



Problem Gambling and the Military

Problem gambling, or gambling addiction, essential features are increasing preoccupation with gambling, a need to bet more money more frequently, restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop, “chasing” losses and loss of control. In extreme cases, problem gambling can result in financial ruin, legal problems, loss of career and family or even suicide. Risk factors for gambling addiction include individuals who are male, young, prone to risk taking or sensation seeking, use and abuse substances, experience stress, depression and PTSD – all factors known to be more likely among military personnel. Active duty military and veterans with gambling problems have a higher risk for gambling addiction than the general population, yet they are dramatically underserved. Problem gambling in the military is a serious health and policy issue that affects readiness.

The Military and Gambling Addiction

- Veterans utilizing Veterans Affairs (VA) treatment services found that 10% were problem gamblers.
- Veterans in treatment for PTSD may be as much as 60 times more likely to have a gambling problem than age matched members of the general population.
- Among veterans hospitalized on a VA inpatient psychiatric unit, 40% met criteria for problem gambling.
- 40% of veterans seeking treatment for gambling report a suicide attempt.
- Among 111 veterans entering a gambling treatment program, 64% reported a history of emotional trauma, 40% physical trauma and 24.3% sexual trauma. Most trauma had occurred in childhood.
- There is a strong link between gambling and alcohol consumption in the military.
- 6.2% of recruits have a current gambling problem.
- It is estimated that 56,000 active duty US service members may 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%

The Military, Gambling and Barriers to Treatment

- The military operates slot machines overseas to raise funds for the Military Welfare and Recreation (MWR) programs with profits of more \$100 million each year. None of these funds are dedicated to prevention, education or treatment services for problem gambling.
- Service members are also playing bingo (averaging \$100,000 per month), accessing casinos near bases and participating in social gambling in barracks in the US and overseas.
- Every three years the 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 GAO report involving the Coast Guard, less than .03% of service members were diagnosed with gambling disorder or seen from 2011 to 2015 in the military health system.
- Active duty, dependents and veterans face significant barriers to treatment including -- 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.

This information was provided by the National Council on Problem Gambling.

Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services Division



Call the helpline or visit the website to learn more about FREE treatment services. Call 919-800-8482 to learn more about screening tools and provider training.