

Battlefield Airmen Injury Prevention Study

Diane Cloonan Warha¹, Timothy S. Wells²

¹Wright State University; ²Wright Patterson AFB

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

The training of Special Forces remains demanding, rigorous, and imperative to the US Air Force. Enlisted Battlefield Airmen include Pararescuemen who conduct combat search and rescue while Combat Controllers infiltrate and establish remote air fields and act as the liaisons to combat aircraft. Battlefield Airmen are exposed to mentally and physically rigorous training regimens, conduct operations in austere environments and often carry loads in excess of 150 lbs. This combination puts specialists at increased risk for acute and chronic injuries. Since there are shortages of operational Battlefield Airmen, it is important to quantify their injury risk, understand contributing risk factors, and explore injury solutions.

METHODS

We propose to apply a public health approach to injury prevention, which includes answering: 1) How big is the problem? 2) What are the causes of injury? 3) Which prevention strategies work? and 4) How effective are our interventions? Descriptive epidemiology using inpatient and outpatient electronic health records will be used to quantify the excess injury risk among Battlefield Airmen. A clinic-based surveillance system will be established to understand causes of injury and additionally used to track trends in injury reduction. Prevention strategy recommendations will be assessed and discussed with health professionals who have expertise in injury prevention and rehabilitation to enhance performance, decrease injury incidence, and decrease rehabilitation time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our objective is to improve the understanding of injury causality through an encompassing and well-defined collection of data, and to provide field managers additional tools and interventions for the prevention of Battlefield Airmen injury.

CONCLUSION

The public health approach to injury prevention provides a useful framework when establishing an effective program to decrease injury among US Air Force Battlefield Airmen.