

Could Black Women be Key to Solving Soaring Suicide Rates in Military?

Written by Forward Times Staff
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*(Via theGrio) – Veterans Affairs officials have announced that studying the uniquely supportive culture of black women might provide a key to addressing the spike in suicides occurring in the armed forces. According to the Los Angeles Times, “Suicides among U.S. military members have spiked this year, with an average of one suicide a day — the highest rate so far during a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

MSNBC reports that this is an 18 percent increase in military suicides compared to last year. While the government does not break down military suicides according to race, among the general population African-American women have the lowest suicide rate of any group. Surprisingly, white men die most often by their own hand. “The suicide rate among white men was 25.96 per 100,000 from 2005 to 2009, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,” related Government Executive magazine in its piece on studying black women to reduce soldier suicides. “By comparison, the rate for black women was less than three suicides per 100,000.”

Veterans Affairs mental health director for suicide prevention, Jan Kemp, told the publication that the specific social qualities black women exhibit will be examined by her group to determine how they might be applied for military personnel. Desirable features of how African-American women relate include open and honest communication, strong social support, and positive encouragement.

“The sense of community among themselves, and the ... built-in support that they get from each other is something we’re paying a lot of attention to, and trying to find ways to emulate,” Kemp told Government Executive. “I think often that veterans and men don’t have that same sort of personal support, and we have to build that for them.”

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