



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on December 30, 2009

U.S. Navy Attempted-Suicide Rate Near 3 Percent

The Navy Times website reported on December 28 that a Defense Department survey of service members for 2008 showed a higher attempted-suicide rate in the U.S. Navy than any other branch of the armed forces.

Sailors attempted suicide at a rate of 2.8 percent, or approximately one out of every 35 sailors. This rate is three times higher than that recorded by the last survey in 2005.

In comparison, the next highest attempted-suicide rate was found in the Marine Corps at 2.3 percent. The Army rate followed at 2 percent, and the Air Force rate came in the lowest at 1.6 percent.



The [2008 Department of Defense Survey of Health Related Behaviors Among Active Duty Military Personnel](#) included responses from 28,546 service members. They were randomly selected from all branches of service, including the Coast Guard, and represent a mix of men and women of different ages, races, and ranks.

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The survey findings show an increase in illegal prescription drug use across the military branches and “dangerous levels” of drinking. The frequency and length of combat deployment “is no doubt playing a part in the stress levels that we’re seeing,” said Jack Smith, acting deputy assistant secretary for clinical and program policy for the assistant defense secretary for health. “It’s a challenging environment.” Smith indicated that since Marines and soldiers are more likely to face close combat, they are exhibiting higher rates of stress-related activities.

Illicit drugs, including prescription drugs such as muscle relaxants and painkillers, were used by 28 percent of service members in 1980, but that dropped to 3 percent in 2002. By 2008, such drug use had risen to 12 percent.

The reason for this may be that many of those who have been injured have found it difficult to get off their medication; they may still be experiencing pain or may have become addicted. Illegal drug use outside of prescription medication was at 2 percent in 2008.

“I think that we’re still trying to determine the meaning of this,” Smith stated. “It’s the first time we’ve drilled down on that as a major issue.”

According to the survey, 18 percent of service members reported major family stress, 23 percent said they were stressed by being separated from their families, and 27 percent noted high levels of stress in their work.

About 42 percent of respondents reported physical or sexual abuse, with 8 percent saying the abuse



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had occurred since joining the military. “I think certainly it’s high,” Smith said. “I think we’re disturbed by those results.”

Almost 50 percent of female Marines and sailors, and 43 percent of female soldiers, reported feeling stress simply because they are women in the military. Robert Bray, the survey’s chief investigator, noted that this could be due to being a single mother or to leaving behind children at home while they are deployed abroad.

“I think the survey results speak for themselves,” declared Bray. “Being one of a minority in a largely male force — particularly in a deployed force — is something we need to be aware of and give some attention to.”

It is also time to give some attention to the stress of perpetual war, to fighting in foreign lands with no end in sight. This is certainly taking its toll on America’s fighting forces. Our Founding Fathers warned of the dangers of foreign entanglements and of going abroad in search of monsters to destroy.

The men and women in the U.S. military are bravely answering their country’s call to the very best of their ability, but it is time now to call them back home to America.



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