

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS
RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 42
TO BE ANSWERED ON 18th JULY, 2022

SUICIDES BY SERVICEMEN AND EX-SERVICEMEN

42. SHRI A. A. RAHIM:

Will the Minister of Defence be pleased to state:

- (a) the number of servicemen and ex-servicemen who have committed suicide over the past five years, branch-wise;
- (b) the details of the particular steps and support given towards ensuring the sound mental health of the servicemen and ex-servicemen; and
- (c) the details of the amount of money allocated towards the same to ensure sound mental health of servicemen and ex-servicemen, over the last five years?

A N S W E R

MINISTER OF STATE
IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

(SHRI AJAY BHATT)

(a): The details of Physical Casualties (Fatal) occurred due to suspected suicides by serving personnel in the armed forces in the past five years are as under:-

Armed Force	Deaths by suicides
Army	642
Navy	29
Air Force	148

However, the Government doesn't centrally maintain the data on suicides committed by the Ex-Servicemen.

(b): For management of Stress and Suicides in services, the Armed Forces are continuously evolving measures to improve the stress mitigating mechanisms. An elaborate Mental Health programme has been formulated and is in vogue since 2009.

Various mechanisms to observe and identify Armed Forces personnel with Psychiatry problems including depression and suicidal tendencies are in place. Detailed guidelines for

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psychiatric examination, diagnosis, treatment and disposal of service personnel and their families suffering from psychiatric disorders have been promulgated by Director General Armed Forces Medical Services (DGAFMS).

Personnel at high risk of stress are identified and counseled by unit Commanding Officers, Regimental Medical Officers and Junior Leaders as per laid down procedures. All personnel returning to unit after leave are interviewed, counseled and medically examined by the Regimental Medical Officers. Stress markers/warning signs of stress are looked for and motivational talks rendered to all.

Following proactive steps have been taken by Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS) for providing quality care and support for psychological conditions and disorders in Armed Forces:-

- (i) Mental health issues including basic counseling skills and combat stress management are a part of military training curriculum for all ranks (officers and other ranks).
- (ii) Major Armed Forces hospitals have well equipped Psychiatry departments that function as therapeutic, training and teaching centres.
- (iii) Psychological counselors are trained at earmarked AFMS hospitals and this training helps the medical professionals to identify high risk cases and their further psychological management.
- (iv) Non-Medical personnel are also trained in basic counseling/mentoring skills. They act as a link between soldiers and well-trained Army Medical Corps (AMC) professional personnel.
- (v) Studies on causes/issues related to suicide/fratricides are carried out from time to time and suitable educational material is disseminated for education of troops.

Administrative actions:

- (vi) Addressing grievances through interactions at all levels.
- (vii) Regular and frequent spells of leave is ensured for troops, especially in field areas.
- (viii) Ensuring Buddy system in units.

Welfare of troops and families:

- (ix) Welfare activities like provision of married accommodation, schooling and recreational facilities are given a thrust.
- (x) Armed Forces Wives Welfare Association members (ladies) too are involved in fruitful de-stressing interactions with the wives of soldiers.

Yoga and meditation:

- (xi) Introduction of Yoga : Yoga as a stress buster has been introduced in the Armed Forces.
- (xii) Besides these, non-medical counselors like the religious teachers (Pandit/ Granthis/ Maulvis) from each unit are also trained in counselling as the soldiers repose faith in them.

Capacity Building:

- (xiii) Both Medical and Non-medical personnel are being trained in counseling to offer their services both in peace and in combat zones.
- (xiv) Training of doctors and junior leaders to identify and handle high risk individuals.
- (xv) Providing holistic preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative health care.

Army

The issue of stress is being addressed by the Commanders in a comprehensive manner at various levels. Sessions for stress management are organized by Commanders and Psychiatrists at all major stations. Counseling is an intrinsic component of 23 Psychiatric Centres in the Army manned by well trained and qualified Psychiatrists and Psychiatric Nursing Assistants.

Specific measures are put in place as part of the multi-pronged strategy to address stress in Army, these include sensitization of Commanders on the subject, addressing grievances through interactions, implementation of 'buddy' system, welfare measures like provision of adequate married accommodation, good schooling, recreation facilities etc.

Indian Navy

In order to augment mental Health Care and reduce mental stress among Naval Personnel, the following initiatives been implemented in the Indian Navy:

- (i) Station Mental Health Centres have been established in Mumbai, Vishakhapatnam, Kochi, Port Blair, Goa and Karwar. Family counselors at Family Welfare centres provide Psychological Counselling.
- (ii) Psychological Counselling is also provided at full fledged Department of Psychiatry at large Naval stations. Apart from posted psychiatrist, services of clinical psychologists and counselors are hired.

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- (iii) Training of manpower:
 - (a) Training of Medical Officer and Paramedical personnel in 'Mental Health First Aid'.
 - (b) Training of non medical personnel in Mental Health - keep your Buddy safe.
 - (c) Increase in strength of trained Human resources in terms of increased seats for MD (Psychiatry) and starting of new training courses such as M. Phil in Clinical Psychiatry, M. Phil in Psycho Social work and Diploma in Psychiatric Nursing in Department of Psychiatry at INHS Asvini under Scheme B of National Mental Health Programme, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- (iv) A toll-free Suicide Helpline is available exclusively for Indian Navy personnel at INHS Asvini.
- (v) A comprehensive policy to prevent suicide among serving Naval personnel bring out strategy IN-SMART (Indian Navy Strategy for Mental Health Assistance Resilience and Training) was promulgated on 12.04.2022.

Indian Air Force

The following measures have been taken by IAF to ensure sound mental health amongst the Air Warriors:-

- (i) A "Psychological Evaluation and Remedial Actions Committee" (PERAC) under the Chairmanship of Air Officer-in-Charge Administration (AOA) with Air Officer-in-Charge Personnel (AOP) and DGMS(Air) as main members meet twice in a year. The committee has been set up for better understanding of the suicides in the IAF and reviews all measures in IAF for creating a stress free environment and prevention of suicides.
- (ii) 114 Civilian Psychological Counselors trained in Clinical Psychology and Stress Management have been employed at various stations in IAF for counseling of service personnel and their dependents.
- (iii) Service Counselors: Training of service personnel in psychological counseling and stress management is being conducted at CHAF, Bangalore for a duration of 08 weeks. 149 Air Warriors have been trained till date and are functioning as Service Counselors at various stations in IAF.
- (iv) Service Mentors: A five day Mentor course for training of officers and airmen to facilitate early recognition of psychological symptoms is being conducted at IAM (Institute of Aerospace Medicine). 742 Mentors have been trained till date. These trained Mentors are posted in training establishments and various other stations of IAF for counseling and early recognition of mental illness amongst the trainees, service personnel and their dependents.

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(v) All personnel with psychological issues are referred by service mentors and service counselors for further evaluation of SMC (Station Medical Centre) by a trained psychological counselor. If required, they are further referred to a Psychiatrist at the nearest service hospital for follow up.

(vi) Mansik Sahayta Helpline: All India toll free helpline 1800-110-080 is functional at Air Force Central Medical Establishment, Delhi and caters for any assistance required round the clock.

(vii) Psychological First Aid (PFA) training has been introduced in all units of IAF with effect from 26 Feb 2020 to recognize early mental health symptoms and provide psychological first aid on the spot. The trained Air Warriors act as first responders and help in developing adaptive coping mechanisms in Air Warriors and families. A total of 4075 Air Warriors have been trained in PFA till date.

(viii) Online Counseling Capsule for all civilian Psychological Counselors is being conducted by IAM on half yearly basis for their familiarization with IAF working environment and issues pertaining to the service. Three such courses have been conducted till date last being on 20 Apr 2022.

(ix) Educational material in the form of advisory and power point presentations/ movies and suicide prevention have been uploaded on DGMS (Air) website for creating awareness amongst the service personnel and their dependents.

(x) Various workshops and lectures on Mental Health and Stress Management are being conducted quarterly in all IAF stations as part of Mission Zindagi Campaign.

All types of medical treatment including mental health are available to the ECHS beneficiaries through a vast network of Polyclinics, Empanelled Health Care Organisations and Service Hospitals spread across the country.

(c) Adequate funds are always allocated for provision of comprehensive healthcare for armed forces personnel and ex-servicemen which comprises preventive, promotive and curative components. No dedicated fund allocation is made for mental health care, however, the same is ensured within the framework of comprehensive healthcare.
