Going All In for Our Military Heroes: Problem Gambling Among Veterans with PTSD

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Objectives

• Understand combat specific PTSD
• Recognize the role of PTSD in the development of problem gambling behaviors
• Discuss community role in prevention of problem gambling among military populations
• Identify available resources
Describe a Soldier
Soldiers are:

- Brave
- Strong
- Heroic
- Patriotic
- Warrior
- Selfless
- Proud
- Respected
- Confident
- Skilled
- Invincible
- Fearless
- Honorable
- Courageous
- Noble
- Honest
- Dependable
- Detailed
- Powerful
- Proficient
- Resilient
Stigma:

A mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person: "the stigma of mental disorder"
Stigma

“A chain is only as strong as it’s weakest link.”

“No man gets left behind.”
Effects of Stigma

- Self-esteem/pride
- Career
- Rank/status
- Rejection
- Embarrassment
- Helplessness
PTSD Prevalence

- **Civilian**
  - Current: 10.00%
  - Lifetime: 12.00%

- **U.S. Combat Veteran**
  - Current: 40.00%
  - Lifetime: 50.00%
Under-reporting

The most commonly reported concerns

• I would be seen as weak (65%)
• Unit leadership would treat me differently (63%)
• Unit would have less confidence in me (59%)
• Difficulty getting time off work (55%)
• Leaders would blame me for the problem (51%)
• It would harm my career (50%)

Combat Related PTSD Basics

- Prevalence
- Delayed onset
- Multiple deployments
- Extended tours
- Bodily injury
- Physical attack
- Witnessing death
Combat PTSD Primary Symptoms

Fast path - Slow path

Three groups:

- Intrusive (re-experiencing)
- Avoidant
- Hyperarousal
Intrusive (re-experiencing)

- Distressing recollections
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares

These symptoms are automatic, learned responses. They are a sign that the body and mind are struggling to cope with the trauma.
Avoidant

- Avoiding places, people, activities and conversations that remind person of combat
- Shutting down
- Restricting emotions
- High pain tolerance
- Loss of interest in daily activities
- Feeling disconnected from the world
Hyperarousal

- Hypervigilance
- Panic attacks
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irregular sleep patterns
- Irritability
- Exaggerated startle response
Combat PTSD Secondary Symptoms

- Domestic abuse
- Intimate partner violence
- Divorce
- Other family problems
- Suicide
- Change in parenting style

- Loss of spirituality
- Unemployment
- Homelessness
- Substance abuse
- Problem gambling
Pathological Gambling

Impulse Control Disorder

DSM IV Criteria:
1. Preoccupation
2. Tolerance
3. Withdrawal
4. Escape
5. Chasing
6. Lying
7. Loss of control
8. Illegal acts
9. Risked significant relationships
10. Financial bailout

• **Problem Gamblers** meet 1 or more criteria
• **Pathological Gamblers** meet 5 or more criteria
Problem Gambling in General Population

Prevalence

• Lifetime rate of Pathological Gambling: 1.5%
• Pathological Gambling in past year: .9%
• Lifetime rate of Problem Gambling: 3.9%
• Problem Gambling in past year: 2%

Problem Gambling in Military Populations

Prevalence

• Veterans receiving psychiatric treatment: 20%

• Veterans receiving treatment for PTSD: 17% with a lifetime prevalence of 29%

• 28% of veterans with PTSD met SOGS criteria for problem gambling, 17% met DSM IV criteria
Problem Gambling Prevalence

![Bar chart showing the prevalence of problem gambling among civilians and U.S. combat veterans. The chart compares current and lifetime prevalence rates.]
Military Gambling Culture
Military Gambling Culture
Other Factors Worth Considering

- Commercial gambling availability
- Large sums of money (bonus & combat pay)
- Financial literacy & financial independence
- Risk-taking behaviors (invincibility)
- Adrenaline (combat)
- Support system
- **Untreated mental health problems**
How can we as professionals, as a community, as citizens provide combat veterans with the services they deserve?
Here’s Where We Go-All-In

• Prevention
• Cultural competence and continued education
• Expand treatment options
• Increase screening for gambling problems
• Co-occurring disorders
• Reduce stigma
Resources

• www.realwarriors.net
• PTSD screening tools: www ptsd va gov
• PG screening:
  www npgaw org/tools/screeningtools asp
• Military problem gambling toolkit:
  www gamblinghelp org
Resources Cont.

• Military One Source (information and referrals): www.militaryonesource.com
• GA Meeting Directory: www.gambersanonymous.org
• Gam-Anon: www.gam-anon.org
Resources Cont.

• Veterans Addictions Recover Center (Ohio)
  Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center: 440-838-6075

• Veterans Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK
Military members in the room?
Thank You!

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