

research snapshot

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Factors associated with at-risk and problem gambling among U.S. veterans

What this research is about

Problem gambling is defined as repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences. Problem gambling is a common issue among military veterans. Other mental health problems that are linked to problem gambling are also common among veterans. These include depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse.

There have been few studies examining problem gambling among veterans, and most of these studies used information from Veterans Affairs (VA) in the USA. However, this information misses veterans who are not enrolled in VA healthcare. The current study examined problem gambling among non-VA veterans. It studied factors associated with problem gambling among veterans in a general population sample.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the Baseline General Population Survey (BGPS). The survey collected data from September 11, 2013 to May 31, 2014. Participants of the BGPS were 9,578 adults living in Massachusetts, USA.

The BGPS captured gambling attitudes, gambling behaviour, and gambling-related problems. The BGPS assessed gambling-related problems using the Problem and Pathological Gambling Measure (PPGM). Based on their answers to the PPGM, participants were grouped as non-gambling, recreational gambling, and at-risk or problem gambling (had one or more symptoms of problem gambling).

The BGPS asked participants for their sociodemographic information (age, race/ethnicity, gender, education, etc.). It asked for their military

What you need to know

This study examined problem gambling among U.S. veterans who were not recruited through Veterans Affairs. The researchers examined survey data from 9,578 adults living in Massachusetts, USA. There were 126 participants with problem gambling. Nearly one-fifth of those participants were veterans. The researchers compared veteran recreational gamblers to veterans with at-risk/problem gambling. Gambling in more activities and having friends and family involved in gambling raised the odds of at-risk/problem gambling among veterans who gambled. Purchase of raffle tickets in the past year lowered the odds of at-risk/problem gambling among the veterans. These findings may be useful in developing treatment for veterans with gambling problems.

status. The BGPS also asked about playing extreme sports, health status, level of stress, tobacco use, alcohol use, binge drinking, drug use, mental health, childhood happiness, and family and friend involvement in gambling.

In this study, the researchers focused on participants with veteran status. They analyzed differences between veteran non-gamblers and veteran gamblers (recreational, at-risk and problem gambling). They also compared veteran recreational gamblers and veterans with at-risk/problem gambling. Finally, the researchers examined factors associated with at-risk and problem gambling among veterans.

What the researchers found

Among the 9,578 BGPS participants, 923 participants (9.6%) were veterans and 129 participants (1.3%) had problem gambling. Of those participants with problem gambling, 126 reported their military status and 26 were veterans. Thus, approximately one-fifth of participants with problem gambling were veterans. This is a higher percentage than previously reported with VA veterans. Another 93 veterans had at-risk gambling.

Compared to veteran gamblers (recreational, at-risk and problem), non-gambling veterans were more likely to binge drink and less likely to have friends and family involved in gambling.

There were few differences between veterans with at-risk gambling and veterans with problem gambling. Thus, the two groups were combined into one group to compare to veteran recreational gamblers. Veteran recreational gamblers and veterans with at-risk/problem gambling differed on education, family and friend involvement in gambling, and involvement in different types of gambling. Veterans with at-risk/problem gambling played more types of gambling than veteran recreational gamblers. They were also more likely to have friends and family involved in gambling. Veterans with at-risk/problem gambling were less likely to purchase raffle tickets in the past year than veteran recreational gamblers. This could be because buying raffle tickets is likely for supporting a charity cause, rather than for winning money.

How you can use this research

This study could be useful to treatment providers working with veterans. Treatment providers could design treatments that address multiple gambling activities and involvement of friends and family in gambling. Future research could examine the changes in problem gambling among veterans over time. It could also study other factors of problem gambling that may be unique to veterans.

About the researchers

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Citation

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