

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Army

Characteristics of Suicides Among US Army Active Duty Personnel in 17 US States From 2005 to 2007

Logan, J., Skopp, N. A., Karch, D., Reger, M. A., & Gahm, G. A. (2012). Characteristics of suicides among US Army active duty personnel in 17 US States from 2005 to 2007. *American Journal Of Public Health, 102*(S1), S40-S44.
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SUMMARY: The authors of this study provided descriptive data for U.S. Army suicides that occurred from 2005 to 2007 in 17 U.S. states using two large scale surveillance systems: National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) and the Department of Defense Suicide Event Report (DoDSER).

KEY FINDINGS:

- Most decedents were White males, less than 30 years old, married, and in the enlisted ranks. Fifty-five percent of suicides were by firearm and 25% of incidents involved alcohol.
- The most common health and stress-related circumstances preceding death were intimate partner problems (45%) and military-related stress (41%), with the latter including current job problems and combat experiences.
- Many decedents showed symptoms of mental health distress; 36% communicated their intent to self-harm, 32% were identified as having a depressed mood, 32% had a recent crisis, and 23% received a mental health diagnosis.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide a wide range of social support to Soldiers; might consider ways to encourage Veterans and their families to continue or begin to integrate new activities that build positive intimate partner relationships and increase coping skills to handle a variety of possibly stressful situations
- Provide training and professional development to staff about the signs and risk factors for suicide as well as procedures for providing appropriate referral services
- Disseminate information about the resources available to Service members and their families who are coping with mental health issues

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support large-scale, community-based suicide prevention efforts including awareness and prevention campaigns
- Continue support for increasing awareness of and access to a wide variety of support services (including access to behavioral health services) for active duty Soldiers and Veterans should be sustained
- Recommend education for professionals working with military families about the impact of deployment on children

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METHODS

- Decedents were drawn from the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) and the Department of Defense Suicide Event Report (DoDSER).
- Cases were identified in the DoDSER database, then linked to NVDRS using incident variables (i.e., state and date of death) and decedent demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, Veteran status, and occupation).
- Data were linked between these databases to comprehensively describe the characteristics of the decedents. Suicides occurred between 2005 and 2007 in 17 U.S. states.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample drawn from the linked database(s) was N = 56.
- Most decedents were White males, less than 30 years old, married, and in the enlisted ranks.
- The sample only included U.S. Army suicide decedents.

LIMITATIONS

- Causality can not be established between the circumstances and the suicides; therefore, it is not known from the data if a preceding issue, like job-related stress, was the main cause of the suicide.
- No self-report data from the decedents prior to their suicide were used (i.e., no knowledge of self-perceptions of these individuals on scales like mood, depression, etc.). This impacts the researcher's ability to accurately gauge preceding events.
- The sample consisted of only U.S. Army decedents and may not be generalizable to other branches of the military.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate the findings from this study in additional states.
- Examine causality between previous circumstances, suicide ideation, and suicide
- Continue to explore the characteristics of suicide decedents across all service branches and components

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