



Suicide Attempts among Activated Soldiers in the U.S. Army Reserve Components

December 20, 2019

News Type: Weekly Spark, Weekly Spark Research

Soldiers in the U.S. Army National Guard and Army Reserve, also called the reserve components, experience many of the same stressors as active component soldiers. However, they also face challenges unique to irregular service. Recent research examined risk factors for suicide attempts in this understudied population.

Using the Army and Department of Defense administrative data system, researchers gathered records for 743,171 reserve component soldiers who were federally activated between 2006 and 2009. They then compared reserve component soldiers with a documented suicide attempt to a control sample.

Researchers found 1,103 suicide attempts among all activated reserve component soldiers. Over 95% of attempts occurred among reserve component soldiers and less than 5% were among officers. Among soldiers, females were more than twice as likely to have attempted suicide as males. Other risk factors for suicide attempts included being younger than age 21, non-Hispanic white, and currently married. Soldiers with less than a high school education and those who were 25 years and older at enlistment were also at increased risk.

After adjusting for sociodemographic variables, reserve component soldiers with less than 2 active-duty years had higher odds of a suicide attempt than those with 5 to 10 active years. Odds of suicide attempt were also elevated among soldiers who were previously deployed (compared to those who were currently deployed) and those with a recent mental health diagnosis.

Among reserve component officers, females were three times more likely than males to have attempted suicide. Time in service and deployment status were not associated with suicide attempts among officers.

Reserve component soldiers play an important role in U.S. national security. Understanding how predictors of suicide risk among activated reserve component soldiers might differ from active component soldiers can help target prevention efforts.

Naifeh, J. A., Ursano, R. J., Kessler, R. C., Gonzalez, O. I., Fullerton, C. S., Herberman Mash, H. B., . . . Stein, M. B. (2019). Suicide attempts among activated soldiers in the U.S. Army reserve components. *BMC Psychiatry*, 19(1), 31.