

# RESEARCH NOTE

## Survey Evaluation of the Training Video, “Simple Things Save Lives”

*Abigail Moore, Andrée Rose, Office of People Analytics*

*Laura Neely, Defense Suicide Prevention Office*

### Introduction

This Research Note presents the results of a brief survey to measure the effectiveness of the training video titled, “Simple Things Save Lives.”<sup>1</sup> The video was a joint collaboration between the Defense Suicide Prevention Office (DSPO) and the Defense Personnel and Security Research Center (PERSEREC), a division of the Office of People Analytics (OPA). The intent of the video was to reach the online community, specifically younger Service members, and it provides guidance on how to recognize and respond to potentially concerning social media posts indicating suicidal thoughts or ideation. A Department-funded study that identified patterns of social and behavioral risks on social media platforms preceding suicide among military personnel provides the research base for this training.<sup>2</sup>

The survey was used to understand the video’s effectiveness, including potential changes in one’s behavior when interacting with others online, and to identify social media platforms that Service members use in order to improve engagement with them in the future. It included 14 questions to assess demographics of the respondents, the quality of the video, what respondents learned from the video, and social media use (see Appendix A for the full survey). Results indicate the “Simple Things Save Lives” video was useful, engaging, and relevant, and that the majority of respondents believed it would change their behavior, e.g., helping them to share useful resources with someone experiencing stress.

### Methods

The military Services were each asked to disseminate the hyperlink for the video to 1,000 Service members (5,000 total – Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and National Guard and Reserve). A 10% response rate was expected. The target goal was 100 Service members from each Service to view the video and complete the survey, for a total of 500 respondents. The Services were also asked to target different demographics for the sample with 50% junior enlisted, 25% senior enlisted, and 25% Officer.

The total Active and Reserve Component Service members completing the survey was 1,560, exceeding the target goal of 500.<sup>3</sup> All responses were anonymous and participation was voluntary. The video was hosted on MilLife Learning and the survey link was embedded at the end of the video;

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<sup>1</sup> Simple Things Save Lives may be viewed here: <https://www.dspo.mil/SimpleThings/>

<sup>2</sup> Bryan, C.J., Butner, J.E., Sungchoon, S., Bryan, A. O., Hesse, C. M., and Rose, A. E. (2018) Predictors of Emerging Suicide Death Among Military Personnel on Social Media Networks, *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 48 (4), 413-430.

<sup>3</sup> The video evaluation was reviewed by the Defense Human Resources Activity Human Research Protection Program and it was determined that the project does not meet the definition of human subjects research under 32 CFR 219 as it was conducted for operational purposes within the DoD.



however, this required an account with user name and password to access. To maximize access, the video and survey link were hosted on the dspo.mil website, which is publicly available. The survey was open from March 1, 2020 to January, 31, 2021 and all data were collected via the web. From March 1 to July 31, 2020, the survey was hosted on the MAX.gov platform, a total of 85 Service members responded to the survey. From August 1, 2020 to January 31, 2021, it was hosted on the Verint Systems platform on an OPA server and a total of 1,475 Service members responded to the survey. For the most part, the questions and functionality remained the same between the two platforms.

While the survey was open for seven months, most activity was recorded between November 2020 and January 2021. During this timeframe, DSPO coordinated with the Suicide Prevention and Risk Reduction Committee (SPARRC), an enterprise-wide, action-officer level committee, to disseminate the hyperlink for the video to Service members and encourage their survey participation after they watched the video. The SPARRC was briefed on the project on September 16, 2020. SPARRC members received a formal request via email from the DSPO Deputy Director on November 18, 2020 to disseminate the hyperlink for the video to at least 1,000 Service members in some manner (e.g., email, social media). SPARRC members received verbal reminders to disseminate the video in meetings on December 15, 2020 and January 13, 2021, and a final email reminder on January 25, 2021.

The Services reported using email as the main vehicle to disseminate the video. Department of Air Force specifically sent the link to the Major Command Violence Prevention Program Managers (these personnel function as suicide prevention program managers at the Command level) and asked them to circulate. Department of Navy sent the video description and evaluation link to the Suicide Prevention Program Managers, who in turn sent it out to their subordinate Suicide Prevention Coordinators (SPC); there is an SPC at every command in the Navy. Additionally, the Navy Fleet Master Chief sent a supporting email with the video link to every Sailor in their command. Department of Army reported sending the video link in an email to program managers, leaders, and colleagues, sharing the video on Army social media accounts, and verbally requesting assistance in formal and informal meetings.

The first question on the survey was an eligibility question that asked about military status (i.e., Active or Reserve Component member). Given that the video was targeted to Service members, respondents who identified themselves as non-military members were not allowed to proceed. In order to be included in the results, respondents must also have answered at least one question other than the eligibility question. It is important to note that the eligibility question was not included in the MAX.gov version of the survey; therefore, data for this question are missing for 85 respondents who took the survey using that platform. However, data from these respondents were included in the results because it is likely they were Active or Reserve Component military members due to the way they accessed the video and survey (i.e., through MilLife Learning).

The survey included two open-ended questions that researchers reviewed and redacted for any personally identifiable information (PII). While inter-rater reliability was not measured or calculated, the researchers content-coded the comments by carefully reviewing each one and grouping them according to similar themes or topics.

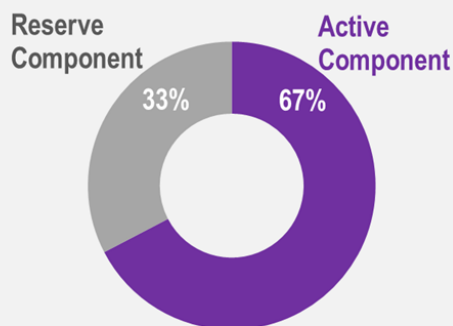
All percentages included in this report were calculated based on the total number responding to each question; missing responses were excluded from the calculations.



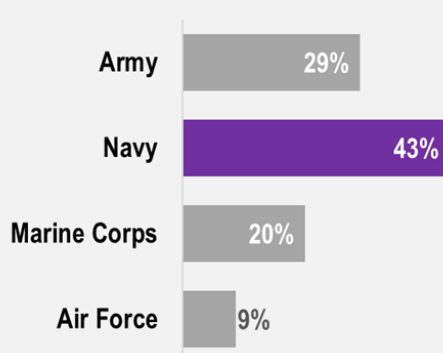
## Survey Respondents

A total of 1,560 respondents completed the survey. About half (51%) were junior enlisted members, a target audience for this video. A majority also reported being Active Component Service members (67%), male (74%), and in the Navy (43%). Most respondents reported being under 40 years old (67%), with about one-third under the age of 30 (34%).

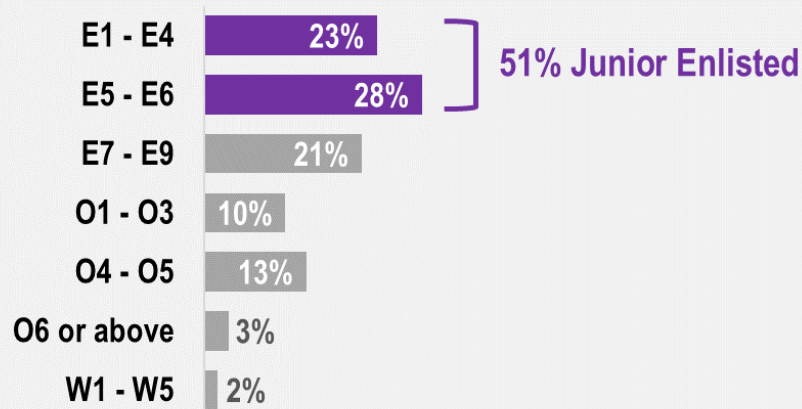
The **majority** of survey respondents were **Active Component** and **almost half** were in the **Navy**.



*Note: The Reserve/Active Component question above was not included in the MAX.gov version of the survey; data are missing for 85 respondents.*

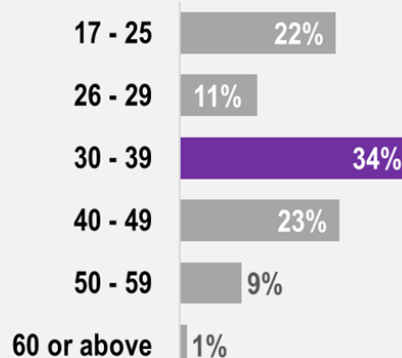
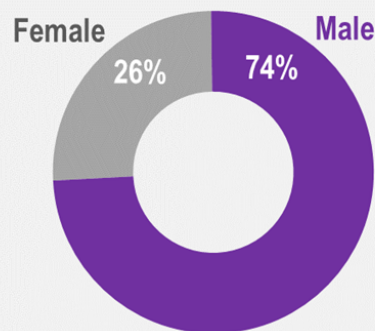


The **majority** of survey respondents were **junior enlisted**, the target audience for this video.





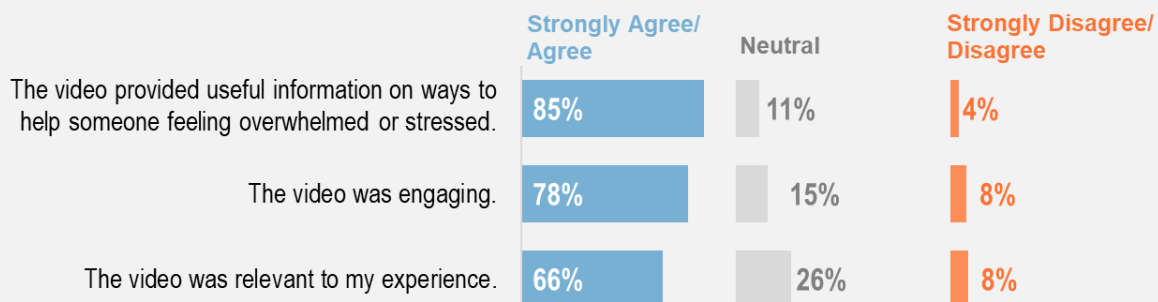
The **majority** of survey respondents were **male**, with about **one-third** under age **30**.



## Survey Results

Overall, survey respondents had positive feedback about the video. Most respondents found the video useful (85%), engaging (78%), and relevant (66%). While still a majority, the percentage who agreed the video was relevant was almost 20 percentage points lower than the usefulness rating.

Most respondents **agreed** that the video was useful, engaging, and relevant.



Among those who agreed that the video was useful, engaging, or relevant, many respondents supplied overall positive feedback about the video, noting it provided a new approach to this type of training.



For those who **agreed** that the video was useful, engaging, or relevant, comments indicated positive feedback, noting that the video provided a new approach to this type of training, as well as some tips related to the resources at the end of the video.

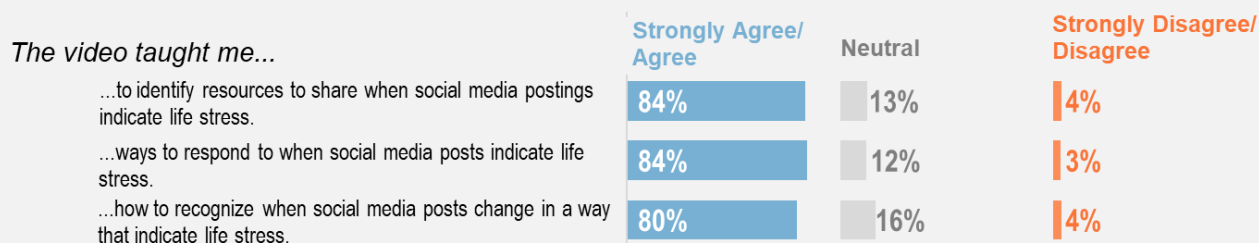
“Length of video is appropriate. Keep within the 5-7 minutes range to keep attention. Keep the message simple and focused (i.e. reach out if you feel something is off). A lot of resources presented at the end, which is great, but no way to capture them all. Consider generating a single flyer that can be printed off and posted within unit spaces.”

“I think the video was delivered well. It was long enough to give due diligence to the subject, but not so long as to lose people's attention. I appreciate that the featured personnel were speaking from personal experience, I feel that makes a big impact. I prefer this kind of delivery over having to find a volunteer to go get trained to deliver course content. Those trainers usually do an adequate job, but when something is personal and a subject that a person feels passionate about, the delivery is typically higher quality. I do acknowledge that in-person training does allow for much needed interaction. Overall, very well done.”

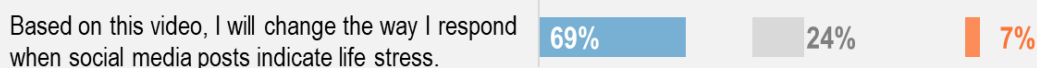
Among those who were neutral or disagreed that the video was relevant, a small percentage of respondents reported they wanted the language to better apply regardless of component, occupational specialty, or other Service member demographics.

Over 80% of respondents agreed that the video taught them something and 69% indicated they would change the way they respond to social media posts that indicate life stress.

#### Most respondents **agreed** that the video taught them something.



#### Though a smaller percentage, most respondents also **agreed** that the video would lead to changed behavior.



Among those who agreed the video taught them something or they would change their behavior, respondents highlighted that even though the video was short in length, it still provided a great deal of information.





For those who **agreed** that the video taught them something or that they would change their behavior, comments again indicated positive feedback, highlighting the fact that while short, the video still provided a lot of information.

“This was a great new video. It's always nice to see refreshing training on a topic that is so important. The same video/training over and over that has not been changed in years doesn't always capture the attention it needs. 'Oh its the same video as last time' may make it appear it's not important to pay attention to if the programmers/owners don't care to refresh it.”

“Great video! Short but very powerful and informative.”

“I like the simplicity of this video. It has the familiarity of videos I would see on social media. It is not too long, and it is relevant to our current climate of interactions with one another.”

For those who were neutral or disagreed that they would change their behavior based on the video, some may have felt they were already acting in ways consistent with the training—they cited not learning anything new from the video. Others felt the video needed to be more in-depth, perhaps by providing more training on suicide intervention, tips on reaching out beyond social media, or changing the climate in which Service members work.

For those who **disagreed** or were **neutral** that the video would lead to changed behavior, some comments indicated the video did not provide new information or that it wasn't in-depth enough.

“I don't feel I learned anything NEW in this video but it reinforced things I already knew.”

“I think that the video is decent but is short and doesn't really equip soldiers with tools to tackle suicide intervention.”

To further assess what respondents may have learned from the video, they were given a hypothetical scenario about a potentially concerning social media post from a friend (see page 12 in Appendix A for the full scenario). Respondents were asked to write-in how they would respond to their friend. Researchers reviewed all responses and content-coded them into common topics or themes. As shown in Table 1 below, of the total respondents, the overwhelming majority (93%) indicated they would follow the recommendation made repeatedly in the video to contact the individual who made the post. About 19% of respondents indicated they would want to meet their friend in-person. Almost half (45%) indicated they would ask questions and listen to their friend, and nearly one-quarter (23%) indicated they would help their friend find support and/or resources. A small percentage of the respondents indicated they would notify a chaplain (3%), someone in the chain of command (2%), or emergency services (e.g., police; 1%).



**Table 1. Responses to Hypothetical Scenario Grouped by Theme**

Theme	Count	Percentage
<b>Contact the individual</b>	1,155	93%
Ask to meet in-person	233	19%
<b>Ask questions and listen</b>	561	45%
<b>Help the individual find support</b>	280	23%
<b>Encourage the individual</b>	105	9%
<b>Notify chaplain</b>	36	3%
<b>Notify command</b>	26	2%
<b>Notify emergency services</b>	16	1%
<b>Other</b>	9	0.7%
<b>Response not substantive or not applicable</b>	57	5%
<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>1,239</b>	

*Note: Response types are greater than the total number of responses because participants provided more than one response type.*

Examples of several responses are below.

**When asked how they would respond to a potentially troubling social media post from a friend, many respondents wrote about using several strategies to respond, starting with contacting the individual directly.**

“ I would contact S/he by telephone and try to get them to talk over some coffee or a meal. However if S/he declines I would simply let my concerns know to individual and try to engage in a deeper conversation most importantly about how much they mean to me let them know I care. If I am not the person for them try and get them to someone they trust. ”

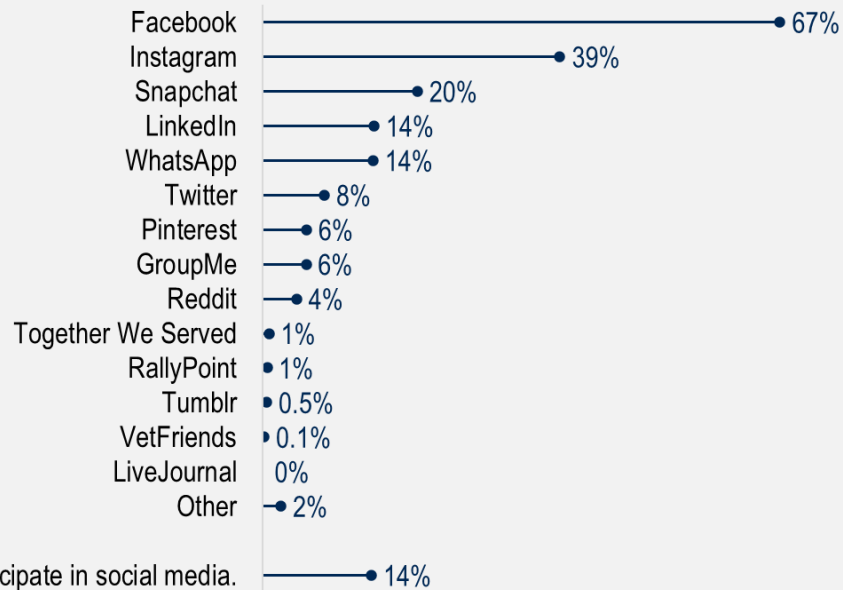
“ I would call them right away and get as much additional details as possible and better know the correct and actual situation. If there is any potential for harm or suicidal actions, I would meet the friend in person right away and stay with them until I can get them to professional helping services. Also, I would quickly get the friend in contact with or to a place of financial help and guidance, timing of this would depend on the severity of the suicidal remarks and/or thoughts. ”

Finally, in order to identify platforms that could be used to engage Service members online, respondents were asked about the social media platforms they use most often. The majority of respondents (67%) reported using Facebook most often. Instagram and Snapchat were the second and third most popular platforms, but their usage was much lower at 39% and 20%, respectively. Only 14% of respondents reported not participating in social media.



### A majority of respondents reported using Facebook most often.

Instagram and Snapchat were the second and third ranked social media platforms used most often, but the percentage who reported using these was much lower than Facebook.



### Conclusions & Recommendations

- Survey results indicated that most respondents found the video effective. A majority indicated it was useful, engaging, and relevant.
- A majority of respondents indicated the video helped them learn by 1) identifying resources to share with someone experiencing stress; 2) providing ways to respond to a social media post indicating life stress; and 3) recognizing when someone's social media posts indicate life stress. Perhaps most importantly, a majority also indicated that after watching the video, they would change the way they respond to social media posts indicating life stress.
- Survey results indicate Facebook may be the best platform to engage with Service members online, as it was reported as the platform used most frequently.





## Appendix A: Survey Instrument

The below images display the full survey, as it appeared on the Verint platform.



**DSPO**  
DEFENSE SUICIDE PREVENTION OFFICE

### "Simple Things Save Lives" Video Evaluation

Tell us what you think of the "Simple Things Save Lives" video!

This assessment should take between 5 and 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will not be linked back to you.

Your input is greatly appreciated. Click **Next** to proceed.

**About the Survey:**

This voluntary survey has 14 questions in this survey. It is anonymous and we do not collect any identifying information.

16%

Next

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Which of the following best describes you?

- ☐ I am a military member on active duty and am not a Guard or Reserve member in an AGR/FTS/AR position.
- ☐ I am a military member in the Guard or Reserve, including an AGR/FTS/AR position.
- ☐ Other

33%

Next

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How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a) The video was engaging.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b) The video was relevant to my experience.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c) The video provided useful information on ways to help someone feeling overwhelmed or stressed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

50%

Next

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How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

a) The video taught me how to recognize when a friend, family member, or significant other's social media posts change in a way that indicates he or she is experiencing life stress.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ N/A; I already knew this before watching the video.

b) The video taught me ways to respond to a friend, family member, or significant other whose social media posts indicates he or she is experiencing life stress.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ N/A; I already knew this before watching the video.

c) The video taught me to identify the appropriate resources to share with a friend, family member, or significant other whose social media postings indicate he or she is experiencing life stress.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ N/A; I already knew this before watching the video.

d) Based on what I saw in this video, in the future, I will change the way I respond to a friend, family member, or significant other whose social media posts indicate he or she is experiencing life stress.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ N/A; I am already responding in a manner consistent with what I saw in the video.

66%

Next

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*The next question is intended to assess how well the training has prepared you for situations on social media sites that may indicate someone may harm her or himself. It is a hypothetical scenario based on research of concerning behaviors communicated on social media sites.*

You scan your Facebook news feed and come across a post from one of your friends that gets your attention. In the post, your friend talks about how s/he got laid off from his or her job. Normally, your friend makes some sarcastic joke about setbacks like this and then asks you to hang out where s/he does some venting but then you both figure out a plan on how s/he can bounce back. That's not the reaction this time. Instead, your friend seems really upset. S/he discloses that s/he has a lot of debt and doesn't know how to pay off bills. Moreover, s/he is worried about asking for financial help from family members because s/he doesn't want to be a burden. At the end of post, you see a sad emoji face with a picture of a gun next to it followed by a "j/k?!" with a few dots trailing off. Your friend has never talked about killing her/himself before but you've never seen a post like this before.

**How do you respond?**

*Please write your approach in the text box below. Please do not include any personally identifiable information, such as names of individuals.*

83%

Next



What is your current pay grade? *Select the corresponding pay grade range.*

What is your branch of Service?

What is your gender?

- ☐ Female  
☐ Male

What is your age? *Select the corresponding age range.*

Which social media platforms do you use most often? *Select up to 3.*

- |                                      |                                             |                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook    | <input type="checkbox"/> RallyPoint         | <input type="checkbox"/> Twitter                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GroupMe     | <input type="checkbox"/> Reddit             | <input type="checkbox"/> VetFriends                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instagram   | <input type="checkbox"/> Snapchat           | <input type="checkbox"/> WhatsApp                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> LinkedIn    | <input type="checkbox"/> Together We Served | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> LiveJournal | <input type="checkbox"/> Tumblr             | <input type="checkbox"/> None. I do not participate in social media. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pinterest   |                                             |                                                                      |

Are there any other comments that you would like to make? *Please do not include personally identifiable information.*

100%

Submit Survey

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