

Return home from war not always peaceful for young vets

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When young servicemen and women return home from a tour of duty, their family and friends breathe a sigh of relief, knowing their loved ones finally are safe and sound. New research, however, shows that is not always the case.

Young [veterans](#) are at risk for violent deaths at home, especially suicide, according to a study to be presented Monday, May 3 at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Adolescent and young adult veterans die violent deaths in war zones throughout the world, yet little is known about the noncombat violent deaths at home. To explore this issue, researchers, led by Tamera Coyne-Beasley, MD, MPH., studied violent deaths among young veterans in North Carolina.

Using data from the 2004-2006 North Carolina Violent Death Reporting System, researchers found that there were 132 deaths at home among young veterans (51 veterans were 18-24 years old, and 81 were 25-34).

Suicide was the most common form of violent death, accounting for 70 percent of the cases. Almost half of those who took their own life (43 percent) had a history of mental illness, most commonly depression. While those with [depressed mood](#) reportedly were receiving treatment, all had a crisis in the two weeks before their death, according to the data. Intimate partner problems contributed to more than half of the suicides,

and job problems contributed to 21 percent.

Also concerning was the rise in [homicides](#) among the youngest veterans ages 18-24 involving interpersonal conflicts, according to the authors. However, the risk of homicide was lower among 18- to 34-year-old veterans than nonveterans of the same age.

Firearms were used in 67 percent of the deaths, and hanging accounted for 24 percent.

"With the troop deployment surge to Afghanistan involving as many as an additional 30,000 veterans, including young veterans, it will be important to ensure that our young men and women who serve our country and their families are given the support and treatment they and their families may need upon their return home," said Dr. Coyne-Beasley, a researcher in the Department of Pediatrics and Internal Medicine at University of North Carolina.

Support should include management and treatment for depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental illnesses; ongoing screening and management for domestic violence; marital and partner counseling as needed; conflict management training; safe firearm storage counseling; and employment assistance should young veterans choose not to re-enlist, Dr. Coyne-Beasley said.

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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