



Service Members, Veterans, and Problem Gambling

A hidden addiction among a vulnerable and
underserved population

David Yeager
US Army Veteran in Recovery

My Story



Active Military & Veterans

What We Know About The Military and Problem Gambling



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Gambling in the Military

“[Gambling] is the child of avarice, the brother of inequity, and father of mischief. It has been the ruin of many worthy families, the loss of many a man's honor, and the cause of suicide”

-George Washington

Gambling in the Military

Gambling has been a part of the military since the Civil War

1930's DoD introduced slots, until 1951 Anti-Slot Machine Act (CONUS)

1980 Army / Air Force reinstated OCONUS slots at request of senior commanders and by customer demand

Warrior Ethos

Honor, Core Values, Type A personality

Accessibility

OCONUS Slot Machines

Online sports betting and casino

History + Training + Experiences = Culture

NOVEMBER 7, 1863.]

HARPER'S WEEKLY.

717



THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC—GAMBLERS AT THE PROVOST MARSHAL'S HEAD-QUARTERS.—[SKETCHED BY A. R. WAUD.]

GAMBLERS IN THE ARMY.

How General Patrick deals with gambling we discover from the picture above.

Mr. Waud writes: "Some inveterate players,

belonging to the Ninety-third New York, were provided with a table, dice, and a tin cup for a dice-box, and, under charge of a guard, were kept at their favorite amusement all day, playing for beans, with boards slung on their shoulders with

the word GAMBLER written on them. They did not seem to enjoy it, an attempt to make the most of their time and play for greenbacks being nipped in the bud. Dinner was also denied them, on the plea that gamblers have no time for meals. Much

harm, no doubt, results from gambling; but it is useless to punish the men while it is so prevalent a vice with the officers."

Gambling has always been more or less prevalent in armies.

Gambling on Active Duty: Slot Machines

According to a 2017 report by the US Government Accountability Office (GAO):

July 2016: 3141 slot machines on overseas US military bases (doubled since 2001 report)

2011-2015: Slots generated \$539 million in revenue, averaging \$108 million per year.
No \$\$ invested in prevention, education, treatment

Low rates of screening for gambling disorder among active duty servicemembers is likely leading to underreporting and undiagnosed individuals with gambling problems.



Active Military & Veterans

At Risk for Problem Gambling and Disordered Gambling

Found to have elevated rates of problems with gambling compared to non-Veterans.

Rates of problem gambling among active-duty military are 3.5x higher than general population (Kraus, S., Grubbs, J., 2022)

6.3 - 8.1% of service members endorse gambling problems

2% lifetime prevalence for any VA facility

2.3 - 9.9% prevalence for Vietnam Era Veterans (Westermeyer et al., 2013)

Problem Gambling Among U.S. Veterans

A national survey found 2.2% screened positive for at-risk or pathological gambling (Stefanovics et al., 2017).

4.2% of Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans exhibit at-risk/probable pathological gambling (Whiting et al., 2016).

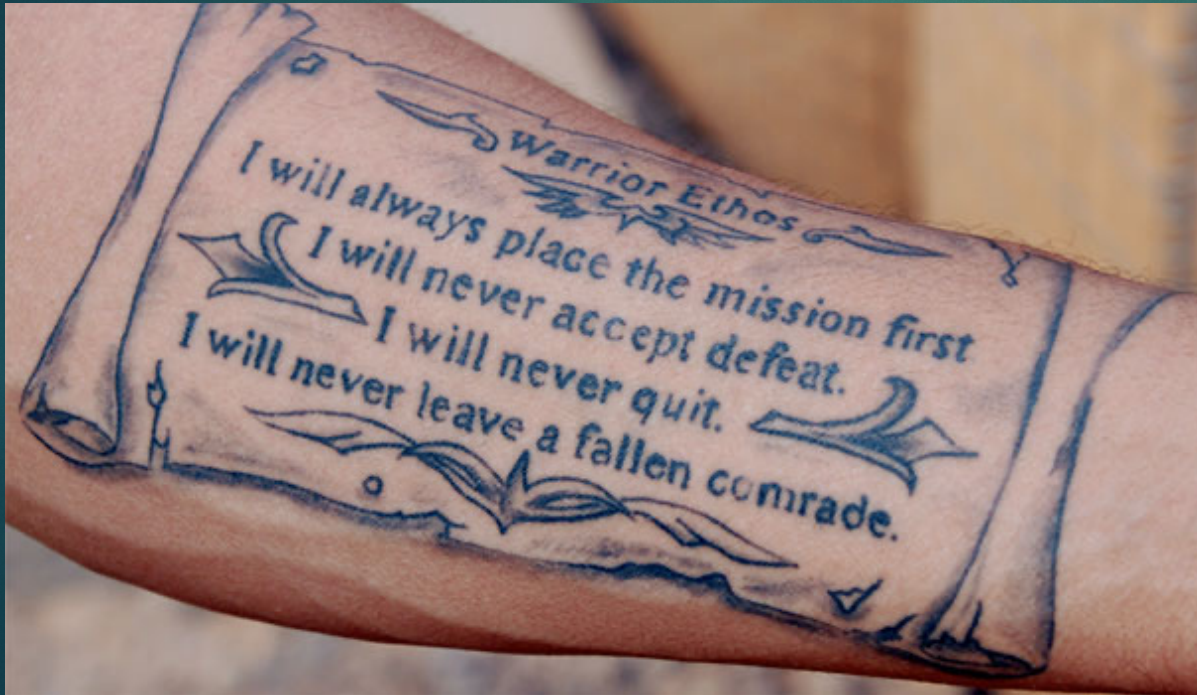
10.7% of mental health treatment-seeking Veterans reported a lifetime history of gambling disorder (Westermeyer et al., 2013).

40% of Veteran gamblers seeking treatment reported a previous suicide attempt (Kausch, 2003).

Among Veteran problem gamblers seeking treatment, high rates of SUD and lifetime suicidal ideation (15%) (Shirk et al., 2018).

Veterans with gambling disorder and pain disorder were 1.9 times more likely to attempt suicide compared to Veterans with pain disorder alone (Ronzitti et al., 2019).

Warrior Ethos



Culture is the totality of ideals, beliefs, language, skills, practices, traditions, values, customs, and behaviors shared by a specific group (Capt. Lunasco et al., 2010).

CHALLENGES WHEN TRANSITIONING FROM MILITARY SERVICE TO CIVILIAN SECTOR

Military Service

- Cohesion with buddies
- Accountability and control
- Targeted aggression
- Tactical awareness
- Lethally armed
- Emotional control Detached and uncaring
- Non-defensive driving, Aggressive driving
- Discipline and obeying orders

Civilian Sector

- Withdrawal from others
- Lack of control
- Inappropriate aggression
- Hypervigilance
- "Locked and loaded" at home
- Detached and uncaring
- Aggressive driving
- Giving orders leads to conflict (no clear "chain of command")



Talking to Servicemembers and Veterans

Do

- Keep politics out

- Be mindful and curious of what branch of service

- Be curious of their lives outside of military (hobbies, interests, family)

- Let them tell you their story when ready; respect their process

Don't

- Ask, "Did your friends die?" or "Did you see people die?" or "Did you kill anyone?"

- Don't assume everyone was in combat (<10%)

- Make assumptions about one's military career. Remember veteran is expert.

Available Resources

VA – the VA Gambling Treatment Program is the oldest residential gambling treatment program, of any kind in the United States. It is located at the Luis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center in Cleveland, OH.

Operation Responsible Gambling – Presented by the National Council on Problem Gambling – operationresponsiblegambling.org

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Questions And Discussion