



BeyondDuty+

Suicidal Ideation and Behaviour

Suicide remains a serious and deeply concerning issue within the UK veteran population. While overall suicide rates among veterans are broadly similar to those of the general population, certain groups – **particularly younger male veterans** – are at significantly higher risk.

A 2023 report from the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) revealed that male veterans under the age of 25 are nearly **three times more likely to die by suicide than their non-veteran peers**. This heightened vulnerability may stem from a combination of unresolved trauma, difficulty adjusting to civilian life, social isolation, and mental health issues such as PTSD and depression.

Suicidal ideation – persistent thoughts about self-harm or ending one's life – often goes unspoken due to stigma or fears around being perceived as weak. Many veterans internalise their distress, which can delay or prevent access to appropriate care. When compounded by factors such as relationship breakdown, financial hardship, substance misuse, or moral injury, the risk of suicidal behaviour increases significantly.

Early intervention, veteran-specific mental health support (such as NHS Op COURAGE), and increased awareness of warning signs within communities are crucial in preventing tragedy and supporting those at risk.

Suicidal Ideation and Behaviour in UK Veterans

Suicidal ideation and behaviour represent critical mental health concerns among UK veterans, often arising from the complex psychological challenges associated with military service and the transition to civilian life

Psychological Impact

Veterans may be at an increased risk of suicidal thoughts and actions due to several interrelated factors:

- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** Trauma experienced during service can lead to intrusive memories, emotional numbness, and hopelessness, significantly increasing suicide risk.
- **Depression and Anxiety:** High rates of mood disorders contribute to feelings of despair and worthlessness.
- **Isolation and Loss of Purpose:** Difficulties in social integration and identity loss after discharge can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and helplessness.
- **Substance Misuse:** Some veterans may misuse alcohol or drugs as a coping mechanism, which can impair judgement and elevate suicide risk.
- **Moral Injury:** Experiences that violate deeply held moral beliefs may lead to intense guilt and shame, further increasing vulnerability.
- **Access to Lethal Means:** Veterans may have greater familiarity with lethal methods, raising concerns about the lethality of suicide attempts.

Prevalence

While overall suicide rates among UK veterans are comparable to the general population, certain subgroups—such as younger veterans, those recently discharged, and those with mental health diagnoses—face heightened risks. Ongoing research highlights the need for targeted prevention strategies.

Support and Prevention

Addressing suicidal ideation and behaviour in UK veterans requires a comprehensive, multi-layered approach:

- **NHS Veterans Mental Health Services:** These services offer risk assessments, crisis intervention, and ongoing psychological support tailored to veterans' needs.
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT):** Evidence-based therapies effective in reducing suicidal thoughts and

improving emotional regulation.

- **Crisis Helplines:** Organisations such as the Samaritans (116 123) and Combat Stress provide confidential 24/7 support for veterans in distress.
- **Peer Support Networks:** Veteran-led groups foster a sense of community and shared understanding, reducing isolation.
- **Safety Planning:** Collaborative development of personalised strategies to manage suicidal urges, including identifying warning signs and support contacts.
- **Family and Caregiver Involvement:** Engaging loved ones in recognising signs of distress and supporting help-seeking behaviours.
- **Public Awareness and Stigma Reduction:** Campaigns to increase awareness and reduce stigma encourage veterans to seek help early.

Contact Us

For more information and support, get in touch with our advisors and veterans with lived experience today.



enquiries@veteranswelfaregroup.co.uk



0330 056 0174