

Executive Summary

Ex-Armed Services
Personnel: Journeys
to Harmful Behaviour



Welcome to the Executive Summary

As well as providing an overview of the research this document should also act as a gateway to the project's companion documents and significant references if you read it online.

We recommend that you do also consult the companion documents which include:

- **The Project Report**
- **A Timeline Summary of Previous Research**
- **Participant Case Studies**
- **A Downloadable Poster of the Key Findings**



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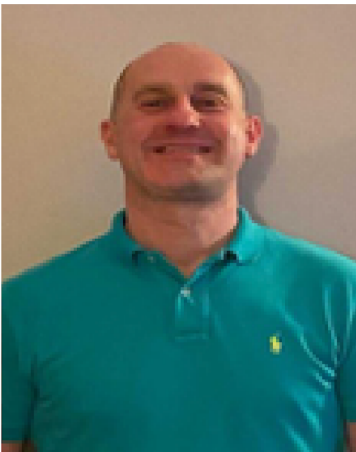
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1. Introduction and Purpose of the Research

The Probation Institute, in collaboration with Liverpool John Moores University, has conducted this qualitative study of ex-armed services personnel who have been convicted of a serious violent or sexual offence. The project was funded by Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT).

This study examines factors influencing the behaviour of ex-armed services personnel who commit serious offences against others over the course of their lives. Indicators from this study can be used to reduce the risk of serious harm to others. The report is intended to encourage discussion as to how veterans can best be supported. This information is valuable to practitioners and policy makers alike across health, educational, social and justice organisations.

Our participants were all men who had served in the UK Armed Forces. In 2014 the Probation Institute researched provision for ex-armed services personnel in the justice system. We included data from the UK Defence Statistics (DASA, 2010) indicating that 99% of the ex-armed services personnel in the justice system were male. In view of the severe constraints on access to research subjects during the period of this project, we did not seek research subjects of other genders.

The findings cover their entire lives, which for some span 65 years. The earliest accounts of military service date back to the 1970s and the most recent ones date from 2019.

The project's aims were to:

- 1: Develop an understanding of the lives of participants before and during service as well as after, considering the impact of military service on participants' lives and their offending histories.
- 2: Consider the specific needs, risks and strengths of veterans who commit a serious offence - and their implications for future intervention.
- 3: Engage practitioners in our emerging evidence base to better understand the specific needs of this group and inform prevention and justice sector policy and practice.

2. Research Context

An estimated 15,000 people leave the UK Armed Forces each year. While most successfully transition into civilian life, a small number become involved in the justice sector. Between 2012 and 2019, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons collected 190 reports indicating 6.07 percent of the male prison population were ex-military.

Veterans in the justice sector are affected by a number of factors, including trauma experienced in childhood, difficulties encountered during service (e.g. health problems) and challenges after service. Veterans are not more likely to commit a crime than civilians, but they are more likely to commit violent crimes (MacManus et. al., 2013) or sexual crimes (DASA, 2010).

In 2016, the Probation Institute, together with the Centre for Criminal Justice Studies, published a report *Provision of Services for Ex-Armed Personnel Under Supervision* which suggested:

- Military service can both positively and negatively impact civilian adjustment.
- Future research should focus on clarifying veterans' needs, such as transitions to civilian life that are dislocating and unmet psychological needs that surface later in life.
- Rather than commission projects and then evaluate them, it is imperative to expand the knowledge base in order to inform future efforts based on an understanding of service needs and impact.

In this study, we address these 3 points in the hope that our findings can strengthen practitioners' responses to veteran cohorts and reduce the likelihood of ex-servicemen committing acts of violence or sexual abuse.

The Veterans' Strategy Action Plan

The Office for Veterans' Affairs published The Veterans' Strategy Action Plan 2022-2024 in January 2022 in response to the Strategy for our Veterans (2018). It outlines the policy commitments to support veterans through 2024. The plan identifies three areas of action:

1. Understanding our veteran community.
2. Transforming services and support for veterans.
3. Celebrating our veterans and their contribution to society.

The Strategy's ongoing commitments are outlined in their Annex A. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) states that it intends to examine this research for additional insights into reducing risk under the theme of 'Veterans and the Law'.

3. Engagement of stakeholders and knowledge exchange

Stakeholder engagement and knowledge exchange were integrated into the research design. Facilitating cross-sectoral dialogue and knowledge exchange were important aspects of the project. To clearly communicate the findings of the research and to learn from others was our priority from the start. As a result, the recommendations of the project have been shaped through a commitment to stakeholder engagement and collaboration.

In this project, cross-sectoral dialogue and knowledge exchange have been important to:

- **Communicate research to stakeholders in a straightforward manner.**
- **Discuss issues that are relevant to policy, practice and communities.**
- **Encourage evidence-based policy making by stimulating debate.**
- **Identify key areas for discussion that will enhance understanding.**
- **Engage stakeholders in the formulation of dissemination strategies in order to influence change.**

Event 1: September 2019. London

Consultation on the implications of current policy and practice

The event was held prior to the collection of data so key stakeholders could discuss their experiences with this group and the challenges of current practices and policies. Researchers also shared their early ideas at the event. The report addresses the specific needs of service providers based on this discussion.

Representatives from 42 organisations attended the event, including armed forces charities, NHS providers of mental health care for veterans, Senior Probation Managers responsible for policy initiatives, probation practitioners, Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), and the Military Correction Training Centre (MCTC), together with colleagues from the third sector and academics.

As a result we learned that:

- Veteran-specific organisations were eager to learn more about how they could assist veterans across the justice sector.
- There is a need for more training focused on the needs and possibilities of veterans in all justice sector organisations.
- Connected practice and networking opportunities were considered crucial for practitioner confidence.
- Research was difficult to use due to a lack of accessibility to reports and academic styles.



Event 2: December 2021, Virtual Platform

Consultation on the implications of the findings of this project

During a virtual knowledge exchange workshop, our key stakeholder groups were joined by Veterans in Custody Support Officers (VICSOs). The invitation was sent via HMPPS. We prompted 3 discussions based on the findings across life stages.

01

Topic: Understanding the life course when working with veterans

The group identified key points throughout participants' lives at which different interventions may have reduced the likelihood of future harm. Many transition points were identified. Included were transitions into and out of school, care arrangements, military recruitment and training, enlistment and different routes out of the military as well as transitions into and out of custody.

02

Topic: Understanding the challenges for policy and practice

The group identified reliance on third-sector and local organisations as a key challenge. Due to the lack of statutory involvement, services were fragmented and often lacked veteran-specific knowledge. Standardised identification processes were viewed as essential for the group from arrest to resettlement. There was a suggestion that access to support for sexual offenders was difficult due to military charities' reluctance to offer assistance.

03

Topic: Understanding our findings through an accessible and dynamic dissemination strategy

The group reiterated the need for straightforward and accessible research materials. Participants wanted to diversify the formats in which findings and recommendations are shared - including learning resources - rather than a lengthy academic report. Discussion 3 resulted in the development of several project resources, including:

1. A timeline of key research findings
2. A poster of key findings
3. Case study learning resources.



4. Method

Numerous recommendations have been made for more qualitative research in order to fully understand the complex issues that affect veterans in the justice sector. By conducting qualitative research, we gain insight into lived experience. The study spoke with 14 men. The interviews took place between 2019 and 2021, in person, by telephone and via video conference while participants were in custody or in the community. Each participant was interviewed twice.

Interviews were designed for a narrative approach to provide an insight into how experiences shape self-identity and outlook. In this way, we can move from strict correlation to understanding the nuance of experiences and their impact.

Findings are based on their lives spanning 65 years. Military service dates back to the 1970s and the most recent insights were gained in 2019. We have considered this factor during our analysis and encourage you as readers and users to reflect on it as well. For example, some accounts of military practices do not exist today - yet they are critical for the justice sector to understand when working with veterans who served in that time period. A fuller description of the characteristics of the participants can be found in the full report.

Practitioner Insights



Four types of insights were gained from practitioners.

1. In the first instance, the advisory group actively contributed insights.
2. In the second instance, stakeholder events were conducted.
3. A third step involved conducting semi-structured interviews with n.7 practitioners in order to better understand the challenges faced by veterans and the impact of current policy provisions.
4. Finally, commenting on the first draft of this report.

These insights can be found throughout the full report in boxes like this one.

5. Who were the participants?

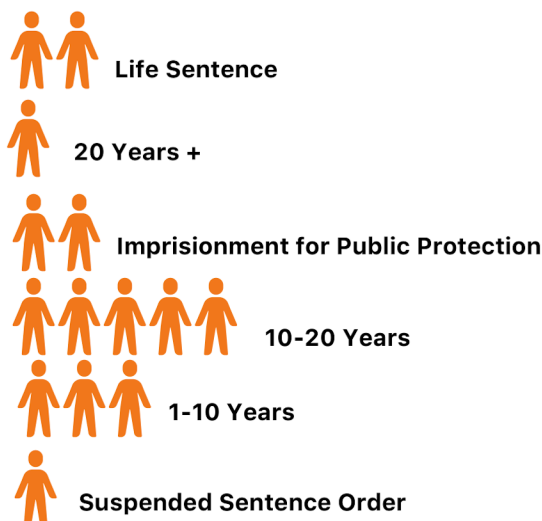
Offence type:

Serious violence (n.6) Sex offences (n.8).



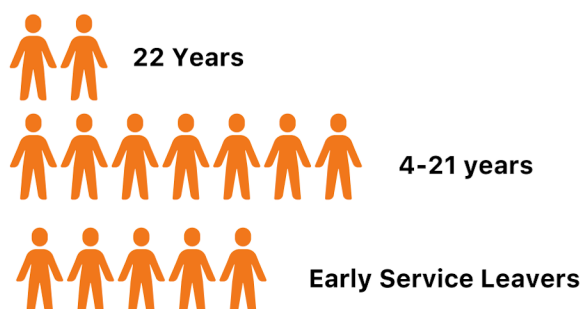
Sentences:

Life Sentence (n.2), 20 years + (n.1) IPP (n.2), 10-20 years (n.5), 1-10 years (n.3), SSO (n.1).



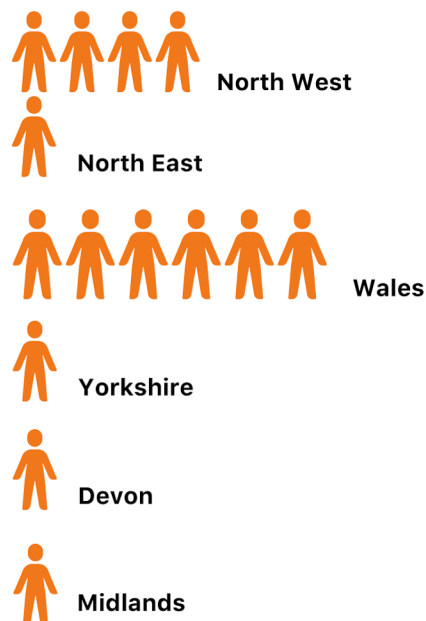
Military service length:

22 years (n.2), 4-21 years (n.7), Early Service Leavers (n.5).



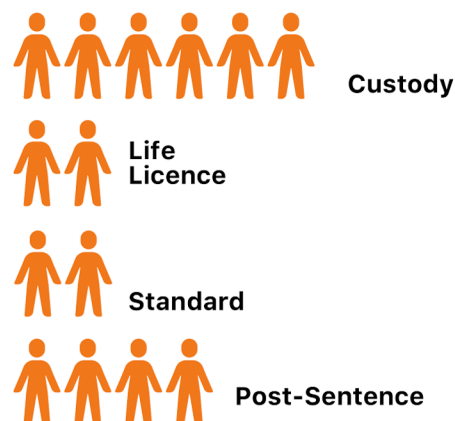
Location:

Northwest (n.4), Northeast (n.1), Midlands (n.1), Yorkshire (n.1), Wales (n.6), Devon (n.1).



Sentence stage:

Custody (n.6), Life Licence (n.2), Standard Licence (n.2), Post sentence (n.4).



6. Key Findings

During the course of the project, we conducted a thematic analysis of each participant narrative. Our key findings demonstrate the importance of understanding the whole life course when working with veterans in the justice sector.

Key Findings 1.1: Military in the Life Course

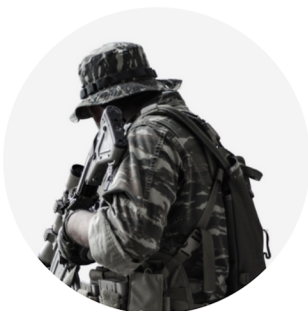


Narratives of pre-military adversity

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Broader childhood adversity was also a feature.

Military used to escape and transform.



Narratives of military service

The military provide protective factors.

Military culture has associated risk factors embedded.

Risk and protective factors become conflated.



Narratives of transition

Risk and protective factors are inversed and exacerbated.

Experiences of exclusion and isolation.

Dishonourable discharge is commonplace.

Key Finding 1.1: Narratives [Cont.]



Narratives concerning the justice sector

Veterans have specific needs.

Risk is often misinformed and escalated.

A need for a tailored approach.



Narratives towards change

Trauma informed practice with children and young people.

ACE aware practice for Ministry of Defence.

Veteran-aware justice sector.

Key Finding 1.2: The 'BACK-SAFE' Acronym

Our analysis demonstrated that individuals who experience adversity in childhood and adolescence are motivated to enlist by eight main factors highlighted by the acronym BACK-SAFE.

B rotherhood
A cceptance
C amaraderie
K inship

S tatus
A ccommodation
F amily Unit
E conomic Security

Key Finding 1.3: Think ACE-ACE

Adverse

Childhood

Experiences



Actively

Correlates with

Enlistment

7. Recommendations

Based on the results obtained from our interviews and knowledge exchange activities, we have developed a series of through-life recommendations for policy and practice. We suggest that there is potential to reduce the risk of serious harm by implementing preventive interventions.

Knowledge of the potential impacts of adversity in early life should inform all interactions with children.

The relationship between childhood adversity and involvement in the criminal justice system is well documented. The results of this study provide further evidence that trauma-informed intervention is critical when dealing with children. As well as integrating and prioritising training on ACEs, it is important to understand the long-term effects of trauma. As other studies have demonstrated, our findings point out the impact of trauma throughout the military life cycle. A connected practice with children requires a whole network approach which includes; health (for example, GPs, school nurses, and health visitors), educational (for example, teachers and administrative staff) social (for example, sports clubs, army cadets and youth clubs) and justice (for example police, courts, youth justice, probation, prison and third sector) organisations.

Recommendation 1:

Health, educational, social and justice organisations must ensure that all staff are adequately trained and have the knowledge and skills necessary to identify childhood adversity and adverse childhood experiences and to respond appropriately to them.

Recommendation 2:

Whenever possible, records of ACEs and other childhood adversities should be sent to the Ministry of Defence when recruiting individuals under the age of 18.

Recommendation 3:

In addition to health practitioners (GPs, community health workers, midwives) and education professionals (teachers, school nurses, support staff, administrators), we recommend the use of our case study learning materials by the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Justice.

The impact of adversity in childhood and trauma across the life course should be recognised throughout ones military career.

The military was perhaps the first institution in the world to fully appreciate the effects of trauma, with the social science around "shell shock" and later, PTSD. In recent years, the MoD have introduced policy and practice concerning wellbeing and trauma in an attempt to shift the culture including mandatory trauma informed practice training (TIP) and mental health training. These developments must be monitored and implemented into subsequent training, policy and practice interventions.

Recommendation 4:

The Armed Forces should identify adversity during recruitment. This should not restrict admission or attach any sort of prejudice but rather present the military with an opportunity to support personnel differently during key stages of risk and need in ones military life (for example post-deployment).

The UK Armed Forces should adopt a proactive approach to trauma-informed practice during the recruitment and selection process. A key component of the enlistment and training processes must identify and monitor the wellbeing of individuals who enter the service with pre-service vulnerabilities, as well as to pay attention to the cultures and practices of basic training which serve to (re)traumatise them.

In order to make recruitment processes more conducive to a trauma-aware culture and to appropriate and progressive activities, a culture change is needed throughout the selection process, particularly for young recruits. In light of recent research (also funded by FiMT), we know that recruits do indeed find the defences required such as emotional numbing and hypervigilance to hold ruptures of childhood traumas - yet later exposure to deployment trauma weakens those defences (see Palmer et. al., 2021).

Education concerning the impact of deployment trauma, particularly for those enlisting with early adverse experiences, should be embedded into existing life-skills training. By providing training, support, and education tailored to the level of understanding of the personnel, we can better prepare them for such a situation in an emotionally stimulating environment, thus minimising the consequences down the road. Providing such care is also important for staff retention.

Recommendation 5:

In order to cultivate an environment where healthy relationships between personnel are more likely and stronger, a culture change is required among the military. For example, promoting a more progressive view of gender, masculinity and balancing military priorities with relationship/family needs (see also Alves-Costa et. al., 2021). We note that through initiatives such as Operation Teamwork (2022) the Army in particular have demonstrated a commitment to addressing cultural and inclusivity issues. It is crucial that these awareness and training inputs include intimate and interpersonal relationships. We recommend that all new initiatives are evaluated to ensure an accurate measurement of their effectiveness over time.

The military culture was characterised by several interviewees as a potentially unhealthy environment for sexual development, in which pornography and prostitution were prominent themes (n. 5). The testimonies of the participants reveal an overtly masculinised culture associated with alcohol, violence and sex (n.13).

A priority for the government and military has been to increase access to services for victims of domestic abuse, as reflected in the Domestic Abuse Act (Home Office, 2021) and the MoD (2018) Domestic Abuse Strategy. In part, military personnel are at risk of perpetrating intimate partner violence due to aspects of military training and culture, such as the legitimisation of violence in a military setting and the male hierarchical structure (Bradley, 2007; Jones, 2012; Melzer, 2002). Several studies have indicated that combat exposure and deployments are associated with higher rates of intimate partner violence and abuse (IPVA) in military families (Kwan et. al., 2018; Kwan et. al., 2020).

Recommendation 6:

The Tri-Service Resettlement Provision (MoD 2020) must develop a set of staggered and tailored resettlement pathways which are specific to dishonourably discharged personnel. These should be embedded into the practices of Military Correction Training Centre (MCTC). We note the Inspection Report on MCTC (May 2022) which describes positive improvements in rehabilitation. We note however the ongoing concern about oversight in the community of individuals who have been convicted of sexual or violent offences and released from MCTC.

A significant number of our participants went absent without leave (AWOL), were involved with the military police (n.12) or the MCTC (n.5). Our study revealed that transitioning from serving in the military to the justice sector took a relatively short time. The majority of participants (n. 12) in the study entered the justice system almost immediately after transition. Among our sample, a significant number (n.7) were sentenced for their offences while in the military.

Recommendation 7:

It is important for the Armed Forces to move away from punishing personnel who go absent without leave (AWOL) to the development of a support pathway for ensuring their reintegration into their duties upon their return or the establishment of a tailored transition pathway out of service.

A veteran-aware justice sector is essential

"I would argue that veteran-specific work is important as they have different needs than most other prisoners. This does not mean that we should camouflage the environment... but it is about recognising their distinct needs."

- Justice Sector Practitioner

Recommendation 8:

Veteran awareness training should be offered to all areas of the justice sector.

The Veterans' Strategy Action Plan (2022-2024; p.3) suggests a further rolling out of accredited training for health providers and the introduction of veteran-aware training for social work teams in every Local Authority. We would suggest that this should be extended beyond social work teams, expanding veteran-awareness training to health, statutory, justice and third sector organisations.

Specific pathways should pay particular attention to different approaches that apply to re-settlement needs, cognitive needs, full-time peer support, help seeking, transferable skills, family interventions and mental health issues. There is a great deal of responsibility for the support of veterans in the third sector, with Armed Forces charities having a significant responsibility in this regard. During this research, it was found that this charitable sector does not, in the main, work with veterans who have committed sexual offences in the past. As a solution, we propose statutory pathways and interventions that take veteran well-being into account.

Recommendation 9:

To build pathways of support for those who have committed sexual offences, statutory bodies within the justice sector must work with charities that support armed forces personnel. This programme of intervention should include awareness-raising and education activities, as well as accredited training to ensure that third sector agencies have confidence in the support they can offer.

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