The Health Related Behaviors Survey (HRBS) is the U.S. Department of Defense’s (DoD’s) flagship survey for understanding the health, health-related behaviors, and well-being of service members.

The HRBS allows leadership to better understand the health-related readiness of the force.

The HRBS is used to facilitate benchmarking in combination with Healthy People benchmarks (designed for the general U.S. population).

Results are weighted to represent the 2018 active component.

**Comparisons with the U.S. General Population**

The 2018 HRBS shows that active component sailors nearly met Healthy People 2020 goals for normal weight and met those goals for obesity. At the same time, sailors had several health challenges.

Sailors reported binge and heavy drinking levels that were greater than those for the general population. Their levels of use of tobacco or nicotine products also exceeded those for the general population and applicable Healthy People 2020 goals. Their levels of serious psychological distress and probable PTSD were greater than those for the general population. Their levels of suicidal ideation and attempts were also greater than those for the general population.

Development of military-appropriate population benchmarks, especially by service branch, could facilitate goal-setting, command visibility, and incremental improvements in health-related readiness.

**Limitations**

A low overall response rate (8.3 percent for the Navy and 9.6 percent across all services) suggests that the results should be interpreted with caution and in conjunction with other existing data. Use of targeted incentives, modules administered to subsets of respondents, or a service member panel survey could help improve response rates and representation. The above comparisons with the general adult population do not control for demographic differences between the two populations.

**Weight and Sleep Issues**

- 67.0% were overweight or obese, according to body mass index
- 30.6% were not age-appropriate sleep quantity requirements
- 31.7% were moderately or severely bothered by sleep-related lack of energy
- 8.1% took sleep medications to help them sleep at least three times weekly

**Mental and Emotional Health**

- 12.8% met criteria for serious psychological distress in the past 30 days
- 21.2% met criteria for serious psychological distress in the past 12 months
- 11.5% met criteria for probable posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the past 30 days
- 10.8% thought about attempting suicide in the past 12 months
- 1.6% reported a suicide attempt in the past 12 months
- 8.5% needed mental health services in the past 12 months but did not receive them
- 27.0% reported mental health service use in the past 12 months
- 37.3% said that seeking military mental health treatment damages one’s military career

**Physical Health and Functional Limitations**

- 36.5% reported one or more chronic medical conditions (e.g., high blood pressure) in the past 12 months
- 27.4% reported that pain (including headaches) had bothered them a lot over the past 30 days
- 6.6% screened positive for mild traumatic brain injury

**Sexual Behavior and Health**

- 20.9% had more than one sexual partner in the past 12 months
- 35.7% had sex with a new partner without using a condom in the past 12 months
- 4.0% reported contracting a sexually transmitted infection in the past 12 months
- 16.3% of those not expecting or trying to conceive a child did not use birth control during their most recent vaginal sex in the past 12 months
- 3.6% reported having or causing an unintended pregnancy in the past 12 months

**Substance Use**

Alcohol, Tobacco, Illicit Drugs, and Prescription Drugs

42.7% had engaged in binge drinking in the past 30 days (five or more drinks for men or four or more for women on one occasion)

13.6% were heavy drinkers (binge drinking at least one or two days a week in the past 30 days)

29.0% viewed military culture as supportive of drinking

40.6% reported any current tobacco or nicotine use

20.4% were current cigarette smokers

12.8% were current smokeless tobacco users

17.4% were current e-cigarette users

1.7% reported illicit drug use (mostly marijuana or synthetic cannabinoids) in the past 12 months

1.5% reported prescription drug misuse in the past 12 months (use without a prescription or use in greater amounts, more frequently, or for longer than prescribed)

**Sexual Orientation, Identity, and Health**

- 7.6% identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB)

**Deployment Experiences and Health**

Among those who had ever deployed:

- 67.6% reported at least one lifetime combat deployment
- 21.8% reported past exposure to combat trauma (e.g., knowing someone wounded in combat)
- 42.2% reported at least one deployment in the past 12 months

**Significantly greater percentages of LGB personnel than non-LGB personnel reported serious psychological distress and probable PTSD, suicidal thoughts and attempts, binge- and heavy drinking, e-cigarette and smokeless tobacco use, illicit drug use, and unwanted sexual contact.* These results are not specific to the Navy.

* Unwanted sexual contact in the HRBS is a broader construct than sexual assault, and these survey responses do not represent official reports of sexual assault.

Adapted from 2018 Department of Defense Health Related Behaviors Survey (HRBS): Results for the Active Component, by Sarah O. Mandeville, Charles C. Engel, Rebecca L. Collins, Robin L. Beckmann, Jacob Breslin, Enika Uribe-Ruiz, Michael Stephen Durbin, Mary Lou Gilbert, David Gett, Jennifer Wuensche-Dennis, Stephanie Brooks Holliday, Sarah MacCarthy, Eric R. Pedersen, Michael W. Robbins, Adam J. Rose, Jamie Ryan, Terry L. Schell, and Molly Simmons, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-4222-OSD, 2021. The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest. For the complete report detailing these and other findings, visit www.rand.org/t/IG147z4.

Limited Print and Electronic Distribution Rights: This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by laws. This representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for noncommercial use only. Unauthorized posting of this publication online is prohibited. Permission is given to duplicate this document for personal use only, as long as it is unaltered and complete. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of our research documents for commercial use. For information on permission and licensing permissions, please visit www.rand.org/about/licenses.html.

To view this infographic online, visit www.rand.org/t/IG147z4.

www.rand.org