

Problem gambling and the military



Research suggests that higher levels of problems and pathology are associated with socio-demographic characteristics of military personnel. Those drawn to military life are predisposed to become gambling addicts, because they are generally young and risk-takers.¹

A recent study found that pathological gambling is more prevalent among military veterans than in the U.S. general population. Different studies of veterans undergoing treatment for PTSD have shown their current rate of problem gambling to range from 0 to as high as 17 percent, with a lifetime prevalence of 29 percent. The rate of problem gambling in the general population is 1 percent to 2 percent.²

- About 2.2 percent of military personnel have indicators of probable pathological gambling, compared with 0.77 to 1.6 percent of the general population.³
- Research shows that military personnel and their families are susceptible to gambling addiction.

Access to gambling on military bases⁴

Slot machines have been on some military bases since the 1930s. The machines were banned from domestic military bases in 1951.

The four branches of the armed services operate more than 4,000 modern video slot machines at nine bases overseas.

The military says revenue from the slots – more than \$120 million per year – is used to fund recreation programs overseas, such as swimming pools, movie theaters and concerts.

Treatment within the military

Limited confidentiality in the military surrounding mental health treatment is of concern; without confidentiality, many people with gambling addiction may never come forward.

In one study, chaplains said that one in three people who come to them for counseling have a gambling problem, but can't tell anyone because they fear dishonorable discharge.

Concerns

Currently the Department of Defense and the services lack consistent policies and programs regarding prevention, referral and treatment of problem or pathological gambling. Information available on gambling and gambling problems in the military potentially understates the prevalence and extent of impacts of problem/pathological gambling in the military.

1 Gambling with Terrorism and U.S. Military Readiness Report. Available at www.ideals.uiuc.edu/handle/2142/229

2 Lee, Lexa. (2007) Problematic Gambling Prevalent in US Military Veterans. Available at <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/564469>

3 Available at www.cnn.com/2007/US/05/22/military.gambling/index.html

4 Available at www.liebertonline.com/doi/abs/10.1089/glr.2006.10.524

See also: Problem gambling and PTSD factsheet which follows