Gambling Problems Among Military & Veterans

November 17, 2009

Keith Whyte, Executive Director
National Council on Problem Gambling
Executive Summary

- Active duty, veterans and dependents are likely to gamble and have substantial risk factors for problem gambling.
- Problem gambling among military personnel is a serious health and policy issue.
- Prevention, education & treatment services non-existent or severely lacking.
- DoD involvement in slot operations likely creates additional resistance to addressing this issue.
Why Soldiers Gamble?

- Readily available during downtime
- Relieve stress/negative feelings
- Supplement income, competition
- Belief in luck, superstition
- It fills a void, use gambling to elevate mood
- Relieve boredom/social isolation
- Cope with trauma
“Started gambling when she was stationed in South Korea in the mid-1990s, but her addiction intensified when in 2000 she was deployed to Keflavík, Iceland, where the slot machines available on the former naval base offered a respite from dark, cold evenings and boredom.”

Gambled all her $40,000 in savings and wrote about $50,000 in bad checks on the base.

Court-martialed for bad checks and put on suicide watch as she was threatened with hard labor, brig and demotion, even though she had asked for medical help for her addiction. Lenyatta avoided jail, but was demoted and eventually pushed out of the Air Force.
Gambling in the Military...

- US service members may legally engage in slot machine gambling at the age of 18.
- Approximately 5,000-10,000 slots OCONUS.
- 2005: $2 billion handle, $120 million revenue.
- CONUS Army bingo, 2005: $45 million.
  - 11 of the largest games average more than $100,000/month.
- Poker, internet & social gambling in barracks.
- No dedicated funds for problem gambling prevention, education or treatment services.
Military PG Risk Factors

- Male
- Younger
- Prone to risk taking/Highly impulsive/Discount the future
- Highly competitive
- PTSD
- Other mental health issues

- Substance use & abuse
- Low SES
- Higher % of minorities
- Link to suicide
- Loneliness & social isolation
- Grief/loss
- Face extreme stressful situations/anxiety
### Rates of Gambling Problems Among Active Duty Personnel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>At Risk (1-2 criteria)</strong></td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem (3-5 criteria)</strong></td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathological (5 or more criteria)</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Gambling & Alcohol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2002 WWSHB</th>
<th>At-Risk/Prob (1-4 criteria)</th>
<th>Pathological (5+ criteria)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstain/Light Drinker</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate/Heavy Drinker</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious Consq/Dependence</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Substance Abuse & Problem Gambling Among Veterans

- 66% of problem gamblers in residential program met lifetime substance abuse or dependence criteria.
- Most substance abuse preceded gambling problems.
- 33% of substance abusing veterans in a treatment program met criteria for problem gambling.
- Current alcohol consumption significantly higher in problem gamblers.
Suicide, PTSD & PG Among Veterans

- 40% of veterans with problem gambling in treatment had made a lifetime suicide attempt.
- 64% of those who attempted suicide reported their most recent attempt related to gambling.


- 17% of veterans entering treatment for PTSD also met criteria for problem gambling.

Warrant Officer Aaron Walsh

- Decorated Army Apache helicopter pilot.
- Developed severe gambling problem.
- Unsuccessful treatment attempts.
- AWOL, resigned 2005 before court martial.
- Committed suicide 2006.
Dr. Rena Nora Military And Veterans Gambling Care Act

- Directs DoD and VA to develop programs to prevent and treat gambling problems.
- Study feasibility of digitizing Brecksville archive—potentially largest database (35+ years) of gambling treatment in world.
- Report to Congress in one year.
- Builds foundation for future efforts.
Private Andrew Foster

- Chaplains Assistant, 8th Army, Korea.
- Stole money from chaplains fund to gamble.
- “He went to Army Community Services; they said they couldn’t help and sent him to Mental Health Services. There, they said, ‘No, we can’t help you-go to your chaplain.’ So he goes to his chaplain, who says he’s not qualified to help with addiction and refers him to...Army Community Services.”

- So Private Foster, whose career is hanging by a thread, is serving out a six-month sentence in South Korea without treatment, Major Dillahunt said. "He's said he hoped to be sent to Iraq when he gets out, because there is no gambling there," she said.
Dr. Rena Nora

- “In our day-to-day work with problem gamblers, we emphasize behavior that has gotten them into trouble, how their use of poor judgment and their character flaws generated chaos in their lives. But in the last few minutes of a session, I look for something positive they can use when they leave. The big word is HOPE.”