

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Perspectives of Suicide Bereaved Individuals on Military Suicide Decedents' Life Stressors and Male Gender Role Stress

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SUMMARY: Although men are more likely to commit suicide, few studies have explored the association between male gender role stressors and suicide within the military. This study utilized the perspectives of bereaved family members' to identify male gender role stressors (e.g. conflicts between work and family commitments, emotional in-expressiveness) that were associated with the suicide of male Service members. Findings from the pilot study showed the male gender role stressors adequately predicted male gender role stress in male Service members who committed suicide. In addition, the study showed that legal or trauma stressors predicted higher levels of male gender role stress at least one month prior to suicide .

KEY FINDINGS:

- Deceased male Service members were characterized as having a strong sense of honor, strength, and achievement while also showing high levels of stoicism and excessive need for control.
- Divorce proceedings predicted high levels of male gender role stress at one month and one year prior to suicide.
- Witnessing the death of a fellow Service member or violence against civilians while deployed for combat predicted high levels of male gender role stress at least one month prior to suicide.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop support groups for Active Duty male Service members to attend during a divorce
- Provide training to build emotional awareness, social attachment, and interpersonal relationship skills in Active Duty male Service members
- Disseminate information on legal services and resources available to Active Duty male Service members who experience a divorce

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend professional education on how to build and encourage emotional awareness for professionals working with Service members
- Promote suicide awareness and awareness of stressors that may increase the risk of suicide in Active Duty male Service members
- Support collaborations with community-based organizations to provide courses and training on suicide prevention and awareness for families of Service members

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited at the second and third annual Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar.
- Due to the sensitive nature of the study, participants were required to complete a detailed consent form which provided grief support resources.
- Participants completed a survey that collected demographic information, information about the Service members' medical and mental health history, life stressors, and male gender role stressors.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were bereaved family members of Active Duty male Service members who committed suicide.
- Sixty-five bereaved family members completed the survey; a majority were women (86%), parents (45%), and White (92%).
- Decedents represented multiple branches including Army (54%), Marine Corps (19%), Navy (14%), Air Force (6%) and Coast Guard (3%).
- Majority of the decedents were enlisted personnel (45%) with at least one completed combat deployment (66%).

LIMITATIONS

- The study design utilized self-reports for survey completion. Self-reports of past events may be biased as they require participants to remember and report past events accurately.
- Accounts from the perspective of bereaved survivors were used to represent the beliefs held by the decedents. These accounts may not accurately reflect Service members' beliefs.
- Majority of the participants in the study were women. This limits the ability of the findings to represent accounts of bereaved male family members.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate the association between male gender role stressors and divorce
- Expand study to Service members who have attempted suicide or are hospitalized due to a suicide attempt
- Include the perspectives of siblings and other types of bereaved survivors

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