

Army reports record number of suicides for June

By Gregg Zoroya
USA TODAY

Soldiers killed themselves at the rate of one per day in June making it the worst month on record for Army suicides, the service said Thursday.

There were 32 confirmed or suspected suicides among soldiers in June, including 21 among active-duty troops and 11 among National Guard or Reserve forces, according to Army statistics.

Seven soldiers killed themselves while in combat in Iraq or Afghanistan in June, according to the statistics. Of the total suicides, 22 soldiers had been in

combat, including 10 who had deployed two to four times.

"The hypothesis is the same that many have heard me say before: continued stress on the force, said Army Col. Christopher Philbrick, director of the Army Suicide Prevention Task Force. He pointed out that the Army has been fighting for nine years in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Last year was the Army's worst for suicides with 244 confirmed or suspected cases.

The increase was a setback for the service, which has been pushing troops to seek counseling. Through May of this year, the Army had seen a decline in suicides among active-duty soldiers this year compared with the same period in 2009.

Philbrick expressed frustration over the June deaths. "Because we believe that the programs, policies, procedures ... are having a positive impact across the entire force. The help is there."

A leading military suicide researcher says changing a culture that views psychological illness as a weakness takes time.

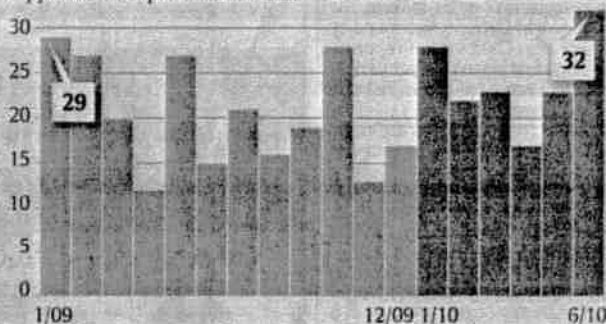
"I would expect it to be years," said David Rudd, dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Science at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City.

The mounting stress on an Army facing renewed deployments and combat in Afghanistan is also a factor, Rudd said. "That's not a challenge they (Army leaders) control. It's a challenge that the president and Congress controls," he said.

The Army also unveiled on Thursday a training video designed to combat suicides. It contains testimonials by soldiers

Army suicides

In June, the number of confirmed and suspected suicides in the Army topped those of previous months.



Source: U.S. Army

By Julie Snyder, USA TODAY



By Mark Humphrey, A

Staying vigilant: Tangeneare Singh, left, a psychiatrist at Fort Campbell Army post in Kentucky, speaks to counselors at a seminar on suicide prevention. The Army has unveiled a suicide prevention video.

who struggled with self-destructive impulses before seeking help. It is titled *Shoulder to Shoulder: I Will Never Quit on Life*.

Philbrick said this was an improved video that he hoped would reach troubled soldiers. The previous video did not resonate with average soldiers, he said. During a showing in Baghdad, soldiers laughed at it, Philbrick said. "In grunt language, it sucked," he said.

The Army's current suicide rate is about 22 deaths per 100,000, which is above a civilian rate that has been adjusted to

match the demographics of the Army. That rate is 18-per-100,000. Only the Marine Corps has a higher suicide rate, at 24-per-100,000. Although Marine Corps suicides had been tracking similarly to last year's record pace, the service reported only one suicide in June.

Just among Guard and Reserve soldiers, suicides have occurred at a higher rate this year than last year, according to Army figures. There have been 65 confirmed or suspected cases this year, compared with 42 for the same period last year.



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