

Afghanistan and Iraq veterans' opioid use similar to that of civilians

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Heavy rucksacks, parachuting out of helicopters, combat injuries, and stress result in chronic pain for many service members. In the United States, opioids are commonly prescribed to manage chronic pain, and overprescribing is a concern, particularly for veterans' healthcare.

However, a new study published in *Pain* suggests that opioid use among Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operation New Dawn (OND) veterans is roughly comparable to that of the general U.S. population.

"We found that use of opioids among OEF/OIF/OND veterans was characterized by use of moderate doses prescribed for fairly long periods of time," said Teresa Hudson, Pharm.D., Ph.D., study author and research scientist at the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System and University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. "However, chronic use among this group of veterans appeared to be lower than that of veterans who served in other time periods."

The first-of-its kind study looked at pharmacy claims data from the Veterans Health Administration and found that 23 percent of all OEF, OIF, and OND veterans were prescribed an opioid in a given year. Among veterans prescribed opioids, about two-thirds took them for short periods of time, and one-third took them chronically.

"Findings from this study suggest that opioid use patterns of OEF/OIF/and OND veterans are similar to those of the U.S. population

and suggest that the opioid problem is not so much a VA problem, but rather, an American problem," said Mark Edlund, M.D., Ph.D., study author and senior research scientist at RTI International.

The study found that PTSD, major depressive disorder, tobacco use, and rural residence were strongly associated with chronic opioid use. Pain severity also increased the odds of [chronic pain](#) use among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

To learn more about RTI's [opioid](#) research, visit the emerging issues page.

More information: Teresa J. Hudson et al, Pharmacoepidemiologic analyses of opioid use among OEF/OIF/OND veterans, *PAIN* (2017). [DOI: 10.1097/j.pain.0000000000000874](https://doi.org/10.1097/j.pain.0000000000000874)

Provided by RTI International

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