

Do childhood experiences of abuse prior to joining the military influence the mental health and suicide behaviors of Canadian military personnel during their military careers?

Tamara Taillieu, Jitender Sareen and Tracie Afifi. "Do childhood experiences of abuse prior to joining the military influence the mental health and suicide behaviors of Canadian military personnel during their military careers?" *CRDCN research-policy snapshots*. Volume 2, July 2023
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Context

This study used information from the 2013 Canadian Forces Mental Health Survey to examine how experiencing abuse in childhood and/or traumatic events during military deployments influence mental health and suicide behaviours among Canadian military personnel. The study also examined whether relationships between child abuse, deployment trauma, mental disorders, and suicide behaviours were different for male compared to female military personnel.

Key finding(s) from the research

This study found that both a child abuse history and deployment-related traumatic events were strongly related to mental disorders among military personnel. In particular, experiencing both child abuse (before joining the military) and deployment-related traumas (during military career) was more strongly related to mental disorders than experiencing wither type of trauma on its own. Although mental disorders were strongly related to suicide behaviours, a child abuse history remained associated with suicide ideation even after the influence of deployment traumas and mental disorders were taken into account. The pattern of findings was the same for both male and female military personnel.

Population(s) studied: Canadian Armed Forces Regular Force personnel between 18 and 60 years of age

Research dataset(s) used: 2013 Canadian Forces Mental Health Survey

Policy implications for this research

Preventing child abuse remains an important public health priority. Early screening and intervention for pre-enlistment factors that might have an impact on mental health, such as a child abuse history, might help to improve the overall health and well-being of Canadian military personnel. In addition, the strong association between mental health disorders and suicide behaviours suggests that military personnel who are experiencing mental health issues should undergo a thorough risk assessment for self-harming behaviors while adhering to the principles of trauma-informed care.

Policy area(s) this research can inform: Health; Government; Population and demography; Society and community

Read the full article

Taillieu, T.L., Sareen, J., & Afifi, T.O. (2022). Associations among child abuse history, deployment-related traumatic events, mental disorders, and suicidal behaviors in Canadian Regular Force personnel. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 35*, 1060-1071. doi:10.1002/jts.22814