

Marked increase in US military suicides

Matthew MacEgan
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The American Medical Association (AMA) recently released a report identifying the risk factors associated with suicide in current and former United States military personnel. According to this report, the incidence of suicide deaths in the US military began to increase sharply in 2005. The AMA states that increased combat deployments underlie this trend.

The US military combat deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan have been associated with this notable upward trend, leading to considerable speculation as to the cause. Studies have shown a parallel between increased numbers of diagnosed mental disorders and suicide rates.

The AMA report shows that individuals with an increased risk for suicide were men, and those with depression, manic-depressive disorder, or alcohol-related problems. Other characteristics common among those with suicide deaths were fewer cumulative deployment days and combat specialist occupation. Those who did not deploy were more likely to commit suicide than those who were deployed.

This suggests that the increase may largely be a product of an increased prevalence of mental disorders among this population. The AMA suggests that this rise is the result of indirect cumulative occupational stresses over years of war.

Despite universal access to health care services, mandatory suicide prevention training, and other preventative efforts, suicide has still become one of the leading causes of death in the US military in recent years. In 2005, suicide deaths numbered 10.3 to 11.3 per 100,000, but by 2008, that number had increased to 16.3 per 100,000.

While researchers point to the fact that mental disorders, rather than experiences seeing dead bodies or participation in the brutal machinations of war, were the main cause for the increase, they offer no explanation as to why the escalation of such disorders

has taken place. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has reported that increases in the diagnosis of mental disorders are the result of increasing deployment, especially post-traumatic stress disorder.

Past studies have shown an increase in the number of active duty service people with mental disorders since the mid-2000s, likely due to the stress of being part of a military that has been at war for so long.

A report coming from the VA earlier this year stated that, on average, a US military veteran commits suicide every 80 minutes. According to the same report, suicides by active soldiers increased by 15 percent in 2012, demonstrating that more soldiers and veterans take their own lives every year than have been killed in action throughout both the Afghanistan and Iraq wars combined.

According to the Associated Press, 154 active-duty troops took their lives during the first 155 days of 2012, the highest rate since the beginning of the Afghan war.

In 2009, at least 334 members of the armed forces took their lives, exceeding the 319 who were killed in Afghanistan that year and more than double the 150 who died in Iraq. More than half of these 334 had served in one of those two war zones.

This number is also reflected in the military of other nations that are actively participating in these wars. A recent report showed that at least 50 active or retired military personnel in the UK committed suicide in 2012, more than the 44 who died in Afghanistan during the same period. Only 40 of the 44 died in military action.

The high suicide rates now erupting are a direct result of the neo-colonial wars being waged by US imperialism. The Center for a New American Security has reported that the “very experience of being in the military and the violence and aggression that go along with it reduces the fear of death inherent in human beings.”

Social conditions that military personnel are faced with also contribute to their increasingly dire outlook on life. As of September 2012, more than 25,000 veterans were reportedly living on the street, at risk of losing their homes, or living in temporary housing. Out of 1.5 million in danger of becoming homeless, only 22,000 were receiving assistance from the VA.



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