

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Suicidal Ideation and Mental Distress Among Adults With Military Service History: Results From 5 US States

Blosnich, J. R., Gordon, A. J., & Bossarte, R. M. (2014). Suicidal ideation and mental distress among adults with military service history: Results from 5 US States. *American Journal of Public Health, 104*(S4), S595-S602.  
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**SUMMARY:** The association of military service history with past-year suicidal ideation and past-30-days mental distress in a sample of individuals was examined. Military service was defined as current or former active-duty service or National Guard or Reserve service. Results showed that military participants had higher odds of mental distress in the past 30 days than civilians.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Thirteen percent of the sample indicated military service.
- Among individuals 40-64 years of age, military service history was associated with both past-year suicidal ideation and past-30 day mental distress.
- Military participants were more likely to be married, have some college education, and be employed than civilians.
- Older (over 65 years of age) military participants had lower rates of mental distress than civilians within the same age range.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide information to military families about how to identify suicidal ideation in loved ones
- Compile and distribute a list of local, military- and community-based mental health resources
- Host classes to help Service members manage stress and emotional duress

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote reintegration programs that include attention to assisting Service members' family in adjusting to the Service member's return
- Recommend screening Service members for suicidal ideation at regular intervals
- Recommend professional development for service providers about assessment and identification of people at risk for self-harm behaviors

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## METHODS

- Data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's 2010 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System from five states were used.
- Participants were randomly selected and interviewed via telephone.
- Participants answered questions about past year suicidal ideation, past 30-day mental distress, and military service.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Twenty-six thousand six hundred eighty-five people participated (84% female).
- Thirteen percent of the sample indicated some military history.
- The race/ethnicity of the sample was mostly White (76%) and Latino/Latina (11%).

## LIMITATIONS

- The data were cross-sectional and any causal conclusions are inappropriate.
- The data only came from five states and may not be representative of the United States as a whole.
- There was variation across the wordings for suicidal ideation by state which may have yielded inconsistent results.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate the study and include a broader sample of participants
- Conduct a longitudinal study to evaluate suicide risk between Service members and civilians over time
- Develop a standardized measure of suicidal ideation and behavior that can be used with national studies

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:  
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>