

Younger generations of those in the military more vulnerable to suicide

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In the last 10 years, the U.S. military has experienced an unprecedented increase in suicides among personnel. While many researchers have largely focused on risk factors among individual soldiers, in a new study, researchers contend that the increase in suicide may also indicate increased vulnerability among more recent generations of young adults. Evidence supporting this perspective is out today in *Armed Services and Society*.

James Griffith and Craig Bryan from the National Center for Veterans Studies at The University of Utah build on research suggesting that increased young adult suicide rates reflect generational declines in social integration (such as access to predictable, stable, and enduring relationships for support and relief) and behavioral regulation (norms that determine the acceptability of certain behaviors).

Griffith and Bryan noted scientific evidence reflecting increased emotional and behavioral problems among younger generations of high school and [college students](#), as well as generational shifts in their values. Of note, more recent generations of [high school](#) and college students report that they value fame and wealth more but value community relations, interest in social problems, and civic engagement less than earlier generations. These changes have been especially pronounced during the transition from Generation Xers to the Millennials.

"The fact that a comparable rise in suicides has not been seen among adolescents and [young adults](#) more broadly across the U.S. suggests the

possibility that the Army is recruiting individuals with more [risk factors](#)," the researchers noted.

Recruitment trends since the elimination of the draft and the inception of the All-Volunteer Force support this possibility. Since the elimination of the military draft, the number of volunteers for [military service](#) has diminished. Of this pool of volunteers, nearly half are accepted into military service; a much larger proportion of the full volunteer pool than the 7% acceptance rate that existed during the time of the military draft. Of those recruits accepted into military service, larger proportions have waivers for health conditions or behavior problems, and a larger proportion come from nontraditional family structures.

More information: "'Suicides in the U.S. Military: Birth Cohort Vulnerability and the All-Volunteer Force," *Armed Services and Society*, 2015.

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