

Suicide Prevention

Considerations for Program Development

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UNITED STATES ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

SOCOM Warrior Care Conference

Overview



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- History of Suicide Prevention
 - Rationale behind the program
 - USASOC Suicide Prevention Program
 - Community
 - Purpose
 - Stress Management
 - Grassroots Initiatives
 - Measurement
 - Recommendations

Historical Perspective

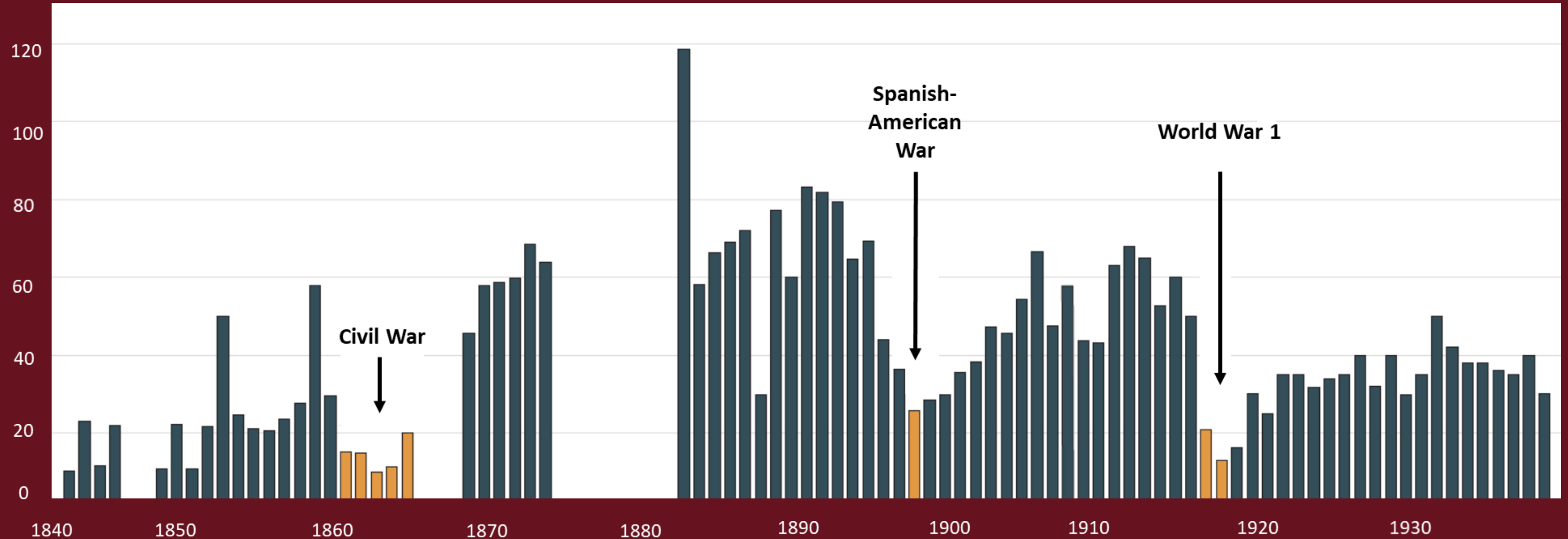


Figure. Suicides Rates Among Active-Duty Personnel in the US Army 1843-2017
JAMA Network Open. 2019; 2(12):e1917448. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.17448

Historical Perspective

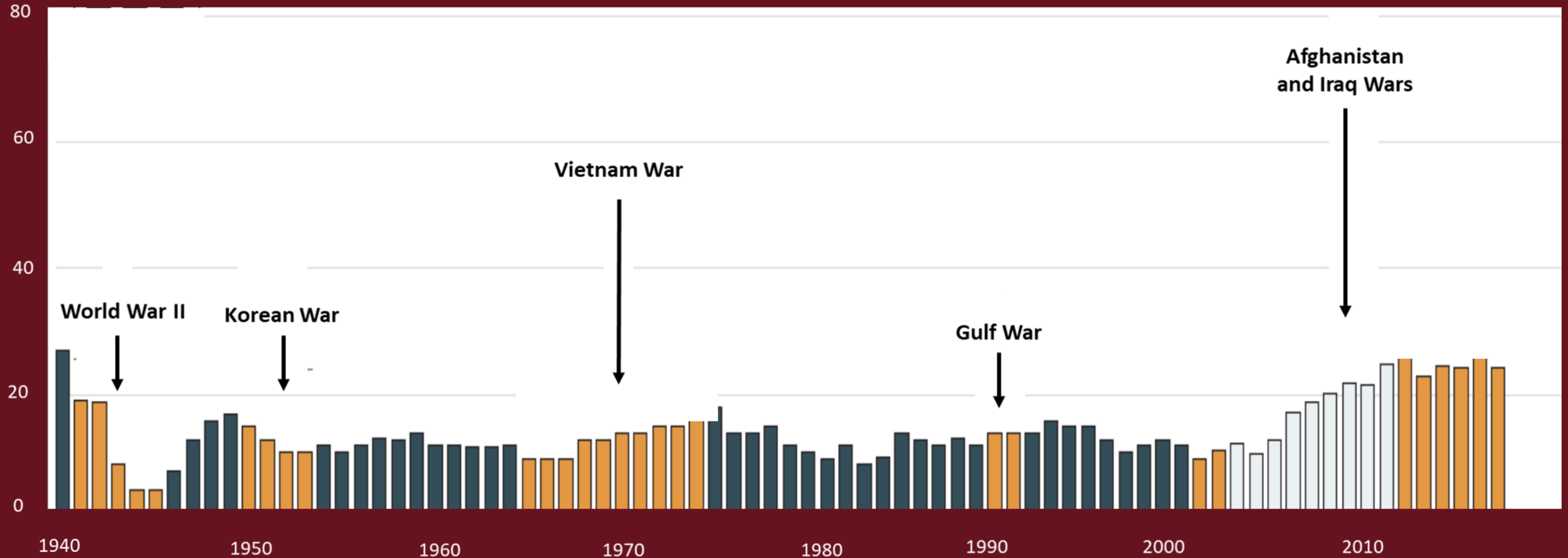


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Historical Perspective

EXHAUSTIVE EFFORTS

- **Army initiated formal suicide prevention efforts in 1984**
 - **836 Soldier's died by suicide 1980-1989**
- **The first review of efforts occurred in 1999**
 - **Increase leadership involvement installation level**
 - **2001 Suicide Prevention Campaign**
 - **Blend prevention and intervention**
 - **Increase education efforts**
- **2009 Suicide Prevention Task Force (2nd review)**
 - **Shorter times between deployments**
 - **Extension of deployments**
 - **Little involvement by MH Providers in suicide prevention program**
 - **Diminishing confidence in program by Soldiers**
- **2007 Suicide Risk Assessments (SRMSO/CID during OIF)**
 - **Intimate relationship problems**
 - **UCMJ violations**
 - **50% of Soldiers engaged with MH 30 days prior to suicide**
- **2008 STARRS with NIMH**
- **2012 Army surpassed the civilian suicide rate**
- **2014 All time high at 23.8 per 100,000 Soldiers**
- **2015 DA PAM 600-24 and AR 600-63**
- **2017 SOCOM Suicide Psychological Autopsies**
- **2021 Chain Teach**
 - **Public health approach tied to CDC guidance**
 - **Focus on cultural change and building resiliency**
 - **Highlighting community resources and support**
- **2023 AR 600-92**
- **Smith et al. (2019) 1819 to 2018**
 - **During and after Vietnam War suicides no longer decreased during war time as seen before**

Rationale

Policy: Current Approach:

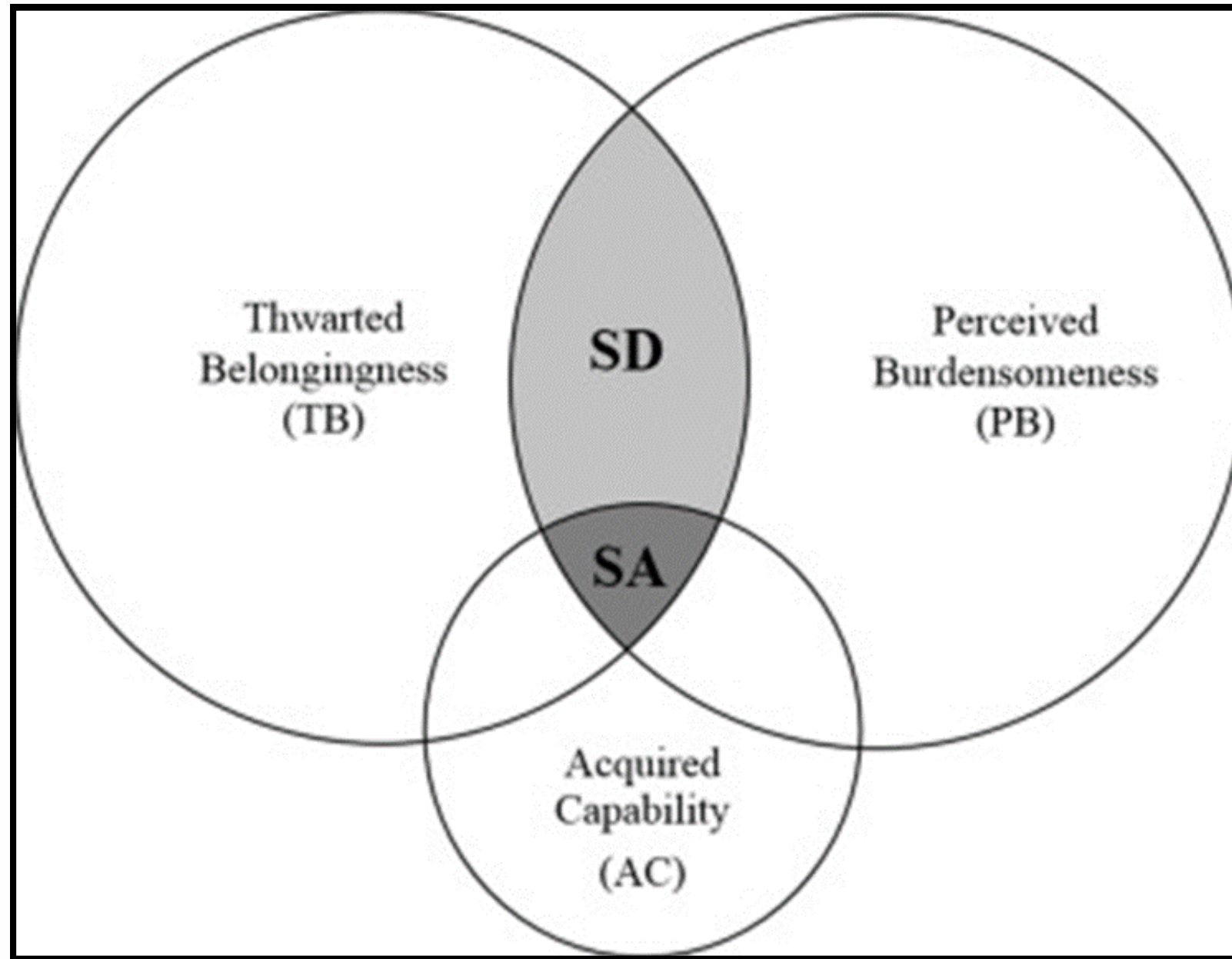
- Increased leadership involvement at installation level
- Increased education programs
- Review boards at upper echelons (DoD and Army)
- Utilization of current research
 - Heavily focused on identification of risk and predictive methods

Policy: Current Limitations

- Perception of and actual lack of trained mental health providers
- Continual rotation of providers and leadership
- Continued stigma
 - Leadership level
 - Peer level
 - Individual level
- Overwhelming resources and initiatives
- Continued increase in suicides and suicide related behavior
- Lack of confidence in the program
- Increase desperation and reactivity in response

USASOC

Suicide Prevention Program



Strategy Framework

- Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (Joiner, 2009)
 - Thwarted Belongingness
 - Perceived Burdensomeness
 - Capability for Suicide
- Grassroots Initiatives
- Measuring Prevention Efforts
- Expansion of Resource Base

Figure. The Interpersonal Psychological Theory of Suicide Note. SD = Suicide Desire, SA = Suicide Attempt. J, Ma, 2018. ResearchGate. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328041831_Suicide_prevention_through_better_understanding_and_identification_of_interpersonal_risk_factors_and_building_strengths

Build a Sense of Community

DECREASE THWARTED BELONGINGNESS

- **Protects against depressed thought processes and challenges negative thoughts**
- **Shows a different way of approaching situations**
- **Demonstrates and offers opportunities to develop healthy coping skills**
- **Offers a long-term solution that impacts the community at large**

Create Opportunities for Purpose

DECREASE BURDENSOMENESS

- Incorporation of spirituality and the power of meaning and purpose
 - Gives a reason to live, awareness of value, and sense of fulfillment
 - Changes focus away from current problems and broadens the perspective of the issue
 - Offers stress relief and increases confidence by creating a mechanism of control

Promote Wellness and Stress Management

Decrease Capability for Suicide

- Offers opportunities to develop healthy behavior and coping skills
- Challenges the negative thoughts related to suicide
- Allows for the ability to think through complex problems and utilize resources
- Gives a tangible approach to support suicide prevention for the individual and community
- Allows for ownership of the struggle and builds confidence in one's ability to regulate despite challenges

Grassroots

Advantages

Grassroots initiatives and community based solutions offer a tailored approach and a platform for the community to become the solution.

Create a platform for people to contribute to the solution and support each other which is foundational to building a resilient community

Our Service Members and families are an untapped resource that can provide support where we are lacking, forming organic entities that create infinite opportunities to challenge negative thoughts and beliefs.

Examples of Grassroots Initiatives

- Coordinating with regional Care Coalition programs to identify local opportunities
- Listing volunteer options and partnerships in the community
- Peer support or mentorship networks
 - This can be an internally created support network or connection with existing networks (national/local)
 - This can also include an element for Families to participate
- Providing grassroots/crisis intervention training
 - Offered to all of the command or strategically provided to target specific groups within the command
 - 'Train the trainer' option allows the command to use their own personnel to provide the training
- Group Therapy/Support Groups
- Hosting/Coordinating events for community building/Family inclusion
 - 1788a events
 - Outings
 - Excursions
 - Activity groups such as biking groups, hiking groups, running groups, fishing groups, music groups, etc

Collect and Measure Data

Program evaluation

- Addresses the limited research and data on SOF suicide and resilience
- Creates opportunities for data collection
 - Provide members with direct and relevant feedback
 - Support personal improvement
 - Ensure program initiatives are effective and relevant to the community

Recommendations

Community-Based Tailored Solutions

- There is a need for programs geared towards a social-ecological framework and taking Service Member's perspectives into account
- Insight from members within the community call for more tangible solution focused initiatives.
- In order to address suicide within such a unique community, there needs to be more exploration into the phenomenon itself as well as community-based solutions that can be more easily accepted by this elusive community.

SOF Specific and Resiliency Research

- There is little research on suicide within the SOF community and on resiliency programs.
- There is a growing literature base on spirituality, meaning, and purpose.
- Incorporating mechanisms to explore the phenomenon of suicide and resiliency programs within SOF is needed.

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