Military Versus Civilian Murder-Suicide


**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
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

Design
Appropriate Research Plan and Sample

Methods
Appropriate Measurement and Analysis

Limitations
Few

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