

# Veterans Suicide and Homelessness

A large red geometric graphic consisting of several overlapping shapes, including a large parallelogram and a smaller rectangle, creating a stylized, abstract form.

Texas  
Veterans  
Commission



# Objectives

1. National Trends in Veteran homelessness and suicide
2. Risk factors and protective factors unique to veteran populations
3. Social determinants of health among veterans
- 4.. Financial distress and suicide risk and homelessness risk among military veterans
5. Identify tangible tools you can use to engage veterans at risk for homelessness and suicide

MILITARY

Have you worked in the  
Veteran homelessness  
space?

A. Yes

B. No

C. Other related areas of  
work

Poll  
Question

# 2023

## Trends and Factors for Veteran Homelessness and Suicide

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# Background Statistics on Veteran Homelessness

- 10.2% of Veterans report experiencing homelessness sometime in their adult life
  - Average of 21.8 months total lifetime homelessness.
  - Average of 80.7 months from military discharge to homelessness
- “Sleeper effect” for Veteran homelessness?
  - Average homeless veterans leaves military at 29 years old
  - Average of 5.5-9.9 years from military discharge to homelessness

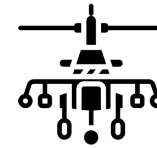
Sources: Tsai, J., Pietrzak, R. H., & Szymkowiak, D. (2021). The problem of veteran homelessness: An update for the new decade. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 60(6), 774-780.

Tsai, Jack, Dorota Szymkowiak, and Robert H. Pietrzak. "Delayed homelessness after military discharge: Examination of a sleeper effect." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 59.1 (2020): 109-117.

# Background Information on Veteran Suicide

The number (count) of suicides among U.S. adults increased was 45,861 in 2019. Veterans accounted, 6,261 suicides in 2019, which, represented 13.7% of suicides among U.S. adults in 2019.

Veterans ages 55-74 were the largest population subgroup; they accounted for 38.6% of Veteran suicide deaths in 2019.



Options

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# Military Mike

7

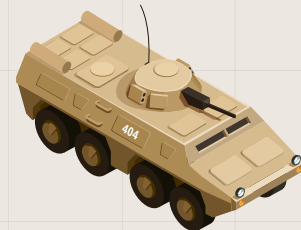
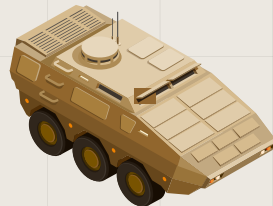
HANDGUN



35-year-old homeless  
veteran

vs

vs





What happened to Mike?  
How did Mike go from the  
military to being  
homeless to dying by  
suicide?





# 2023

## Risk Factors and Protective Factors unique to the veteran population

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# Risk Factors for Veteran Homelessness

## Strongest factors

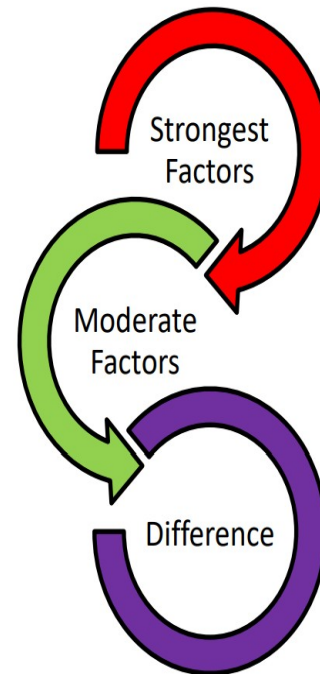
- Substance use disorders and mental illness
- Low income and income-related factors.

## Moderate factors

- Social isolation
- Adverse childhood experiences
- Past incarceration

## Differences between homeless veterans and other homeless adults

- Generally, veterans are older, better educated, more likely to be male, married/was married, and have health insurance coverage



Coming  
Home  
doesn't  
mean their  
war is over

Source: Tsai, J., & Rosenheck, R. A. (2015). Risk factors for homelessness among US veterans. *Epidemiologic reviews*, 37(1), 177-195.

# Risk Factors for Veteran Suicide

11

- Suicidal ideas/behaviors
- Physical and Mental Health Concerns
- Economic Hardships
- Childhood trauma
- Social Isolation
- Access to means
- Substance intoxication

Military

# Suicide Risk Factors unique to Military Veterans

- Deployment to hostile environments/war zones.
- Frequent or lengthy deployments.
- Service-related injury.
- Having been physically or sexually assaulted during service.
- Extreme stress.



# Shared Risk Factors

Homelessness	Completed Suicide
Male	Male
Low socioeconomic status	Low socioeconomic status
Mental illness	Mental illness
Substance use disorders	Substance use disorders
Lack of social support	Lack of social support
Chronic medical conditions	Chronic medical conditions
Adverse childhood events	Adverse childhood events
History of incarceration	Family history of suicides
Past homeless episodes	Past suicidal attempts

# 2023

## Social determinants of health among veterans

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# What are the social determinants of health?

15



# SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH



**BASIC NEEDS**



**EMPLOYMENT**



**FAMILY & SOCIAL  
SUPPORTS**



**FINANCES &  
BENEFITS**



**HIGHER  
EDUCATION**



**HOUSING &  
HOMELESSNESS**



**LEGAL**



**MENTAL HEALTH &  
SUBSTANCE USE**



**PHYSICAL  
HEALTH**

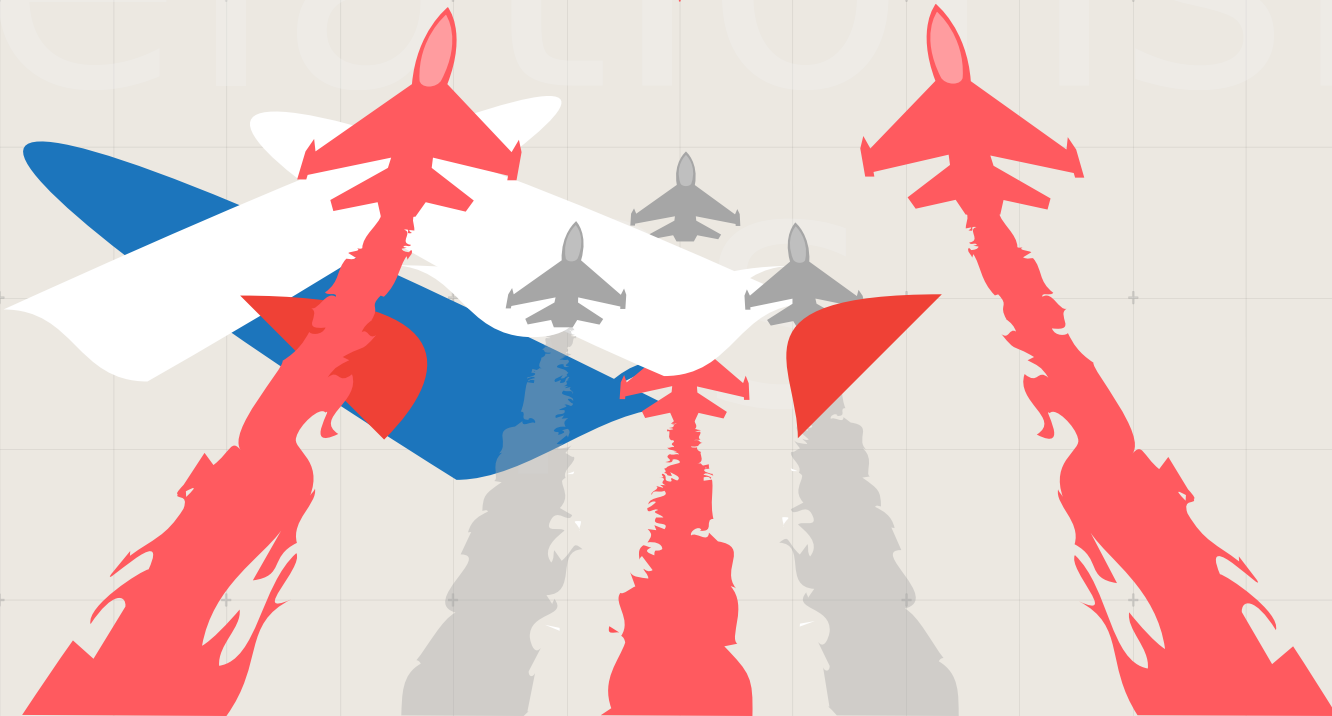


**SPIRITUALITY**

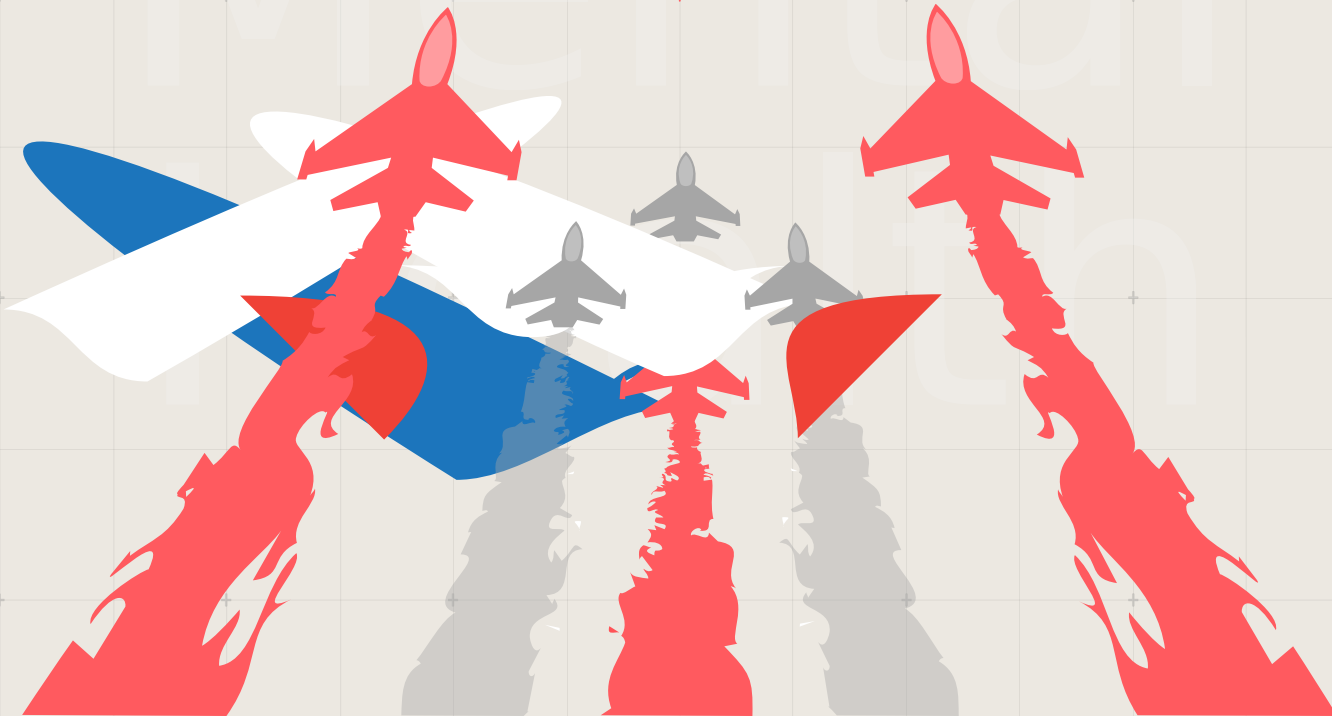




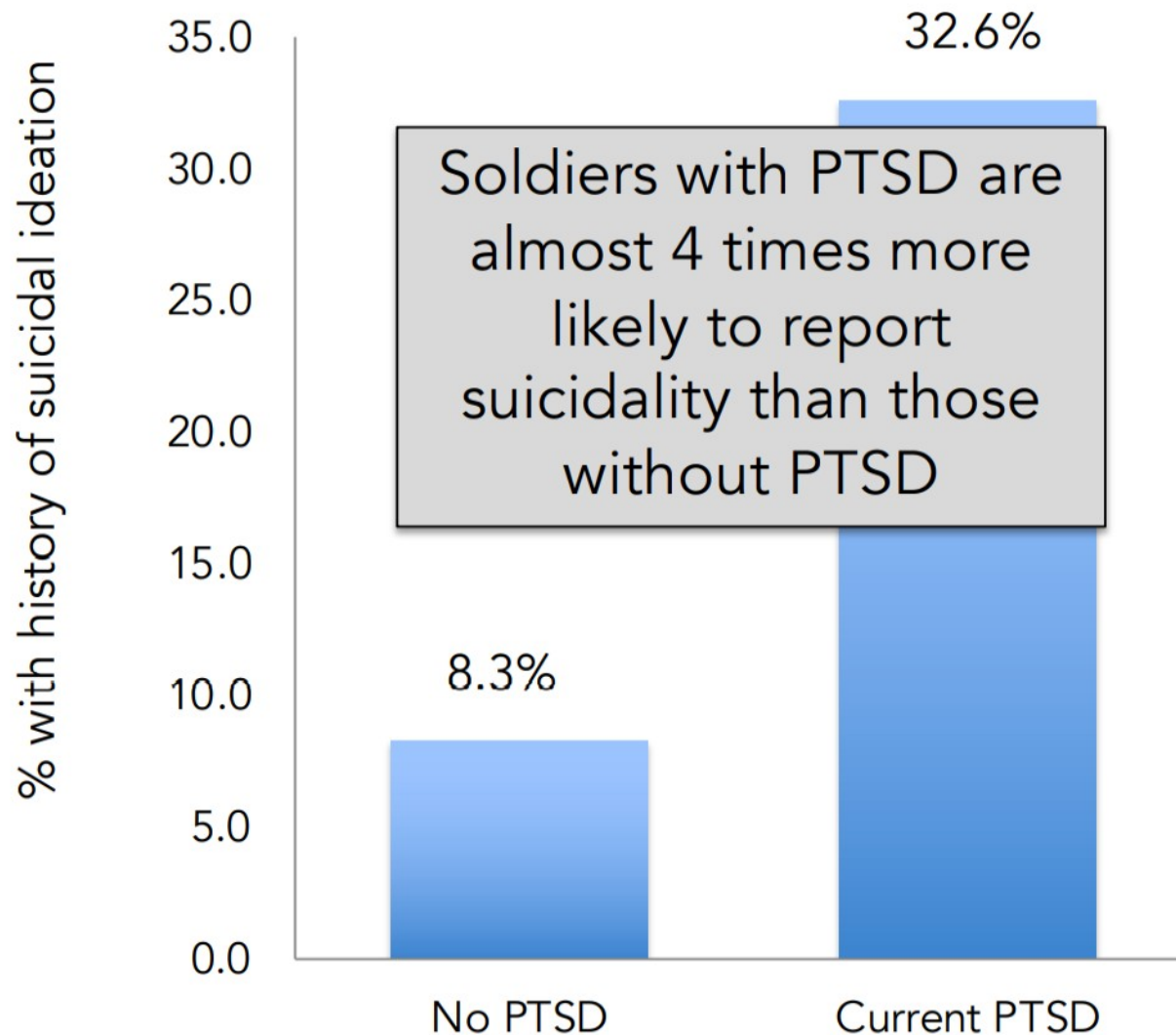
# 1. The central role of social support



## 2. The determinants of the mental health determinants

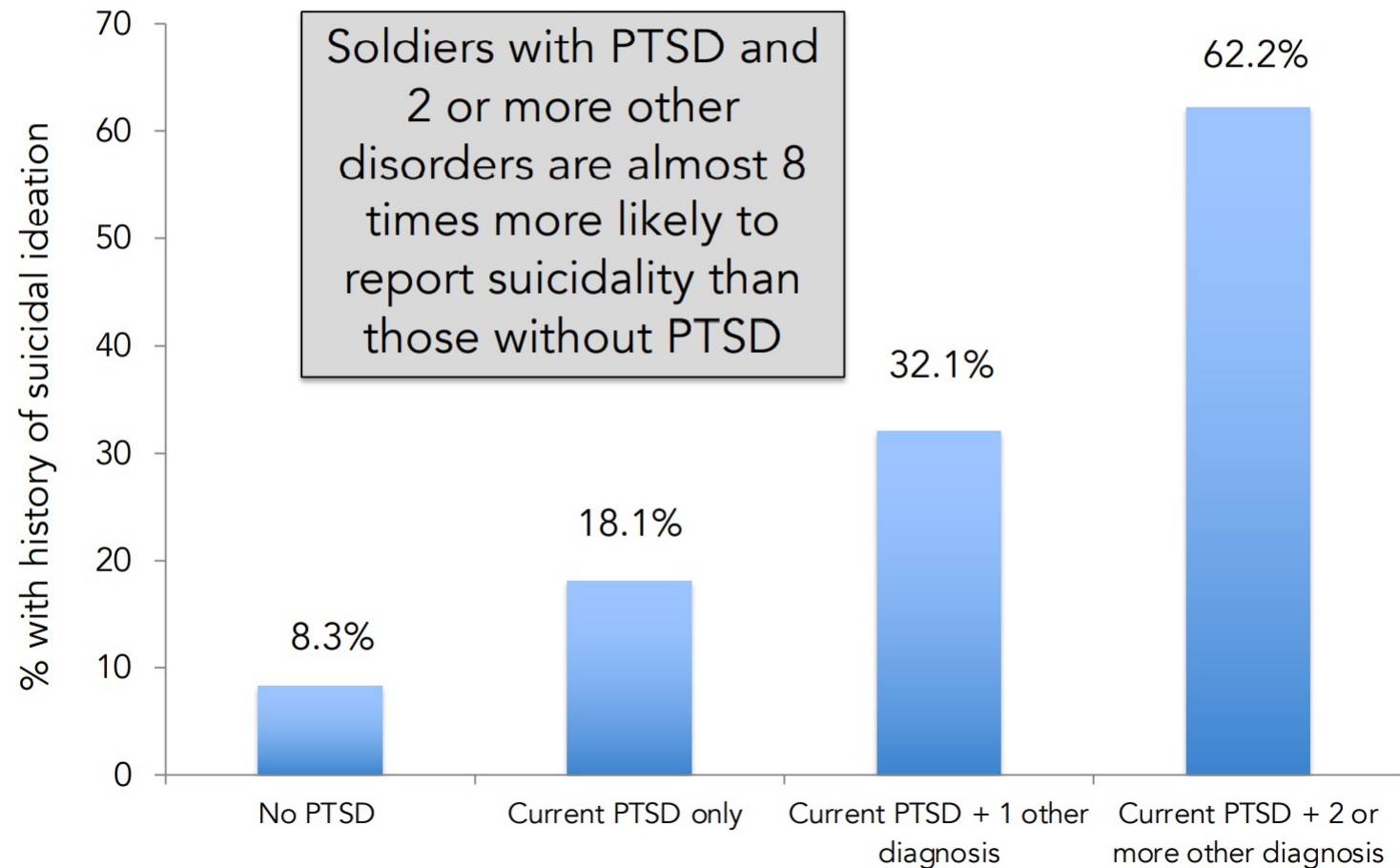


# PTSD and suicidality



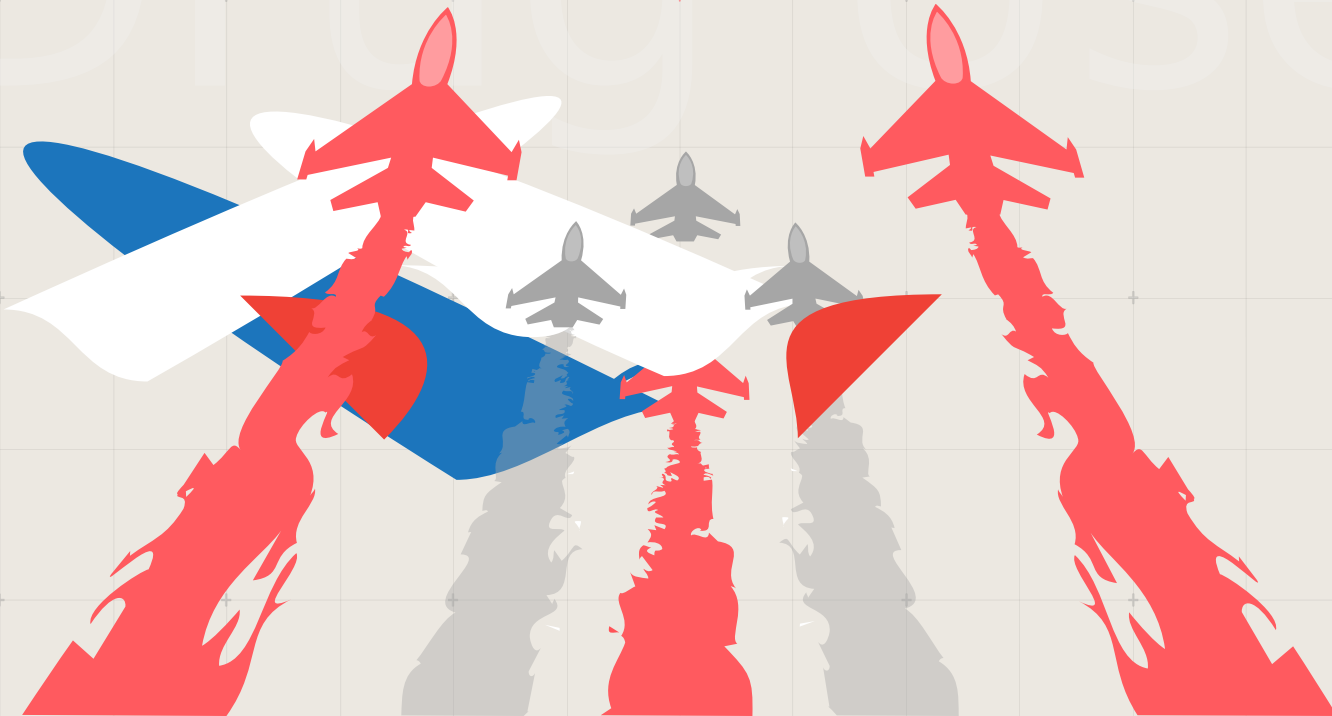


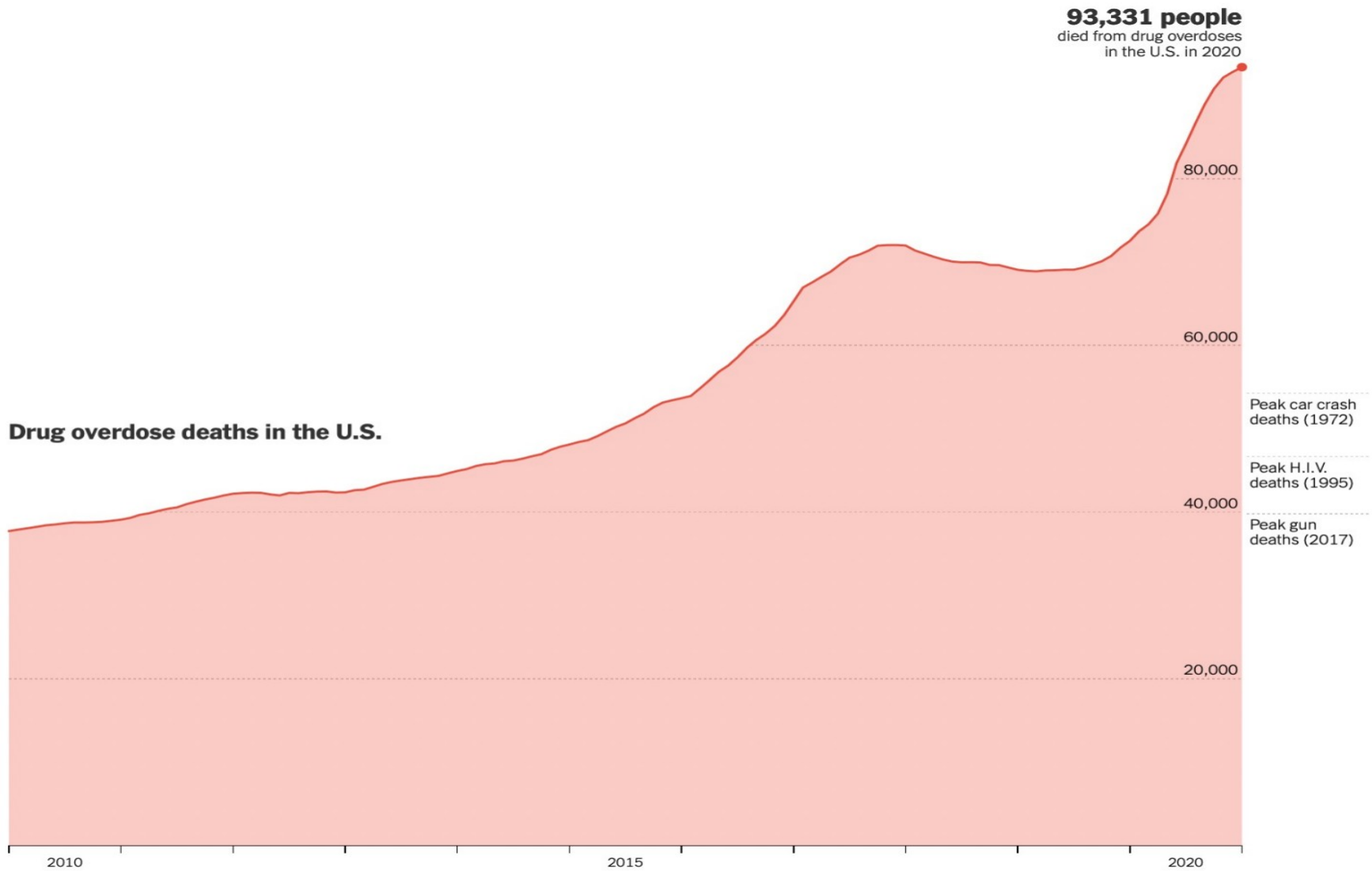
## Comorbid PTSD and suicidality



# 3. Ubiquity

Drug Use





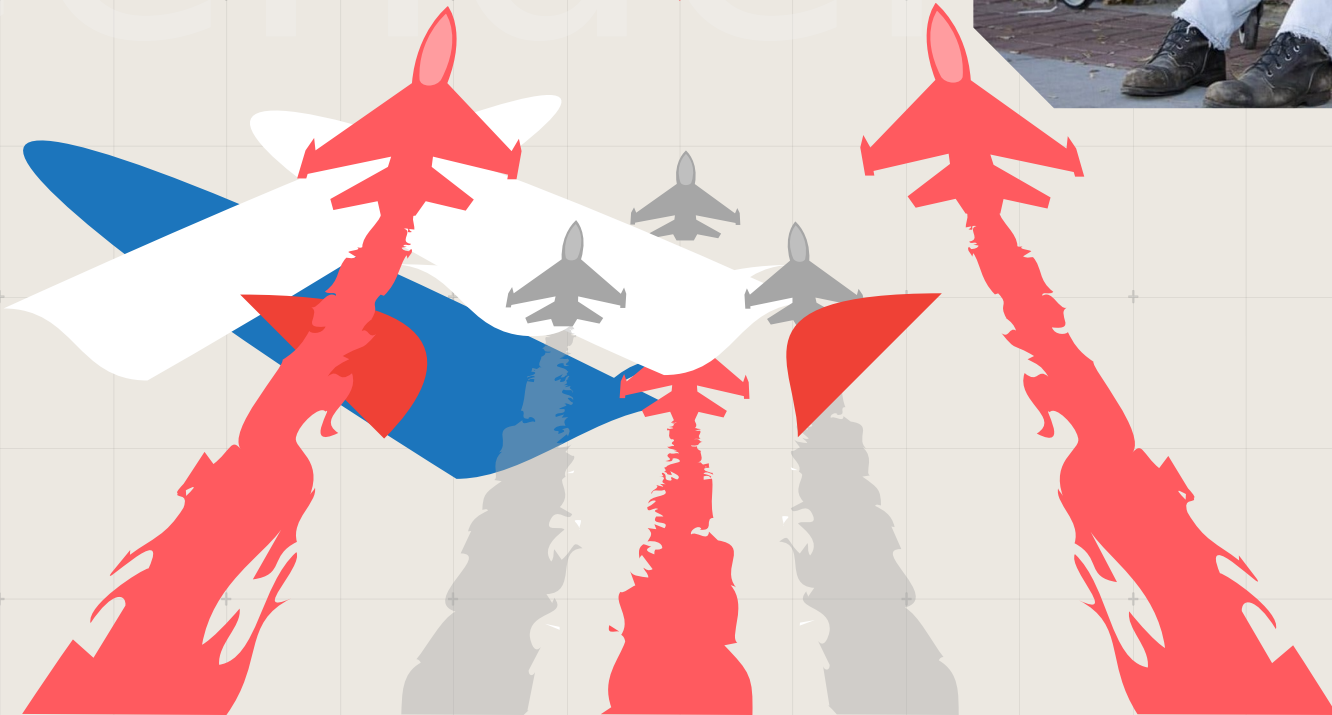
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Veteran  
S

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# 4 . Gender as a social determinant of suicide and homelessness among veterans

25



## 8% of homeless veterans

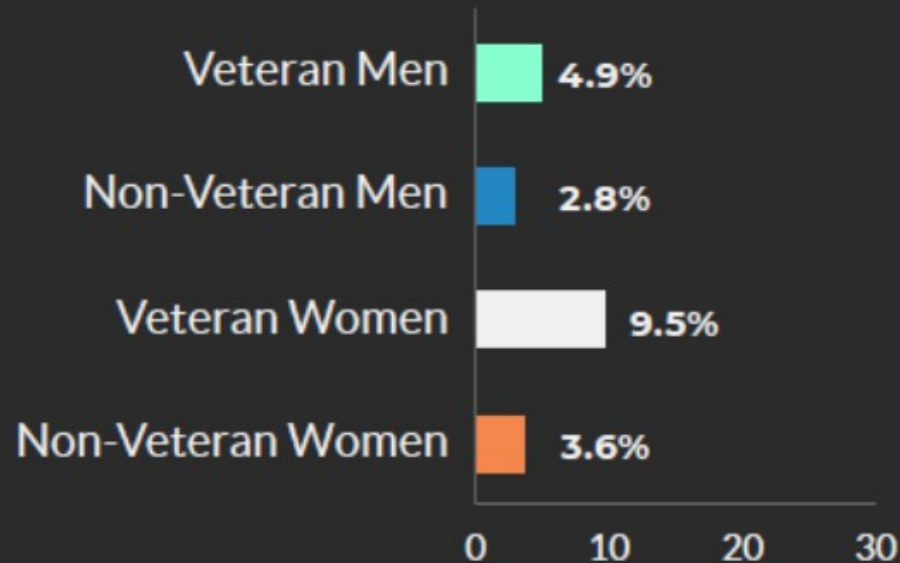
are women.  
(AHAR)

Veteran women are more than twice as likely as non-Veteran women and over three times as likely as non-Veteran women living in poverty to experience homelessness

## Prevalence of SI and SA among Veterans compared to non-Veterans, by Gender <sup>26</sup>

The Comparative Health Assessment Interview Study (CHAI; Hoffmire 2021a)

### Age 18 or older



Would  
you  
consider  
this a risk  
factor?  
Yes  
or  
No?

“At a population level, in most countries of the world, women have more limited access to, and less control over, resources, and over their bodies and lives, than do men.”

- For example: education, income, social roles...
- Gender-based discrimination and violence
- Structural gender inequality



Would  
you  
consider  
this a risk  
factor?  
Yes  
or  
No?

The military is a system that shapes the conditions of daily life

- Women are a minority group within this system

## Mental BreakTime

On the next slide  
there are two  
soldiers  
camouflaged in  
the terrain, can  
you find them?



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2023

FINANCIAL  
DISTRESS AND  
SUICIDE AND  
HOMELESSNESS  
RISK IN MILITARY  
VETERANS

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## VETERANS AND FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

- 🔍 Many military service members become financially independent later in life than civilian counterparts.
- 🔍 Predatory lenders target military populations, largest concentrations of payday lenders in zip codes in the US near military bases (DOD, 2006; Graves & Peterson, 2005; Oron, 2006; Tanik, 2005).
- 🔍 Service members three times more likely than civilians to take out payday loans (Institute of Medicine, 2010).
- 🔍 National Financial Capability Study showed military service members more likely to incur credit card debt than civilians (FINRA, 2013; Skimmyhorn, 2016)
- 🔍 Young veterans in the first year after military separation at risk of becoming delinquent on debt payments, including auto loans, revolving credit accounts (credit cards), and personal or retail installment loans (CFPB, 2020).
- 🔍 Veterans may require retraining to transfer skills from military to civilian work.



## FINANCIAL WELLBEING AND SUICIDE RISK

🔍 In active-duty US soldiers, 23% reported having “financial problems” in the 24 hours preceding a suicide attempt (Bryan et al., 2012).

🔍 An analysis of VA electronic health records found that financial problems increased odds of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts in Veterans (Blosnich et al., 2019).

🔍 Link between financial strain and suicide shown in the general population (Haw et al., 2015; Kerr et al., 2017).

🔍 People with unsecured debt are 5.8 times more likely to attempt suicide and 7.9 times more likely to complete suicide compared to those without unsecured debt (Richardson et al., 2013).

# TOP 20 RISK FACTORS FOR SUICIDE ATTEMPTS (De La Garza et al., 2021)

35

1. Felt like wanted to die

2. Thought about committing suicide

3. Attempted suicide

4. During past 4 weeks, felt downhearted and depressed

5. Age

6. During past 4 weeks, how often did work or other activities less carefully than usual as result of emotional problems

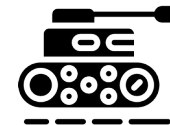
7. Experienced major financial crisis, bankruptcy, or been unable to pay bills on time in last 12 months

8. During past 4 weeks, how often accomplished less than would like as result of emotional problems

9. Grade level during 2000-2001 school year

10. Highest grade or year of school completed

Buddy Check Day is 11<sup>th</sup> of each month



# TOP 20 RISK FACTORS FOR SUICIDE ATTEMPTS (De La Garza et al., 2021)

11. During past 4 weeks, how often physical health or emotional problems interfered with social activities

12. Blood/natural father ever an alcoholic or problem drinker.

13. Occupation: current or most recent job

14. Current marital status

15. Family income in last year

16. Age when biological/adoptive parents stopped living together

17. Thought a lot about own death

18. Present situation includes in school part time

19. Personal income in last year

20. Parent lived with after biological or adoptive parents stopped living together



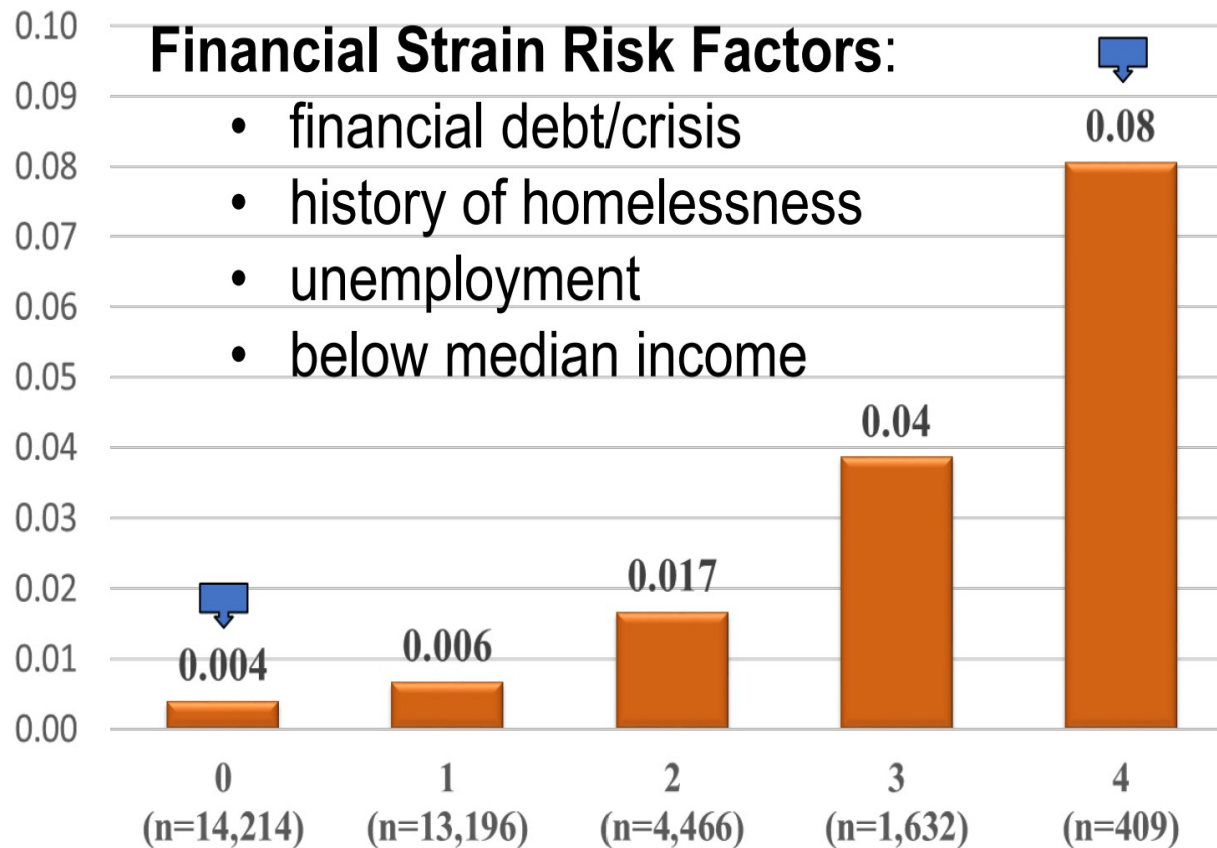
Buddy Check Day is 11<sup>th</sup> of each month



Predicted Probability of Suicide Attempt  
In the Next Three Years

## Financial Strain Risk Factors:

- financial debt/crisis
- history of homelessness
- unemployment
- below median income



Number of Financial Strain Risk Factors at the Start of Study  
(n = # of participants)

Elbogen et al., 2020b

Buddy Check Day 11<sup>th</sup>  
of each month!



# 2023

Identify tangible tools  
you can use to engage  
veterans at risk for  
homelessness and  
suicide

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# Texas Veterans Commission

Health Care  
Navigators

Career  
Advisors

VA Claims  
Specialist

Peer Service  
Coordinators

Justice  
Involved  
Veterans

Military  
Cultural  
Competency

Rural Veteran  
Counselors

Suicide  
Prevention  
Coordinators

Homeless  
Veteran  
Coordinators





# Buddy Check Day

What is it?  
What day is it?  
How can it help?



TVC



ELITE NAVY

# Identify and support people at risk

## **Gatekeeper training**

AS+K suicide prevention  
CALM -Counseling  
access to lethal means

Crisis Intervention  
**988**

## **Treatment for people at risk of suicide**

Promoting access to  
collaborative treatment  
Emergency department  
brief interventions with  
follow-up visits

**Veterans  
Crisis Line**



**1-800-273-8255**

**PRESS 1**



# Strengthen Economic Supports

## **Strengthen Economic Supports**

Unemployment benefit programs

Other income supports (e.g., benefit awareness, family assistance)

## **Housing stabilization policies**

Government subsidies

Potential outcomes

Reductions in foreclosure and eviction rates

Reductions in emotional stress

Reduction in rates of suicide

# REFERENCES

Canetto, S. S., & Sakinofsky, I. (1998). The gender paradox in suicide. *Suicide & life-threatening behavior*, 28(1), 1–23.

Hoffmire, C. A., Borowski, S., Griffin, B. J., Maguen, S., & Vogt, D. (2022). Trajectories of suicidal ideation following separation from military service: Overall trends and group differences

Sandro Galea, 2022. The social determinants of health. Boston University School of Public Health

Kerr, W. C., M. S. Kaplan, N. Huguet, R. Caetano, N. Giesbrecht, and B. H. McFarland. 2017. Economic recession, alcohol, and suicide rates: Comparative effects of poverty, foreclosure, and job loss. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 52, 469–75.

Blosnich, J., A. Montgomery, M. Dichter, et al. (2019). Social determinants and military Veterans' suicide ideation and attempt: A cross-sectional analysis of electronic health record data. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 35, 1759-67

Nicola M. Winkel, MPA Project Director Arizona Coalition for Military Families

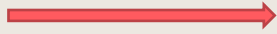
Jack Tsai, Ph.D. Professor Public Health, UTHealth. Addressing homelessness and housing instability to prevent suicide.

# Military Mike

PTSD / Dysregulated

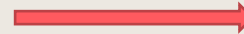
Childhood Trauma

IED Explosion



Substance Use

Social  
Isolation

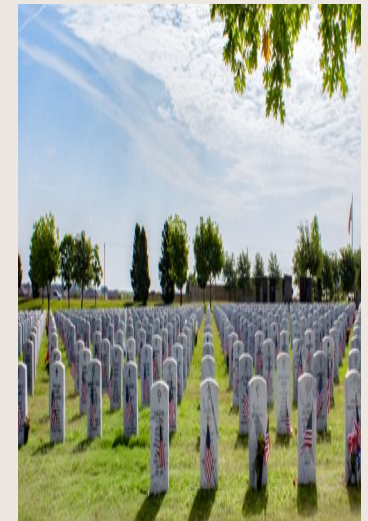
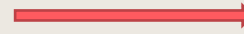
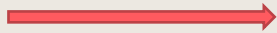


Burden to  
society

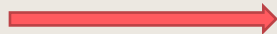
No Rapport with counselor

Hopeless

No employment/homeless



?



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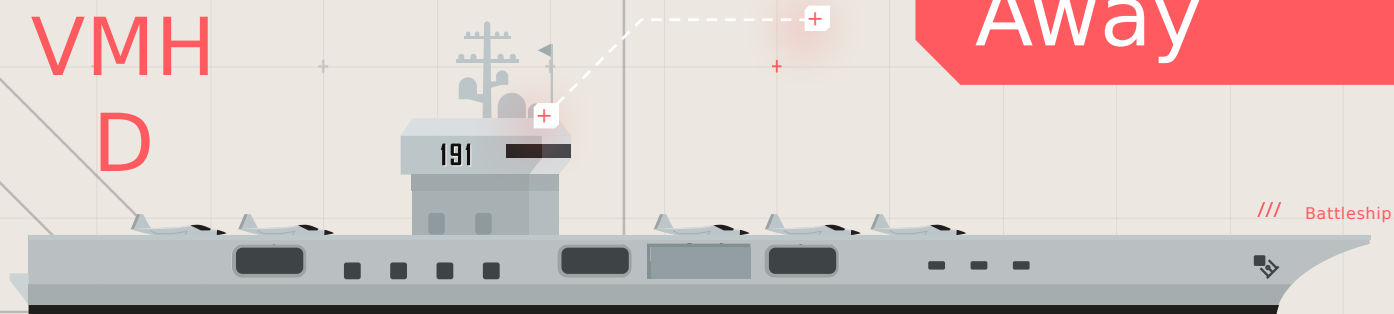


Die by suicide

# Thank you for attending today



VMH  
D



Anchors  
Away

/// Battleship