

BOX 9.1 Numbers in the News

Because the strength of the military is dependent on the health of its soldiers, the U.S. military collects extensive data to measure that health. One variable that it tracks is the suicide rate. After a two-year decline, suicides among military personnel spiked in 2012, surpassing the number killed in action. The military responded by stepping up programs to help soldiers deal with potential causes such as stress. But although the military is committed to minimizing the occurrence of suicide, it could well be that it is not responsible for the 2012 spike. Actually, if you compare the number of suicides among service members to the number you would expect to see if there was no difference between military personnel and the civilian public, you find that the observed number of military suicides is lower than you would expect randomly. This difference is supported by the fact that many of the soldiers committing suicide were never deployed.⁸ Perhaps factors on the home front are culpable for the 2012 spike.