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Acute Stress Disorder: Incidence Findings and Diagnostic Implications for U.S. Active Duty Service Members

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Acute Stress Abstract

Acute stress disorder (ASD) is a psychiatric diagnosis that can occur between three days and one month following traumatic events such as injuries, violence, and/or experienced or threatened harm (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). ASD has long been utilized as a predictor of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, literature examining ASD elucidates that predication of subsequent PTSD is not as reliable as once thought (Bonnano et al., 2012; Bryant, 2018). Further, there is a dearth of empirical literature examining ASD among active duty service members (SMs). As such, the present study sought to provide epidemiological data by examining incidence rate trends of ASD diagnoses among various SM demographic classifications between 2016 and 2020. A retrospective cohort study utilizing data extracted from the Defense Medical Epidemiology Database (DMED) was conducted to identify all diagnosed cases of ASD among SMs. The primary outcome of interest was the incidence rate of ASD diagnoses (per 1,000). Overall, the incidence rate was calculated to be 3.76 (per 1000) and declined by an average of 10% between 2016 and 2020. Results indicated that single young Black females in junior enlisted ranks serving in the Army were the most at risk for receiving an ASD diagnosis. Future research should continue to independently examine ASD among SMs. Specifically, underrepresented groups such as female SMs and non-White SMs should be examined to promote more informed interventions for ASD. The trends in incidence rates and demographics at risk depict the need for more research regarding SMs as well as diagnostic implications that impact military operations, careers, and readiness.