

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Factors Associated With Suicidal Ideation in OEF/OIF Veterans

Lemaire, C. M., & Graham, D. P. (2011). Factors associated with suicidal ideation in OEF/OIF veterans. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 130(2-Jan), 231-238. doi:10.1016/j.jad.2010.10.021

SUMMARY: Mental health screenings of OEF/OIF Veterans were reviewed to examine factors associated with suicidal ideation. History of suicide attempts and documented mental health diagnoses (psychotic disorder, depressive disorder, or posttraumatic stress disorder [PTSD]) were associated with suicidal ideation.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Prior suicide attempts and being female were associated with higher rates of suicidal ideation.
- Having a mental health diagnosis (psychosis, depression, or PTSD) was associated with suicidal ideation; depression was associated with the most elevated risk for suicidal ideation.
- Having co-morbid depression and PTSD increased the risk of current suicidal ideation even more than having either diagnosis alone.
- Social support was protective against suicidal ideation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Host welcome back events for recently returned Veterans and their families in order to strengthen social support
- Offer on-going gatherings for Service members and Veterans to increase social ties among Service members
- Provide families with information related to suicide, including symptoms of suicidal ideation, and resources for those struggling with thoughts of suicide

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend routine and periodic screenings of recently returned Service members to examine for suicidal ideation and behavior
- Continue to support outreach activities, prevention efforts, and interventions aimed at decreasing suicide-related behavior among Service members
- Encourage training for service providers working with returning Service members regarding how to recognize the sign and symptoms of suicidal ideation and behaviors

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METHODS

- All returning OEF/OIF Veterans registering with the Houston Veterans Affairs Medical Center were assessed for PTSD, substance use, depression, and overall functioning.
- Deployment risk and resiliency factors were rated by psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists.
- The records of Veterans initially screened between May 2004 and March 2008 were identified; clinical raters reviewed the records for suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and mental health diagnoses.
- Veterans were separated into two groups: those with and without suicidal ideation.

PARTICIPANTS

- Study participants included 1,716 Veterans (89% male).
- Fifty percent of participants were White, 27% were Black, and 18% were Latino.
- No information on military branch was presented.

LIMITATIONS

- The standardized interview was developed for clinical purposes and not designed for research which could impact the accuracy of results.
- The data were retrospective and may be biased.
- These findings were specific to Houston-based OIF/OEF Veterans and may not generalize to other populations.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate the efficacy of interventions designed to bolster social support among Service members as a protection against suicidal behavior
- Utilize a validated measure of suicidal behavior to increase validity of the study
- Replicate this study with Service members from other hospitals/clinics, including those in other geographic parts of the country

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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