

New study examines the factors underlying suicides in the Army National Guard

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Studies report that since 2004, suicides rates in the U.S. Army have been on the rise. While researchers debate the cause, a new study finds that among suicide cases from 2007 – 2010, young white males were more at risk than any other demographic. This study, out today, will be published in *Armed Forces & Society*, a SAGE journal published on behalf of the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society.

[Army](#) Research Psychologists James Griffith and Mark Vaitkus analyzed data from the Army National Guard's (ARNG) personnel data system, from a routine data collection of ARNG soldiers returning from deployment, and Army reserve soldiers' responses to the 2009 Status of Forces Questionnaire. They found that 17-24 year-olds were an average of 1.59 times more likely to have committed [suicide](#) than their older peers, that males were 3.05 times more likely to have committed suicide than females, and that white soldiers were 1.85 times more likely to have [committed suicide](#) than other race groups.

Additionally, researchers found that for soldiers that had been deployed, combat exposure and other military-related variables showed little to no associations with suicide risk. These findings are consistent with those reported in other, independently conducted Army studies.

Researchers offered explanations for each of the three suicide patterns among ARNG soldiers. For example, as suicides in the Army are more likely to occur among 17 to 24 year-olds, Griffith and Vaitkus discussed how this younger age group is one in which individuals are likely to be

struggling to define who they are and how they relate to others. "Self-identity provides the individual with a sense of worth and meaning, characteristics often absent in suicide cases," authors stated.

Griffith and Vaitkus also stated that African American, compared to white, communities often have better support systems, higher participation in religion, and have also been described to be more resilient in adapting to difficult life experiences.

With regards to differences between male and female soldiers, researchers stated that males are more likely to engage in behavior that would put them at risk for suicide such as familiarity with and use of fire arms and alcohol/substance abuse, that men are less likely to seek or develop social support, and that women benefit more from social integration than men.

Researchers stated that they hoped their findings would help identify those who are at risk for suicide and concluded, "after identifying those at risk, soldiers need to be managed and provided appropriate support and care." Nevertheless, they also noted that this is complicated for reservists who spend most of their time in "part-time" or civilian status. As reservists now number about one-half the active duty Army, the researchers argued for more deliberate thought on how best to screen reserve [soldiers](#) who are at-risk for suicide, especially with the recent increased reliance on the reserves. At present, reservists identified as at risk must rely on their own private health care for treatment, which is likely to be inadequate.

More information: "Perspectives on Suicide in the Army National Guard," *Armed Forces & Society*.

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