

**Surveillance of Suicide Cases
(National Guard and Reserve)
January through December 2016**

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**SURVEILLANCE OF SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR (NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE)
JANUARY THROUGH DECEMBER 2016
PHIP NO. 14-01-1018
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1. PURPOSE

This paper presents characteristics of activated and non-activated U.S. Army National Guard and Reserve Soldiers who died by suicide during 2016. This includes suicides identified by the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES) and Army G-1.

2. REFERENCES AND TERMS

Appendix A provides the references cited, and the Glossary provides a list of acronyms and terms.

3. INTRODUCTION

Since 2008, the U.S. Army Public Health Center (APHC), Division of Behavioral and Social Health Outcomes Practice (BSHOP) has collected, analyzed, and disseminated surveillance data on suicidal behavior cases (suicides, suicide attempts, and suicidal ideations) among activated U.S. Army Soldiers. The *Surveillance of Suicidal Behavior Publication (SSBP)*, published annually by BSHOP, describes the characteristics of Active Army Soldiers who had a suicidal behavior and presents observed trends and changes in risk factors over time. Suicide surveillance data are used by key military leaders, public health practitioners, and behavioral health (BH) providers (e.g., psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists) in the U.S. Army to focus prevention efforts, plan programs, allocate resources, develop policy, monitor trends, and suggest actionable recommendations in order to mitigate adverse outcomes.

Previously, BSHOP only reported suicidal behavior cases among activated Soldiers because the completion of the Department of Defense Suicide Event Report (DoDSER) is not required for non-activated Soldiers and comprehensive data for non-activated Soldiers is limited. However, to improve consistency in reporting among Department of the Army organizations, BSHOP adapted the current public health information paper to include activated and non-activated National Guard (NG) and Army Reserve (AR) suicide cases.

4. METHODS

Activated and non-activated NG and AR Soldiers who died by suicide during the 2016 calendar year (CY) are included. Suicide cases among activated Soldiers were obtained from the AFMES and cases among non-activated Soldiers were obtained from Army G-1. The Department of Defense (DOD) defines suicide as “death caused by self-inflicted injurious behavior with any intent to die as a result of the behavior.”¹ Counts of suicide cases include pending and confirmed cases. Pending cases may take over 2 years to be confirmed. While suicide cases were identified using Army G-1 and AFMES, demographic, military, and deployment data were obtained from the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC); BH and alcohol use data were obtained from the Periodic Health Assessment (PHA). Population counts used to calculate rates were obtained from AFMES. All of these data with the exception of

Army G-1 data and population counts were obtained from the Army Behavioral Health Integrated Data Environment (ABHIDE) (Appendix B), which is the most comprehensive data warehouse for information pertaining to suicidal behavior in the U.S. Army.

While DoDSER information and recent medical claims provide additional contextual information to better characterize stressors (BH indicators and other medical problems), such data were only available for activated Soldiers (less than 10% of this population). Moreover, none of the non-activated Soldiers had a BH medical claim within 15 months of their event. Therefore, the majority of suicide cases included in this analysis were non-activated Soldiers and this information was not available for inclusion in this paper. Instead, information from the PHA was reported. The PHA is a preventive screening tool designed to improve the reporting and visibility of Individual Medical Readiness for all Soldiers.² Although Soldiers are required to complete a PHA annually, it is considered current if less than 15 months have passed since the last PHA was completed.³ Seventy-seven percent of NG and 65% of AR Soldiers completed a PHA within 15 months of their suicide event, which were all included in this analysis.

Deployment history was obtained from the total deployments in the past 5 years reported by the Soldier on the PHA. Alcohol misuse was assessed using the PHA's Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test – Consumption (AUDIT-C). Soldiers were considered to screen positive for symptoms of depression if they responded with “More than half the days” or “Nearly every day” for at least one of the two questions from the Patient Health Questionnaire-2.⁴ Self-reported Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms from the Primary Care PTSD Screen on the PHA refer to a “Yes” response to at least two of the four questions on the tool.⁴

Frequencies and percentages were calculated for all categorical variables and means and standard deviations were calculated for continuous variables. Crude suicide rates were calculated for National Guard and Army Reserve Soldiers. All data management and analytical procedures were performed using SAS 9.4 (SAS Institute, Cary, North Carolina). Rate calculations were performed using Microsoft Excel[®] (Microsoft Office Professional Plus[®] 2013).

5. RESULTS

During 2016, 149 NG and AR Soldiers died by suicide ($n = 108$, NG and $n = 41$, AR). Crude suicide rates were 31 per 100,000 NG Soldiers and 21 per 100,000 AR Soldiers. Most cases were male, aged 17–34 years, non-Hispanic white, single, and were not on activated status ($n=135$) at the time of the event (Table 1). Moreover, AR cases were slightly older (Mean age: 30 years) than NG cases (Mean age: 27 years). The majority of cases were from the enlisted ranks (93%) and more than half had no history of deployment within the past 5 years (Table 2). There was a greater percentage of junior enlisted Soldiers among NG cases (61%) than AR cases (46%). On the PHA, 10% of the cases reported alcohol misuse, 6% reported depression symptoms, and 5% reported PTSD symptoms. Suicidal thoughts were reported for 3% of cases (Table 3).

6. CAVEATS

There are several caveats relating to interpreting surveillance data that should be considered when reviewing these results. First, the numbers in this paper are considerably greater than what was reported in the 2015 SSBP (NG - 15 cases and AR - 8 cases).⁵ This is primarily due to the inclusion of both activated and non-activated suicide cases. Second, surveillance data typically improve as data collection becomes refined over time. This may result in frequencies and percentages appearing to increase in later years. Although these increases may be the result of improved data capture and not a true change in suicide frequency.

7. POINT OF CONTACT

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APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

TABLES

**Table B-1. Demographic Characteristics, Suicide Cases,^a
National Guard (NG) and Army Reserve (AR), 2016**

Characteristic	Suicide Cases n (%)	
	NG (n = 108)	AR (n = 41)
SEX		
Male	103 (95)	38 (93)
Female	5 (5)	3 (7)
AGE (YR)		
17–24	47 (44)	13 (32)
25–34	46 (43)	19 (46)
35–64	15 (14)	9 (22)
Mean (SD)	26.8 ± 7.3	30.0 ± 10.5
Mode	21	21
RACE-ETHNICITY		
Non-Hispanic White	85 (79)	30 (73)
Non-Hispanic Black	9 (8)	4 (10)
Hispanic	4 (4)	5 (12)
Non-Hispanic Asian/ Pacific Islander	6 (6)	1 (2)
Non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native	4 (4)	1 (2)
MARITAL STATUS		
Single	74 (69)	23 (56)
Married	29 (27)	15 (37)
Divorced	5 (5)	3 (7)
ACTIVATION STATUS		
Not activated	96 (89)	39 (95)
Activated	12 (11)	2 (5)

Notes:

^aActivated suicide cases include those confirmed by the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES) or pending confirmation. Non-activated cases were obtained from G-1. SD: Standard Deviation.

**Table B-2. Military Characteristics, Suicide Cases,^a
National Guard (NG) and Army Reserve (AR), 2016**

Characteristic	Suicide Cases n (%)	
	NG	AR
	(n = 108)	(n = 41)
RANK		
E1–E4	66 (61)	19 (46)
E5–E9	35 (32)	19 (46)
W1–W5	1 (1)	0 (0)
Cadets	0 (0)	0 (0)
O1–O3	5 (5)	1 (2)
O4–O8	1 (1)	2 (5)
NUMBER OF DEPLOYMENTS		
0	61 (56)	24 (59)
1	28 (26)	8 (20)
2	11 (10)	5 (12)
3	4 (4)	3 (7)
4+	4 (4)	1 (2)

Legend:

DoDSER = Department of Defense Suicide Event Report

E = Enlisted

O = Officer

W = Warrant Officer

Notes:

^aActivated suicide cases include those confirmed by the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES) or pending confirmation. Non-activated cases were obtained from G-1.

Table B-3. Alcohol Misuse Indicators^a, Behavioral Health Screeners^b, and Suicidal Thoughts^c among Suicide Cases^d, National Guard (NG) and Army Reserve (AR), 2016

Indicator	Suicide Cases n (%) ^e	
	NG (n = 84)	AR (n = 29)
ALCOHOL MISUSE		
Unhealthy Drinking ^f	9 (11)	2 (7)
Probable Alcohol Disorder ^g	1 (1)	0 (0)
Referred to ASAP	5 (6)	0 (0)
Received Alcohol-Related Education	43 (51)	14 (48)
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SCREENERS		
Positive Depression Screening ^h	4 (5)	3 (10)
Positive PTSD Screening ⁱ	2 (2)	4 (14)

Legend:

ASAP = Army Substance Abuse Program

AUDIT-C = Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test - Consumption

PHQ-2 = Patient Health Questionnaire – 2

PTSD = Post-traumatic stress disorder

PHA = Periodic Health Assessment

Notes:

^aBased on AUDIT-C scores from the most recent PHA in the 15 months before the suicide.

^bBased on PHQ-2 and PTSD scores from the most recent PHA in the 15 months before suicide. Responding with “More than half the days” or “Nearly every day” for at least one of the two questions results in a positive depression screen. Responding “Yes” to at least two of the four questions on the PTSD tool results in a positive PTSD screen.

^cBased on responses from most recent PHA in 15 months before suicide.

^dActivated suicide cases include those confirmed by the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES) or pending confirmation. Non-activated cases were obtained from G-1. ^eCompleted PHAs were available from all but 24 NG and 12 AR Soldiers.

^fThe threshold for a positive screen indicating unhealthy drinking is 5 or more for men and 4 or more for women.

^gA high positive screen, indicating probable alcohol disorder, is 8 and above.

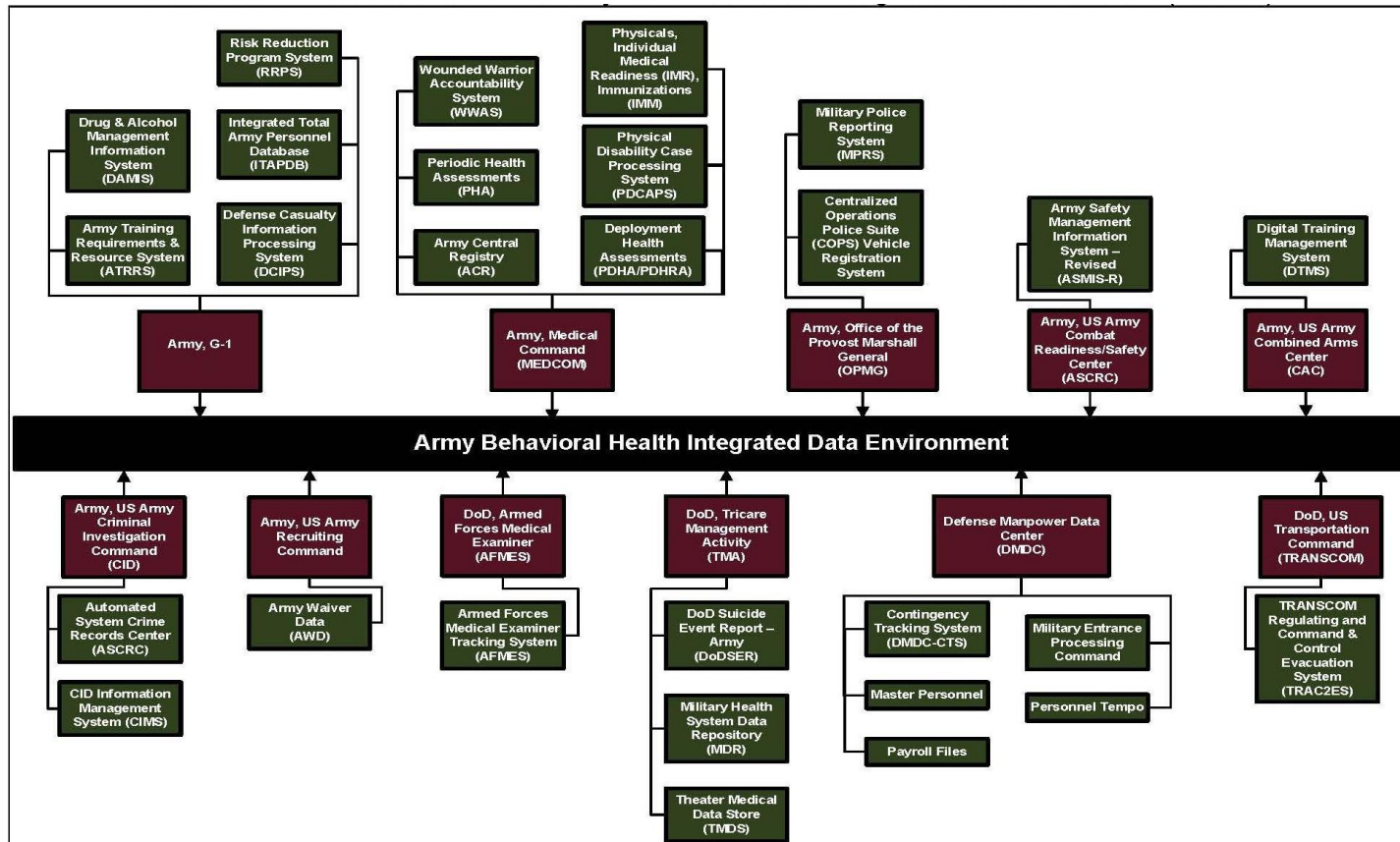
^hDepression screening data were available for all but 3 NG Soldiers with complete PHAs.

ⁱPTSD screening data were available for all but 8 NG and all but 4 AR Soldiers with complete PHAs.

^jSuicidal thoughts data were available for all but 8 NG Soldiers and all but 5 AR Soldiers with complete PHAs.

APPENDIX C

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA SOURCES IN THE ARMY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INTEGRATED DATA ENVIRONMENT (ABHIDE)



GLOSSARY

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABHIDE

Army Behavioral Health Integrated Data Environment

AFMES

Armed Forces Medical Examiner System

APHC

U.S. Army Public Health Center

AR

Army Reserve

ASAP

Army Substance Abuse Program

BH

Behavioral Health

BSHOP

Division of Behavioral and Social Health Outcomes Practice

CY

Calendar year

DMDC

Defense Manpower Data Center

DOD

Department of Defense

DoDSER

Department of Defense Suicide Event Report

E1–E9

Enlisted rank

NG

National Guard

O1–O8

Officer rank

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PHA

Periodic Health Assessment

PHQ-2

Patient Health Questionnaire-2

PTSD

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

SSBP

Surveillance of Suicidal Behavior Publication

W1–W5

Warrant Officer rank