

## Challenges, Impacts, and Solutions of Suicide in Armed Forces

### Introduction

*“The suicide of a soldier not only causes deep damage to national security, but also devastates the lives of many members of an entire family.”*

The Indian armed forces and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), including CRPF, BSF, ITBP, SSB, NSG, and Assam Rifles, are the backbone of national security, safeguarding borders and maintaining internal peace. However, a alarming surge in suicides—850 cases reported in CAPF, NSG, and Assam Rifles from 2020 (144 cases) to 2025 (160 cases), and 750 cases in CAPF from 2018 to 2025, with the highest in CRPF (250) and BSF (190)—reveals a silent crisis that not only represents personal loss but also threatens organizational cohesion and national defense. This essay explores the root causes, institutional challenges, profound impacts, and viable solutions to this growing issue, emphasizing the need for urgent reforms to protect those who protect us.

### Main Causes of Suicides

Suicides in the armed forces primarily arise from chronic stressors such as extended separations from family, grueling workloads, and inadequate leave policies in units like CRPF, BSF, and ITBP. Personnel endure high-pressure deployments on volatile borders, counter-terrorism operations, election duties, and VIP security, which intensify mental health issues like depression and PTSD. Data indicates that over 80% of these incidents occur shortly after leave, highlighting the imbalance between personal life challenges—such as marital disputes, family bereavements, and educational concerns for children—and professional demands, including financial insecurities and job-related fatigue, underscoring the human cost of unrelenting service.

### Challenges

Institutional shortcomings exacerbate this crisis, as CAPF lags behind the army in mental health support, with only 13% of personnel accessing psychological counseling in 2021. A culture of stigma persists, viewing mental health issues as signs of weakness or indiscipline, discouraging help-seeking and perpetuating isolation. Unlike the army's structured frameworks, CAPF lacks dedicated mental health infrastructure, leaving personnel vulnerable to untreated conditions amid demanding operational environments, which not only hinders early intervention but also reflects a broader systemic neglect in prioritizing psychological well-being.

### Impacts on Individuals, Families, and Organizations

The repercussions of suicides are far-reaching, affecting individuals through irreversible loss and deep psychological trauma, families with devastating economic hardships and emotional distress, and organizations with eroded morale and operational inefficiencies. Statistics reveal 3,600 deaths in CAPF and Assam Rifles from 2018 to 2024, including 300 in combat and 3,300 on duty, which strains force readiness and incurs significant replacement costs. This ripple effect diminishes public trust, fosters a cycle of contagion among peers, and undermines the forces' effectiveness, ultimately posing risks to national security and highlighting the urgent need to address these interconnected human and institutional costs.

**Solutions**

To combat this crisis, a multifaceted approach is essential, starting with mandatory mental health programs that include regular check-ups, counseling, and training for all personnel. Establishing a buddy system and dedicated CAPF mental health branches, akin to the army's Defence Institute of Psychological Research, would foster open dialogues and early detection. Additionally, implementing fair duty rotations, 24/7 helplines like Sahyog, and apps for confidential support, alongside deploying trained counselors in every battalion, can alleviate isolation. Supportive leadership and widespread awareness campaigns to destigmatize mental health, combined with policies for better leave and workload management, offer practical, evidence-based pathways to prevention, potentially reducing suicide rates by enhancing resilience and support networks.

**Conclusion**

safeguarding the mental health of armed forces and CAPF personnel is not just a moral imperative but a strategic necessity, as articulated by Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, who stressed strengthening protectors to build a stronger nation. Building on initiatives like the Defence Ministry's Mansik Svasthya Sahayata Yojana and NCRB's reporting, comprehensive policies must prioritize empathy, resources, and accountability to create a supportive environment. By addressing this crisis collectively, India can reduce suicides, bolster force efficiency, and honor the dignity of its defenders, ensuring a resilient future for national security.

