

Army suicide rate could top nation's this year by Mike Mount

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WASHINGTON (CNN) -- The rate of suicides among active duty soldiers is on pace to surpass both last year's numbers and the rate of suicide in the general U.S. population for the first time since the Vietnam war, according to U.S. Army officials.

As of August, 62 Army soldiers have committed suicide, and 31 cases of possible suicide remain under investigation, according to Army statistics. Last year, the Army recorded 115 suicides among its ranks, which was also higher than the previous year.

Army officials said that if the trend continues this year, it will pass the nation's suicide rate of 19.5 people per 100,000, a 2005 figure considered the most recent by the government.

The rise can be attributed to the increased pace of combat operations, the number of deployments and financial and family troubles connected with deployments, [Army](#) officials said.

"Army leaders are fully aware that repeated deployments have led to increased distress and anxiety for both soldiers and their families," Secretary of the Army Pete Geren said. "This stress on the force is validated by recent studies of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans reporting symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder or major depression."

The statistics were released Tuesday at a news conference announcing the completion of a study by mental health experts who the [Veterans Administration](#) asked to review its suicide prevention work and track numbers.

On Tuesday, the VA also announced findings from a study showing that suicides hit an all-time high in 2006 among younger U.S. military veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The numbers show record levels for men, but the statistics are lower for women.

According to the VA, about 46 of 100,000 males between the ages of 18 and 29 utilizing VA services committed suicide in 2006, compared with about 27 the year before.

For female veterans in the same age group, about three in 100,000 killed themselves in 2006, compared with about eight per 100,000 in 2005.

The suicide rate for males is also higher than for the general United States population in 2005. The number for the general population is about 20 people per 100,000, according to the VA numbers. Numbers were not available for the 2006 general male population suicides.

Veterans Secretary James Peake said the department would try to reduce the number of suicides by using recommendations by the mental health expert panel.

"The report of this blue-ribbon panel, and other efforts under way, will ensure VA mobilizes its full resources to care for our most vulnerable veterans," Peake said in a statement.

Among veterans who left the military in 2001, 141 killed themselves between 2002 and 2005, according to VA statistics in the report. In 2006, 113 more veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars committed suicide.

The Veterans Administration has said the rise in suicides can be directly connected to the increase in veterans coming from both wars since 2001.

Representatives from the Department of Defense, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health made the following recommendations:

- Design a study that will identify suicide risk among veterans of different conflicts, ages, genders, military branches and other factors.
- Improve the VA's screening for suicide among veterans with depression or post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Foster a better understanding of suitable medications for depression, PTSD and suicidal behavior.