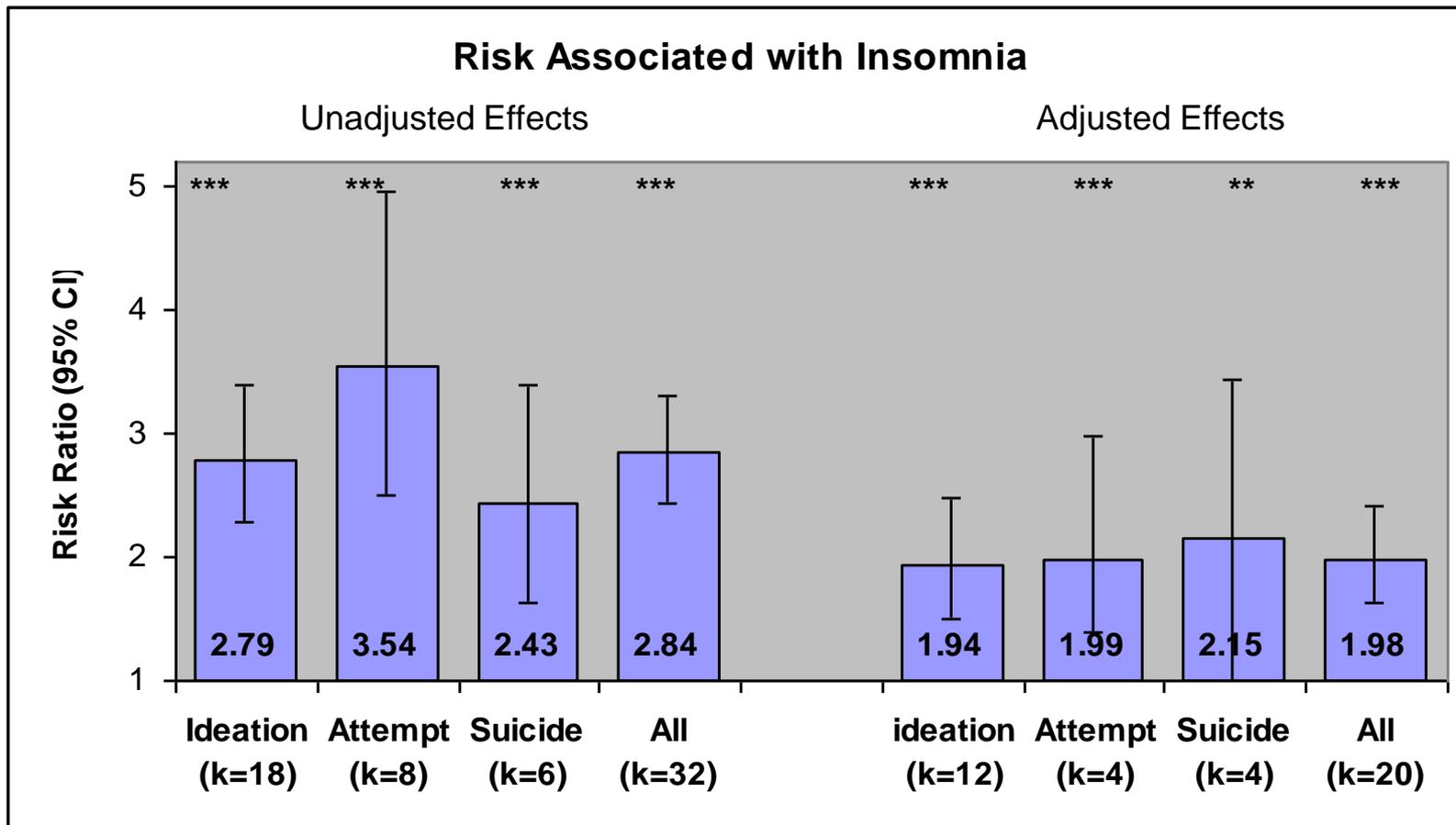
# Outline

- Sleep & suicide meta-analysis
- Sleep disturbance preceding suicide among Veterans
- Suicidal ideation and sleep disturbance among VA behavioral telehealth callers
- Impact of insomnia treatment on suicidal ideation in civilians
- Current VA and/or DoD projects
- Case Study

# Sleep & Suicide Meta-Analysis

- Literature search of electronic databases 1966-2011
- 39 Studies met inclusion criteria with a total sample size of ~148,000 individuals
- 57 data points as some studies had multiple outcomes
  - Suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, suicide
  - Insomnia, nightmares, sleep disturbance
- Data presented as risk ratio (RR) for a suicidal outcome when a sleep disturbance was present
- No studies in military or veteran samples

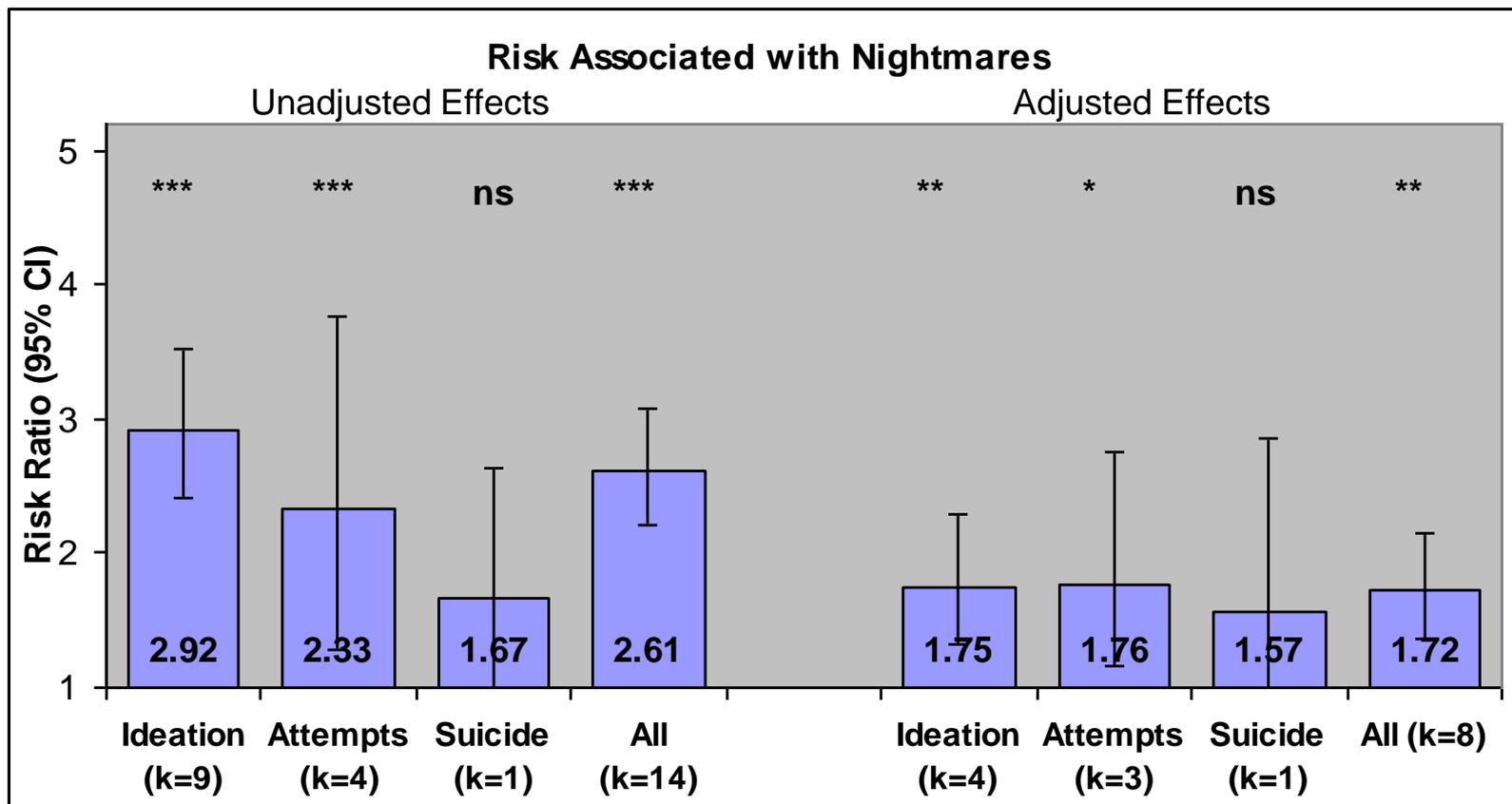
# Sleep & Suicide Meta-Analysis



\* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001

Pigeon, Pinquart & Conner (in Press), J Clin Psychiatry.

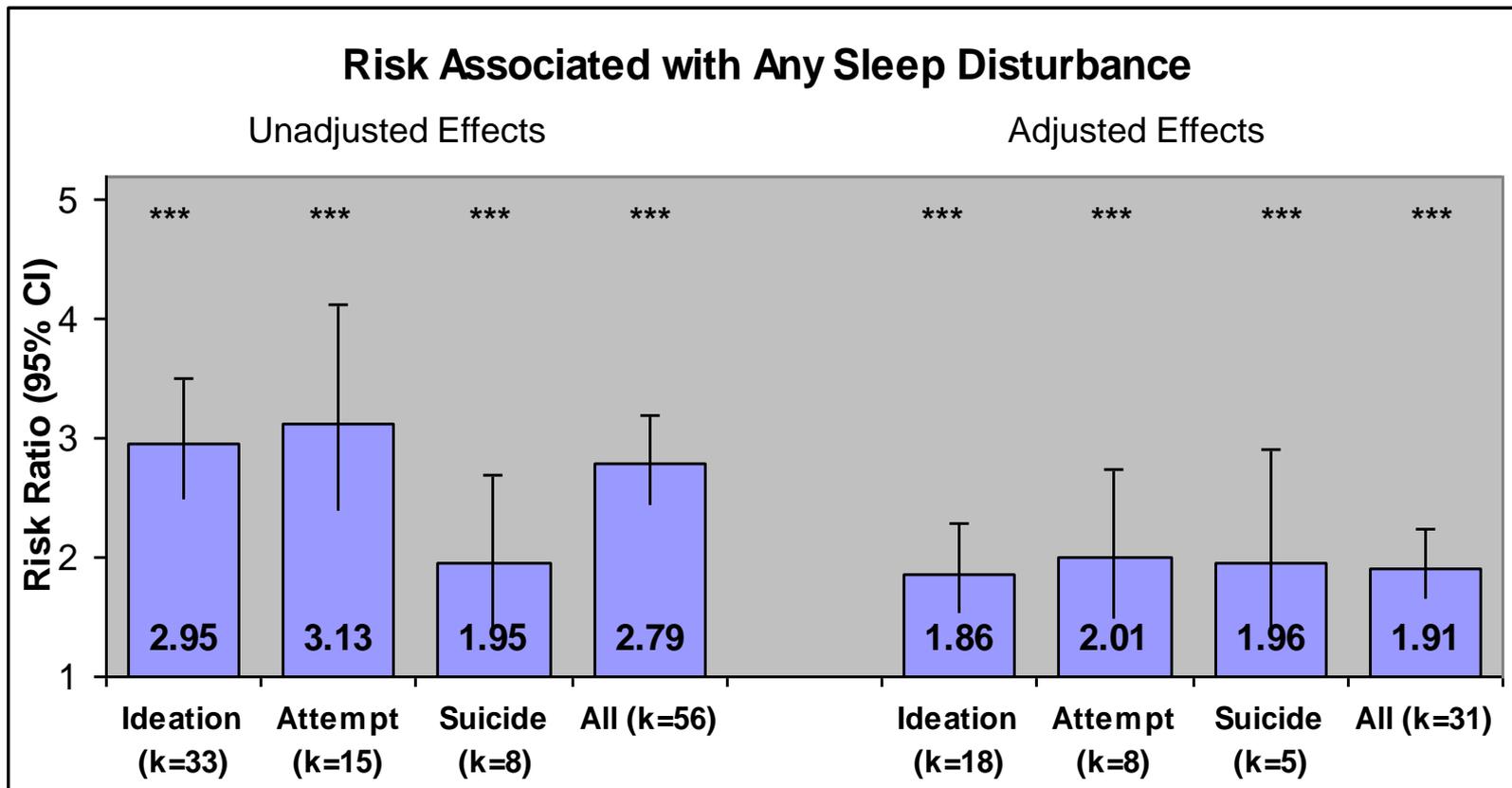
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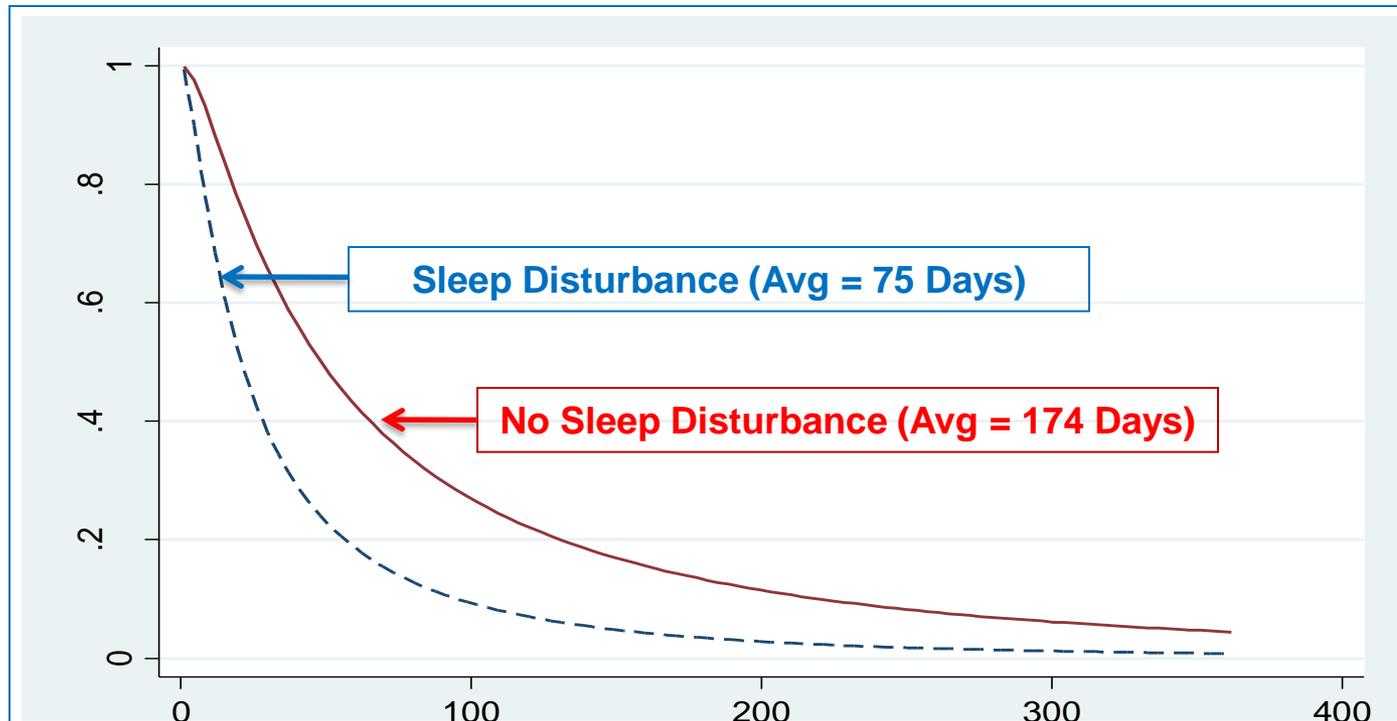
Pigeon, Pinquart & Conner (in Press), J Clin Psychiatry.

# Sleep Preceding Suicide in Veterans

- 423 Suicides in VISN 2 (NY) & VISN 11(PA) FY 2000-06
- Chart review of 381 (90%) who received services with Veterans Health Administration (VHA) providers in the year preceding death
- 45% had a documented sleep disturbance compared to 55% without sleep disturbance
- Outcome: Number of days between last VHA visit and death
- Controlling for: age, gender, VISN, presence of psychiatric symptoms, and presence of substance abuse symptoms

Pigeon, et al (2012), Am J Public Health.

# Sleep Preceding Suicide in Veterans



Number of Days Elapsed Between Last VHA Visit and Death

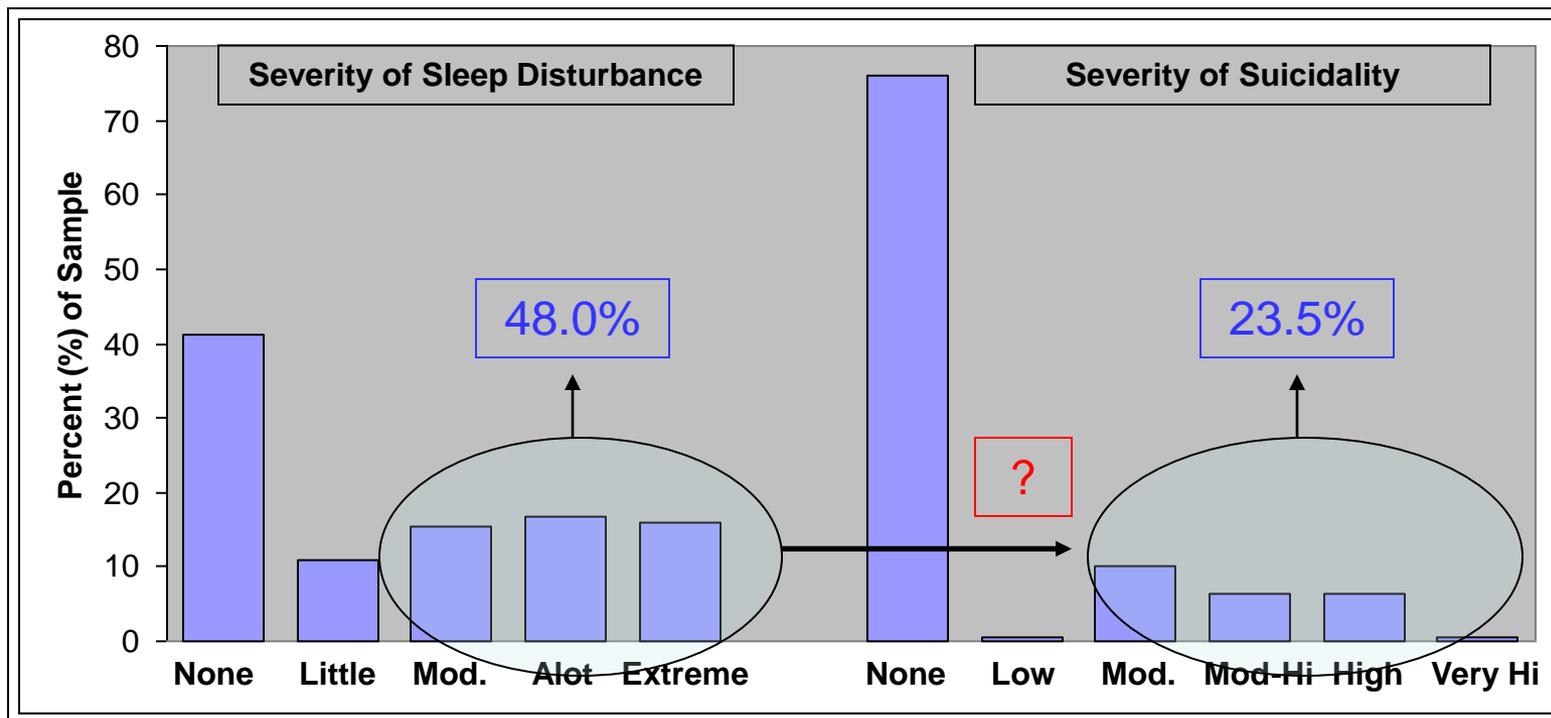
Pigeon, et al (2012), Am J Public Health.

# Sleep and Suicidal Ideation in Veterans

- Telephone based assessments performed by the VA Behavioral Telehealth Center (N=654)
  - Paykel Suicide Scale
  - PHQ-9 for depression
  - Alcohol module of the MINI Neuropsychiatric Interview
  - Trouble falling/staying asleep from the PTSD Checklist

Bishop, Pigeon, & Possemato (under review)

# Sleep and Suicidal Ideation in Veterans

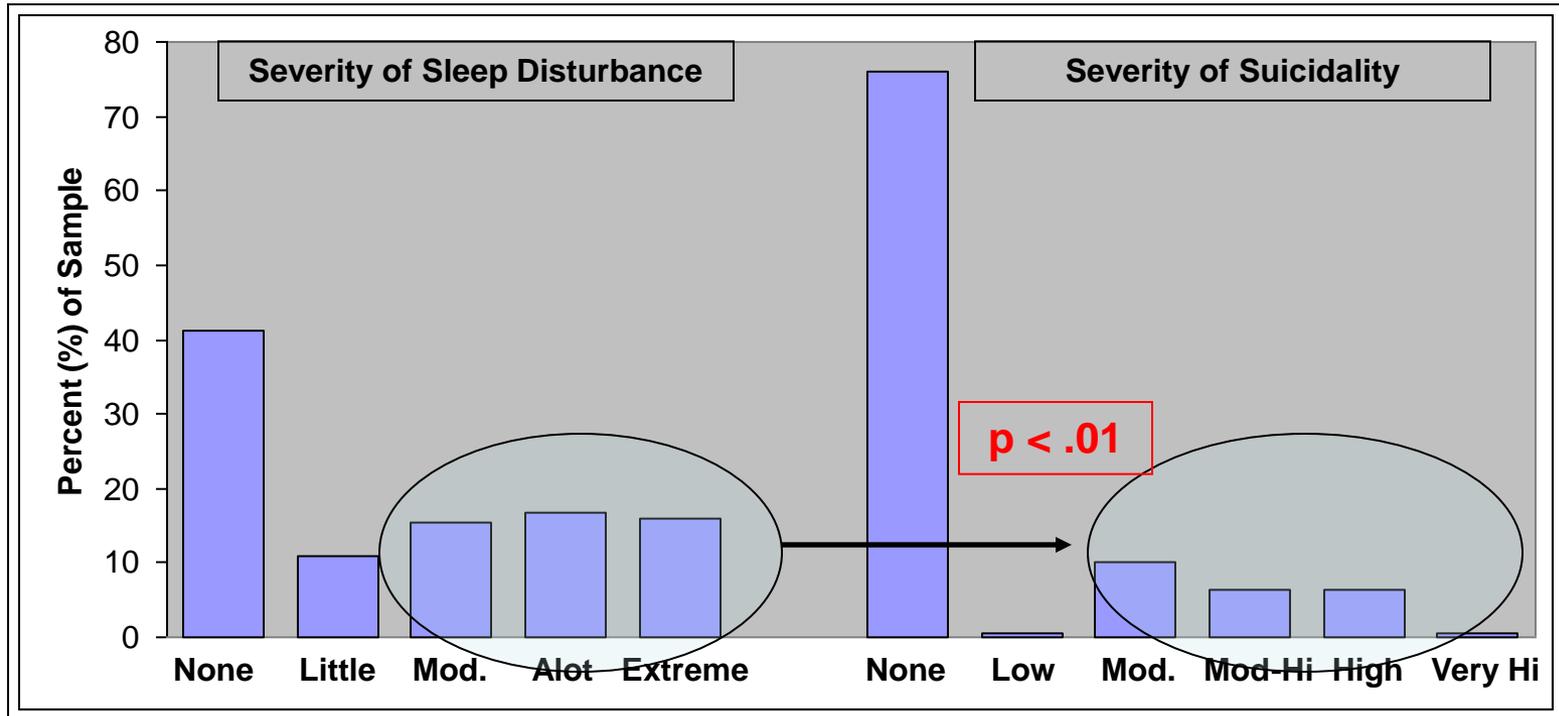


Multiple Regression analysis

Controlling for age, gender, etoh dep, depression

Bishop, Pigeon, & Possemato (under review)

# Sleep and Suicidal Ideation in Veterans



Multiple Regression analysis

Controlling for age, gender, etoh dep, depression

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# Summary

- Meta-analytic support for insomnia, nightmares and overall sleep disturbance as risks for suicidal thoughts and behaviors in general pop.
- Sleep disturbance associated with suicide among Veterans
- Insomnia-like sleep problems are associated with suicidal ideation in Veterans referred to behavioral telehealth

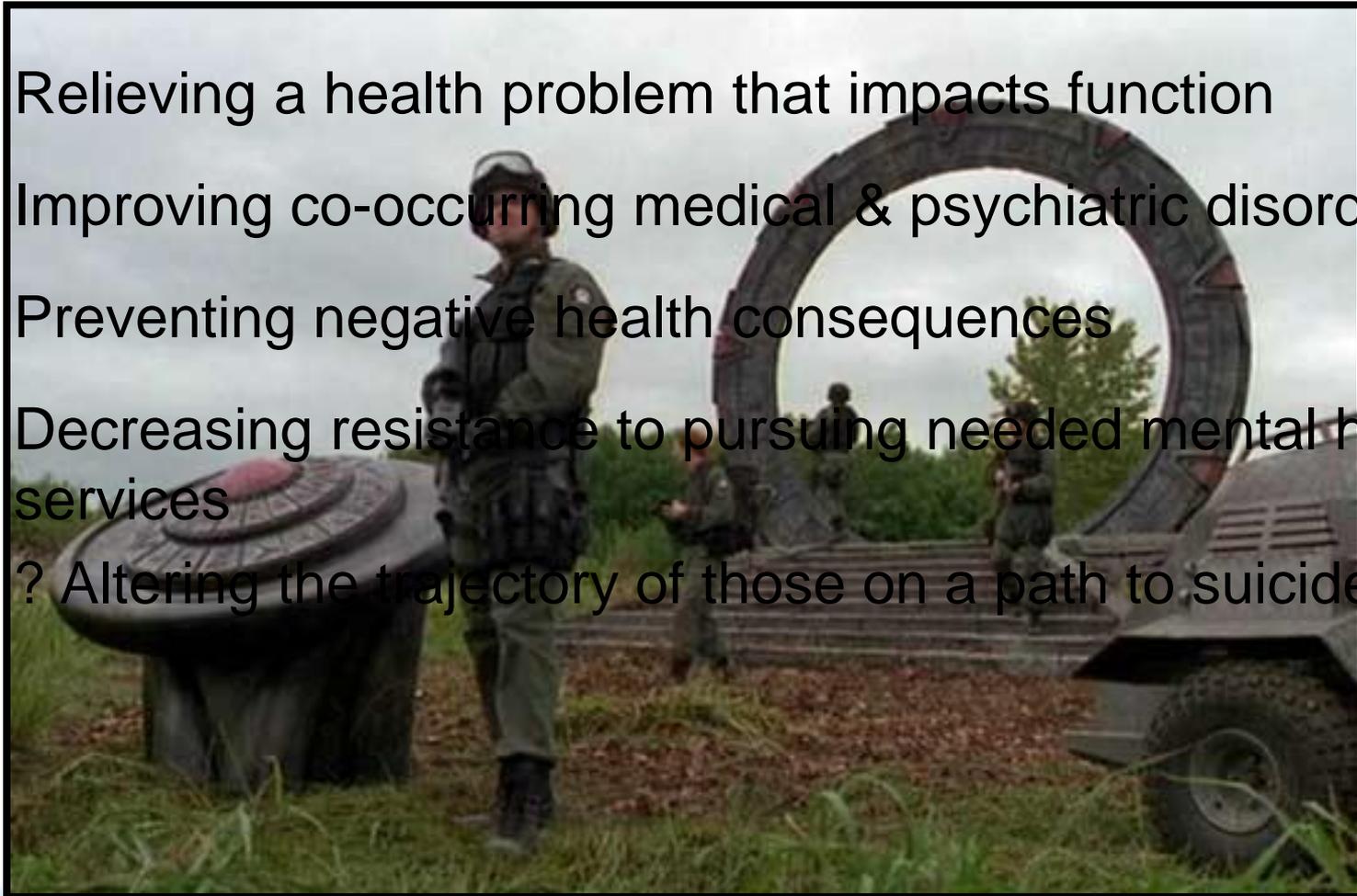
What Do We Do About It ?

“The best cure for insomnia is to get a lot of sleep.” -- W.C. Fields



# Treatment of Sleep Disturbances Represent a Gateway to:

- Relieving a health problem that impacts function
- Improving co-occurring medical & psychiatric disorders
- Preventing negative health consequences
- Decreasing resistance to pursuing needed mental health services
- ? Altering the trajectory of those on a path to suicide ?



# Thank You



# Case Study

- From a pilot study of CBT for insomnia and nightmares for Combat Veterans
- 6 individual sessions of CBT-I + 2 sessions of imagery rehearsal for nightmares
- 3 of 15 participants had suicidal ideation at baseline

Pigeon, Britton & Knox (under review)

# Case Study – Subject VV

- 66 y.o. male; multi-divorced; 3 adult children
- Multiple tours (special forces) with poor recall
- PTSD, MDD controlled with antidepressant
- Diabetes, hypertension, multiple meds
- Multiple current major life stressors
- No-showed, canceled multiple times, but completed

Pigeon, Britton & Knox (under review)

# Case Study – Subject OIF

- 40 y.o. male; married w/ children; employed FT
- 18 mo. tour (Base hospital medic & security)
- LBP, mTBI, migraines, hypertension, Reyanud's
- PTSD, MDD
- Multiple meds
- Almost nightly nightmares since return
- Anniversary of events coincided with post-tx assessment (large rebound of sx's)

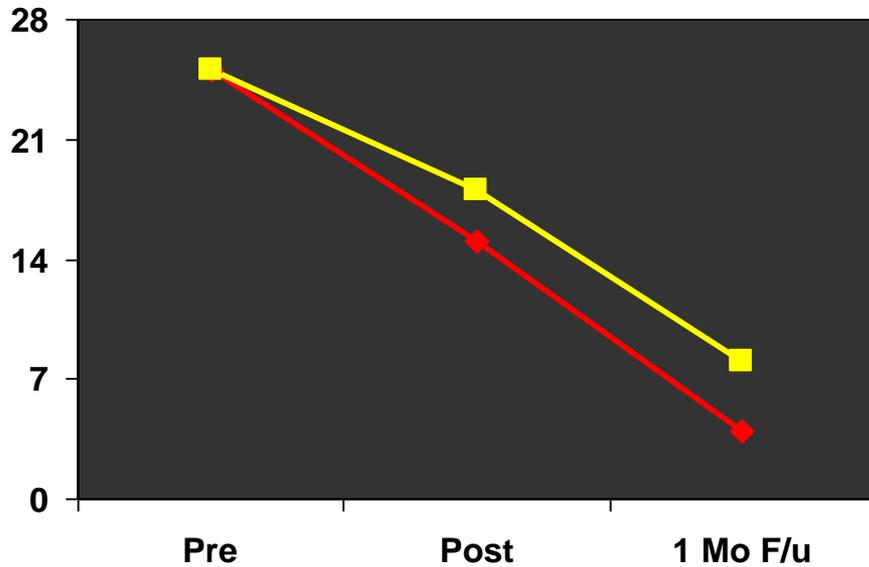
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# Case Results

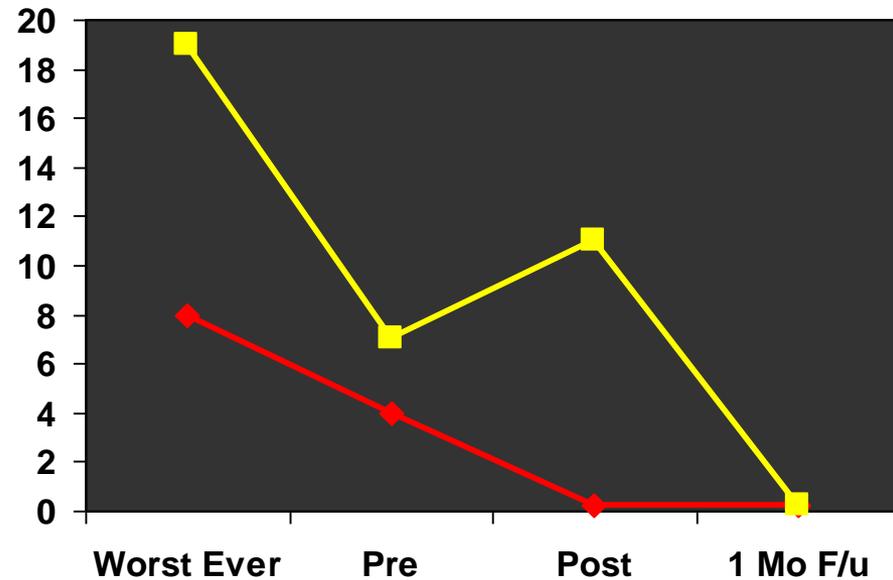
OIF

VV

## Insomnia Severity Index



## Scale for Suicidal Ideation



Pigeon, Britton & Knox (under review)