



National Defense Committee

Veteran Suicide, Recent Reports, Combat Exposure Risk

The National Defense Committee believes the greatest suicide risks factors for veterans are:

- **Being young,**
- **Being male,**
- **Being combat veterans.**

Young:

Between 2001 and 2022, the most recent years for which the VA reported veteran suicide data¹, the veteran suicide rate has, indeed, risen precipitously across every age and gender demographic. But for the 18-34-year-old veterans, it's risen most significantly:

- In those years, the overall veteran suicide rate rose 36%, but the 18-34-year-old veteran suicide rate rose almost 80%.
- Between 2001 and 2020, an additional 145 veterans died from suicide annually. But 225 more 18-34-year-old veterans died of suicide. In other words, **but for the 18-34-year-old veterans increase in suicide deaths over those years, there would have been a net reduction in veteran suicides.**

Male:

While female veteran suicides rates are alarmingly high, they are, on average far below that of their male counterparts;

- from the 2016 VA Veteran Suicide Annual Report, **the only year in which combat veteran suicide deaths was examined**, among the 18-24 OEF/OIF/OND veterans, the male suicide rate is almost eight times higher than females – 124.0/100,000 for the males compared to 16.7/100,000 for the females.
- **The young, male, combat deployed veteran suicide rate is more than seven times that of the young, female, combat deployed veteran.**

This gender difference continues for the broader 18-34-year-old veteran cohorts, where the differentiation between combat and non-combat deployed is not made readily available, but where the male suicide rate is 52.3/100,000 while the female veteran suicide rate is 19.5/100,000. **The young, male, overall veteran suicide rate is almost three times higher that of the young, female, overall deployed veteran.**

And despite the proclamations of falling veteran suicide rates, under closer examination they do not hold up:

- The 18-34-year-old veteran suicide rate rose from 51/100,000 in 2019 to 52.3/100,000 in 2020.
- Between 2001 and 2020, while the overall veteran suicide rate rose 39%, **the 18-34-year-old veteran suicide rate rose 95%, the male 18-34-year-old suicide rate rose 97%, and the female 18-34-year-old veteran suicide rate rose 157%.**

¹ US Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Suicide Prevention and Mental Health, "2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report", Data Appendix, https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2020/2001-2020-National-Data-Appendix_508.xlsx, accessed 21 Sep 22



National Defense Committee

Combat Experience:

Unfortunately, the last year the VA reported on suicide deaths for combat deployed veterans was the 2016 Report,² with data through 2014. With the release of the 2019 report, the VA indicates they no longer receive deployment data from the Department of Defense so that they can conduct data analysis of the relationship of suicide deaths with combat deployments. Regardless, analysis of the data we do have would seem to indicate combat deployment as a significant risk factor for suicide:

- While the overall veteran suicide rate for 2014 was 32.8/100,000, for combat deployed veterans it was 47.8/100,000, 46% higher.
- The 18-24-year-old combat deployed veteran suicide rate was 110.3/100,000 and the male 18-24-year-old combat deployed veteran suicide rate was 124/100,000.
- Put another way, **the 18-24-year-old male combat deployed veteran suicide rate is three to four times higher than the overall veteran suicide rate, and seven to eight times higher than the non-veteran overall suicide rates.**

Race, Ethnicity, and Veteran Suicide

White veteran suicide rates are higher than every other race and ethnicity group:

- 140% greater than Black veterans.
- 15% greater than Native American veterans.
- 13% greater than Asian American/Pacific Islander veterans.
- 325% greater than multiple race veterans
- 84% greater than Hispanic veterans.

Data and Research Recommendations

- **Resume tracking combat veteran suicide rates.**
- **Explore why Black and Hispanic veteran suicide rates are so much lower than white veterans.**
- **Make ALL VA and DoD suicide data available on Data.gov**
 - o **Anonymized.**
 - o **Raw data.**
 - o **By smallest and most differentiated cohorts possible while protecting decedents' personal information.**
 - o **Make the VA-DoD veteran suicide data repository available without a government agency sponsor.**
- **Explore the results of the America's Warrior Partnership Study results.**
- **Explore the relationship between VA Fiduciary Rules, provision of veteran mental health data to Red Flag Courts, and the incidence of veterans avoiding needed mental health care from the VA.**

² US Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Suicide Prevention, "Suicide Among Veterans and Other Americans, 2001–2014", 3 August 2016, updated August 2017, <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2014/2001-2014-suicide-data-report.pdf>, accessed 2 March 2021