

# Department of Defense Surveys of Health-Related Behaviors Among Guard/Reserve Military Personnel

A COMPONENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE LIFESTYLE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (DLAP)

For nearly 30 years, the Department of Defense (DoD) has collected information regarding behavioral and health readiness of active duty military personnel through the Survey of Health Related Behaviors Among Military Personnel. In 2005, DoD initiated the Department of Defense Lifestyle Assessment Program (DLAP), which incorporated the active duty health behaviors study and expanded the scope to include the National Guard and Reserves, as well as other special studies, the first of which examined Unit-level influences on alcohol and tobacco use. Findings from the program provided information on the fitness of the force, including estimates of alcohol, drug, and tobacco use; nutrition and physical activity; and critical assessments of emotional stress and other issues. Data are used to assess and document potential health and lifestyle issues pertaining to personnel, to track health-related trends, and to identify high-risk groups and areas needing additional screening or intervention. Results help leaders better understand the nature, causes, and consequences of substance abuse and health practices in the military and to evaluate and guide programs and policy. Additional information on the DLAP is available at <http://dlap.rti.org>.

## DLAP Health Behavior Survey Among Guard/Reserve Military Personnel

Since 1982, RTI has conducted nine surveys for the active duty force under the guidance of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs) and the TRICARE Management Activity (HPA&E). In 2006, a new survey expanded the population base beyond the active duty force to incorporate the Guard/Reserve Components of the military. Guard/Reserve personnel are of particular interest in view of their key role in conflicts around the world. Findings from the study have significantly aided our understanding of a wide range of health-related behaviors among Reserve Component personnel. Survey results have also helped to identify both the common needs of the Reserves and the distinct needs of each component.



The study also compared its findings with those for active duty personnel to assess strengths, limitations, and special needs of Reserve Component personnel.

## RTI's Approach

For this study, RTI conducted a comprehensive survey of personnel in the six Guard/Reserve Components of the armed forces (Army National Guard, Army Reserve, Naval Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Air Guard, Air Force Reserve). Participants were selected to represent men and women in all components. Following the same methodology used for active duty personnel, 18,342 self-administered questionnaires were completed anonymously, primarily in group sessions at Reserve Component drilling locations; questionnaires for those not attending the group administrations were obtained by mail. The questionnaire was similar to that of the 2005 active duty survey, permitting comparisons between active duty and Reserve Component personnel. Data collection took place at 126 randomly selected Reserve centers and armories clustered in 16 areas. Data analyses compared prevalence rates of health and lifestyle variables across personnel from the six Reserve Components.



## Current Status

The Department of Defense recently launched a second iteration of the survey of the Guard/Reserve components as a part of the DoD Lifestyle Assessment Program (DLAP) and it is under way. The anonymous survey, being conducted by RTI International, is titled the 2009 Survey of Health Related Behaviors Among Guard/Reserve Military Personnel (Reserve Component Survey). It seeks to again gather lifestyle and health-related data from approximately 20,000 Reservists and National Guardsmen from randomly selected commands throughout the United States. This new survey will permit the tracking and monitoring of important changes in health and mental health measures across time.

## Key Findings

Selected findings from the 2006 survey include the following:

### Results in Comparison with Active Duty Personnel

- Reserve component personnel who served in Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF/OEF) showed significantly higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms (10.1%) than any active duty personnel and higher rates than those serving in no theater (4.2%).
- Likewise, for suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, active duty personnel showed no statistically significant differences due to theater, but Reserve Component personnel did. Suicide attempts were significantly higher among those who served in OIF/OEF (1.6%) and in theaters other than OIF/OEF (5.3%) compared with those who did not serve in theaters (0.7%).
- Reserve Component personnel were significantly less likely to engage in heavy alcohol use, binge drinking, and cigarette smoking than active duty personnel.

### Results within the Reserve Components

- Compared with personnel who had not been deployed in the past 24 months, those who had been deployed one or more times had higher percentages of past-month heavy alcohol use, past-year illicit drug use except marijuana, past-year any illicit drug use, and possible alcohol dependence.
- Hazardous drinking or worse (i.e., harmful drinking or dependence as measured by the AUDIT) was reported by 20.1% of all personnel in the Reserve Component and was reported at rates three to ten times higher for heavy drinkers than for those who drank at lower levels.



- In the total Reserve Component, 23.7% of personnel were current smokers (any smoking in the past 30 days), 9.3% were heavy smokers, and 5.8% were classified as dependent on nicotine. Rates of any smoking were higher in the Marine Corps Reserve, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve than in the Navy Reserve, Air National Guard, or Air Force Reserve. Rates of heavy smoking were higher in the Army National Guard than in any other Reserve Component.
- Cigarette smoking after joining the military was a significant concern regarding Reserve personnel. Of the total Reserve Component, 14.3% of all respondents and 38.4% of current smokers started smoking after joining the military.
- Analgesics and marijuana were the most common form of illicit drug used among Reserve personnel in response to past-month and past-year behavior. More specifically, 4.0% of Reserve personnel reported using analgesics and 3.0% reported using marijuana within the past month; rates of use in the past year were 7.3% for analgesics and 6.1% for marijuana.

### More Information

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RTI 6827-2 0510



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