

# research snapshot

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## Better resilience may help to protect military populations from gambling harms

### What this research is about

Gambling has become increasingly available over the past few decades. This is concerning because it can lead to increased rates of problem gambling. Problem gambling is when someone's gambling leads to financial, emotional, or relationship harms.

Current military personnel and veterans have higher rates of problem gambling than the general population. So, military service may involve *risk factors* that could increase someone's risk of developing problem gambling. An example risk factor is experiencing distress. Problem gambling tends to co-occur with other disorders, such as depression and substance use disorder. It is also associated with suicidal thoughts and behaviours. These mental health issues are more common in people who have served in the military. So, they may be risk factors for problem gambling in military populations.

People in the military may also have *protective factors* that reduce their risks of problem gambling. An example protective factor could be having good family relationships. However, little is known about these factors in military populations. This study looked at possible risk and protective factors for problem gambling in military personnel and veterans.

### What the researchers did

This study used a subset of items from the 2015 Global Health and Wellbeing Survey. This survey recruited participants from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the USA. Over 10 000 people participated. About 60% of participants were women, and all participants were at least 16 years old.

### What you need to know

Military populations (i.e., active-duty and veterans) have higher rates of problem gambling than the general population. However, it is not clear what factors increase or reduce the risk of problem gambling in military populations. This study examined risk and protective factors for gambling in military and the general population. Participants completed an online survey. The results showed that military participants gambled more often than non-military participants. Many different risk and protective factors were linked to gambling in the non-military participants. For military participants, only the protective factor of 'resilience' was linked to gambling behaviour. So, military personnel with higher resilience may be at lower risk of gambling harm.

The survey asked participants if they were active military personnel, veterans, or not involved in the military. It then asked participants if they gambled in the past year, and if so, how often. It also asked if they wanted to cut down on their gambling and/or were encouraged by others to reduce their gambling.

Next, the survey used the following scales to measure potential risk factors:

- Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)
- Psychiatric Symptom Frequency Scale (PSFS) (to measure suicidal thoughts and behaviours)
- Brief Disability Questionnaire (BDQ) (to measure days out of their role/work)
- It also asked participants if others encouraged them to reduce their substance use.

The survey also used the following scales to measure potential protective factors:

- Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI)
- Brief Resilience Coping Scale (BRCS) (resilience being the ability to cope with hardship)
- Schuster's Social Support and Conflict Scale
- Intimate Bond Measure (IBM) (care from partner)

The researchers tested how the risk and protective factors linked to participants' gambling behaviours.

### What the researchers found

Most participants were not involved in the military, while 3.9% were veterans and 3.3% were active military personnel. Overall, active military personnel and veterans were more likely to have gambled in the past year than non-military participants. Among participants who gambled, active military personnel and veterans also gambled more frequently.

Active military participants were the most likely to have thought about cutting down on gambling. They were also the most likely to have had others encourage them to reduce their gambling.

In non-military participants, gambling frequently was linked to lower levels of two protective factors. These protective factors were well-being and perceived care from a partner. Additionally, wanting to cut down on gambling was linked to higher levels of two risk factors. These risk factors were psychological distress and suicidal thoughts and behaviours. Wanting to cut down on gambling was also linked to lower scores on all four of the potential protective factors.

In active military personnel and veterans, there was only one direct link between gambling behaviour and the risk or protective factors. Namely, gambling frequently was linked to lower levels of resilience. However, psychological distress, suicidal thoughts, and personal well-being all affected resilience. So, these factors indirectly affected gambling frequency in active military personnel and veterans.

### How you can use this research

This research shows military populations gamble more frequently than non-military populations. The

researchers recommend militaries screen personnel for problem gambling during routine health assessments. Additionally, services could aim to increase resilience in military populations.

### About the researchers

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### Citation

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