

Introduction

- Suicide is a significant public health concern in the United States, and in particular in the U.S Army.
- Among U.S. Army soldiers, rates of suicide have increased substantially since 2001 and continue to be high.
- Interpersonal relationships are central to suicide risk.
- This study examines the onset and duration of suicide ideation (SI) among soldiers in the U.S. Army.

Methods

Participants

- U.S. enlisted males soldiers (N = 6,491) from the Pre-Post Deployment Study, a part of Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Servicemembers (Army STARRS)¹
- Individuals were recruited from three Brigade Combat Teams prior deployment to Afghanistan in 2012
 - **Age:** 18-50 (*M* = 25.6, *SD* = 5.8)
 - **Married:** 53.0%
 - **Education:** high school or less: 53.4%, some college or more: 46.6%
 - **Race:** White, 73.4%; other: 26.6%
 - **Pay grade:** E1-E4: 65.9%, E5-E9: 34.2%

Measures

- **Lifetime SI:** Participants were asked how old they were the very first time they had suicidal thoughts and the most recent time.
- Three attachment styles were assessed with items adapted from the Relationship Questionnaire²:
 - **Preoccupied:** “People I care about sometimes don’t want to be as close to me as I want. I worry they might leave me. This sometimes makes me too clingy.”
 - **Fearful:** “I want to have relationships, but have a hard time letting people get close. I worry I will be hurt if I let people get too close.”
 - **Secure:** “I am pretty comfortable with emotional closeness, but I am also fine being alone. I don’t worry much about being accepted or rejected.”
- **Social Network** (smaller vs. larger): “How many people do you have in your personal life of the following sorts?” followed by two items capturing emotional closeness within their SSN: “people who you feel really close to”; and “people who really care for you and would be there if you needed them.”

Results

Table 1. Categorization by Onset and Duration of SI

	The Most Recent Before Age 18	The Most Recent SI 18 or Older
First SI Before Age 18	Recovered (Group 1, n = 192)	Persistent (Group 2, n = 188)
First SI 18 or Older		Late-onset (Group 3, n = 306)

- Among the 713 soldiers (11.1%) who reported lifetime SI, 380 (55.4%) experienced their first SI before age 18, including 192 (50.5%) “*recovered*” and 188 (49.5%) “*persistent*” . The rest 306 soldiers who first experienced SI at age 18 or later were classified as “*late-onset*” .

Table 2. Predicting Onset and Duration of SI

	Persistent vs. Recovered	Late Onset vs. All Others
Socio-demographics		
Non-white vs. White	0.80 (0.49-1.33)	1.10 (0.85-1.44)
Lower vs. Higher Education Level	0.98 (0.59-1.63)	0.65 (0.49-0.86)
Married vs. All Others	1.01 (0.57-1.79)	1.21 (0.93-1.57)
E5-E9 vs. E1-E4	1.10 (0.61-1.92)	1.59 (1.18-2.13)
Attachment Styles		
Preoccupied Attachment	1.28 (0.58-2.85)	1.75 (1.16-2.65)
Fearful Attachment	2.07 (1.15-3.72)	3.31 (2.26-4.86)
Secure Attachment	0.72 (0.46-1.13)	1.01 (0.81-1.28)
Smaller Social Network Size	0.94 (0.60-1.46)	2.09 (1.61-2.70)

- Compared to the recovered , individuals with fearful attachment were more likely to experience persistent SI.
- Compared to those with early-onset SI (Groups 1 and 2) or no SI, individuals with preoccupied or fearful attachment, as well as those with a smaller social network, were more likely to experience late-onset SI.

Conclusions

- This study underscores the importance of understanding the role of attachment styles and social networks in suicide risk, particularly the impact of preoccupied attachment among soldiers with early-onset SI.
- A crucial next step is to investigate these relationships prospectively to inform the development of targeted interventions.

¹Ursano, R. J., Colpe, L. J., Heeringa, S. G., Kessler, R. C., Schoenbaum, M., & Stein, M. B. (2014). The Army study to assess risk and resilience in servicemembers (Army STARRS). *Psychiatry*, 77(2), 107-119. <https://doi.org/10.1521/psyc.2014.77.2.107>
²Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: a test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61(2), 226-244. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.61.2.226>