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Brian A. Moore

Sophie Vincent

Michael Schlenk

Anne White

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Moore, Brian A.; Vincent, Sophie; Schlenk, Michael; and White, Anne, "Opioid Use Disorder in the Active Service: Incidence Rates and Behavioral Health Considerations" (2022). *Symposium of Student Scholars*. 337.

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Opioid Use Disorder in the Active Service:

Incidence Rates and Behavioral Health Considerations

Brian A. Moore, Sophie R. Vincent, Michael A. Schlenk, Anne White

Abstract

Military service members experience occupational specific injuries that often result in chronic pain, and comorbid behavioral health concerns that may be exacerbated by opioid use. Despite the vast amount of research examining substance use in the military, there is a dearth of literature examining the incidence of opioid use disorder (OUD). The present epidemiological study aims to examine the incident rate trends of OUD diagnoses among active duty service members between 2016 and 2021. The present study utilized data drawn from the Defense Medical Epidemiology Database (DMED) to conduct a retrospective cohort study and calculate the incidence rate of OUD (per 10,000) active duty United States service members. The average calculated incidence rate of OUD diagnoses from 2016 to 2021 was 6.1 (per 10,000) and declined by 0.34% each year on average. Opioid use disorder was most frequently diagnosed among service members who identified as male, married, white, between the ages of 30-39, junior enlisted, and serving in the Army. The incidence rate trends of OUD diagnoses among service members warrants further investigation into the mechanisms contributing to increased risk among identified groups and the development of mitigation strategies that can contribute to a reduction in opioid use and abuse.

Keywords: Opioid Use Disorder (OUD), risk factors, chronic pain, active duty service member (SMs), military