

# Veterans' Lived Experiences of Military Service, and Recovery from Problem Gambling

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## Rationale

Qualitative research focussing on lived experience are fundamental in providing a psychological comprehension of gambling [1]

However, qualitative methods remain on the periphery of military studies [2].

The current study used qualitative research methods to provide a more nuanced view of gambling addiction in UK Armed Forces veterans and their families.



## Method

Six UK Armed Forces veterans classified as "Problem Gamblers" participated in semi-structured interviews comprised of nine open-ended questions (Lasting an average of 45 min 18 s)

Five questions related to **military experience and the transition from active Armed Forces service**

Four questions related to **gambling addiction, recovery, and access to support services.**



"Whilst you were serving, how do you think your service affected you?"

"How has your gambling affected your relationship and/or family life?"

## Findings

### Trauma in the Armed Forces

"My tour in particular in Bosnia, we saw quite a lot of results of quite recent ethnic cleansing. In fact I resigned my commission during that, the last week of that tour."

Army, 8 Years' Service, 49 Years Old

### Poor Transition

"All they care about is can you write a CV. Um. Have you done the courses that you want to do, not what you need to do. Can we see about getting you an interview someplace. You know, it doesn't actually concentrate on what you are capable of doing."

Army, 22 Years' Service, 52 Years Old.

### Poor Mental Health

"But somewhere along the lines someone has got to say fucking hell we can't send him away again.

You know, I got asked all the right questions and said all the right things. You know "You feel ready?" and stuff like that. Of course I do. I want more money to gamble, don't I?"

Army, 8 Years' Service, 29 Years Old

### Start With Perfunctory Gambling

"When, I first joined and I was a young soldier, um, almost all of your free time was based around the bar and everything to do with the bar. So if you were bored of a conversation that is when I would be on a fruit machine. For me it wasn't so much stress relief, it was boredom from what I was doing."

Army, 8 Years' Service, 32 Years Old

### Armed Forces Facilitates Addiction

"They might be able to mask it while they're in, because they've got that  
"Oh God, he's in the Armed Forces. He can't have a financial problem. He can't have a mental illness. He must be fine."  
Yeah right. But you know they're not and I can speak for that."

RAF, 12 Years' Service, 44 Years Old

### Deception

"And it morphed itself into becoming my whole life was a lie. To actually not being the person [Wife] thought I was. Um, hiding everything. Being dishonest about everything. Um, when you start lying about small things, I would, I would lie about nothing related to gambling whatsoever."

Army, 8 Years' Service, 49 Years Old

### Good Family Support

"My parents and my siblings, um, supported me every way they could. Um, if I didn't want to settle where I originally home stay with any one of them. Um. Financial support was there, emotional support."

Army, 22 Years' Service, 52 Years Old

## Conclusions

- A veteran's pathway to gambling addiction, and recovery from gambling addiction mirrors that of those in the general population
- Veterans stated that Armed Forces service may propagate the addiction, due to the amount of downtime requiring an exciting pass-time, and the apparent ease of 'hiding' the addiction
- Interventions for veterans should consider their Armed Forces service and aim to cater to first-order family members, who are at an increased risk of experiencing second-hand harms.



## References

- [1] Reith & Dobbie (2012, *Addict Res Theory*)
- [2] Carreiras & Castro (2012) in *Qualitative Methods in Military Studies: Research Experiences and Challenges*
- [3] Braun & Clarke (2006, *Qual Res Psychol*)

