The Myth of 22 Veteran Suicides Per Day

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The VA’s 2012 Suicide Date Report estimates Twenty-two Veteran suicides a day. This is a misnomer and a widely misunderstood calculation, says Stacy Bare. This figure has rallied a nationwide movement and electrified the devotee mantra of promoting the performance of
22 pushups a day, and setting in motion hype of titanic proportions among media outlets and politicians. This has all come about at the expense of a highly inaccurate and misinterpreted context and the genuine problem of epidemic proportions that lies at the root of veteran suicides.

In the words of VA Secretary Shulkin, one Veteran suicide is already far too many. Shockingly, Veteran suicides have exceeded those killed in action in the combat theater for an extended period of time. This is a national tragedy of colossal proportions.

In 2012, it was the Veterans Administration that estimated that 22 veterans took their lives per day, but this data was extrapolated from records collected from only 21 states from 1999 to 2011. This constituted only a small sample of states providing data and “evidence of uncertainty in Veteran identifiers on US death certificates,” says Bare. Additionally, data from four larger states (California, Texas, Arizona, and North Carolina) was not even included in these calculations, reports Patricia Kime. This suggests the need to interpret this data with considerable caution.

A survey of 1.3 million Veterans discharged from the military between 2001 and 2007 disclosed that 1650 Veterans died in the line of duty between 2001 and 2009, as compared to 7703 non-deployed Veteran deaths during the same time frame. Among these were 351 deaths by suicide within the population of deployed Veterans and 1517 suicides among non-deployed Veterans (Bare, 2015). In undertaking the math, this equals less than one Veteran death per day during a nine-year time period.

To be continued…