

Department of Defense (DoD) Quarterly Suicide Report (QSR) 3rd Quarter, CY 2020

**Karin A. Orvis, Ph.D., Director,
Defense Suicide Prevention Office
(DSPO)**

The estimated cost of this report or study for the Department of Defense is approximately \$6,770 for the 2021 Fiscal Year. This includes \$3,940 in expenses and \$2,830 in DoD labor.



**DEFENSE SUICIDE
PREVENTION OFFICE**

Introduction

The Department of Defense (DoD) is fully committed to preventing suicides in our military community – every death by suicide is a tragedy. The DoD recognizes the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of our Service members and families. We are closely monitoring potential impacts and proactive steps to mitigate those potential impacts. During this time, we remain dedicated in our efforts to educate the force, support the force, and emphasize social connectedness.

At this time, it is too early to determine whether suicide rates will increase or decrease for Calendar Year 2020. The DoD will need to collect the full year of data and allow appropriate latitude to investigate individual cases to make such a determination, and to then conduct the necessary statistical analyses to understand trends over time.

To help determine the impact of suicide on the Total Force, the Defense Suicide Prevention Office (DSPO) routinely collects and reports surveillance data on suicide mortality across the Department. The most up-to-date counts of suicide deaths are reported in the Quarterly Suicide Report (QSR).¹ The QSR complies with Objective 11.1 of the DoD Defense Strategy for Suicide Prevention (DSSP) by providing timely and accurate suicide data to guide suicide prevention efforts across the Department.

DSPO collects suicide data via a collaborative effort with the Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES) and the Suicide Prevention Program Offices of the Military Services (i.e., Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force). AFMES is the official DoD entity responsible for verifying and reporting deaths by suicide for the Active Component and, to the extent available, the Reserve Component, to DSPO.^{2,3} These numbers are reconciled with the Military Services to ensure the most accurate information is reported.

Quarters are based upon the Calendar Year (CY) and defined as:

- Quarter 1 (Q1): January 1st – March 31st
- Quarter 2 (Q2): April 1st – June 30th
- Quarter 3 (Q3): July 1st – September 30th
- Quarter 4 (Q4): October 1st – December 31st

The current report presents data from Q3 of CY 2020. Data include all known or suspected suicides (both confirmed and pending) as of September 30, 2020, for both the Active and Reserve Components. Hence, the numbers presented in this report are preliminary and subject to change in future quarterly reports as previously unknown suicide cases are

¹ Absolute counts do not account for changes in population size. Consequently, caution should be used when making comparisons across groups and/or interpreting changes in suicide counts across time.

² Active Component: Full-time members of the U.S. Armed Forces and Cadets/Midshipmen at the designated military academies.

³ Reserve Component: Limited to members of the Selected Reserves (SELRES). SELRES are drilling and training members of the National Guard and Reserves, Individual Mobilization Augmentees, and full-time support Active Guard and Reservists. This excludes members of the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) and Inactive National Guard (ING).

reported.⁴ In addition, caution should be used when interpreting seeming trends over time, as true trends require statistical analysis. This includes incorporating potential population shifts within a given Service to understand whether a seeming increase or decrease is a true trend across time.

Caution should be used when making comparisons across groups and/or interpreting changes in suicide counts across time because counts do not account for changes in population size. Rates account for differences in population sizes; and, as such, provide a more standardized way to make comparisons over time or across groups.⁵ For the most recent DoD annual suicide rates and trends/changes over time, please see the CY 2019 DoD Annual Suicide Report (available at: <https://www.dspo.mil/ASR/>).

QSR Data

Attachment A details the number of suicide deaths by Service and Component. For Q3 of CY 2020, the Military Services reported the following:

- 111 in the **Active Component**
- 13 in the **Reserve**
- 29 in the **National Guard**

Comparisons of suicide counts between Q3 CY 2019 and Q3 CY 2020 are provided below.⁶

- For Q3 CY 2020, the number of **Active Component** suicide deaths increased by 26 compared to Q3 CY 2019 (111 versus 85 suicide deaths)
 - Army Active Component suicide deaths increased by 17
 - Marine Corps Active Component suicide deaths increased by 7
 - Navy Active Component suicide deaths increased by 1
 - Air Force Active Component suicide deaths increased by 1
- For Q3 CY 2020, the number of **Reserve** suicide deaths decreased by 4 compared to Q3 CY 2019 (13 versus 17 suicide deaths)
 - Army Reserve suicide deaths decreased by 4
 - Marine Corps Reserve suicide deaths increased by 1
 - Navy Reserve suicide deaths decreased by 1
 - Air Force Reserve suicide deaths stayed the same
- For Q3 CY 2020, the number of **National Guard** suicide deaths increased by 4 compared to Q3 CY 2019 (29 versus 25 suicide deaths)
 - Army National Guard suicide deaths increased by 6
 - Air National Guard suicide deaths decreased by 2

⁴ Official annual suicide counts and unadjusted rates are published in the DoD Annual Suicide Report. The most recent report is for CY 2019 Available at: <https://www.dspo.mil/ASR/>.

⁵ Rates are defined as the total number of suicides divided by the population for a given time period.

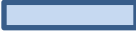

⁶ Research on the seasonal effects of suicide death has shown mixed results (e.g., Gutzwiller, 2011; McCleary, 1994; Postalache, 2012; Rossler, 2010). Comparisons made above are solely for descriptive purposes and may not reflect true statistical increases or decreases in suicide.

Attachment A

| DoD Component and Service | CY 2013 | | CY 2014 | | | | CY 2015 | | | | | CY 2016 | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| | Total | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Total 2014 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Total 2015 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Total 2016 |
| Active Component | 256 | 72 | 72 | 59 | 73 | 276 | 60 | 71 | 72 | 63 | 266 | 62 | 56 | 83 | 79 | 280 |
| Army | 121 | 26 | 33 | 32 | 35 | 126 | 33 | 28 | 32 | 27 | 120 | 31 | 20 | 42 | 37 | 130 |
| Marine Corps | 46 | 11 | 9 | 6 | 8 | 34 | 3 | 12 | 13 | 11 | 39 | 12 | 11 | 8 | 6 | 37 |
| Navy | 41 | 16 | 19 | 8 | 11 | 54 | 10 | 14 | 11 | 8 | 43 | 9 | 10 | 19 | 14 | 52 |
| Air Force | 48 | 19 | 11 | 13 | 19 | 62 | 14 | 17 | 16 | 17 | 64 | 10 | 15 | 14 | 22 | 61 |
| Reserve Component | 220 | 46 | 34 | 48 | 42 | 170 | 42 | 54 | 72 | 46 | 214 | 56 | 51 | 45 | 50 | 202 |
| Reserve | 86 | 24 | 14 | 20 | 21 | 79 | 13 | 21 | 37 | 18 | 89 | 18 | 24 | 18 | 20 | 80 |
| Army Reserve | 59 | 13 | 4 | 15 | 10 | 42 | 9 | 17 | 21 | 8 | 55 | 6 | 13 | 11 | 11 | 41 |
| Marine Corps Reserve | 11 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 11 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 19 |
| Navy Reserve | 5 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 15 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 14 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 10 |
| Air Force Reserve | 11 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 9 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 10 |
| National Guard | 134 | 22 | 20 | 28 | 21 | 91 | 29 | 33 | 35 | 28 | 125 | 38 | 27 | 27 | 30 | 122 |
| Army National Guard | 120 | 16 | 18 | 24 | 19 | 77 | 21 | 28 | 30 | 25 | 104 | 33 | 22 | 26 | 27 | 108 |
| Air National Guard | 14 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 14 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 21 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 14 |

| DoD Component and Service | CY 2017 | | | | | CY 2018 | | | | | CY 2019 | | | | CY 2020 | | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Total 2017 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Total 2018 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Total 2019 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Total 2020 |
| Active Component | 74 | 58 | 71 | 84 | 287 | 81 | 78 | 78 | 89 | 326 | 91 | 72 | 85 | 100 | 348 | 88 | 81 | 111 | 280 |
| Army | 32 | 24 | 27 | 33 | 116 | 36 | 31 | 40 | 34 | 141 | 30 | 37 | 35 | 43 | 145 | 37 | 41 | 52 | 130 |
| Marine Corps | 7 | 9 | 15 | 12 | 43 | 13 | 13 | 15 | 16 | 57 | 14 | 6 | 11 | 16 | 47 | 14 | 10 | 18 | 42 |
| Navy | 16 | 13 | 15 | 21 | 65 | 23 | 15 | 11 | 19 | 68 | 22 | 14 | 19 | 18 | 73 | 18 | 12 | 20 | 50 |
| Air Force | 19 | 12 | 14 | 18 | 63 | 9 | 19 | 12 | 20 | 60 | 25 | 15 | 20 | 23 | 83 | 19 | 18 | 21 | 58 |
| Reserve Component | 53 | 68 | 65 | 40 | 226 | 49 | 44 | 62 | 62 | 217 | 45 | 43 | 42 | 25 | 155 | 42 | 50 | 42 | 134 |
| Reserve | 21 | 29 | 27 | 16 | 93 | 22 | 16 | 19 | 24 | 81 | 21 | 16 | 17 | 11 | 65 | 18 | 25 | 13 | 56 |
| Army Reserve | 12 | 20 | 17 | 14 | 63 | 15 | 11 | 13 | 9 | 48 | 10 | 8 | 11 | 7 | 36 | 9 | 16 | 7 | 32 |
| Marine Corps Reserve | 5 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 10 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 10 | 19 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| Navy Reserve | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 11 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 7 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 10 |
| Air Force Reserve | 2 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 11 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 13 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 8 |
| National Guard | 32 | 39 | 38 | 24 | 133 | 27 | 28 | 43 | 38 | 136 | 24 | 27 | 25 | 14 | 90 | 24 | 25 | 29 | 78 |
| Army National Guard | 30 | 35 | 35 | 21 | 121 | 24 | 26 | 36 | 33 | 119 | 19 | 24 | 22 | 11 | 76 | 21 | 19 | 28 | 68 |
| Air National Guard | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 12 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 5 | 17 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 14 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 10 |

Note: All figures above may be subject to change in future publications as updated information becomes available. Suicide counts (both confirmed and pending) are current as of 30 September 2020.

 Indicates a change from the previous QSR based on updated information.
 Highlighted for comparison