

## **SUICIDE AND THE MILITARY**

There are 36 thousand suicides in the United States each year (2015). That's almost 100 a day. Veterans make up 22 of those daily suicides and that number has continued to increase over the past 10 years.

In certain branches of the military, suicide rates have almost doubled in the last decade. However, Pentagon data shows that 52 percent of military suicides were committed by active-duty service members who had never been in combat. Research shows that service members who were never deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq may suggest that mental health issues and life circumstances may play a larger role in military suicide than the stresses of combat.

Although historically, the suicide death rate in the U.S. Army have been below the civilian rate, the suicide rate in the U.S. Army began climbing in the early 2000s, and by 2008, it exceeded the demographically matched civilian rate. Concerns about this increase led to partnership between the Army and the National Institute of Mental health (NIMH) to find answers.

"During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan the rates increased and surpassed those of civilians. They have remained high," stated Dr. Robert Ursamo, director of the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress at the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences in Bethesda.

Some studies linked the suicide risk factors did emerge. Those who left the military early had a 63 percent higher suicide rate than service members who had not separated from service. Service members with the fewest years of military service were at higher risk. Service members who left the military after just a short stint of less than four years were at higher risk for suicide than those who left after serving four or more years, regardless of whether or not they had been deployed.

Studies of suicide in the military tend to focus on actual suicides. But new research, part of a wider effort to understand the problem and explore solutions, looks at suicide attempts, including, home life, work performance, social life, and close relationships.

### **COMMON RISK FACTOS:**

**Unable to Acclimate into Society or Find Work** – Not getting along with life-long friends and family members, lacking the desire to enjoy previous hobbies (camping, fishing, sports, etc.) and maintain permanent employment.

**Sleep Issues** – Cannot sleep at night. The Vet has to self-medicate (pills, alcohol).

**Lack of Motivation and Energy** – Functioning requires illegal drugs, copious amount of caffeine, nicotine, and other amphetamines.

**TBI/PTSD** – Any traumatic brain injury and post traumatic issues whether diagnosed or not.

**Depression** – Sad, lethargic, lacking energy to communicate or function normally.

**Substance Abuse** – This is also known as self-medicating. Alcohol is needed to sleep. To awaken requires excessive caffeine, and illegal drugs, etc.

**Major Life Stressor** – Most suicide attempts in the Veteran community occurred roughly within two weeks after a major life stressor occurred. Major life stressors create difficult periods of time. When you lose a family member, your home, marriage, or your job, thoughts of suicide can turn into actions. A majority of suicides occur primarily due to financial or relationship issues.

### **WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP A VETERAN?**

**Listen** – If you know a veteran, whether they're family or friend, and he/she may be struggling when leaving the military, the best thing you can do is listen.

**Vet on Vet Help** – If you are a Veteran and on the right track with your life, reach out to old buddies and check on them. Your battle buddy may still need you. Talking to someone who completely understands you and what you are dealing with is very helpful.

**Raise awareness** of the veteran suicide epidemic to the general public.

**Build camaraderie** between veterans as well as between veterans and civilians  
Keep asking your Vet to spend time with you.

### **WHO CAN YOU CALL IF YOU NEED HELP FOR YOURSELF OR LOVED ONE?**

**Veteran's crisis line 1-800-273-8255, Option 1**

### **REFERENCES, RESOURCES & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
([http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/index.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/index.asp))
- Veteran Suicide In America: An Unspeakable Epidemic  
(<http://www.military.com/benefits/2015/10/14/veteran-suicide-in-america-an-unspeakable-epidemic.html>)
- Suicide in the Military: Army-NIH (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/science-news/2014/suicide-in-the-military-army-nih-funded-study-points-to-risk-and-protective-factors.shtml>)
- The Riskiest Time for Military Suicide Attempts (<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/this-is-the-riskiest-time-for-military-suicide-attempts/>)
- Suicide in the Military (<http://www.stripes.com/news/special-reports/suicide-in-the-military>)