

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
National
Guard

Soldier Background and Postinvestigative Events Associated With Timing of Suicide Following Deployment of U.S. Army National Guard Soldiers

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SUMMARY: Death by suicide in the U.S. has increased dramatically among Service members. This study examined differences among non-deployed (n=366) and deployed (n=327) Army National Guard Soldiers based on past behavioral and psychological events, and relationships among timing of suicide. Findings revealed further information on potential stressful events that relate to suicide among Guard Soldiers.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Suicides during deployment were more common among Guard Soldiers who were older in age (24-29 years) and had longer military service. Suicides that occurred 0 to 120 days post-deployment were most commonly related to transition problems.
- Family conflicts, employment problems, financial difficulties, and transition problems were more common events experienced for Soldiers who died by suicide within one year post-deployment.
- Higher rates of psychological and behavioral problems (e.g., criminal behavior, mental illness) were related to suicides that occurred over one year after return from deployment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops during reintegration to help families and Service members adjust to the Service members' return
- Enhance education and activities related to finances, families, and employment for military families to prepare them for reintegration transitions
- Offer pre and post-deployment support groups for Service members and their families

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs for identification of suicide-related symptoms and prevention of suicide in military families
- Recommend education of professionals (e.g., mental health and education professionals) on the increased risk of Service member suicide during reintegration
- Encourage collaboration among DoD programs and community-based organizations to support a smooth transition for departing Service members, especially those who have been referred for post-deployment health risk

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METHODS

- Data were extracted from the Reserve Component Manpower System which is a data base of previously collected surveys regarding Guard Soldiers' demographic characteristics and behavioral and psychological events.
- This study examined relationships among past events (e.g., parent-family problems) and suicides in Guard Soldiers. It also examined how these events and demographic characteristics were related to the time when the suicide occurred for deployed Soldiers.
- Statistical analyses were conducted to examine differences among non-deployed and deployed Guard Soldiers based on past events, and relationships among timing of suicide and events for deployed Soldiers.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample consisted of 705 Army National Guard Soldiers who died by suicide from 2007 through 2014. Information regarding race/ethnicity was not provided.
- Of the total sample, 327 (48%) of the Guard Soldiers had deployed once, while 52% (n=366) of the Guard Soldiers had never deployed.
- Most suicides had occurred 365 days post-deployment (n=222), while 23 Guard Soldiers died by suicide during deployment.
- Guard Soldiers' ages ranged from 17 to 29 years, with a majority who were single (67%) and of enlisted rank (75%).

LIMITATIONS

- Study findings were limited due to secondary data collection, thus findings may have not adequately captured the relationship of past events and Soldier suicides.
- There was a lot of time since the Soldier returned from deployment (e.g., 365 days post-deployment), thus it is difficult to determine whether the deployment or life events had greater influence on Soldier's suicide.
- Study measures were limited in that there was a lack of explicit detail as to how much influence each event (e.g., family conflict) had on Soldiers' suicide.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine relationships of suicide risk to specific behavioral health conditions, including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Explore the amount of influence military and life events have on Soldiers' who completed suicide at different time intervals during post-deployment
- Collect longitudinal data from current Service members regarding behavioral and psychological events, such as transition problems

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