

# Suicide not associated with deployment among US military personnel

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Deployment to Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom was not associated with suicide in a study of more than 3.9 million U.S. military personnel in the Air Force, Army, Marine Corps and Navy, according to an article published online by *JAMA Psychiatry*.

The [suicide](#) rate among active duty U.S. military members has increased in the last decade and research on the potential effect of deployment to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) or Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) is limited, according to the study background.

Mark A. Reger, Ph.D., of Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Tacoma, Wash., and coauthors used administrative data to identify deployment dates for all services members (October 2001 through December 2007) and suicide data (October 2001 through December 2009) to estimate rates of suicide death to compare deployed service members with those who did not deploy, including suicides that occurred after separation from the military.

Among more than 3.9 million service members, the authors identified 31,962 deaths of which 5,041 deaths were identified as suicide by December 2009.

Deployment was not associated with the rate of suicide, according to the study results. Of the 5,041 suicides, 1,162 were among service members who deployed (a rate of 18.86 per 100,000 person-years) and 3,879 suicides were among service members who did not deploy (a rate of

17.78 per 100,000 person-years).

The results also showed that those who separated from military service were at increased risk of suicide compared with those who had not separated. Among those who had separated from service, both those who deployed and those who had not deployed showed similarly elevated risks for suicide.

The risk for suicide also was higher among those individuals who separated from the military after shorter periods of service. The study indicates that individuals with less than four years of service had an increased rate of suicide compared with those with four or more years of military service. For example, military personnel who left the service after 20 years or more of service had a suicide rate of 11.01 per 100,000 person-years compared with those who has served less than a year and had a suicide rate of 48.04 per 100,000 person-years, according to the results. The authors explain possible reasons for the higher suicide rate among those who served for shorter periods of time might include the transition to military life, loss of a shared military identity and difficulty finding work.

Services members discharged under other than honorable conditions also had higher rates of suicide compared with those discharged until honorable conditions. Services members with an honorable discharge had a suicide rate of 22.14 per 100,000 person-years while those with a not honorable discharge had a suicide rate of 45.84 percent, according to the study results.

"In summary, the accelerated rate of suicide among members of the U.S. Armed Forces and veterans in recent years is concerning. Although there has been speculation that deployment to the OEF/OIF combat theaters may be associated with [military](#) suicides, the results of this research do not support that hypothesis. Future research is needed to examine

combat injuries, mental health and other factors that may increase [suicide risk](#). It is possible that such factors alone and in combination with deployment increase suicide risk," the study concludes.

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