

JSNA Lite Bite: Armed Forces Community

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Purpose

This JSNA Lite Bite explores the health and wellbeing needs of Military Veterans and the Armed Forces Community in Hertfordshire.

Review of literature

Who are veterans?

- Veterans can be defined as those who served for a least one day in Her Majesty's Armed Forces (Regular or Reserve) or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations.¹
- In 2017, it was estimated that 89% of veterans in Great Britain were male – significantly higher than in the non-veteran population (47%). Additionally, 99% of veterans were white compared to 92% in the non-veteran population and this difference was statistically significant.²

Armed Forces Community

- Military veterans form one part of the wider Armed Forces Community, which includes regular personnel, reservists, veterans, families of regular personnel, reservists and veterans, and the bereaved.³
- Members of the Armed Forces Community work together with Local Authorities, the Public Sector, the Charitable and Voluntary Sectors, and Businesses to establish an Armed Forces Covenant, and in 2011, Hertfordshire established one of the first. This Covenant is a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly.⁴
- The [Armed Forces Act \(2021\)](#) enshrines this Covenant in law, preventing members of the Armed Forces Community from being disadvantaged when accessing services like healthcare, education and housing and improving the Service Justice System. This is also highlighted in the [Veterans' Strategy Action Plan: 2022-2024](#).

Employment

- The Ministry of Defence directly funds employment support for those leaving the Armed Services through the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) which offers a high quality, no cost recruitment service for two years after their discharge date.¹

- Of the 2019/20 UK regular Service leavers who used a billable CTP service (80%) and reported their employment outcomes six months after leaving service, 86% were employed, 7% were unemployed, and 10% were economically inactive.⁶
- A study of the King's Military Cohort found that 20% of veterans claim unemployment benefits (UB) shortly after leaving but this proportion drops rapidly to around 2% in the first 2 years post service. The most consistent predictors of claiming UB were low rank, unplanned discharges (but not medical discharge), and having a history of claiming benefits before joining the Services.⁷
- Although findings suggest that the majority of Service leavers do maintain employment over time, a mixed-methods study focusing on the longer-term employment outcomes for ex-Service personnel found that most are not satisfied with their civilian job or career and were unsatisfied with the resettlement support they received. Certain groups face a more complex transition into civilian life and establishing successful long-term employment (including females, ethnic minorities, wounded, injured and sick, and older Service leavers), and so employment support should be tailored to specific individual needs.⁸

Education

- All UK military personnel are automatically enrolled into an Enhanced Learning Credits scheme, which can be used by both serving personnel and veterans (up to a maximum of 5 years after leaving) to fully fund the tuition costs of an eligible first degree, or a proportion of any other qualifying HE course.⁹
- Of the economically inactive Service Leavers using the CPT service in 2019/2020, 36% were in education, training or volunteering, the majority of which consisted of people under the age of 40.⁶
- Despite this, the UK lacks evidenced research into the veteran experience in higher education, with higher education institutions (HEI) in the UK lacking the veteran support, funding and structures that are present in other countries (like the US). Given that veterans can often find it difficult to adapt to the different culture and identity in HEIs, for example, the shift from collectivism to individualism, measures should be implemented to support student veterans to both access and thrive in UK HEIs.⁹
- Furthermore, a 2020 Ministry of Defence report found that 23% of Armed Forces families with school aged children stated they experiences difficulties with their children's schooling in the past year.¹⁰ These children often require additional support needs as multiple school moves (including overseas) and frequent parental absences can disrupt relationships and schooling.¹¹

Health

- According to Annual Population Survey 2017, overall, there were no differences in self-reported general health between veterans and non-veterans. However, veterans aged 35-49 years were significantly more likely than non-veterans to report certain problems including back or neck-related conditions (34% and 23% respectively), leg or feet-related conditions (33% and 20% respectively) and arm or hand-related conditions (22% and 13% respectively).²
- Mental illness may also differ between veterans and non-veterans. One large-scale analysis, after adjusting for age and race, found that the proportion of female veterans with past-year PTSD was higher than in women civilians (11.7% vs 6.0%) and this followed a similar pattern in

men (6.7% in men veterans and 2.6% in men civilians). Male veterans exhibited the longest delay in seeking treatment.¹² A military cohort study found that deployment and a combat role during deployment were associated with alcohol misuse and worse mental health outcomes in ex-serving regular personnel.¹³

- Evidence suggests that veterans aged 16-54 years are more likely to experience common mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression and alcohol problems than comparable age groups in the general population.¹⁴

Veterans and the Criminal Justice System

- There is a general lack of data and evaluation on Veterans of the Armed Forces place within the criminal justice system, however, emerging data is beginning to provide a picture of the UK landscape. Despite this, more research needs to be completed on veterans' pathways to offending and how they can be better supported to make alternative choices.¹⁵
- The most reliable evidence published in 2010 by the Defence Analytical Services and Advice (DASA) suggests that there are around 2,207 veterans in prison, making up approximately 3.0% of the total prison population in England and Wales. This statistic was generated via data linkage studies.¹⁶
- The main offences committed are violence against a person, sexual, and drugs offences. UK veterans are thought to be less likely than the general population to be in prison for all offences except sexual offences.¹⁵
- According to the most recent statistics, an estimated 5,860 veterans were subject to probation supervision in 2009. This represented 3.4% of those in contact with the probation service in England and Wales that year.¹⁷
- Of this group, 99% of offenders were male and 1% were Armed Forces Officers. Much of the contact with the probation service involved community orders (57%) and the most common offences were violence against a person (19%) and summary motoring (11%).¹⁷

Housing

- Sustainable housing has been identified as one of the most important aspects of successful transition into civilian life.¹⁸ Part of the role of the [Armed Forces Covenant Board](#) is to ensure that veterans are not at a disadvantage because of their service, meaning housing policies should include special arrangements for veterans and their families including shorter waiting times or making them exempt from proving links to the local area.
- Data from rates of home ownership whilst in service suggest that over 50% of service leavers may be classified as 'semi-sorted' or 'in need' in relation to housing (i.e., do not own their own home).¹⁸ Two areas most often identified as crucial for successful housing transitions relate to financial knowledge and access to appropriate information/advice.¹⁸
- Members of the Armed Forces community who experience difficulties securing suitable accommodation can turn to local authority allocated housing for help. In 2018, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Governments recorded that nearly 7,000 households given a new social housing letting included someone who has served in the Armed Forces, approximately 2% of total lettings.¹⁹

Veterans and Homelessness

- Estimates generated over the last decade suggest somewhere between 3 – 6% of the UK's homeless population are veterans.²⁰ The statistics generated are not wholly reliable, due to the data being London-centric, and doesn't reflect the nature of the issue nationwide.
- The most recent statistic generated by [The Combined Homelessness and Information Network](#) (CHAIN) in 2019/20 is that 6% of people sleeping rough had served in the Armed Forces at some point. This statistic also includes homeless foreign nationals.²¹
- There are some distinct differences within the veteran homeless population and general homeless population in the UK. Namely, homeless veterans tend to be older, with a survey of CHAIN referrals showing 44% of veteran clients were aged 50 years or over compared with just 18% of the total client population being in this age group.
- It has been suggested that the veteran homeless population is 100% male and predominantly white, reflective of the wider Armed Forces population. This group is disproportionately represented by individuals having served in the Army compared to the Royal Navy or Royal Air Force. This discrepancy could be due to the Army being larger than the other two divisions, however, some evidence suggests that the Army draws more recruits from socially disadvantaged backgrounds which are considered risk factors for homelessness.²²

COVID-19 pandemic

- **Veterans CHECK study** – An online survey of ex-service personnel in the UK in June-September 2020 found that, compared with pre-pandemic levels in 2014-16, there was a reduction in hazardous drinking in this group (from 48.5% to 27.6%). However, 27.4% of veterans reported feelings of loneliness. COVID-19 stressors (difficulties with relationships, boredom and health difficulties) were significantly associated with hazardous drinking, loneliness and common mental health disorders even after adjustment for previous mental health issues and alcohol use. Additionally, although hazardous drinking had reduced, a higher proportion of veterans are still in high-risk drinking categories compared to the general population in England.^{23,24}
- The employment rate of service leavers decreased significantly between 2018/19 to 2019/20 (-2%) which is likely due to the economic effects of COVID-19 and the reduction in employment availability, particularly for those aged under 25.⁶
- There appears to be limited research into the effects of the pandemic on Veterans' health in the UK with most research focusing on US Veterans population. One US study estimated that the excess mortality rate in 2020 was lower for the Veteran population compared to the general population. However, this may lack applicability to the UK.²⁵

National Statistics

- In 2017, it was estimated that there were 2.4 million veterans living in households across Great Britain.¹ The Ministry of Defence (MoD) estimates that around 15,000 people leave the UK Armed Forces each year.¹
- It is projected that the number of veterans in Great Britain will reduce to 1.6 million by 2028. However, the proportion of veterans of working age will increase from 37% in 2016 to 44% in 2028 whilst female veterans will increase from 10% to 13% in the same time period.²⁶

Local statistics

- There are no robust data available on the number of veterans living in Hertfordshire; however, a question about this was included in the 2021 Census.²⁷ The most recent estimate is from the Annual Population Survey 2017 and this estimated there were 28,000 veterans living in Hertfordshire that year.²⁸
- As of 2020, there are approximately 388 children of military families attending Hertfordshire schools.²⁹

Improving Healthcare Access for Veterans Healthwatch Report

- Healthwatch Hertfordshire investigated the experiences of local veterans in 2020 in their [Improving Healthcare Access for Veterans report](#).³⁰ They found that few NHS services proactively identified veterans; collected or shared data on veterans; and that veterans found it difficult to access priority treatment because they were not aware of the support available to them or the importance of disclosing military service. Many NHS services were not aware of the services and support available for veterans. Other reasons for not disclosing military service include stigma and pride, not identifying with the term veteran and not being prompted by GPs to share the information. Where veterans did disclose their military service to their GP, most of the time this did not result in any practical benefits or access to priority treatment.

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT)

- Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) - Recovery rates for residents in Hertfordshire in 2019/20 were lower than in England overall with 45% recovery rate in East and North Hertfordshire CCG and 47% in Herts Valleys CCG. The target for recovery across the adult age group is 50%.³¹ In 2019/20, veterans and their dependents accounted for 360 referrals in Hertfordshire (185 in East and North Hertfordshire CCG and 175 in Herts Valleys CCG). After treatment, 38% and 51% respectively reported reliable recovery.³²

Services and Interventions

- In March 2022, after consultation with local authorities, CCGs and charities, the [MoD and Office for National Statistics developed a standardised question](#) for asking if someone has previously served in either the regular or reserve Armed Forces. By gathering consistent data on this topic, appropriate policy and services can be developed to help support military veterans living in the UK.
- The [Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant](#), promoted as Hertfordshire Heroes, is a coalition of around 30 organisations, including charities, businesses, local authorities, NHS and the military who work together to ensure that the Armed Forces Community in Hertfordshire are given the support they need. As part of their [2022/23 action plan](#), priorities are laid out to ensure fair access to services:
 - **Health:** encourage GP practices to sign up to the Veteran Friendly GP Practice scheme; embed the needs of veterans into social prescribing plans in Hertfordshire; support a single point of contact pilot scheme; and work with ICS to develop better information sharing.

- **Housing:** District and Borough Champions to ensure housing allocation policies include references to the Armed Forces community to ensure fair access to services.
- Since 2019, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) has been a Gold Award holder of the [Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme](#). This award recognises HCC's commitment to being a forces-friendly organisation and upholding the values of the Armed Forces Covenant.
- The [Veterans and Reservists' Mental Health Programme](#) is a specialist MoD programme that provides mental health assessments and treatment advice for veterans and reservists deployed overseas. Access must be provided via a GP referral, but self-referrals are sometimes accepted in exceptional circumstances. All veterans referred to the programme receive a full psychiatric assessment by a consultant psychiatrist who then send the completed report to the individual's GP and, if relevant, a local mental health service with advice on onward treatment and care.³³
- Several mental health resources are available specifically for Veterans of the Armed Forces, who may have complex mental health issues related to their experiences:
 - [Veterans Gateway](#) is a first point of contact for veterans seeking support. They can put veterans and their families in touch with the organisations best placed to help with advice and support on healthcare, housing, employability, finances or personal relationships.
 - [Help for Heroes](#): a registered charity that provides mental health and wellbeing advice for veterans and their families. It includes a free and confidential psychological wellbeing advice and support service called [Hidden Wounds](#) that eligible veterans and their families can self-refer to.
 - There is a [specific veterans mental health service](#) within the NHS that veterans can be referred to or refer themselves for specialist support.
 - [Combat Stress](#) is a charity that provides specialist treatment and support for veterans, focusing on those with complex mental health issues.
- **[Veteran Friendly GPs](#):** GPs can gain the Veteran friendly accreditation which, amongst other requirements, requires a clinical lead for veterans in the surgery to undertake training, and ensure that the practice is meeting the health commitments of the Armed Forces Covenant. As of 4th May 2022, there were 12 Veteran Friendly accredited GPs in Hertfordshire, including:
 - Bancroft Medical Centre (SG5 1ND)
 - Church Street Partnership (CM23 2LY)
 - Bedwell Medical Centre (SG1 1LQ)
 - Gade Surgery (WD3 7DJ)
 - Kings Langley Surgery (WD4 8ET)
 - The Maltings Surgery (AL1 3JB)
 - Bridgewater Surgery (WD18 7QR)
 - Suthergrey House Medical Centre (WD17 1LS)
 - Rothschild House Group (HP23 6PU)
 - Longrove Surgery (EN5 2ED)
 - Whitwell Surgery (SG4 8AG)
 - Stanmore Medical Group (SG1 3QA)

- **Cobseo** is a confederation of service charities which represents the whole Armed Forces Community, providing a single point of contact for interaction with Government; with the Royal Household; and with the Private Sector. Through Cobseo membership, charities demonstrate their commitment to work with fellow organisations for the wider benefit of the Armed Forces Community. Charities whose focus is clinical treatment or healthcare, or any type of therapeutic intervention, have stringent additional criteria to fulfil where they must demonstrate sufficient evidence for effectiveness and adherence to NICE guidelines.
- **UK Battlemind** is a programme that focuses on positive psychology and cognitive behavioural techniques to help service personnel reframe negative thoughts. Soldiers are trained to repurpose the skills they may have drawn on during active service to use them to effectively tackle issues around mental health, PTSD, and the transition to civilian life.³⁴ Although Results from a recent Randomised Controlled Trial comparing this intervention to the standard UK debrief suggests that UK Battlemind did not have a significant impact on mental health or stigma, it may have a small effect on the self-reporting of binge drinking, which is generally high for UK service personnel.³⁴
- **Trauma Risk Management (TRiM)** is a voluntary, peer-led scheme first developed by the Royal Marines that aims to identify and assist UK military personnel who have been exposed to potentially traumatic experiences (PTE). Practitioners are embedded within military units, are non-medical staff and tend to occupy junior management positions.³⁵ Subsequent evaluations of this programme have found that service personnel offered the TRiM programme following a PTE are more likely to seek formal mental health support for PTSD and problematic drinking than those not receiving the intervention.³⁶

Summary

- Although not a homogenous group, members of the Armed Forces Community living in the UK often face challenges relating to employment, health, education, housing and the criminal justice system. The COVID-19 pandemic may have exacerbated the hardships that some military veterans face, including mental health disorders and unemployment.
- The Armed Forces Covenant seeks to support members of the Armed Forces Community adapt to civilian life, with there being laws in place to prevent them being disadvantaged or discriminated against. Furthermore, there are a wide array of services and interventions to help support members of the Armed Forces Community in the UK.
- According to the 2020 'Improving Healthcare Access for Veterans' report, it is estimated that there are around 28,000 veterans living in Hertfordshire, many of whom may experience difficulties accessing NHS services. The Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant has committed to prioritising fair access to health and housing services in 2022/23.

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