



Problem Gambling and the Military

Active duty military and veterans have a higher risk for gambling addiction than the general population, yet they are dramatically underserved.

The Military and Gambling

- The U.S. military operates slot machines overseas to raise funds for the Military Welfare and Recreation (MWR) programs with profits of \$100 million each year. None of these funds are dedicated to treatment.
- Service members also play bingo, access casinos near bases and participate in social gambling in barracks in the U.S. and overseas. Bingo games bring in an estimated \$100,000 monthly to MWR programs.

The Military and Problem Gambling

- Risk factors for gambling addiction include: individuals who are male and young; being an ethnic minority, prone to risk taking or sensation seeking; use substances; and those who experience stress, depression and PTSD – all factors known to be more likely among military personnel.
- According to the National Council on Problem Gambling, veterans utilizing Veterans Affairs (VA) treatment services found 10 percent were problem gamblers. Among veterans hospitalized on a VA inpatient psychiatric unit, 40 percent met criteria for a problem gambling disorder.
- According to a study conducted at Brecksville VA Medical Center, among 111 veterans entering a gambling treatment program, 64 percent reported a history of emotional trauma, 40 percent physical trauma and 24 percent sexual trauma. Most trauma occurred during childhood.
- According to a Georgia State University study, problem gambling in the military co-occurs with substance use disorder, intimate partner violence, PTSD, depression and suicide.
- Six percent of recruits and 56,000 active duty US service members have a gambling problem.

Previous DOD large scale worldwide health studies of military personnel showing lifetime rates of gambling.

| Year | Population | Combined Rate | At Risk/ Moderate | Serious Problem |
|------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 2002 | Active Duty | 9.8% | 8.6% | 1.2% |
| 2006 | Reserve/Guard | 13% | 10.5% | 2.5% |
| 2008 | Air Force Recruits | 8.1% | 6.2% | 1.9% |

Problem Gambling Signs and Barriers to Treatment

- Problem gambling signs include: increasing preoccupation with gambling; a need to bet more money more frequently; restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop; and “chasing” losses and loss of control. Pathological gambling can result in financial ruin, legal problems, loss of career and family or even suicide.
- Every three years the Department of Defense (DOD) added problem gambling screening questions to their worldwide health study of military personnel, which was discontinued. Currently, there is no screening for gambling addiction.
- In a 2017 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report involving the Coast Guard, less than .03 percent of service members were diagnosed with gambling disorder or seen from 2011 to 2015 in the military health system.
- Barriers to treatment include: lack of consistent screening or treatment; possible loss of security clearance or dishonorable discharge; confidentiality concerns when accessing services; stigma, shame and misunderstanding; and problem gambling is often accompanied by crimes with risk of courts martial.

