

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Military Versus Civilian Murder-Suicide

Patton, C. L., McNally, M. R., & Fremouw, W. J. (2017). Military versus civilian murder-suicide. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(17), 2566–2590. doi:10.1177/0886260515593299

SUMMARY: Military members and civilians have different patterns of violent behaviors; however, little is known about the differences between military members and civilians who perpetrated murder-suicide (i.e., a person kills someone[s] and then commits suicide within one day). This study analyzed data from 259 military and 259 civilian murder-suicide perpetrators to compare their differences in demographics and behaviors. Results revealed significant differences between military and civilian murder-suicide perpetrators in terms of age, motive, and behavioral factors.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Military murder-suicide perpetrators were older and were more likely to be married than civilian perpetrators.
- Compared to civilian perpetrators, military perpetrators were more likely to commit murder-suicide due to declined health problems but less likely due to amorous jealousy.
- Compared to civilian perpetrators, military perpetrators were less likely to be intoxicated and less likely to have intimate partner violence problems.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Disseminate information on military bases about where to seek help when Service members are in distress
- Offer support groups for Service members who experience poor health to promote coping skills
- Provide workshops to military families on useful communication skills to improve family cohesion

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that address the unique challenges that Service members might encounter after leaving the military
- Raise awareness on military bases about how untreated health problems may lead to violence, including murder-suicide incidents
- Encourage the training of professionals working with Service members regarding common motives that cause Service members to perpetrate murder-suicide

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Data were obtained from the National Violent Death Reporting System between 2003 and 2010.
- Measures included each participant's demographic information, military status, motive for murder, and victim-perpetrator relationship.
- Data were analyzed to examine the differences between the military and civilian murder-suicide perpetrator groups.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 518 male murder-suicide perpetrators; half of them served in the military (n = 259) whereas the other half never served in the military (n = 259).
- The average ages of the military and civilian samples were 57.05 years (SD = 18.06) and 41.56 years (SD = 13.72), respectively.
- Both the military and civilian samples were primarily White (80% and 73%, respectively) and Black (both 19%); however, the civilian sample also included 8% of Asian Americans and Native Americans, whereas the ratio of Asian Americans and Native Americans was less than 1% in the military sample.

LIMITATIONS

- Only male perpetrators were included in the study, so the findings cannot be applied to female perpetrators.
- It was unclear whether the military perpetrators were still in the military when committed murder-suicide or how many years they served in the military, which could be confounding factors in the study.
- Military status was not confirmed by official sources (e.g., military records); therefore, it may not truly represent some participants' military status.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Analyze data from both male and female perpetrators so that the findings can be better generalized
- Examine whether Veteran's length of time served in the military influenced their possibility of perpetrating murder-suicide
- Explore other factors (e.g., socioeconomic status) that are associated with murder-suicide

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>