



U.S. Air Force Program

Program Description

The U.S. Air Force suicide prevention program is a comprehensive, institution-wide intervention that focuses on enhancing protective factors and decreasing risk factors for suicide. Major goals of the program include:

- Promoting awareness of the range of risk factors related to suicide;
- Educating the community regarding available mental-health services; and,
- Reducing the stigma related to help-seeking behavior.

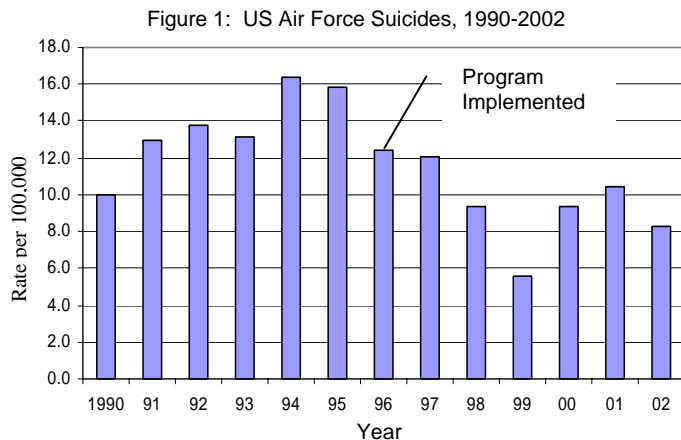
These goals were achieved through the development of 11 initiatives (see table below) that targeted strengthening social support, promoting development of effective coping skills, and changing policies and norms so as to encourage effective help-seeking behaviors. Because of the universal nature of the risk and protective factors targeted by the program, reductions in other violent behavior can also be expected.

Eleven Key Initiatives of the US Air Force Program

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| 1. Leadership Involvement | 7. Critical Incident Stress Management |
| 2. Professional Military Education | 8. Integrated Delivery System for Human Services Prevention |
| 3. Guidelines for Commanders on Use of Mental Health Services | 9. Limited Patient Privilege |
| 4. Community Preventive Services | 10. Behavioral Health Survey |
| 5. Community Education & Training | 11. Epidemiological Database and Surveillance System |
| 6. Investigative Interview Policy | |

Evaluation Design and Outcomes

The U.S. Air Force program was evaluated using an interrupted time series design (Knox, et al., 2003). Rates of suicide deaths, as well as



other violence-related

statistics, were examined for 6 years prior to and after program implementation (see Figure 1).

Analysis of post-implementation rates (1997-2002) revealed a 33% risk reduction for suicide. Reductions in rates of homicide (-51%), accidental death (-18%), and severe and moderate family violence (-54% and -30% respectively) were also observed. The only variable to increase was mild family violence (+18%); this was likely do to the reduction of severe and moderate family

SPRC Classification

Promising

Program Characteristics
Intervention Type Workplace Community- Based
Target Age 18 +
Gender Female & Male
Ethnicity Multiple
IOM Category Universal Selective Indicated

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violence.

Generalizability

Although this intervention occurred within a unique population, the U.S. Air Force, the program should be generalizable to other communities or institutions for the following reasons: (a) the program is based on a public health model that has successfully been employed against other health threats, (b) the program is supported by existing theory; and, (c) members of the U.S. Air Force represent tremendous ethnic, geographical, and socioeconomic diversity.

Implementation Essentials

Because of the comprehensive nature of the program, there are a variety of critical implementation components. Foremost among these is leadership buy-in. Leader awareness education and training formed the first of the 11 initiatives developed for the program. Other important aspects include the incorporation of suicide prevention into required training, improvement of the referral process, and the improved identification of at-risk individuals. Perhaps the most essential ingredient was the reduction of stigma associated with help-seeking.

Targeted Protective and Risk Factors

The U.S. Air Force suicide prevention program impacts the following risk and protective factors that have been targeted by the *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention* for the reduction of suicide in the United States.

Increased Protective Factors

Easy access to a variety of clinical interventions and support for help-seeking

Decreased Risk Factors

Stigma associated with help-seeking behavior
Barriers to accessing health care, especially mental health and substance abuse treatment

Program Costs

The U.S. Air Force Suicide Prevention Program Manual.....Free (USAF, 2001)
TrainingVaries

Program Contact Information

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References

Knox, K. L., Litts, D. A., Talcott, G. W., Feig, J. C., & Caine, E. D. (2003). Risk of suicide and related adverse outcomes after exposure to a suicide prevention programme in the U.S. Air Force: Cohort study. *British Medical Journal*, 327, 1376-1381.

USAF. (April, 2001). *The Air Force Suicide Prevention Program*. Air Force Manual 44-160. Document available online at <http://www.e-publishing.af.mil/pubfiles/af/44/afpam44-160/afpam44-160.pdf>