



Supporting
Military Families
Through Research
and Outreach

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

The Prevalence and Psychosocial Correlates of Suicide Attempts Among Inpatient Adolescent Offspring of Croatian PTSD Male War Veterans

Maršanić, V.B., Margetić, B.A., Zešević, I. & Herceg, M. (2014). The prevalence and psychosocial correlates of suicide attempts among inpatient adolescent offspring of Croatian PTSD male war Veterans. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 45, 577-587. doi:10.1007/s10578-013-0426-2.



231 Croatian adolescents whose fathers had severe military-related PTSD and who were admitted to a psychiatric inpatient unit participated in a study examining the prevalence and psychosocial correlates of suicide attempts. Adolescent internalizing symptoms, family dysfunction, lower levels of maternal and paternal care, and paternal over control were significantly associated with suicide attempts.

Key Findings:

- 62% of the youth had attempted suicide in the previous 6 months.
- Adolescents who reported school failure were more likely to have attempted suicide. Teens living in urban areas were more likely to have attempted suicide compared to those in rural areas.
- Adolescents who had attempted suicide reported significantly higher levels of internalizing problems and lower levels of externalizing problems compared to non-attempters.
- Attempters reported poorer family functioning (both mothers and fathers were less affectionate and more overprotective and controlling) compared to non-attempters.
- Higher levels of problems in family functioning and parental overcontrol were associated with suicide attempts.

Implications for Programs:

- Family programs could partner with school personnel to identify youth who may be at risk for self-harm behavior in order to coordinate supportive services.
- Programs could include modules in their parenting curricula about warning signs for teen suicide as well as helpful resources.
- Programs could provide information on PTSD and their implications for teen suicide.

Implications for Policies:

- Policies could recommend that programs serving adolescents who engage in self-harm behavior include a family component in all phases of the treatment process.
- Policies could continue to allocate funding for programs aimed at decreasing suicidal ideation in adolescents.
- Policies could recommend funding professional development for family care workers about detection and effective responses to young people who are engaging in suicidal ideation or behavior.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could include additional comparison groups such as non-psychiatrically hospitalized adolescents and those without fathers with PTSD to make this data more understandable contextually.
- Additional studies could use non-self-report measures of suicidal behavior and behavior problems in order to strengthen these findings.

Prepared by the Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu

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Background Information

Methodology:

- Adolescents (12-18 years of age) with biological fathers who were diagnosed with chronic PTSD related to combat exposure during the 1991-1995 Homeland War in Croatia who were admitted to a psychiatric inpatient unit were included in this study.
- Exclusion criteria included: adolescents with direct exposure to war trauma themselves, adolescents with a significant medical illness or disability, and families in which the father had a psychotic disorder. 63% of those eligible agreed to participate.
- Adolescents were psychiatrically assessed during the first two weeks of their admission to the hospital. They completed self-report measures of demographics, suicide attempts, competencies and behavioral problems, family functioning, and parental bonding.
- Chi square and multilogistic regression analyses were used to test associations of suicide attempt with demographics and risk factors. T-tests determined mean differences in adolescent behavior problems, family functioning, and parental bonding between suicide attempters and non-attempters.

Participants:

- 231 adolescents participated (52% girls).
- Average age: 15.20 years (SD=1.55 years); 68% were still in school, 32% had dropped out of school.
- Socio-economic status: 59% low, 21% middle, 12% poverty, 9% high.
- Residential area: 61% rural, 39% urban.
- Racial/ethnic composition: 94% Croatian, 6% other.

Limitations:

- These findings are correlational, and causal relationships are not appropriate.
- There was no comparison group of non-psychiatric adolescents, so it is difficult to interpret some of these findings.
- All of the participants had fathers with severe PTSD, and so these results may not generalize beyond this group.
- The measures were all self-report and may be affected by biases.

Assessing Research that Works

Assessing Research that Works				
Research Design and Sample	Quality Rating: ★★☆☆			
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★☆☆)	Questionable (★☆☆)
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research Methods	Quality Rating: ★★☆☆			
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★☆☆)	Questionable (★☆☆)
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Limitations	Quality Rating: ★★☆☆			
	Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★★)	Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★)	Limited Several Limitations (★★☆☆)	Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★☆☆)
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Implications	Quality Rating: ★★☆☆			
	Excellent (★★★★)	Appropriate (★★★)	Limited (★★☆☆)	Questionable (★☆☆)
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications				
Overall Quality Rating ★★☆☆				