

Military-Related Moral Injury: The Role of Experiential Avoidance and Event Centrality in Increasing Suicide Risk Among U.S. Military Veterans

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Introduction

- Suicide among veterans is recognized as a significant public health concern.¹
- Recently, there has been increased attention on the emerging construct of moral injury (MI), as it has been linked to increased suicidal thoughts and behaviors.²
- Experiential avoidance³ (EA) and event centrality⁴ (EC) (i.e., the degree to which a traumatic event seems central to an individual's identity or life story), have been found to increase trauma pathology and psychological distress within veteran populations.
- Both EA and EC could be salient underlying factors that better clarify the linear relationship between MI and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Aim

- Examine the moderating effects of experiential avoidance and event centrality on the relationship between MI symptoms and suicidal thoughts, while controlling for posttraumatic stress symptoms.

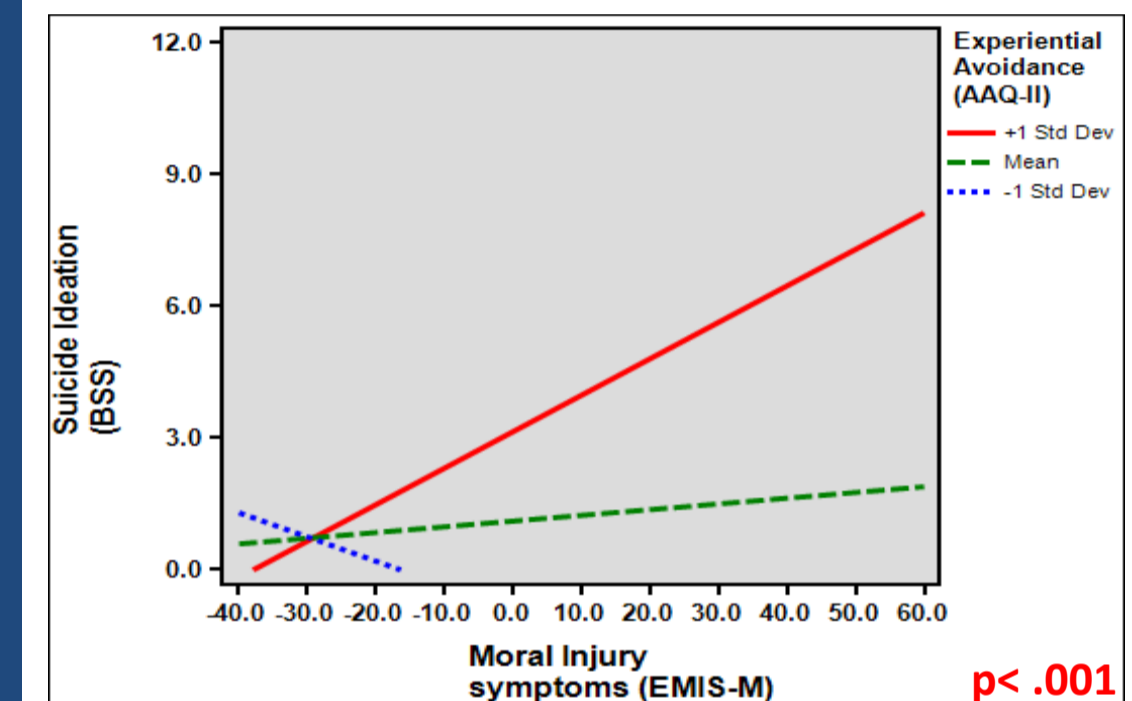
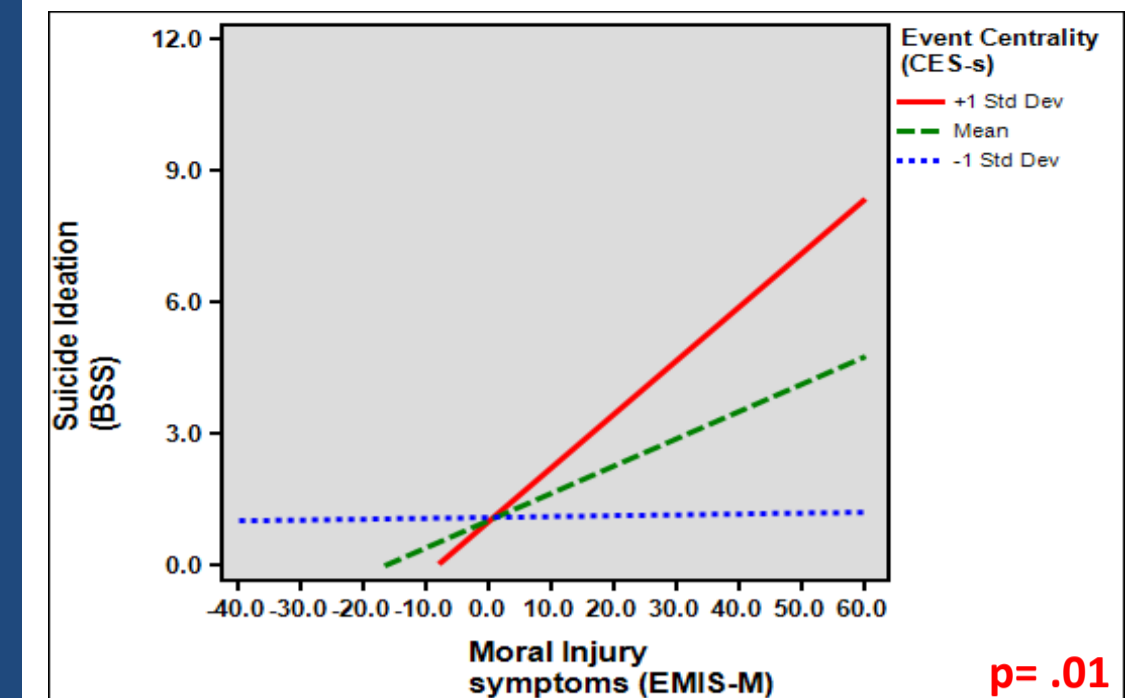
Method

- **Participants:** 300 U.S. military veterans
 - General demographics: Age: 42.4 (*SD*: 12.5); Male: 71%; White: 75%.
 - Military demographics: Army: 47%; Post 9/11: 47%; Combat deployment/s: 50%.
- **Procedure:** Recruited and screened through Amazon's Mechanical Turk, an online crowdsourcing website, where participants accessed an anonymous Qualtrics survey link.
- **Measures:**
 - Expressions of Moral Injury Scale- Military Version
 - Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II
 - Centrality of Event Scale-short form
 - Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation
 - PTSD Checklist for DSM-5
- **Analysis:** Hierarchical Moderated Regression.



Veterans with elevated moral injury symptoms, who attempt to avoid their internal experiences or who view their most traumatic event during military service as central to their identity, are more likely to think about suicide.

Results



Discussion

- These findings expand our understanding of the relation between MI and suicide, suggesting the exacerbating effects of EA and EC on suicidal thoughts, specifically among veterans experiencing greater moral injury symptoms.
- This research implies the value of certain interventions, for example ACT, which has been shown to effectively reduce both experiential avoidance⁵ and event centrality.⁶ Furthermore, it highlights the salience of testing the efficacy of ACT among veterans with elevated moral injury symptoms as a component of suicide prevention.

References

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