# Suicide Rates In Military Personnel

Being enlisted in the military is not only a physically demanding commitment, but it is also a mentally challenging task. Enlisting in the military can incredibly impact someone's life both positively and negatively. Although the negative impacts can be life-threatening, there are several ways they can be lessened. Such things include having prior knowledge of the outcome and seeking help through others to recover.

In order to discuss the crisis of Veteran suicide, the history behind it must be addressed. Although this is a very sensitive subject for many, it must be researched and acknowledged in order to pay respect towards those who have taken their lives and to protect future lives. Military suicide has been recorded and dated back since the beginning of military formation. However, it only began to become a large, impactful issue within the past century. Throughout the years after World War I, governments all over the world were unsure of how to prevent military suicide. Quickly after the War, suicide rates in the U.S started to become more common and was soon deemed as a "postwar problem." However, there was still little to no government assistance offered to veterans, it was left to the veteran and his/her family to support the individual. Soon after the Second World War, on June 22, 1944, President Roosevelt signed a bill to help veterans called the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. The G.I. Bill established hospitals, made low-interest mortgages and assisted in covering expenses for veterans heading to college or trade schools. "From 1944 to 1949, nearly 9 million veterans received close to $4 billion from the bill's unemployment compensation program" (Sullivan).

Around 1980, citizens began to notice the steady increase in suicide rates after the Servicemen Readjustment Act. Many claims began to arise saying 50,000 to 100,000 Vietnam Veterans have taken their lives. The government soon followed up rebuking these assumptions and claiming it was closer to 10,000 veterans. These types of claims and films such as Taxi Driver and Full Metal Jacket have publicized the issue and have caught society's attention towards the subject. Due to suicide rates increasing to 22 per day since 2001, in March 2019, the White House assured to create an "aspirational, innovative, all-hands-on-deck approach to public health" towards veterans' mental health. Although this was a big promise, not much has been done.

Suicide rates in military personnel have a long history but unfortunately, not much has been done in order to protect veterans and enlisted individuals. The military is frequently discussed. People are constantly talking about their hopes and dreams of enlisting in the military. It is great to know people love our country enough to want to risk their lives for our nation. We often hear about the process of enlisting, the procedures taken after being enlisted and the benefits that come from being in the military. There is a common trend with all these topics, these are all positive things about enlisting and being part of the armed forces. However, what we do not hear as often is the negative effects procedures have on military personnel both while still enlisted or after retiring. When an individual is excited to enlist, the negatives are drowned out by the positives. The individual is nose deep into all the good and excited that they fail to recognize the dangers of what is to come after the war. This does not mean the physical danger of war but more of the mental state it can put someone in. The negative effects of joining the military are major but can be unintentionally overlooked and forgotten about. When considering

enlisting into the military, they tend to refuse to think about the pessimistic outcomes for several reasons whether it is due to fear, lack of knowledge or doubt. Whether the negative effects are minor or major they should not be swept under a rug and avoided, they should be considered and discussed with a professional. When individuals are informed of the negative effects of enlisting in the war, people still don't recognize the mass amount of mental trauma it can cause. Many people claim that just by being aware of their issue, their mental health will not degrade, which is not the case. Although acknowledging the cons can help you in the end, it will not fully prevent you from being affected. Individuals need to be fully aware and educated about the impacts of war in order for the outcome to be altered in a positive manner.

There are several different negative impacts of war such as physical, mental and emotional but the leading causes of suicides of veterans come from the mental toll brought on individuals. The leading causes of suicide in veterans include depression, hopelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), trauma and access to firearms. Individuals who were deployed are not the only ones getting affected by the trauma, even those who only went through training suffer from suicidal thoughts. According to the World Health Organization, almost one million people die by suicide every year, which is a global mortality rate of 10.7 per 100,000. In the United States (U.S.), someone attempts suicide every 31 seconds and an average of 1 person dies by suicide every 11.9 minutes, a rate of 13.3 per 100,000. Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the country. “Among active-duty troops, the Marine Corps had the highest rate with 31.4 suicides per 100,000 Marines. The Army had 24.8 suicides per 100,000 soldiers, the Navy had 20.7 suicides per 100,000 sailors and the Air Force had 18.5 suicides per 100,000 airmen. The suicide rate for the Army National Guard was 30.6 suicides per 100,000 guardsmen.” (Brooke). Those who died by suicide held a common trend, the majority seemed to be males younger than 30, More than 45,000 veterans and active-duty service have committed suicide in the past six years, which is more than 22 deaths a day. In other words, that is more suicides each year than the total American military deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq.

After enduring the physical, mental and emotional stress of war or training. Individuals are told to be tough, push through their pain and to hide it. This is exactly one of the reasons veterans do not search for help in their darkest moments. The past few years they have always been told to hide it, constantly having “There is no pain, just discomfort!” yelled at them, so it is now engraved in their minds. The individual will feel weak and defeated if they get help so they avoid it at all costs. When they are finished serving their time, they are sent home but unfortunately, they are not finished fighting, many are severely scarred, they have PTSD from what they felt, saw, heard and smelt in war, they are anxious, depressed, isolated and traumatized. Organizations such as Military Onesource, PTSD United and many more are put in place for those who need help. Most services provide free, non-medical, 24/7 counseling to veterans coping with PTSD. Karen Richards Nichol shares the story of her loving husband who lost his life to suicide to an organization called Stop Soldier Suicide. She told reporters Mark, who was a husband, father, a son, a brother, a friend and an uncle, lost his battle against himself. She mentions, “Sometimes it’s hard to reconcile the knowledge that he loved us so very much and yet still managed to hurt so many people. I know that was never his intention.” (Nichol). His loved ones were left wondering all of the “what ifs' ' and “if only’s' ' She knows she was not responsible for his actions but she doesn't hesitate to think about what would have happened if she forced him to seek help. She constantly contemplated what she could have done better in order to prevent what had happened that day. Veteran, Mark, repeatedly said PTSD was for the weak as a mask to hide his sufferings

Many people make up assumptions and myths dealing with suicide rates in veterans. People claim the length of one's deployment affects the individual. After analyzing several studies it is clear that the deployment including combat, length of deployment and number of deployments do not directly affect the veteran. People also say the majority of service members who die from suicide had a pre-existing mental illness. That myth has been proven wrong countless times. People tend to believe that talking about suicide to those wanting to enlist or who have already enlisted, will encourage the individual to commit such acts. When in reality it needs to be said and hear, countess people have died from suicide, talking about it would create awareness and allow the individual to express his/her feelings and make them feel comfortable to open up. Rather than hiding their problems, the individual will feel welcomed to talk about it which could result in saving countless lives. Although talking about suicide is an incredibly heart-wrenching topic, it is especially important to talk about it and educate yourself and each other. People tend to shy away from the topic of suicide because it is scary or they do not want to come to terms with the fact that it is a real thing happening in our lives today. Approximately 20 United States veterans die by suicide a day, which is 7,300 people a year. People are scared of this statistic so they push it under a rug and pretend like it is non-existent when in reality it is a current issue affecting thousands of lives. This is not a problem that will go away over time. People need to be aware of this evil and counteract against it whether it is donating towards the organization or research or talking to loved ones and friends. As citizens, we are to step up to the plate and help those who have fought for our country for countless hours.

The point of this is not to discourage individuals to enlist in the military but rather to make them aware of what is to come so they can be willing to seek help if needed. Suicide and depression are daunting subjects that often go unrecognized. It can be incredibly impacting not only the veteran's life but her/her family as well. We need to prevent the rate of suicide in veterans from increasing but recognizing an issue before it becomes too deadly.