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Mental health services provided by occupational therapists for armed forces: A scoping review

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INTRODUCTION

Wars have a substantial impact on the mental health of military personnel and thus it is important to consider their wellbeing and ability to adapt. Our soldiers may face issues related to the armed services and placements, such as performing their respective duties while being under a major amount of stress and dealing with the risk involved in serving their nation or even getting back to a civilian lifestyle after service. Occupational therapists are gradually adopting a major role to help army personnel by creating a sustainable system for supporting, treating, and vocationally rehabilitating soldiers.

OBJECTIVE

To identify what is known about the mental health services provided by occupational therapists for the armed forces.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

MEDLINE/PubMed, EMBASE, Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, CINAHL, ProQuest, SAGE journal, Wiley Online Journals and PsycINFO databases were used. Articles from 2010 September 2020 will be considered. Articles in which occupational therapists working with interdisciplinary teams will also be included. Population included Military personnel and Military veterans. The services solely provided by health professionals other than occupational therapy will be excluded. The studies which discuss OT services/interventions provided to armed forces apart from mental health services will be excluded.

Results & Discussion:

Five out of the twelve articles were identified and discussed about the interventions that focused on reducing PTSD symptoms of which Animal-assisted Therapy, Trauma-focused Therapy and Cognitive Processing Therapy were the most frequently used. The remaining articles focused on other mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, combat stress, substance use disorder for which stress and anger management, sleep management, relaxation techniques and engagement in meaningful activities. All the mentioned interventions produced outcomes such as decrease in symptoms, increase in social, community and occupational participation (confidence, trust, acceptance of self and others, emotional regulation) leading to overall improvement in Quality of Life.

LIMITATIONS: We could not access some of the databases due to which relevant articles could have been missed out. The range of year of publication was a short span of 10 years. Due to this, many research that was published before 2010 could not be included. Full text articles were not available for many relevant articles. Language other than English could not be included for the study.

IMPLICATIONS: Future researchers can focus on conducting higher level of studies in this area. Our study can help newly joined OTs to consider and choose this area in which they can specialize or start new initiatives. More research could be focused on military personnel specifically.

CONCLUSION: Through this scoping review, we identified a range of assessment tools and services that are utilized by Occupational Therapists in the care of military personnel and military veterans who experience various mental health issues. Occupational therapy focuses on occupation which gives a distinctive perspective to the treatment of military personnel and veterans affected by various mental health issues that negatively affect their functioning across different areas of occupation.

Keywords: Occupational therapy, mental health, interventions, armed forces.