

**Impacts of Control and Stress on U.S. Army Veterans:
The role of alcohol and tobacco as coping mechanisms**

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Abstract

There are multiple stressors associated with military service to which service members may be exposed throughout their contract. Although many people associate military substance use with life-altering events (i.e., separation from family members during deployments or witnessing the death of a fellow soldier), I hypothesize there are structural factors of the Army that incentivize maladaptive coping mechanisms and allow a persistent culture of acceptance around substance use. This study aims to identify specific characteristics of the U.S. Army, if any, that may influence tobacco and alcohol use; it also may determine whether or not tobacco or alcohol use decreases after participants retire from military service. Participants for this research study are U.S. Army veterans who completed all necessary training to receive orders to a permanent duty station and whose contracts ended within the past six years. Using the snowball method of recruitment, 10 former soldiers were interviewed with open-ended questions about their experiences while serving and their transition to civilian life. The most commonly reported factors contributing to alcohol use included an environment that perpetuated party culture, abuses of power by leadership, and a sense of loss over an individual's autonomy. Due to the unique structure of the Army's workplace, tobacco was used as a form of escape; the communal nature of the activity influenced its continued use. There was a substantial decrease in tobacco use post-retirement, but alcohol use remained around the same level whether the participant was serving or not. Many participants noted that while they still felt the impulse to drink, it was for social and stress-relief purposes rather than a maladaptive coping mechanism. The results of this study highlight critical areas of research in the fields of military and substance use sociology.

Alcohol and tobacco use have been a part of the Army since its inception; even meals given in the field used to include a cigarette and matches. Founded alongside the United States, the U.S. Army is steeped in tradition and its unique qualities often sequester it from public view. Though the military has sprouted new branches as technological advancement has occurred, each branch has retained individual cultures and customs that distinguish it from the others. While there are differences between the branches, the emphasis on rank, superiority, and uniformity is a common experience of each service member. Orders given by a superior officer are to be followed unquestionably, unless the order is illegal, immoral, or unethical, referred to as a (UCMJ, n.d.). Soldiers are obligated to abide by an extensive legal code; the Uniformed Code of Military Justice governs serious criminal offenses, as well as minor grooming code infractions. Although hierarchical systems are critical when under fire from an enemy combatant, the extensive rigidity suppresses personal choice, creating an urge to seek control in other areas of life, and the emphasis on a strict power hierarchy creates a breeding ground for power misuse and loss of personal autonomy. The research presented in this paper examines how soldiers utilized substances in their time-in service as impacted by a loss of personal autonomy, workplace stress, and attitudes towards substance use.

Literature Review

Military Background

Founded on June 14, 1775 with a small number of troops, the modern Army has grown to 504,330 active duty service members and is one of six branches: Army, Marine Corps, Air Force, Navy, Space Force, and Coast Guard. The Department of Defense is the nation's single largest employer, with over 3.4 million employees, over 1,326,273 active duty military personnel (About, n.d.). The U.S. Army continues to employ the largest number of any branch with

482,416 people (Active, 2023). In 1948, women were allowed to enter the service; however, women have been serving as nurses and in clerical positions for years prior. There have been many reforms to close the gender gap within the military but still an incredibly small percentage of the service is made up of women; only 17.3% active duty personnel (U.S. Department, 2022).

The military culture, and Army culture specifically cannot be understood without clarity on the two types of service tracks: Officer and Enlisted. The core difference between these two service-tracks is education. Enlisted members must be between the ages of 17 and 32 and have obtained a high school diploma but are not required to attain any education other than a high school-level. Although enlisted members may work towards their undergraduate degree while serving through a two year schooling program known as Green to Gold, the soldier must switch to an officer-track after obtaining their diploma (Green, n.d.). Those entering as an officer must have attended an accredited higher institution of learning and received a bachelor's degree prior to their service. Enlisted members can have a rank between E-1 (Private) to E-9 (Sergeant Major of the Army), but Officers of any rank, from O-1 (Second Lieutenant) to O-10 (General), outrank all enlisted members, regardless of years in service (U.S. Army, n.d.). Lower ranks are not allowed to go above their direct superior's head and must always follow the chain of command. Around 51% of the Army is made up of what is referred to as "Junior Enlisted" or those between the ranks of E-1 to E-4 (Defense, 2022); these soldiers are usually between the ages of 18 to 26 and are usually male. 82% of the Army is any enlisted rank, including Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs, E-5 to E-9), so a small minority make up the Officers, or those with the highest levels of authority (Defense, 2022).

U.S. Army Control

Categorized by Goffman as a total institution, the level of control exerted by the U.S. Army is beyond what would be considered reasonable within the general American public (Davies, 1989). A total institution is defined by Goffman as “a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time together lead an enclosed formally administered round of life.” (Davies, 1989). It is critical to point out that total institutions separate their populations and all aspects of life, work, leisure, etc., are around the same people. This control may be necessitated by the dangerous nature of the work, and members are bound by legally enforceable regulations that address all kinds of topics. Soldiers abide by strict grooming and dressing standards, are given orders dictating where they live, and even require clearance from superior officers to travel beyond a certain distance from their duty station (Suits, 2021). There is minimal research that speaks directly to the impact of this military structure on the individual, and how this type of dominance, experienced daily for an extended period of time, might contribute to a person’s use of tobacco or alcohol.

Substance Use & Abuse

Substance use for the purposes of this research paper refers to the use of tobacco products including, but not limited to cigarettes, dip, and other smokeless tobacco products. However, the CDC is defined as the use of any substance, legal or otherwise, that can be absorbed into the body through a variety of methods (Substance, n.d.). The American Psychological Association defines substance abuse as compulsive use of substances that has a negative impact on aspects of an individual’s lives (Substance use, abuse, n.d.).

Tobacco Use

Tobacco has been woven into the fabric of the military since its inception, even MREs (meals ready to eat) containing small cigarette packs were provided to soldiers for many years. While MREs no longer contain cigarettes and the United States Army has a more oppositional stance to tobacco use by service members, service members still turn to tobacco at an alarming rate. Some researchers cite a culture within the military that allows continued tobacco use by service members (Haddock, 2009). Extensive tobacco use causes nicotine addiction. This addiction can cause stressful withdrawal symptoms when an addict attempts to stop. Smokers in the military often cite smoking as a method of stress relief, but researchers have found that the nicotine use itself is the primary driver of stress, not a method of relief (Stein, 2008). Over 30% of the military uses some form of tobacco, but only about 19% of the general U.S. population uses it (Williams et al., 2021). According to the Department of Defense, close to 40% of current smokers in the military only began smoking after they had enlisted. Although the military has attempted to limit cigarettes and other tobacco products, e-cigarettes and vapes contribute to similar physical, psychological, and financial strain as traditional tobacco products (Williams et al., 2021).

Alcohol Use

For the purposes of this research, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Services (SAMHSA) definitions of binge drinking and heavy drinking are used. Binge drinking is defined by SAMHSA as “five or more drinks on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days,” for males and “four or more drinks on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days.” Heavy drinking is defined for both males and females as “binge drinking on 5 or more days in the past 30 days,” (Substance Abuse, 2019). Alcohol use among military personnel also

exists at a troubling rate. While heavy drinking is actually more common among veterans, binge drinking remains over 5% higher for military members, 30% versus the general population, 24.7% (Substance, 2019). The American Addiction Center reports that 1 in 3 active duty service members have reported engaging in binge drinking (Sharp, 2021). With a unique power structure that leans heavily on the chain of command and tradition, the U.S. Army has been a place where young soldiers have turned to tobacco and alcohol to cope (Haddock, 2009). However, research into how the power structure enables alcohol use is needed.

Military Culture

Within the military, researchers found unique parts of social culture that accepted substance use. Williams, Reddy, Quinn, and Bell found that the culture of smoking contradicted the public policy of the Armed Forces. They cited other studies that have linked e-cigarette use to higher rates of binge drinking and other substance misuse (Williams et al., 2021). Other researchers found a positive association between beliefs that drinking was a positive stress reliever and likelihood of high alcohol use rates (Ames et al., 2007). These research articles highlight the cultural attitudes as an area for further study.

Stress & Coping in the Service

There are a variety of factors researchers have attributed to heightened substance use in the military. Dolan and Ender identified a paradox among multiple areas that served as both stressors and stress relievers (Dolan & Ender, 2008). Family connection was cited by some soldiers as their way to stay connected to the states and cope with the stress of the job, while others experienced marital problems and being separated from their children that caused excess stress. Most interestingly, the support programs, such as

mental health professionals that soldiers are supposed to go to for assistance, may report things to their commanders and endanger their job standing. Many participants were untrusting of assistance programs, leadership, and even their coworkers, fearing repercussions or stigmatization for seeking help (Dolan & Ender, 2008). Haddock identified stress from deployments, separation from families, and combat experiences influenced tobacco use among junior enlisted service members (Haddock et al., 2009). The factors identified within the research were directly tied to military service, but there was minimal identification of structurally engrained stress factors.

Research Questions & Hypothesis

Undertaking an exploratory study into Army substance use, the researcher developed three research questions:

1. How does the loss of control people experience when they join the military influence stress?
2. Did participants perceive tobacco and alcohol as effective stress relievers while they were in the military?
3. How does tobacco and alcohol use continue after someone leaves military service?

Include some of what i found or did not expect in qualitative research

Although many people associate substance use with life-altering events like coming under enemy fire or witnessing the death of a fellow soldier, I hypothesize structural factors, including the strict workplace environment, hierarchical structure, and loss of personal autonomy the Army that incentivize maladaptive coping mechanisms and allow a persistent culture of acceptance around substance use.

Data & Methods

Methodology

Qualified participants were obtained through the snowball method of recruitment, but the researcher began with personal contacts. At the end of the interview, all participants were asked if they would be willing to provide contact information for others who might be interested. Each participant served in the U.S. Army, completed Basic Combat Training, Advanced Individual Training, and received orders to a Permanent Duty Station prior to their separation from service. Individuals must have also entered into the U.S. Army in the enlisted designation, with a high school diploma between the ages of 17-32. Ten individuals engaged in in-depth interviews, answering primarily open-ended questions, as well as some closed-ended survey questions for an understanding of their background. The interviews lasted around 90 minutes and included follow-up questions in addition to the main interview questions. Participants were asked a range of questions, including if they believed their substance use was directly impacted by their time in-service and why they drank alcohol. Each participant has been assigned a pseudonym, which is used for quotation credit. Interviews were recorded on Zoom with respondents' permission and later transcribed, beginning with the Zoom transcription and making corrections or additions as needed. All data used in the analysis was taken from the transcripts of these interviews and coded for common themes.

Findings & Analysis

Numerical Data

Nine participants identified as male and one as female; all ten identified as white. A high school diploma was the most commonly reported level of education, but half of the participants attended some college or received their associates degree. Half were the first in their immediate

families to serve in any military branch and most reported serving between four and six year contracts, although one participant served for 11 years. Five left the Army after achieving the rank of Specialist (E-4), one as a Corporal (E-4), and four as Non-Commissioned Officers: three as a Sergeant (E-5) and one as a Staff Sergeant (E-6).

Prior to their service in the Army, a slim majority, six of the 10, reported no alcohol use at all, the others drinking primarily in social settings. During their contracts, eight participants said they participated in binge drinking on average 2-3 times per week, with the other two disclosed an average of 4-6 times per week. All ten used alcohol heavily every month while in the Army. After leaving the military, there was greater variation in alcohol use than there was in tobacco use. Four either completely stopped drinking or drank rarely, while the other six still maintained the same level of use in both binge drinking and heavy alcohol use: five binge drinking 2-3 times per week, one drinking 4-6 times per week, and all six drinking heavily every month.

Six of the ten participants used tobacco prior to entering the military, either dip or cigarettes. While in the military, the other four began smoking once they entered Advanced Individual Training and many others who smoked before said their use began to promptly increase, remaining at high levels until they left the Army. Two of the ten socially smoked, often every weekend while drinking. Two said they smoked about a half a pack per day, while five smoked a pack or more per day. One only used smokeless tobacco in dip form, using a half a can per day minimum. Rates of tobacco use for everyone were higher at the end of the service contract than at the beginning. All ten individuals said they have either completely stopped smoking, transitioned to vaping with no tobacco use, or have significantly reduced weekly consumption of cigarettes after leaving the military.

Loss of Personal Autonomy & Alcohol Use

Despite being adults, participants reported a complete lack of control over their own lives, with one respondent comparing it to the way a parent might treat a young child. Superiors would call in soldiers when they wanted or force them to stay late at work without explanation. The ability to exert excessive control contributed to a feeling of helplessness among junior enlisted and supported a hostile work environment.

[...] working a lot and being told exactly how to do something and being micromanaged down to an extreme level, all the way down to your personal life, and when you can go to sleep, when you can eat, it-it really takes the control away from somebody. I mean that's a very big stressor when you're not in control of your own life. (Julian)

Many turned to alcohol as a way to forget their experiences in the workplace. Although sociological literature commonly associates alcohol use by service members with PTSD and experiences in combat (Haddock, 2009), the structurally embedded mistreatment of soldiers in a non-combat, domestic day-to-day work environment was specifically pointed out by participant Alex: “We weren't in combat or anything like that. There are a lot of people that drink to get rid of memories, to forget the crazy things that are happening, but we were drinking to just forget about being treated like crap all the time.” Noah also characterized his alcohol use as a time to unleash pent up frustration with his work situation, “On the weekends my friends and I would be drinking and just talking about all the horrible bullshit that would go down in the office.”

Others used alcohol to regain a sense of control. All participants said they were unable to make their own decisions over the majority of their lives, with Morgan explaining that his decision to drink was more than for kicks on a Friday night: “It’s just like if I’m gonna feel out of control, I at least better be drunk.” Similarly, Avery explained that drinking alcohol, for him, lessened the mental load and reestablished choice in his life. He also said that it was an easy choice to make because the work environment could be so destructive. “[...] Every day, every

day, pretty much sucked, but then there were the days that just really sucked. No matter which day you're just going to be wanting to sit down and drink a beer or have a drink.”

Even if someone wanted to use their earned days of paid leave to take a break from the workplace, that leave must be approved by a superior. If the leave was not approved for whatever reason, the soldier absolutely had to be at work when ordered or there could be severe legal penalties. Charlie often saw soldiers request time off only to be given heaps of work that would have to be finished in order for their leave to be approved. Upon encountering this situation himself, he turned to alcohol to relax and mentally check-out for a while.

Specifically when it came down to just taking any sort of leave, it usually came down to “I'm not gonna let you go if you don't first do this for me,” and that doesn't make any sense right? I've served the time in which I needed to accrue these hours in these days, but we're not going to let you go because the unit needs you.

[...] And so I would focus on the alcohol as a way to be like, you know what, at least I know I'm old enough to drink. So, I would go and have a beer at the bar and hang out with people, or just spend my time taking shots in my room because I knew that I had at least a little bit of control over my life at that small second.

Another of the most commonly reported experiences that influenced alcohol use was a loss of the individual's personal autonomy after signing their service contract. The terms of the contract would be active service for a specified amount of years and often some years of reserves service for a shorter period of time. By signing this contract soldiers would be locked into their time in-service unless some sort of extenuating circumstance, like severe illness, arose. The encompassing nature of the Army meant for many participants there was minimal separation between the work and personal life. The real losses of control experienced at work were not limited to a 5pm cutoff time, as many civilian jobs are. There are contractual obligations for all soldiers, who are subject to Uniform Code of Military Justice, a set of laws and regulations that apply to all military personnel. If soldiers do not abide by these guidelines or follow orders, there can be real, impactful legal ramifications, including jail time. When discussing how he used

alcohol to cope with the stress of the strict rules, Eli said “They are in charge and there's legal ramifications if you don't do what they tell you to do. There was always a threat of UCMJ [military justice legal repercussions] action.” Other participants described how they felt trapped in an undesirable work environment, but acknowledged that the contracts they signed would not allow them to just walk away. When asked about what it was like to live within such a rigid legal structure, Avery responded “You can't quit. There's zero quitting this. There's no getting out, you're stuck here until the end. If you did quit, you could go to jail.”

All participants mentioned the inability to leave as a factor that contributed to their alcohol consumption. Like Avery, Chris also addressed times where he drank because he could not leave the Army. Rarely, Chris said, could a soldier talk back to a superior without facing some sort of punishment. He said “There are times where you just wish you could walk away because it's toxic people, stupid situations. ... You can't just tell your boss to fuck off and walk away, you have to sit there and take it on the chin.”

A dishonorable discharge was likened by many respondents to a felony charge on a permanent record that would impact employment prospects for the rest of someone's life; Julian noted that the repercussions for leaving or violating the UCMJ codes are not something that only have an impact within the Army

Yeah, once you sign up it's either you can get a bad discharge; anytime you go for a job, they'll look at your record and they'll see a bad discharge. That's an immediate red flag for any employer. Or you can stick it out and deal with it. Or if you just leave, they'll stick you in jail. You can't even just say “Hey I'm done with this, here's my two weeks. I'm out. No.

You risk going to jail for not showing up to work, just because you don't feel like it, and that I think that was a real major player for why people were so stressed out. Because I mean what other 18-19 year olds... most of them go through 10 jobs, you know, they get fired, quit this one, because their manager looked at them funny.

Once you're in the army, there is no getting out unless you want some serious

repercussions for getting out before your contract.

After participants' contracts expired and they left the Army, many entered the civilian workforce.

With the ability to leave jobs if they wanted, the urge to drink due to this excessive control was gone. For many there was an adjustment in their civilian jobs, with James describing his aha-moment

The army, I think a big stressor in that is like, no matter how much you go through you can't just like be done. You have to go through more. It's not a choice, it's not your choice. Where now it's more like I could do whatever. I could just leave, like what do you, what fire me? Comparatively in the Army, we can send you to military prison, because this is a breach of your contract with the government.

[he then juxtaposed it with an experience in the civilian workforce]

There's a small mind blowing moment, of like, I showed up and someone was like "oh yeah, they called in, they're not coming today." I was like, "called in? Like what, we can do that?"

[...] There's much more dire consequences in the army for not being there or not doing what you're supposed to.

Workplace Stress & Tobacco Use

Tobacco had a unique role for all ten participants. Each person said it was a gateway to hourly or semi-hourly breaks they might not otherwise receive. Studies have shown that tobacco use, while often viewed by the user as a substance that reduces stress, actually increases reported stress levels and begins a cycle that perpetuates the use (Stein et al., 2008). Chris perceived tobacco as a way to reduce his stress, saying "I guess I always just thought nicotine calmed me down. It gave me something to do. Sometimes, it was a good excuse just to get away from everyone. Something stressful would happen and the response was chain smoke."

James acknowledged that while smoking may have contributed to his stress-levels, he did not experience those feelings while he was an active smoker.

Well when you smoke you get a little 15 minute break every hour. I could just step outside and go smoke or something and it felt like a good...I know that people say that it

actually increases your stress, but it felt like a good stress reliever for a minute. Just smoking a cigarette was a relief from working all day, or again just bullshit again. When I just got to step outside and have a cigarette, it felt like a stress reliever.

Every participant thought, at least at the time, that smoking or dipping helped decrease their stress levels and often used them during various training exercises or prior to parachute jumps.

Distinct from alcohol, the high from nicotine has different effects and the smoker is still able to function in the workplace. By using cigarettes, participants said they could still get some kind of high while being able to return to their jobs relatively quickly. Avery said although he was sure some people may have engaged in drinking on the job, tobacco was a much more widely used coping mechanism.

Many noticed that only smokers got a break during the workday and began to smoke so they could join. Advanced Individual Training was where many began to notice, and tobacco was the only accessible substance.

It was...starting out in AIT, because we could only smoke or dip outside, it started out as just like a way to get away for 5, 10 minutes. You know everybody's got shit going on, and when you're inside you got the drill sergeants over you and you're just like, man, fuck I just want 5, 10 minutes to cool down, go do something, I'm going to smoke break. Let's just go outside and chill out for a second, we can get away from everybody. (Julian)

James brought up similar experiences, as alcohol was not available, and brought up how exposure to an excessively stressful environment pushed many into tobacco use.

I get basic, like they're training you, but then you're still treated like a child in AIT. All the platoon sergeants and stuff...the ones I had were pretty fucking mean, just the worst people. [...]

I think just all the stress inducers, like I think that's where a lot of people would try to start smoking, because you can't drink in AIT. A lot of people would start smoking or try to find some sort of stress reliever for AIT, just because it's a bunch of bullshit.

When asked if either of them had tried to quit smoking while they were working, James said he had considered it, but ultimately always began smoking again, usually due to work-related stress. According to James, and every other participant, the stress and experiences in the daily structure

of their work played an essential role in the initiation and continuation of tobacco use. Julian said quitting never once crossed his mind and when asked directly if tobacco and alcohol use were directly impact by his experiences in the Army he responded

I would say so just because it gave me the reason to dip or smoke. It was like I have a reason, I have so much stress going on, so much to deal with; why can't I smoke? There's people who don't deal with nearly as much stuff as we did in the Army who smoke and drink. So we have all the reasons to. We have no reason not to.

Charlie referred to a different stress than other participants. His job often dealt with the creation of pamphlets or videos that showcased different events. Sometimes gruesome or disturbing, he turned to smoking to give himself mental breaks from the imagery. Charlie mentioned, "Some of the products I was making dealt with a lot of dark images, a lot of children being beaten and families being torn apart. I needed a break from it. I just didn't really want to spend too much time if I didn't have to." Though the rationale behind each participant's tobacco use varied slightly, all ten agreed that their experience in the office highly contributed to daily use of tobacco as an escape mechanism when they would not have otherwise been given a break.

Army Culture & General Substance Use

Participants consistently brought up how substance use, both alcohol and tobacco, was an inherent part of their service experience. One participant, Julian, likened the culture of alcohol use to what is often seen on college campuses: heavy, social use. Entwined in Army culture, a common sentiment from participants was that everyone drinks and that is just how it is.

Respondents were in a consensus that this cultural process followed a pattern: newer service members would be stationed at a base, engage in heavy alcohol use to make friends, and then continue a high level of use throughout their contract. All ten participants noted that although a variety of reasons might have initiated their alcohol use, the social bonding aspect helped the use

continue. Eli described his initiation into drinking as in-part due to himself getting easily influenced and also to the camaraderie of the Army.

People love to drink. I just never found so many people—I never went to like in person college, but what I know is there's a lot of parties. In the military, you get the barracks and people don't want to be at the barracks so they have barracks parties. Everybody's drinking and everybody's just pretty open about drinking a lot. Like everybody in the military drinks basically. Yeah I don't know, it's just what people do I guess... misery and alcohol bonding people.

Both Avery and Julian echoed similar sentiments, with Avery focusing on the impact of his friendships on his alcohol use. He described the get-togethers he would have with his friends and said drinking would often be the purpose.

Friends are all people you see every day, drinking was its own specific bonding activity. Even if we weren't doing anything else, and if we were just sitting there listening to music, that drinking was like its own specific little activity that I was doing with my friends.

In a slight deviation from other participants, Charlie specifically cited peer pressure as a factor in his drinking, although he acknowledged personally driven stress relief was another primary factor.

Social drinking was a common occurrence and widely accepted, but participants also said that concerns about the regularity of service member alcohol use crept into the workplace. Various training sessions would occur, intending to address substance use, but these presentations were often unconvincing. Participants said the training consisted of warnings against drunk driving and excessive alcohol use; Noah said “[...] It was just the same as the normal government saying "don't drink and drive and that was really the one time you heard don't drink.” However, the message was contradicted by actual experiences and leadership involvement in drinking. Alex described his and his friend’s attitudes towards the leadership, saying:

They were like “if you have more than two beers you are binge drinking.” They were constantly telling people not to drink, and it was always ridiculous, because it was like you know we're gonna. You guys put us through all this shit, you guys keep telling us not to do it, but we're going to. [...] I mean I've seen some of the Sergeants saying it drunk. It's like dude, I know what you're doing this weekend, what are you talking about. Shit, I saw what you just did in the office like 45 minutes ago; you're pregaming for the weekend, what are you talking about?

One of the participants, Chris, reflected on the irony of his responsibility for the training while he was participating in heavy alcohol use. He said that he felt the messages were not well received both because no one took the messengers seriously and the pervasiveness of alcohol use was difficult for people to escape from. There was no effective effort, that he witnessed, to modify service member alcohol use.

Charlie was one participant that reported workplace stress initiated his drinking, but the accessible drinking opportunities and acceptance of use enabled his consumption of alcohol. It was used by leaders to build a sense of camaraderie and teamwork.

[...] You go outside to go get your laundry and there's people in the hallways playing beer pong and drinking and inviting you to come, have a shot and then even during like the big ceremonies where everybody's dressed up and looking great they have a giant bowl where they're mixing a bunch of liquors and saying hey if you don't drink this you're not part of the unit, so it was definitely just a lot of people were having fun and saying join us and then it was also you're at a military event and it is expected.

Tobacco was also categorized as its own activity that emphasized social bonding. Higher ranking leadership sanctioned tobacco use, and the office would take breaks as a group to smoke outside. Smoking was a part of the office culture, as well as at training, various schools, and deployments. Avery saw smoking as a way to connect with his co-workers in a non traditional way:

I kind of feel like you just see all these older people and these NCOs and these officers always smoking and hanging out and you kind of just want to do that to you know. [...] Like the whole office would just go outside and smoke and then come back in. So it was kind of like a way for you to bond with your NGOs, without actually having to do, like, bonding activities. That was a pretty solid one.

The training and lectures that addressed alcohol use did not cover tobacco use and few regarded seeing it as a problem. Julian and James specifically mentioned that mental awareness was a positive aspect that helped them during work hours, and the commonality of use contributed to their own decisions to use tobacco. As Julian put it “[...] to get a little bit of a nicotine high just kind of feels like you're boosting your mental awareness just by having a little bit of a drug in you, really it just helps. Everybody thinks that helps and so everybody around you is doing it, so it's like why not.” When Charlie was asked about his motivations for smoking he mentioned he was swayed by peer influence, wanting to emulate his coworkers. He reflected on his addiction with some frustration, mentioning that he did not like the feeling of the impulse to smoke. He said “It looked cool. I just, I saw other people doing it and I was like well if they can do it, I could do it. [...] I got addicted to this thing because I'm not a smart human being.”

Although peer influence played a role, none of the participants mentioned actually feeling peer pressured into tobacco use as some had mentioned with alcohol. It was characterized as a regular part of everyday life that participants made the choice to engage in. Most of the participants noted that the occasional use of tobacco transformed into a compulsion, but Alex was an outlier, saying that it was the social element alone that drove his cigarette use. Once he left the military, he said he found it easy to quit, no longer being around others who did it. “You know, because when you smoke the chemicals or whatever that makes you want the cigarette or whatever right, but I was, I was never like that...and people always thought it was weird but whenever I smoked, it was because somebody else was smoking.” Alex also said, while he was in the military, he smoked with others, but on days where he was alone, he did not get an urge to smoke like the other participants.

Outliers & Positive Culture Associations

Despite many of the negative aspects of Army substance use culture, some participants brought up many positive things they enjoyed. Since the community revolved so heavily around the Army, people often found most of their friendships in the workplace or in the barracks. Emma said she felt the community was unlike any other group she had engaged with, saying a fair amount of the people she worked with were the same people she had gone through Advanced Individual Training, and even Basic Training with. This continual proximity to each other necessitated some amount of friendliness, as Avery pointed out

Definitely yeah, community is huge, but in a weird, strange way in the military. That's just because you're forced to see everyone every day and you can't really...well you can, but it's just hard when you hate someone that you have to see, and that you have to be around.

When asked why he drank alcohol while in the Army, Alex talked about how he would get together with his friends almost every weekend, and unlike some of the other participants, only used alcohol in the presence of others. He talked openly about his enjoyment of his time with his friends and did not describe the heavy alcohol in a purely negative way

Why they drink alcohol was in the military um it was just a fun thing to do. [...] I know that I had quite a few friends that would do things during the week, and I always thought that was crazy. I would just bottle it all up waiting for the end of the week and then just blow some steam, and you know get drunk with all the fellows and have some good fun. Whenever I would drink, I would never drink alone.

Others brought up how they missed the way the military gave them easy access to their friends, noting that being out of the military has complicated making friends. Avery compared how simple it was to hang out with friends and engage with an activity like drinking, versus his experiences in the civilian world:

You wake up across the hall from your best friend and you go to work with them, and you work all day, and then it's time for lunch, the same time, every day. Then you go back to

work at the same time. By the time the end of the day comes, you're off and then you're with your friends again just somewhere else, and I mean that whole part was really cool.

I feel like now, working where I work, I'll try and go to one of my co workers and be like "What do you do after this? There's like a bar right there, you want to go have a beer after this?" I mean they always say no, they always say no, but it was fun in the military, because you always knew where everyone was, and what everyone was doing, and everyone was like "sure yeah, I'll go have a beer."

James also felt that the sense of community was lost, echoing a similar sentiment

It was a lot easier to have people over for drinks, or something. [...] There's quite a few people I haven't talked to in a minute, because it's so easy when you all work together. Everybody lives nearby and you can just have people over on a weekend to drink and watch a movie. You're constantly seeing the same people all the time, so it's easy to form that kind of community. When people get out or PCS or something it's a lot harder to keep that up because outside of the military everybody has a different direction to go and not everybody is from the same place. [...] You build your community around the base, like your friend groups and so, when people get out or people move they go somewhere entirely different. It's hard to keep that community outside of the military, to be honest.

Toxic Leadership & Abuse of Power

Most commonly reported as a contributing factor to both alcohol and tobacco use was toxic leadership and abuses of power. All ten participants brought up specific instances, as well as general behaviors exhibited by leaders daily. Army leadership exerts power over soldiers with a large degree of freedom and little oversight. The chain of command, which requires all soldiers to report to their direct superiors, is enforced through policies that punish for insubordination. Emma said that even if a superior was wrong, lower ranking soldiers could not do anything to rectify issues and "had to blindly follow whatever they were doing." She continued, saying that one of the biggest problems was a continued lack of communication. Often leaders would not entertain ideas from lower ranks, even if something might improve the unit overall. Charlie explained that this problem was a common one, at least in his experience. When asked about the style of leadership he most often encountered, he said "There were more of the ones that didn't understand what it meant to be a good leader and so instead of having the proper training, they

would just belittle and make your life a living hell until you did what they wanted you to. It was just a nightmare dealing with those people.” This issue, Morgan explained, was a direct contributor to his own alcohol and tobacco use. For Alex, it was the creative methods of punishment leadership could use for even a minor infraction: “It was the constant group punishment thing. That was always something that really got to me; somebody else's deeds really dictated your fate in the military, and it was pretty harsh a lot of the time.” He went on to say menial tasks, like picking up a specific number of rocks or sweeping dirt for 4 hours, would be used as long as they were tangentially related to the action of the punished soldier. The helplessness in those situations was something multiple people addressed, with Julian sharing an instance where he was kept up all night because of a misplaced hard drive case. Although they all knew the case was locked in an inaccessible room, the entire unit was kept at work all night.

He made us stay at work till six o'clock in the morning. Then he let us go and he was like, “All right, instead of doing PT today, you guys can just come back at nine o'clock in the morning, I'll give you guys a late morning. [...] So it's just like some leadership gets put in positions where they clearly don't know what they're doing.

Many participants said these experiences contributed to their decision to leave the service and emphasized that if the promotion structure and leadership styles had been different, they may have chosen to stay in the military.

Promotions in the Army are based on a points system. When people achieve a certain number of points, they are able to be promoted to the next rank. The number of points needed for each rank can fluctuate depending on the number of open slots. If no slots are available, points are raised to an extremely high number, until people are needed and points drop. “They have a unique way of promoting people in the Army, not based on job experience and management experience, but more like just soldier experience: fighting, running, being able to know your ranks, being able to know who's in charge.” Julian said. Similarly to many other participants,

Alex heavily criticized the points system,

Here's the thing: the way they have their promotion system, I get it and it makes sense, on paper, but when you apply it in real life there's a bunch of fucking idiots that get promoted to Sergeant that way. A lot of the time it's because they're really good at PT, like these PT studs. That's important in the military but being able to lead – their abilities to lead are never challenged, and so they just ended up in this position of leader. Whether they're good at it or not, it doesn't matter; their points say that they get to be promoted so they just they're there. All of a sudden, they get this power to basically say “hey go do these things, because I want them done.” It's like well, it'd be a lot easier if we did this and then they'd say “well, it'd be a lot easier if you just shut the fuck up.”

James pointed out that this kind of system incentivizes poor leadership; in a system where only the numbers on a paper matter, the personality and leadership methods are not taken into consideration.

Most of the time it's like the people that are not normally good can just kind of stick it out. If you stay in long enough, the Army will push you through. Those types of people get to the top and then it's just kind of like that cycle of like a group of people joining and 50% of them are good, 50% of them are bad. By E-5 or E-6, the people that are good are like this is a bunch of bullshit I'm getting out, while the people that are bad...they're like “Well, this is easy, I can just stick this out,” and then they get to higher rank and then just make everybody's life a living hell.

Even among people who had originally been friendly with each other, Alex noticed that the breadth of power the Army bestowed would change people. He said it was common for people to begin weaponizing their power and treating people they had known for years differently.

It was really annoying. It's like you know there's some people that get this rank and then all of a sudden before they were standing right next to you and now they're standing above you. And it's not even just like a little bit above you. They've completely risen to an entirely different level.

I watched quite a few people that I knew just changed into a completely different person as soon as they got stripes on their chest and they became this, this person to be feared more than revered. That always kinda scared the crap out of me, because this person now has so much power and they always say they're not going to change, but they always do.

James put it succinctly when asked about why this phenomenon might occur, “[...] People are like, oh look at all this f*****g power. I'm going to get that rank so I can s**t on people too.”

Upon being asked about specific instances of abuse of power, James relayed his own story of his Article 15 hearing that caused him great personal stress and highlighted how the experiences in the Army workplace bleed heavily into other areas of people's lives. An Article 15 hearing is a disciplinary action under the UCMJ codes that is used by higher ranking officers to punish a variety of disciplinary infractions (Better, 1980). He had been put on staff duty, a 24 hour guard shift with a lower ranked soldier. It was a common occurrence to allow one of them to leave for a break, and James allowed the soldier some time to take a break on New Year's Day. Afterwards, James took his turn for a break, but while he was gone a newer superior came in and was livid James was not there. He initiated an Article 15 hearing, which many of his coworkers found ridiculous. He went on

Like one, this was a normal thing for people to do, but it seemed like people higher up had no idea what was going on with that, and so they tried to change a lot. I was the scapegoat, so I was the guy that are trying to fuck over, to be like 'Well, this is how it's supposed to be done and we're going to give you, and you know a fucking article' and shit like that. Everybody around me was like this is bullshit, but it kept going higher and higher. And so, that was a very stressful time in my life, and so I drank a lot during that time period.

When the investigation began, he became increasingly concerned that a misunderstanding between lower ranked soldiers who thought shift splitting was a sanctioned policy, and the official who viewed it as a direct affront to his authority was spiraling into a serious legal battle. James said the Article accused him of "dereliction of duty" and charged him with abandoning his post. He explained

[it] means I just like purposefully was just like "Fuck this I'm out." Like I was just abandoning my post when that wasn't like the situation at all. Like I said, the culture of staff duty was like as long as someone's at the desk, we can split shifts and get food, stuff like that. I can man the phones so you can take a little nap, then come back, and then I'll go do the same thing. Supposedly, that's not the way it should have been according to this guy.

Time kept passing without any word from legal personnel at the Judge Advocate General's (JAG) office [the Army's legal office], who was supposed to call him to provide legal advice. Although Article 15's were supposed to last only two weeks, because of COVID, there was a long delay. The severity of his charge did not hold up to even his company commander,

As shitty as the dude was, he was like this is something that should have been just handled at the company level. Quick slap on the wrist, like I give you a fucking counseling, say hey you got to like stay after work and mow the lawn for a little bit, but some reason, the group commander wanted to handle this lonely Corporal. Like I said it's supposed to last about two weeks tops. Mine lasted four months.

He went on to describe how his alcohol use rose as time passed by with no resolution, "So it was four months of waiting to get fucked just constantly and it was so anxiety inducing and just drinking a lot, because I was like tomorrow could be the day, tomorrow could be the day, tomorrow, could be the day, every single day, and it just kept waiting." When he finally heard from a JAG representative, they essentially told him there was nothing he could do and would be better off just taking whatever punishment they gave.

He decided to try his best to put together his own case, but found that it was difficult to figure out how to best defend against the charges.

They also said that during my hearing, they said that I had lied to the investigating officer, and I was like what point did I lie? It's because the Private First Class (E-3) that I was allowed to split the shifts with said that I didn't let him go to lunch and I remembered I did. I got my texts from him which fucked him. I got phone records, I just tried to call the people that you scan in your card. I put together my own case because JAG basically told me I was fucked, so yeah.

Ultimately, I was found not guilty because everybody, or hopefully everybody, around this commander was like "yeah this is kind of dumb, you seem like you kind of just specifically trying to fuck this guy," and I presented a my evidence and stuff like that...that was a stressor for a lot of drinking at the time."

He was able to beat the charges, but during the course of the hearing faced stark rise in his alcohol use. His experience with an authority figure wielding their power had a direct impact on his substance use.

Cessation of Military Service & Substance Use Continuation

When describing their use of alcohol and tobacco currently, there was a distinctive difference between the two substances: alcohol use for most continued at the same rate as it had in the Army, while all tobacco use slowed or ceased completely. Those who used alcohol predominantly in a social setting stopped heavy alcohol use, while those who reported using alcohol for stress relief continued to use alcohol heavily post-Army.

Alcohol

For many, there was a large adjustment to the civilian world and the effects of alcohol use are still present. When asked why Avery currently engaged in heavy alcohol use, he replied

I drink alcohol now, because I don't think that I can go more than a week without wanting to. I won't for one, maybe two days. I mean I've done it so many times where I'm just like I should take a break, and then three days later I'm like, no let's get super drunk tonight for no reason. It's Tuesday, but who cares if it's Tuesday. And it is Tuesday, and I will probably get super drunk tonight. I blackout every time I drink.

He was asked if his time in the military directly contributed to his alcohol use and responded, "It's definitely to blame, I would say, but it's also like I could have chosen to work out, or I could have chosen to go for a run or do push ups, but it's just the easiest way out, I guess." Like Avery, James had similar reasonings for continuing his heavy alcohol use, saying,

Oh, I don't know. Like the honest answer would be kind of I mean I am a little depressed. I like drinking. I don't mix it with like meds or anything. I don't I don't take meds but uh I don't know just kind of...I guess it's just a flow over from the military just kind of a mixture of like depression and just kind of what was started as continued on from the military.

Some cited new sets of stressors, especially financial ones with the stability of the Army gone, (finding a job, paying rent, etc.), but these stressors did not contribute to alcohol use as the military stressors did. The external stressors only continued what had already been started. Chris responded "It makes me feel good, that's the best description. It takes the edge off and makes things more enjoyable." James acknowledged his family culture of alcohol use would create

some difficulty in fully removing alcohol and Julian said he used alcohol to bond and connect with others, much like he did in the military.

A few participants stopped drinking almost completely, saying once they were no longer in a social environment that encouraged drinking, they found no reason to do so. One participant, Alex, said becoming a father was the catalyst: “Honestly I have responsibilities, I have more responsibilities now as a father and it leads me to not not drink as much or really almost ever. [...] I just have lost the need to do it. I have lost the group and the opportunities aren’t there like they used to be.” For others, like Morgan, drinking has become an activity for pleasure. He listed relaxation and recreation as his two primary reasons to drink and noted that it was a very rare occurrence. Charlie continued to use alcohol heavily for a while after he left the military, but eventually stopped. He described the motivation for his decision,

When I was allowed to drink and just do whatever I wanted, I would tend to do things that I regret, whether that be say something mean to somebody I cared for, or drive intoxicated which is never a good never a good thing. It just always happened and I was a very stubborn person, so I always felt like I could do anything, and when I drink it's way worse. [...] Once I stopped, I saw that furniture doesn't break as easily when you're not drunk and just plopping on top of them. You find [fewer] messes in the kitchen, the next day. [...] I'm less fun and I'm less cool but I'll take it.

Tobacco

Each participant had a different motivation for slowing or stopping tobacco use, but all ten did so. There seemed to be a realization that one day it just was not necessary or enjoyable anymore. Julian, who primarily used dip, realized that the stressors that used to motivate dipping were not there and made the effort to stop just to see if he was capable of it. He was successful, and even when one of his friends began dipping again he said, “I mean, I've done quit so I might as well keep it up.”

Two participants said their significant others motivated them. Avery was glad his girlfriend helped him stop smoking and said since doing so, he becomes disgusted by the smell

of cigarette smoke and has no urge to do so. Charlie, who still smokes cigarettes, but exclusively at work, said it was a much lower amount than he had used in the Army and at home never does. “My lady friend is allergic to tobacco smoke, something in it drives her crazy. So, I try to stay away from it to make her feel happier and breathe easier.” Charlie explained, “And I only do it at work because it's a way to take a 15 minute break.”

James, who transitioned to vaping after his time in the Army emphasized that the daily stressors of the Army were critical drivers of his decision to smoke. Responding to whether or not his use while in service was directly impacted by the experiences he had, he maintained that he did not think his smoking would have gotten so bad, over a pack a day sometimes, if he had not joined the military. Although he still vapes, he has plans to stop; he says his addiction to nicotine is why he smokes, but hopes that he can use vaping to completely stop: “I'm trying to wean myself off currently because in the long run, this is not going to be healthy.”

Discussion & Conclusion

Throughout the data there is a strong theme of disillusionment. Many thought that their military experience would be what was promised by their recruiter, but once they signed their contract and entered the world, they received an experience very different. These findings align with pre-existing research on total institutions, which found that constricted environments with a lack of personal autonomy drove members to find other ways to find control in their lives (Haddock, 2009). A perceived or real loss of control over the service member's life had a direct impact, raising stress levels and motivating alcohol use, often at a heavy rate. Although it primarily contributed to alcohol use, there were also some themes of loss of personal autonomy in the use of tobacco, where participants used it to get breaks that they might not otherwise receive.

Unlike research that suggests nicotine use actually heightens stress levels, participants often spoke about how cigarettes were a way for them to reduce their stress levels in the workplace. Tobacco was seen as a highly effective stress reliever, and four of the ten participants started smoking after they joined the Army, aligned with other statistics which found about 40% of current smokers in the military only began once they joined (Williams et al., 2021).

When examining how tobacco and alcohol use continued after participants left the military, there were different factors depending on the substance. A participant's reason for drinking predicted whether their pattern of use would or would not continue. Alcohol use was split but tobacco use was not.

Limitations

This study was limited in scope and is not generalizable to the military population. It applies only to this group of participants due to the small sample size. Additionally, the demographic makeup of participants was mostly white males. Further research should include a diverse group of participants to understand how or if other demographic factors contribute to either type of substance use.

Future Scope & Implications

This research indicates that there is a divide between military policy, which takes a more hardline stance against substance use, and the lived realities of soldiers. While the Army has created programs and training to help combat drinking and smoking, the effectiveness of these programs has been debated, as the social pressure to engage in drinking and the lack of alternative coping mechanisms for workplace stress are strong enough to continue to affect substance use. As a total institution, the military has an obligation to provide alternative coping methods and to teach its members, especially enlisted soldiers, how to avoid maladaptive coping

mechanisms. A reevaluation of policy effectiveness will help address whether the intended impact is achieved, and input from current service members could help leadership tailor their policies in the most effective way.

The most commonly reported stressor associated with both tobacco and alcohol use was toxic leadership and abuse of power. The strict structure of rank and legal penalties for disobeying orders are a critical part of war strategy, ensuring that communication and authority is clear in life or death scenarios. However, this system, when used in times of peace, creates conditions that allow, and incentivize abuses of power. The power structure is by design, and it bleeds into the culture, having impacts far beyond what might have originally been intended. Often it is described as a right of passage, with some participants saying Officers received less respect from enlisted members because the Officers did not face the same treatment, never completing their right of passage. Over the course of this research, a key question to consider has arisen: is it possible to have an authority system where soldiers are allowed to freely disobey orders able to exist given the safety issues that might pose? The results of this research undoubtedly show that some sort of change in the exercise of power, but it is not clear what changes could or should be implemented. Since it is a cultural issue, a policy change is not enough to instigate real change; unless the Army addresses the substance use among its fighting force and its role in enabling it, true change might never occur.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

**University of North Carolina-Pembroke
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Adult Participants
Social Behavioral Form**

IRB Study #46-21

Consent Form Version Date: 11/09/2021

Title of Study: Impacts of Control and Stress on U.S. Army Veterans: The Role of Alcohol and Tobacco as Coping Mechanisms

Principal Investigator: Hannah Irving

UNC-Pembroke Department: Sociology

UNC-Pembroke Phone number: (910) 775-4038

Email Address: STUDENT EMAIL

Faculty Advisor: Brooke Kelly

Funding Source and/or Sponsor: N/A

Study Contact telephone number: STUDENT #

Study Contact email: hji001@bravemail.uncp.edu

IRB Contact telephone number: (910) 775-4512

Participants must be 18 or older. If you are under 18, you do not qualify to participate in this study. Participants must also have enlisted in the United States Armed Forces and completed basic training, advanced individual training, and received assignment to a permanent duty station. Participants must have retired within the past five years.

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary.

You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty. Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to identify how stressors associated with military service influence tobacco and alcohol use and to determine whether or not substance use decreases after participants retire from military service.

How many people will take part in this study?

If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of approximately 10-15 people in this research study.

How long will your part in this study last?

Your part in this study will last for one interview session. This interview session should take around 60-90 minutes.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

You will be asked questions regarding substance use, coping mechanisms, and experiences while in the military. These questions will be asked during one 60-90 minute interview session. This interview will be both audio and video recorded. You are able to stop recording or questioning at any point. At the end of the interview, the principal investigator will ask for contact information for any potential study participant referrals. Please note you are under no obligation to provide researchers with referral information.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study?

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You may not benefit personally from being in this research study.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?

You will be asked questions about substance use and stressors associated with military service. These topics may be upsetting. You are not required to answer any question you are uncomfortable with and you may stop the interview at any time. You should report any problems to the researcher. The researcher will provide you with a list of possible mental health and substance use resources you can utilize.

How will your privacy be protected?

- The principal investigator will store your consent form, interview recording, and interview transcript in a secure location.

- No legal names will be attached to interviews. Pseudonyms will be used in transcriptions of interviews and any research reports. These pseudonyms will be assigned via an online random name generator.
- Only the principal investigator will have access to names or contact information.
- The responses will be combined and analyzed for common themes. Some quotes may be used, however any specific responses used in research will not include any identifiable information.
- The principal investigator will not disclose any study participation to outside parties, including other participants.

Participants will not be identified in any report or publication about this study. Although every effort will be made to keep research records private, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. This is very unlikely, but if disclosure is ever required, UNC-Pembroke will take steps allowable by law to protect the privacy of personal information. In some cases, your information in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies for purposes such as quality control or safety.

Will this interview be audio or video recorded?

This interview will be audio and video recorded via Zoom or Webex, and audio recorded with an electronic recorder, with your consent, to obtain a clear and accurate representation of this conversation. The Zoom or Webex video recording will be destroyed after the transcription is completed. This is a university affiliated account and is password protected. Only the principal investigator has access to this account.

- The Zoom or Webex recordings will be placed in a secure location on a password protected computer.
- After the interview, the principal investigator will transcribe the audio from the interview, creating a written record. This record will be kept in a secure location with the consent form and the audio recording.
- The audio recording will be destroyed after transcription is completed by the principal investigator.
- You may ask for the Zoom or Webex recording, and the audio recorder, to be turned off at any time.

Check the line that best matches your choice:

_____ OK to record me during the study

_____ Not OK to record me during the study

Will you receive anything for being in this study?

You will not receive anything for taking part in this study.

Will it cost you anything to be in this study?

There will be no costs for this study other than your time to participate. There can be potential embarrassment if the data of this interview is revealed with associating details. Steps are being taken to protect the confidentiality of your information.

What if you have questions about this study?

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact the researchers listed on the first page of this form.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 910.775.4359 or by email to irb@uncp.edu.

How will your responses be used after data collection is completed?

Your data will be combined with other participants' data. It will be compared and examined for common themes. No identifiers will be used during the reporting of this data and will mostly be discussed at the aggregate level. This data may be used in research papers or presentations at academic conferences.

Title of Study: Impacts of Control and Stress on U.S. Army Veterans: The Role of Alcohol and Tobacco as Coping Mechanisms

Principal Investigator: Hannah Irving

Participant's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

 Signature of Research Participant Date

 Printed Name of Research Participant

Appendix B: Interview Questions

University of North Carolina at Pembroke R.E.A.C.H. Fellowship Project

IRB Study # 46-21

Title of Study: Impacts of Control and Stress on Army Veterans: The Role of Alcohol and Tobacco as Coping Mechanisms

Date:

Principal Investigator: Hannah Irving

Faculty Advisor: Brooke Kelly

I. Demographic Information

- A. Age: What is your age?
 - 1. *18-20 years*
 - 2. *21-24 years*
 - 3. *25-27 years*
 - 4. *28-34 years*
 - 5. *Over 35 years*
- B. Gender: What gender do you identify as?
 - 1. *Male*
 - 2. *Female*
 - 3. *Non-binary/Gender Fluid*
 - 4. *Prefer not to answer*
- C. Race or Ethnicity: What is your race/ethnicity? (please select all that apply)
 - 1. *White*
 - 2. *Black or African American*
 - 3. *American Indian or Alaska Native*
 - 4. *Asian*
 - 5. *Hispanic or Latino*
 - 6. *Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander*
 - 7. *Other: (please specify) _____*
 - 8. *Prefer not to answer*
- D. Education Level: What is the highest degree you have received?
 - 1. *Less than high school diploma/GED*
 - 2. *High school diploma/GED*
 - 3. *Some college courses*
 - 4. *Associate's Degree*
 - 5. *Bachelor's Degree*
 - 6. *Graduate level or higher*
- E. Employment Status: What is your current employment status?
 - 1. *Employed 32 hours or more per week*
 - 2. *Employed less than 32 hours per week*
 - 3. *Temporarily laid off, sick leave or maternity leave*
 - 4. *Unemployed*
 - 5. *Disabled*
 - 6. *Homemaker*
 - 7. *Full-time student*
 - 8. *Other: _____*
- F. Marital Status: What is your marital status?
 - 1. *Married*
 - 2. *Widowed*
 - 3. *Divorced*
 - 4. *Seperated*
 - 5. *Never Married*
 - 6. *Domestic Partnership*

7. *I prefer not to answer*
- G. Military: What age did you join the United States Armed Forces?
1. *18-20 years*
 2. *21-24 years*
 3. *25-27 years*
 4. *28-34 years*
- H. Military: Has any of your immediate family served in any branch of the United States Military (Active Duty, Reserves, National Guard)?
1. *Yes: circle all that apply*
 - a. *Spouse*
 - b. *Parent(s)*
 - c. *Sibling(s)*
 - d. *Grandparent(s)*
 2. *No*
- I. Military: How long did you serve in the United States Armed Forces?
1. *6 months to 1 year*
 2. *1 year to 3 years*
 3. *3 years to 6 years*
 4. *6 years to 9 years*
 5. *9 years and higher*
- J. Military: What is the highest rank you achieved while in the United States Armed Forces?
1. *Private (E-1)*
 2. *Private 2nd Class (E-2)*
 3. *Private First Class (E-3)*
 4. *Army Specialist (E-4)*
 5. *Corporal (E-4) [considered a junior Non-Commissioned Officer]*
 6. *Sergeant and above (E-5 - E-9) [Non-Commissioned Officers]*
- K. Military: What state were you recruited from?
1. _____
- L. Military: What year did you retire?
1. *2016*
 2. *2017*
 3. *2018*
 4. *2019*
 5. *2020*
 6. *2021*
- I. **General Substance Use: Tobacco**
- A. General: Have you smoked at least 100 cigarettes in your ENTIRE LIFE?
1. *Yes*
 2. *No*
 3. *Prefer not to answer*
- B. General: Have you had any quit attempts? (Defined by NHIS as stopped smoking for one day or longer with the intention of quitting)
1. *Yes*
 2. *No*
 3. *Prefer not to answer*
- I. **In-Service Substance Use: Tobacco**
- A. In-Service: Did you smoke prior to your enlistment?
1. *Yes, used daily*
 2. *Yes, used some days*
 3. *Yes, tried it*
 4. *No*
 5. *Prefer not to answer*
- B. In-Service: Did you use smokeless tobacco products prior to your enlistment?

1. *Yes, used daily*
 2. *Yes, used some days*
 3. *Yes, tried it*
 4. *No*
 5. *Prefer not to answer*
- C. In-Service: On average, how many cigarettes did you smoke daily while in service?
1. *1 - 5*
 2. *6 - 10*
 3. *11 - 15*
 4. *16 - 20*
 5. *Over a pack per day*
 6. *Does not apply*
- D. In-Service: If you started smoking during your time in service, when did you begin using cigarettes or smokeless tobacco products?
1. *Does Not Apply: Before enlistment*
 2. *During Basic Training*
 3. *During Advanced Individual Training*
 4. *During Airborne School*
 5. *During your first assignment at a Permanent Duty Station*
 6. *Prefer not to answer*
- E. In-Service: Would you say you smoked or used smokeless tobacco products more often at the end of your time in service than at the beginning?
1. *Yes*
 2. *No*
 3. *Prefer not to answer*
- I. **Retired Substance Use: Tobacco**
- A. Retired: How often do you smoke cigarettes?
1. *Daily [everyday smoker]*
 2. *Some days [someday smoker]*
 3. *Do not currently smoke [former smoker]*
 4. *Has never smoked [never smoker]*
 5. *Prefer not to answer*
- B. Retired: On average, how many cigarettes do you smoke daily?
1. *1 - 5*
 2. *6 - 10*
 3. *11 - 15*
 4. *16 - 20*
 5. *Does not apply*
- C. Retired: How many days of the past 30 DAYS have you smoked a cigarette?
1. *None*
 2. *1 - 10*
 3. *11 - 20*
 4. *21 - 30*
 5. *Prefer not to answer*
- D. Retired: Do you use smokeless tobacco? (ie. vapes, electronic cigarettes, dip, chewing tobacco, snuff, dissolvables)
1. *Yes, currently use*
 - a. *Use everyday*
 - b. *Use some days*
 2. *Yes, have used before but do not currently use*
 3. *No, have never used*
- E. Retired: How many days of the past 30 DAYS have you used a smokeless tobacco product? (ie. vapes, electronic cigarettes, dip, chewing tobacco, snuff dissolvables)
1. *None*

2. 1 - 10
3. 11 - 20
4. 21 - 30
5. *Prefer not to answer*

F. Retired: During the PAST 12 Months or your time post retirement, whichever is shorter, have you stopped smoking for more than one day BECAUSE YOU WERE TRYING TO QUIT SMOKING?

1. Yes
2. No
3. *Prefer not to answer*

I. **General Substance Use: Alcohol**

A. Have you had an alcoholic drink EVER in your life?

1. Yes
2. No
3. *Prefer not to answer*

I. **In-Service Substance Use: Alcohol**

A. In-Service: Did you begin drinking alcohol after you enlisted in the United States Armed Forces?

1. Yes
2. No
3. *Prefer not to answer*

B. In-Service: While in the military, did you participate in binge drinking? (Binge drinking is defined by the National Survey on Drug Use and Health as 5 or more drinks on the same occasion for males, 4 or more drinks on the same occasion for females)

1. Yes
2. No
3. *Prefer not to answer*

C. In-Service: How often do you estimate you participated in binge drinking during your time in service? (definition in question B above)

1. *Daily*
2. *4-6 times per week*
3. *2-3 times per week*
4. *Once per week*
5. *A few times per month*
6. *Once per month*
7. *A few times per year*
8. *Only once per year*
9. *Never*
10. *Prefer not to answer*

D. In-Service: Did you use alcohol heavily while in the U.S. Army? (Heavy alcohol use is defined by the NSDUH as binge drinking on 5 or more days in the past 30 days)

1. Yes
2. No
3. *Prefer not to answer*

E. In Service: How often do you estimate you participated in heavy alcohol use?

1. *Every month*
2. *6-11 months out of the year*
3. *3-5 months out of the year*
4. *1-2 months out of the year*
5. *Only a handful of times during your military service*
6. *Never*

I. **Retired Substance Use: Alcohol**

A. Retired: Have you had an alcoholic drink after retiring from the United States Armed Forces?

1. Yes
2. No
3. *Prefer not to answer*

- B. Retired: Do you currently participate in binge drinking? (Binge drinking is defined by the National Survey on Drug Use and Health as 5 or more drinks on the same occasion for males, 4 or more drinks on the same occasion for females)
1. *Yes*
 2. *No*
 3. *Prefer not to answer*
- C. Retired: How often do you estimate you participate in binge drinking? (definition in question B above)
1. *Daily*
 2. *4-6 times per week*
 3. *2-3 times per week*
 4. *Once per week*
 5. *A few times per month*
 6. *Once per month*
 7. *A few times per year*
 8. *Only once per year*
 9. *Never*
 10. *Prefer not to answer*
- D. Retired: Do you currently use alcohol heavily? (Heavy alcohol use is defined by the NSDUH as binge drinking on 5 or more days in the past 30 days)
1. *Yes*
 2. *No*
 3. *Prefer not to answer*
- E. Retired: How often do you estimate you participate in heavy alcohol use currently?
1. *Every month*
 2. *6-11 months out of the year*
 3. *3-5 months out of the year*
 4. *1-2 months out of the year*
 5. *Only a handful of times*
 6. *Never*
- F. How many days out of the week do you estimate you have at least one alcoholic drink?
1. *1-2 days*
 2. *3-5 days*
 3. *6-7 days*
- I. **In-Depth: In-Service**
- A. Why did you drink alcohol while in-service?
 - A. Why did you use tobacco products while in-service?
 - A. What life stressors (personal or professional) did you experience most often while in-service?
 - A. Are there any work experiences you can recall where you used alcohol and/or tobacco to relieve stress? If so, please explain.
 - A. Did you have any experiences with leadership that contributed to tobacco and/or alcohol use while in-service? If so, please explain.
 - A. Would you say that your tobacco and/or alcohol use in-service was directly impacted by your experiences in-service? Why or why not?
- I. **In-Depth: Retired**
- A. Why do you drink alcohol?
 - A. Why do you use tobacco products?
 - A. Have you noticed any change in your alcohol use? Please explain
 - A. Have you noticed any change in your tobacco use? Please explain
 - A. What life stressors (personal or professional) do you experience most often?
 - A. Are there any experiences you can recall where you recently used alcohol and/or tobacco to relieve stress? If so, please explain.
- I. **End of Interview**

- A. Would you know anyone that fits the criteria of this project, who might be interested in participating?
 - 1. Name:
 - a. Contact Information:
 - 2. Name:
 - a. Contact Information:
 - 3. Name:
 - a. Contact Information: