Suicide Attempts in the United States Army

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The suicide attempt rate of active-duty enlisted soldiers in the U.S. Army was found to be 377/100,000 person-years. More than 98 percent of attempts were by enlisted soldiers who constitute 83.5 percent of active duty soldiers. Attempt risk is greatest for soldiers who (1) are female, (2) entered service at age 25 or older, (3) are in their first four years of service, (4) are not currently deployed, (5) are age 29 or younger, (6) are white, (7) have less than a high school education, and (8) had a mental health diagnosis within the previous month.

Attempt risk among enlisted soldiers is greatest during their first service year, decreases substantially during the second service year, and continues to decline gradually during subsequent years of service. Attempt risk among officers remains fairly stable through their Army careers. Soldiers who are currently deployed are at lower risk than soldiers who are not deployed. Officers, who make up 16.5 percent of active-duty soldiers, accounted for only 1.4 percent of attempts. The attempt risk for enlisted female soldiers was almost 13 times that of female officers.

The authors also found that “59.8 percent of enlisted soldiers and 70.2 percent of officers received a [mental health] diagnosis before their suicide attempt, suggesting that many at-risk soldiers have already been identified by the Army health care system as needing mental health services and providing opportunities for further risk assessment and intervention.”

The study was conducted using data from the Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Servicemembers (STARRS) from 2004 to 2009.


Populations: Military Service Members and Veterans
About Suicide: Suicidal Thoughts and Behavior, Attempts