



Ministry  
of Defence

**Defence Statistics Health  
Ministry of Defence  
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Reference: **FOI 2021/00533**

Date: **8 February 2021**

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your email of 16 January 2020 requesting the following information:

- Total number of serving personnel that committed self-harm who required medical treatment.
- Total number of serving personnel who had committed suicide.
- Total number of serving personnel who sought help from the NHS, or were referred to specialist mental health services.

I would ideally like this broken down from January 1 2018 to December 31 2020, but I will accept whatever recorded information that fits within the 18-rule. And, if possible, by gender and age.”

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

I can confirm that the Ministry of Defence holds this information. However, MOD will not be able to answer the request without exceeding the appropriate cost limit. This is because to retrieve and extract information in scope of your request to determine how many UK Armed Forces personnel who had committed self-harm required medical treatment or sought help from the NHS would require a manual search of medical records, requiring at least a month’s worth of effort. It is therefore exempt under Section 12 of the FOI Act.

Section 12 of the Act makes provision for public authorities to refuse requests for information where the cost of dealing with them would exceed the appropriate limit, which for central government is set at £600. This represents the estimated cost of one person spending 3.5 working days in determining whether the department holds the information, and locating, retrieving and extracting it.

I can confirm that the Ministry of Defence holds information on suicides among serving personnel. The information is exempt under Section 21 of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), because it is reasonably accessible to you by other means. It is already in the public domain and can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-armed-forces-suicide-and-open-verdict-deaths-index>. Latest information on suicides will be released on 25 March 2021.

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

The MOD have produced a number of ad hoc statistical bulletins detailing self-harm in the UK Armed Forces of which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/deliberate-self-harm-in-the-uk-armed-forces-index>

MOD also produce an annual official statistic on the mental health of the UK Armed Forces which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/defence-mental-health-statistics-index>

Please note, if care is carried out in secondary care at a NHS or private hospital, the hospital will then advise a military GP if a patient has a procedure in the form of a discharge letter. A military GP can record this information in a number of ways:

- A paper letter may be filed in a paper medical record.
- A letter may be scanned into the electronic patient record (in a pdf format)
- The GP may make notes in the medical record as free text, all of which ensures the medical record is up to date but the information is not available in the central data warehouse.

The electronic patient record has information that is Read coded. Read codes are a set of clinical codes designed for Primary Care to record the everyday care of a patient. They are part of a hierarchical structure and form the recognised standard for General Practice. Any data entered as free text only in the patients' medical record cannot be analysed as this information is not available in the data warehouse.

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

Would you like to be added to our contact list, so that we can inform you about updates to statistics and consult you if we are thinking of making changes? You can subscribe to updates by emailing [Analysis-Health-PQ-FOI@mod.gov.uk](mailto:Analysis-Health-PQ-FOI@mod.gov.uk).

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](mailto: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/>.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

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