

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## Precipitating Circumstances of Suicide Among Active Duty U.S. Army Personnel Versus U.S. Civilians, 2005-2010

Logan, J. E., Skopp, N. A., Reger, M. A., Gladden, M., Smolenski, D. J., Floyd, C. F., & Gahm, G. A. (2014). Precipitating circumstances of suicide among active duty U.S. Army personnel versus U.S. civilians, 2005-2010. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 45(1), 65-77. doi:10.1111/sltb.12111

**SUMMARY:** To better understand the differences among suicide events between Soldiers and civilians, it is important to evaluate precipitating factors. Both Soldiers and civilian decedents experienced stress related to mental health symptoms and intimate partner relationships near the time of their deaths.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- There were no significant differences in the health- and stress-related precipitating circumstances between Soldier and civilian decedents.
- Mental health symptoms and intimate partner relationship difficulties were identified as the two most common precipitators to suicide among both Soldier and civilian samples.
- It was estimated that 27% of Army and 28% of civilian decedents were receiving mental health treatment near time of death.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop classes that teach coping skills to help manage Service members' feelings of distress
- Disseminate written materials about the warning signs related to suicidal ideation and where to receive help on installations
- Create support groups for families of Service members who have committed suicide to receive social support

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage military families to attend educational programs about warning signs of suicidal ideation
- Recommend supportive services and programming for Service members who show signs of distress
- Continue to provide support for programs that engage military families in activities related to health and wellness

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## METHODS

- Data about the Soldiers' military service (e.g., deployment history) were obtained from the Department of Defense Suicide Event Reports; additional data about Soldiers and civilians were gathered from the National Violent Death Reporting System.
- Participants' data were from Soldiers and civilians who resided in the 18 states who participated in the National Death Reporting System from 2005-2010.
- Sources included law enforcement records, medical examiner and toxicology reports, and death certificates.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Decedent data related to suicides were analyzed from 141 Soldiers and 563 civilians. Researchers matched three to four civilian decedents for every one Soldier. Most of the sample was male (96%).
- The sample was predominately White (72% of Army and 76% of civilian), followed by Black (13% of Army and 12% of civilian) and Latino (8% of Army and 6% of civilian). The rest of the sample was identified as "Other" race (7% of Army and 6% of civilian).
- The majority of decedents were between 18 years and 39 years old. About half (46%) of Army decedents had at least one deployment.

## LIMITATIONS

- Group comparisons were limited due to the restricted amount of data that were able to be analyzed from large, shared databases.
- There is no indication of what data sources supplied which information that was used for analyses, which limits the ability to interpret findings and replicate the study.
- There were no data presented on the rationale for including a much larger number of civilian decedents in the study, so it is unclear as to why a larger civilian sample was used in the analyses.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine additional group differences related to suicide attempts and completions between Service members in different service branches and civilian populations
- Study additional precipitating factors that may influence suicide events in Service members
- Examine if participation in prevention programming reduces suicidal ideation among Service members

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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