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Gambling Alert - October 13, 2022



New study shows potentially alarming link between military service and gambling disorder

- Research carried out by University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) and Bowling Green State University reveals rate of problem gambling among active duty military was 3.5 times higher than among civilians
- Rate of problem gambling among active duty military was 68.6% compared with 18.7% among civilians
- Of the 102 active duty personnel who completed the survey, 70 screened positive for problem gambling

At yesterday's International Center for Responsible Gaming (ICRG) Conference on Gambling and Addiction in Las Vegas, Shane W Kraus, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, UNLV, and Joshua Grubbs, Ph.D., Bowling Green State University, revealed a potentially huge and alarming discrepancy between problem gambling amongst the military community compared with civilians.

With research scarce in this field, Dr. Kraus' research was funded by behavioral health expert Kindbridge Research Institute (KRI) to analyze data from a large, sample of military personnel, representing one of the first longitudinal studies of gambling in

this group.

The study of 3,050 US civilians, veterans and active duty military showed the rate of problem gambling among active duty military (68.6%) was 3.5 times higher than among civilians (18.7%). While the sample of 102 active duty service members who completed the survey was relatively small, 70 of them screened positive for problem gambling.

Following his presentation on Monday, Dr. Kraus, said: “Our findings suggest that more comprehensive research is needed to fully understand how widespread the issue of problem gambling is among active duty personnel. Current trends in the data suggest there could potentially be many service members with unmet treatment needs for problem gambling.”

KRI is leading the drive for greater awareness, research and treatment for US veterans suffering from gambling disorder via its Military Research Associate Program (MRAP), which assists veterans transitioning from military service to advanced training in mental health treatment and research, and its 50x4Vets project, whose goal is to increase the rate of research on treatment for veterans with gambling disorder by 50-times in the next four years.

This research was supported by donations to KRI from DraftKings and Playtech. The data was collected as part of funding awarded to Drs. Joshua Grubbs and Shane Kraus for their work on sports betting from the ICRG.

Commenting on Dr. Kraus’ findings, Nathan D.L. Smith, PhD, Executive Director of Kindbridge Research Institute, said: “This really is a ‘canary in a coal mine’ moment. Because of the sampling method and small sample size, the rate of problem gambling in this sample cannot be generalized to the wider active duty military community. However, the significant rate of gambling problems in active duty military is a major red flag and larger, more representative studies of active duty military are now vital to determine what the true rate of gambling disorder is in this population.”

The US Department of Defense (DoD) operate over 3,000 slot machines on overseas bases that produce over \$100 million dollars of revenue each year. A recent review of the responsible gambling policies mandated by states and the DoD by KRI placed the DoD worst out of the 36 jurisdictions with legal slot machine gambling.

Dr. Smith said: “Our review concluded that the DoD requires only

one of the ten responsible gambling policies recommended by the American Gaming Association, while the average number of responsible gambling policies required in the other 35 states was just over seven.”

Another major issue facing military personnel suffering from gambling disorder is seemingly a discouragement from seeking help.

Dr Smith added: “Active duty military seek help for problem gambling at significantly lower rates than the civilian population. The reasons for this are likely complex, but a major factor may be that active duty military can face consequences in their career, including discharge, if they report a gambling problem to military medical staff.

“People with untreated gambling problems can get caught in a destructive cycle of negative feelings and gambling to escape those feelings, which leads to more negative emotions. In a situation where treatment is not available, these harmful spirals can cause significant damage to a person’s home life, career, mental health, and finances.

“In severe cases, a person in a negative spiral can exhibit suicidal behavior. In fact, in one study, 40% of US veterans receiving treatment for gambling problems reported a suicide attempt.”

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