

The Role of Caregivers in Preventing Military and Veteran Suicide

Rajeev Ramchand



Main Points



Who are military and veteran caregivers?

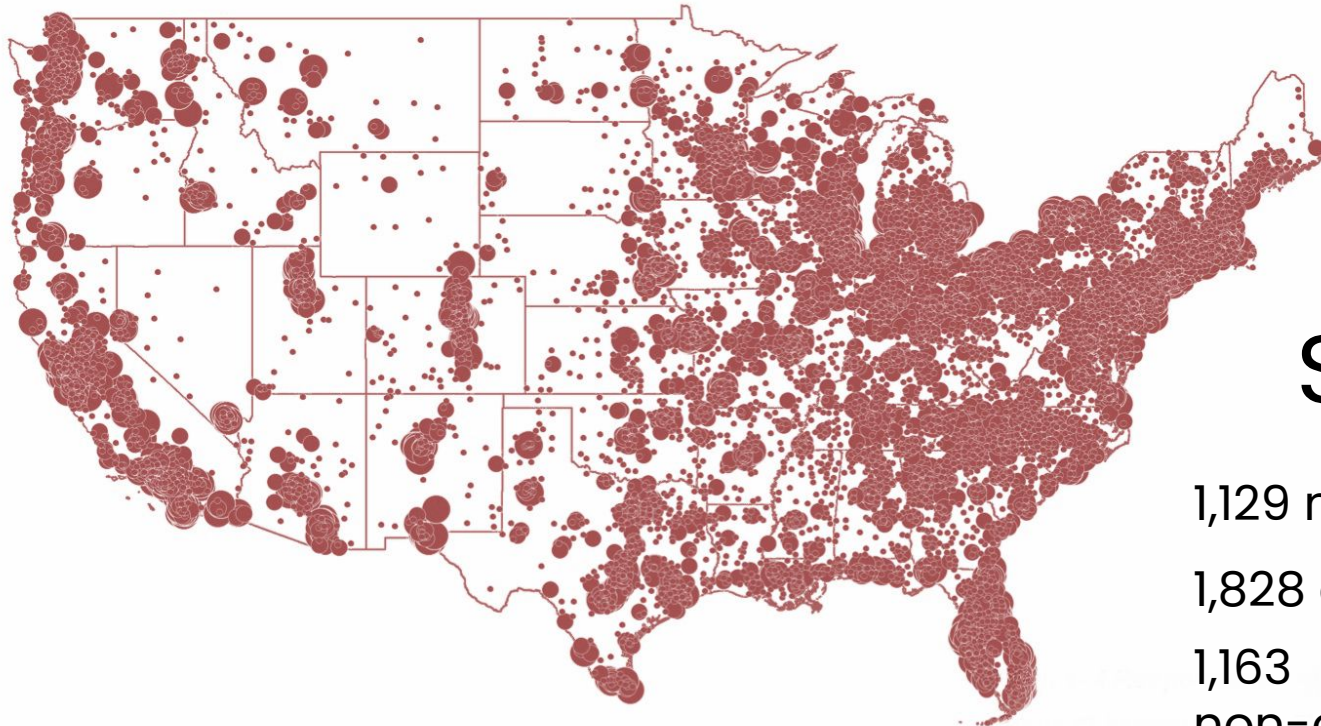


Military and veteran suicide



What might work (better)?

National survey of caregivers



Sample

1,129 military caregivers

1,828 civilian caregivers

1,163

non-caregivers

Reference: Ramchand, Tanielian, et al., 2014. Hidden Heroes: America's Military Caregivers. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

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

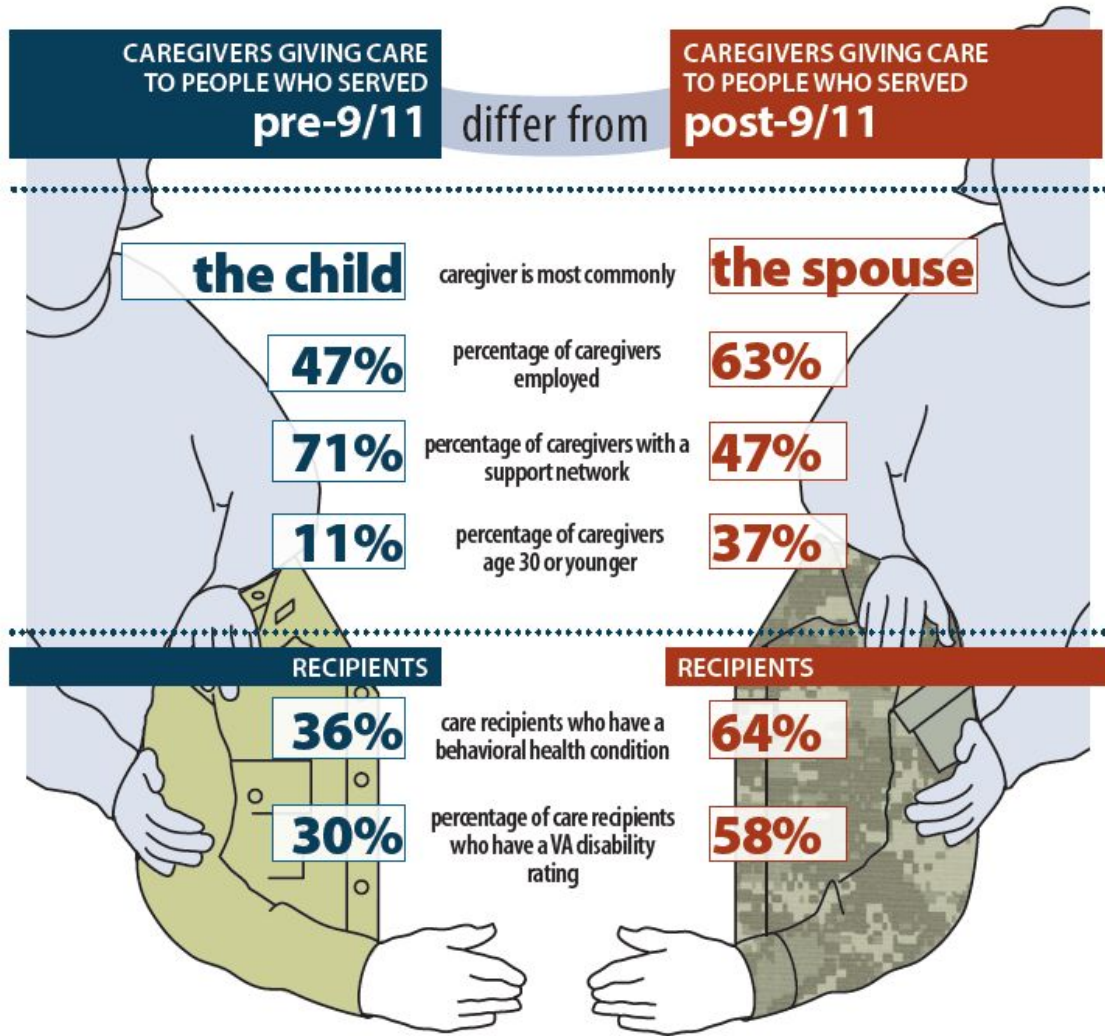


5.5 million
military/
veteran
caregivers



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



Reference: Ramchand, Tanielian, et al., 2014. Hidden Heroes: America's Military Caregivers. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

Changing How We Are Capturing Caregiving 2022

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?

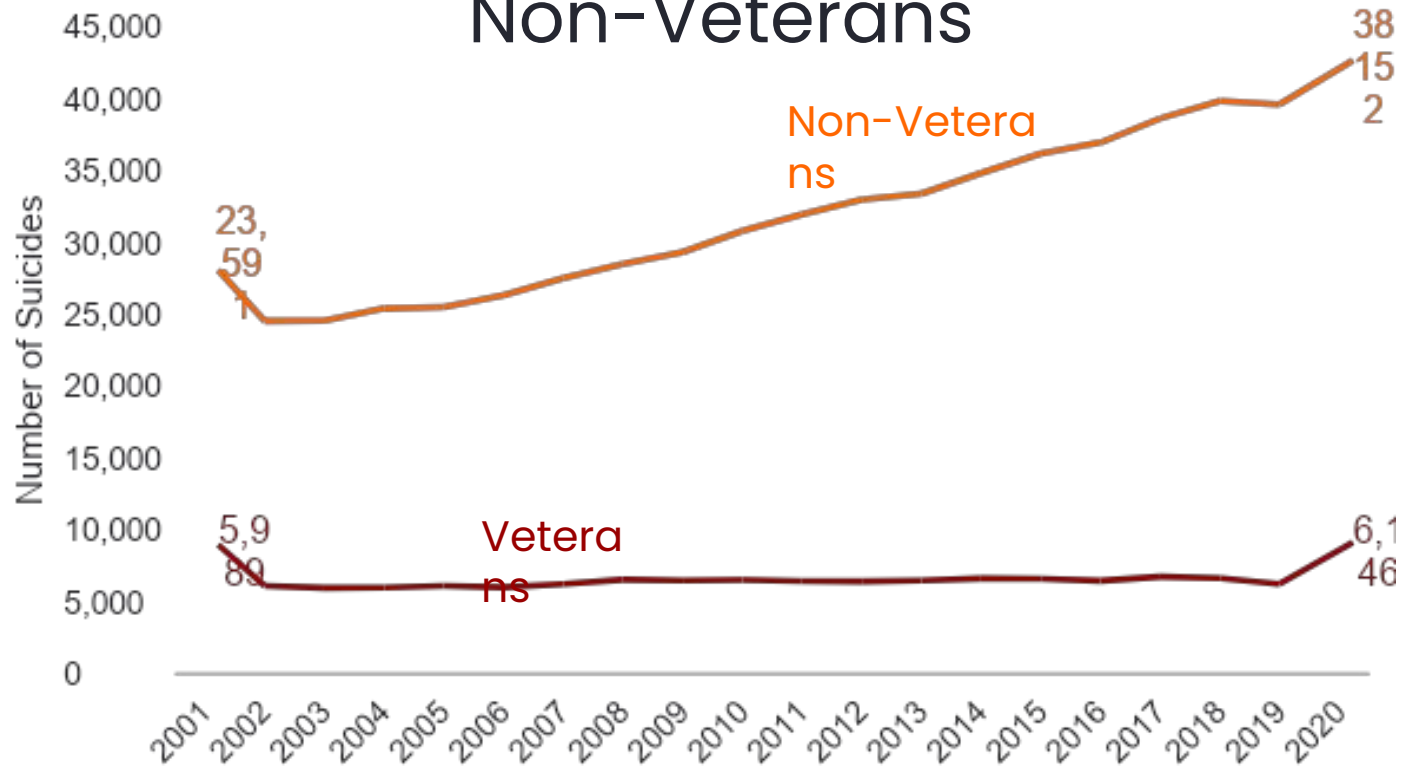


Veteran suicide



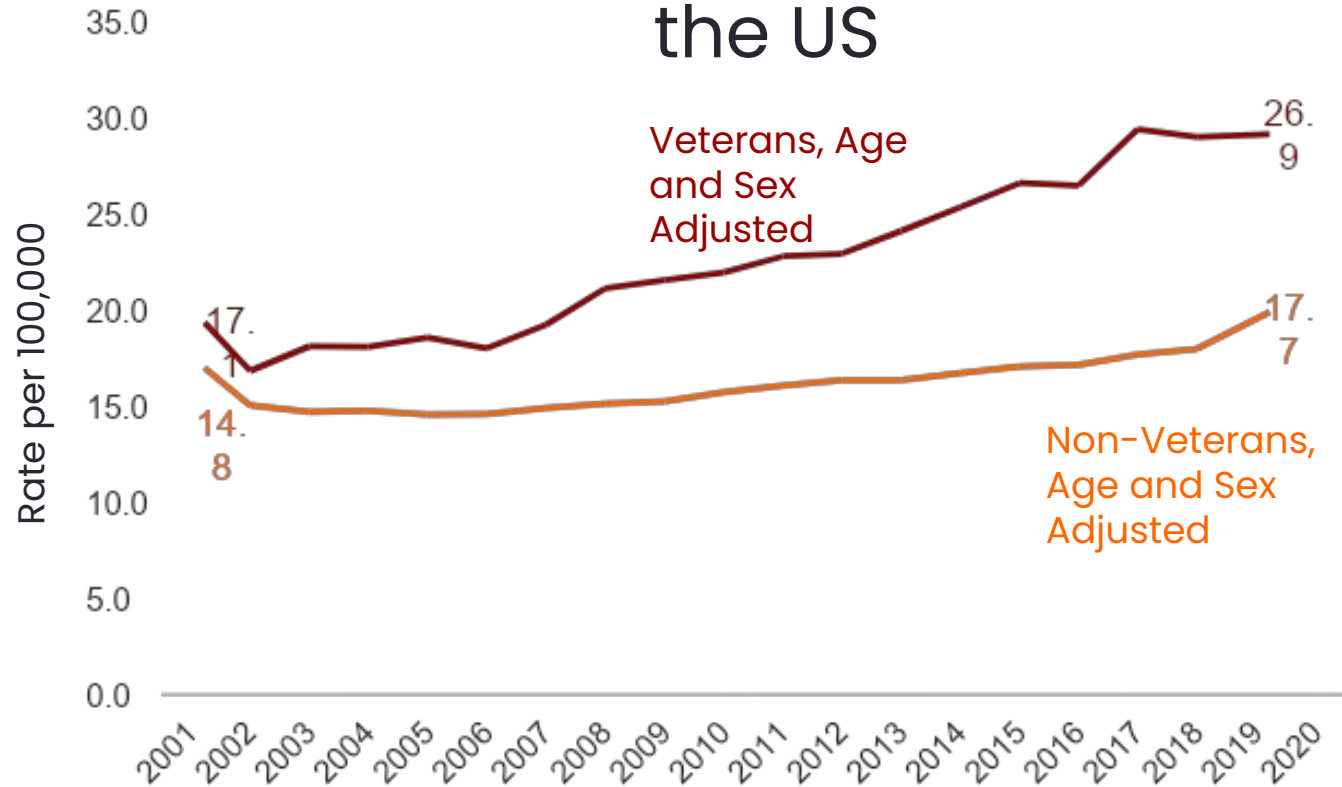
What might work (better)?

Significantly Higher Numbers Among Non-Veterans



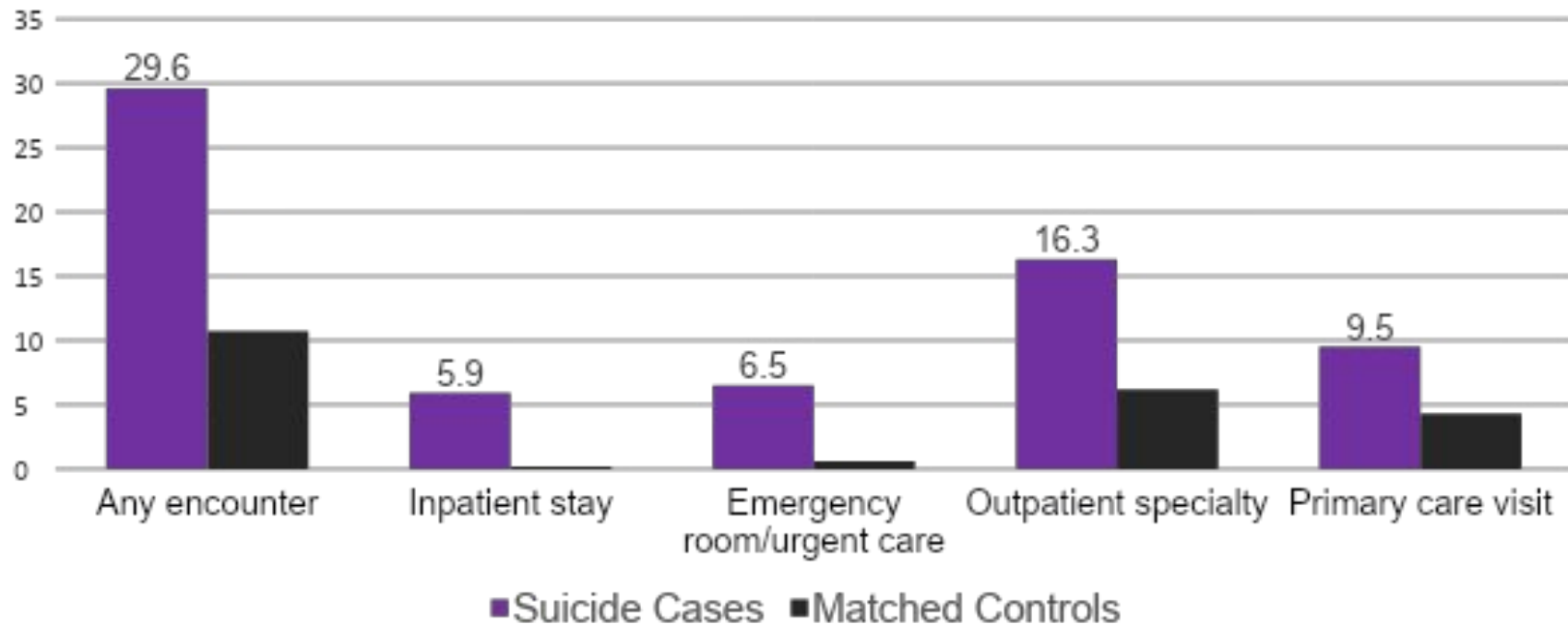
From: Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. [2020 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#). US Department of Veterans Affairs.

Significantly Higher Rates Among Veterans Across the US



From: Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. [2020 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#). US Department of Veterans Affairs.

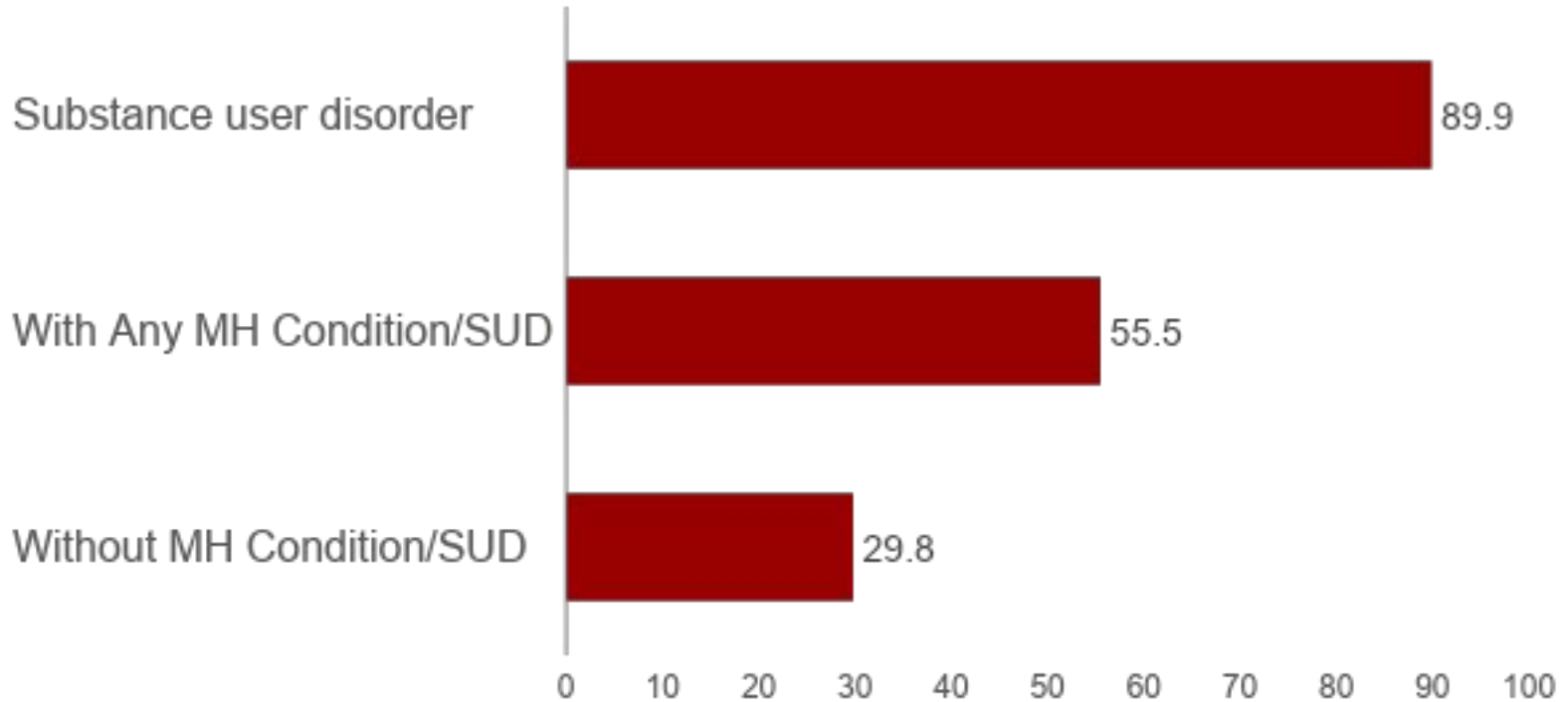
Health Encounters in 7 Days Prior to Suicide Death (Including But Not Restricted to Veterans)



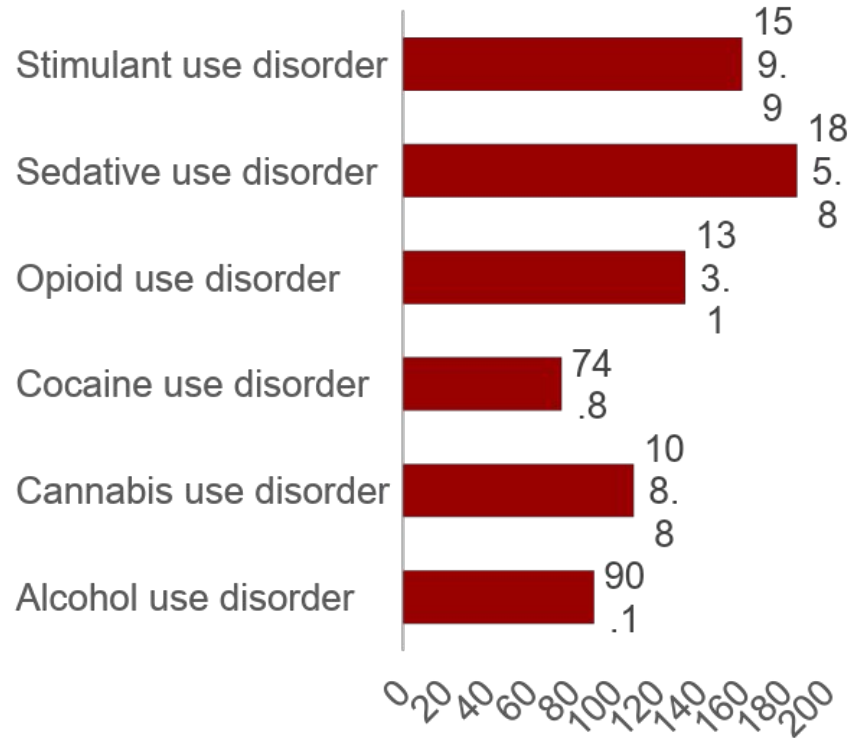
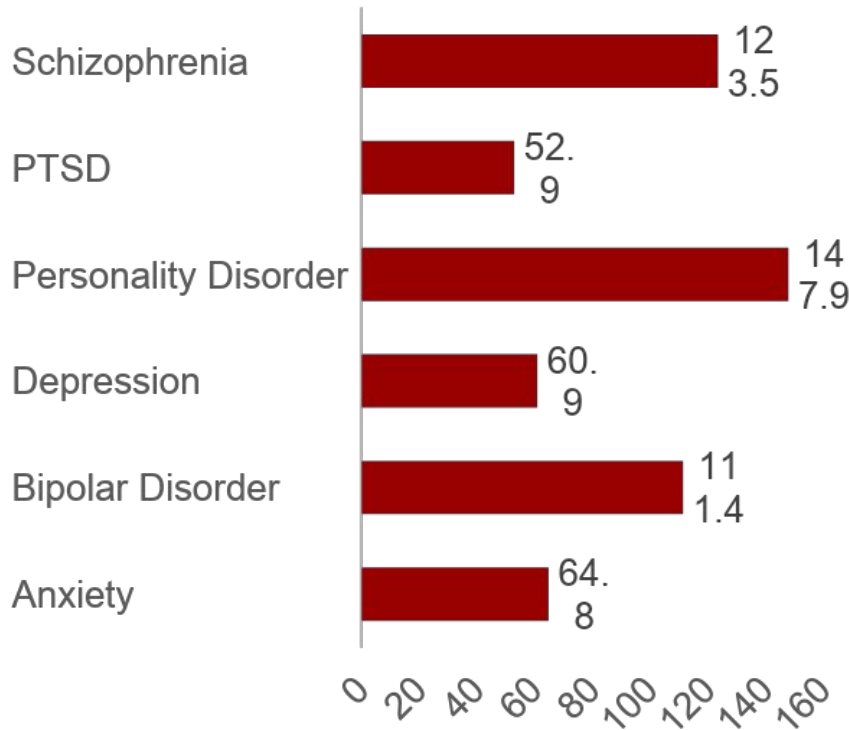
2,674 individuals who died by suicide 2000–2013 and were members of one of health care systems serving 8 states (Mental Health Research Network)

From: Ahmedani et al., 2019

Suicide rates among recent VHA Users, 2020



Suicide rates among recent VHA Users, 2020



Main Points



Who are military and veteran caregivers?



Veteran suicide

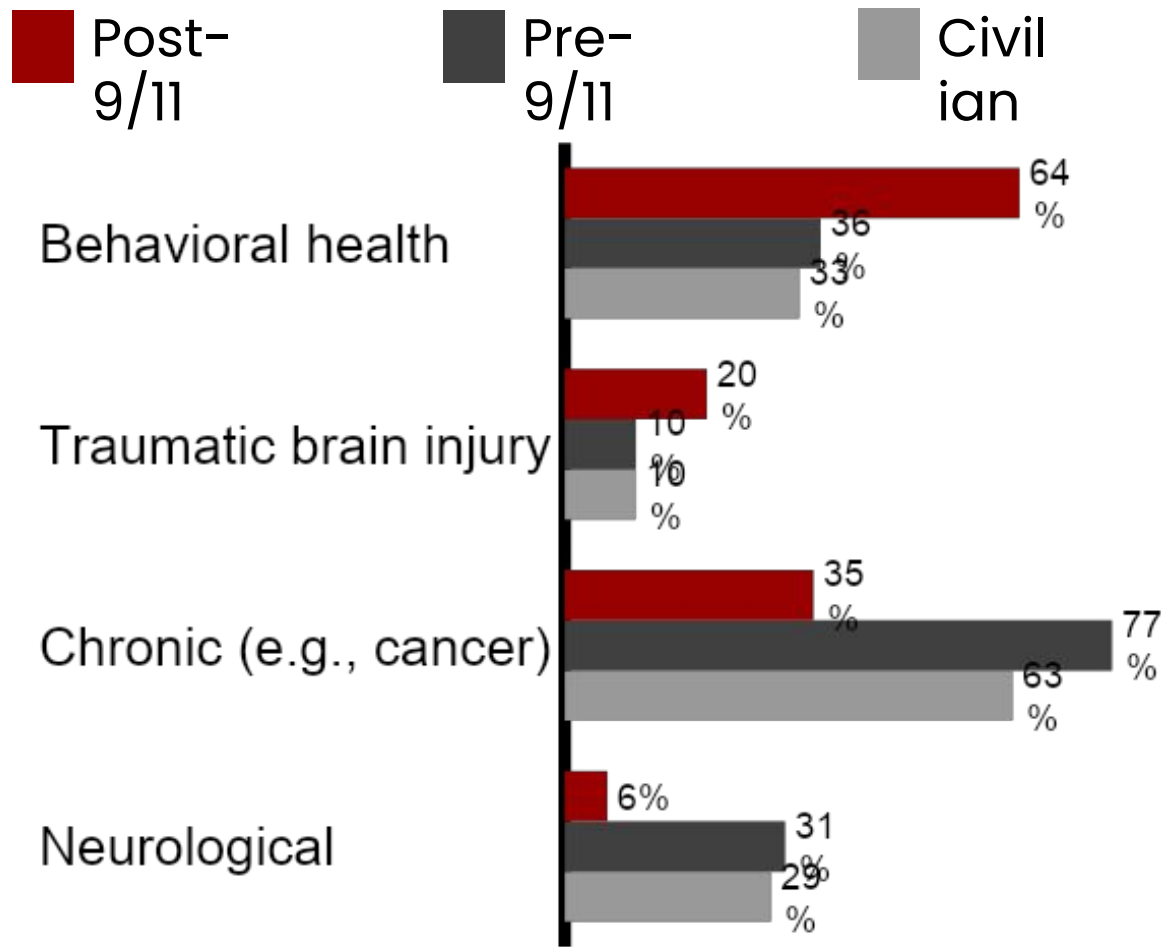


What might work (better)?



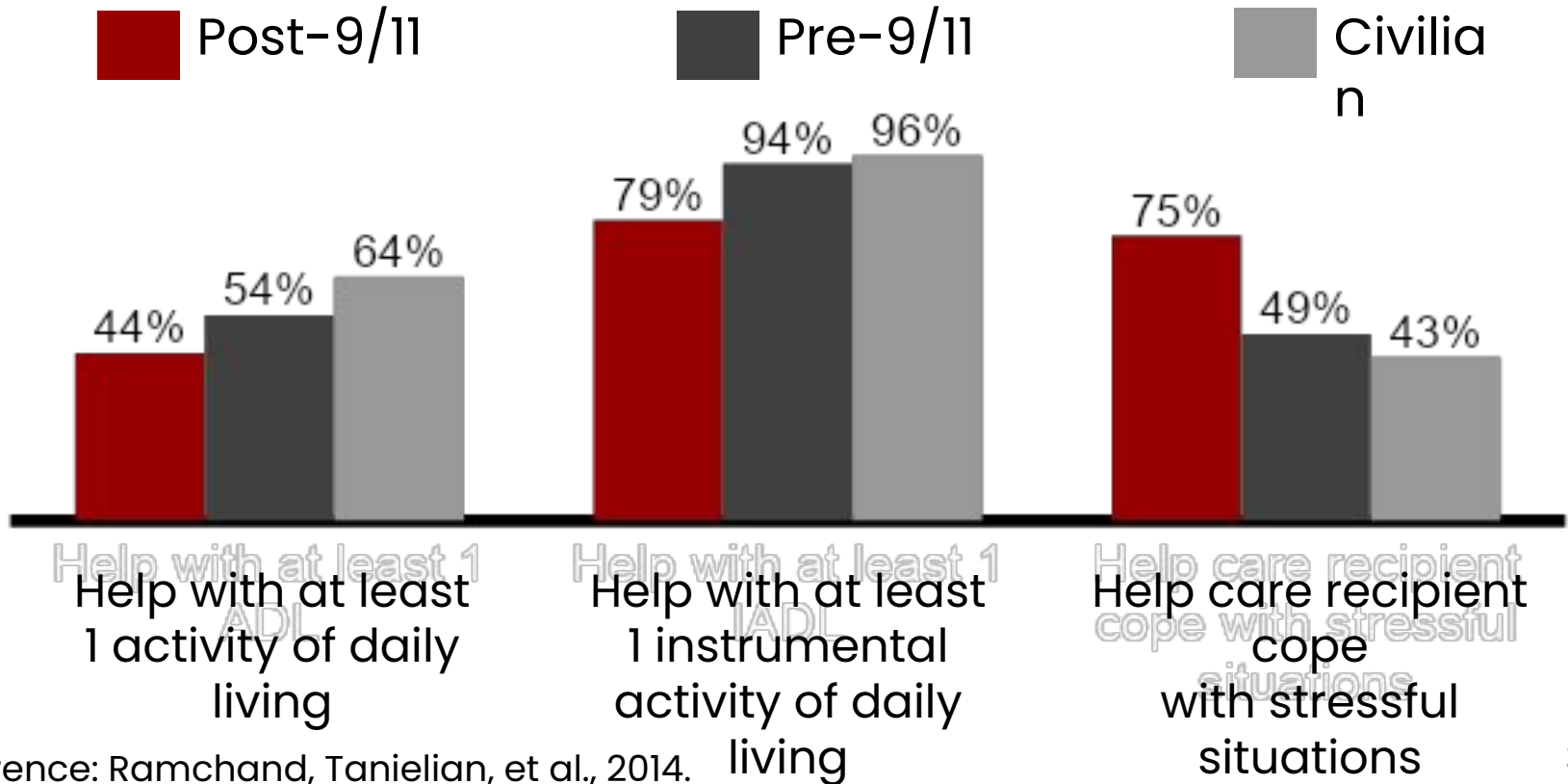
5.5 million
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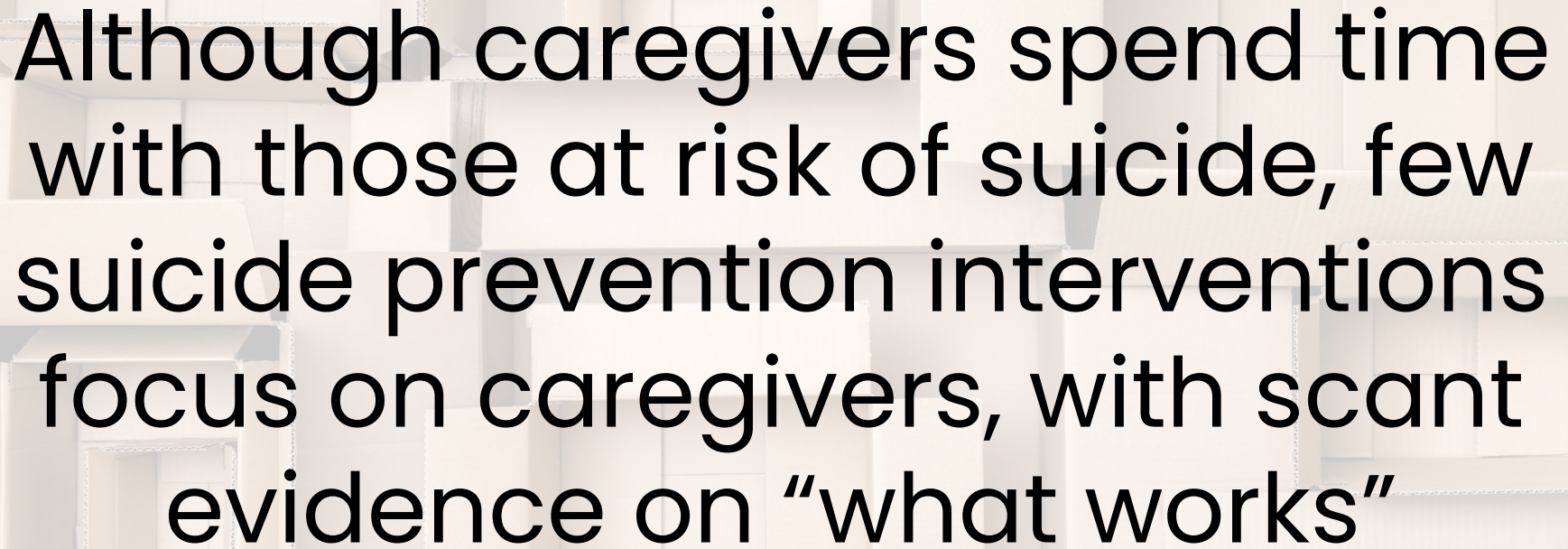
Common Conditions among Care Recipients



Reference: Ramchand, Tanielian, et al., 2014.

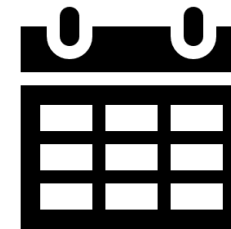
What Caregivers Do



The background of the slide consists of numerous stacked cardboard boxes of various sizes, creating a textured, three-dimensional effect. The boxes are light brown and are arranged in a way that suggests a warehouse or a storage area. The lighting is soft, highlighting the edges and flaps of the boxes.

Although caregivers spend time with those at risk of suicide, few suicide prevention interventions focus on caregivers, with scant evidence on “what works”

	7 days before death	30 days before death	New Onset
Ideation	10	11	3
Substance use	11	12	1
Purposelessness	10	14	4
Anxiety, etc.	11	15	4
Feeling Trapped	10	12	4
Hopelessness	10	13	4
Withdrawal	11	12	2
Anger, etc.	8	9	2
Recklessness	7	10	3
Mood changes	11	14	3

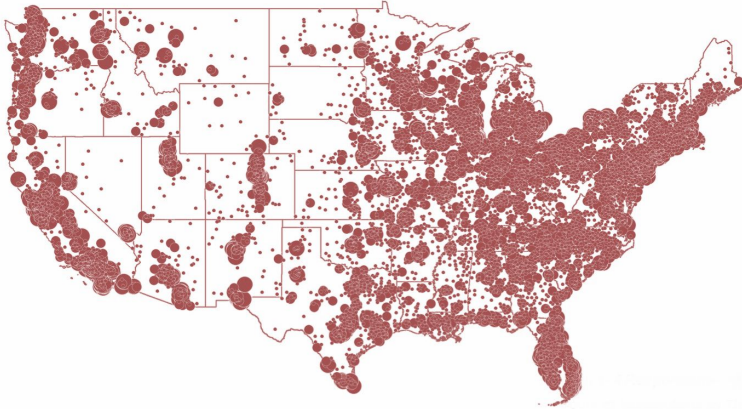


Warning signs may
not indicate acute
risk

Among **17**
suicides in New
Orleans in 2016

Reference: Ramchand et al., 2017. Opportunities to intervene? “Warning signs” for suicide in the days before dying. *Death Stud*, 41(6), 368–375.

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)

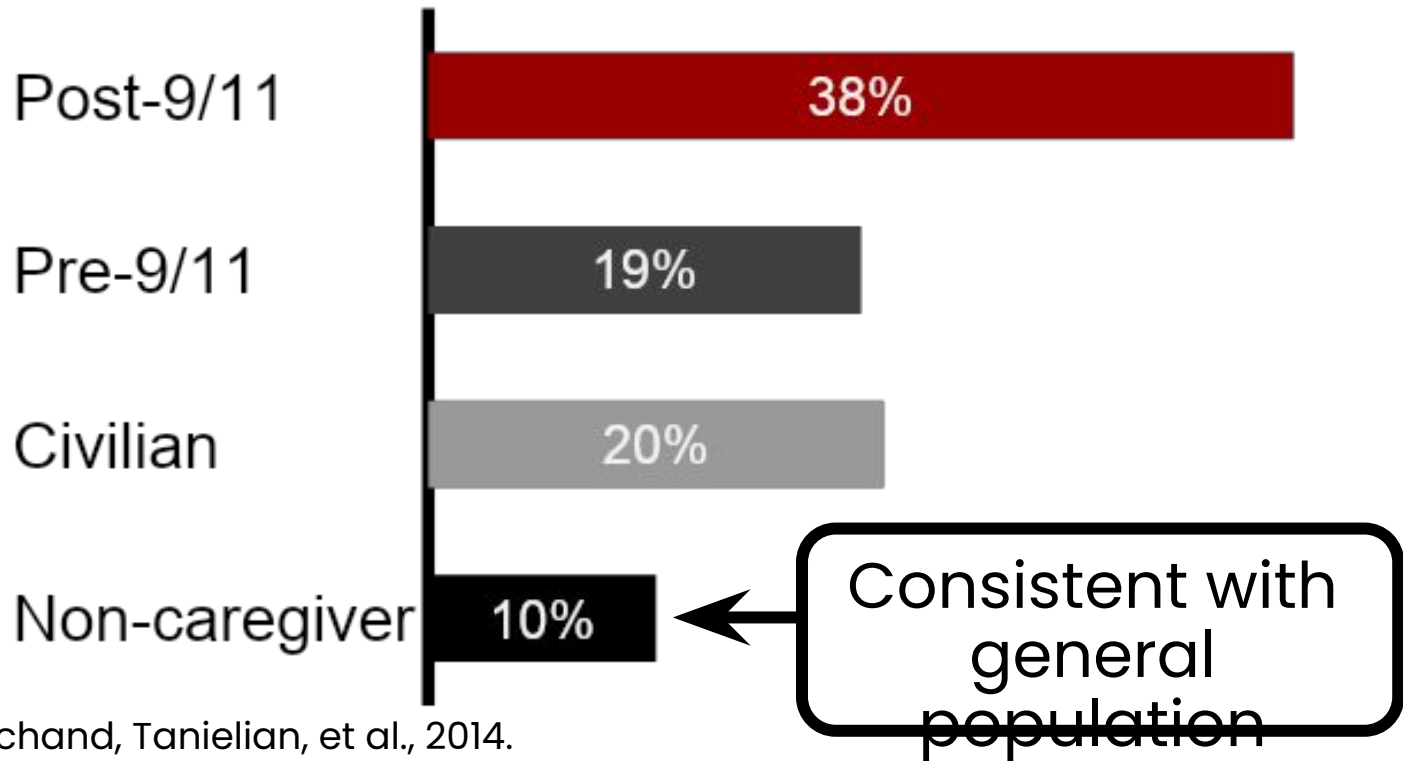


Include and engage survivors with lived experience in suicide prevention efforts



What about
caregivers'
suicide risk?

% meeting criteria for probable depression



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

Reference: Ramchand, Tanielian,
et al., 2014.

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**

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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

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OPEN ACCESS

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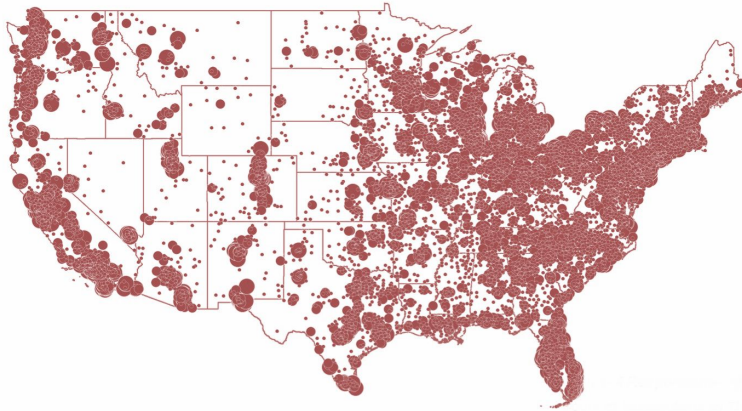
24% of 458 military caregivers reported suicidal ideation since becoming a caregiver

Abstract

The United States (US) has been at war for almost two decades, resulting in a high prevalence of injuries and illnesses in service members and veterans. Family members and friends are frequently becoming the caregivers of service members and veterans who require long-term assistance for their medical conditions. There is a significant body of research regarding the physical, emotional, and social toll of caregiving and the associated adverse health-related outcomes. Despite strong evidence of the emotional toll and associated mental health conditions in family caregivers, the literature regarding suicidal ideation among family caregivers is scarce and even less is known about suicidal ideation in military caregivers. This study sought to identify clusters of characteristics and health factors (phenotypes) associated with suicidal ideation in a sample of military caregivers using a cross-sectional, web-based survey. Measures included the context of caregiving, physical, emotional, social health, and health history of caregivers. Military caregivers in this sample ($n = 458$) were mostly young adults ($M = 39.8$, $SD = 9.9$), caring for complex medical conditions for five or more years. They reported high symptomatology on measures of pain, depression, and stress. Many (39%) experienced interruptions in their education and 23.6% reported suicidal ideation since becoming a caregiver. General latent variable analyses revealed three distinct classes or phenotypes (low, medium, high) associated with suicidality. 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. This study indicates that interruption of life events, loss of self, and caring for a veteran with mental health conditions/suicidality are significant predictors of suicidality in military caregivers. Future research should examine caregiver life experiences in more detail to determine the feasibility of developing effective interventions to mitigate suicide-related risk for military caregivers.

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

2022 National survey of caregivers



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?

4.8%
National >17,
2021

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

1.4%
National >17,
2021

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

0.7%
National >17,
2021

Thank
you

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org

