



Ministry  
of Defence

Defence Statistics (Health)  
Ministry of Defence  
Oak 0 West (#6028)  
Abbey Wood North  
Bristol BS34 8JH  
United Kingdom

Telephone [MOD]: +44 (0)30679 84423  
Facsimile [MOD]: +44 (0)1179 319634  
E-mail: DefStrat-Stat-Health-PQ-FOI@mod.uk

Reference: **FOI 28-11-2013-153605-005 correspondence dated: 28 November 2013**

Date: **18 December 2012**

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your email of 28 November 2013 requesting the following information:

*"could i ask how many members of the armed forces have committed suicide while on service outside of the uk in Afghanistan & Iraq in 2012, 2013 Further to clarify what age ranges were those that sadly did"*

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000.

A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm that information in scope of your request is held. Some information held by the Department falling within scope of your request falls entirely within the scope of the absolute exemptions provided for at section 44 (Prohibitions on disclosure) and qualified exemptions provided for at section 38 (Health and Safety) of the FOIA and has been withheld.

Section 44(1)(a) has been applied to some of the information as disclosure of that information is prohibited by or under any enactment. Defence Statistics (Health) release annual updates on suicides in the Armed Forces as a National Statistic publication. In accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and the Code of Practice for the release of National/Official Statistics we are unable to provide the data for 2013 prior to the next statistical release, due on 27 March 2014. The latest edition can be found at the below link :

[Deaths in the UK Regular Armed Forces 2012](#)

Section 38 (1)(a) is a qualified exemption and is subject to public interest testing which means that the information requested can only be withheld if the public interest in doing so outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

Section 38 has been applied to providing the age range of suicides in Iraq or Afghanistan because disclosure of the information would endanger the physical or mental health of any individual. Whilst the MOD recognises that there is continuing interest in deaths amongst personnel serving in the UK Armed Forces and that in releasing information the MOD would be promoting accountability and transparency, it is likely that the inadvertent disclosure of identities would adversely affect the psychological and emotional well being of next of kin and the MOD has a residual duty of care for the next of kin of those Service personnel who die whilst in-Service and for these reasons I have set the level of prejudice against release of the exempted information at the higher level of "would" rather than "would be likely to". The balance of balance of public interest was found to be in favour of withholding the information.

In 2012 there was **one** coroner confirmed suicide or open verdict among UK Armed Forces personnel which occurred in Afghanistan. There were none to occur in Iraq. In addition, there were a further two deaths in Afghanistan where the cause of death suggests suicide but at the time of publication of Deaths

in the UK Regular Armed Forces 2012, a coroner's inquest had not yet taken place. Therefore the figure provided is a minimum and may be subject to change.

## Background notes

Defence Statistics (Health) compiles the Department's authoritative deaths database for all **UK Armed Forces personnel who died whilst in Service** going back to 1984. Information is compiled from several internal and external sources from which we release a number of internal analyses and external National Statistics Notices.

When providing statistics on suicides, Defence Statistics (Health) rely exclusively on the information provided by coroners in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland, and the Procurator Fiscal in Scotland. This ensures the Department's objectivity, as all accidental deaths and those resulting from violent action have to be referred to these officials for investigation. For sake of brevity these sources of information have been labelled collectively as "coroner's verdicts".

The statistics provided include both coroner-confirmed suicides and open verdict deaths, in line with the definition used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), since research has shown that these deaths share many similarities with suicides except that in the case of open verdict deaths, the intention of the deceased to take their life has not been sufficiently proven to the satisfaction of the coroner.

Figures are for tri-Service regular and reservist personnel.

Every suicide is a tragedy and our thoughts remain with the families of all those who have sadly taken their own lives. Suicide amongst members of the Armed Forces remains extremely rare and is lower than comparative rates in the civilian population. There has also been a very clear downward trend in suicide and underdetermined death rates in the Armed Forces over the last 28 years. Mental health of our personnel and veterans is a top priority for the Government that is why we have committed £7.4 million to ensure there is extensive mental health support in place for everyone who needs it.

We also have a wide range of support including tailored NHS mental health services, priority treatment for veterans, the Big White Wall online mental health wellbeing service and a 24-hour helpline with Combat Stress so Service Personnel and Veterans can seek help at any time.

Would you like to be added to our contact list, so that we can inform you about updates to our statistical publications covering deaths in the UK Armed Forces and consult you if we are thinking of making changes? You can subscribe to updates by emailing: [DefStrat-Stat-Health-PQ-FOI@mod.uk](mailto:DefStrat-Stat-Health-PQ-FOI@mod.uk)

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, 1st Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail [CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk](mailto:CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk)). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.ico.gov.uk>.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Defence Statistics (Health) Head (B1)