



# BeyondDuty+

## Substance Misuse and Gambling Addiction

**Substance misuse** including alcohol, prescription drugs, and illicit substances is a frequent **coping mechanism**. Veterans are **more likely than the general population** to misuse alcohol, with studies showing a strong link between trauma exposure and heavy drinking.

**Gambling addiction** is a significant concern amongst veterans. Research from the Forces in Mind Trust and the University of Liverpool highlights that UK veterans are at **greater risk of problem gambling** than civilians, often driven by isolation, boredom, or as a maladaptive coping strategy.

These behaviours often mask **deeper mental health issues** and exacerbate financial instability, relationship breakdowns, and further isolation.

## Impact of Gambling Among UK Veterans in the UK

**Gambling addiction** is an often **overlooked but serious** issue affecting many UK veterans, with significant psychological consequences. Veterans may be particularly vulnerable to problem gambling due to a **combination of factors** related to their military service and post-service experiences.

## Why Are Veterans at Risk?

- **Coping with Trauma and Stress:** Veterans experiencing PTSD, anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues may turn to gambling as an escape or a way to self-soothe emotional pain.
- **Transition Challenges:** The loss of military structure, identity, and social support can lead to boredom, loneliness, or a search for excitement—all of which

can increase gambling risk.

- **Risk-Taking Personality:** Military culture often encourages risk-taking, which may translate into gambling behaviours post-service.
- **Financial Strain:** Difficulties securing stable employment after service can lead to financial pressures, sometimes prompting gambling as a misguided attempt to improve finances.
- **Accessibility:** The availability of online gambling platforms makes it easier for vulnerable veterans to engage in problematic gambling behaviours without immediate oversight.

## Psychological Consequences

Problem gambling among veterans can exacerbate existing mental health issues and create new psychological challenges, including:

- **Increased Anxiety and Depression:** Financial losses and the stress of gambling can worsen symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- **Social Isolation:** Gambling addiction often leads to withdrawal from family, friends, and community, increasing feelings of loneliness and detachment.
- **Relationship Breakdown:** Conflicts arising from gambling-related debts or secrecy may damage or end important relationships.
- **Low Self-Esteem and Guilt:** Veterans may experience shame and guilt over gambling behaviour, which can deepen psychological distress.
- **Risk of Suicide:** Problem gambling is linked to a higher risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviours, especially when combined with other mental health conditions common in veterans.

## Support and Treatment Options in the UK

Addressing gambling addiction in veterans requires a holistic and veteran-specific approach:

- **Specialist Gambling Support Services:** Organisations such as GamCare and Gordon Moody provide confidential advice, counselling, and treatment tailored to problem gambling.
- **Veteran-Specific Programs:** Some veteran charities, including Combat Stress and the Royal British Legion, incorporate gambling addiction support into their mental health services.
- **Psychological Therapies:** Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), including

gambling-focused CBT, is effective in helping veterans address underlying issues and develop healthier coping mechanisms.

- **Peer Support:** Veteran peer groups and recovery networks offer a sense of community and understanding that can encourage recovery.
- **Financial Counselling:** Integrated financial advice and support help veterans manage debts and rebuild stability, reducing triggers for gambling relapse.

## Reducing Stigma and Encouraging Help-Seeking

Stigma around both mental health and gambling addiction can prevent veterans from seeking help. Awareness campaigns and veteran-friendly services that promote confidentiality and understanding are critical in encouraging early intervention and support.

## Impact of Gambling Among UK Veterans

Gambling addiction is a serious but often overlooked issue affecting many UK veterans, with significant psychological consequences.

## Why Veterans Are at Risk:

- **Coping with Trauma:** PTSD, anxiety, and depression can lead veterans to use gambling as escape or self-soothing.
- **Transition Challenges:** Loss of military structure and social support can cause boredom, loneliness, and risk-taking.
- **Military Culture:** A tendency towards risk-taking may increase gambling behaviors.
- **Financial Strain:** Employment difficulties can prompt gambling as a misguided way to improve finances.
- **Accessibility:** Easy access to online gambling increases risk.

## Psychological Consequences:

- Worsened anxiety and depression
- Social isolation and withdrawal
- Relationship conflicts and breakdowns

- Low self-esteem, guilt, and shame
- Increased risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviours

## Support and Treatment in the UK:

- Specialist services like **GamCare** and **Gordon Moody**
- Veteran charities such as **Combat Stress** and **Royal British Legion** offering tailored support
- Psychological therapies including gambling-focused CBT
- Peer support groups providing community and understanding
- Financial counselling to manage debts and reduce relapse risks

## Reducing Stigma:

Promoting veteran-friendly, confidential services and awareness campaigns is vital to encourage early help-seeking and recovery.

## Addiction and Substance Misuse Among UK Veterans

Substance misuse, including alcohol and drug addiction, is a significant concern among UK veterans, often linked to the psychological and social challenges faced during and after military service. Veterans may turn to substances as a way to cope with stress, trauma, or mental health conditions like PTSD, depression, and anxiety.

## Prevalence and Risk Factors

- **Coping with Trauma:** Many veterans use alcohol or drugs to self-medicate symptoms of PTSD, depression, or anxiety.
- **Military Culture:** Alcohol consumption has historically been a common part of military social life, sometimes normalizing heavy drinking.
- **Transition Stress:** The loss of military structure and identity, coupled with social isolation or unemployment, can increase vulnerability to substance misuse.
- **Physical Pain and Injury:** Some veterans may misuse prescription painkillers or other drugs to manage chronic pain resulting from service-related injuries.
- **Mental Health Stigma:** Fear of judgment or career repercussions may prevent

veterans from seeking help for mental health issues, leading to substance misuse as an unaddressed coping strategy.

## Common Substances Misused

- **Alcohol:** The most commonly misused substance among veterans, often leading to dependency, health problems, and social issues.
- **Prescription Medications:** Opioids and benzodiazepines may be misused following injury or as a means of managing anxiety or sleep problems.
- **Illicit Drugs:** Some veterans may use cannabis, cocaine, or other drugs, sometimes as a form of escape or self-medication.

## Impact of Substance Misuse

Substance misuse exacerbates existing mental health conditions and can severely impair a veteran's ability to reintegrate into civilian life. Consequences may include:

- Relationship breakdowns and social isolation
- Employment difficulties
- Increased risk of accidents and health complications
- Legal problems
- Heightened risk of suicide

## Support and Treatment in the UK

Addressing addiction in veterans requires specialized, veteran-focused care that acknowledges the unique experiences of military service. Key support options include:

- **NHS Substance Misuse Services:** These provide assessment, detoxification, counselling, and rehabilitation, tailored where possible for veterans.
- **Veterans Addiction Services:** Some charities, like Combat Stress and Addaction, offer programs specifically designed for veterans dealing with addiction and co-occurring mental health issues.
- **Psychological Therapies:** Evidence-based treatments such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Motivational Interviewing (MI), and trauma-informed care are crucial in treating substance misuse alongside PTSD and other disorders.
- **Peer Support:** Veteran peer groups provide a supportive environment that encourages recovery and reduces stigma.
- **Holistic Approaches:** Incorporating physical rehabilitation, social support, and

employment assistance improves long-term outcomes.

## Importance of Early Intervention and Integrated Care

Early identification of substance misuse and integrated treatment approaches addressing both addiction and mental health are essential for successful recovery. Encouraging veterans to access support without fear of stigma or discrimination remains a priority across UK services.

### Contact Us

For more information and support, get in touch with our advisors and veterans with lived experience today.



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