

Study of veterans finds family support during deployment reduces suicidal thoughts

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Family support during deployment is an important protective factor against post-deployment suicidal ideation according to a new study in the journal *Anxiety, Stress and Coping*.

Suicidal ideation includes thoughts that can range from fleeting consideration of suicide to the development of a specific plan for killing oneself. Research on [suicidal ideation](#) in veterans who served in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in Iraq has revealed a number of important predictors of suicidal ideation, including potentially traumatic deployment experiences (such as combat and sexual assault), mental health symptoms and diagnoses (such as [posttraumatic stress disorder](#) - PTSD - and depression) and lack of social support. Despite advances in understanding suicidal ideation among veterans, [family](#) factors during deployment remain relatively unexplored as predictors of suicidal ideation in this population.

For this study, a one-time mail survey was completed by 978 OEF/OIF veterans who reported combat exposure. The survey asked about a variety of deployment and post-deployment experiences, including family stress and support.

"We found that both family stress and lack of family support during deployment were associated with suicidal ideation; however these associations occur primarily through mental health symptomatology, consistent with findings observed for other deployment factors,"

explained Dawne S. Vogt, PhD, associate professor of psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine and epidemiologist in the Women's Health Sciences Division, National Center for PTSD at the VA Boston Healthcare System.

According to the researchers this study provides novel evidence for the role of deployment family factors in post-deployment suicidal ideation and further highlights the potential of treating [mental health](#) symptoms as a means of preventing [suicidal thoughts](#) among veterans.

Provided by Boston University Medical Center

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