

# Cause and effects of drugs and alcohol abuse during the vietnam war essay

[Health & Medicine](#), [Alcoholism](#)



Drug abuse and its negative effects on soldiers is a historically common phenomenon in the military service and personnel. During the American civil war, soldiers used drugs to increase their level alertness and to dull the pains they incurred during the fights. Others used the drugs to reduce the fatigue from working and staying awake for several hours during the war. Unfortunately, the use of drugs in addition to alcohol abuse lead to addiction and other drug related consequences among the military service members in the army (Char 123).

This problem went on undetected for a long period resulting to a huge negative mental and physical effect on soldiers. The U. S military gave it a proper attention and recognition in the early 70's during the Vietnam War. Research revealed that nearly twenty percent of the soldiers admitted to the fact that they had abused one or more types of narcotic drugs on a weekly basis. As a result, most of them exhibited signs and symptoms of addiction coupled with aggressiveness. Such effects raised concerns to the effects of drug abuse and dependence on soldiers during and after the Vietnam War.

The main reason for heavy drug usage and alcohol abuse in the military during the war was its acceptance as a norm and tradition in the military service. During wars, the military thought that alcohol use was an important ingredient in raising confidence and morale among the soldiers. They used drugs to reduce the effects of watching their friends die brutally during the fights. It is because of such reasons that the U. S military availed daily rations of alcohol to soldiers without the knowledge of its effects on the service men. A common misconception that associates best soldiers with heavy drinking is another reason that contributed to the alcohol abuse

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during the war. The military structure that allowed rewarding of exemplary soldiers with alcohol and the availability of alcohol to military service men at reduced prices in their outlets are examples of the environmental factors that promoted drug abuse during the war. On the other hand, lack of family support and professional psychological help to deal with various atrocities that the soldiers faced during the war lead them to seek drug abuse as an alternative and treatment to their immediate need. Uncomfortable weather and the dangerous environment with lack of predictability made the soldiers to use drugs to stay disconnected with such surroundings.

The major effect of drug abuse during the war was addiction and dependence. The soldiers became addicted to the drugs with some continuing with its usage even after returning home. The psychological quick fixes through drug abuse lead them to drug slavery in the end. Mentally, many soldiers suffered from mental psychosis due to the heavy dependence on the drugs (Bryant 129). Drug use raised the level of psychological stress and frustrations during the war, which took the form of excessive violence and aggressiveness by the soldiers towards civilians. The family relations and marital status of the soldiers broke down after their return from war due to the addiction and drug use. The inability to control the urges and the withdrawal symptoms associated with disruption in drug use affected the soldiers' health and social life.

During the war itself, military personnel workers related military unpreparedness and readiness to drug abuse. The low level of performance standards due to drug abuse contributed greatly to such unpreparedness. It

meant that missions and strategies failed due to unawareness and sloppy executions due to drug abuse. Most of the addict soldiers faced disciplinary problems due to inability to follow instructions during the war. In the air force, statistics directly attribute a number of military aircraft accidents to excessive alcohol and drug abuse. These types of accidents would not have occurred if the service men were not stoned. Physical health of the soldiers deteriorated due to heavy usage of opiates. Muscle wastage and contraction of communicable diseases due to sharing of needles while injecting the drugs are but examples of physical health problems.

The need for an immediate cure of psychological stress due to traumatic war experiences created a huge demand for drugs among the U. S military soldiers during the Vietnam War. Lack of psychological treatment programs and immediate support to the soldiers made their need for drugs to increase on a daily basis as long as the war lasted. On the other hand, the servicing of this huge demand to the soldiers was possible due to the presence of a readily available supply of Narcotics in Philippines. Heroin and Marijuana were the most readily available drugs during the war. Reports indicate that Cannabis Sativa grew wildly in the Vietnam forests and countryside. The drug was therefore cheaply and readily available to the U. S soldiers. It was even available in the streets as pre- rolled marijuana cigarettes.

The cultivation and processing of Heroin in the Triangle countries also contributed to the availability of heroin to soldiers during the war. For a few dollars, a U. S soldier could purchase large amounts of heroin to last for weeks. All these factors coupled with the lack of drug prohibiting laws and

enforcement agencies by the Vietnamese government posed a major problem towards reducing the supply of drugs to the military personnel during the war period. The situational factors coupled with the military demand for drugs escalated the level of drug abuse by soldiers during the war. Availability of a huge supply of such highly addictive drugs at cheap prices without any governmental control accounts for the high level of drug abuse during that period.

Another source of supply of drugs to the military was the medical prescriptions and supply from the military medics. Even though prescribed, some medicines such as morphine, which is an amphetamine and Darvon, pose a great risk of addiction. The medics use them as sedatives or painkillers while treating soldiers. Frequent use of such drugs provided another source of supply of drugs to the military. Soldiers became addicted to their use due to the high frequency of casualties that needed treatment during the war. Many soldiers succeeded in convincing the medics to give them more drugs than the recommended dosage.

The U. S military responded to this problem through creation of military policies concerned with the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse. The military gave dishonorable discharge to soldiers who disobeyed the military directives regarding drug and substance abuse (Eberle 475). The military also intensified educational efforts to enlighten the soldiers on the effects of drug abuse. The setting up of programs such as the amnesty program aimed at rehabilitation, detection, and early prevention of addiction and drug dependence in the U. S military.

In conclusion, the Vietnam War is a classic example of how environmental factors can contribute to the drug and substance abuse. It clearly shows the negative physical, mental/psychological and social effects of drug abuse. The U. S military response on the other hand offers a good example on how to combat the problem. Even though it has not succeeded entirely on rooting out substance abuse in the military, it has succeeded in lowering the level in the recent years.

### **Work Cited**

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