Suicide and Military Deployment

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A large study that included all branches of the United States military found no association between deployment (including combat experience, length of deployment, or number of deployments) and suicide risk. The factors significantly associated with an increased risk of suicide were similar to those for civilians, including “male sex, depression, manic-depressive disorder, heavy or binge drinking, and alcohol-related problems.”

The authors suggest that the increases in the suicide rate in the military in recent years may in fact be due to the documented increase in mental health disorders seen in the military since 2005, which itself may be related to occupational stress for members of the military, regardless of whether they are deployed or stationed in the United States. The data analysis also found that the suicide rate in the military might be reduced by 18 percent by preventing or eliminating alcohol-related problems. Lesser, but substantial, reductions could be made by preventing or eliminating depression and manic-depressive disorders (11 percent and 5 percent, respectively). The age- and sex-adjusted suicide rate in the military was found to be 9.6/100,000 person-years. The crude rate was found to be 11.73/100,000 person-years.