

Author's Accepted Manuscript

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PII: S0165-1781(15)30705-8
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2016.05.028>
Reference: PSY9716

To appear in: *Psychiatry Research*

Received date: 19 November 2015
Revised date: 12 May 2016
Accepted date: 20 May 2016

Cite this article as: Craig J. Bryan, M. David Rudd and Evelyn Wertenberger Individual and environmental contingencies associated with multiple suicidal attempts among U.S. military personnel, *Psychiatry Research* <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2016.05.028>

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Individual and environmental contingencies associated with multiple suicide attempts among U.S. military personnel

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Abstract

Suicidal behavior among U.S. military personnel persists as a significant public health issue.

Previous research indicates the primary motive for suicide attempts among military personnel is the desire to reduce or alleviate emotional distress, a finding that converges with studies in nonmilitary samples. Much less is understood about the consequences of a first suicide attempt that could influence the occurrence of additional suicide attempts. In order to identify these contingencies, 134 active duty Soldiers who had attempted suicide (n=69 first-time attempters, n=65 multiple attempters) participated in structured interviews focused on their experiences immediately following their first attempt. Soldiers were more likely to have made multiple suicide attempts if they were younger at the time of their first attempt, were not admitted to a hospital or treatment program after their first attempt, or experienced emotional and psychological relief immediately afterwards. Results suggest that Soldiers who experience emotional and/or psychological relief immediately after their first suicide attempt or do not receive treatment are more likely to make additional suicide attempts.

Keywords: military; suicide; emotion relief; functional model; reinforcement

1. Introduction

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