

**2008 Department of Defense Survey of
Health Related Behaviors Among
Active Duty Military Personnel**

A Component of the Defense Lifestyle Assessment Program (DLAP)

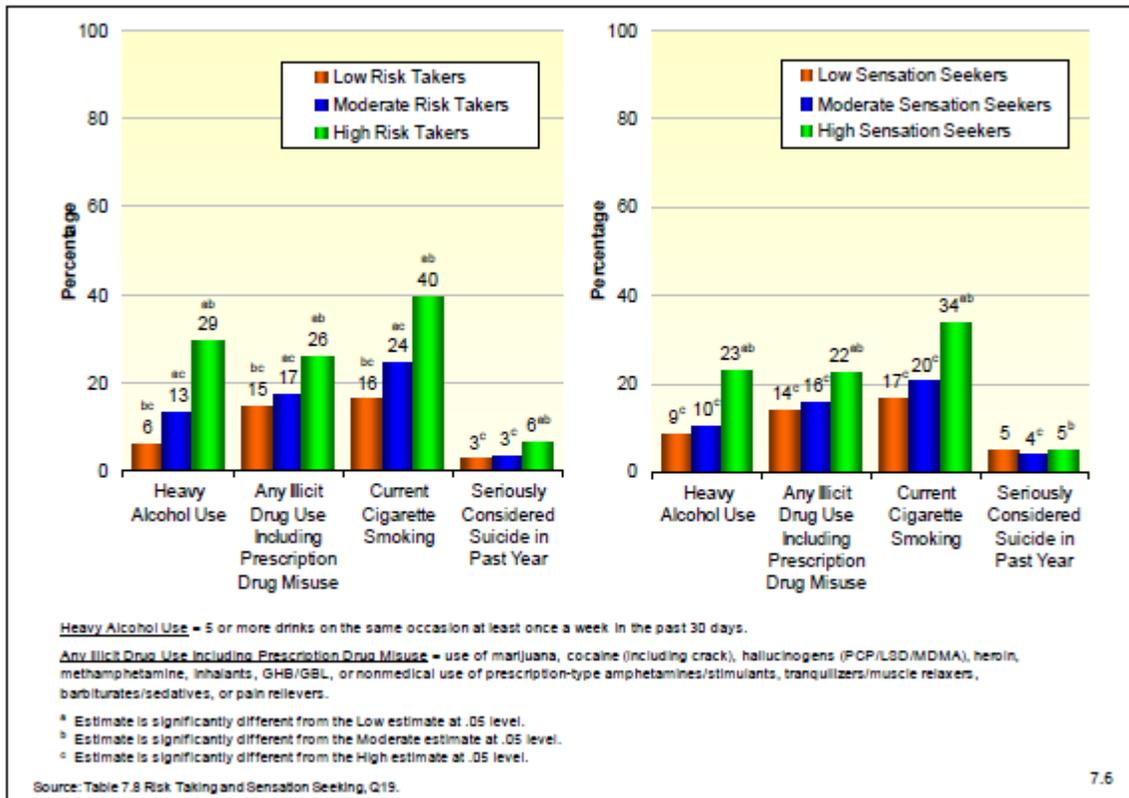
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7.4 Risk Taking and Sensation Seeking

Risk taking dispositions include a series of associated characteristics, such as impulsiveness and venturesomeness. *Impulsiveness* refers to acting impulsively without considering the possible risk of the action, and *venturesomeness* refers to engaging in risky behaviors although the potential dangers of the action are known (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1978). In addition to risk taking, *sensation seeking* refers to the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences (Zuckerman, 1994). Though these factors are correlated, they have been shown to be both conceptually and empirically distinct (Cherpitel, 1999). In addition

Figure 7.6 Health Behaviors by Risk Taking and Sensation Seeking, All Services, 2008



to substance use, these risk-taking dispositions have been linked with accidental injury (Cherpitel, 1993, 1999), pathological gambling (Wolkowitz, Roy, & Doran, 1985), and risky sexual activity (Kahn, Kaplowitz, Goodman, & Emans, 2002).

Figure 7.6 presents multiple health behaviors (i.e., heavy alcohol use, any illicit drug use including prescription drug misuse, current cigarette smoking, and suicidal ideation) by risk taking and sensation seeking. These data are also presented in [Table 7.8](#).

- As shown in [Table 7.8](#), 46% of military personnel were classified as high risk takers, and 78% of military personnel were classified as high sensation seekers.
- Moderate risk takers had a higher prevalence of all selected substance use measures compared with low risk takers, and high risk takers had a higher prevalence of all selected substance use measures compared with moderate risk takers. For example, high risk takers were more than twice as likely to be heavy drinkers (29%) compared with moderate risk takers (13%), and were nearly five times more likely to be heavy drinkers compared with low risk takers (6%). High risk takers also were more likely to have seriously considered suicide in the past year (6%) compared with low or moderate risk takers (both 3%).
- There were no significant differences between low sensation seekers and moderate sensation seekers in heavy alcohol use, illicit drug use, current smoking, or any of the selected risk behaviors. However, those who were high sensation seekers had higher rates of heavy alcohol use (23%), any illicit drug use including prescription drug misuse (22%), and current smoking (34%) compared with low or moderate risk takers. High sensation seekers also were more likely to have seriously considered suicide in the past year (5%) compared with moderate sensation seekers (4%).

Wolkowitz, O.M., Roy, A., & Doran, A.R. (1985). Pathological gambling and other risk-taking pursuits. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 8, 311-322.