



Ministry
of Defence

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Ref: FOI 2020/07671

15 September 2020

Dear [REDACTED],

A response was sent on the 03 August 2020 to your Freedom of Information request submitted on the 06 July 2020 requesting the following information:

- “Detailed figures on the number of suicides by both serving Armed Forces members and veterans, as officially recorded, since the start of 2020.
- Data from comparable periods, i.e. the previous six months (July-December 2019), and/or the first six months of 2019, and 2018, for comparison.”

However, when the department was reviewing the response, it was identified that there was an error in the number of UK regular Armed Forces suicides between 1 January 2020 and 20 July 2020. A reservist suicide had mistakenly been included in the 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2020 data which should have only included regular personnel. Defence Statistics Health do not receive routine notifications of all deaths among reserve forces and therefore do not report deaths among reserve personnel. Please find below a revised version of the response with all data correct as at 20 July 2020.

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

A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm that some of the information in scope of your request is held. Information on the number of veteran suicides is not held by the Ministry of Defence, however, information on the number of suicides among serving UK regular Armed Forces personnel has been provided.

Between 1 January 2020 and 20 July 2020 there have been **two** coroner confirmed suicides among serving UK regular Armed Forces personnel. Please note, the suicide information provided is in line with the definition used by the Office for National Statistics in the publication of National Statistics. There is an obligation for all accidental deaths, and those resulting from violent action, to be referred to coroners in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland, and the Procurator Fiscal in Scotland for investigation. Inquests are usually held within a few months of the death, but occasionally a few years may elapse before a verdict is returned.

Table 1 presents the number of coroner confirmed suicides among serving UK regular Armed Forces personnel between 1 January 2018 and 20 July 2020 by six monthly time periods.

Table 1: UK regular¹ Armed Forces coroner confirmed suicides, number
1 January 2018 to 20 July 2020

Month	2018	2019	2020
All	16 ^p	11 ^p	2 ^p
1 January to 30 June	4 ^p	10 ^p	2 ^p
1 July to 31 December	12 ^p	1 ^p	-

Source: Initial NOTICAS and DMICP

¹ Figures are for regular personnel and only those reservists who have died whilst on operational deployment

^p Numbers are provisional and subject to change when the verdict is returned on deaths awaiting coroner's inquest

Under section 16 of the Act (Advice and Assistance), you may find it useful to note the following:

Veteran Suicide Data

Suicide data for veterans of the UK Armed Forces is not currently captured by the Government. However, we, alongside the Office for Veterans Affairs within the Cabinet Office, are working to improve data collection of the veteran community, as envisioned by the Strategy for our Veterans. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has commissioned a new study to investigate causes of death, including suicide, amongst all those who served in the UK Armed Forces between 2001 and 2014, covering combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, encompassing veterans and those still serving:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-study-into-iraq-and-afghanistan-veterans-launched>.

MOD officials are continuing to work with colleagues in NHS Digital, the Health Research Authority and National Records Scotland and are hopeful that the initial report will be published later this year.

In 2019 the Secretary of State for Defence directed that the study be extended to include all veterans who served after 2014, now and into the future. Thus MOD will be able to track the impact of future deployments on the health of Service personnel both whilst serving and as veterans.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secretary-calls-for-veteran-led-support-to-be-at-the-heart-of-mental-health-services>

The MOD also publishes studies on the causes of death, including suicide, of veterans from the 1982 Falklands war (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/causes-of-deaths-among-the-uk-armed-forces-veterans-of-the-1982-falklands-campaign>) and from the 1990/91 Gulf war (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/causes-of-deaths-that-occurred-among-the-uk-veterans-of-the-199091-gulf-conflict>). Both studies show that the suicide rates amongst veterans were lower than comparative rates in the civilian population.

Serving UK regular Armed Forces Suicide Data

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. The information presented has been compiled from data held by Defence Statistics on 21 May 2020.

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". There is an obligation for all accidental deaths, and those resulting from violent action, to be referred to these officials. Inquests are usually held within a few months of the death, but occasionally a few years may elapse, therefore some recent deaths may not have clearly defined causal information. In these cases, deaths are identified as waiting verdicts and are not included in this response.

The information presented includes both coroner-confirmed suicides in line with the definition used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in the publication of National Statistics. The National Statistics definition of suicide includes deaths given an underlying cause of intentional self-harm or

an injury/poisoning of undetermined intent. In England and Wales, it has been customary to assume that most injuries and poisonings of undetermined intent are cases where the harm was self-inflicted, but there was insufficient evidence to prove that the deceased deliberately intended to kill themselves and thus given an open or narrative verdict by the coroner.

All deaths are coded to the International Classification of Diseases 10th edition (ICD-10) which is produced by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Information held in death certificates is analysed and assigned the appropriate ICD code to ensure that deaths included are only those which meet the National Statistics definition of Suicide and these may be a suicide, open verdict or narrative verdict conclusion from the Coroner. The ICD-10 codes are what define suicides and are : ICD-10 codes : X60-X84: intentional self harm; Y10-Y34d: injury or poisoning of undetermined intent; Y87.0 and Y87.2e : sequelae of intentional self harm, injury or poisoning of undetermined intent.

Figures are for regular personnel and only those reservists who have died whilst on operational deployment.

Defence Statistics Health produce an annual National Statistic on Suicide in the UK Armed Forces which is released at the end of March every year and available at the link below.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-armed-forces-suicide-and-open-verdict-deaths-index>

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance.

If you wish to complain about the handling of your request, or the content of this response, you can request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.gov.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely

Defence Statistics Health