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## Many Military Vets in College Plagued By Thoughts of Suicide

They're six times more likely than other students to attempt it, study shows

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By Alan Mozes

HealthDay Reporter

THURSDAY, Aug. 4 (HealthDay News) -- American military veterans attending college are far more likely to entertain thoughts of suicide than fellow students who have never been in the military, a new national survey indicates.

Data from the poll paints a grave picture of these students' mental health: Nearly half of all vets currently in higher education say they have considered suicide at some point in their lives, while one in five say they have actually made plans to go through with it.

Such figures far exceed estimates of suicidal tendencies among college students who have never been in the military, the researchers noted.

"The data suggest that the problems experienced by soldiers while on active duty don't end when they separate from the service," study author David Rudd, of the National Center for Veterans Studies at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. "Rather, a large number of student veterans continue to experience significant problems, including post-traumatic stress symptoms and suicide risk."

"The reported rate of suicide attempts among student veterans was six times that of the general student population," Rudd notes. Those reporting 'serious' suicidal thoughts -- those thinking about suicide with a plan -- was more than three times that of the general student population.

Rudd and his colleagues are slated to present their findings Thursday at the American Psychological Association annual meeting in Washington, D.C.

The 2011 survey by a national student veteran coalition known as the Student Veterans of America drew responses from 525 veterans currently enrolled in college.

About 80 percent of those polled were men, and the average age of the respondents was 26. Roughly three-quarters were white (a percentage that represents the actual racial background of today's military), and nearly all had been deployed in either Iraq or Afghanistan. And about 60 percent said they had been exposed to actual combat in one or the other arena.

The results: 46 percent said they had considered suicide at some point, and more than 10 percent said they had considered it quite seriously. Nearly 8 percent said they had actually attempted suicide, while almost 4 percent said they viewed an attempt as being likely or very likely.

Underscoring the seriousness of the problem, the research team pointed out that such figures suggest that the role that suicide plays in the lives of student veterans is comparable to -- or perhaps even more dire -- than the role it plays among the broader pool of young adults ages currently seeking mental health care in a VA medical center setting.

Rudd and his associates also noted that the survey results are particularly striking when compared with 2010 data compiled by the American College Health Association. This data indicated that among the general college population, just 6 percent of enrolled students said they had "seriously" considered suicide. The same data revealed that a little more than 1 percent of non-vet students had attempted suicide.

The survey results prompted the authors to advise that college counselors and clinics to increase screening for trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder.

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