



Public Attitudes to the UK Armed Forces in Northern Ireland

Professor Chérie Armour and Dr Bethany Waterhouse-Bradley
Dr Jana Ross
Dr Margaret McLafferty
Dr Matthew Hall

Psychology Research Institute,
Faculty of Life and Health Sciences,
Ulster University

June 2018

Foreword

The gap between perception and reality in the context of the Armed Forces community, and specifically for ex-Service personnel, damages opportunities and unbalances sensible policy decisions. Addressing the gap has to start with a clear and evidence-based understanding of what are both the perceptions and the reality. This particular research therefore sits very neatly within the broader Northern Ireland Veterans Health and Wellbeing Study which tackles the reality, as do many other of the reports we at Forces in Mind Trust have funded.

Indeed, it is striking that the results of this public attitude research would not seem wildly out of kilter if derived from the rest of the United Kingdom. The perception that two thirds of veterans are likely to suffer from mental ill health, when the reality is that proportionally the prevalence is barely different to that of the general population, is sadly widespread. It hinders employment prospects, and paints a false picture of what someone gains from their service, and what in turn the ex-Service person brings to society.

This report warrants careful consideration, and I particularly applaud its recommendations which rightly focus on better community integration, and greater awareness of the true nature of the individuals that collectively form the Armed Forces community.

One of the few findings unique to Northern Ireland is the lack of awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant – 80%. I recognize that this is a sensitive issue, but in our other studies, we have demonstrated that considerable work is undertaken that, whilst not necessarily labelled as ‘Covenant’, certainly delivers its principles in all but name. That is not to be complacent, but it is worth being balanced in taking forward work that actually delivers better support, rather than merely gives existing support a better title.

So overall we are gratified that this credible and well-conducted piece of research identifies less of a gulf in perception and support for the Armed Forces community between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom than perhaps we had feared might be the case when we embarked upon the work. There is more to be done, and careful consideration of the sensibly balanced recommendations by all involved would be an excellent place to start.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Ray Lock". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Air Vice-Marshal Ray Lock CBE

Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust

Forces in Mind Trust

The Forces in Mind Trust was founded in 2012, through an endowment of £35 million from the Big Lottery Fund, to promote the successful transition of Armed Forces personnel, and their families, into civilian life.

Our Vision is that all ex-Service personnel and their families lead successful and fulfilled civilian lives. Our Mission is to enable them to make a successful and sustainable transition.

Our Strategy is to use our spend-out endowment to fund targeted, conceptually sound, evidence generation and influence activities that will cause policy makers and service delivers to support our Mission.

For full details of what we have funded, our published research, and our application process visit our web site www.fim-trust.org



Acknowledgements

The team would like to thank Paula Devine from Queens University and ARK NI and the rest of her team for sharing their vast experience in public attitudes surveys in helping us develop the questions and including us at every stage of data collection. We would also like to thank Professor Gillian Robinson from Ulster University and ARK NI for being responsive and supportive to us proposing a new schedule of questions for the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILTS), and for her support in making that happen. Finally, we would like to thank Professor Nicola Fear from Kings' College London. Her support in the development of the questions will ensure comparative work between the UK and NI on public attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces is possible and we look forward to working with her on this in future.

The authors would also like to acknowledge the dynamic and steadfast work of Martin Robinson, the PhD researcher working with the NIVHWS, and Dr Emma Walker, whose support when she was a member of the research team helped make this happen.

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Acronyms

AFC	Armed Forces Covenant
CAIN	Conflict Archive on the Internet
GB	Great Britain
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NI	Northern Ireland
NILT	Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey
NIVHWS	Northern Ireland Veterans' Health and Wellbeing Study
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RIR	Royal Irish Regiment
TRBL	The Royal British Legion
UDR	Ulster Defence Regiment
UK	United Kingdom
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector
UDR	Ulster Defence Regiment
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector

Executive Summary

Overview

The current report entitled *Public Attitudes to the UK Armed Forces in Northern Ireland* is the fourth in a series of reports from the Northern Ireland Veterans' Health and Wellbeing Study (NIVHWS). In 2017, the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) funded the inclusion of the first ever set of questions on public attitudes towards current and former UK Armed Forces personnel in Northern Ireland (NI) in the annual Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT). NILT is a joint project between Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University and is representative of the attitudes and opinions of the full NI population. NILT respondents were asked for their opinion on a range of issues related to the UK Armed Forces in NI. Questions focused on respondents' attitudes towards, and opinions of, the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles and the UK Armed Forces today; comparisons of public attitudes to the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles and in current times; respect for Armed Forces personnel; associations with Armed Forces personnel; alcohol use and the mental health of Armed Forces personnel; the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC); and specialist veteran mental health services in NI. Each of the above topics were examined in regard to one or more key demographic variables, such as age, gender, geographical location and religious affiliation.

Background

UK Armed Forces personnel were deployed to the streets of NI from August 1969 to July 2007. During this time, around 300,000 Regular and Reserve personnel served in NI, with numbers peaking at 30,000 in 1972, but declining to 13,000 in 2001 after the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. More than 40,000 of the soldiers serving in NI were 'home service' personnel, who served in either the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), or later the Royal Irish Regiment (R-Irish). These 'home service' regiments were recruited locally, and often included individuals who served in a part-time capacity alongside their civilian jobs. Both the UK Armed Forces and the civilian population of NI paid a high price during the Troubles with many deaths and Troubles-related injuries (Conflict Archive on the INternet (CAIN), 2018a). The Good Friday Agreement saw the eventual withdrawal of the UK Armed Forces from NI when Operation Banner (the Army Operation) officially ended in 2007 with most paramilitary groups declaring they had decommissioned. The Army in NI now have two Regular battalions and one Reserve (UK Government, 2015). The role the UK Armed Forces played during the Troubles remains contested, and opinions of this are presumed to be divided along national, religious, political, and ethnic divides (e.g. loyalist/Protestant supportive of the UK Armed Forces and republican/Catholic unsupportive).

There is currently a significant number of veterans and their families living in NI. The Royal British Legion (TRBL; 2014) estimated the number of veterans living in NI to be around 56,700; roughly 3% of the population. Including the wider veteran community (e.g. veterans, spouses, divorcees, widow(ers), children), the number rises to around 8% (TRBL, 2014). However, it is pertinent to note that many veterans residing in NI are cautious of disclosing their military affiliations and so may not appear in these figures.

Although the Troubles officially ended twenty years ago with the Good Friday Agreement, security issues for current and former military personnel remain. Several studies (Cochrane, 2013; Evans & Tonge, 2012; Horgan & Morrison, 2011; Tonge, 2014; Whiting, 2014) have also shown that dissident paramilitary

activity has been steadily increasing in post-Troubles NI. Veterans taking part in focus groups conducted for the *Current and Future Needs of Veterans in Northern Ireland* report (Armour et al., 2017b) expressed concerns for their personal safety, claiming they were still vigilant about to whom they disclosed their military past. Such trust issues were reported as barriers to accessing support services for key issues, such as housing and mental health (Armour et al., 2017b).

Throughout the NIVHWS, key actors and participants in the research have indicated the importance of public perceptions of, and attitudes to, military veterans, both in the political sphere, and for veterans themselves. Service providers indicate the difficulty of providing veteran specific services in an environment where issues associated with the UK Armed Forces are politicised, and where there are so many sensitivities involved in championing issues related to veterans. Veterans themselves indicate that they do not feel comfortable accessing some public services, particularly where they might need to disclose their veteran status. Some veterans also expressed that concerns for their personal safety continue to have significant impact on their mental wellbeing.

Currently, Service personnel, their families and veterans in NI can avail of all services afforded to citizens in NI (e.g. statutory health and social care, social housing) and a range of voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations (see Armour et al. (2017a) for a comprehensive discussion of the VCS supporting veterans in NI). Veterans in NI can also access assistance from the newly established Veterans' Support Office. In spite of these developments, veterans in NI remain slightly different from those in the rest of the UK; many of whom can avail of a range of additional statutory support services related to the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC).

In the rest of the UK, the AFC provides a guarantee that those who have served in the UK Armed Forces and their families will not be disadvantaged as a result of their military service. The AFC has two core principles: no member of the current or former Armed Forces community should be disadvantaged compared to other citizens in accessing public and commercial services; and special consideration may be appropriate for some members of the Armed Forces community such as those who have been injured or bereaved (House of Commons Library, 2018). In NI, the implementation of the AFC is impeded by a debate around its compatibility with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act¹.

The political sensitivities around the UK Armed Forces in NI, and the legacy of the Troubles, are said to impact upon the nature of the debate surrounding the AFC (House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2013). In spite of the difficulties adopting the AFC at a national level, several local authorities have adopted its principles and Armed Forces Champions have been appointed in every council – though in NI these are referred to as Veterans' Champions.

Public attitudes in the UK (excluding NI) towards the UK Armed Forces are currently higher than they have been in many years, despite negative views about some of the conflicts in which military personnel have been involved (e.g. Iraq and Afghanistan). There are some misconceptions about those who serve, including a belief that those who have served in the military are at higher risk of poor mental health, but overall the group is viewed positively by the British Public. This support is consistent with the tenets of the AFC, which acts as a commitment by the UK government, public and private sectors, and the public to ensure that those who have served in the Armed Forces are not disadvantaged, and that in some special cases they will be provided with additional support. However, despite the overall view of the Armed Forces by the British public being favourable, the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (Ministry of Defence (MOD), 2017) reported that only 41% of Service personnel felt they were valued by society; a decline every year since 2014. This has the potential to have deleterious effects on veterans' mental health outcomes.

¹ Section 75 requires NI public authorities to carry out their functions and duties equally irrespective of gender, ethnicity, political opinion, religious belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, dependant and marital status.

Methods

The NILT is a joint, annual project, between Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, which has collected NI public attitudes for the last two decades. The questions within the NILT survey are grouped into modules and these change each year, depending on the funder and focus, and have included questions on abortion, dementia, Europe, men, pensions, public services and so on. The aims of the survey are to: provide a locally focused resource to be used by the general public; and to generate data for academic and theoretical debate. Many of the modules map on to public attitudes surveys in the rest of the UK. The survey is often used to inform public policy development in NI.

Sample

The 2017 NILT Survey was a cross-sectional survey based on two-stage random samples of adults aged 18 years or over living in private households. The sample size, along with the random sampling procedure enable the survey to provide a statistically-robust way of recording public attitudes. Comparison of demographic characteristics with Census and government surveys ensures that the NILT samples are representative of the population in NI. In other words, the NILT captures an accurate picture of what NI public attitudes are on a range of issues and the possible determinants of these.

Questions on the UK Armed Forces Community living in NI

The NIVHWS study team sought to identify public attitudes in NI towards the UK Armed Forces in NI. To meet this objective, the team adapted questions from existing UK public attitudes surveys, and devised new questions using data from other work packages of the NIVHWS. Researchers then worked with ARK NI to ensure that the questions mapped easily on to the rest of the survey for the sake of continuity, accessibility and ease of administration.

Data Collection

The survey involved more than 1200 face-to-face interviews. The survey was computer-assisted to facilitate interviewer administration and to also allow for easy self-completion, as well as the traditional pen and paper method. Technical notes detailing the full methodology for the NILT survey in 2017-2018 are available, alongside technical notes from previous years, at <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/datasets/technotes.html>.

Key Findings

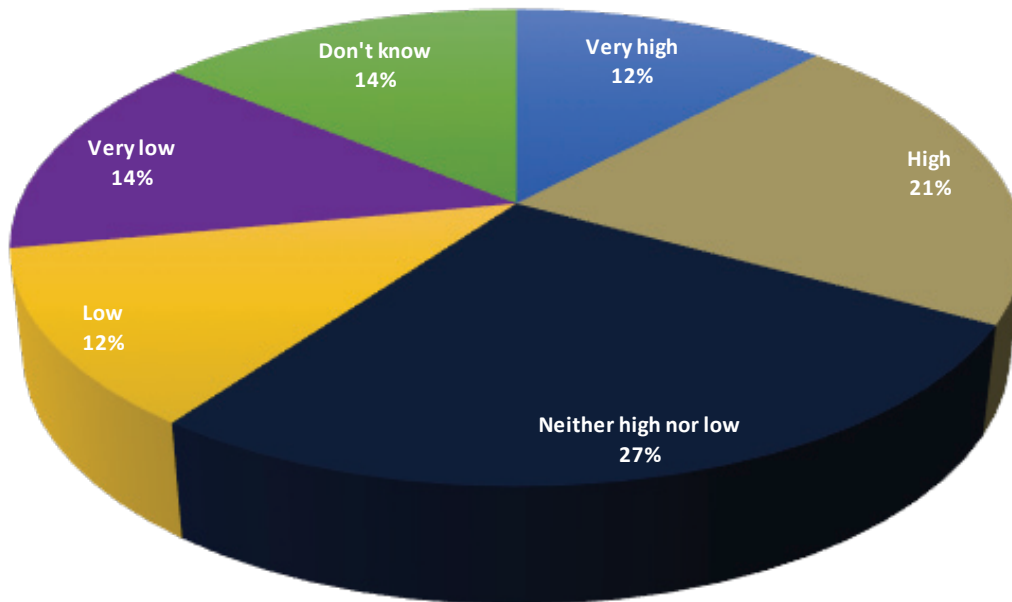
The data collected here as part of the NILT provides the first ever evidence base on the NI public attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces. The results have the potential to inform discussions on dealing with the legacy of the Troubles as well as how support is provided to the Armed Forces population given the political and legal complexities of the situation.

The following are the key findings of this report:

- One third (33%) of the NI population have a high/very high opinion of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles, whereas a quarter of the population (26%) have a low/very low opinion

Public opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles in NI

Looking back at the past and 'the Troubles' in NI, what is your general opinion of how the UK Armed Forces acted during that time?

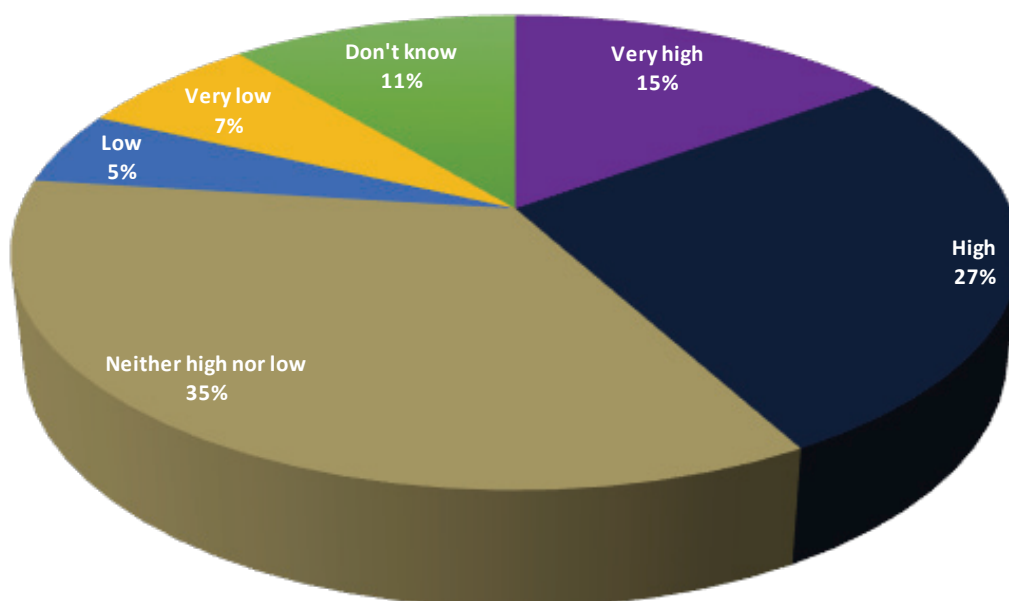


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

- In relation to the UK Armed Forces today, the divide is much wider with 42% of the NI population having a high/very high opinion and 12% having a low/very low opinion

Public opinions towards the UK Armed Forces in 2017

Now thinking of the UK Armed Forces in 2017. What is your general opinion of the UK Armed Forces?

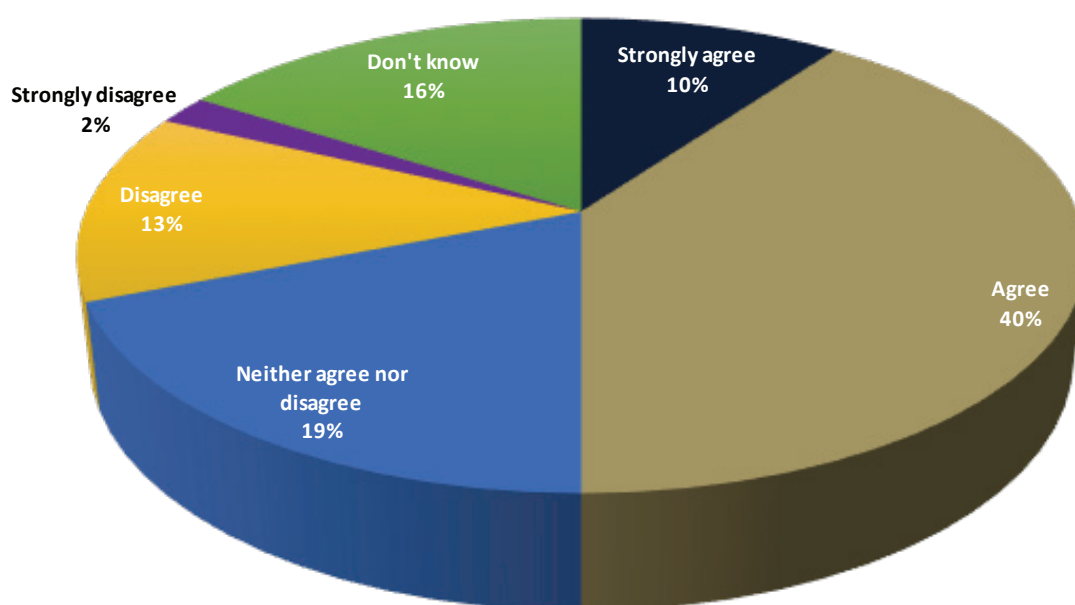


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

- Based on the two points above, the opinion of the public is more favourable to the UK Armed Forces of today than to the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles
- The majority of the NI public (78%) do respect the Armed Forces in general and a total of 62% do not feel more negatively towards the UK Armed Forces who served in NI relative to those who served elsewhere
- The majority of the NI population would feel comfortable/very comfortable if someone who has been in the UK Armed Forces moved in next door to them (70%), married their close relative (70%), or if someone from their own family joined the UK Armed Forces (63%)
- Half (50%) of the NI population believe that alcohol problems are more likely in someone who has been in the Armed Forces relative to someone who has not

Public opinions of the alcohol-related problems in the UK Armed Forces

People who have been in the Armed Forces are more likely to have problems with alcohol than those in the general population

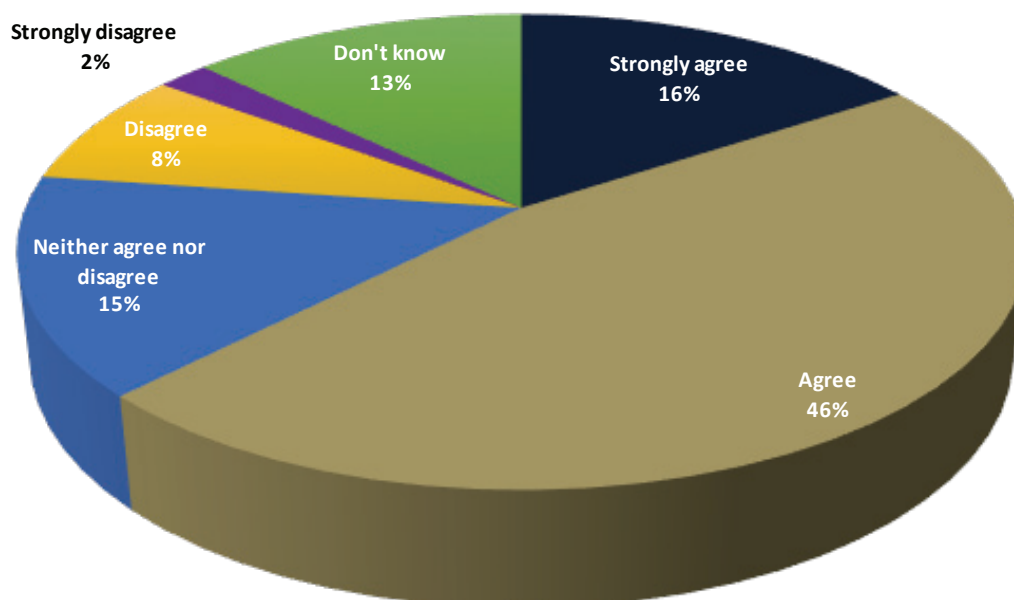


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

- Over half of the NI public (63%) believe that mental health problems are more likely in someone who has been in the Armed Forces relative to someone who has not

Public opinions of the mental health issues in the UK Armed Forces

People who have been in the Armed Forces are more likely to have mental health problems than those in the general population



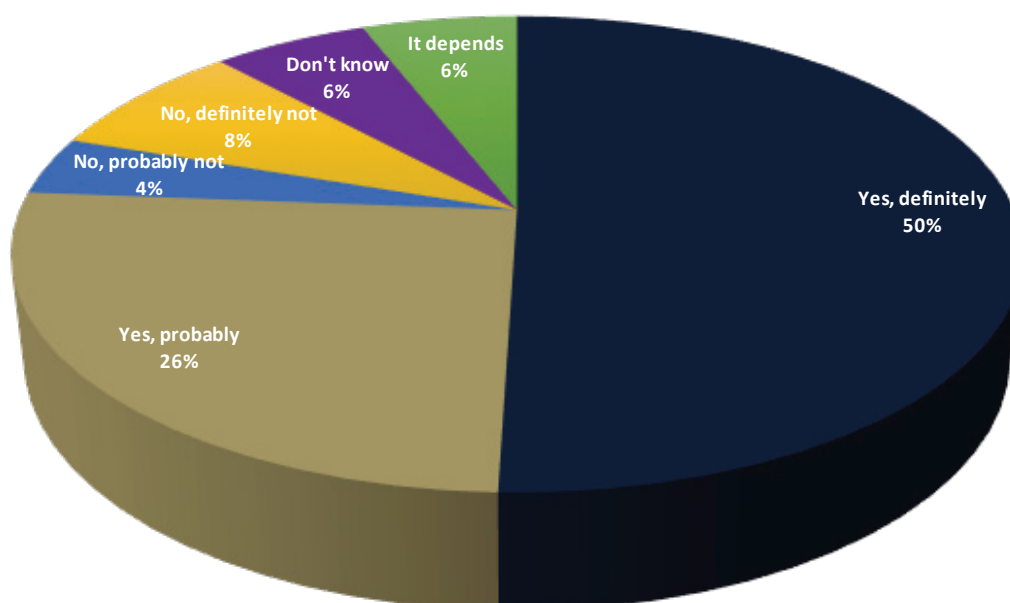
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

- Fewer people in NI agree (19%) than disagree (30%) that some public services in NI discriminate against those who have been in the Armed Forces, but a large proportion (51%) are undecided or simply do not know
- A quarter of the NI population (25%) agree that people who have been in the Armed Forces are disadvantaged in NI due to their military service, but another quarter (26%) disagree, with a half (50%) being undecided or saying they do not know²
- A large majority of the NI population (80%) have not heard of the AFC
- The majority (78%) of people in NI believe it to be fair that an ex-soldier in England is not disadvantaged in getting access to health treatments or housing due to their military service and 72% believe it to be fair if an ex-soldier in England who suffered significant injuries is given priority health treatment or housing
- Two thirds of the NI population (66%) believe it would be fair for an ex-soldier in NI to get priority health treatment or housing if they had significant injuries
- A similarly large proportion of the NI public (67%) also believe that it would be fair for a soldier to keep their place on a housing waiting list whilst they are on deployment
- Almost 70% of the NI population (69%) believe that it would be fair if a soldier with service-related PTSD got priority treatment for their mental health problem
- The majority of the NI population (77%) indicated strong support that a specialist mental health service should be provided in NI for military veterans living in the region; only 12% disagreed with this, the remainder neither agreeing nor disagreeing

² Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Specialist mental health service in NI for UK Armed Forces

In England there is going to be a specialist mental health service set up for people from the UK Armed Forces... Do you think that a similar mental health service should be provided in NI for ex-military people living here?



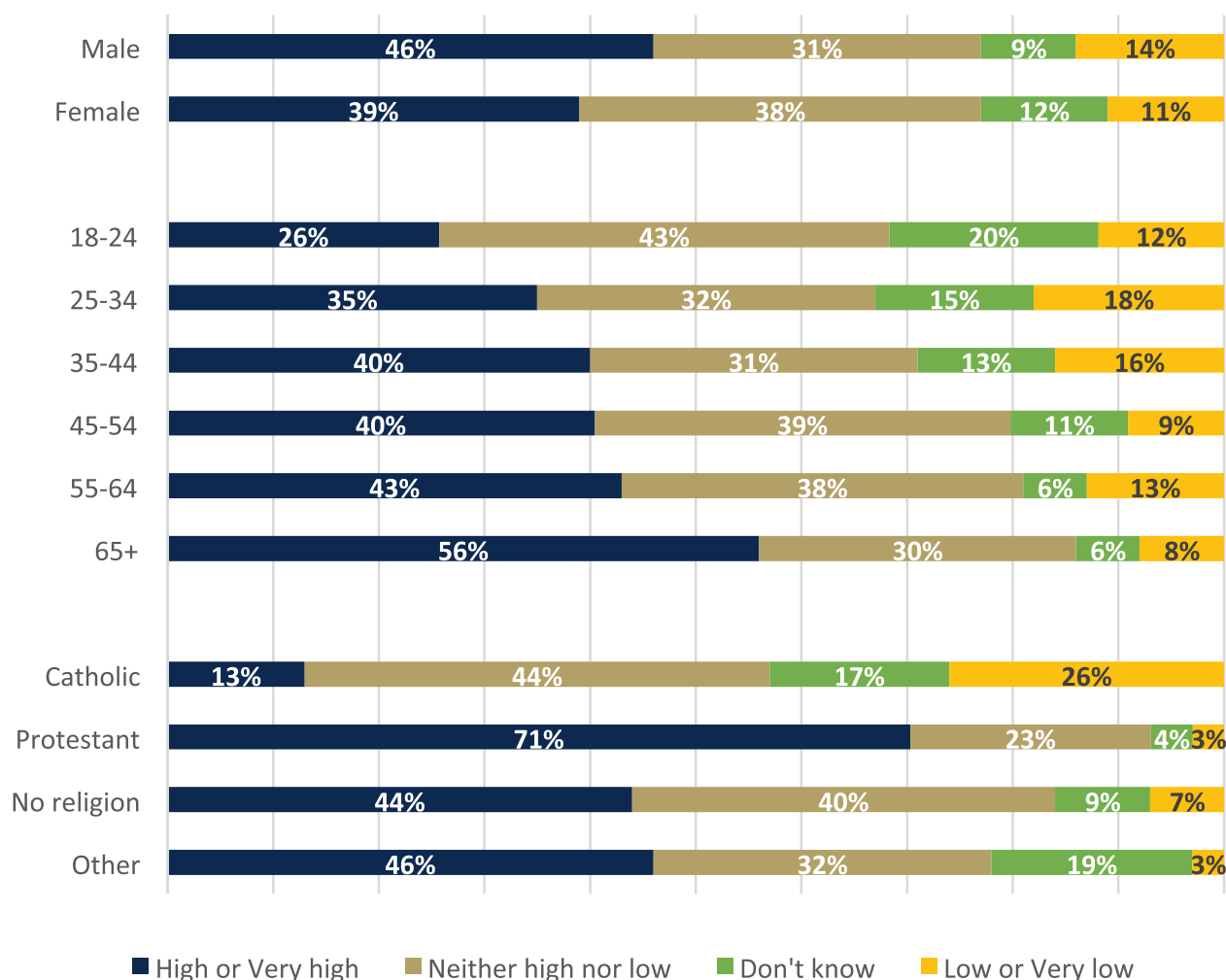
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

- Many of the above opinions differed depending on one's gender, age, religion, family connections with the Armed Forces, and geographical location. For example³:

³ For demographic breakdown on each question, please refer to the full report

Demographic differences in opinions towards the UK Armed Forces today

Now thinking of the UK Armed Forces in 2017. What is your general opinion of the UK Armed Forces?



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

- The most striking demographic differences emerged in relation to religion, with Catholics expressing markedly fewer positive and more negative opinions relative to Protestants, which reflects the impact of the legacy of the conflict, where allegiances were often drawn in line with religious and national identities

Conclusions

Public attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces in Great Britain (GB) and NI are positive, although slightly less so in NI, most likely due to the legacy of the Troubles. There were, however, similarities across the nations, with older people being slightly more supportive than younger people. The public in NI and GB are also similar in their willingness to separate out individuals who serve in the Armed Forces from the popularity of particular missions and operations.

Similar to the opinions found in the UK, NI public perceived members of the UK Armed Forces as being more vulnerable to experiencing mental ill-health and have problems with alcohol, compared to the general population. This may be related to how they are often portrayed in the media and it can have

negative impact on military personnel returning to civilian life, as they may be fearful of reporting that they have a problem, in case it impacts on their job prospects or relationships with others.

Differences in opinions were found also across some council areas. For example, more than half of those living in the Antrim and Newtownabbey, and Ards and North Down areas had positive opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles. In contrast, relatively high rates of negative opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles were found in Derry and Strabane, Newry, Mourne and Down and in Mid Ulster areas. These findings reflect the political make-up of the councils in these areas – with the areas having the highest rates of positive opinions consistently demonstrating higher rates of voting for Unionist parties, and those with highest rates of negative opinions being areas with a high proportion of votes for Republican and Nationalist parties.

In terms of religion, people identifying as Catholic and those from Catholic communities tend to have negative memories of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles, with many reporting intimidation and discrimination by the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles. These negative memories likely resulted in negative opinions, which may also have been passed down to the younger generations.

While very few respondents in NI were aware of the AFC, the responses to individual scenarios consistently indicated support for its principles. Those with strong family connections with the Armed Forces were more likely to have heard about it. Nevertheless, almost a half of those with strong military connections indicated that they did not know what the AFC was, and this suggests that even though the AFC is not yet in force in NI, there needs to be greater awareness about it, and the benefits it can bring.

The Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey conducted with almost 28,000 UK Regular Armed Forces personnel found that only 41% of them they were valued by society (MOD, 2017). Since the view of the Armed Forces is slightly more negative in NI, it is likely that veterans feel even less valued. Indeed, research conducted by Armour et al. (2017b) found that veterans who served in NI during the Troubles thought they had been ‘demonized’ and consequently do not receive recognition for their sacrifices. Other research suggests that feeling unsupported by the public can lead to poor mental health in veterans (Karstoft et al., 2015).

The findings suggest that veterans in NI and England hold views that are not in line with actual public attitudes. Increased interaction between the public and those associated with the UK Armed Forces could help to address these discordant perceptions.

Recommendations

Reflecting on the key findings of this report and following on from the previous work carried out in *Supporting and Serving Veterans in Northern Ireland*, we have developed a number of practical recommendations based on the experiences relayed to us throughout this research to date. These recommendations are for the consideration of policy-makers in MOD, NIO and the NI Executive. There are also recommendations for service providers and care commissioners across the statutory and voluntary sectors:

Key Area	Recommendation	Implications
Community Integration and building of relationships between veterans and the community	Local authorities and Armed Forces Charities should work together to develop and promote public engagement activities for veterans in local communities; especially those aimed at targeting different geographical areas and younger people.	Develop improved veteran and community cohesion, trust and understanding helping to strengthen and normalise relationships across NI.
Data collection and monitoring	Public sector agencies should consider monitoring techniques which include veteran status where possible and appropriate. For detailed recommendations on this, see Armour et al. (2017a).	This has the potential to improve understanding of outcomes for this population, and importantly (given the lack of confidence that public services are not discriminating against UK Armed Forces personnel), provide evidence of fair and equal treatment for this population.
Awareness Training	A public facing campaign promoting positive images of veteran mental health and addressing perceptions of alcohol misuse may be beneficial. It may be possible to use data from the forthcoming NIVHWS survey, which includes evidence about mental health and alcohol use in this population.	By addressing the apparent discrepancy between public perceptions of mental health and alcohol misuse, there is the potential to reduce stigma and mitigate reluctance of veterans to disclose these issues for fear of how it may affect their employment and social networks.

Awareness raising about the Armed Forces Covenant amongst service personnel and veterans in NI	A public engagement exercise aimed at ex-Service personnel and their families about the Armed Forces Covenant could improve understanding of the Covenant, its principles, and the situation specific to NI.	It is also important that veterans know what services they can expect to receive, as previous research has revealed a disconnect between what veterans expect and services provided in line with the AFC.
Utilise new and forthcoming evidence base to inform ongoing debate on the adoption of the Armed Forces Covenant in NI	The development of an exploratory committee or working group looking at the issues associated with implementation of the Covenant in NI could help to address real and perceived problems with implementation of the Covenant. In line with recommendations in the Armour et al. (2017a) report, the group could also collect evidence to compare outcomes for veterans in NI versus the rest of the UK.	Having a dedicated group would help coordinate information and debates relating to the AFC. It could examine issues associated with political sensitivities, legal barriers, and language usage in NI. The collection of an evidence base would allow for comparison of outcomes in NI with those in the rest of the UK; which would help distinguish whether or not the lack of formal adoption of the Covenant negatively affects veterans in NI.

Further Research

The previous reports by the NIVHWS have all highlighted the relative absence of research specifically on NI veterans. This research has addressed some gaps in knowledge related to the impact of the legacy of sectarian conflict on public perception of the UK Armed Forces. However, there are a number of potential avenues for further research:

- *The annual incorporation of military-related questions in the NILT survey:* This report presents the findings of the first questions to be asked in the NILT relating to NI public perceptions of the UK Armed Forces. However, this only presents as snapshot in time. It would therefore, be useful to have these same questions (and maybe others) included annually so that public opinions can be mapped over time and any changes highlighted;
- *Explore younger people's opinions of the UK Armed Forces:* Given many younger people report less positive attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces, despite many of them growing up in post-conflict NI, it would prove useful to focus on those perceptions. This could be done through the incorporation of similar questions included in the Young Life and Times Survey;
- *Identify whether UK Armed Forces personnel are discriminated by some NI statutory services:* The NILT data indicated that respondents with family connections to current or former UK Armed Forces personnel were more likely to think service personnel are discriminated by NI public services and disadvantaged in the NI employment market. Thus, further research in this area could be warranted;

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- *Examine how the NI (and UK as a whole) public develop their perceptions and attitudes of the UK Armed Forces:* The NILT data indicated that the majority of respondents thought current and former military personnel were more likely to have a mental health issue and alcohol problems than the general population. Given that available data suggests otherwise (Hotopf et al., 2006), it would be useful to explore the transmission mechanisms underlying such assumptions due to their potentially very negative impact on military personnel returning to civilian life. For example, such veterans may be fearful of reporting that they have either or both of an alcohol or mental health problem, due to the negatively held public perceptions that they are more likely to suffer such issues, and employers may feel less willing to take a chance on ex-Service personnel if they feel that there is a higher likelihood that they are suffering such problems. In both cases, this might impact ex-Service personnel's job prospects and/or relationships with others (Armour et al., 2017b).

Concluding Remarks

This report shows that while some groups in NI still hold negative views about the UK Armed Forces, the majority of respondents have positive attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces. This is in spite of the fact that veterans themselves feel undervalued and even 'demonised' as a result of their time in the military. Many of the findings were consistent with the rest of the UK, with notable exceptions of discrepancies across religious affiliation and geographical regions (both of which could be explained by the historical context of the Troubles in NI). Notably, when comparing views of the Armed Forces during the time of the Troubles to the views of the Armed Forces in current time, opinions are overall more favourable in the latter. Furthermore, the findings show wide-scale public support for the provision of tailored services to veterans, as well as special treatment by public service providers where required. These findings indicate the willingness of the public to separate individual soldiers from the institution of the UK Armed Forces. There are policy implications for these findings; particularly around the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in NI, and the development of veteran-specific services in the region in line with other parts of the UK.

1.0 The Armed Forces in Northern Ireland

Overview:

- Operation Banner
- Post-Troubles
- The relevance of public attitudes to the UK Armed Forces in NI
- Political attitudes to veteran-specific service provision in NI
- Conclusion

1.1 Operation Banner

UK Armed Forces personnel were deployed to the streets of Northern Ireland (NI) on Operation Banner, from August 1969 to July 2007. According to Ulster University's Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN; 2018a), around 300,000 Regular and Reserve personnel served in NI during the Troubles, with numbers peaking to 30,000 in 1972, but declining to 13,000 in 2001 after the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. More than 40,000 of the soldiers serving in NI were 'home service' personnel, who served in either the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), or Royal Irish Rangers (RIR). These 'home service' regiments were recruited locally, and often included individuals who served in a part-time capacity alongside their civilian jobs. These 'home service' soldiers paid a high price, with 203 dead (60 of which were killed after they had left the forces, targeted because of their military connection), and 590 injured⁴. This compares with 454 deaths and 5,672 injuries for other UK Armed Forces personnel (CAIN, 2018b).

The NI civilian population also paid a high price with 30,058 Troubles-related injuries (1969-2003) and 2,426 deaths (1969-2015) (CAIN, 2018b). The role the UK Armed Forces played during the Troubles remains contested, and opinions of this are presumed to be divided along national, religious, political, and ethnic divides (e.g. loyalist/Protestant supportive of the UK Armed Forces and republican/Catholic unsupportive). Public perception of the UK Armed Forces varied, reflecting contentious policies and practices such as people being stopped and searched in the street, homes and belongings being searched without warning, people being questioned, interrogated and interned, and having their freedom to move around the region restricted (see Darby, 2003; Patterson, 2013 for more detailed accounts). Consequently, part of the Good Friday Agreement was the eventual withdrawal of the UK Armed Forces from Northern Irish streets. Operation Banner officially ended in 2007 with most paramilitary groups declaring they had decommissioned. Consequently, the number of military personnel remaining in NI was further reduced to around 5000 Regular and Reserve personnel by 2007 (CAIN, 2018a). The new Royal Irish Regiment reformed with the merger of the former UDR and RIR. The Army now have two Regular battalions and one Reserve in NI (UK Government, 2015).

⁴ CAIN data figures include injuries and deaths post-1998 the official end of the Troubles.

1.2 Post-Troubles

Although there is now a relatively small number of military personnel in NI compared to the numbers stationed during the Troubles, and with a markedly different mandate (e.g. largely for response to external threats), there is still a significant number of veterans and their families living in NI. Indeed, TRBL (2014) estimated the number of veterans living in NI to be around 56,700, roughly 3% of the population. Including the wider veteran community (e.g. veterans, spouses, divorcees, widow(ers), children) the number rises to around 8%, which compares to around 9% in England and Scotland and about 12% in Wales (TRBL, 2014). However, it is pertinent to note that many veterans residing in NI are cautious of disclosing their military affiliations and so may not appear in these figures.

Although the Troubles officially ended twenty years ago with the GFA, security issues for current and former military personnel remain. For example, in March 2009, two off-duty British soldiers were shot dead, and two others were injured, by the Real Irish Republican Army (IRA), outside Massereene Barracks, and in 2015 a dissident republican letter bomb exploded inside Palace Barracks in Holywood. Several studies (Cochrane, 2013; Evans & Tonge, 2012; Horgan & Morrison, 2011, Tonge, 2014; Whiting, 2014) have shown that dissident paramilitary activity has been steadily increasing in post-Troubles NI. Indeed, veterans taking part in focus groups conducted for the *Current and Future Needs of Veterans in Northern Ireland* report (Armour et al., 2017b) expressed concerns for their personal safety, claiming they were still vigilant about to whom they disclosed their military past. Such trust issues were reported as barriers to accessing support services for key issues such as housing and mental health (Armour et al., 2017b).

There have been a number of key events which may also affect public attitudes towards veterans in NI. The publication of the Saville Report in June 2010 marked the completion of the independent inquiry into Bloody Sunday. The report concluded that soldiers of the Parachute Regiment unjustifiably caused the deaths of 13 people and injured a similar number who were not posing a threat of causing death or serious injury. Public responses to the findings have been mixed, with some calls for the prosecution of those involved. This follows the 2005 establishment of the Historical Enquiries Team, set up by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to investigate 3,269 unsolved murders (some involving former Armed Forces personnel) committed during the Troubles. However, funding for the Historical Enquiries Team was cut in 2014 and since then there has been a robust debate in public, political and media circles on whether to continue investigations on historic allegations of crimes by former UK Armed Forces personnel who served in NI (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2017).

1.3 The relevance of public attitudes to the UK Armed Forces in NI

Throughout the NIVHWS, key actors and participants in the research have indicated the importance of public perceptions of, and attitudes to, military veterans, both in the political sphere, and for veterans themselves. Service providers indicate the difficulty of providing veteran specific services in an environment where issues associated with the UK Armed Forces are politicised, as well as the sensitivities involved in championing issues related to veterans. Veterans themselves indicate that they do not feel comfortable accessing some public services, particularly where they might need to disclose their veteran status. Some veterans also expressed that concerns for their personal safety continue to have significant impact on their mental wellbeing (see Armour et al. (2017b) for more details).

Recent publications from the NIVHWS indicate that veterans in NI have complex needs (Armour et al., 2017b), including issues with employment (e.g. training, identity management, cultural adjustment), physical and mental health (e.g. prosthetics, PTSD), domestic (e.g. bills, food, rent), social and emotional

(e.g. comradeship, feeling part of a network), finance (e.g. money management, welfare) and the need for a safe space (e.g. a drop-in centre, non-judgemental and like-minded people). Whilst many of these needs are similar to those faced by the wider population in NI, there are several areas of support where veteran specific services are deemed to be more appropriate. This is particularly the case in mental health services, where veterans repeatedly indicated a reluctance to engage in treatment with a professional who does not have military-specific training.

Currently, Service personnel, their families and veterans in NI can avail of all services afforded to citizens in NI (e.g. statutory health and social care, social housing) and a range of voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations (see Armour et al. (2017a) for a comprehensive discussion of the VCS supporting veterans in NI). Veterans in NI can also access support from the Veterans' Support Office; a newly established centralised body borne from recommendations of the *Supporting and Serving Military Veterans in Northern Ireland* report from the NIVHWS team (Armour et al., 2017a). The Veterans' Support Office links individuals to the NI Veterans' Support Committee and, where necessary, to veterans' champions within the eleven government departments and health trusts across the region. In spite of these developments, veterans in NI remain slightly different from those in the rest of the UK; many of whom can avail of a range of additional statutory support services related to the implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC).

In the rest of the UK, the AFC provides a guarantee that those who have served in the UK Armed Forces and their families will not be disadvantaged as a result of their military service. The AFC has two core principles: no member of the current or former Armed Forces community should be disadvantaged compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services; and special consideration may be appropriate for some members of the Armed Forces community, such as those who have been injured or bereaved (House of Commons Library, 2018). This commitment is actioned through specialist services, exemptions related to some eligibility requirements for schools and public housing, and more. The AFC is underpinned by an investment of £10m per annum (Gov.UK, 2016). In NI, the implementation of the AFC is impeded by a debate around its compatibility with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.

1.4 Political attitudes to veteran-specific service provision in NI

Unlike in other regions of the UK, there are concerns that the implementation of the AFC in NI could provide preferential access to cross-government services for military personnel and thus contravene Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. Section 75 requires NI public authorities to carry out their functions and duties equally irrespective of gender, ethnicity, political opinion, religious belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, dependant and marital status. While a number of key actors have stated that the first principle of the AFC is in keeping with the spirit of Section 75 (e.g., the Committee on the Administration of Justice), evidence presented to the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee meeting (2013) suggested that much of the opposition relates to political and public perceptions toward the UK Armed Forces and their role during the Troubles.

In evidence provided to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, human rights groups argued that the spirit of the first principle of the AFC is in keeping with NI's equality legislation, and that it would only be the second principle that could prove to be complicated (House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2013). However, the independent non-governmental organisation Committee on the Administration of Justice has argued that there is not a significant conflict between dealing appropriately with the welfare, housing and health needs of current and former Armed Forces personnel and the NI equalities framework (House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2013). The NGO points to similar specific measures that have been provided in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's anti-poverty strategy, which

provides support to help alleviate the effects of poverty and social isolation in rural areas, particularly among vulnerable groups, or the NI Executive's decision to fund women's groups but not men's (House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2013).

Overall, it was determined by the committee that Section 75, being no stricter than equality legislation in the rest of the UK, should not be a practical barrier to implementation of the AFC (House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2013). Lord Ashcroft's Veteran Transition Review takes this one step further and calls for the amendment of Section 75 to include veterans as a protected group, citing the amendment of the legislation to include those who identify as Travellers, and states firmly that veterans in NI are experiencing discrimination and disadvantage without implementation of the AFC in the region (Ashcroft, 2014; 2017).

The political sensitivities around the UK Armed Forces in NI, and the legacy of the Troubles, are said to impact upon the nature of the debate surrounding the AFC (House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2013). This concern has been reflected to a certain extent in recent debates in the NI Executive (prior to its suspension), where Members of the Local Assembly (MLAs) debated on whether or not to appoint a representative from NI to the Armed Forces Covenant Reference Group. Although the majority of the MLAs who participated were supportive of representation for NI on the group, those who did not give their support expressed significant objections relating to historical perceptions of the Armed Forces and their role in NI. According to the Minister of State for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans, although those opposed to the AFC have an unfavourable view of the UK Armed Forces as an institution, there was a strong recognition of the need to support veterans (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2016). In spite of the difficulties adopting the AFC at a national level, several local authorities have adopted its principles and Armed Forces Champions have been appointed in every council – though in NI these are referred to as Veterans' Champions.

1.5 Conclusion

The UK Armed Forces actively deployed to the streets of NI throughout Operation Banner during the Troubles, which makes this region of the UK unique in comparison to GB. In addition, a significant number of those Armed Forces personnel were part of the two 'home service' units (UDR and RIR). Many of the estimated 56,700 veterans living in NI (TRBL, 2014) are likely to be from those 'home service' units. Living in one's former theatre of combat is also relatively unique for former UK Armed Forces personnel. As discussed throughout this chapter, Northern Irish public attitudes toward current and former Armed Forces personnel are likely to be polarised because of the role the Armed Forces played during the Troubles. The extreme sensitivity on both sides surrounding the involvement of the UK Armed Forces in the Troubles is likely to affect the nature of the debate on implementation of the AFC in NI (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2017).

Key Points:

- NI is the only part of the UK where the Armed Forces have been actively deployed;
- The situation of 'home service' veterans means many of those who served in NI are still living in their former 'operational theatre';
- The role of the UK Armed Forces in NI has been contentious, and it is likely that public attitudes towards this population will be polarised along key and distinct demographic constructs, e.g., age, gender & religion;
- More than 57,000 veterans are estimated to live in NI.

2.0 Public attitudes toward the Armed Forces in Britain

Overview:

- Introduction
- Public attitudes in Britain
- Conclusion

2.1 Introduction

Public attitudes in the UK (excluding NI) towards the UK Armed Forces are currently higher than they have been in many years, despite negative views about some of the conflicts in which military personnel have been involved (e.g. Iraq and Afghanistan). There are some misconceptions about those who serve, including a belief that those who have served in the military are at higher risk of poor mental health (Ashcroft, 2017), but overall the group is viewed positively by the British Public. This support is consistent with the tenets of the AFC, which acts as a commitment by the UK government, public and private sectors, and the public to ensure that those who have served in the Armed Forces are not disadvantaged, and that in some special cases they will be provided with additional support. This chapter will explore the attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces in more depth, as well as the relevance of this to the implementation of the AFC in the UK. Finally, it will introduce the potential differences between NI and the rest of the UK with regard to support for the Armed Forces.

2.2 Public attitudes in Britain

Hines et al. (2015) argued that the relationship between the UK Armed Forces and the UK public has often been uneasy because of the absence of the Armed Forces in everyday society, stifling the opportunity for shared experiences, mutual understanding and support. McCartney (2011) argued that the public image of the British Soldier has tended to fluctuate between three stereotypes: the hero; the victim; and the villain. In short, the 'hero' celebrates soldiers' bravery and willingness to give their life for national security. The image of the soldier as 'victim' centres on the loss of life, casualties from asymmetrical warfare (such as roadside bombs in Afghanistan) or the government not providing troops with necessary equipment. Finally, reporting on illegal killings in combat or brawling in bars at home are the type of things which may portray soldiers as 'villains.'

According to Hussain and Ishaq (2005) there has been a major debate since the mid-1990s, in both military and political circles, about the relationship between military and civilian society. This is related to the difficulties of recruitment and retention in the UK Armed Forces. The declining relationship has been attributed to a changing society whose values are not entirely consistent with or supportive of the military (Strachan, 2000). This has been attributed to unpopular military operations (e.g. the 2003 invasion of Iraq) and concerns over the treatment of some minority groups in the military.

Hines et al., (2015) suggested that the civil-military divergence in the UK has resulted in public opposition toward the 2001 Afghanistan conflict, and 2003–2009 Iraq war, and questioning of the evidence for military operations. NatCen Social Research (2012) found that 58% of the GB population thought that military personnel should

not have been sent to Iraq, and 48% thought the same about Afghanistan. Hussain and Ishaq's (2005) study conducted with a random sample of 500 people from the general population reported that the British public appear to be more pacifist than in previous decades. However, a relatively recent YouGov (2014) poll suggested that with the threat of attacks by ISIS on the UK streets, the public appear to be more supportive of operations against ISIS. This support decreases when asked about taking sides in the Syrian civil war.

There is also evidence of public concern that women and ethnic minorities are not treated fairly (Gribble et al., 2014; Hussain & Ishaq, 2005). Respondents to a YouGov (2014) poll suggested that the Armed Forces need to modernise, so that women could serve in close-combat roles and the Armed Forces could become more socially diverse. However, Hines et al. (2015) suggested that the modernising steps the Armed Forces have taken have been overlooked by the public, because of some media over-sensationalising stories, and negative reporting.

Despite reservations about specific aspects of the Armed Forces and their operations, the surveys conducted over the last two decades (e.g. Gribble et al., 2014; Hussain & Ishaq, 2005; NatCen Social Research, 2012; YouGov, 2014) have shown that the majority of the respondents viewed the Armed Forces as doing a good job. Indeed, the British Social Attitudes survey (NatCen Social Research, 2012) found that 83% of the GB population have a 'high' or 'very high' opinion of the Armed Forces, and this differs across age groups: 92% of the 65+ year olds and 73% of the 18-34 year olds have a high or a very high opinion. Only minor differences were expressed in support of military personnel according to political affiliation, with Conservatives being slightly more supportive. NatCen Social Research (2012) also found that 77% of all respondents reported that their attitude towards the Armed Forces has stayed the same, with 18% reporting that their attitude had improved since the withdrawal of personnel from Iraq. Additionally, 75% of respondents thought that military personnel deserved a great deal of respect, linking to the image of the soldier as 'hero'. They also expressed concerns that personnel were more likely to have a mental illness, and experience suicidal tendencies, thus reflecting an image of Armed Forces personnel as 'victims'.

Despite the overall view of the Armed Forces by the British public being favourable, the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (Ministry of Defence (MOD), 2017) reported that only two fifths (41%) of Service personnel felt they were valued by society; a decline every year since 2014. This has the potential to have deleterious effects on veterans' mental health outcomes (Karstoft et al., 2015).

2.3 Conclusion

According to the NatCen Social Research's (2012) British Social Attitudes⁵ survey, the majority of the GB population are clearly supportive of the Armed Forces. This has remained relatively constant since the Armed Forces were withdrawn from operations in Iraq. Many of the findings support the theory that attitudes towards the military can be classified into some more stereotypical views: soldier as 'hero', soldier as 'villain', or soldier as 'victim'. Though it is worth noting that most negative opinions expressed (the 'villain' stereotype) were centred on conflicts and deployments themselves, as opposed to individual Armed Forces personnel. The public do appear to have conceptions of those who have served in the military as having a higher propensity towards alcohol misuse and poor mental health. Regardless, the overarching sentiment towards the UK Armed Forces is one of approval. In spite of this, a large proportion of military personnel do not feel valued by society. Of note is the fact that much of the survey's questions (British Social Attitudes Survey) related to overseas conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and the attitudes of those living in NI are not reflected. The following chapters will explore the issues specific to NI with regard to public attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces. This study seeks to redress this gap.

⁵ It is difficult to gauge Scottish public opinions as NatCen's partner organisation ScotCen Social Research does not appear to have asked the same question of the Scottish public.

Key Points:

- The British public are largely supportive of the Armed Forces;
- Support appears to have been relatively stable since 2009;
- Armed Forces personnel feel undervalued by the general public in spite of these positive attitudes;
- The experiences of the members of the Armed Forces in GB and NI are different and so public attitudes to them are also likely to vary.

3.0 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey

Overview:

- Introduction
- Sample
- Questions on the UK Armed Forces community living in NI
- Data collection
- Conclusion

3.1 Introduction

The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey is a joint, annual project between Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, which has collected NI public attitudes for the last two decades. The questions within the NILT survey are grouped into modules and these change each year, depending on the funder and focus, and have included questions on abortion, dementia, Europe, men, pensions, public services and so on. The aims of the survey are to: provide a locally focused resource to be used by the general public; and to generate data for academic and theoretical debate. Many of the modules map on to public attitudes surveys in the rest of the UK. The survey is often used to inform public policy development in NI. In 2017, the team responsible for the NILT survey invited contributors to propose potential modules of questions. The NIVHWS asked the Forces in Mind Trust to fund a module with questions on NI public attitudes toward the UK Armed Forces Community living in NI. The rationale for doing this work was two-fold: 1) given public attitude surveys in England, this was always on the research agenda for NI, and 2) earlier work with veterans in the region highlighted that understanding public opinions of Armed Forces and veterans was an important issue for veterans themselves. Indeed, veterans had reported feeling that there were significant negative attitudes towards them and some identified this as a source of anxiety or distress. Some key actors believed that the idea of providing specialist services to veterans, as is done under the AFC in other regions of the UK, would be politically unacceptable to the public in NI (Armour et al., 2017a; 2017b), however there was no evidence to support or refute this. To gain some insight into the validity of these assumptions, and to provide an evidence base with which to compare public attitudes of the NI with the rest of the UK, a module of questions was developed in conjunction with the NILT team. These were part of the larger questionnaire which included questions relating to minority ethnic people, community relations, aging, political attitudes, paramilitary activity and community safety.

3.2 Sample

The 2017 NILT Survey was a cross-sectional survey based on two-stage random samples of adults aged 18 years or over living in private households. This sampling methodology reflects the lack of a comprehensive individual-level sampling frame in NI. The first sampling stage involves randomly selecting a household using the Postal Address File. The second stage involves randomly selecting one adult of eligible age. The sample size, along with the random sampling procedure enable the survey to provide a statistically-robust way of recording public attitudes. Comparison of demographic characteristics with Census and government surveys indicates that the NILT samples are representative of the population in Northern

Ireland⁶. What this design aimed to achieve was to obtain a representative sample of adults living in NI in terms of gender, age, location, socioeconomic circumstances, religion (if any), political persuasion, engagement with NI services, and so on. In other words, capture an accurate picture of what NI public attitudes are on a range of issues, including the possible determinants of these.

3.3 Questions on the UK Armed Forces community living in NI

The NIVHWS study team sought to identify public attitudes in NI towards veterans in the region, to examine attitudes towards the provision of specialist services to veterans, and to develop questions which would allow for comparison between NI and the rest of the UK. To meet these objectives, the team adapted questions from existing UK public attitudes surveys, and devised new questions using data from other work packages of the NIVHWS. Researchers then worked with ARK NI to ensure that the questions mapped easily on to the rest of the survey, for the sake of continuity, accessibility and ease of administration.

The specific questions asked about the UK Armed Forces Community living in NI were:

Q1. Looking back at the past and ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland, what is your general opinion of how the UK Armed Forces acted during that time?

Q2. Now thinking of the UK Armed Forces today in 2017. What is your general opinion of the UK Armed Forces?

Q3. How comfortable or uncomfortable would you be if...

- Someone who had been in the UK Armed Forces moved in next door to you?
- Someone who had been in the UK Armed Forces married a close relative of yours?
- Someone in your family joined the UK Armed Forces?

Q4. How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?

I don't respect the Armed Forces of any country.

I feel more negatively about members of the UK Armed Forces who served in Northern Ireland than I do about those who fought in other conflicts.

Q5. Have you heard of the Armed Forces Covenant?

Q6. The Covenant is an agreement that promises that members of the UK Armed Forces will never be put at a disadvantage in getting access to things like health treatments or housing because of their time in the military. Thinking about an ex-soldier living in England, do you think that this is generally fair or unfair?

Q7. The Covenant also includes a promise that members of the UK Armed Forces may get priority health treatment or housing if they face special issues as a result of their time in the military, for example if they were significantly injured. Thinking about an ex-soldier living in England, do you think that this is generally fair or unfair?

Q8. The Armed Forces Covenant does not apply in Northern Ireland. Some people would like the rules extended to here, but others feel that they are unfair or unnecessary. Suppose there was an ex-soldier

⁶ <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/datasets/technotes.html>

living in Northern Ireland. If this soldier was given priority health treatment or housing, because they had received significant injuries, do you think that this would be generally fair or unfair?

Q9. Frank was a soldier in Afghanistan before returning to his home town of Belfast. Before joining the army, he was on the waiting list for a Housing Executive house but because he spent so much time away from home, he had to go back to the bottom of the housing waiting list. Do you think that it would be fair or unfair if the rules allowed Frank to keep his place on the waiting list and not have to start again?

Q10. Anna was also a soldier in Afghanistan before returning to her home in Enniskillen. She suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder because of her experiences in Afghanistan. If she lived in England she would get priority treatment for this disorder because her condition was related to her military experiences. Do you think it would be fair or unfair if the rules in Northern Ireland also allowed Anna to get priority treatment for her condition?

Q11. How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?

- Some public services in Northern Ireland discriminate against people who have been in the UK Armed Forces
- People who have been in the Armed Forces are more likely to have problems with alcohol than those in the general population
- People who have been in the Armed Forces are disadvantaged in Northern Ireland due to their military service
- People who have been in the Armed Forces are more likely to have mental health problems than those in the general population

Q12. In England there is going to be a specialist mental health service set up for people from the UK Armed Forces. This will provide help for people living in England who have mental health problems that are a direct result of their experiences in the military. Do you think that a similar mental health service should be provided in Northern Ireland for ex-military people living here?

3.4 Data Collection

The survey involves more than 1200 face-to-face interviews. The survey is computer-assisted to facilitate interviewer administration and to also allow for easy self-completion, as well as the traditional pen and paper method. It includes a comprehensive demographic component at the start of the survey, allowing for the comparison of a range of key variables related to age, gender, religion, socio-economic status, educational attainment and more. The survey is first tested through a pilot process with at least 30 participants in a range of geographical areas. All interviews were carried out by experienced interviewers employed by Perceptive Insight.

Through the process of the pilot survey, the NILT team worked with the NIVHWS team to identify areas which were confusing or particularly sensitive. Amendments were made based on these suggestions where appropriate. In particular, some more sensitive questions were included in a self-report survey alongside other sensitive questions included in the survey. The longer questions, presenting case studies of individuals, were presented to the respondents on cards in order to give them a chance to both hear the question read and to read it themselves. Technical notes detailing the full methodology for the NILT survey in 2017-2018 are available, alongside technical notes from previous years, at <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/datasets/technotes.html>.

3.5 Conclusion

It has been suggested that the debate on the implementation of the AFC in NI is affected by the assumption of negative public attitudes in the region toward the UK Armed Forces. Given that many veterans who have participated in the NIVHWS share this perspective, and the negative impact this has on their mental wellbeing and willingness to engage with public services, the NIVHWS believed it was important to develop an evidence base to explore these issues. The placement of these questions in a well-established public attitudes survey supported the collection of the data required within the time frame of the NIVHWS without the development of an additional work package.

Key Points:

- NILT is an annual survey about NI public attitudes to a range of issues;
- In 2017 FiMT funded the first ever questions in NILT about the UK Armed Forces;
- The 2017 NILT Survey was a cross-sectional survey based on two-stage random samples of adults aged 18 years or over living in private households;
- Questions related to the UK Armed Forces at different points in time, perceptions of veteran mental health and wellbeing, and attitudes towards the provision of specialist services to this population.

4.0 Public attitudes toward the Armed Forces in Northern Ireland

Overview:

- Introduction
- Results
 - The UK Armed Forces during the Troubles
 - The UK Armed Forces today
 - Comparisons of public attitudes to the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles and in current times
 - Respect for Armed Forces personnel
 - Associations with Armed Forces personnel
 - Alcohol use and mental health of Armed Forces personnel
 - The Armed Forces Covenant
 - Specialist mental health services in NI
- Summary of Results

4.1 Introduction

This section will provide an overview of the findings of the FiMT funded module of questions on public attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces in NI. These results form the first ever public attitudes data set on the military in NI. The findings, which examine results across a range of demographic variables, will help to gain a better understanding of the attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces in a post-conflict society. This has the potential to inform discussions on dealing with the legacy of armed conflict in the region as well as how support is provided to this population given the political and legal complexities of the situation.

4.2 Results

The findings are presented by theme and include the following areas: attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces, both historical and present day, and respect for Armed Forces personnel; acceptability of associations and contact with Armed Forces personnel; perceptions of the mental health and wellbeing of veterans; knowledge of the and attitudes towards the Armed Forces Covenant; and attitudes towards specialist services for this population.

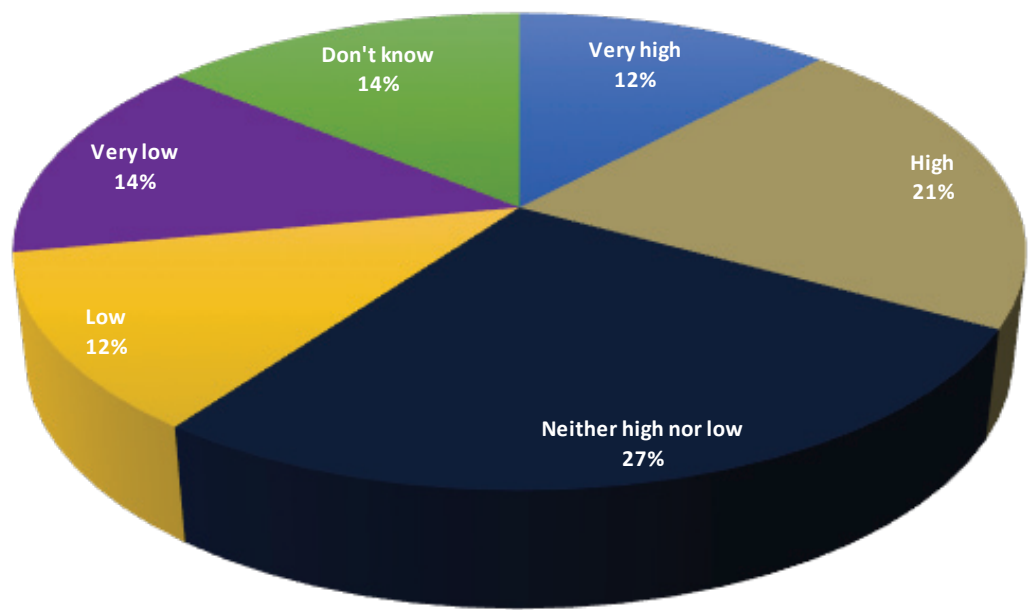
4.2.1 The UK Armed Forces during the Troubles

The first question in the survey asked about public attitudes towards the actions of the UK Armed Forces in NI during the Troubles. Using a scale ranging from *Very low* to *Very high*, respondents were asked to provide their opinion of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles. Overall, a total of 33% had

a high or a very high opinion and 26% had a low or a very low opinion, with the rest being in between or not having an opinion (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Public opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles in NI

Looking back at the past and 'the Troubles' in NI, what is your general opinion of how the UK Armed Forces acted during that time?



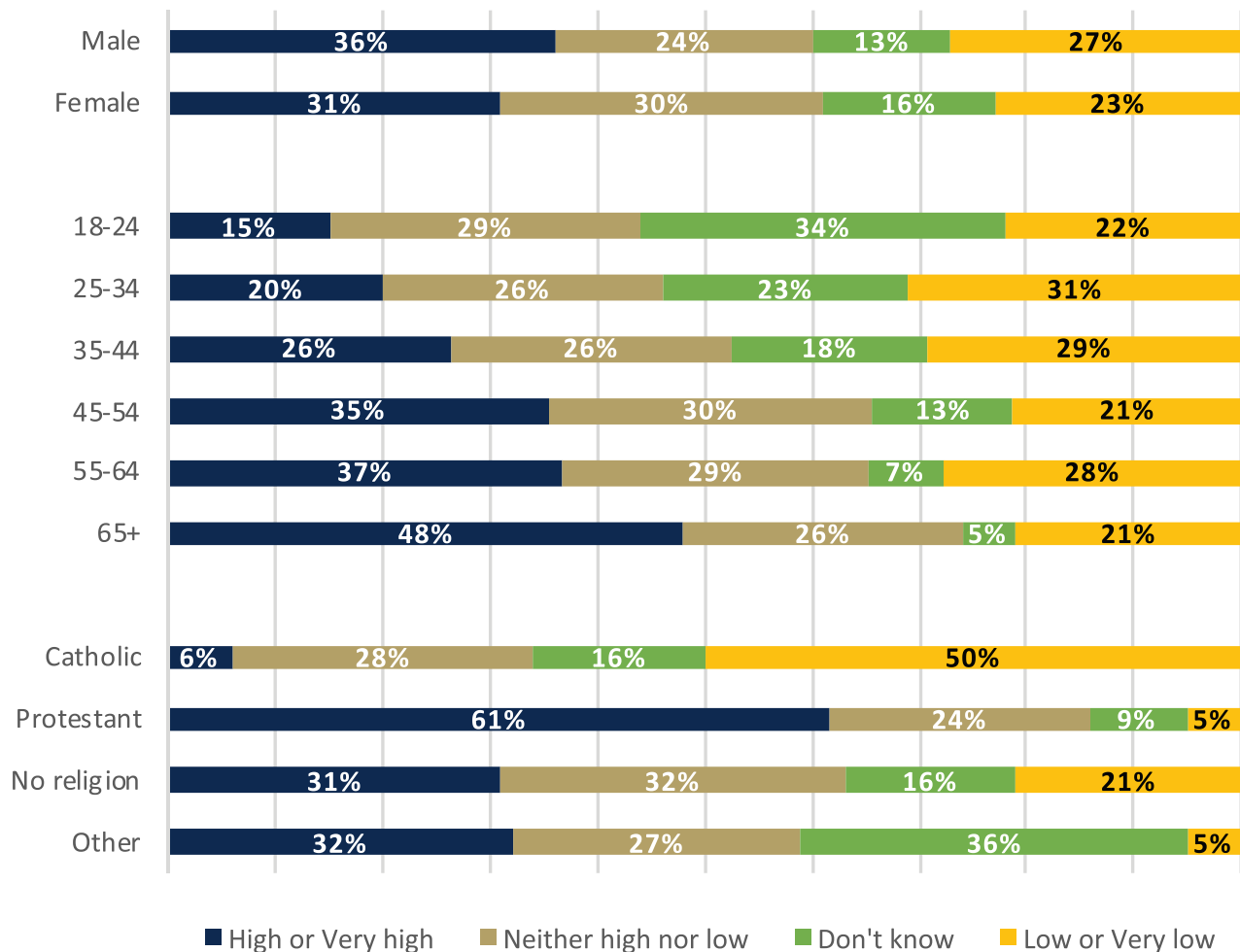
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Further analyses revealed that differences of opinion were minimal across genders, with only a slightly greater proportion of males (36%) having a high or a very high opinion compared to females (31%). Differences in opinions by age were also revealed (Figure 4.2), with the rate of high or very high opinions increasing with each age category from 15% in the 18-24 year olds to 48% in those aged 65+. However, quite a few respondents in the younger age groups indicated that they did not know what their opinion was, or they had a neutral opinion. Conversely, a greater proportion of the younger respondents had negative (i.e., low or very low) rather than positive (high or very high) opinions. The most positive opinions were revealed among those aged 65+.

Additionally, the opinions were divided based on respondents' religion, with only 6% of respondents who identified as Catholic having a high or a very high opinion, compared to 61% of those who identified as Protestant (Figure 4.2). Further analyses revealed that respondents' opinions were related to whether or not they or their family had connections with the Armed Forces. Specifically, Catholics were more likely to have high (as opposed to low) opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles, if they had more connections with the Armed Forces. Whether or not Protestants had any connections to the Armed Forces made no difference to their opinions, as these were generally high.

Figure 4.2: Demographic differences in public opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles in NI

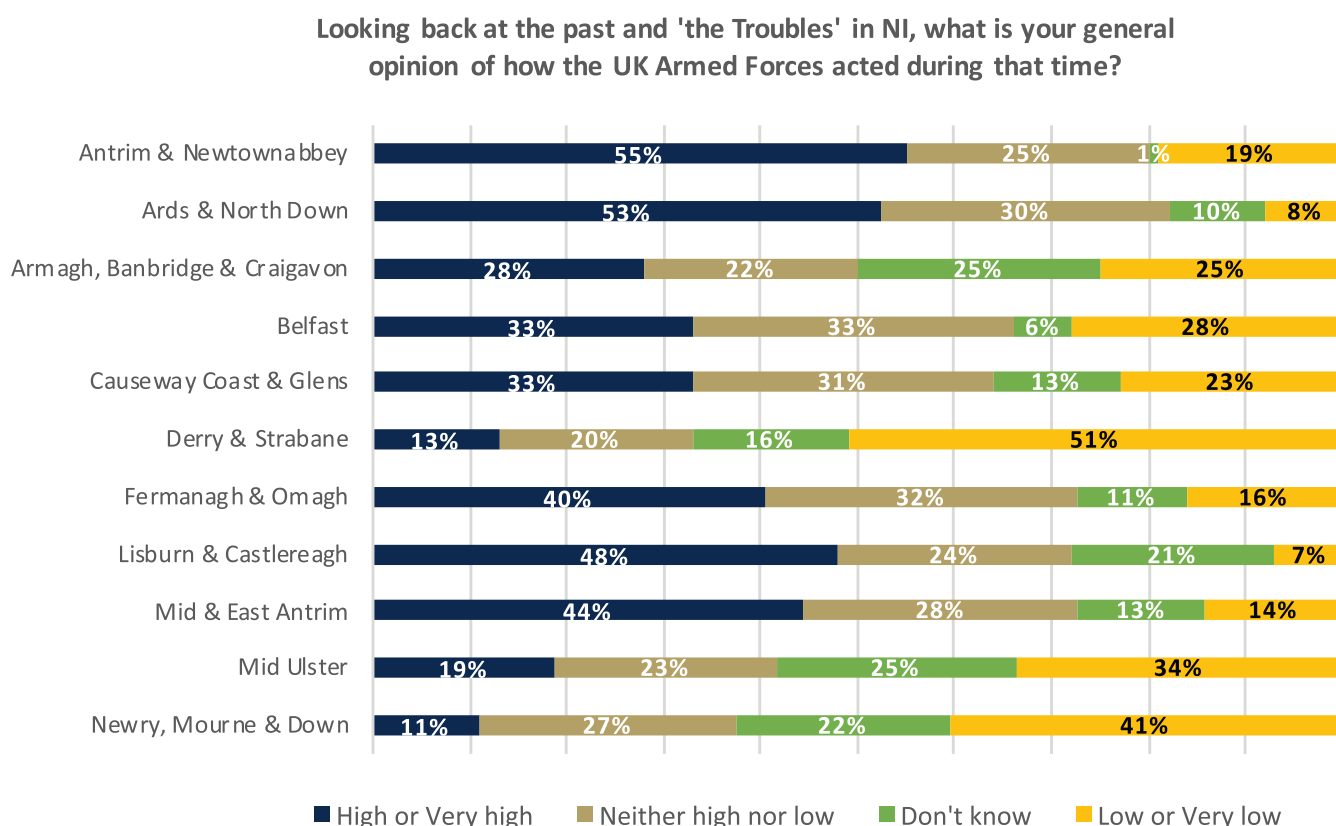
Looking back at the past and 'the Troubles' in NI, what is your general opinion of how the UK Armed Forces acted during that time?



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Large variations in opinions were also revealed across different geographical areas of NI (Figure 4.3). More than half of those living in the Antrim and Newtownabbey (55%), and Ards and North Down (53%) areas had high or very high opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles. In contrast, more than half of those living in Derry and Strabane area (51%) had low or very low opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles. A great proportion of low or very low opinions was also reported by respondents in Newry, Mourne and Down (41%) and in Mid Ulster (34%) areas.

Figure 4.3: Geographical differences in opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles



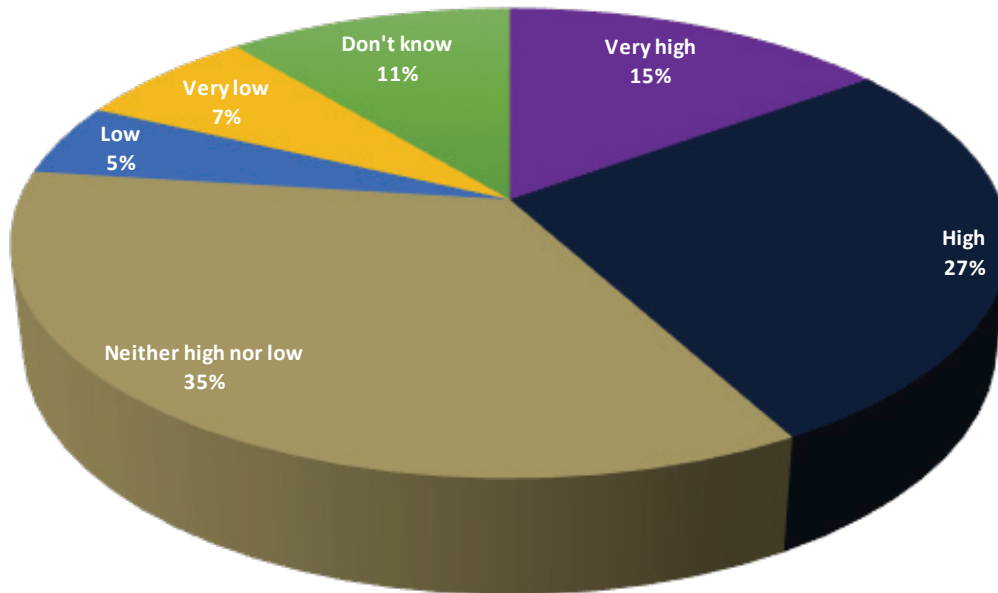
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

4.2.2 The UK Armed Forces today

The second question in the survey asked about public attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces today (i.e. in 2017). Using a scale ranging from *Very low* to *Very high*, a total of 42% of respondents had a high or a very high opinion, 12% had a low or a very low opinion, and the remaining 46% were in between or they did not know (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4: Public opinions towards the UK Armed Forces in 2017

Now thinking of the UK Armed Forces in 2017. What is your general opinion of the UK Armed Forces?

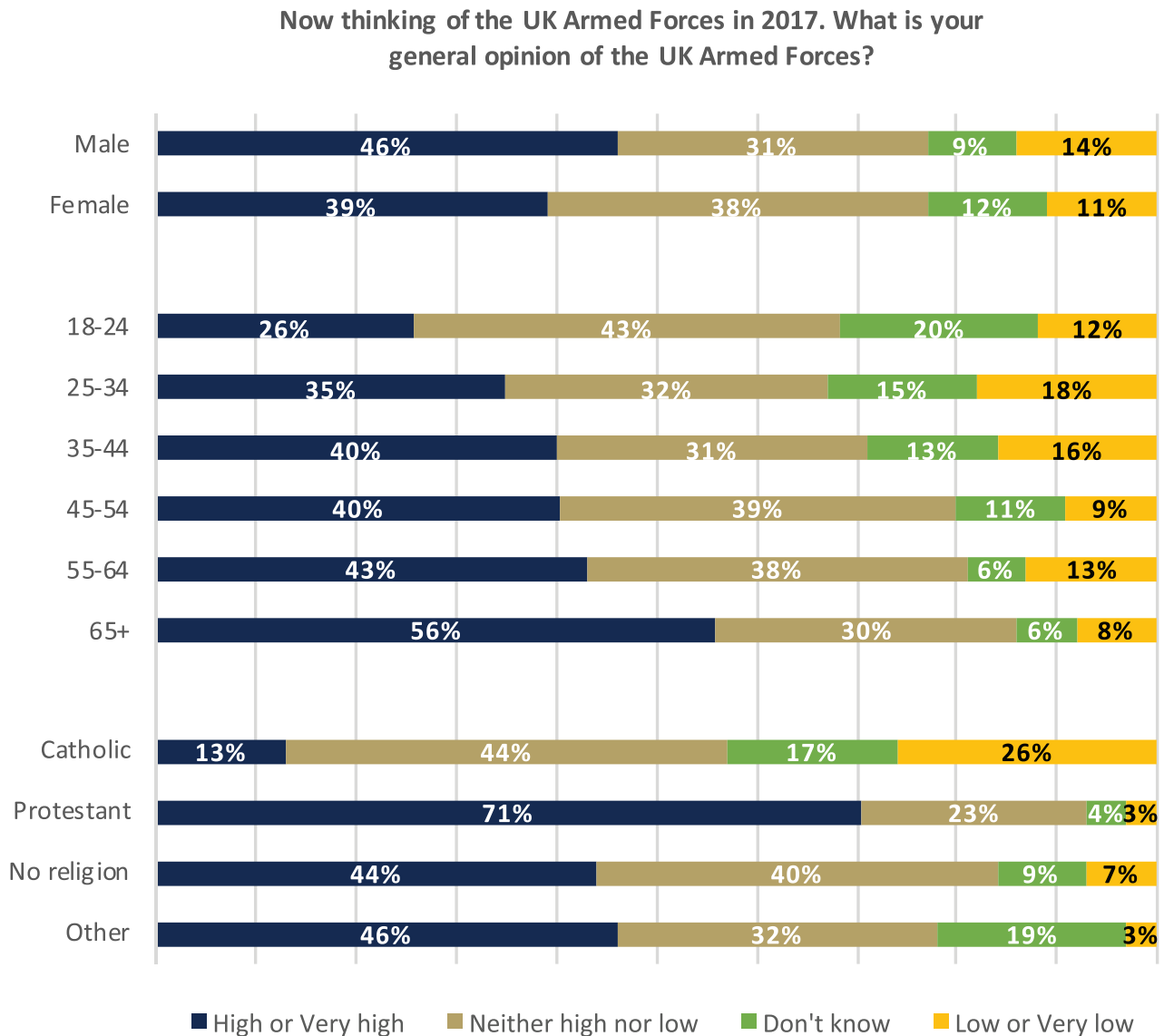


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

A slightly greater proportion of males (46%) than females (39%) reported high or very high opinions (Figure 4.3). Numerous age differences were also revealed. A smaller proportion of respondents in the younger age categories had a high or a very high opinion of the UK Armed Forces today. However, especially in the youngest age category (18-24), a substantial proportion of respondents had neutral or no opinions (63%). Individuals in the oldest age category (65+) had the highest proportion of positive opinions (Figure 4.5).

There were also large religious differences in opinions, with only 13% of Catholics, but 71% of Protestants having a high or a very high opinion of the Armed Forces today (Figure 4.5). Catholics with more family connections to the Armed Forces were more likely to have high than low opinions, whereas for Protestants, family connections did not make a difference to their opinions.

Figure 4.5: Demographic differences in opinions towards the UK Armed Forces today

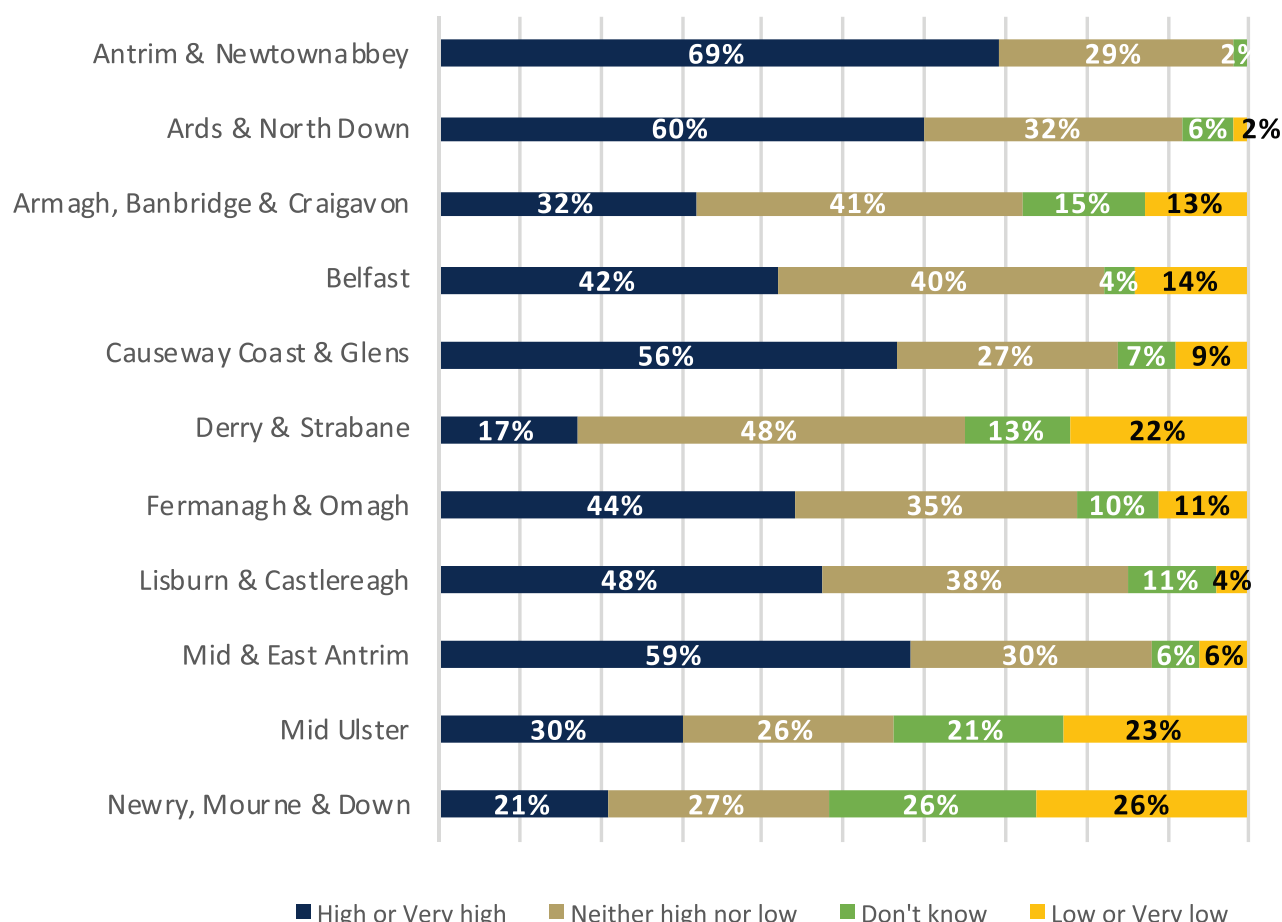


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Opinions towards the UK Armed Forces today were also divided based on geographical location (Figure 4.6). Antrim and Newtownabbey had the highest rates of positive (i.e. high or very high) opinions (69%) towards the Armed Forces today and interestingly, 0% of respondents living in this area had low or very low opinions. Over half of the respondents in Ards and North Down (60%), Mid and East Antrim (59%), and Causeway Coast and Glens (56%) also had high or very high opinions. Concerning low or very low opinions, the highest rates were reported in Newry, Mourne and Down (26%), followed by Mid Ulster (23%) and Derry and Strabane (22%) areas.

Figure 4.6: Geographical differences in opinions towards the UK Armed Forces today.

Now thinking of the UK Armed Forces in 2017. What is your general opinion of the UK Armed Forces?



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

4.2.3 Comparisons of public opinions to the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles and in current times

Table 4.1 below shows the differences in public opinions towards the actions of the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles and towards the UK Armed Forces in 2017.

Table 4.1: Comparison of public opinions to the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles and in current time

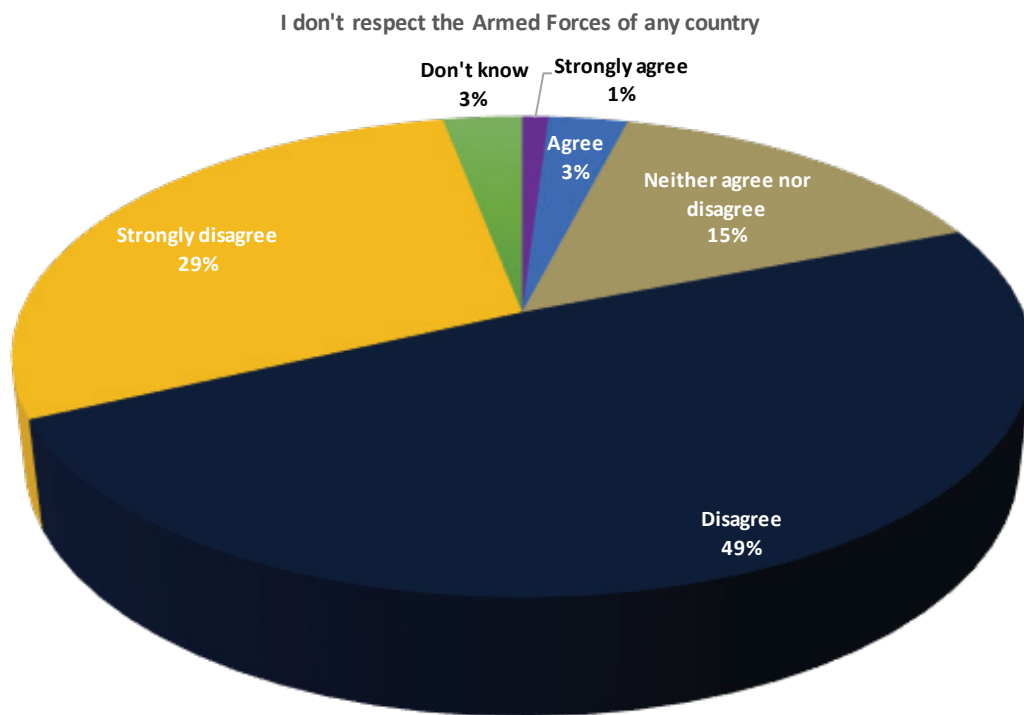
	During the Troubles	In 2017
Very high	12%	15%
High	21%	27%
Neither high nor low	27%	35%
Low	12%	5%
Very low	14%	7%
Don't know	14%	11%

Note. Percentage of the population with each specific opinion. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer.

4.2.4 Respect for Armed Forces personnel

Respondents were also presented with a statement related to their respect for the Armed Forces of any country, and a statement related to their feelings about members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI relative to those who fought in other conflicts. They were asked to rate these statements on a scale ranging from *Strongly agree* to *Strongly disagree*. The majority of respondents (78%) indicated that in general they do respect the Armed Forces (Figure 4.7). Only 4% indicated that they do not respect them.

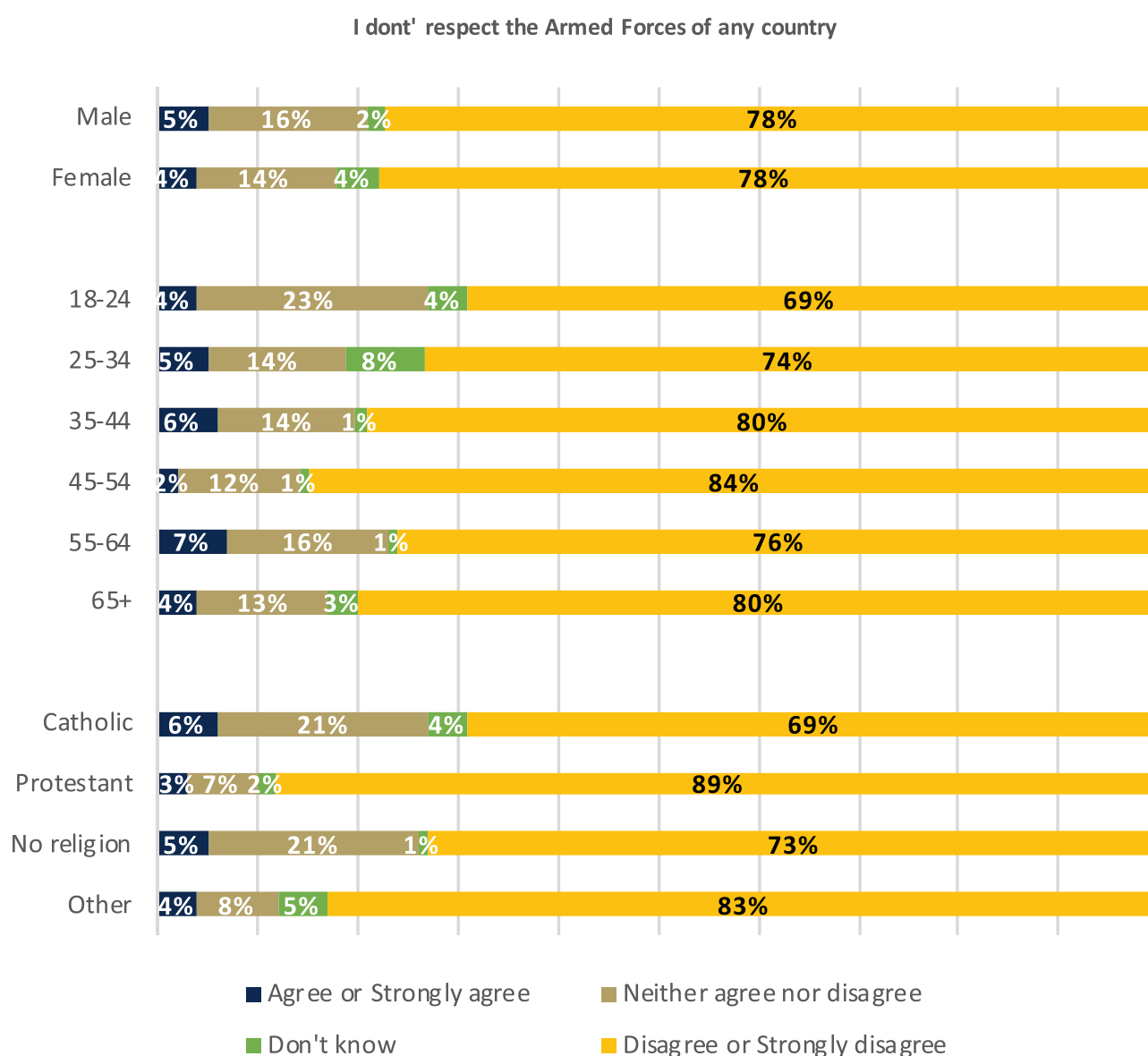
Figure 4.7: Respect for the Armed Forces of any country



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

As shown in Figure 4.8, there were no major differences between males and females in their respect for the Armed Forces of any country. In terms of age differences, the highest proportion of participants who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement 'I don't respect the Armed Forces of any country', was found in the 45-54 age group (84%), while the smallest, although still quite high, proportion of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement was found in the 18-24 age group (69%). There were also some religious differences: 89% of Protestants versus the lower percentage of 69% of Catholics disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Figure 4.8: Demographic differences in the respect for the Armed Forces of any country

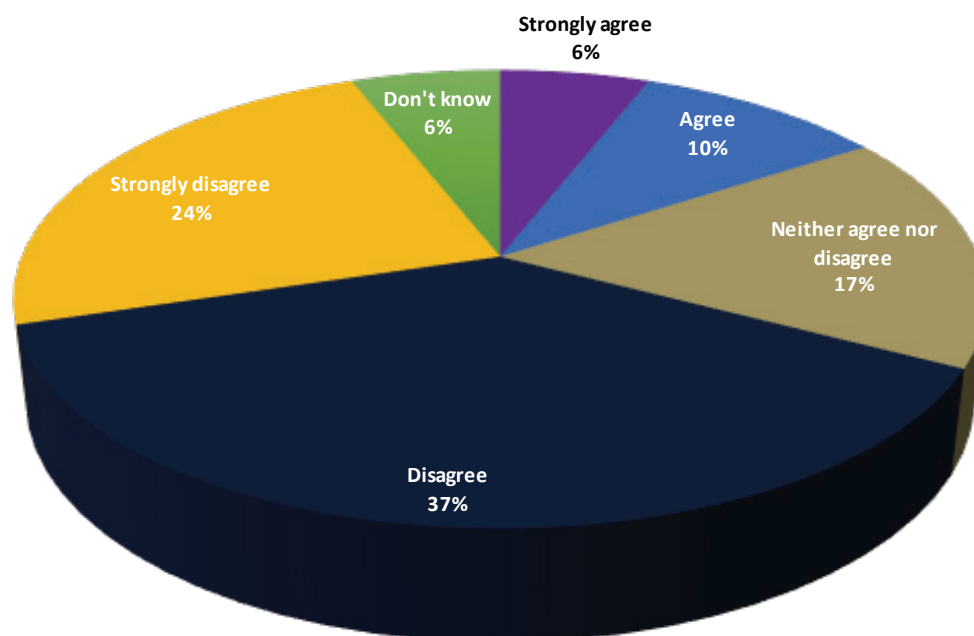


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

In relation to the second statement 'I feel more negatively about members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI than I do about those who fought in other conflicts', a total of 62% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with it, whereas 16% agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9 Feelings towards members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI versus those who fought in other conflicts

I feel more negatively about members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI than I do about those who fought in other conflicts

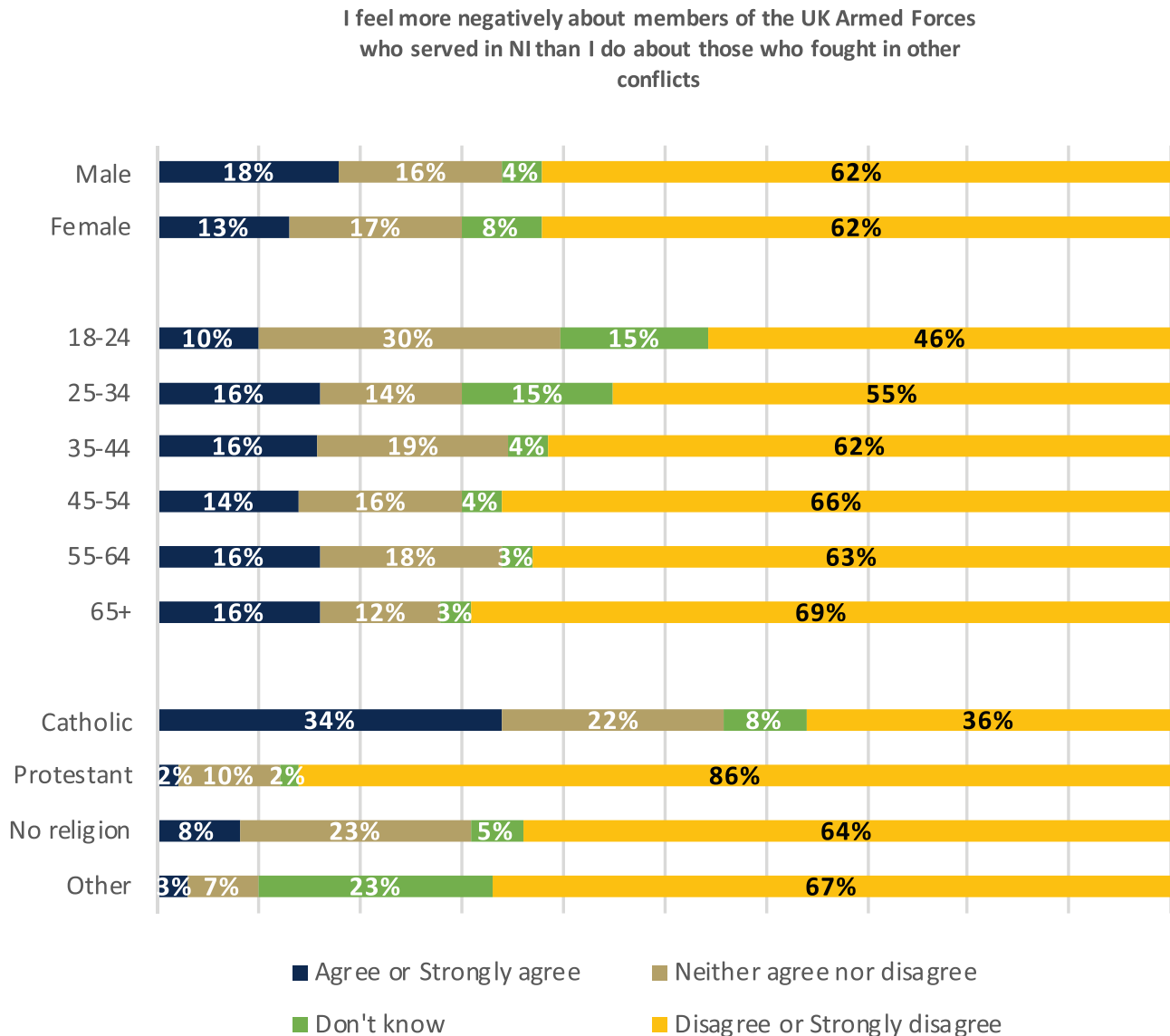


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

There were no gender differences in the proportion of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement (Figure 4.10), but a slightly greater proportion of males (18%) than females (13%) agreed or strongly agreed that they feel more negatively about members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI than those who fought elsewhere. In terms of age differences, again, smaller proportions of the younger age groups disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement (46% of 18-24 year olds, 55% of 25-34 year olds) compared to the older age groups (69% of the 65+ year olds).

There were larger religious differences, however, with only 36% of Catholics indicating that they do not feel more negatively about those members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI than those who fought elsewhere, contrasted against 86% of Protestants. On the other end of the spectrum, 34% of Catholics indicated that they do indeed feel more negatively about the members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI, whereas only 2% of Protestants shared this view. Further analyses revealed that Catholics with more family connections with the Armed Forces were less likely to feel negatively about those who served in NI than to those who served elsewhere, whereas Protestants' opinions were not affected by whether or not they had any family connections with the Armed Forces.

Figure 4.10: Demographic differences in the feelings towards members of the UK Armed Forces who served in NI versus those who fought in other conflicts



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

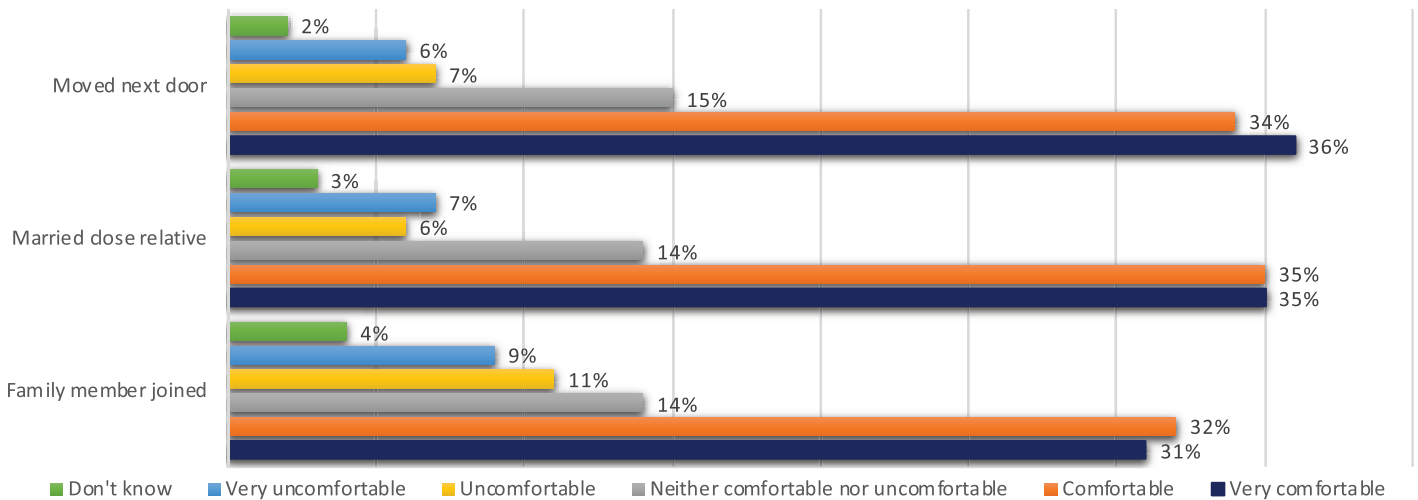
4.2.5 Associations with Armed Forces personnel

Figure 4.11 shows respondents' answers to three questions asking them how comfortable/uncomfortable they would feel if someone who had been in the UK Armed Forces moved in next door to them, married their close relative, and if someone in their family joined the UK Armed Forces. The majority of respondents indicated that they would feel comfortable or very comfortable in all three scenarios (Moved next door: 70%; Married close relative: 70%; Family member joined: 63%).

Figure 4.11: Associations with the Armed Forces

How comfortable or uncomfortable would you be if...

...Someone who had been in the UK Armed Forces moved in next door to you?
...Someone who had been in the UK Armed Forces married a close relative of yours?
...Someone in your family joined the UK Armed Force

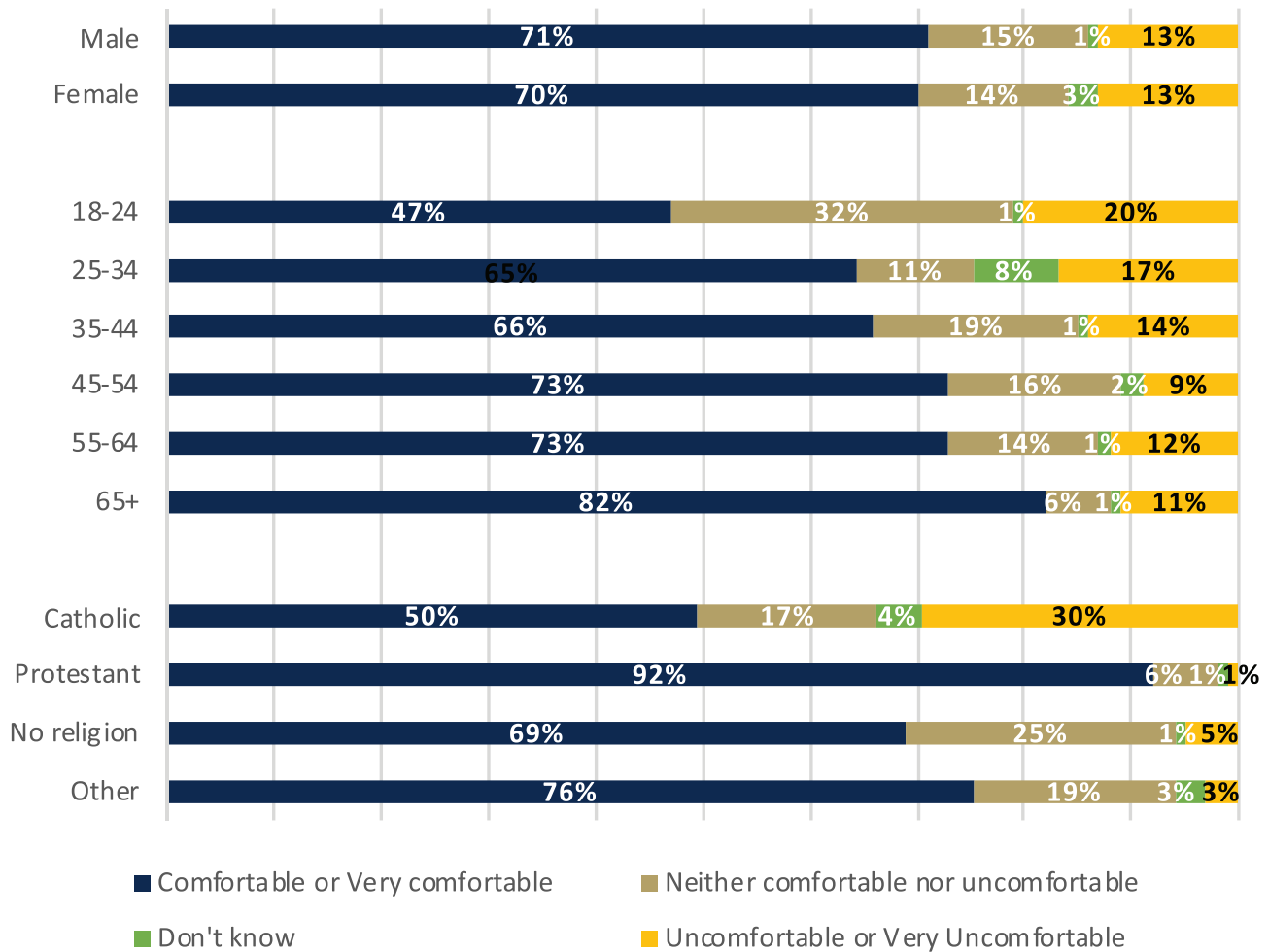


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Demographic breakdown of responses to the above three questions is presented in Figures 4.12-4.14 below. In relation to someone from the Armed Forces moving next door to the respondents, there were almost no gender differences in responses, but some age differences were revealed, such that the rates of being comfortable or very comfortable with such a situation increased with age from 47% in the 18-24 year olds to 82% in the 65+ year olds. Religious differences were also revealed: only 50% of Catholics would be comfortable or very comfortable with the situation, compared to 92% of Protestants. Additionally, 30% of Catholics indicated that they would be uncomfortable or very uncomfortable with the situation, compared to only 1% of Protestants.

Figure 4.12: Demographic differences in associations with the Armed Forces (Someone from Armed Forces moved next door)

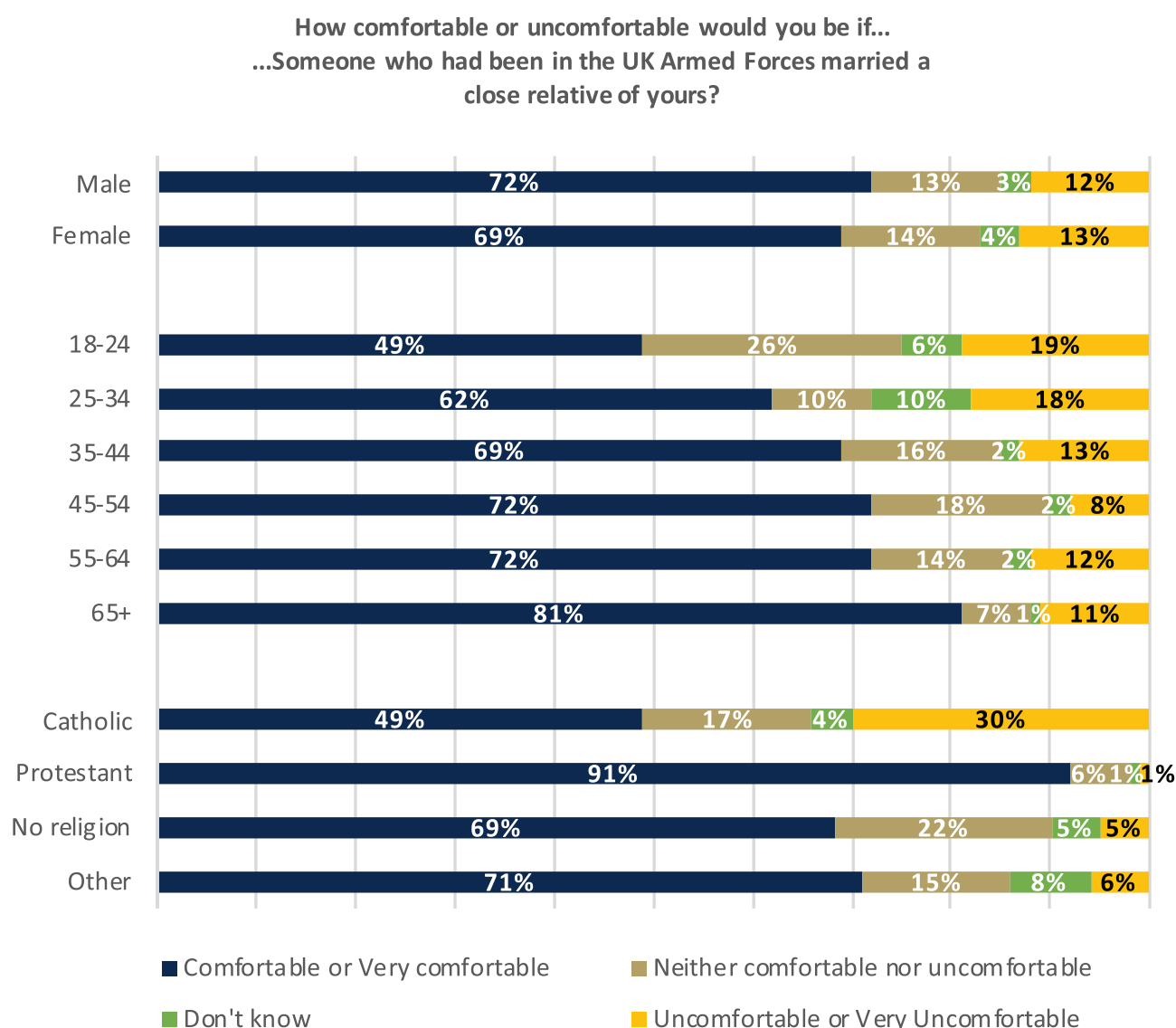
How comfortable or uncomfortable would you be if...
...Someone who had been in the UK Armed Forces moved in
next door to you?



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

As Figure 4.13 shows, gender differences were again minimal in relation to respondents' rating of a hypothetical situation in which someone from the Armed Forces married a close relative of theirs. There were differences in responses across age groups, which resembled those from the previous situation, with the rates of being comfortable or very comfortable with such a situation increasing with age from 49% in the 18-24 year olds to 81% in the 65+ year olds. In terms of religion, 49% of Catholics would be comfortable or very comfortable if someone from the Armed Forces married a close relative of theirs (30% would be uncomfortable or very uncomfortable), but as many as 91% of Protestants would be comfortable or very comfortable with such a situation, and only 1% uncomfortable or very uncomfortable.

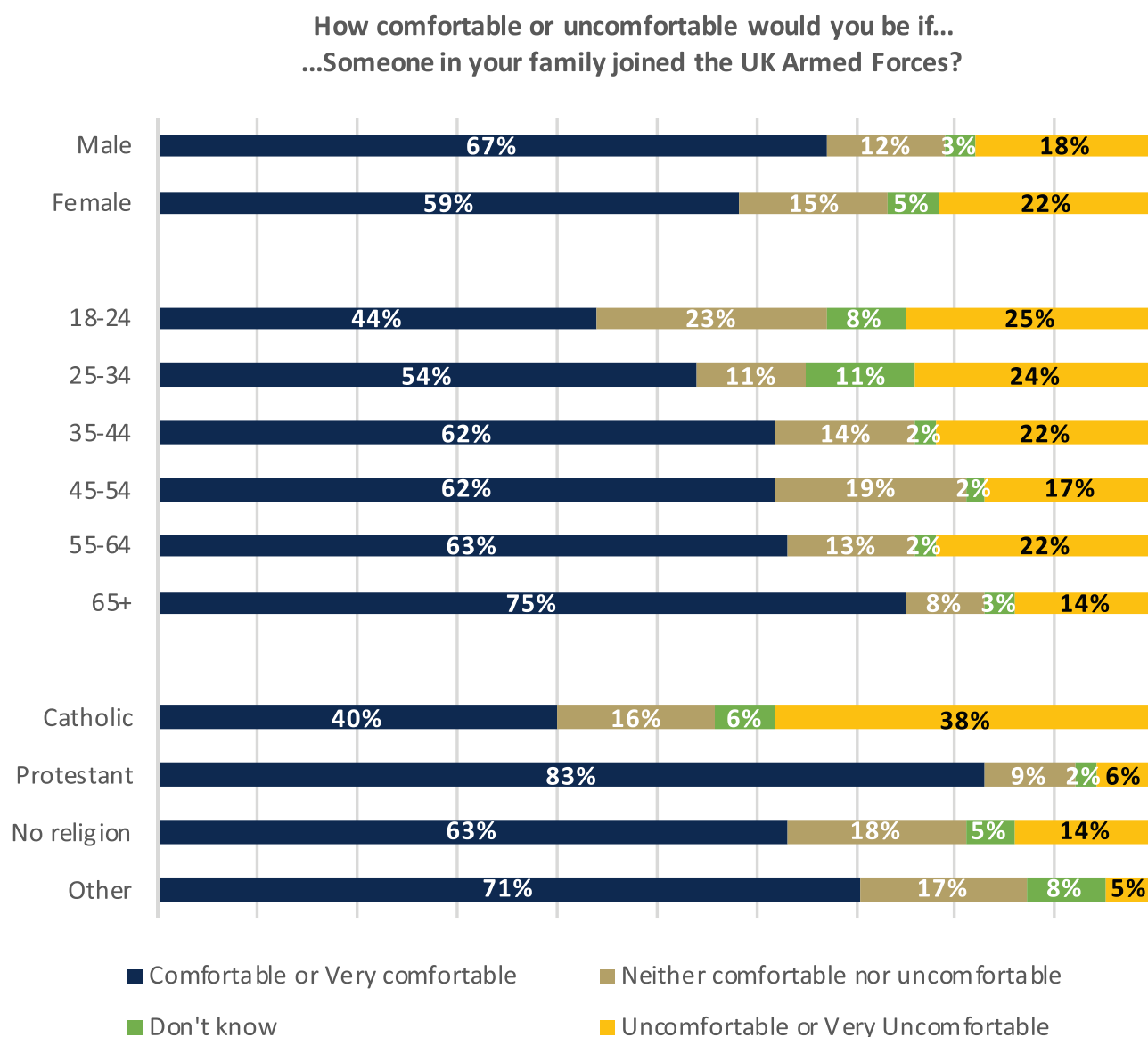
Figure 4.13: Demographic differences in associations with the Armed Forces (Relative married someone from Armed Forces)



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

In the last hypothetical scenario, in which a family member of the respondents joined the Armed Forces, 59% of females indicated that they would feel comfortable or very comfortable, compared to 67% of males. Across the different age groups, the rates of being comfortable or very comfortable with the situation increased from 44% in the 18-24 year olds to 75% in the 65+ year olds. A total of 40% of Catholics would feel comfortable or very comfortable, but almost the same proportion (38%) would feel uncomfortable or very uncomfortable. Again, this stands in direct contrast to Protestant respondents, 83% of which would feel comfortable or very comfortable, and only 6% uncomfortable or very uncomfortable.

Figure 4.14: Demographic differences in associations with the Armed Forces (Family member joined Armed Forces)



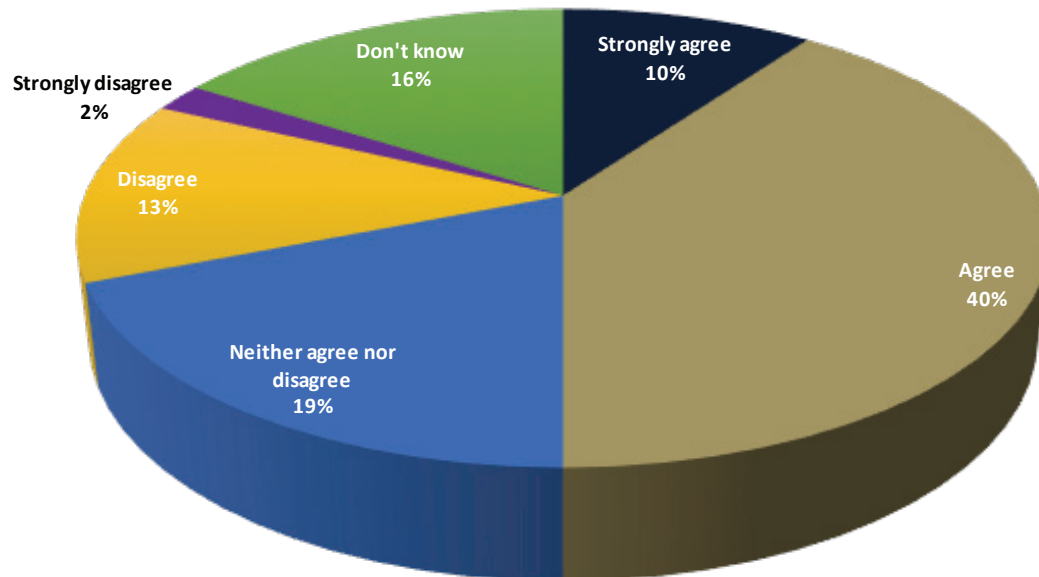
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

4.2.6 Alcohol use and mental health of Armed Forces personnel

Respondents were also asked what they think about alcohol and mental health-related problems of those who have been in the Armed Forces. They were presented with statements and asked to rate them using a scale ranging from *Strongly agree* to *Strongly disagree*. Figure 4.15 shows that 50% of respondents believed that those who have been in the Armed Forces are more likely to have problems with alcohol than those in the general population (only 15% of the respondents disagreed with this statement, with the rest being in the middle or not having an opinion).

Figure 4.15: Public opinions of the alcohol-related problems in the UK Armed Forces

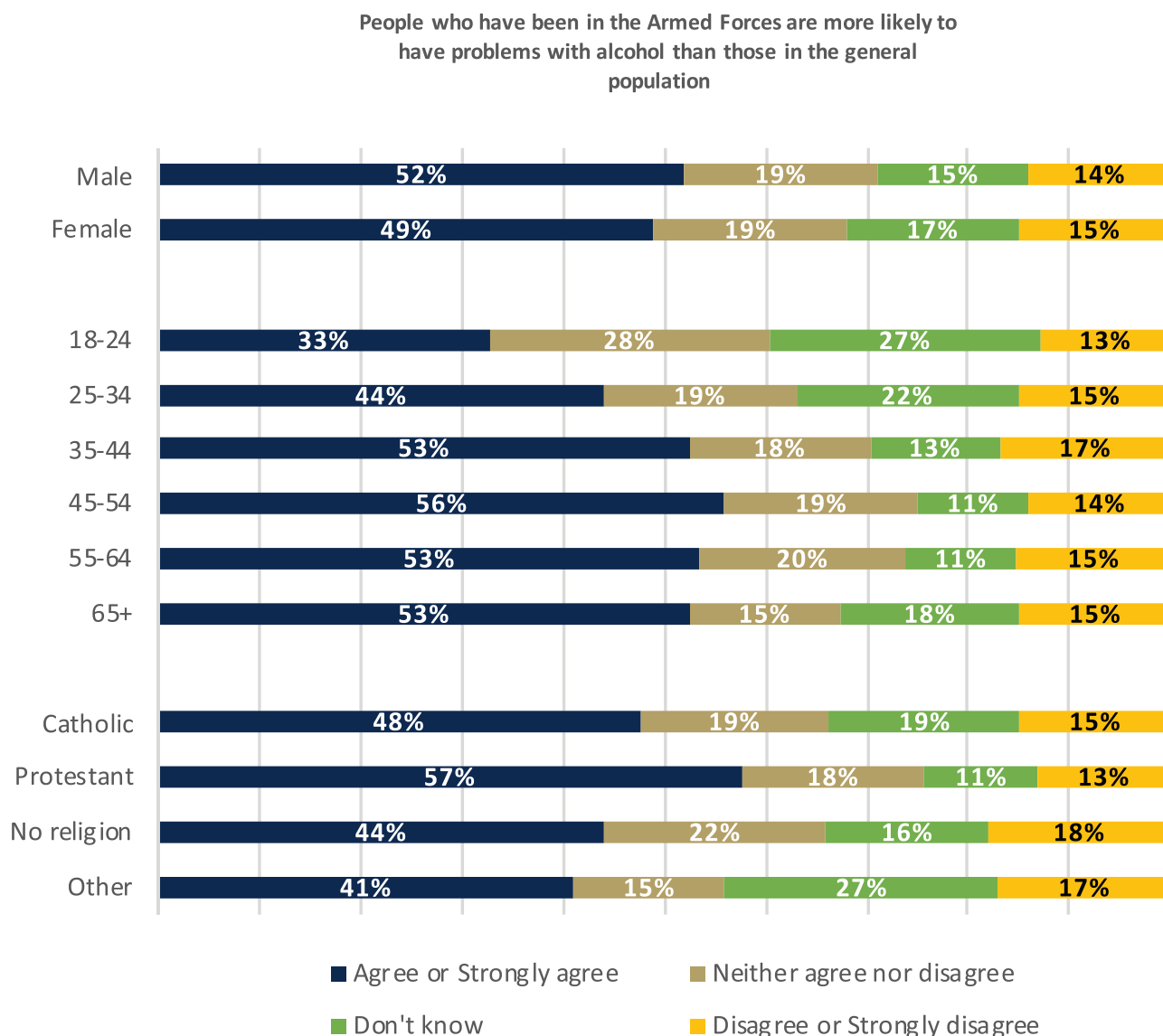
People who have been in the Armed Forces are more likely to have problems with alcohol than those in the general population



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

There were minimal gender differences in the public opinions of the alcohol-related problems in the Armed Forces (Figure 4.16). In terms of the different age groups, however, the smallest proportion of those who agreed or strongly agreed that alcohol problems are more likely in the Armed Forces than in the general population were found in the 18-24 age group (33%) and the 25-34 age group (44%), whereas over half of those in the older age categories (35+) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. In terms of religious differences, Protestants had the most negative opinions, with 57% of them believing that alcohol problems are more likely in member of the Armed Forces (Figure 4.11).

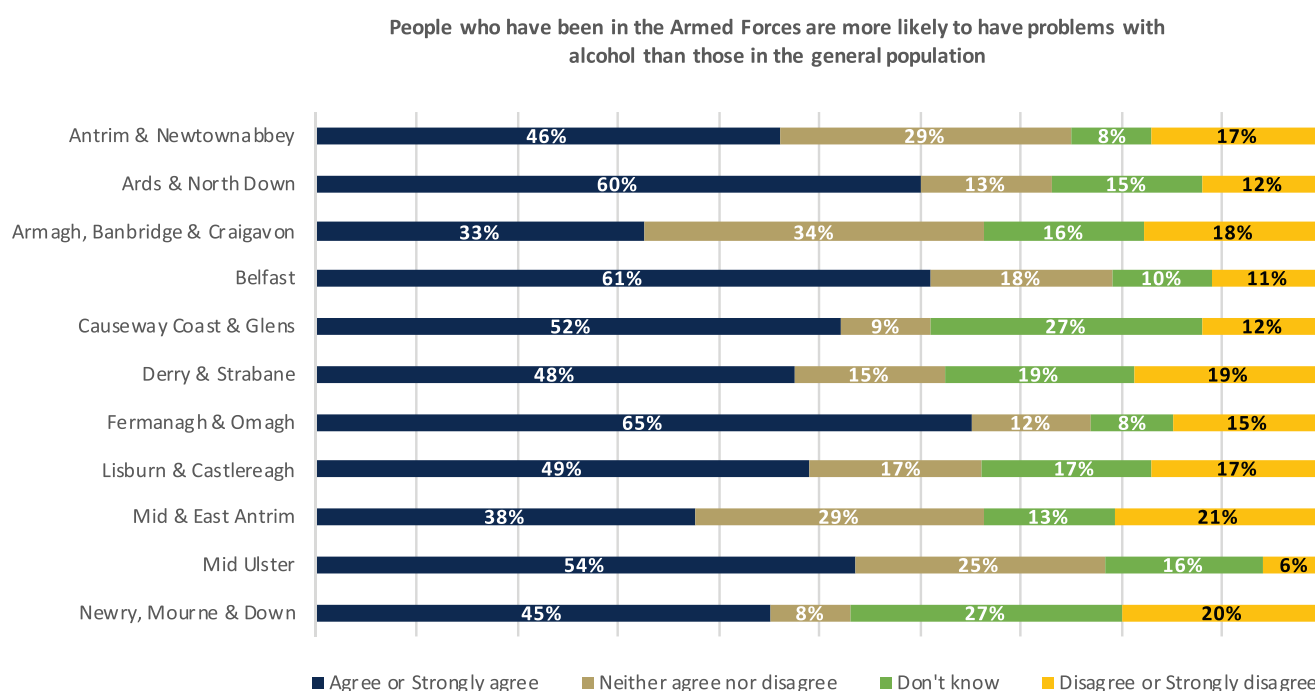
Figure 4.16: Demographic differences in public opinions of the alcohol-related problems in the UK Armed Forces



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Some geographical differences were also revealed in relation to respondents' opinions of the alcohol related problems in the Armed Forces relative to the general public (Figure 4.17). Specifically, the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon area had the smallest proportion of respondents (33%) who agreed or strongly agreed that alcohol problems are more likely in the Armed Forces. In contrast, the highest proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with this statement was found in the Fermanagh and Omagh areas (65%).

Figure 4.17: Geographical differences in opinions of the alcohol-related problems in the UK Armed Forces

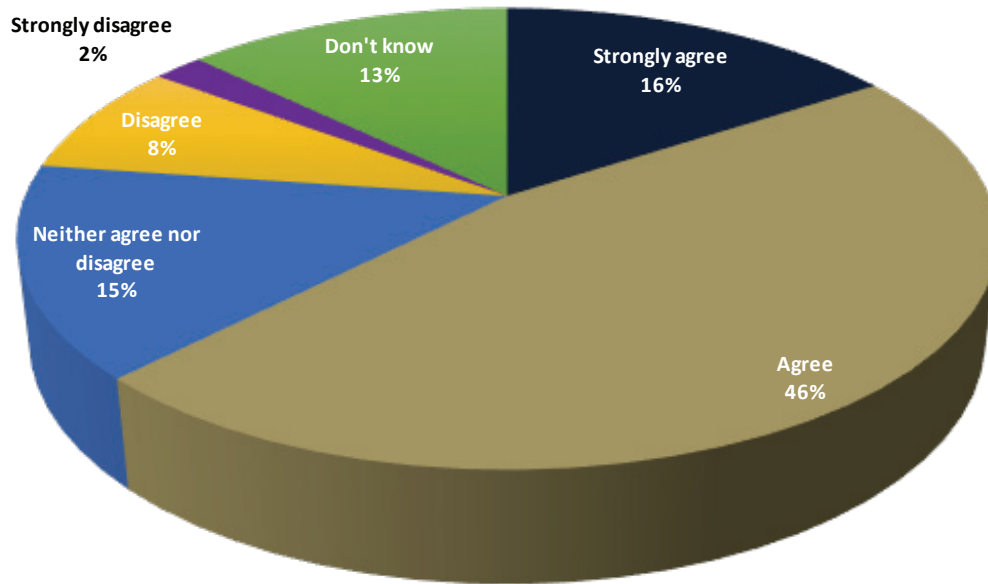


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

In relation to mental health problems, 63% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that these are more likely in someone who has been in the Armed Forces than in someone from the general population (only 10% of the respondents disagreed with this statement and the rest were in the middle or they did not have an opinion; Figure 4.18).

Figure 4.18: Public opinions of the mental health issues in the UK Armed Forces

People who have been in the Armed Forces are more likely to have mental health problems than those in the general population

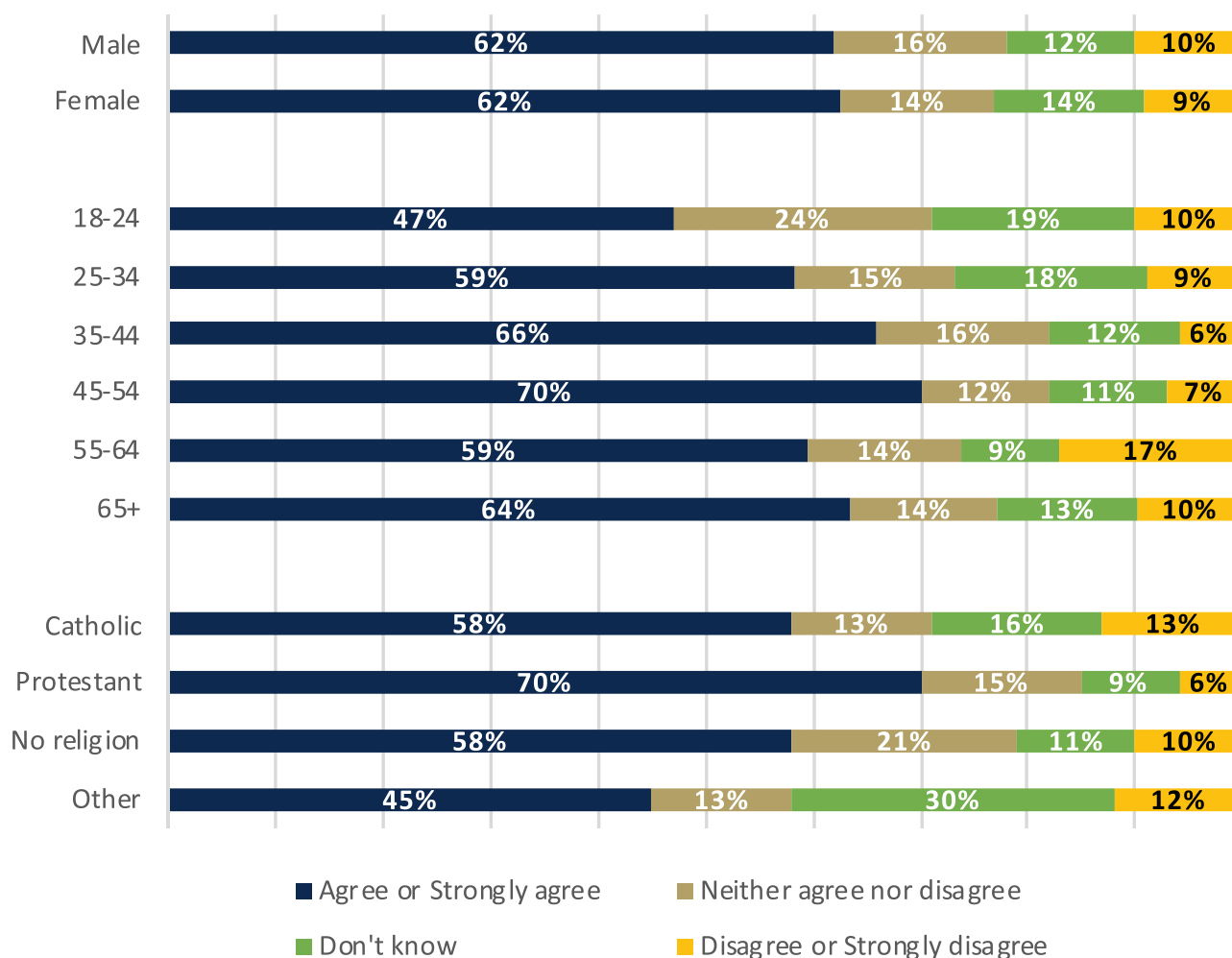


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

There were no gender differences in respondents' beliefs about the mental health problems in the Armed Forces (Figure 4.19). Some age-related differences were revealed, however: 47% of the 18-24 year olds agreed or strongly agreed that mental health problems are more likely in those who have been in the Armed Forces than those from the general population, while between 59%-70% of respondents from the other age groups agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. In terms of religion, the highest proportion of those who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement was found in the Protestants group (70%; Figure 4.19).

Figure 4.19: Demographic differences in public opinions of the mental health issues in the UK Armed Forces

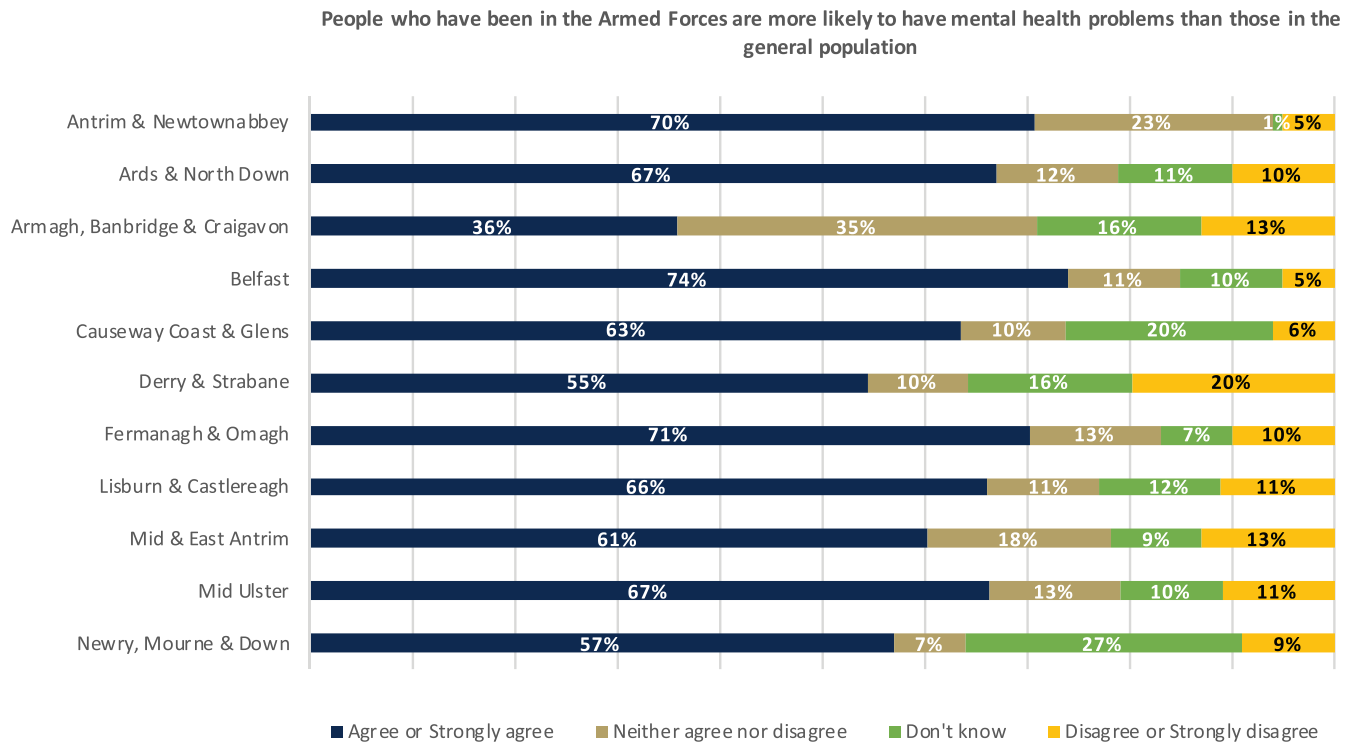
People who have been in the Armed Forces are more likely to have mental health problems than those in the general population



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Again, there were some geographical differences in respondents' opinions about whether mental health problems are more likely in the Armed Forces than in the general population (Figure 4.20). The lowest rates of agreement with this statement were found in the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon area (36%). The highest rates of agreement were found in the Belfast area (74%).

Figure 4.20: Geographical differences in public opinions of the mental health issues in the UK Armed Forces

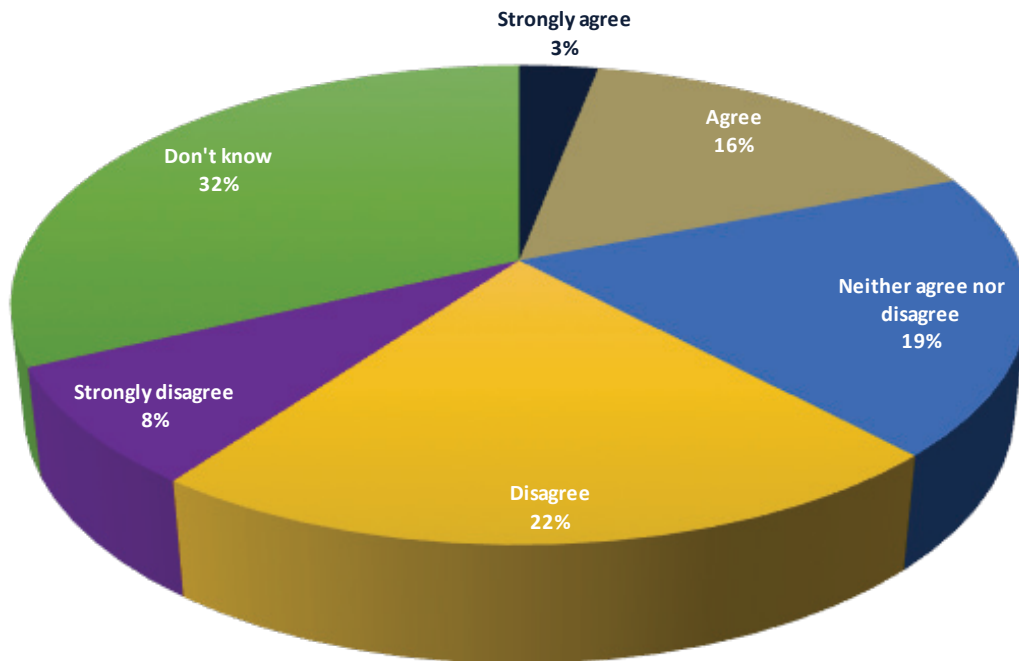


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

When presented with a statement saying that some public services in NI discriminate against people who have been in the Armed Forces, 19% of respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with it and 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 4.21). It is also interesting to note that just over half of respondents were undecided or did not know (19% neither agreed nor disagreed; 32% did not know).

Figure 4.21: Opinions about discrimination by public services in NI

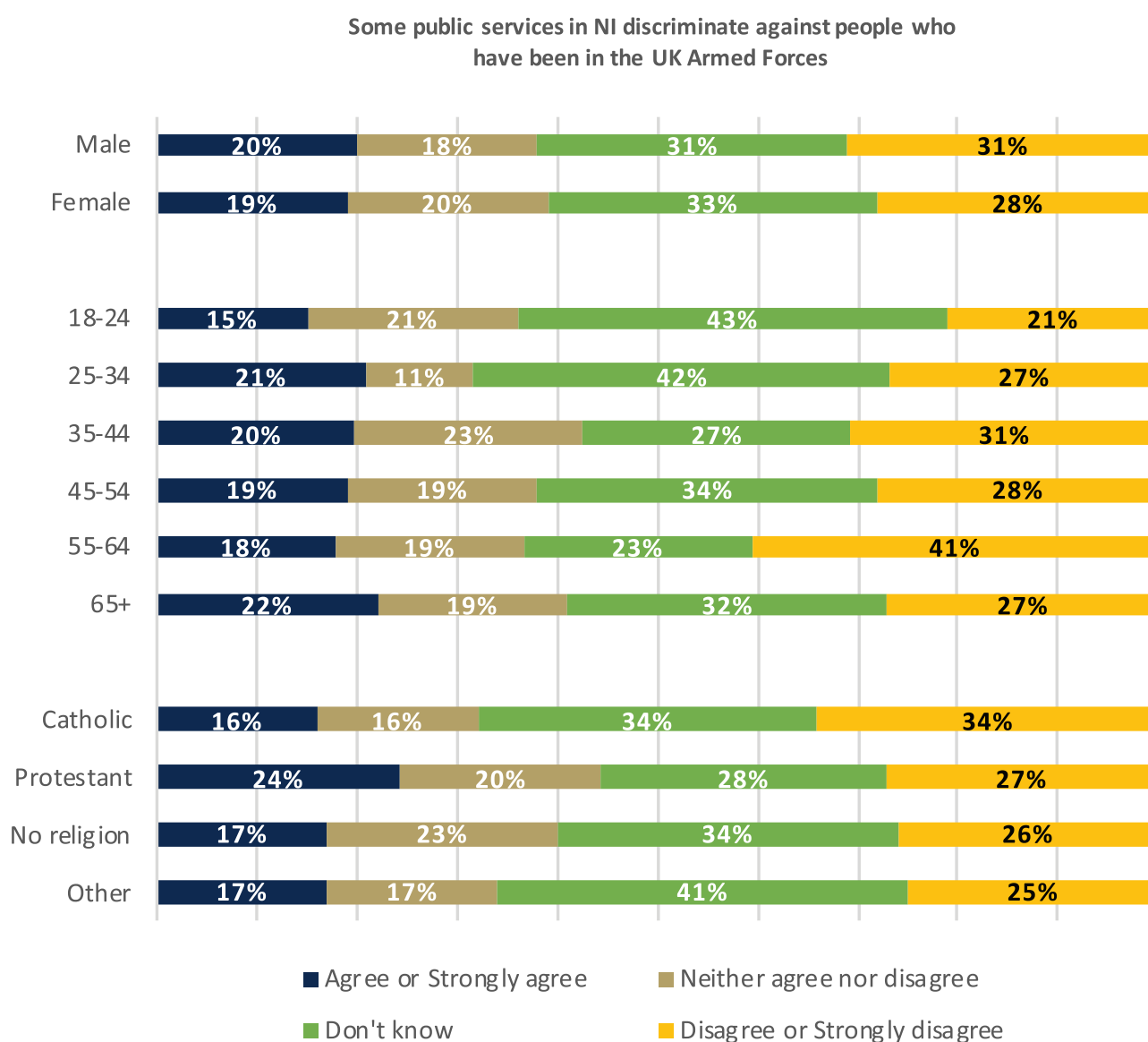
Some public services in NI discriminate against people who have been in the UK Armed Forces



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

There were almost no differences between males and females in relation to the above statement (Figure 4.22). Again, differences were seen across the age brackets, with a relatively high proportion of respondents in the two youngest age categories (18-24: 43%; 25-34: 42%) saying that they didn't know whether public services in NI discriminate against people who have been in the UK Armed Forces, while those showing the highest rates of disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement falling into the 55-64 age group (41%). In terms of religion, 16% of Catholics agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (34% disagreed or strongly disagreed) and 24% of Protestants agreed or strongly agreed (27% disagreed or strongly disagreed).

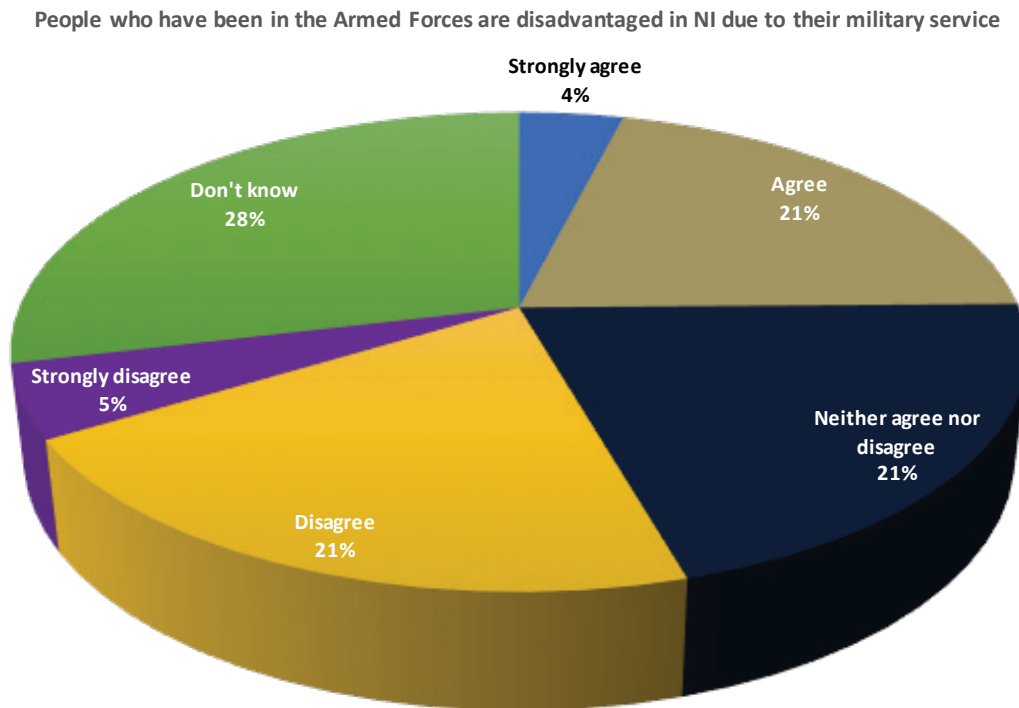
Figure 4.22: Demographic differences in opinions about discrimination by public services in NI



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

When presented with a statement ‘People who have been in the Armed Forces are disadvantaged in NI due to their military service’, there was no consensus in the full sample; 25% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, whereas 26% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 4.23). Again, half of the respondents (50%) neither agreed nor disagreed or they did not know (please note that the percentages are rounded to the nearest integer). Further analyses revealed that respondents’ family connections with the Armed Forces played a role in their responses: 51% of those with strong connections agreed or strongly agreed that those who have been in the Armed Forces are disadvantaged in NI due to their military service, 34% of those with some connections, 29% of those with hardly any connections, and only 18% of those with no connections with the Armed Forces agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

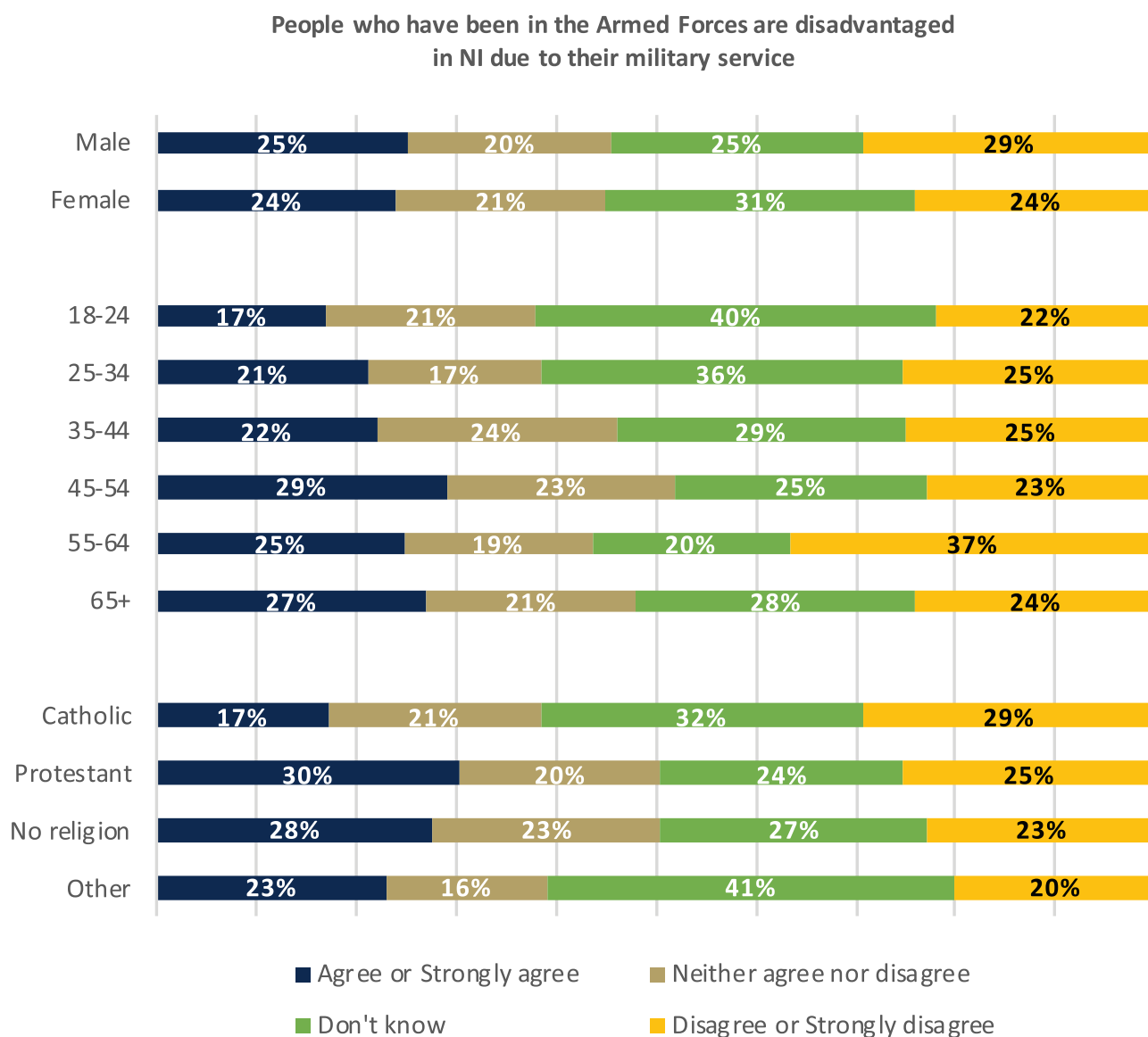
Figure 4.23: Public opinions about members of the Armed Forces being disadvantaged



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Figure 4.24 presents the demographic breakdown of respondents' agreement or disagreement with the statement 'People who have been in the Armed Forces are disadvantaged in NI due to their military service'. Again, there were minimal gender differences and the two youngest age categories (18-24 and 25-34) had the highest proportion of respondents who did not know how to answer the question; 40% and 36% respectively. The 55-64 age group had the highest rate of disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement (37%). A greater proportion of Protestants (30%) than Catholics (17%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Figure 4.24: Demographic differences in public opinions about members of the Armed Forces being disadvantaged

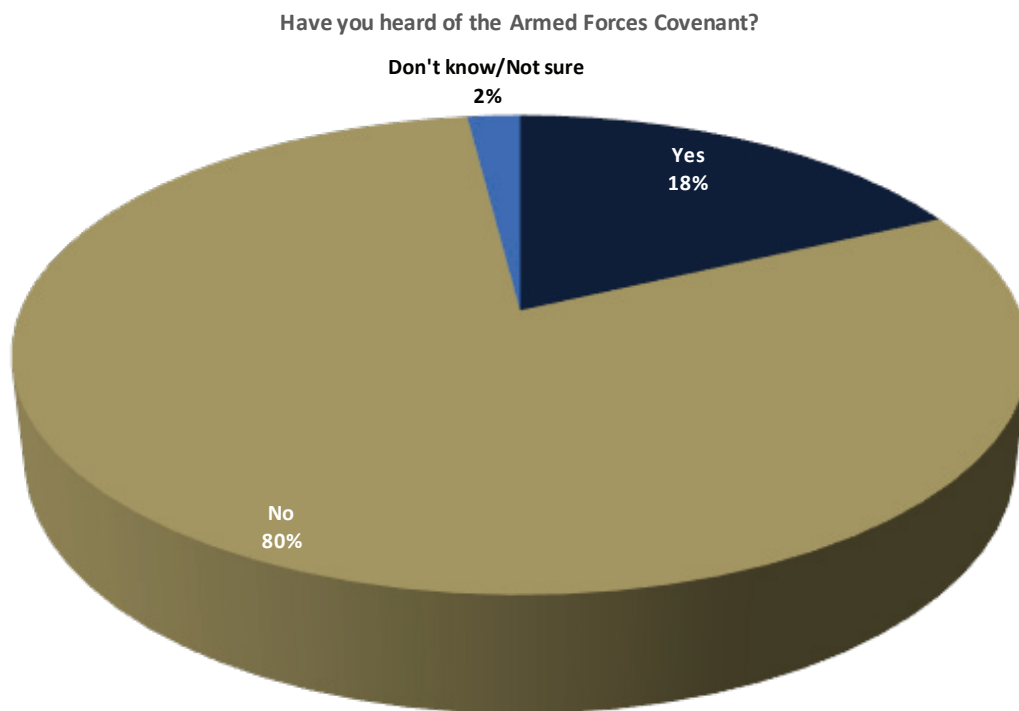


Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

4.2.7 The Armed Forces Covenant

Another set of questions in the survey enquired about issues relating to the AFC, as discussed earlier in the report. The first one of these questions asked the respondents whether they had heard about the AFC, with response options *Yes*, *No*, and *Don't know/Not sure*. As Figure 4.25 shows, the vast majority of respondents (80%) indicated that they had never heard of the AFC, with only 18% having heard about it and the remaining 2% being unsure.

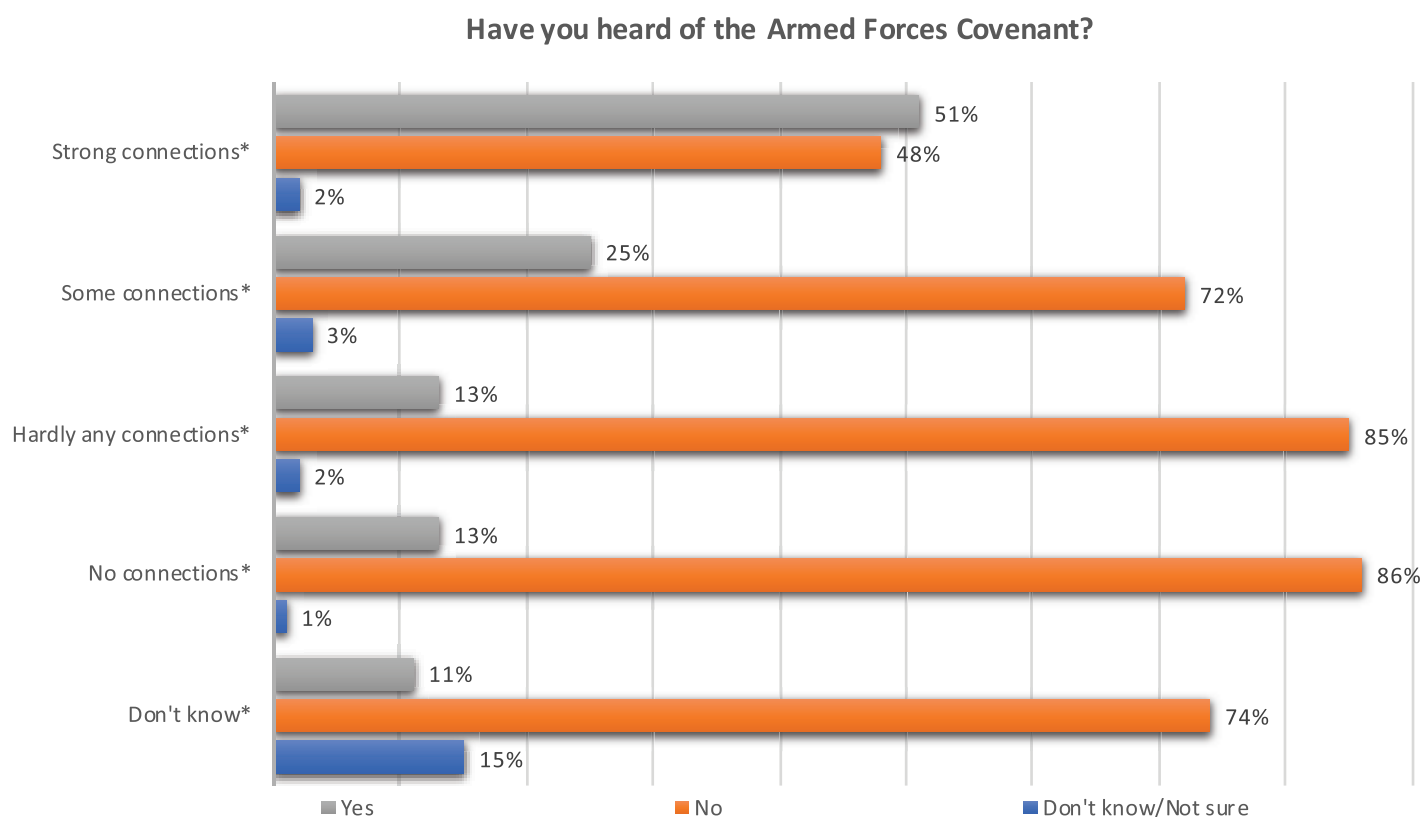
Figure 4.25: Knowledge of the existence of the Armed Forces Covenant in the full sample



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Additional analyses revealed that respondents' family connections with the Armed Forces played an important role in their responses (Figure 4.26). Specifically, 51% of respondents with strong connections and 25% of those with some connections indicated that they have heard about the AFC, compared to 12% of those with no connections.

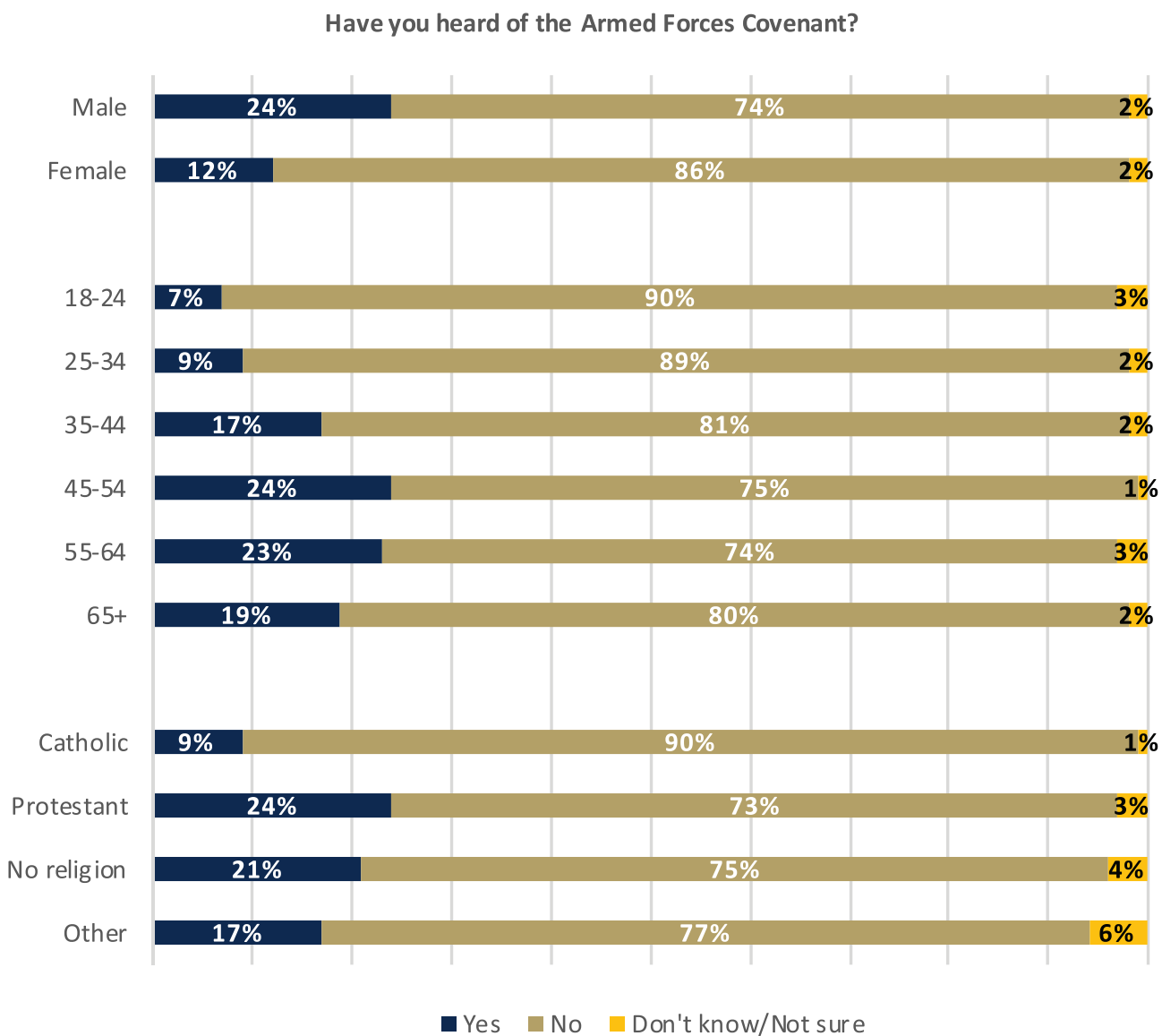
Figure 4.26: Knowledge of the existence of the Armed Forces Covenant and family connections with UK Armed Forces



Note. * Respondents were asked “How would you describe you and your family’s connections with the UK Armed Forces?”
 Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Twice as many males (24%) than females (12%) had heard about the AFC and there were also some age differences (Figure 4.27): only a small proportion of the youngest age groups had heard about it (7% of the 18-24 year olds; 9% of the 25-34 year olds), with the 45-54 (24%) and 55-64 age categories (23%) having the highest proportion of respondents who have heard about the AFC. Only 9% of Catholics, but 24% of Protestants had heard about the AFC.

Figure 4.27: Demographic differences in the knowledge of the existence of the Armed Forces Covenant



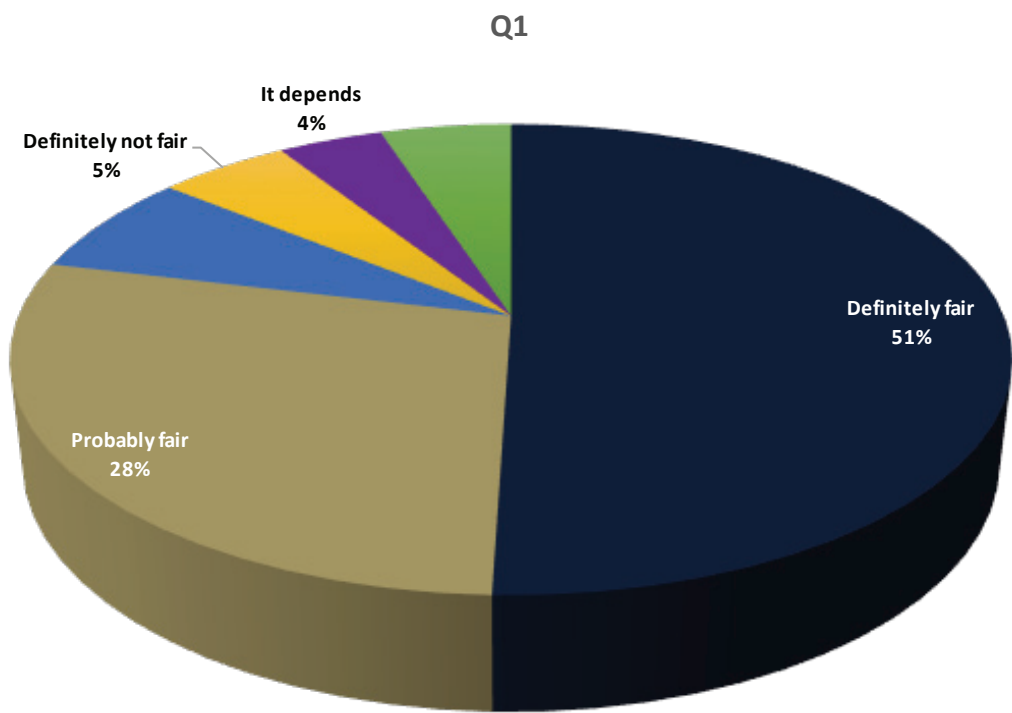
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Five additional scenario-based questions were asked about the AFC; two of these were related to England and the remaining three were related to NI. Respondents were asked to indicate how they felt about the scenarios using a scale ranging from *Definitely fair* to *Definitely not fair*. The first question read as follows:

Q1: The Covenant is an agreement that promises that members of the UK Armed Forces will never be put at a disadvantage in getting access to things like health treatments or housing because of their time in the military. Thinking about an ex-soldier living in England, do you think that this is generally fair or unfair?

As shown in Figure 4.28, a large proportion of respondents (78%) indicated that it was probably fair or definitely fair for ex-soldiers in England not to be disadvantaged due to their military service in terms of health treatments and housing. Only 12% thought it was probably or definitely not fair.

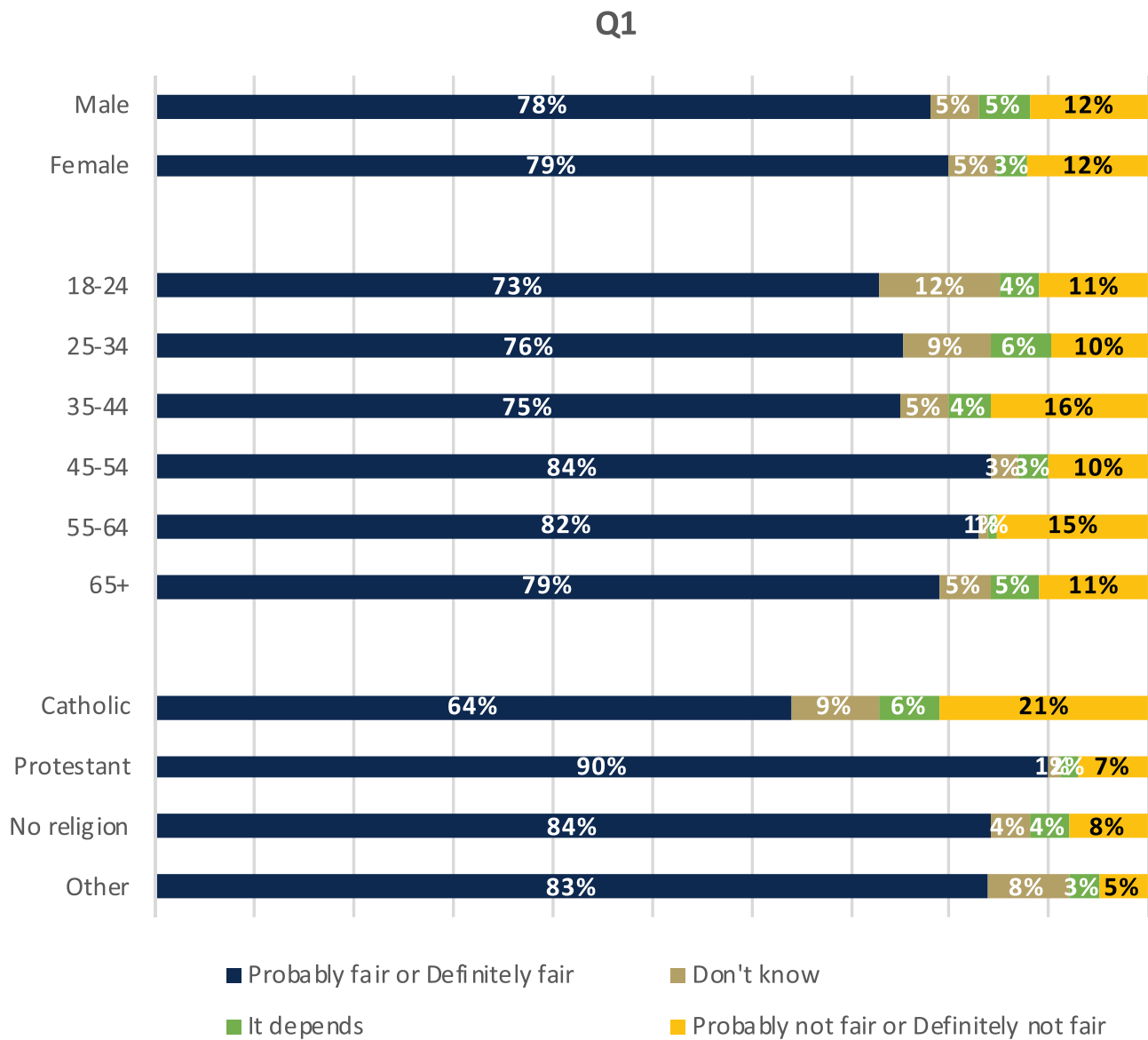
Figure 4.28: Armed Forces Covenant – Scenario question 1



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Demographic breakdown of responses to the above question is presented in Figure 4.29. There were minimal gender and age differences. In terms of religion, 64% of Catholics thought it was probably fair or definitely fair for an ex-soldier in England to never be put at a disadvantage, but 21% thought it was probably not fair or definitely not fair. Ninety percent of Protestants thought it was probably fair or definitely fair and only 7% thought it was probably not fair or definitely not fair.

Figure 4.29: Demographic differences in responses to Armed Forces Covenant – Scenario question 1



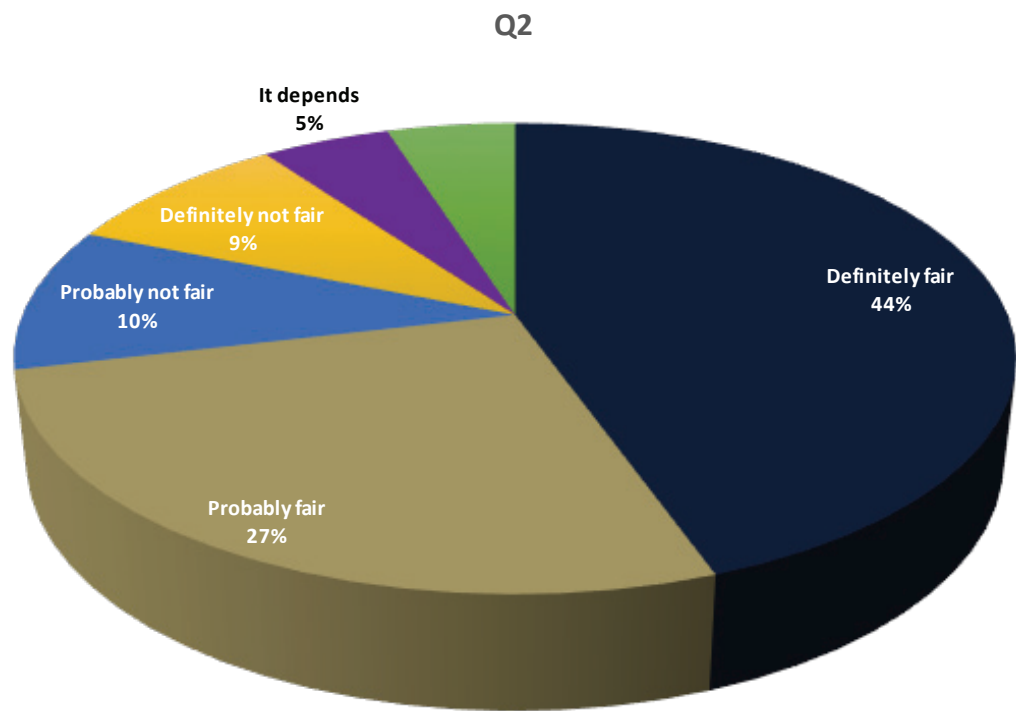
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

The second question asked the respondents:

Q2: The Covenant also includes a promise that members of the UK Armed Forces may get priority health treatment or housing if they face special issues as a result of their time in the military, for example if they were significantly injured. Thinking about an ex-soldier living in England, do you think that this is generally fair or unfair?

As Figure 4.30 shows, a total of 72% of respondents thought this was probably fair or definitely fair and 19% thought it was probably not fair or definitely not fair.

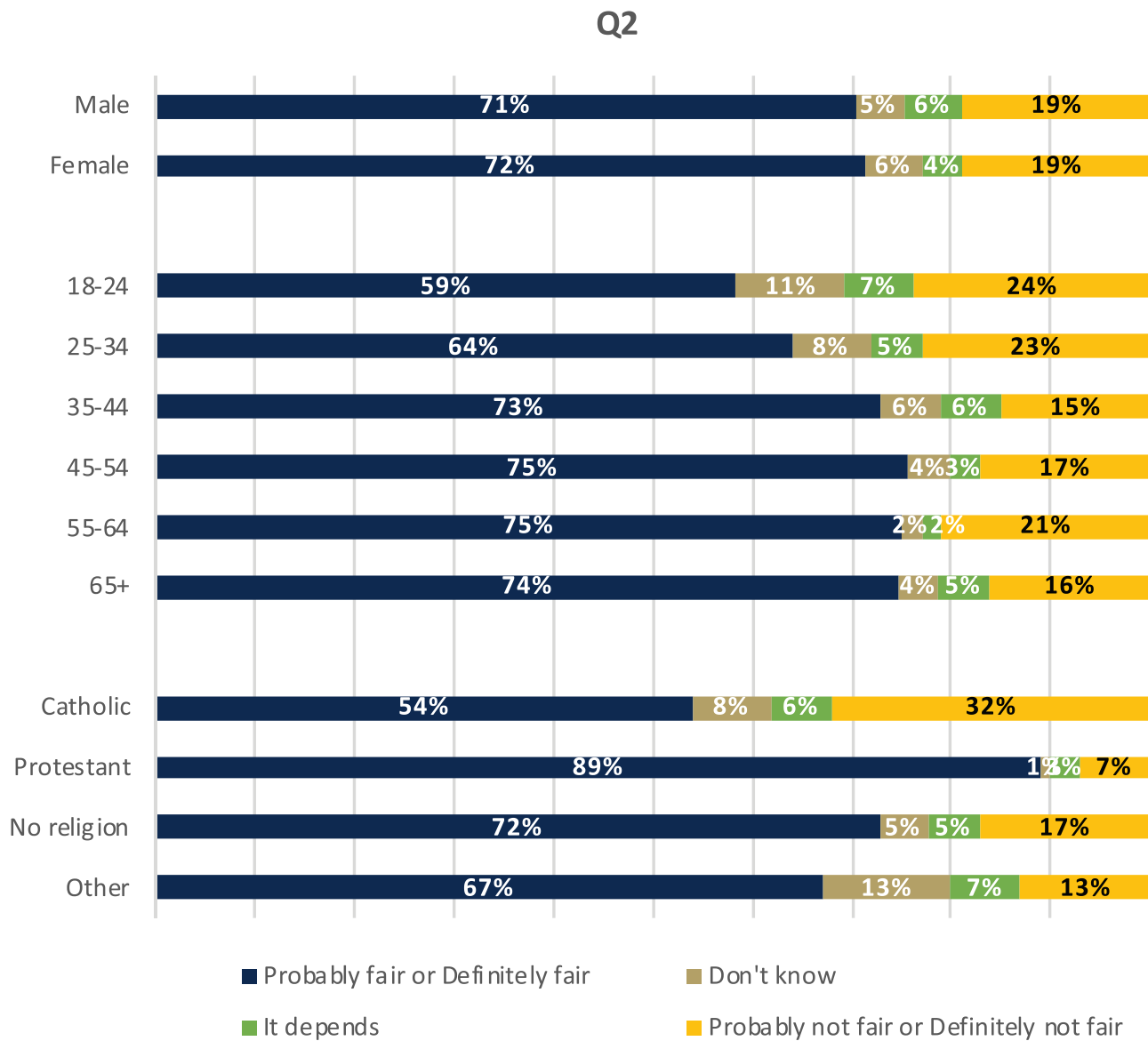
Figure 4.30: Armed Forces Covenant – Scenario question 2



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Figure 4.31 shows the demographic breakdown of responses related to the second scenario question. Gender differences were again minimal. In terms of age, the two youngest categories (18-24 and 25-34 year olds) had a slightly lower proportion of respondents (59% and 64% respectively) than the rest of the age groups who thought it was probably fair or definitely fair for an ex-soldier in England to get priority health treatment or housing if they faced special issues, such as significant injuries. Religious differences were also revealed: only 54% of Catholics believed it was probably fair or definitely fair and a further 32% thought it was probably not fair or definitely not fair. In contrast, 89% of Protestants thought it to be probably or definitely fair and only 7% thought it was probably or definitely not fair.

Figure 4.31: Demographic differences in responses to Armed Forces Covenant – Scenario question 2



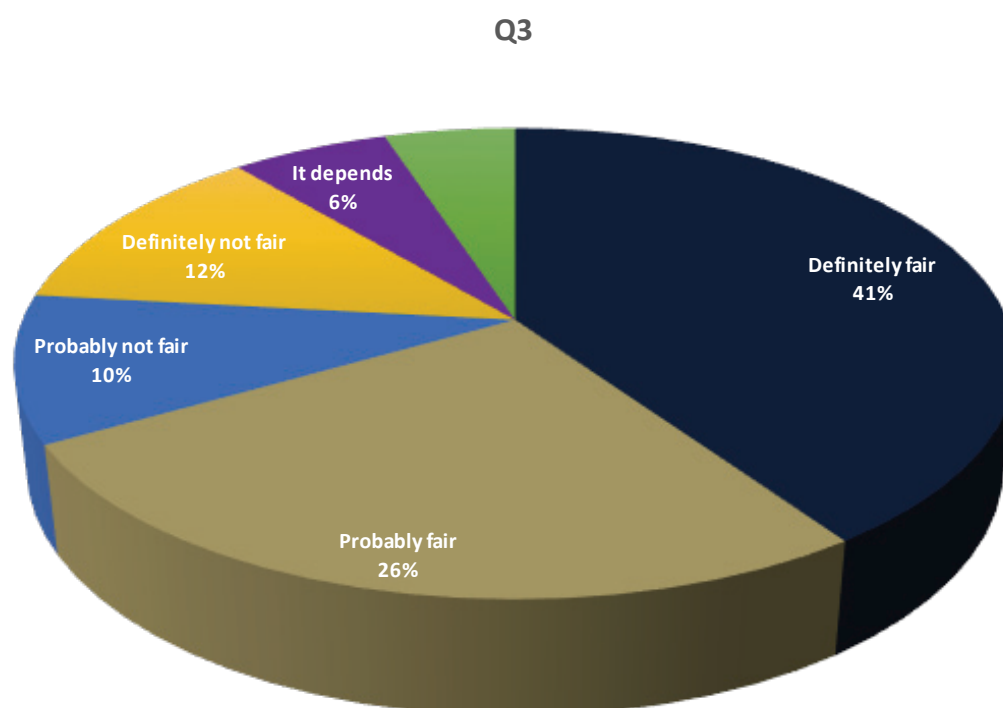
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

The third question related to the AFC was specifically about NI and it asked:

Q3: The Armed Forces Covenant does not apply in Northern Ireland. Some people would like the rules extended to here, but others feel that they are unfair or unnecessary. Suppose there was an ex-soldier living in Northern Ireland. If this soldier was given priority health treatment or housing, because they had received significant injuries, do you think that this would be generally fair or unfair?

A total of 66% respondents thought this was probably fair or definitely fair and 22% thought it was probably not fair or definitely not fair (Figure 4.32).

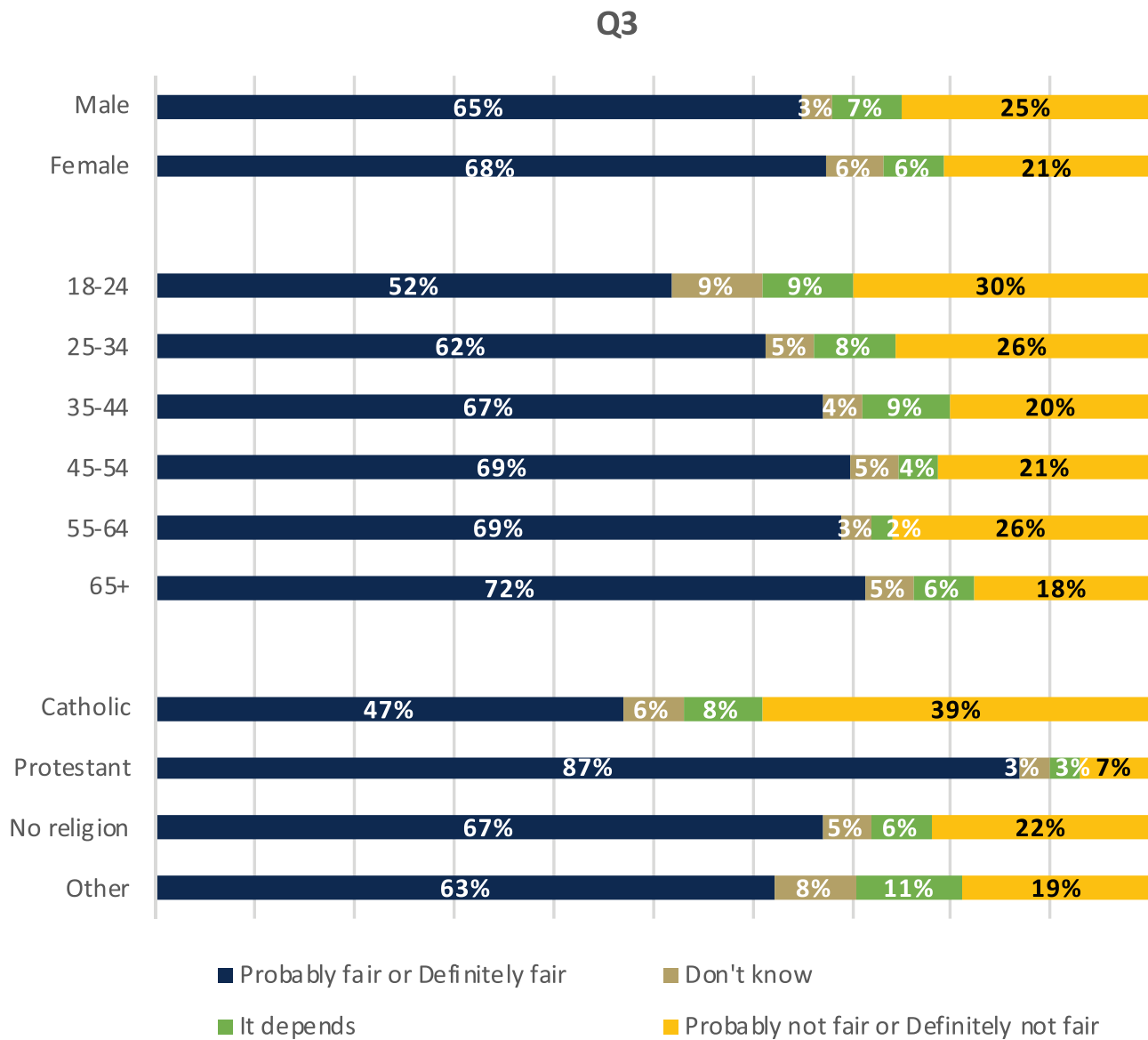
Figure 4.32: Armed Forces Covenant – Scenario question 3



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Gender differences in relation to responses to the above scenario were minimal (Figure 4.33), with only a slightly greater proportion of females (68%) than males (65%) believing it to be probably fair or definitely fair if an ex-soldier living in NI was given priority health treatment or housing because they had significant injuries. A relatively small proportion (52%) of the youngest participants (18-24 years old) thought it to be probably or definitely fair. There were larger religious differences, with only 47% of Catholics, but 87% of Protestants believing it to be probably or definitely fair.

Figure 4.33: Demographic differences in responses to Armed Forces Covenant – Scenario question 3



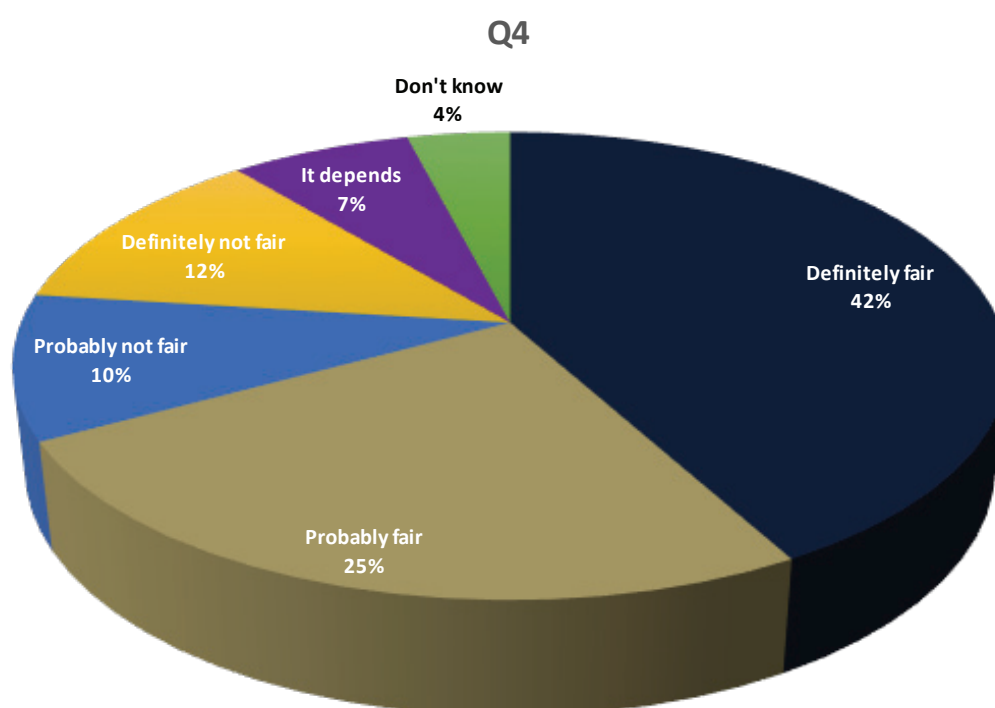
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

The fourth question asked the respondents:

Q4: Frank was a soldier in Afghanistan before returning to his home town in Belfast. Before joining the Army he was on the waiting list for a Housing Executive house, but because he spent so much time away from home, he had to go back to the bottom of the housing waiting list. Do you think that it would be fair or unfair if the rules allowed Frank to keep his place on the waiting list and not have to start again?

A total of 67% of respondents thought this was probably fair or definitely fair (Figure 4.34). A further 22% thought it was probably or definitely not fair.

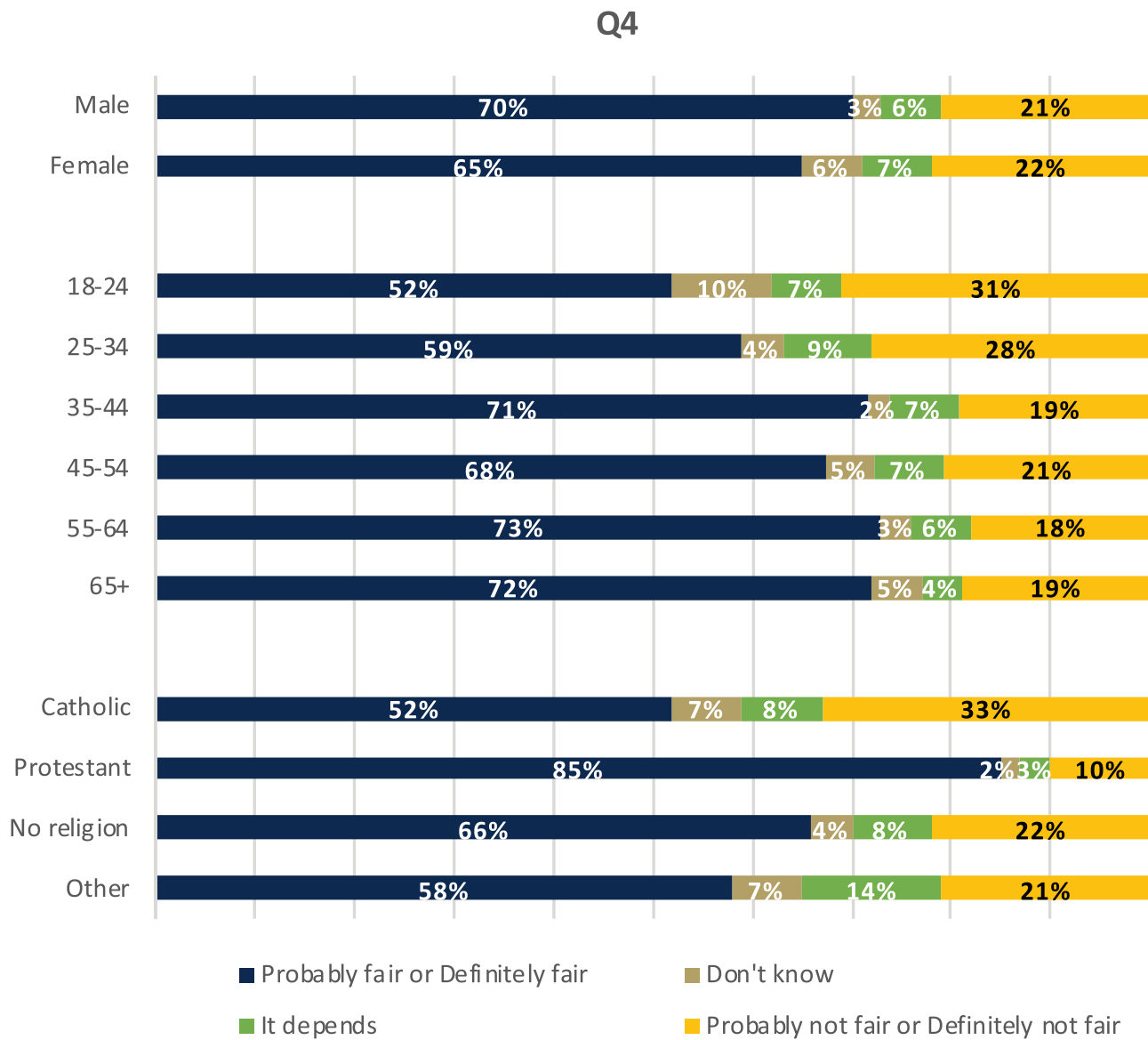
Figure 4.34: Armed Forces Covenant – Scenario question 4



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

Figure 4.35 shows the demographic differences in responses to the above scenario. A slightly greater proportion of males (70%) than females (65%) believed it to be fair for someone from the Armed Forces to keep their place on the housing waiting list whilst they are on deployment. Greater proportions of the older age groups believed this to be fair, with only 52% of the 18-24 year olds selecting probably fair or definitely fair – nearly 20% less than the age categories older than 35 years. Religious differences were again relatively large; 52% of Catholics and 85 % of Protestants believed this to be probably or definitely fair (33% of Catholics and 10% of Protestants thought this was probably or definitely not fair).

Figure 4.35: Demographic differences in responses to Armed Forces Covenant – Scenario question 4



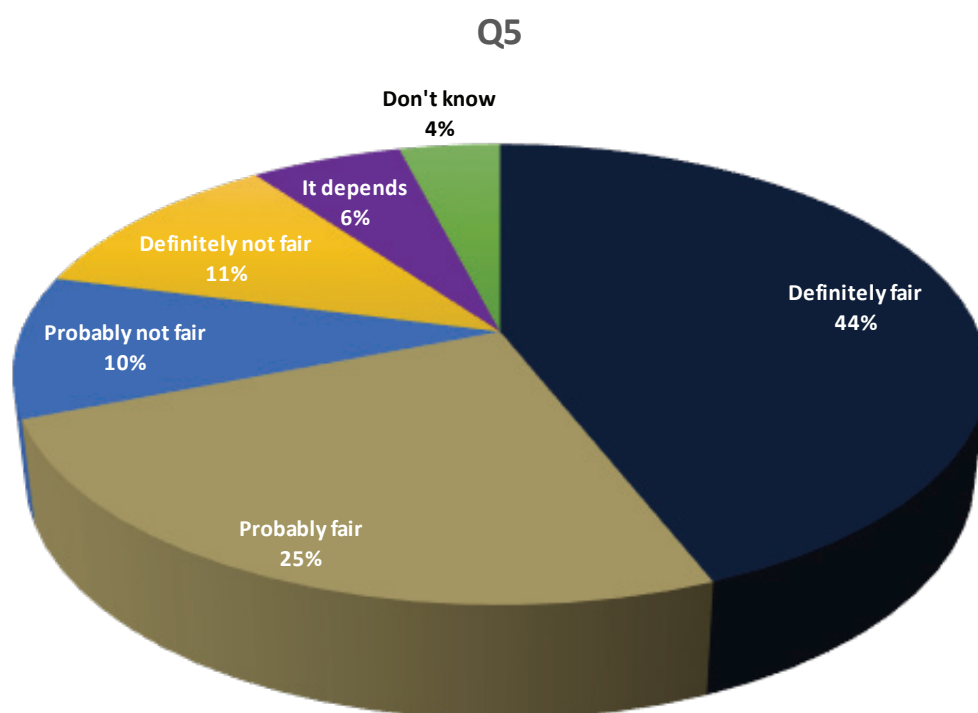
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

The final question related to the AFC read:

Q5: Anna was a soldier in Afghanistan before returning to her home in Enniskillen. She suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder because of her experiences in Afghanistan. If she lived in England she would get priority treatment for this disorder because her condition was related to her military experiences. Do you think it would be fair or unfair if the rules in Northern Ireland also allowed Anna to get priority treatment for her condition?

As shown in Figure 4.36, 69% of respondents believed that this was probably fair or definitely fair and a further 21 % thought it was probably or definitely not fair.

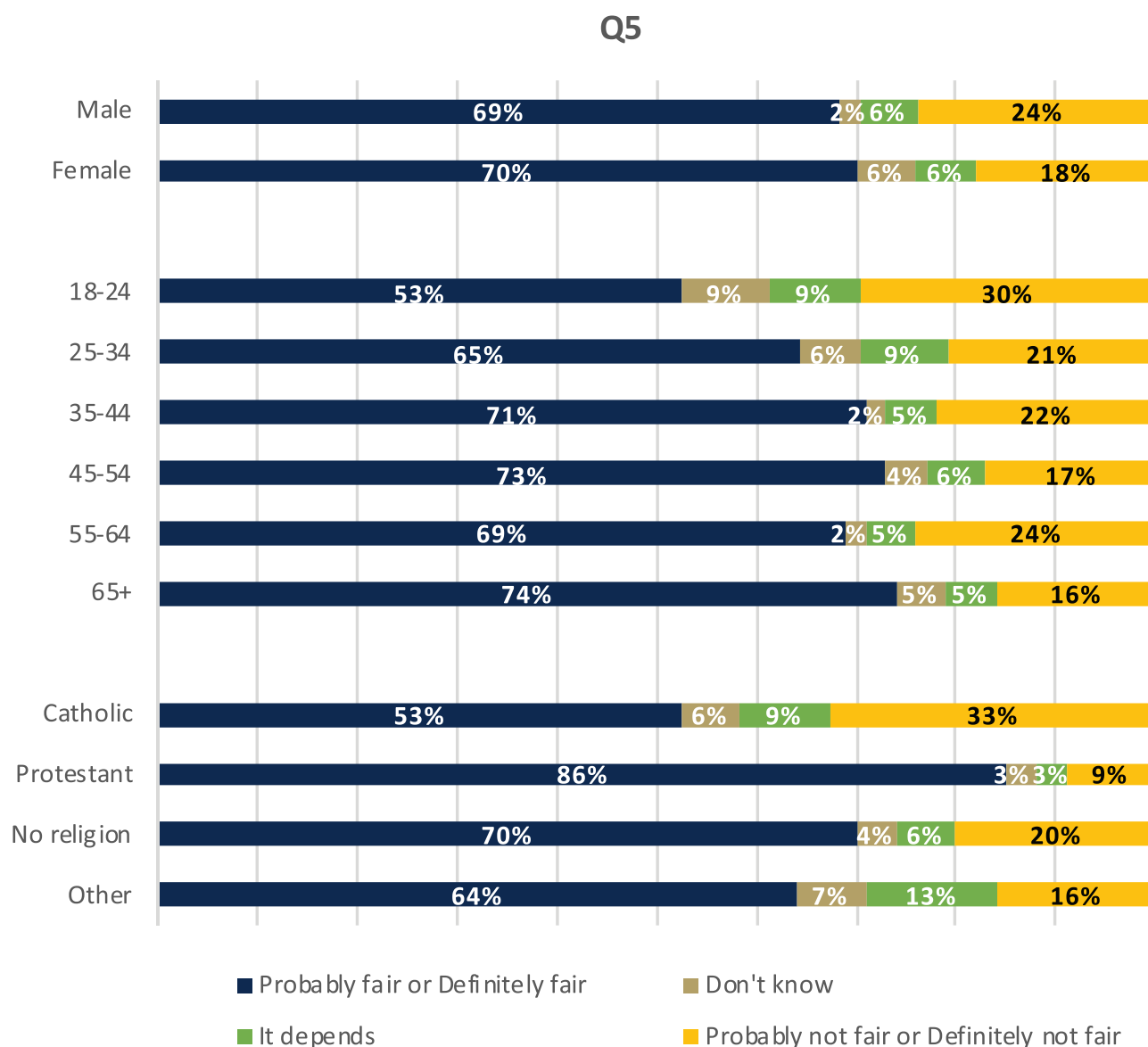
Figure 4.36: Armed Forces Covenant – Scenario question 5



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

The demographic breakdown in responses to the above scenario is presented in Figure 4.37. A slightly greater proportion of males (24%) than females (18%) thought that it was probably or definitely not fair for a soldier with a service-related mental health condition to get priority treatment in NI. A relatively small proportion (53%) of the 18-24 year olds thought that this was fair. Again, the differences were most pronounced in relation to religion, where only 53% of Catholics thought that this was probably or definitely fair, relative to 86% of Protestants. Additionally, 33% of Catholics thought that it was probably or definitely not fair, relative to 9% of Protestants.

Figure 4.37: Demographic differences in responses to Armed Forces Covenant – Scenario question 5



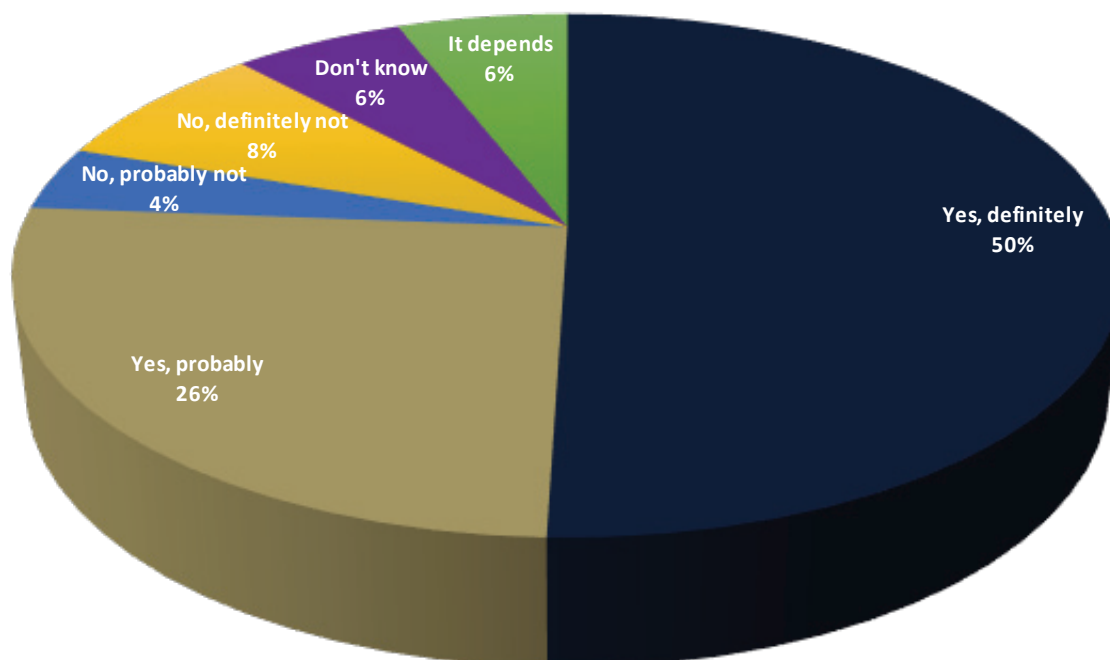
Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

4.2.8 Specialist mental health services in NI

Finally, respondents were asked if a specialist mental health service should be provided in NI for ex-military people. Just over half of the respondents (51%) answered *Yes, definitely*, with a further 26% answering *Yes, probably* (Figure 4.38). Only 12% responded *No, probably not* or *No, definitely not*. Therefore, 77% of the NI population were in favour of a specialised mental health service for veterans in NI.

Figure 4.38: Specialist mental health service in NI for UK Armed Forces

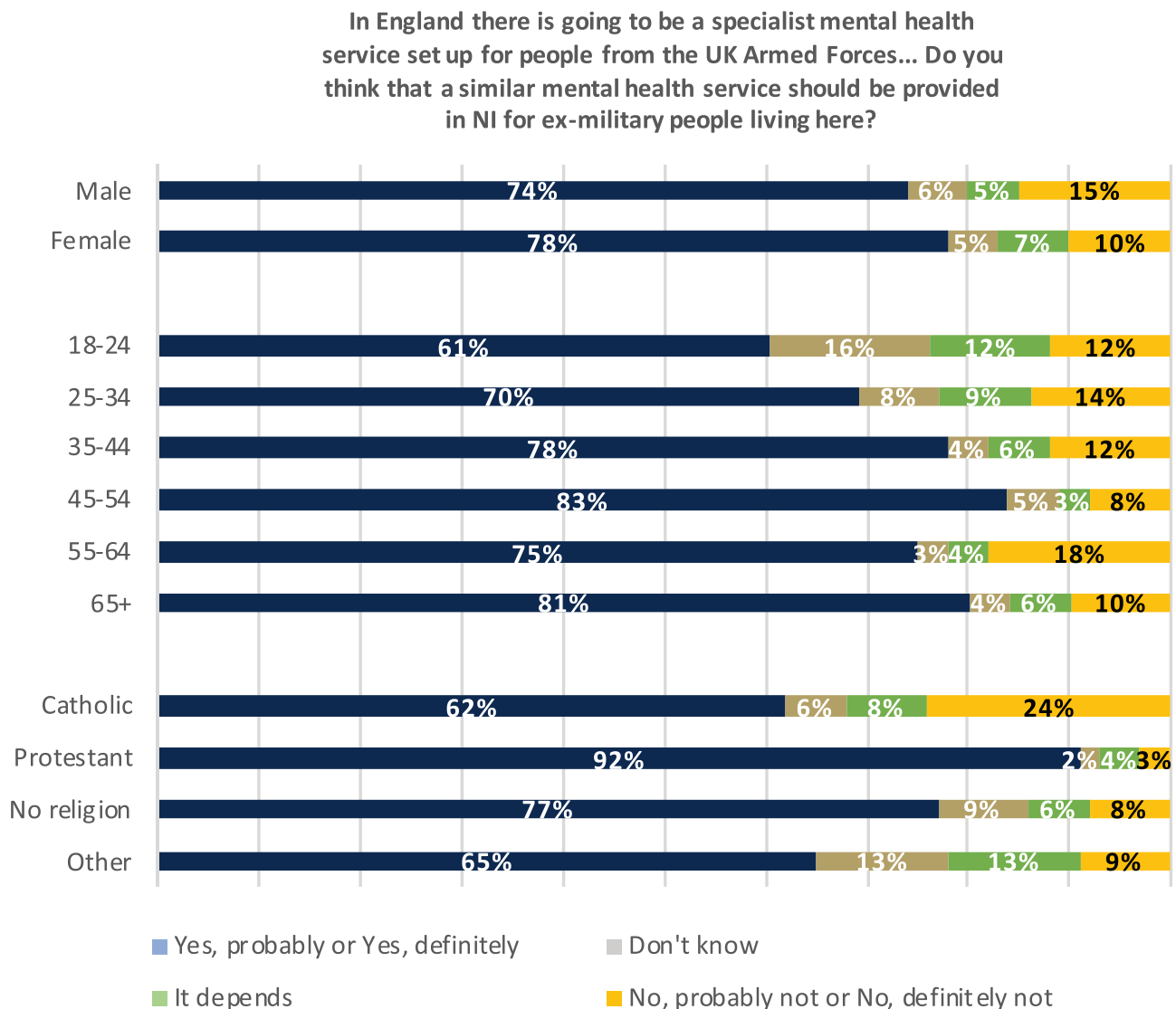
In England there is going to be a specialist mental health service set up for people from the UK Armed Forces... Do you think that a similar mental health service should be provided in NI for ex-military people living here?



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

As shown in Figure 4.39, there were only small gender differences, with 74% of males and 78% of females believing that there should probably or definitely be a specialised mental health service in NI for veterans. In terms of age differences, the youngest age category showed the least (yet still high levels of) support (61% indicated probably yes or definitely yes). A total of 62% of Catholics felt that such a service should probably or definitely be provided, relative to 92% of Protestants. A further 24% of Catholics believed that such a service should probably or definitely not be provided, compared to only 3% of Protestants.

Figure 4.39: Demographic differences in opinions about specialist mental health service in NI for UK Armed Forces



Note. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

4.3 Summary of Results

The following section summarizes the key findings. One third (33%) of the NI population have a high/very high opinion of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles, whereas a quarter of the population (26%) have a low/very low opinion.

- In relation to the UK Armed Forces today, the divide is much wider with 42% of the NI population having a high/very high opinion and 12% having a low/very low opinion.
- Based on the two points above, the opinion of the public is more favourable to the UK Armed Forces of today than to the UK Armed Forces during the Troubles.

-
- The majority of the NI public (78%) do respect the Armed Forces in general and a total of 62% do not feel more negatively towards the UK Armed Forces who served in NI relative to those who served elsewhere
 - The majority of the NI population would feel comfortable/very comfortable if someone who has been in the UK Armed Forces moved in next door to them (70%), married their close relative (70%), or if someone from their own family joined the UK Armed Forces (63%)
 - Half (50%) of the NI population believe that alcohol problems are more likely in someone who has been in the Armed Forces relative to someone who has not
 - Over half of the NI public (63%) believe that mental health problems are more likely in someone who has been in the Armed Forces relative to someone who has not
 - Fewer people in NI agree (19%) than disagree (30%) that some public services in NI discriminate against those who have been in the Armed Forces, but a large proportion (51%) are undecided or simply do not know
 - A quarter of the NI population (25%) agree that people who have been in the Armed Forces are disadvantaged in NI due to their military service, but another quarter (26%) disagree, with a half (50%) being undecided or saying they do not know⁷
 - A large majority of the NI population (80%) have not heard of the AFC
 - The majority (78%) of people in NI believe it to be fair that an ex-soldier in England is not disadvantaged in getting access to health treatments or housing due to their military service and 72% believe it to be fair if an ex-soldier in England who suffered significant injuries is given priority health treatment or housing
 - Two thirds of the NI population (66%) believe it would be fair for an ex-soldier in NI to get priority health treatment or housing if they had significant injuries
 - A similarly large proportion of the NI public (67%) also believe that it would be fair for a soldier to keep their place on a housing waiting list whilst they are on deployment
 - Almost 70% of the NI population (69%) believe that it would be fair if a soldier with service-related PTSD got priority treatment for their mental health problem
 - The majority of the NI population (77%) indicated strong support that a specialist mental health service should be provided in NI for military veterans living in the region; only 12% disagreed with this, the remainder neither agreeing nor disagreeing
 - Many of the above opinions differed depending on one's gender, age, religion, family connections with the Armed Forces, and geographical location
 - The most striking demographic differences emerged in relation to religion, with Catholics expressing markedly fewer positive and more negative opinions relative to Protestants, which reflects the impact of the legacy of the conflict, where allegiances were often drawn in line with religious and national identities

Each of the above results will be discussed in the following conclusory chapter and will be the basis of the report recommendations.

⁷ Percentage values are rounded to the nearest integer

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

Overview:

- Introduction
- Comparison between NI and the rest of the UK
- Perceptions of mental health and alcohol use
- Indicators of attitudes towards UK Armed Forces in NI
- Differentiation between people and institutions
- Implications for policy, services and the Armed Forces Covenant
- Recommendations
- Further research
- Concluding remarks

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1 we discussed a variety of different roles which can be allocated to military personnel: soldier as ‘villain’, soldier as ‘victim’ and soldier as ‘hero’ (McCartney, 2011). These stereotypical roles are complicated, convoluted and often intersect in the public imagination. In NI, where the UK Armed Forces were deployed in a formal operation for several decades, public conception of these roles may differ across groups and cannot be easily disentangled from the policies of the UK government and the actions of those who served during the Troubles. In NI, this status of ‘villain’, for example, may have potency because many soldiers must live alongside communities who might have felt victimised by the UK Armed Forces. The affording of ‘victim’ status also has certain implications, given the role of the Commission for Victims and Survivors⁸ and the associated funding and services allocated specifically to those who are identified as belonging to these categories. Finally, while there is clearly a strong show of public support from certain components of the population in NI, many veterans living in NI believe that their service goes largely unrecognised, and the status of ‘hero’ is one which eludes those veterans living in the region (Armour et al., 2017b). Many veterans report feeling that the public activities which encourage the ‘hero’ status (e.g. wearing medals in public, military parades) are seen as unacceptable in NI, thus adding to a sense of alienation experienced by many in this population (Armour et al., 2017b). Given that feeling a lack of support from the public has a deleterious effect on the mental health of some veterans (Karstoft et al., 2015), and that a perception of the political sensitivities surrounding military service has affected the implementation of the AFC in NI (House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2013), it has been important to develop an evidence base which interrogates public attitudes towards this group. This chapter will examine the findings in the wider context of the UK and NI and discuss their relevance to policy, public services and the movement towards ‘normalising’ attitudes towards military institutions in a post-conflict society.

⁸ The Commission for Victims and Survivors was established in May 2008 under the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2008. It is a Non-departmental Public Body (NDPB) of The Executive Office of the NI Assembly.

5.2 Comparison between NI and the rest of the UK

As discussed in Chapter 2, public attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces across GB are overwhelmingly positive. We hypothesised correctly that this would be lower in NI, due to the legacy of the Troubles. However, while the overall rates of approval were lower in NI, there were similarities in patterns across demographic indicators: in both the GB and NI, younger people tend to be slightly less likely to be supportive than older people (NatCen Social Research, 2012). Additionally, NI and GB results show parallels relating to the apparent willingness of the public to separate out individuals who serve in the Armed Forces from the popularity of particular missions or operations; with the majority of respondents in GB reporting that their views remain unaffected by particular military operations (NatCen Social Research, 2012), and those in NI stating that they do not feel more negatively about those who served in NI than those who have served in other conflicts. It is worth noting, however, that when those in NI were asked to give an opinion on the *actions* of military personnel during the NI conflict, there was a more significant discrepancy between demographic groups in positive opinions. Overall, however, in spite of the particularities of NI, many of the public responses to the UK Armed Forces are consistent with those reported in GB (NatCen Social Research, 2012).

5.3 Perceptions of mental health and alcohol misuse

The findings revealed that the public perceive members of the UK Armed Forces as being more vulnerable to experiencing mental ill health, and more likely to misuse alcohol. This may be related to how they are often portrayed in films or television programmes, or in regular reporting of poor mental health, PTSD and suicides amongst this population (Brooke, 2017). For example, the UK newspaper *The Telegraph* (Nicholls, May 22, 2018) recently ran an article entitled *Youngest soldier sent to Iraq killed himself after horrors of war left him feeling 'useless', inquest hears*, which discussed the suicide of a former young soldier who had enlisted at 16 after being inspired by soldiers on television. The soldier was deployed to Iraq at 18 years old and then faced difficulties readjusting to civilian life and was eventually discharged from the Army after failing a drugs test at the age of 22. Similar scenarios, where veterans are portrayed as having difficulties adjusting to civilian life and turning to substance misuse are visible in films such as *Born on the Fourth of July* (Stone, 1989). Such assumptions can have a very negative impact on military personnel returning to civilian life in that they may be fearful of reporting that they have a problem, in case it impacts on their job prospects or relationships with others. Furthermore, veterans with mental health or alcohol related problems who served in NI may be reluctant to seek help for security reasons (Armour et al., 2017b).

The majority of respondents in NI believed that those in the military have a problem with alcohol misuse. This is consistent with Lord Ashcroft's 2017 review of public opinions towards veterans in the whole of UK, which found that 51% of the population thought that alcohol addiction is somewhat or much more likely in someone who has been in the Armed Forces compared to people in general. There were some demographic and geographical differences in these perceptions, with those from Protestant backgrounds more likely to identify this as a problem. Respondents in Fermanagh and Omagh (the highest percentage in NI) are almost twice as likely to view the UK Armed Forces as having issues with alcohol misuse than in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon (the lowest percentage). It is possible that this is related to the high rates of home service deaths and injuries incurred in this area, including some high-profile incidents (e.g. the Enniskillen bombing) where people with military associations were targeted.

The majority of respondents in NI believed that poor mental health is likely to be higher in those who have served in the Armed Forces than in the general population. Again, this reflects the discussion in

Lord Ashcroft's 2017 review, but is more moderate than the 78% of the UK population who thought that mental health problems were somewhat or much more likely in someone who has been in the Armed Forces (Ashcroft, 2017). Although not directly comparable, the current study and the study conducted by Lord Ashcroft seem to suggest that a greater proportion of the UK population as a whole, compared to the population in NI, believe that mental health problems disproportionately affect those who have been in the Armed Forces. Additionally, a higher percentage of Protestants than Catholics believed that mental health problems are more likely in members of the Armed Forces. There were also geographical differences, with Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon once again having the lowest proportion of respondents who thought poor mental health was more common in the UK Armed Forces. The highest proportion was in Belfast once again, this reflects an area where a lot of incidents related to the troubles were experienced.

The forthcoming quantification report from the NIVHWS could provide more insight into these geographical differences. Based on what we know about the effect of increased connections to Armed Forces on public attitudes (discussed in depth in the next section), once there is a better understanding of where the highest proportion of veterans in NI are located, we can assess whether or not having regular contact with someone from the Armed Forces (e.g. in an area where there are likely to be more of them and where they are more likely to disclose their service) affects whether or not they make assumptions about poor mental health and alcohol misuse.

The NIVHWS Health and Wellbeing Survey includes a number of questions on mental wellbeing and drug and alcohol use. The findings from this survey will provide some comparators for these public assumptions. It is interesting to note that research conducted with the Armed Forces veterans residing in England has found that veterans are actually no more likely to have a mental health or alcohol-related problem than the general population (Woodhead et al., 2011a). In the older, National Service, veterans the rates of mental health problems are even lower than those in the general population of the same age (Woodhead et al., 2011b). In serving UK personnel, the rates of common mental health disorders (anxiety and depression) appear to be twice as frequent as in the general working employed population (Goodwin et al., 2015). It is, however, important to note, that unless we have reliable information on the numbers of the Armed Forces personnel and veterans from the upcoming Census, we will never know the true extent of the alcohol and mental health-related problems in this population. Nevertheless, the existing data suggests that although the serving personnel may be more likely to have some mental health issues than the general population, over the years, as the personnel retire and become veterans, these rates even out.

5.4 Indicators of attitudes towards UK Armed Forces in NI

As discussed above, there were a number of similarities between responses from the wider UK population and those in NI. Given the unique setting of NI discussed throughout this report and the regionally specific questions used in the NILT, it is important to discuss the kind of variables that were indicators of positive and negative attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces in NI. As part of the analyses, we looked at gender, age, religious identification, geographical location, and strength of contact with Armed Forces personnel. These will be discussed in depth below, as will the relationships and overlap between some of the indicators.

Age

The most positive attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces in NI were held by the oldest age group (65+), with the lowest percentage of positive attitudes in the youngest age group. There are a number of potential reasons why younger people may be less likely to have positive views of the UK Armed Forces, in spite of not having direct exposure to the military on active duty in the region. It could be related to a lack of more

commonplace or relational contact with those who are in the Armed Forces or a lack of having had family in the Armed Forces. Given the continued segregation of communities through housing and schools, for many in rural or socio-economically deprived areas, there has been little opportunity to facilitate positive exposure to those who have served in the Armed Forces. Other studies have attributed more polarised political attitudes of young people in NI to the very fact that they have not been exposed to the ‘worst’ of the violence and conflict experienced by their elders (Byrne & Bell, 2006; McGrellis, 2011). However, similar results were found across Britain, so these opinions are not exclusive to the NI situation. The lack of positive attitudes in this cohort may be due to a number of factors, such as negative reporting and over-sensationalising by the media (Brooke, 2017; Hines et al., 2015), or by opposition to UK involvement in overseas conflicts (Strachan, 2000). Public engagement activities may help improve understanding and in turn improve public attitudes towards the Armed Forces across the community in NI.

Geographical location

There were marked differences in positive and negative attitudes across some council areas. More than half of those living in the Antrim and Newtownabbey (55%), and Ards and North Down (53%) areas had high or very high opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles. In contrast, more than half of those living in Derry and Strabane area (51%) had low or very low opinions of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles. A great proportion of low or very low opinions was also reported by respondents in Newry, Mourne and Down (41%) and in Mid Ulster (34%) areas. These results reflect the political make-up of the councils in each of these areas – with the areas having the highest rates of approval consistently demonstrating higher rates of voting for Unionist parties, and those with lower rates of approval in areas where there is a high proportion of votes for Republican and Nationalist parties. Furthermore, some areas were impacted by the Troubles to a greater extent. For example, the Derry/Londonderry area and Fermanagh and Omagh council area witnessed some of the worst atrocities during the Troubles, including Bloody Sunday, the Omagh Bombing and the Enniskillen bombing. Moreover, the deprivation that came with the 30 years of civil conflict had a greater impact on some areas than others, particularly the border regions. Indeed, the areas with the most negative opinions of the UK Armed Forces are some of the most economically deprived areas in NI.

Religious identification

Numerous people identifying as Catholic and those from Catholic communities have negative/very negative memories of how the UK Armed Forces acted during the Troubles. As can often happen where there is a prolonged Armed Forces presence in civilian areas, many felt intimidated and discriminated against by the military. There were social and political objections to intervention by the British government more generally during this time, which also impacted on people’s views of the military and their operations. For those whose communities had a heavy Army presence and witnessed some of the worst violence of the conflict, they are more likely to have had negative contact with the military. Check points and house searches were common (yet not exclusively) in Catholic communities (particularly in more socioeconomically deprived areas), with many people from their community interned by the military, often for what they perceived to be negligible reasons. It is to be expected therefore that such memories led to more negative opinions in such communities. Furthermore, many of these negative attitudes appear to have been passed down to the next generation.

Relationships and contact with Armed Forces

Hines et al. (2015) refer to the civilian-military gap, which they describe as a social distance which can arise due to a lack of contact between the Armed Forces and the general population, as well as a lack of shared

experiences. Due to the history of the military in NI, this gap is understandably likely to be wide, and therefore careful consideration needs to be given to enhance ways in which to address this divide. This becomes particularly pertinent given the findings of this survey, which indicate that family connections to the Armed Forces affect are related to differential responses to many questions.

Those with strong family connections with the military had more positive opinions towards military personnel. Connections were particularly important for Catholic respondents as they significantly predicted more positive attitudes. Protestant attitudes were more positive, irrespective of whether they had connections with the military. Those with family connections were more likely to determine that Armed Forces personnel were likely to be discriminated by NI public services and also felt that they were disadvantaged as a result of their career. Generally, however, the majority of the general public did not appear to know how the Armed Forces were treated by public services in NI or if they were disadvantaged. Further research in this area therefore could be warranted.

As would be expected, a higher percentage of respondents who had strong family connections to the Armed Forces have heard about the AFC (as opposed to those with few or no connections). However, almost a half of those with strong military connections indicated that they did not know what the AFC was. This would suggest that even though the AFC is not yet in force in NI, there needs to be greater awareness about it, and the benefits it can bring, particularly among veterans and those with a family connection. This is also important in terms of mediating expectations of the AFC, as previous research in NI (Armour et al., 2017b) has shown there to be a discrepancy between what some veterans assume the AFC will provide versus the actual implementation of the Covenant.

5.5 Differentiation between people and institutions

While there is not a drastic difference in the numbers of those who approved or highly approved of the Armed Forces today versus during the Troubles, the proportion of people who reported low or very low opinions about the Armed Forces today is less than half of the proportion of those who reported low or very low opinions in relation to the actions of the Armed Forces during the Troubles. This demonstrates the ability for people to differentiate between the institution overall, and the policies and actions taken in the past. This notable progress is a positive sign in a post-conflict society where segregation remains substantial, and where post-agreement political affiliation has become more rather than less polarised (Wilson, 2016). Furthermore, the high rates of comfort with close association with members of the UK Armed Forces and the willingness for a significant proportion who, in accordance with rates of approval of the UK Armed Forces, believed that this same group should be entitled to specialist services, shows a separation between feelings about institutions and feelings about individual citizens. Again, this is an encouraging sign for progression of the normalisation of some of the institutions which played a significant role in the Troubles.

There are a number of findings which demonstrate this ‘humanisation’ of the individual soldier. When asked about preferential treatment for those who served in the UK Armed Forces, the majority of respondents indicated that they should not be disadvantaged due to their time in the military and should receive priority treatment for mental health problems. Furthermore, the majority of respondents indicated that they would be comfortable if someone from the Armed Forces moved in next door, married a close relative, or someone in their family joined the Armed Forces. While rates were lower for Catholics than Protestants, as would be anticipated, the responses were overall positive. Due to a lack of prior research in this area however it is not possible to determine if there is a true improvement in attitudes and opinions

of the UK Armed Forces in NI. The current research therefore provides vital information which means that attitudes can be compared in the future to see if indeed there is an improvement.

There are potentially strong implications for mental and social wellbeing in these findings as well. While the overall view of the Armed Forces by the British public tends to be favourable, the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey conducted with almost 28,000 UK Regular Armed Forces personnel found that only 41% of them felt they were valued by society (MOD, 2017). Since the view of the Armed Forces is more negative in NI, it is most likely that veterans feel even less valued. Indeed, recent research revealed that veterans in NI who served during Operation Banner believe that they have been 'demonized' and do not receive recognition for their work (Armour et al., 2017b). We know from other literature that feeling unsupported by the public can lead to poor mental health in veterans (Karstoft et al., 2015) and has a deleterious effect on their willingness to seek help, and on their general wellbeing (Palmer et al., 2017).

Veterans in NI and England hold views that are not in line with actual public attitudes. Again, increased interaction between the public and those associated with the UK Armed Forces could help to address these discordant perceptions.

5.6 Implications for policy, services and the Armed Forces Covenant

While very few respondents in NI were aware of the AFC, the responses to individual scenarios consistently indicated support for its principles. Over three quarters of those surveyed were supportive of a specialist mental health service for veterans in NI (a higher rate than in England), although rates of support were lower from Catholics. This may be related to the fact that the survey found that the majority of respondents believe that military personnel are much more likely to have mental health and alcohol related problems than the general public – though it is worth noting that in England people were *more* likely to view military personnel as being vulnerable to poor mental health than in NI, but *less* likely to endorse the development of specialist mental health services than in NI.

The support of the majority respondents for specialist mental health services for UK Armed Forces Personnel, and for exceptions to be made in allocation of housing and support for special treatment in the provision of healthcare provide a clear evidence that there is little public opposition to the implementation of the AFC in NI. It also matches with the expressed wishes of veterans in the region for the development of a dedicated Veterans' Centre, which could provide veteran-specific support in the region (Armour et al., in press). These findings, coupled with interpretations of the Equality legislation which would allow for these provisions to be made under Section 75 based on other precedents (House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2013), provide a potential impetus to re-frame the debate on the formal adoption of the AFC in NI.

The findings show significant discrepancies across religious groups and geographical locations in attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces. This indicates that there are still legacy issues in a large part of the population which impact on the way military institutions are viewed. There has been significant progress made in acceptance of the police in communities in NI where this would not have been possible before. This was the result of significant institutional adaptations, public campaigns, and pro-active recruitment drives (including quotas). Given the impact of the legacy of the Troubles on the attitudes of a significant proportion of the population in NI, it could be beneficial to take a more pro-active approach to improving views of the UK Armed forces in the region; borrowing from best practice of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and being led by institutions and political leaders.

5.7 Recommendations

Reflecting on the key findings of this report and following on from the previous work carried out in *Supporting and Serving Veterans in Northern Ireland*, we have developed a number of practical recommendations based on the experiences relayed to us throughout this research to date. These recommendations are for the consideration of policy-makers in MOD, NIO and the NI Executive. There are also recommendations for service providers and care commissioners across the statutory and voluntary sectors:

Key Area	Recommendation	Implications
Community Integration and building of relationships between veterans and the community	Local authorities and Armed Forces Charities should work together to develop and promote public engagement activities for veterans in local communities; especially those aimed at targeting different geographical areas and younger people.	Develop improved veteran and community cohesion, trust and understanding helping to strengthen and normalise relationships across NI.
Data collection and monitoring	Public sector agencies should consider monitoring techniques which include veteran status where possible and appropriate. For detailed recommendations on this, see Armour et al. (2017a).	This has the potential to improve understanding of outcomes for this population, and importantly (given the lack of confidence that public services are not discriminating against UK Armed Forces personnel), provide evidence of fair and equal treatment for this population.
Awareness Training	A public facing campaign promoting positive images of veteran mental health and addressing perceptions of alcohol misuse may be beneficial. It may be possible to use data from the forthcoming NIVHWS survey, which includes evidence about mental health and alcohol use in this population.	By addressing the apparent discrepancy between public perceptions of mental health and alcohol misuse, there is the potential to reduce stigma and mitigate reluctance of veterans to disclose these issues for fear of how it may affect their employment and social networks.

Awareness raising about the Armed Forces Covenant amongst service personnel and veterans in NI	A public engagement exercise aimed at ex-Service personnel and their families about the Armed Forces Covenant could improve understanding of the Covenant, its principles, and the situation specific to NI.	It is also important that veterans know what services they can expect to receive, as previous research has revealed a disconnect between what veterans expect and services provided in line with the AFC.
Utilise new and forthcoming evidence base to inform ongoing debate on the adoption of the Armed Forces Covenant in NI	The development of an exploratory committee or working group looking at the issues associated with implementation of the Covenant in NI could help to address real and perceived problems with implementation of the Covenant. In line with recommendations in the Armour et al. (2017a) report, the group could also collect evidence to compare outcomes for veterans in NI versus the rest of the UK.	Having a dedicated group would help coordinate information and debates relating to the AFC. It could examine issues associated with political sensitivities, legal barriers, and language usage in NI. The collection of an evidence base would allow for comparison of outcomes in NI with those in the rest of the UK; which would help distinguish whether or not the lack of formal adoption of the Covenant negatively affects veterans in NI.

5.8 Further Research

The previous reports by the NIVHWS have all highlighted the relative absence of research specifically on NI veterans. This research has addressed some gaps in knowledge related to the impact of the legacy of sectarian conflict on public perception of the UK Armed Forces. However, there are a number of potential avenues for further research:

- *The annual incorporation of military-related questions in the NILT survey:* This report presents the findings of the first questions to be asked in the NILT relating to NI public perceptions of the UK Armed Forces. However, this only presents as snapshot in time. It would therefore, be useful to have these same questions (and maybe others) included annually so that public opinions can be mapped over time and any changes highlighted;
- *Explore younger people's opinions of the UK Armed Forces:* Given many younger people report less positive attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces, despite many of them growing up in post-conflict NI, it would prove useful to focus on those perceptions. This could be done through the incorporation of similar questions included in the Young Life and Times Survey;
- *Identify whether UK Armed Forces personnel are discriminated by some NI statutory services:* The NILT data indicated that respondents with family connections to current or former UK Armed Forces personnel were more likely to think service personnel are discriminated by NI public services and disadvantaged in the NI employment market. Thus, further research in this area could be warranted;

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- *Examine how the NI (and UK as a whole) public develop their perceptions and attitudes of the UK Armed Forces:* The NILT data indicated that the majority of respondents thought current and former military personnel were more likely to have a mental health issue and alcohol problems than the general population. Given that available data suggests otherwise (Hotopf et al., 2006), it would be useful to explore the transmission mechanisms underlying such assumptions due to their potentially very negative impact on military personnel returning to civilian life. For example, such veterans may be fearful of reporting that they have either or both of an alcohol or mental health problem, due to the negatively held public perceptions that they are more likely to suffer such issues, and employers may feel less willing to take a chance on ex-Service personnel if they feel that there is a higher likelihood that they are suffering such problems. In both cases, this might impact ex-Service personnel's job prospects and/or relationships with others (Armour et al., 2017b).

5.9 Concluding Remarks

This report shows that while some groups in NI still hold negative views about the UK Armed Forces, the majority of respondents have positive attitudes towards the UK Armed Forces. This is in spite of the fact that veterans themselves feel undervalued and even demonised as a result of their time in the military. Many of the findings were consistent with the rest of the UK, with notable exceptions of discrepancies across religious affiliation and geographical regions (both of which could be explained by the historical context of the Troubles in NI). Furthermore, the findings show wide-scale public support for the provision of tailored services to veterans, as well as special treatment by public service providers where required. These findings indicate the willingness for the public to separate individual soldiers from the institution of the UK Armed Forces. There are policy implications for these findings; particularly around the implementation of the AFC in NI, and the development of veteran-specific services in the region in line with other parts of the UK.

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