The Role of Caregivers in Preventing Military and Veteran Suicide

Rajeev Ramchand
Main Points

Who are military and veteran caregivers?

Military and veteran suicide

What might work (better)?
National survey of caregivers

Sample

1,129 military caregivers
1,828 civilian caregivers
1,163 non-caregivers

How We Captured Caregiving

2014

Do you provide unpaid care and assistance for, or manage the care of, someone who is at least 18 years old and has an illness, injury or condition for which they require outside support?

This may include help with tasks such as personal care, bathing, dressing, feeding, giving medicines or treatments, help with memory tasks for someone with brain injury, help coping with symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), transportation to doctors’ appointments, or arranging for services, etc. You do not need to live with the person. Care and assistance are considered unpaid if you provide them without receiving financial compensation in exchange for doing so.
9% of U.S. adults are caregivers

5.5 million military/veteran caregivers
1.1 million post-9/11 military/veteran caregivers
Post-9/11 military/veteran caregivers differed from pre-9/11 military/veteran caregivers.
2022 National survey of caregivers

Please indicate if you provide any of the following types of assistance to someone who has an illness, injury or condition for which they receive outside support:

- Personal care, bathing, dressing, or feeding
- Giving medicines or treatments
- Help with memory tasks for someone with brain injury
- Help coping with symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Help coping with another psychological disorder (for example, depression or anxiety)
- Providing transportation to doctor appointments or arranging for medical or psychological services
- Other types of assistance which the person has difficulty performing themselves
Main Points

Who are military and veteran caregivers?

Veteran suicide

What might work (better)?
Significantly Higher Numbers Among Non-Veterans

Significantly Higher Rates Among Veterans Across the US

From: Ahmedani et al., 2019

2,674 individuals who died by suicide 2000-2013 and were members of one of health care systems serving 8 states (Mental Health Research Network)
Suicide rates among recent VHA Users, 2020

Suicide rates among recent VHA Users, 2020

Main Points

- Who are military and veteran caregivers?
- Veteran suicide
- What might work (better)?
5.5 million military/veteran caregivers
Common Conditions among Care Recipients

What Caregivers Do

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-9/11</th>
<th>Pre-9/11</th>
<th>Civilian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help with at least 1 activity of daily living</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with at least 1 instrumental activity of daily living</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help care recipient cope with stressful situations</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>49%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Although caregivers spend time with those at risk of suicide, few suicide prevention interventions focus on caregivers, with scant evidence on “what works”
Warning signs may not indicate acute risk

Among 17 suicides in New Orleans in 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Warning Sign</th>
<th>7 days before death</th>
<th>30 days before death</th>
<th>New Onset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance use</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposelessness</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety, etc.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling Trapped</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopelessness</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger, etc.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recklessness</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mood changes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2022 National survey of caregivers

How concerned are you that [the person you are caring for] may be at risk of suicide?

1. Very concerned
2. Somewhat concerned
3. Not really concerned
4. Not at all concerned
Supporting caregivers of those with mental health problems or recurrent/chronic suicidality may prevent suicide

- Develop and test interventions that include caregivers AND those specifically for caregivers
- Disseminate those programs for caregivers that work (e.g., Family-to-Family)
- Include and engage survivors with lived experience in suicide prevention efforts

What about caregivers’ suicide risk?
% meeting criteria for probable depression

- Post-9/11: 38%
- Pre-9/11: 19%
- Civilian: 20%
- Non-caregiver: 10%

Consistent with general population

Tested predictors of major depression

Demographics (race/ethnicity, sex, age, marital status)

Education level

Type of disability

Household income/characteristics

Relationship to care recipient

Time spent caregiving

Helping care recipient cope with stressful situations

Confirmed predictors of major depression among post-9/11 caregivers

Demographics (race/ethnicity, sex, age, marital status)

Education level

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Helping care recipient cope with stressful situations

Phenotypes of caregiver distress in military and veteran caregivers: Suicidal ideation associations

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4 Center for Research to Advance Community Health (CRACH), UT Health San Antonio, San Antonio, TX, United States of America

24% of 458 military caregivers reported suicidal ideation since becoming a caregiver

Individuals in the high suicidality phenotype were significantly more likely to have interrupted their education due to caregiving and live closer (within 25 miles) to a VA medical center
At any time in the past 12 months, that is from [DATEFILL] up to and including today, did you seriously think about trying to kill yourself?

During the past 12 months, did you make any plans to kill yourself?

During the past 12 months, did you try to kill yourself?

4.8%
National >17, 2021

1.4%
National >17, 2021

0.7%
National >17, 2021
Thank you

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