Suicide Prevention in the Israeli Military

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According to the results of a recent evaluation, there was a 57 percent drop in the suicide rate among the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) following implementation of the IDF Suicide Prevention Program in 2006. The authors suggested that reducing access to weapons when not essential, such as when soldiers were on leave, may account for the program’s success, given that 84 percent of suicides by Israeli soldiers were found to be associated with firearms.

In addition to restrictions on firearm access, the IDF Suicide Prevention Program consisted of “de-stigmatizing help-seeking behavior, integrating mental health officers into service units, and training commanders and soldiers to recognize suicide risk factors and warning signs." The average annual IDF suicide rate decreased from 23/100,000 before the intervention to 11/100,000 after it was implemented. This decline was statistically significant among male soldiers, but not female soldiers. The authors suggested that it would be difficult to demonstrate a statistical effect among female soldiers given that they accounted for only eight percent of suicide deaths in the cohort.