

April 12, 2010

## **Suicide deaths common among soldiers: study**

By QMI Agency

Suicide is the third most common cause of death for Canadian Forces personnel, a new study says. 13 April 2010

The study, called Preventing Deaths in the Canadian Military, says motor vehicle crashes and cancer were the top two causes of death, respectively.

Published last month in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine, the study examined the causes of death for 1,710 active-duty members who died between January 1983 and December 2007.

Traumatic injuries caused 57% of deaths and disease was responsible for the remaining 43%.

More specifically, motor-vehicle crashes accounted for 22% of deaths, neoplasms (tumours) 22%, and suicide 17%.

Combat deaths accounted for less than 5%, with most of those coming in the final two years of the study when Canadian troops were deployed to southern Afghanistan.

The study found many military personnel died far from the fields of battle and for reasons that could be prevented.

“Almost one quarter of all military deaths can be attributed to individual behaviours, the three major ones being suicide, alcohol consumption, and tobacco use,” the study says. “These results differ from the general population because of the reduced risks attributable to physical inactivity and poor diet in young, healthy military members, for whom trauma remains the leading cause of death. Incidents involving firearms and munitions caused 147 deaths (9% of deaths overall), yet many of these were related to training or suicide.

“These results argue for more disease prevention, mental health care, and safety programs to complement the traditional military focus on trauma,” the study says.

According to the researchers, combat soldiers are more likely to start smoking to cope with the stress of deployment and are more likely to abuse alcohol after returning from deployment. They're also more likely to die from inadvertent injury when they return home.

“Therefore, even in times of war, prevention strategies targeting seat-belt usage, tobacco use, excessive alcohol consumption, and mental health may have the greatest impact on reducing future military deaths.”