



Why People Die By Suicide: Recent Developments

Thomas Joiner, Ph.D.

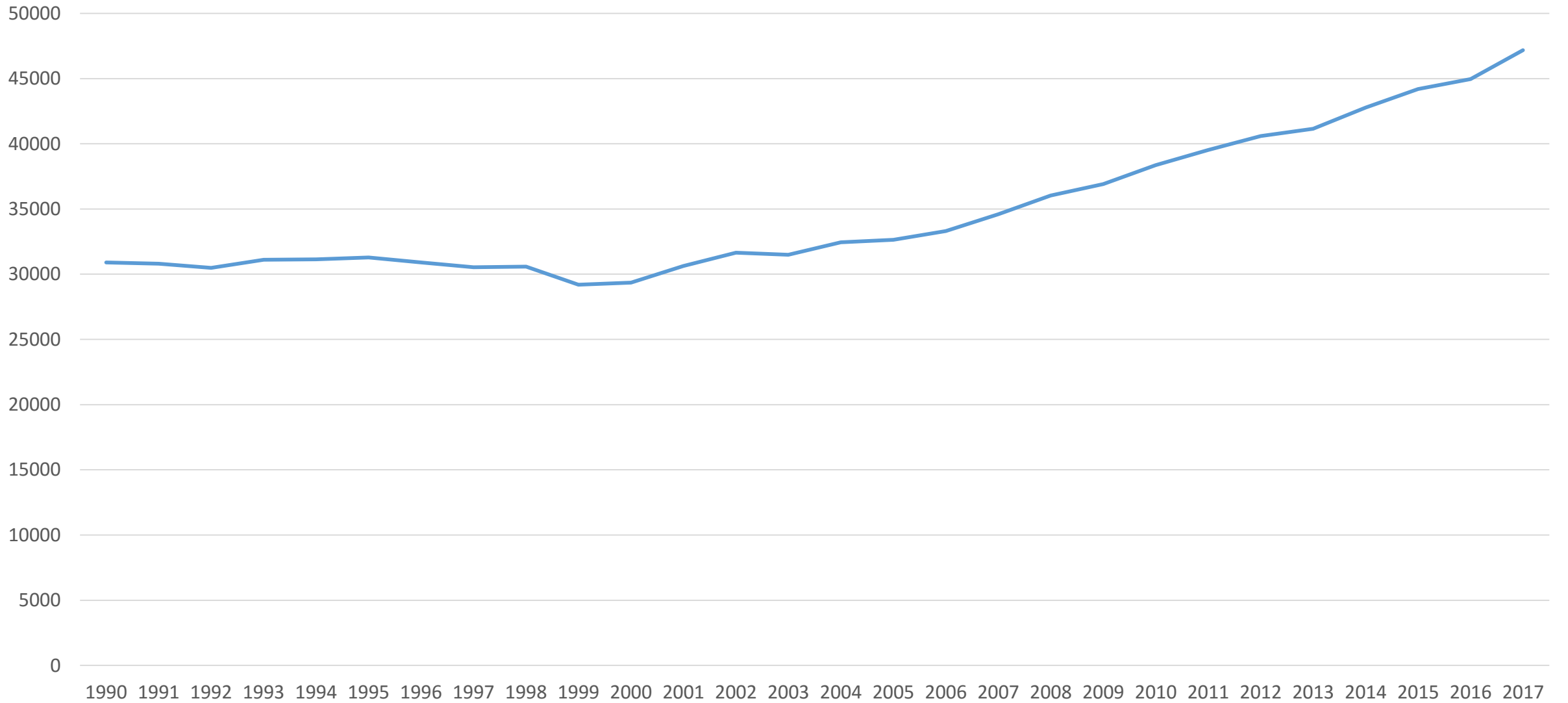
The Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor of Psychology

Florida State University

joiner@psy.fsu.edu

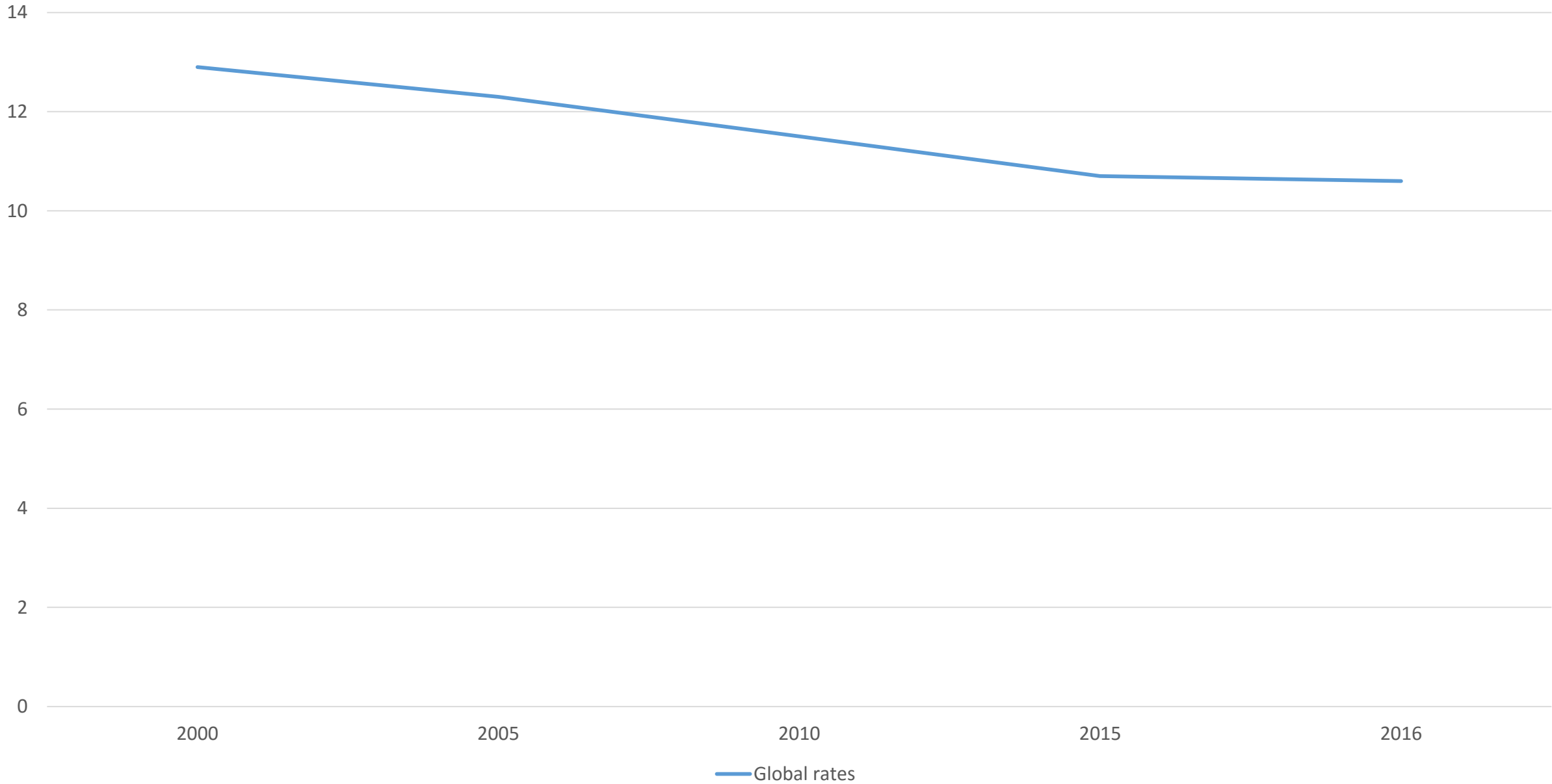
Magellan Healthcare 2019 Suicide Prevention Conference, Boise, ID

US Total



— US Total

Global rates (per 100,000 population)





In the Lake District, June 1957.



Case Examples from Robins' (1981) *The Final Months*

1. "He became very agitated...restlessly pacing from room to room. At other times he would sit almost motionless for prolonged periods. His speech diminished greatly...He began to lose weight and to say that he was a burden on his family and would never get well. He developed insomnia..."

Case Examples from Robins' (1981) *The Final Months*

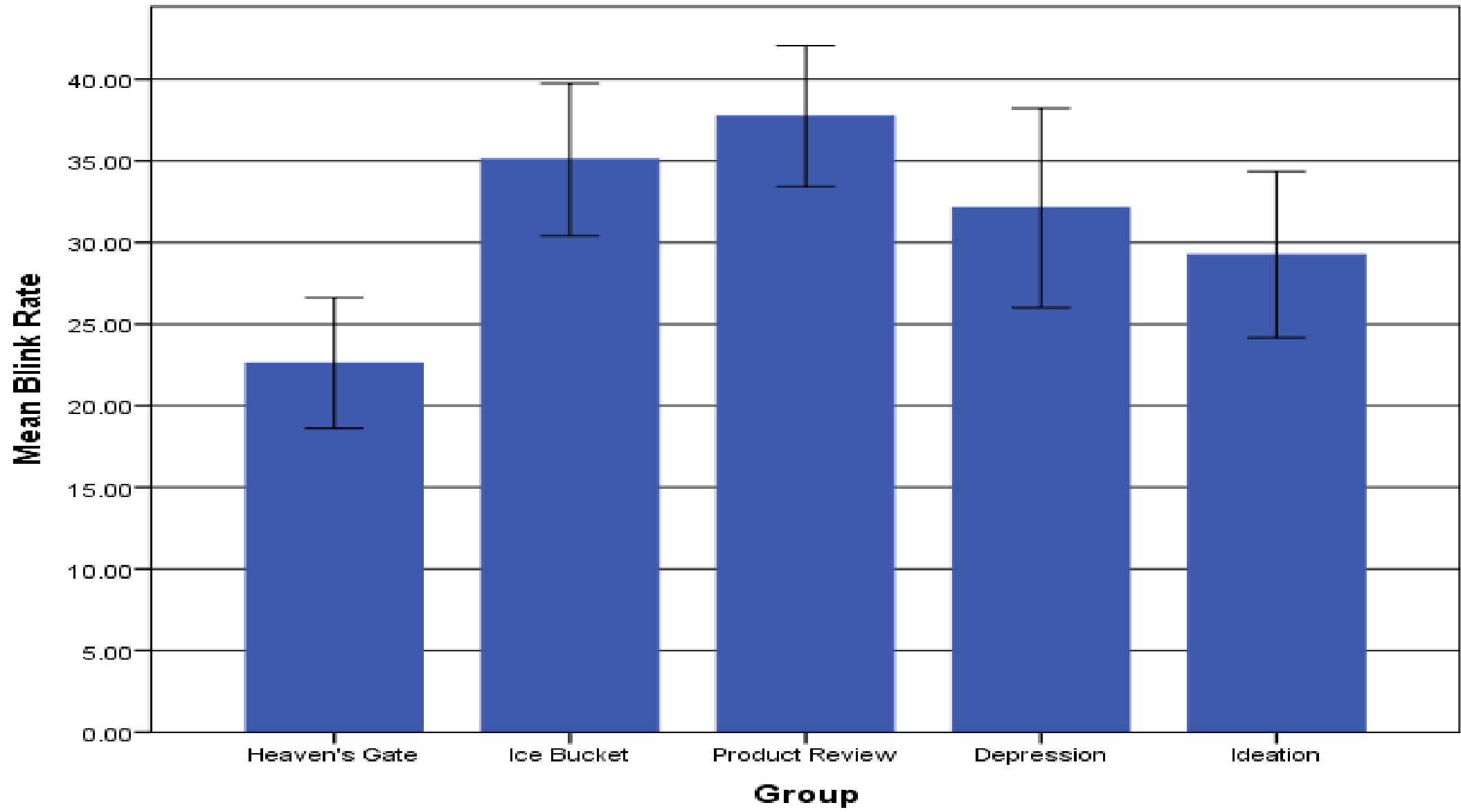
2. “He stopped eating and lost 25 pounds...and said that he was a burden to his family...”

Case Examples from Robins' (1981) *The Final Months*

3. he experienced “insomnia, weight loss (he lost 20-30 pounds in the last months of his life)...outbursts of rage...he had often paced the floor, crying and wringing his hands.”

Case Examples from Robins' (1981) *The Final Months*

4. "Severe insomnia developed...He ruminated about being a burden on his family, about the family spending all their money on him, and about his wife having no money for the future. He lost weight...He lost interest in everything, showing a diminution in affectionate relationships with his family and in his usual social and recreational activities...He paced the floor in agitated fashion."



Duffy et al. (2019).

A Good Theory

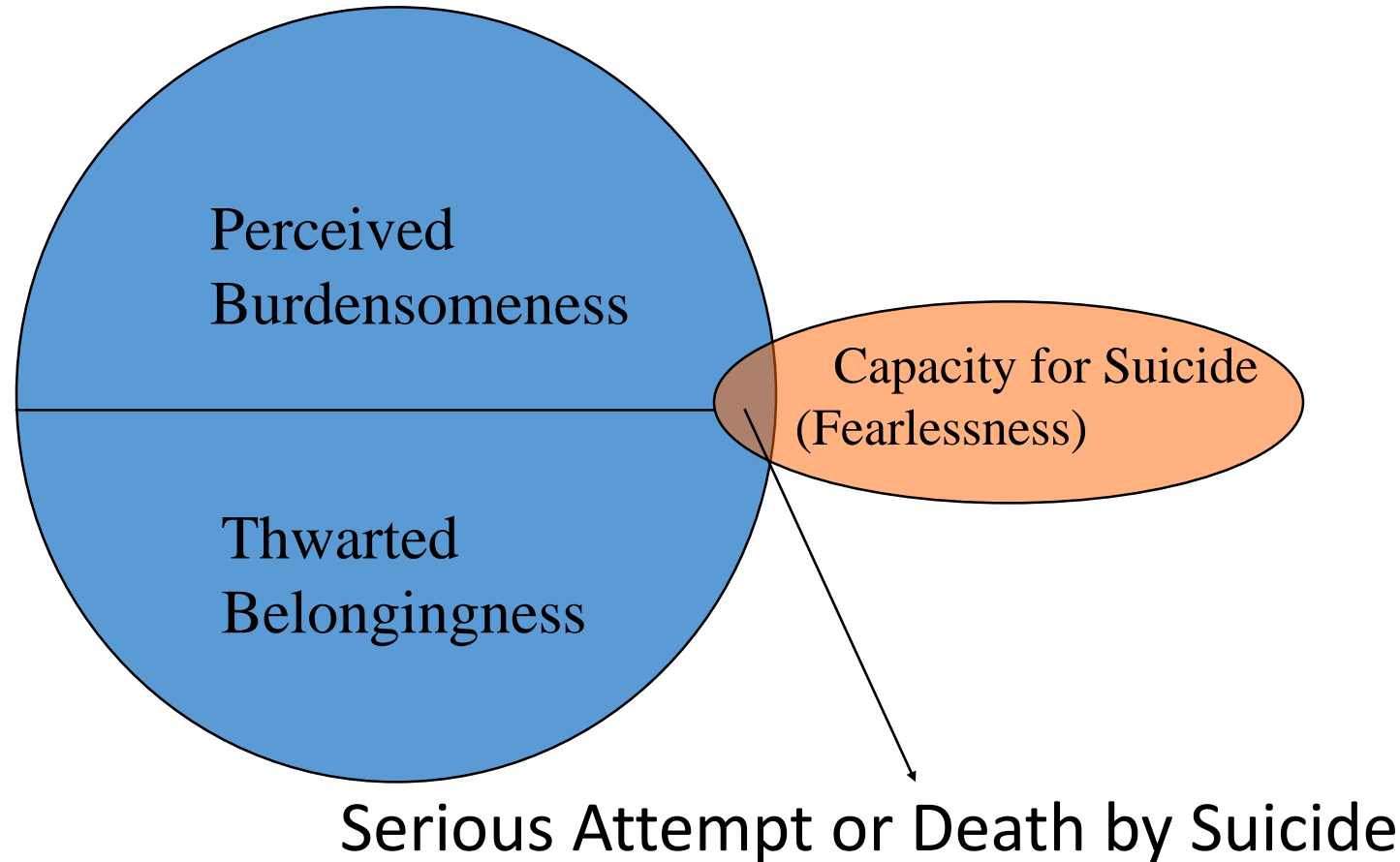
explains the
heretofore
unexplained....

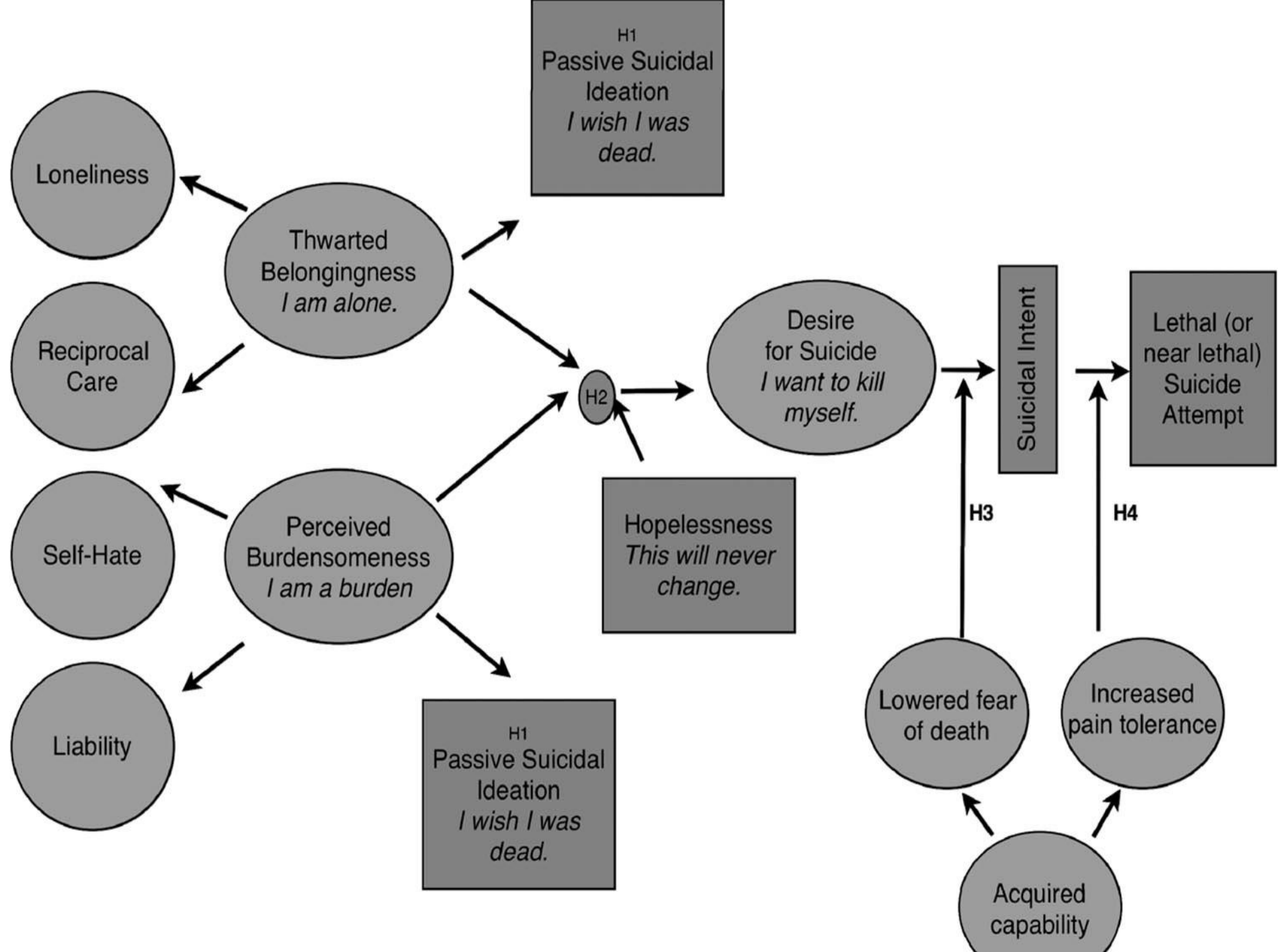
Why....?

- do suicide rates decrease in times of national crisis?

Sketch of the Theory

Those Who
Desire Suicide





Novel Predictions

- Veterinarians with more exposure to euthanizing animals should have lower fear of death. (They do; Witte et al., 2013).
- Hard exercise increases risk in Anorexia Nervosa (A. Smith et al.).

Suicide in Anorexia Nervosa

- We pitted these two accounts against each other, in a study of 239 women with AN, followed over ~15 years.
- 9 died by suicide, the leading cause of death among the sample.
- Of these 9, were they mostly highly lethal methods or not?

Suicide in Anorexia Nervosa

- The *least* lethal method: Ingestion of a powerful household product, along with alcohol (BAC = 0.16%). Cause of death was gastric hemorrhaging due to the product's ingredients.

- Next behavior: Called 911.

Holm-Denoma, Witte, Gordon, Herzog, Franko, D.L., Fichter, Quaflied,
& Joiner (2008).

The Taft Bridge, Connecticut Ave., Washington, DC

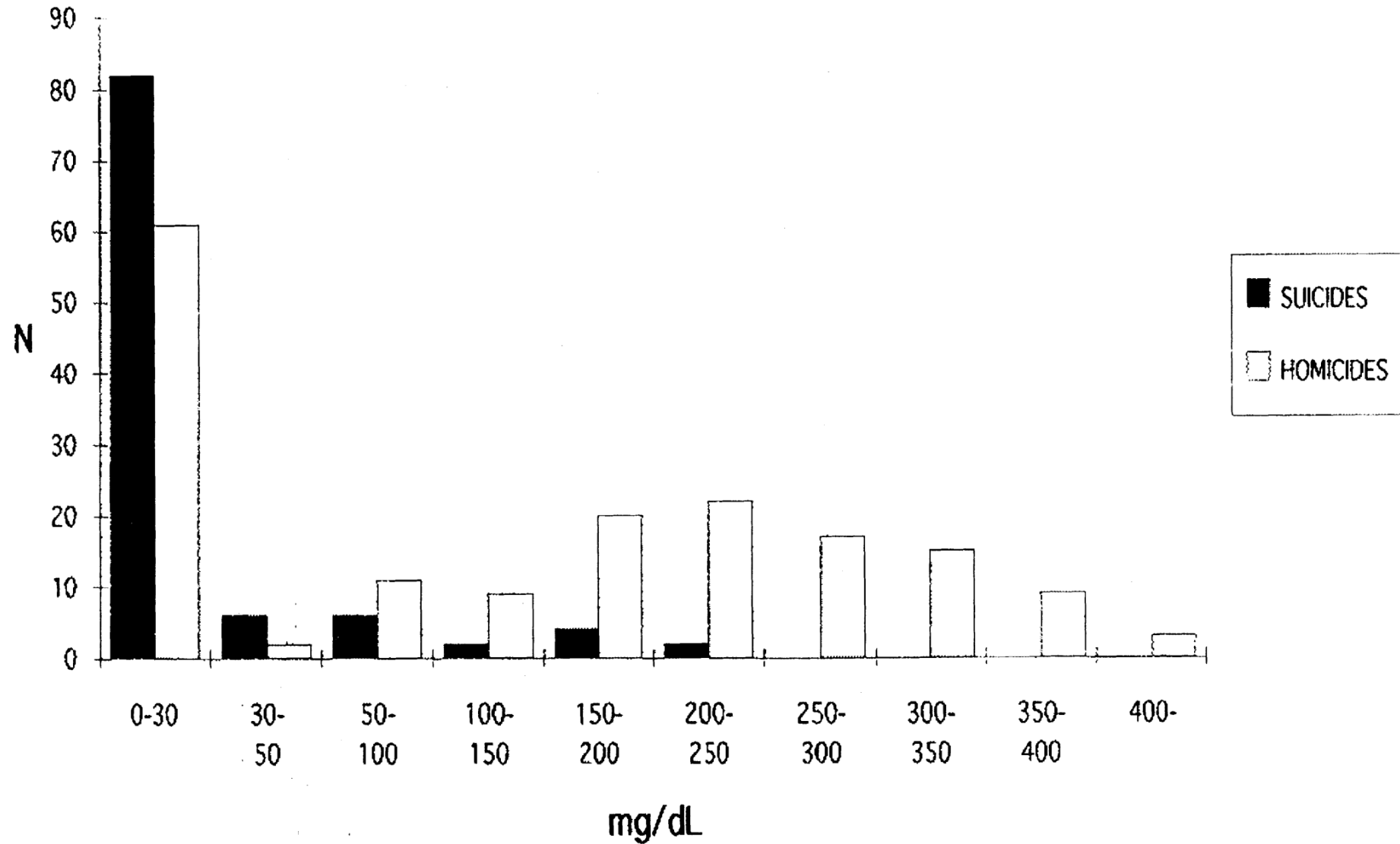


The suicide barrier (fence) on the Ellington Bridge



<u>Bridge</u>	Pre: '79-'86	Post: '87-'90
• Ellington	3.67 deaths	0.00 deaths
• Taft	1.69 deaths	2.00 deaths

Blood alcohol concentrations in victims of sharp force injuries in the Stockholm area
1983-92

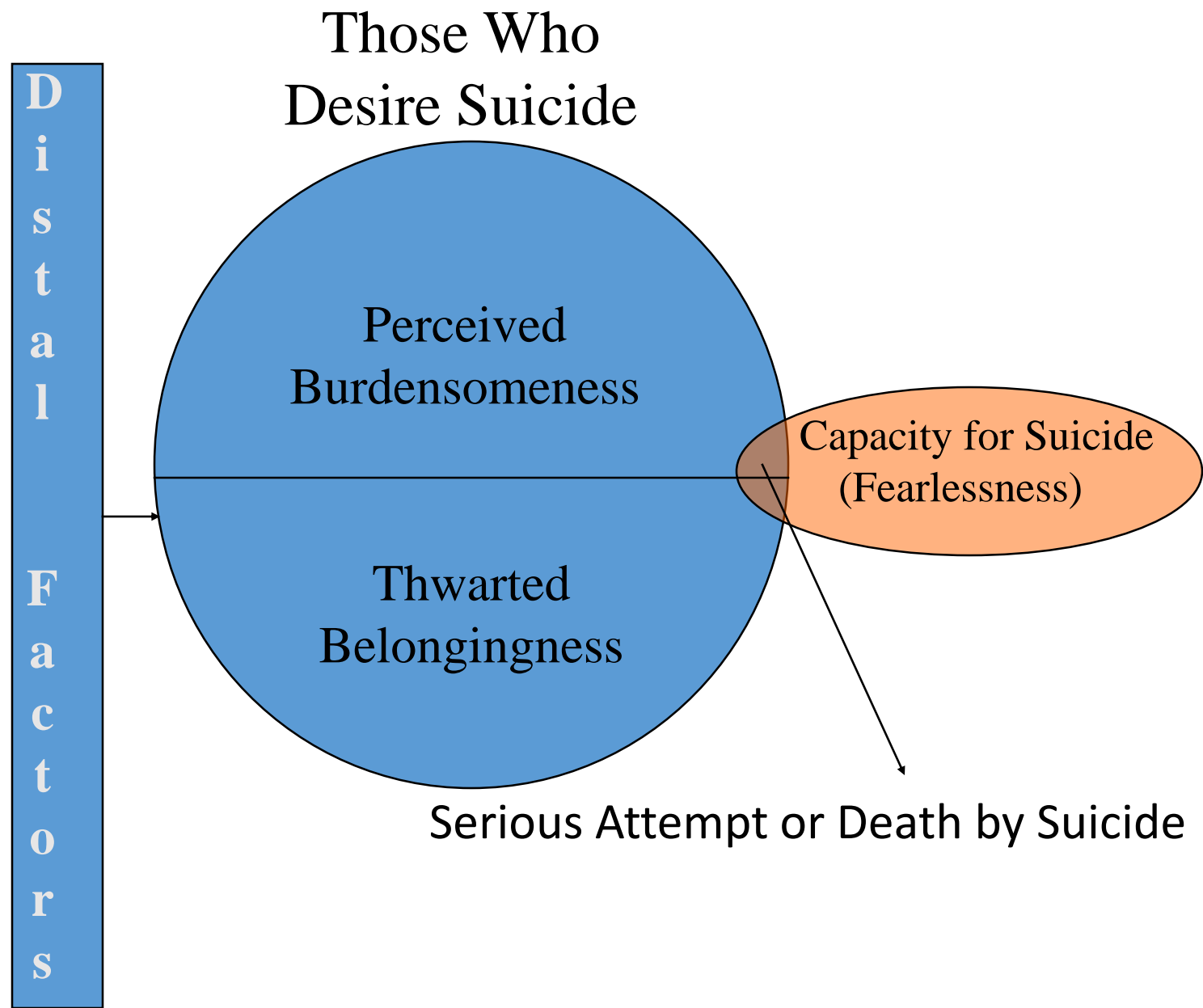


Blood Alcohol Content at the Time of Suicide

Anestis, Joiner, Hanson, & Gutierrez
(2014, *J Abnormal Psychology*):

92 studies, 167,894 decedents, same
pattern of findings.

Time frame is key to
understanding.



Empirical Support for the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide

Chu et al. meta-analysis (2017,
Psychological Bulletin, continued):

“...the interaction between thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness was significantly associated with suicidal ideation...”

Empirical Support for the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide

Chu et al. meta-analysis (2017,
Psychological Bulletin, continued):

“...However, effect sizes for these interactions were modest.”

The Military Suicide
Research Consortium
(msrc.fsu.edu)

Thank you for your attention

joiner@psy.fsu.edu