

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Suicidal Ideation Among Sexual Minority Veterans: Results From the 2005-2010 Massachusetts Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey

Blosnich, J. R., Bossarte, R. M., & Silenzio, V. M. B. (2012). Suicide ideation among sexual minority veterans: Results from the 2005-2010 Massachusetts behavioral risk factor surveillance survey. *American Journal of Public Health, 102*(S1), S44-S47. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2011.300565

SUMMARY: Researchers investigated suicidal ideation among sexual minority Veterans using data from the 2005-2010 Massachusetts Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey. The authors had two aims: 1) document the proportion of Veterans who reported sexual minority status and 2) compare mental health and suicide ideation between those reporting sexual minority status and those who did not.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Nearly four percent (3.76%, n = 1,700) of the Veterans sampled in this study reported suicidal ideation. This percentage is similar to findings from other studies of Veterans or the U.S. general population.
- Sexual minority Veterans reported significantly less availability of social and emotional support and higher prevalence of suicidal ideation.
- Although sexual minority Veterans had higher odds of suicidal ideation, the difference was explained by poor mental health and lower social and emotional support; therefore, this study supports the idea that it is not the sexual orientation status itself that causes problematic outcomes for minority Veterans.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Host trainings for professionals who work with military families on sexual minority status among Service members and how sexual identity may be related to mental health and other factors
- Tailor suicide prevention workshops to specific groups (e.g., LGBTQ Service members) as different groups have different social and emotional needs
- Disseminate information on suicide prevention and positive coping skills to all military couples, especially those who have a history of trauma

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support efforts to address the stigma surrounding sexual orientation and accessing mental health services among Service members
- Encourage research that examines effective intervention methods to address discrimination based on sexual orientation or identity
- Recommend integrating suicide prevention education into existing service delivery systems for military families

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METHODS

- Participants responded to the Massachusetts Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (2005–2010), which used random samples of non-institutionalized adults.
- Most data were ascertained with just one item on the survey; for example, social and emotional support was assessed by asking, "How often do you get the social and emotional support you need?"
- Statistical analyses were used to assess for group differences among sexual minority and heterosexual subgroups.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 1,700 Veterans (n = 61 sexual minority, n = 1,639 heterosexual). The sample composition was predominately male, between the ages of 40-64 years, and heterosexual.
- Ethnic composition of the sample is as follows: sexual minority (97% White, 3% Non-White); heterosexual (89% White, 11% Non-White).
- No information was provided on specific service branches of the sample.

LIMITATIONS

- The number of sexual minority respondents reporting suicidal ideation was small, thereby limiting generalizability.
- Other untested variables may be influencing results, such as, substance abuse, which were not included in the analyses.
- Causation between sexual minority status and outcomes cannot be determined because only cross-sectional data were collected.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate this study using a national sample to assess for suicidal ideation among sexual minority Service members
- Collect additional data to clarify the mechanisms underlying suicidal ideation among sexual minority Service members
- Gather data on personality and individual factors that may impact Service members' suicide risk, especially among LGBTQ Service members

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