



Public perceptions of veterans and the armed forces

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Method and sample (Qualitative)

- 4x 90 minute online groups and 4x 120 minute face-to-face groups were used to explore perceptions of the UK armed forces, looking in particular detail at perceptions of veterans and their reintegration into civilian life;
- Groups were split by age and all groups contained a mix of social grade, gender, age (within the specified range), targeted particular groups as shown below, and included business owners/senior managers.



Group	N	Age	Gender	Other
1. Edinburgh	10	34-55	M = 4, F = 6	General public, parents
2. Oakham	9	55+	M = 7, F = 2	General public, parents
3. London	10	25-34	M = 5, F = 5	General public
4. Newport	6	25-34	M = 3, F = 3	General public
5. Online	9	18+	M = 4, F = 5	Those who regularly donate to a veterans charity
6. Online	9	18+	M = 4, F = 5	Teachers
7. Online	10	18+	M = 6, F = 4	Would consider joining the armed forces
8. Online	7	18+	M = 3, f = 4	Family of armed forces veterans

Method and sample (Quantitative)

- Quantitative interviewing took place between 12 June to the 28th June 2018. In total 2,849 interviews were collected using a self complete, online methodology.
- The sample is weighted to be reflective of the UK population (16+) based on age, gender, social grade, region and ethnicity (BAME vs. non BAME).
- Northern Ireland was over sampled and subsequently down-weighted to allow for a robust base size within this region.
- All sample was taken from the YouGov research panel.
- In addition to the main body of the survey, the questionnaire also contained an image testing section. This section asked people to state whether they associated a series of images with their perception of a UK Armed Forces veteran. Respondents were given 10 seconds to make their choice for each image. This section was placed at the end of the survey so as not to affect any of the preceding questions. Detail regarding this section is provided in the relevant section of the report.



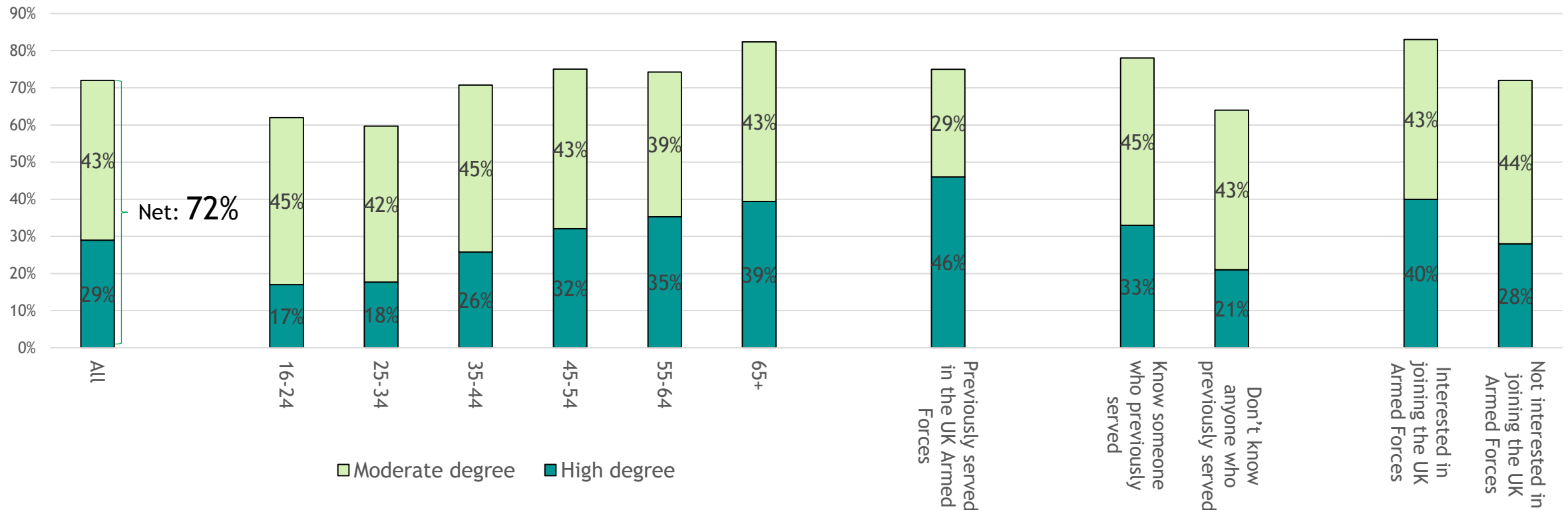
Serving in the UK Armed Forces

Degree to which character is defined by serving

Overall, just under three quarters (72%) say that they think a person's character is defined to at least a moderate degree by serving and 29% say it is defined to a high degree.

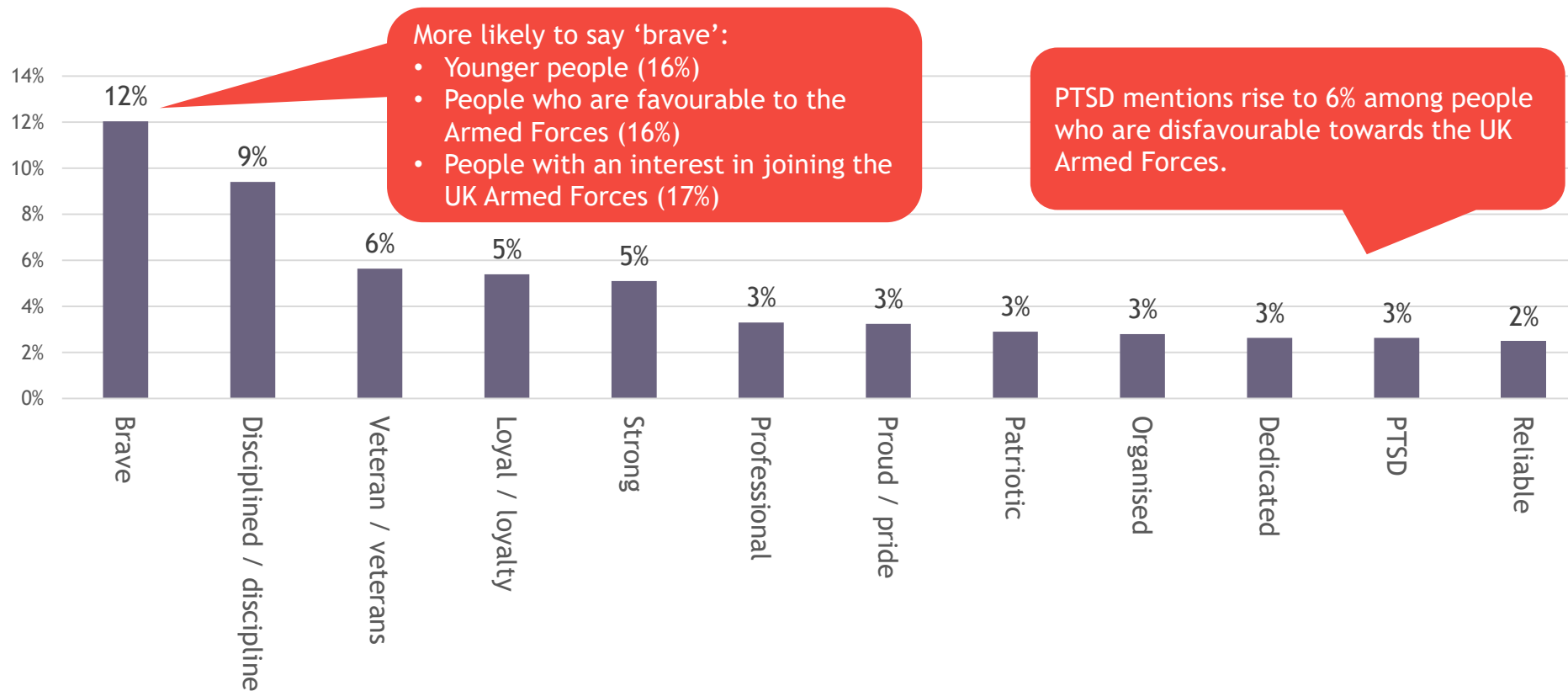
Among those who personally served, the perception to which a person's character is affected is even more profound with just under half (46%) saying it is defined to a high degree.

% who say a person's character is defined to a high/moderate degree by serving in the UK Armed Forces



Top of mind association with people who have previously served in the UK Armed Forces

In general the words which are chosen to describe people who have previously served in the UK Armed Forces are positive in nature with the most common associations being made with bravery and discipline. The most mentioned negative description is with PTSD (3%).

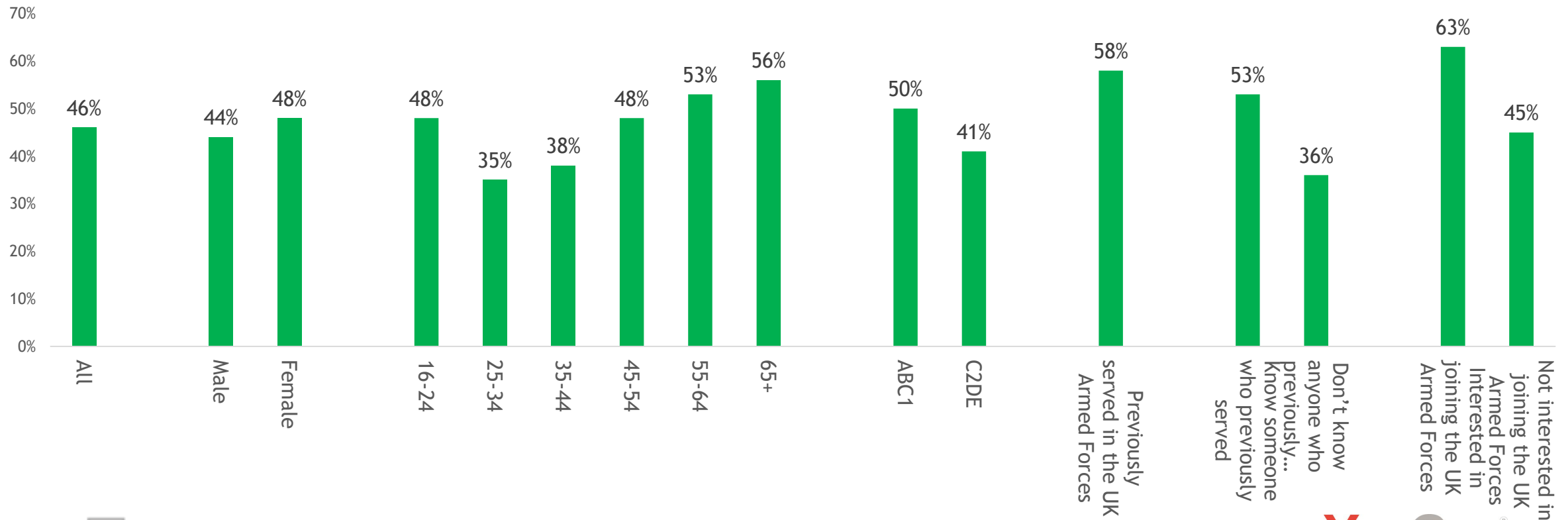


* Responses only shown if chosen by >1%

Top of mind association with people who have previously served in the UK Armed Forces

Overall just under half think of a positive word when considering those who previously served in the UK Armed Forces. Only 14% think of a negative association.

% net positive top of mind association

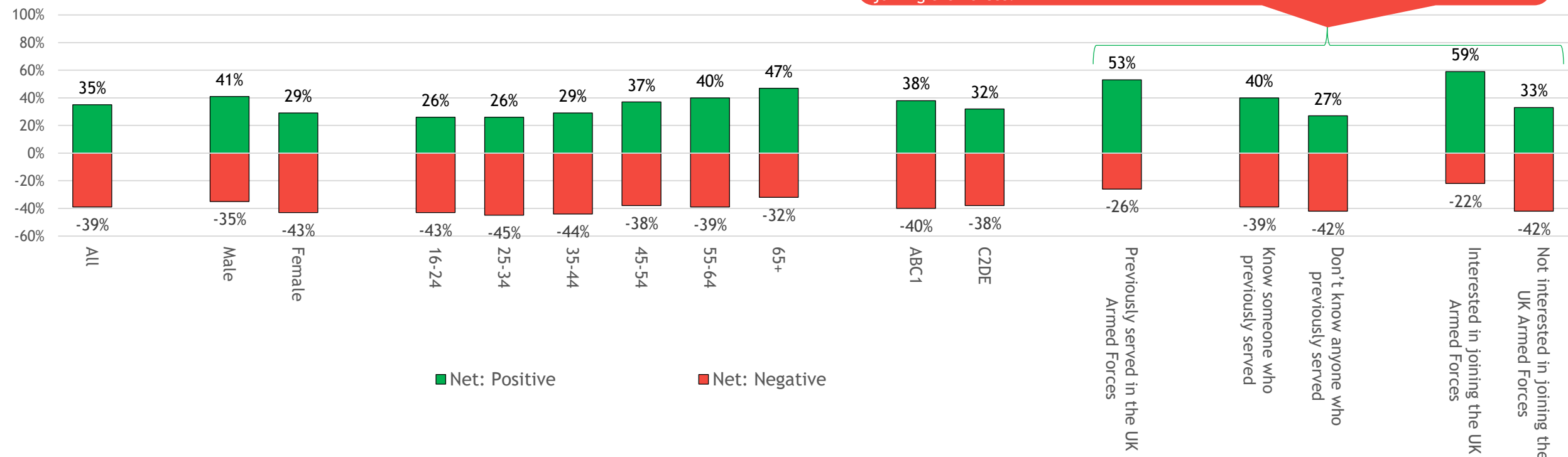


Impact of serving when returning to civilian life

Overall, there is roughly an even split of those who think serving in the UK Armed Forces has a positive impact (35%) when returning to civilian life compared to those who think it has a negative impact (39%).

Those who think serving has a positive effect tend to be male, older and in the ABC1 social grade.

The number who think serving has a positive effect (53%) is twice as many as those who think that it has had a negative impact (26%) among people who have previously been in the UK Armed Forces. Those who think it has a positive effect are also more prevalent among people who know ex-Forces members and those who are interested in joining the Forces.

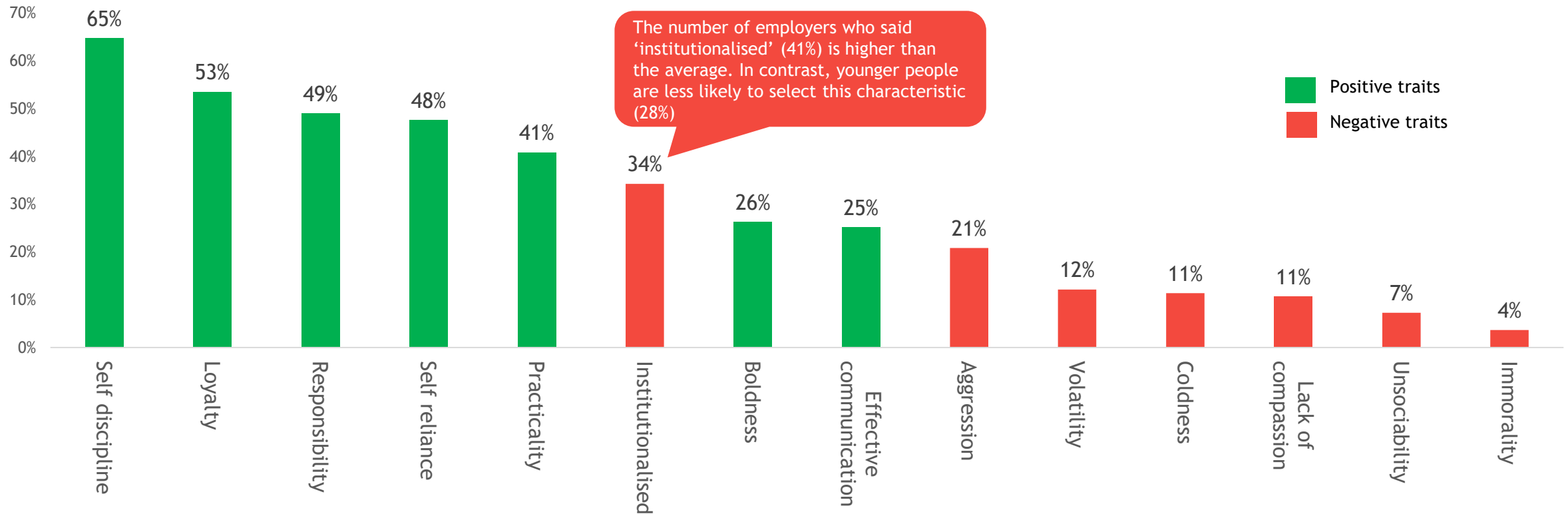


Characteristics of ex-UK Armed Forces - overall

Seven out of the top eight characteristics associated with those who have served in the UK Armed Forces are positive, with self discipline (65%) and loyalty (53%) chosen by the majority. Just under half also think that ex-Forces members are responsible and self reliant.

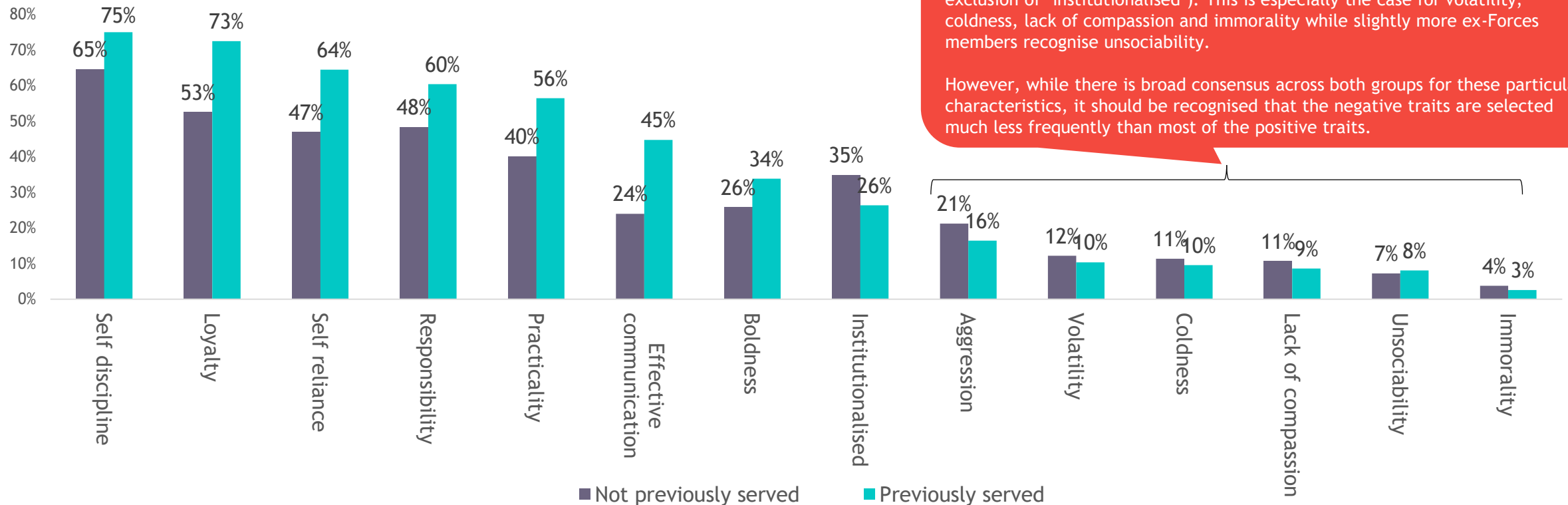
The most common negative trait is 'institutionalised' chosen by just over a third of people (33%). This suggests that there is an awareness of an issue which could create difficulties in transitioning from military to civilian life.

Generally, selection of positive traits are higher among older people with the exception of boldness for which the youngest age group (16-24 y/o) selected it most often (34%).



Characteristics of ex-UK Armed Forces - views of those who have served

When looking at how ex-Forces members see characteristics of those who have served, it can be seen that the positive traits come out even more strongly compared to those who have never served. The first hand experience of this group therefore strengthens the finding that on balance, people think serving promotes a beneficial set of character traits.



While there is a large increase in the numbers of ex-Forces members who recognise positive characteristics from serving, there is a much smaller decrease in the numbers who recognise most of the negative traits (with the possible exclusion of 'institutionalised'). This is especially the case for volatility, coldness, lack of compassion and immorality while slightly more ex-Forces members recognise unsociability.

However, while there is broad consensus across both groups for these particular characteristics, it should be recognised that the negative traits are selected much less frequently than most of the positive traits.

— The Armed Forces Covenant

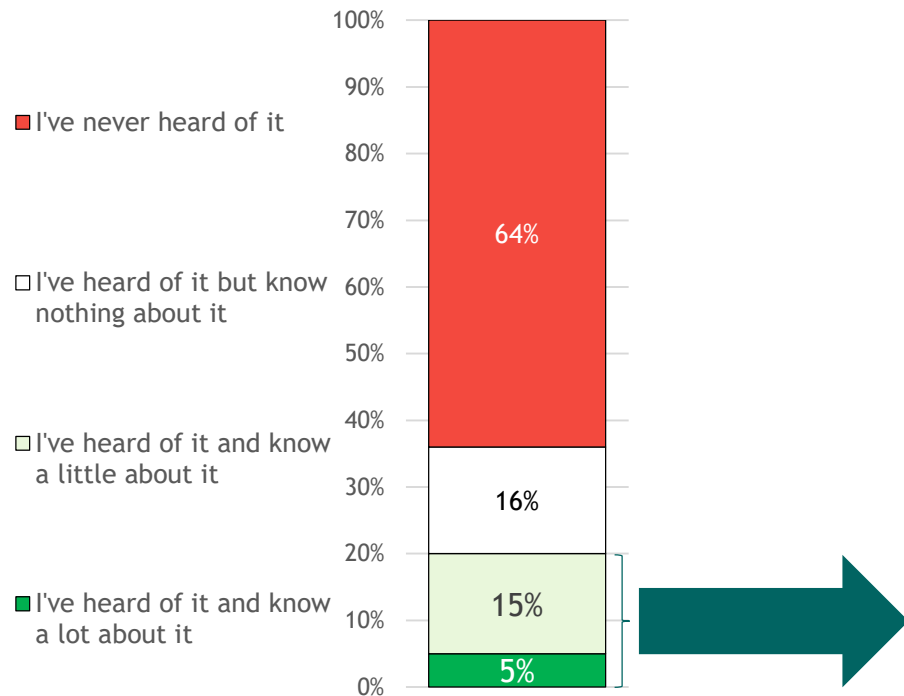
The Armed Forces Covenant

Almost two thirds of people (64%) said they have not heard of the Armed Forces Covenant. This is higher among females (71%), people aged between 25-44 (69%). It is lower among those who are interested in joining the Armed Forces (41%).

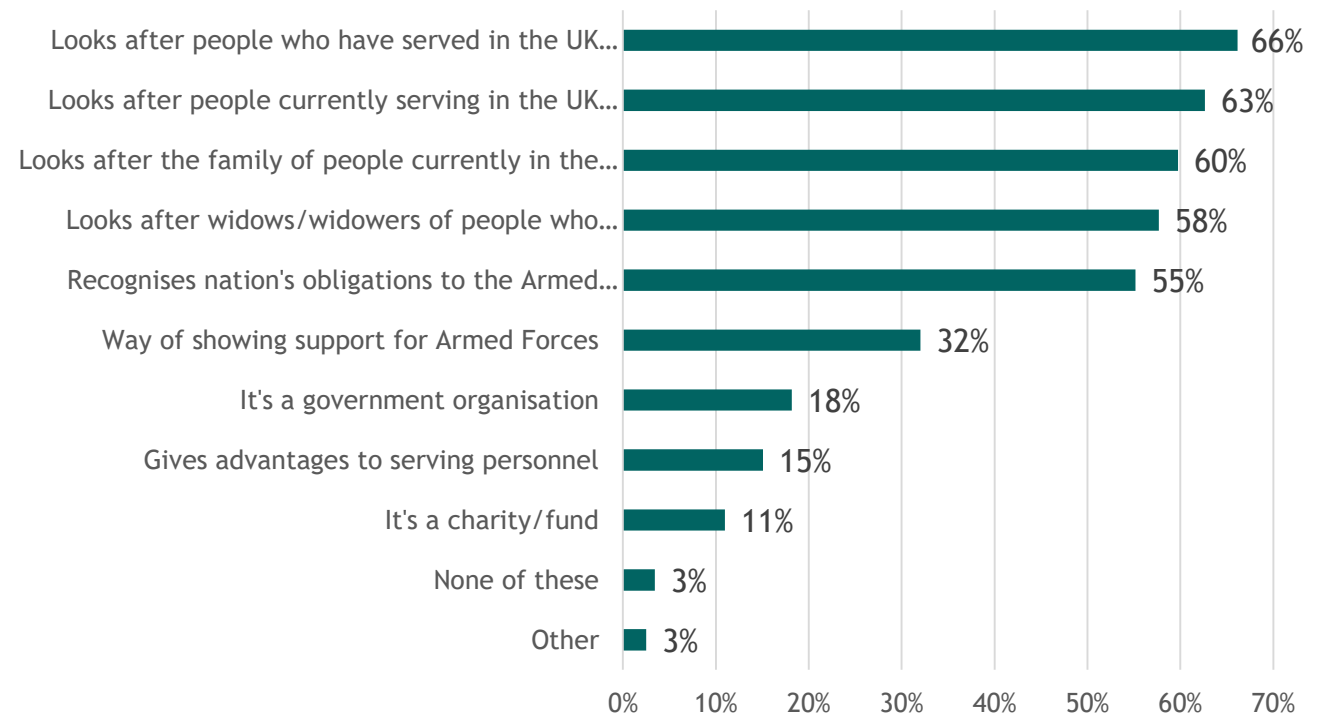
Among those who know at least something about the Armed Forces Covenant, the most commonly selected purpose of the Covenant was to look after those who have (previously) served (66%) followed by looking after those currently serving (63%).

The majority also thinks that it covers family and widows/widowers of people who are serving/have served.

Awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant



Function of the Armed Forces Covenant

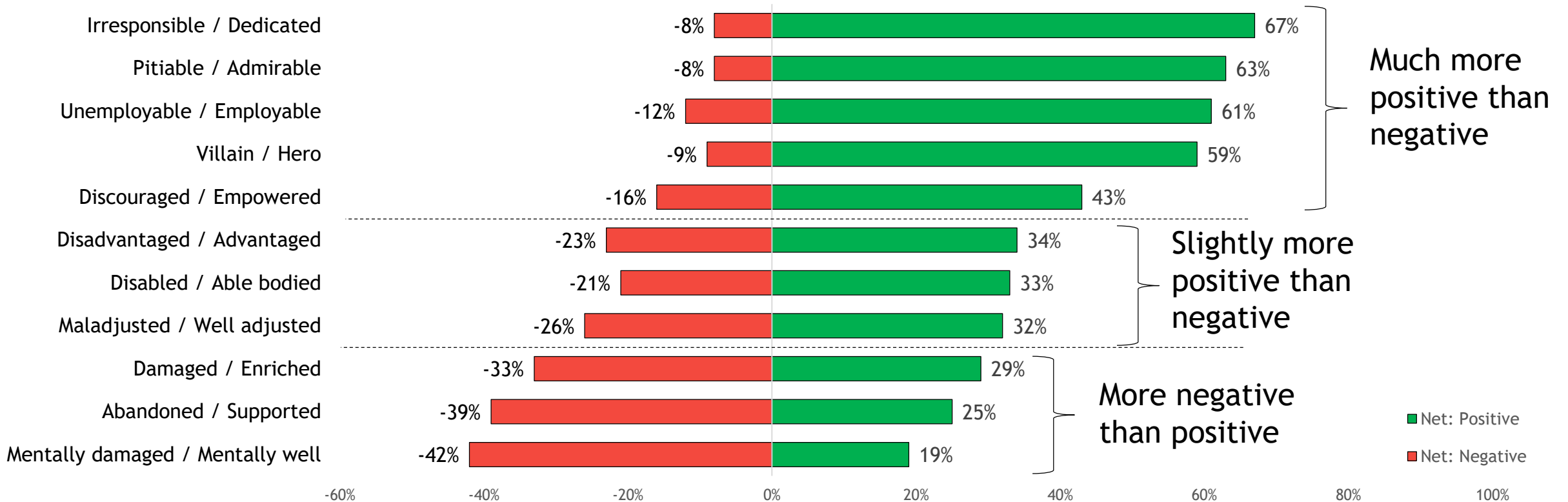


Perceptions of people who have previously served in the UK Armed Forces

Overall perceptions of ex-Forces members [1]

When presented with a series of descriptive scales about how ex-Forces members may be viewed, 8 out of the 11 categories, tested are viewed in a positive light. This is especially the case for being seen as dedicated, admirable, employable, heroic and empowered. There is a second group for which ex-Forces members are seen in a slightly more positive than negative way (advantaged, able bodied and well adjusted).

Finally, there are 3 areas where ex-Forces members are perceived as more negative than positive. This includes being seen as damaged, abandoned and most noticeably, mentally damaged.



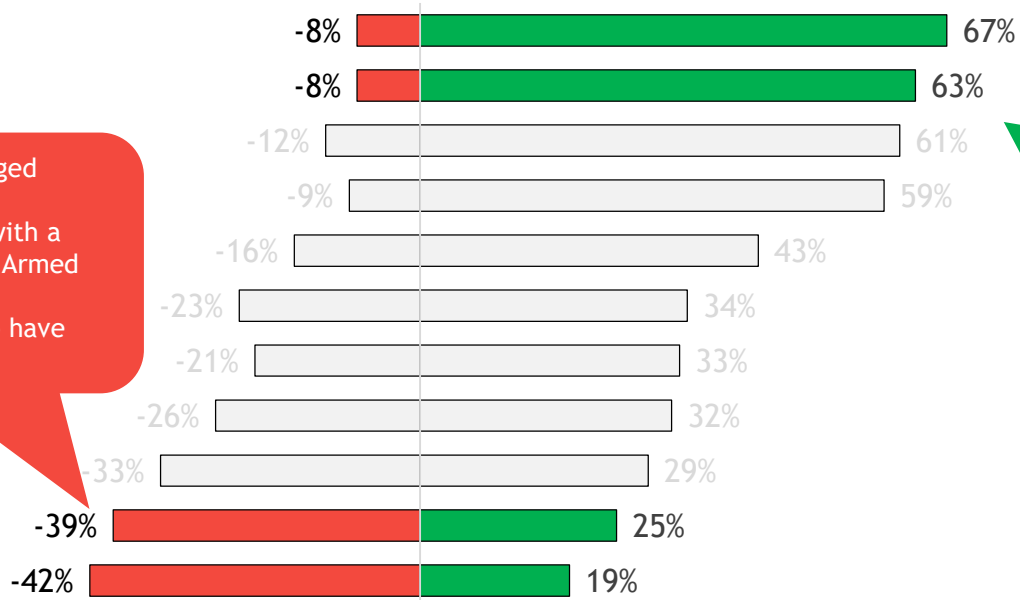
Overall perceptions of ex-Forces members [2]

Taking the two perceptions for which ex-Forces members are most positively associated with and the two most negative perceptions, it can be seen that...

- Irresponsible / Dedicated
- Pitiable / Admirable
- Unemployable / Employable
- Villain / Hero
- Discouraged / Empowered
- Disadvantaged / Advantaged
- Disabled / Able bodied
- Maladjusted / Well adjusted
- Damaged / Enriched
- Abandoned / Supported
- Mentally damaged / Mentally well

- Highest among middle aged people (35-44 y/o: 42%)
- Very high among those with a negative view of the UK Armed Forces (65%)
- Higher among those who have previously served (43%)

- Significantly higher among females (46%) than males (38%)
- Strong age influence. The youngest group showing the highest level of association (16-24 y/o: 54%) compared to the oldest group (65+ y/o: 31%)



- Significantly more females (69%) than males (65%)
- Not an obvious age differential
- Extremely high among those who would encourage a friend or family member to join the UK Armed Forces (83%)

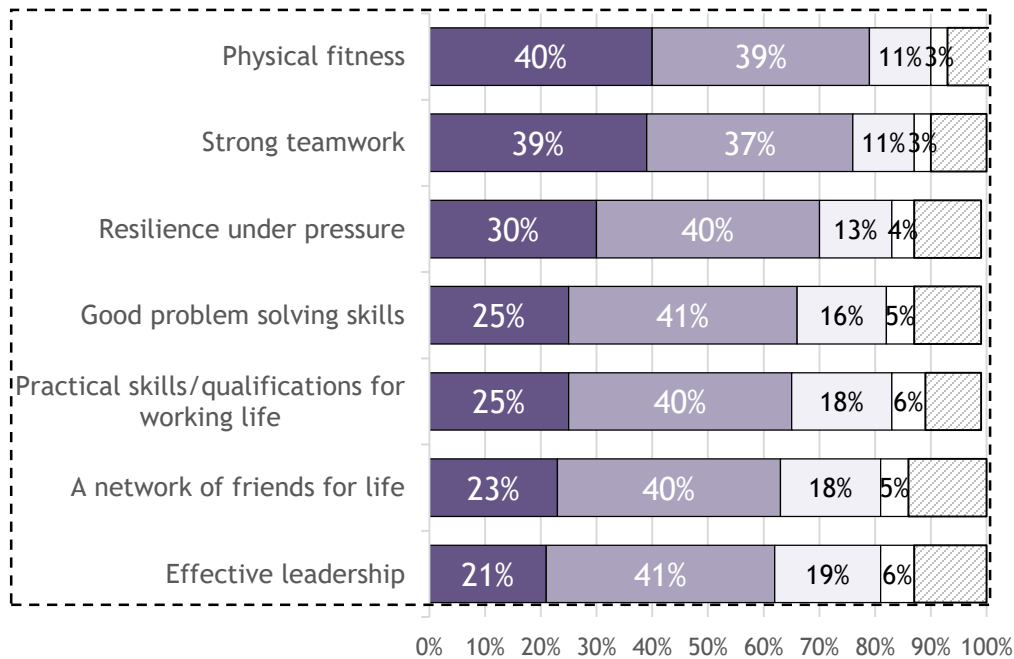
- Highest among 16-24 year olds (66%) and 65+ year olds (69%)
- Very high among those who would encourage a friend or family member to join the UK Armed Forces (82%)

■ Net: Positive ■ Net: Negative

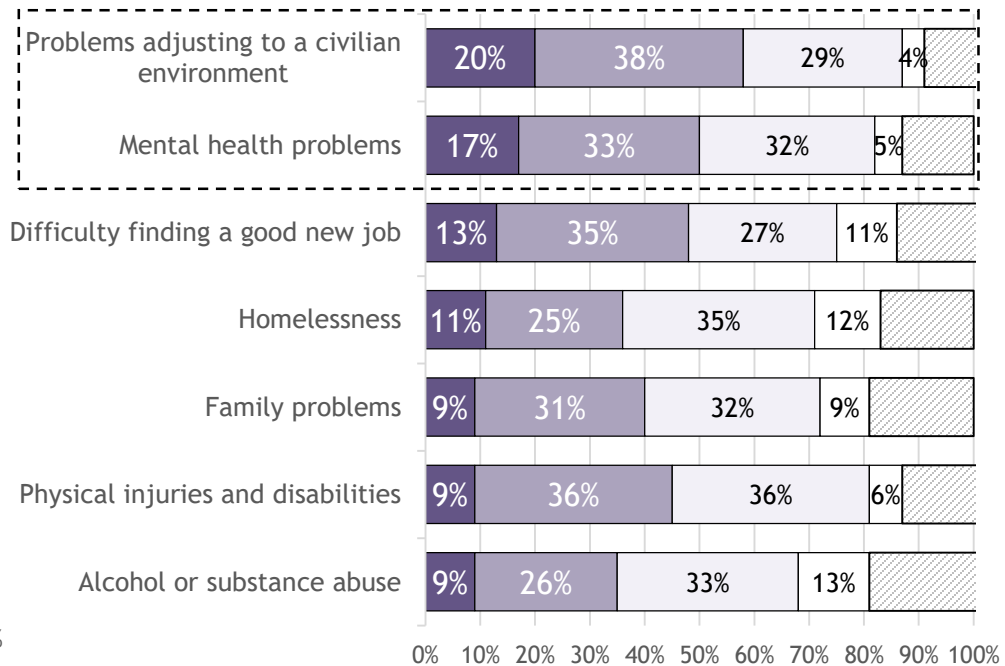
Positive and negative associations of ex-Forces members [1]

The majority of people said they associate all of the positive factors tested at least somewhat, with those who have previously served in the UK Armed Forces. The strongest positive associations are with physical fitness and strong teamwork. In contrast the only two negative factors which are associated by the majority to ex-Forces men and women are adjusting to a civilian environment and mental health problems

Positive associations



Negative associations



■ A lot ■ Somewhat □ A little □ Not at all □ Don't know

While there is a level of association for both the positive and negative factors tested, the *degree* of this association is much stronger among the positive factors. This can be illustrated by the two most common positive/negative factors:

- Those who associate physical fitness *a lot* with ex-forces members= 40%
 - Those who associate strong teamwork *a lot* with ex-forces members= 39%
- Compared to...
- Those who associate problems adjusting to civilian environment *a lot* with ex-forces members= 20%
 - Those who mental health problems *a lot* with ex-forces members= 17%

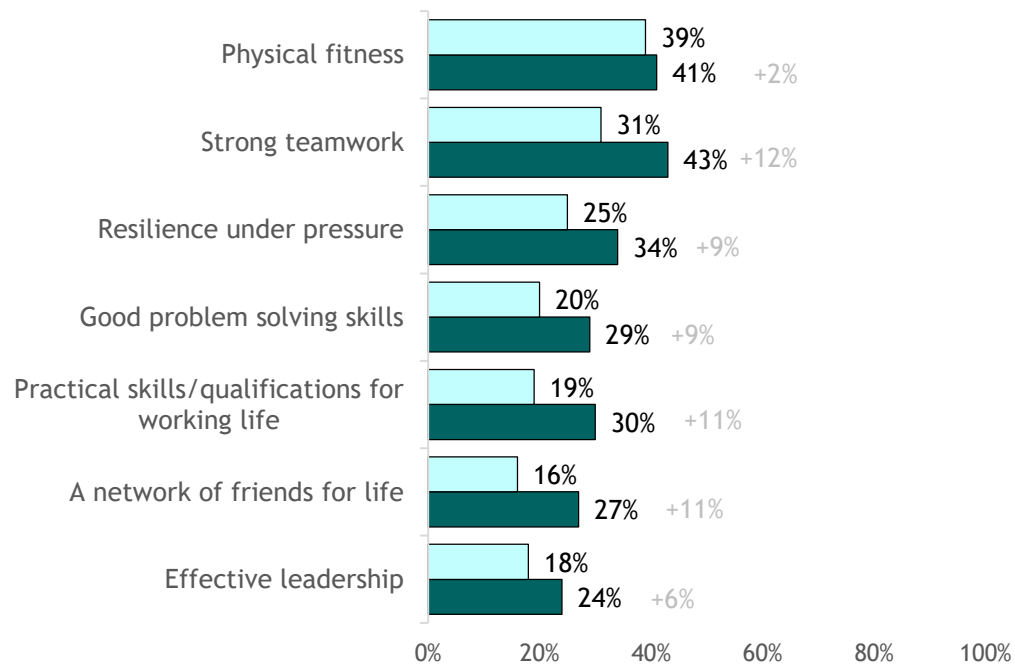
Positive and negative associations of ex-Forces members [2]

When comparing the perceptions of people who know someone who previously served versus those who don't, it is notable that there is a very similar level of negative association between the two groups.

However, when looking at positive factors, among those who know someone who has served, there is a much higher level of association with most areas tested. This is most evident for 'strong teamwork', practical skills/qualifications' and a network of friends'.

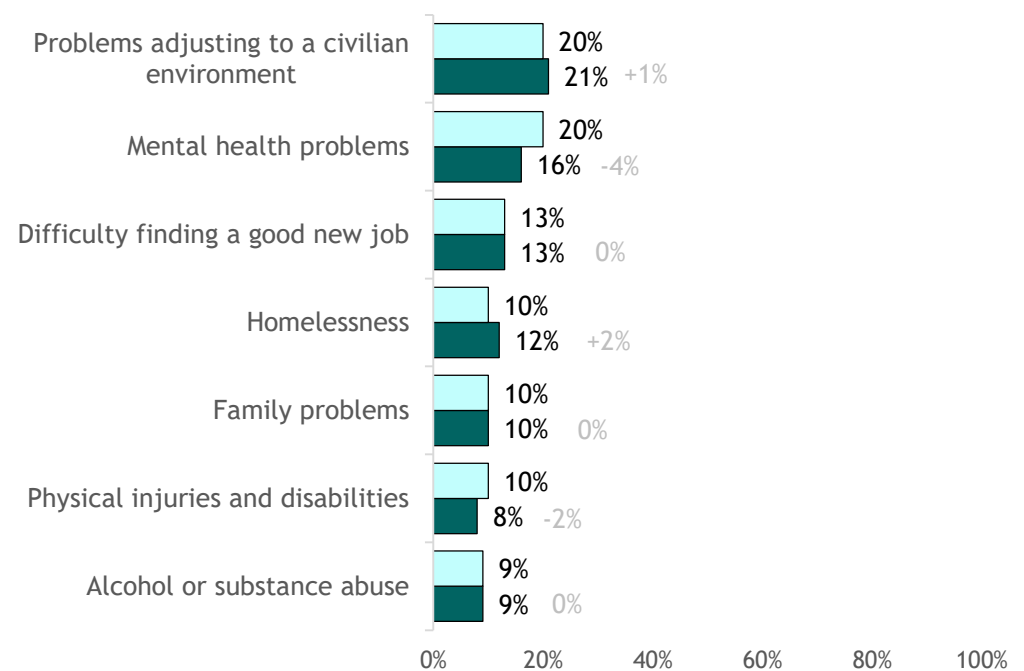
Positive associations

% who said they associate each factor 'a lot' with ex-Forces members



Negative associations

% who said they associate each factor 'a lot' with ex-Forces members



■ Know someone who previously served □ Do NOT know anyone who has previously served

Initial qualitative reactions are stereotypical; emotional responses to the term 'veteran' are less inclusive

Initial associations are **emotional and conform to stereotypes**; many participants think of older males who have retired from the armed forces, and from work in general. Women and younger generations are rarely mentioned.

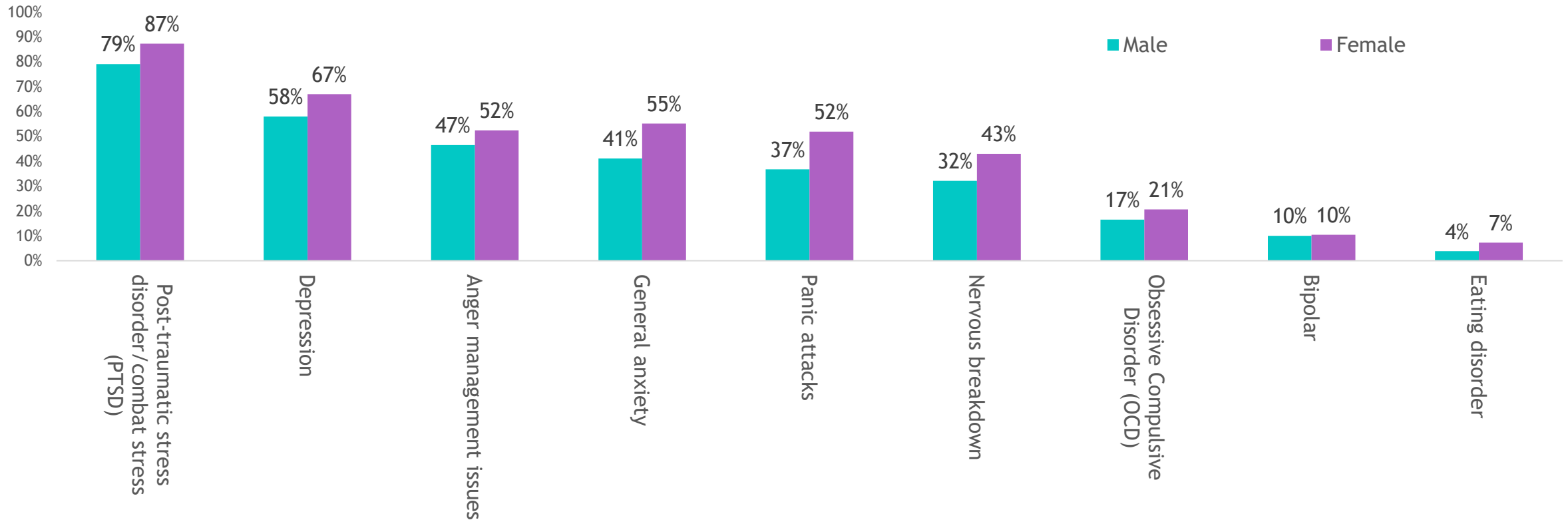


Participants say they are respectful of veterans and their heroism, stemming from the **sacrifice** they have made by serving in the armed forces. Bravery is mentioned in relation to joining, serving in, and leaving the armed forces.

However, 'veteran' also connotes **damage** - a majority of participants highlight that veterans may suffer from physical or mental injury resulting from their military experience. As in the quantitative findings, participants emphasise the mental over the physical effects.

Mental health problems

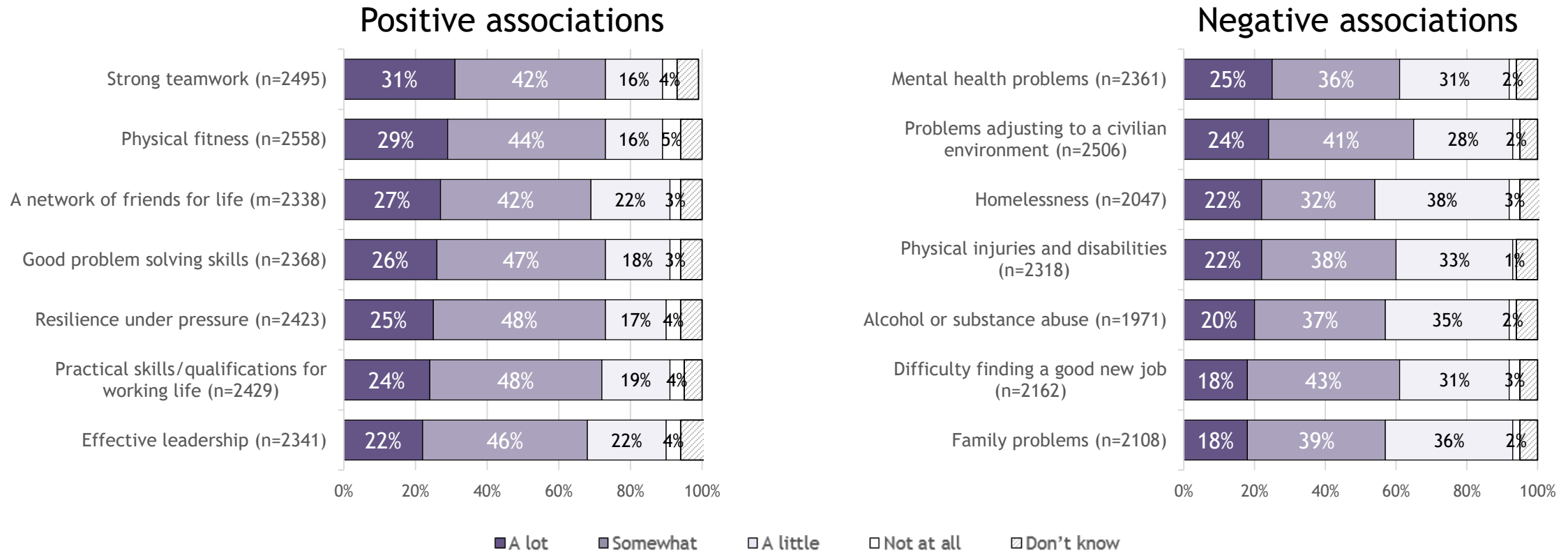
Among those who associate mental health problems to some degree with ex-Forces members, PTSD is the most commonly selected condition (overall 83%). The majority also associate depression (62%) and anger management issues (50%) with those have previously served. As can be seen below, females are significantly more likely to associate conditions (with the exception of bipolar) with ex-Forces members.



Q25. Which, if any, of the following conditions do you associate with people who have previously served in the UK Armed Forces? Please select all that apply.
Base: Associate mental health problems with veterans (male 1,146 / female 1,215)

Impact on daily life

While the degree of association for the positive factors is generally perceived to be higher compared to the negative factors the level of *impact* on daily life is more comparable across the two sets. Additionally, there is not a large disparity across the different factors in the perceived level of impact meaning that all areas are thought to carry through to day to day life to a similar and fairly substantial extent.

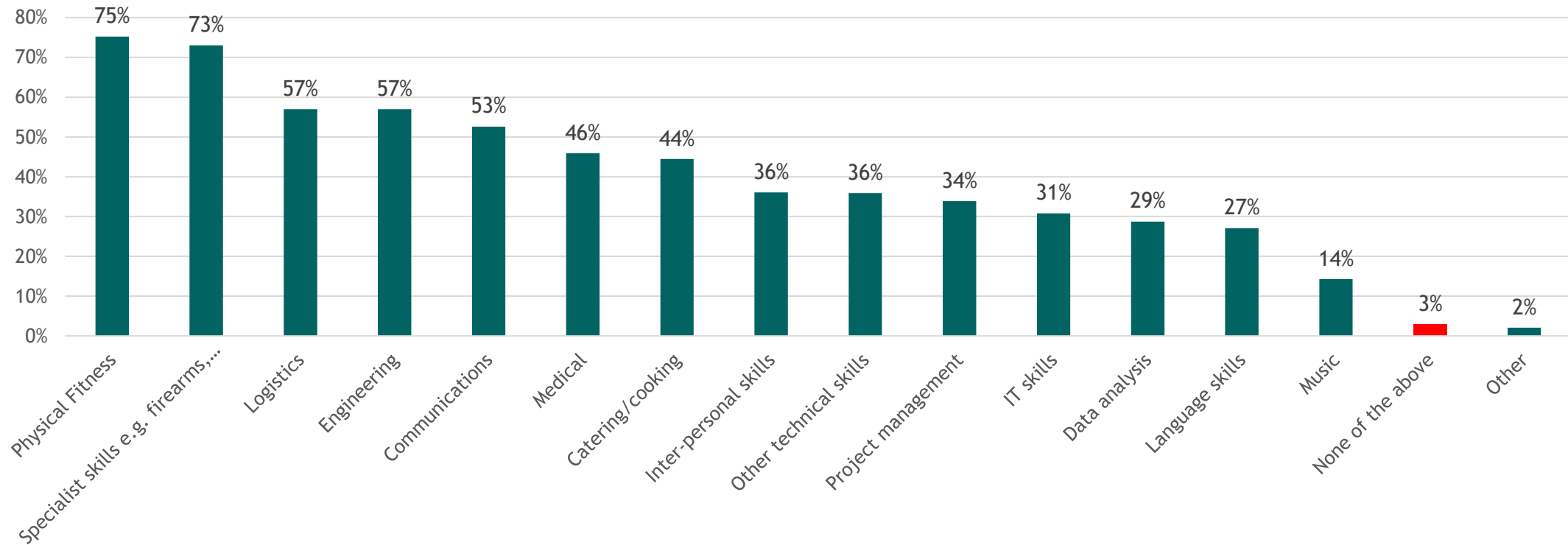


[Q26] To what degree do you think the following will impact on the day to day lives of people who have previously served in the UK Armed forces? Base: Associate each category to some extent with ex-Forces members. Base shown on the graph.

Skills

Physical fitness and specialist skills are most commonly associated with those who have previously served in the UK Armed Forces. Other skills chosen by the majority are logistics and engineering.

Very few failed to make any association between the UK Armed Forces and the skills presented.



[Q27] Which of the following do you think are skills sets associated with people who have previously served in the UK Armed Forces? Please select all that apply.

Base: All (2,849)

Rational responses to ‘veteran’ are broader, but come as an afterthought

- When probed further, participants consider the term ‘veteran’ more rationally; contrary to initial emotional reactions, many are clear that the term can be applied to a **much more diverse group than originally considered**, including women and younger ex-service people.



“I guess in the armed forces they are quite a diverse bunch; some of these [associations] you could turn on their head...you could find someone who is not angry at all or not mentally or physically injured. I guess it’s more diverse than what we put down.”
[M, 25-34, Newport]



“You think of somebody old, veteran means old, but then you think for a moment and you think, ‘Oh yes, they could be younger, yes’.”
[M, 55+, Oakham]

- Many participants acknowledge that although they see veterans as qualitatively different from the general public (as a result of their experiences in service) - a veteran could ultimately be anyone, with each individual having variable experiences of life during and after service.

'Veteran' makes sense in the US, but is less familiar in the context of the UK



- Participants say veterans are better respected in the US than the UK - for some, 'veteran' is an **Americanised term**, used by a country who are staunchly proud of their military past, more so than in the UK.
- Some also say the term is politically charged, and used to either generate charitable support in the US, or to justify foreign policy decisions.



In contrast, some suggest that attitudes towards war in the UK are more reserved, and veterans are therefore less venerated.

*"I'm ex-RAF, and I don't describe myself as a veteran. I think I agree with the term...I know, having dealt with a lot of Americans in my time, manufacturing helicopters, they did describe themselves as veterans. So, it goes back to the USA part of things."
[M, 55+, Oakham]*

When thinking about veterans in both US and UK contexts, some (esp. older groups) say that the term tends to be used when referring to specific conflicts (e.g. a veteran of WW1). As a generalised term for all ex-service personnel, it fails to resonate.

*"It's the end of a particular conflict, isn't it? So, if you served in Iraq, then you're an Iraq veteran, but you can still be an active soldier at the same time."
[M, 25-34, London]*

‘Veteran’ is a loaded and therefore limiting term - alternatives could be less problematic

The term ‘veteran’ does not seem to be recognised as commonplace - a majority of participants say this is **not the language they would use in conversation**, and where they see the term used in society (esp. the media), it can be a loaded word used in reference to more extreme cases.

Associations drawn from the word ‘veteran’ do not accurately reflect the distribution of veterans across society; the term is somewhat **limiting** and may therefore be more problematic than helpful.

Participants suggest ‘**ex-service**’ as a more widely used alternative, citing ‘ex-servicemen’s clubs’ as an everyday example.

“I don’t usually talk about veterans in everyday conversations...I feel like ‘veteran’ is more likely to be used for older individuals, whilst people who may have left the forces recently tend to be called ‘ex-servicemen/ex-forces’ etc.”
[F, Would consider joining]



“I mean, ex-military, or ex-service...I know various people who have been in the services, but I don’t think I’ve ever thought of them or called them ‘veterans’ or heard them call themselves veterans.”
[M, 55+, Oakham]



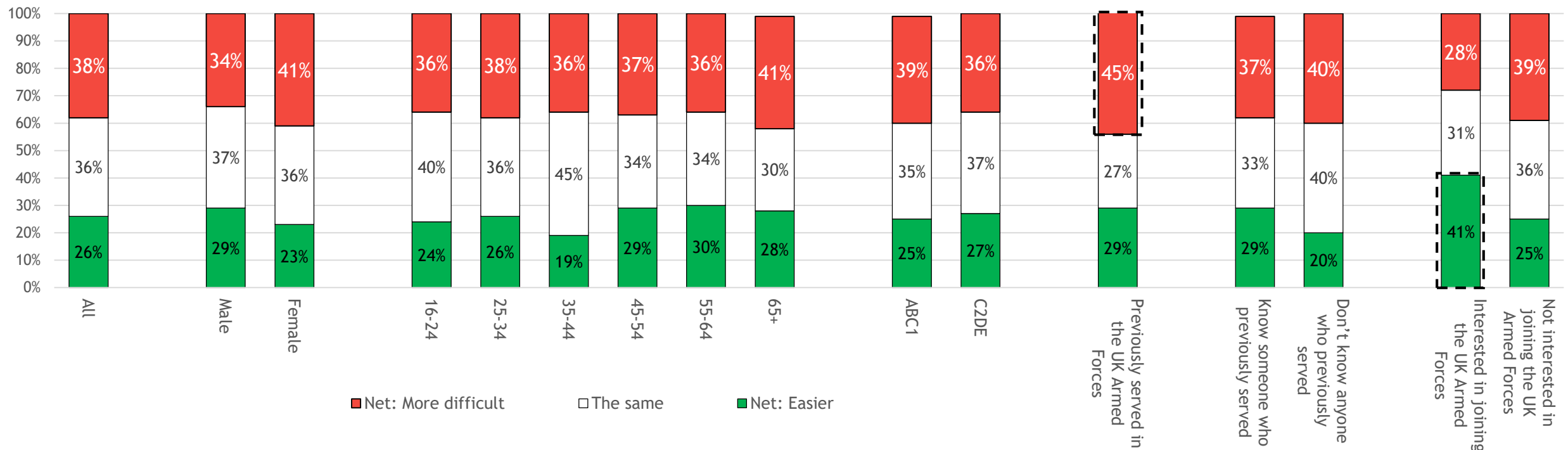
— Transition to civilian life

Ease of finding employment

Overall, there is split opinion in how easier or otherwise it is perceived for ex-members for the UK Armed Forces to find employment after leaving the Services. More than a third of people (38%) think that it is more difficult for ex-service men and women to find a job after leaving than it is for an average person while a similar number think it is roughly the same while less people (26%) think that it is easier for them.

Negative sentiment is highest among those who have previously served (45%) suggesting that first hand experience can present difficulties.

Positive sentiment is highest among those interested in joining (41%).



Veterans are perceived to have transferrable skills but may be limited by a lack of qualifications and civilian experience

Disciplined

- Perceptions of veterans' employability are complex; many say that veterans have transferrable skills and qualities that would be extremely desirable in the workplace, reflecting the views of 59% of respondents in the quantitative research conducted.

*"I guess you hear about employers, that they really want people that have been in the military to come in where they work because they have things such as good discipline, that kind of stuff."
[F, 25-34, London]*

Hard working

- However, many participants also say that veterans may **need support to adapt their skills** - learning how to apply skills in a new way should be supported by the MOD before leaving the armed forces and throughout the transition to civilian life.

*"Their training isn't always given a qualification recognised in civilian life, for example the pilots and aircraft engineers in the RAF have a license valid only in the military; they have to requalify with civilian licenses if they want to continue that career."
[M, Would consider joining]*

Leadership

- Some participants identify lack of experience in the things that many of us take for granted, such as CV writing and interviewing. Also, a lack of formal qualifications, existing qualifications (from time during service) not being recognised, or sector relevant experience may act as additional barriers, making veterans less attractive to employers.

Organisation

Participants see employers as open to veterans, but say incentives would encourage those who demonstrate bias

- Some participants, particularly in younger groups, **do not believe that employers are biased** against veterans; for some of these participants, they have seen veterans employed first-hand.
- Some participants acknowledge that employers may be unsure about veterans' mental state and ability to cope. Employers may be concerned about aggression or willingness to take orders and may want evidence of suitability prior to offering a permanent position.
- Many participants say that it is not the responsibility of veterans to reassure potential employers; it is up to the government to incentivise employment of veterans, and more could be done to educate employers who have reservations.



"I would say, recently I have seen a positive discrimination towards veterans. Recently, I think a couple of weeks ago, I saw a job ad for the London Underground specifically for veterans."

[M, 25-34, London]

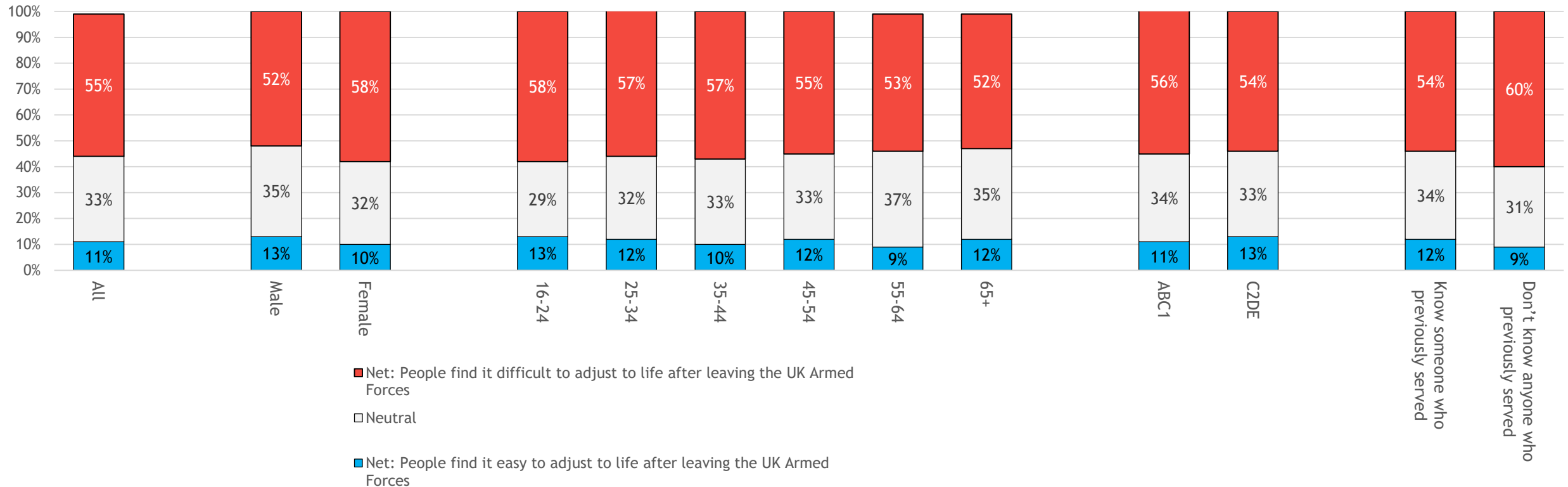


"It shouldn't be down to the individual, there should be external assurances from govt. to employers."

[M, Would consider joining]

Adjusting to normal life

There is a widespread recognition of the difficulty in adjusting to life after leaving the Armed Forces. Overall, 55% say they think ex-Forces members would find it difficult compared to 11% who said they thought it would be easy. Younger people and women are more likely to think it is difficult.



Participants are aware of, and sympathetic to, the challenges of reintegration

- On the whole, participants demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the emotional and practical barriers to reintegrating into civilian life and tend to describe the process as difficult; this is similar to the quantitative findings, where just 11% of respondents said the process would be easy.

- Participants identify less regimented schedules as a possible difficulty for those who are particularly institutionalised, while issues such as **stable housing and re-entering the jobs market** may pose a problem, particularly for those without social support.

“So, in that respect, regardless of whether you’ve seen action or not, and you’re suffering from PTSD, anybody who’s come out of the military could actually find themselves really tinkering on the edge of not coping. It’s going from being institutionalised to being out in the big, wide world without any support.”

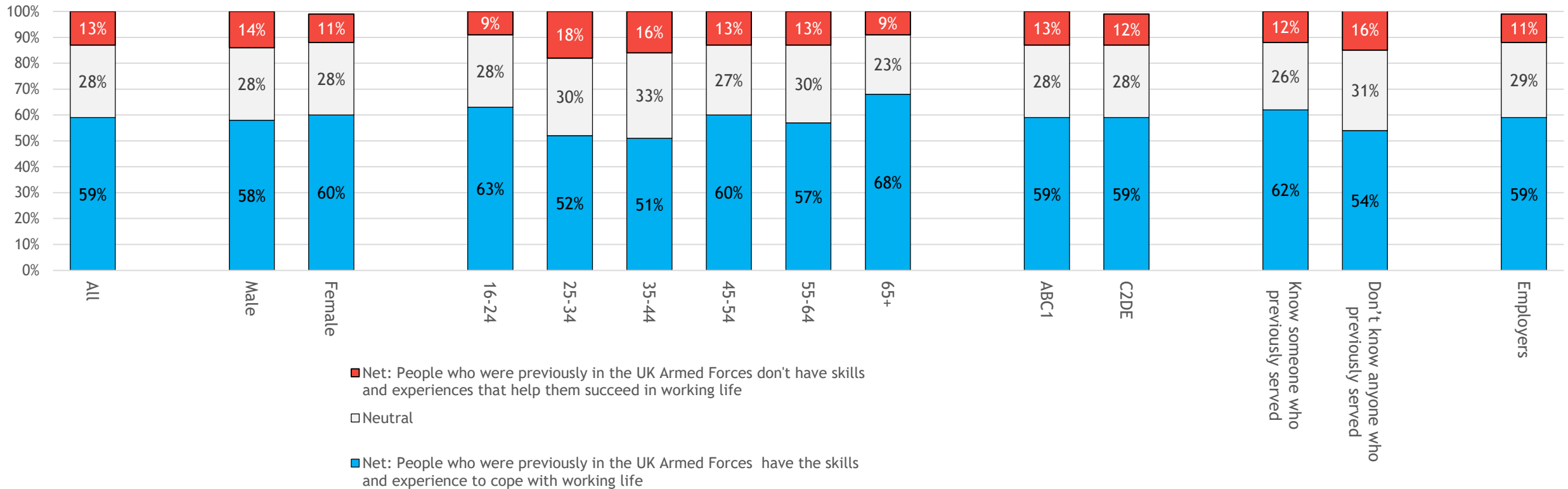
[F, 55+, Oakham]



- Emotionally, participants say that people leaving the armed services may struggle with leaving their military ‘community’ and may feel **isolated** or unable to relate to others in civilian life. Experiences of trauma may enhance this isolation and, for some, lead to **mental health issues** such as PTSD.

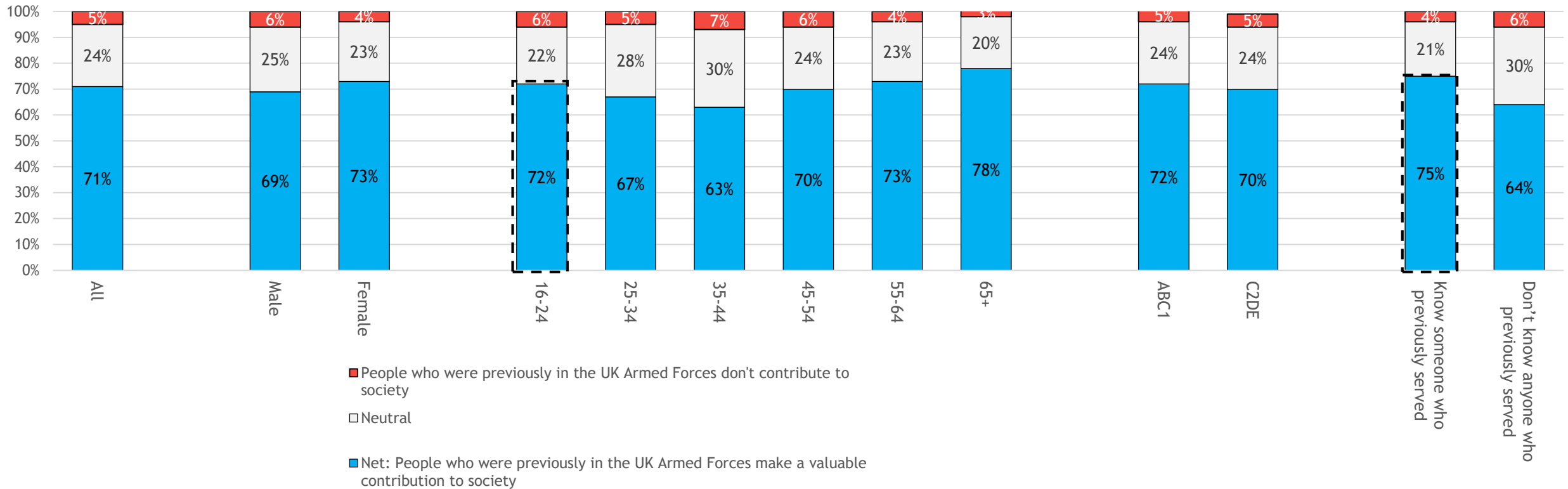
Skills and experience to cope with working life

The majority (59%) think that those previously in the UK Armed Forces have the skills and the experience that will help them succeed in working life while only 13% think this is not the case. Among employers, the number who do not think that they have the skills and experience is only 11%.



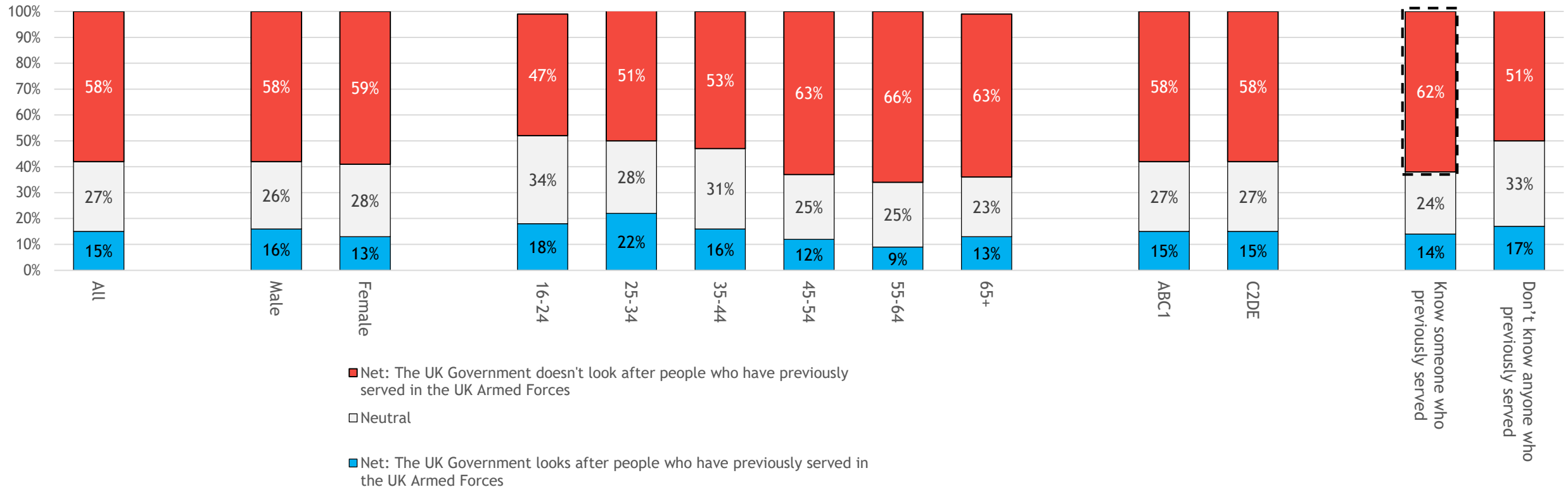
Contribution to society

Very few people think that ex-Forces members do not make a contribution to society. In contrast the vast majority do believe that this is the case, a sentiment which peaks among older people and those who know someone who has previously served. It can also be noted that the positive sentiment is relatively prevalent among the youngest age bracket.



Governmental support

Just under 6 in 10 (58%) think that the Government does not properly look after those who have previously served in the UK Armed Forces. This is a view more widespread among older people and also among those who personally know someone who has previously served.



Support is seen as a government responsibility, and currently, it is considered inadequate

A majority of participants have limited knowledge of the support available to veterans. On the whole, participants say that the **support available is not sufficient**, citing links to homelessness and prevalence of mental health issues as evidence of this.

Participants say that it is the **responsibility of the government**, with many also citing the Ministry of Defence, to ensure that those leaving the armed forces (at any stage), are supported to reintegrate into society.

Many say that veterans have made a significant sacrifice and their time in service has left them institutionalised - therefore the **MOD have an obligation to help them 'de-program'**; the MOD trained them to be service personnel, now they must hold responsibility for retraining them. In the eyes of participants, veterans are *owed* this support.



*"It's as though they are thrown on the scrap heap as soon as they have finished their service."
[M, Donates to charity]*



*"I feel bad when I hear of a veteran suffering, the Government have a duty of care to look after them!"
[M, Would consider joining]*

Leaving the armed forces is a transition - many say support should start early on in this process

Some participants say support for veterans could be improved through reallocation of funding by the MOD.

Participants feel strongly that **support should begin early**, whilst people are serving - resources should be focused on equipping ex-service personnel with the emotional and physical skills required to thrive in civilian life.

Some participants emphasise that support in place needs to be presented appropriately - participants are sceptical that veterans would seek help, and suggest that **embedding support into the forces culture prior to transitioning** out would begin to normalise the services offered.

"If they [MOD] didn't spend so much on overpriced / useless equipment maybe they would have some more to use on vets."

[M, Would consider joining]

"They need to be informed about services that are available, they should be given options to help them develop their skills in order to help them integrate and to get them into the workplace."

[F, Family connection]

"Support them before they leave the service. Normalise mental health care while still in service so that people are not scared for their career if they admit to problems."

[F, Family connection]



Participants say that as veterans will not seek help themselves, services must be offered proactively

- A majority of participants assume that those leaving the armed forces are **reluctant to ask for help**.
- Participants say **pride** is the most prominent barrier here - they say military culture teaches service personnel to suppress emotional responses, and believe veterans of that culture would see help-seeking as weakness or failure.
- Many participants say that it may not be obvious where to find the required services, even when ready to accept help. For this reason, and in order to overcome pride, participants say support must be offered **proactively**.



*"I feel like a lot probably don't take up the help that they actually could due to not wanting to be weak."
[M, Teacher]*



*"The take home message is to be in there before people are thinking of coming out...knowing these things exist might really help people. It's that prevention versus cure thing."
[F, 25-34, Newport]*

Charities play an important role, but ultimate responsibility lies with the government

- Participants acknowledge that charities play an important role in veterans' reintegration, however feel anger that they are relied upon to fill in the gaps. For many, it is a duty to provide state funded support - including financial, housing, skills and emotional support.

*"I don't think it should be a charity, I think it should be the government."
[M, 34-55, Edinburgh]*



- Some participants say that, where charities are working to support veterans, the approach needs to be joined up - other charities, the government, and state funded services must **coordinate efforts** to maximise positive outcomes.

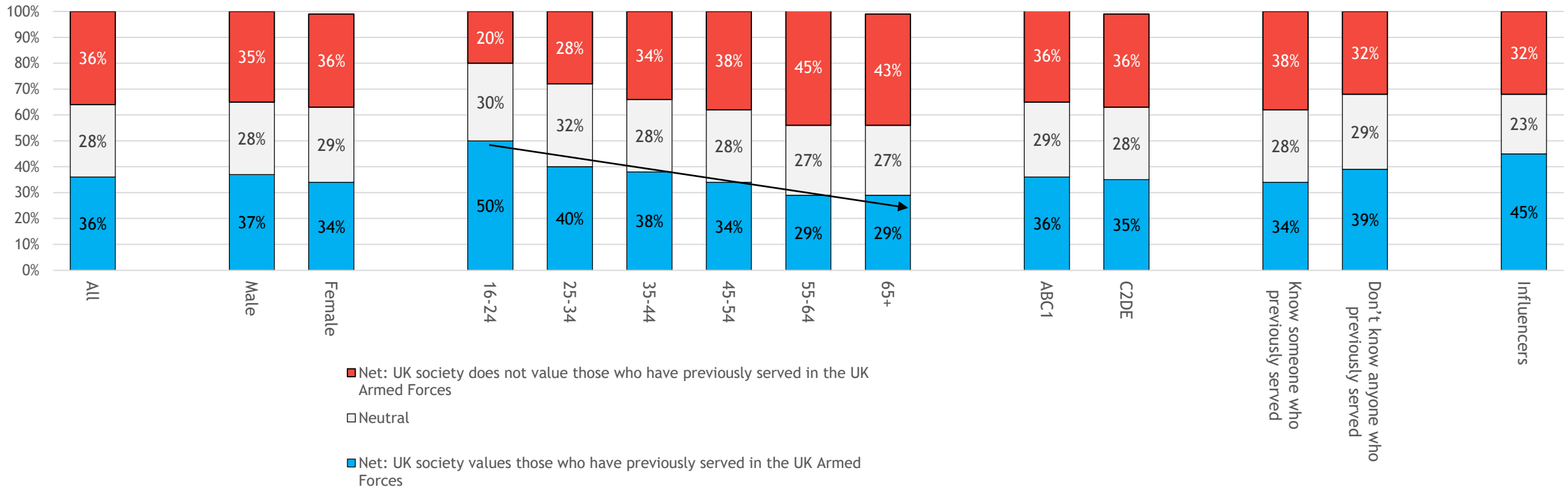
- Some participants also say that charities have an important role to play in educating society about those serving in, and leaving, the armed forces.

*"Well, my message to the organisation...would be make common cause with other organisations, both specialised in the ex-military and in all other sorts of people serving."
[M, 55+, Oakham]*

Being valued by society

Much like ease of finding employment, public perception of the level that society values ex-members of the UK Armed Forces is divided. Overall, exactly the same amount (36%) believe that society values this group as those who think it does not.

Perception is more positive among young people with only 20% of 16-24 year olds thinking society does not value ex-Forces members compared to 43% of those aged over 65.



Perceptions of veterans' treatment differ across age groups, but the government attracts the most criticism

- Some participants, particularly those in older groups, believe that veterans' treatment in society has deteriorated; this is fitting with the quantitative findings, where older groups felt veterans were less valued. Society at large, and particularly young people, do not confer the appropriate level of respect on veterans.
- Conversely, some participants (esp. younger) say that treatment of veterans may be improving - publicity from charities and specially organised events have helped to raise the profile of veterans in society. Additionally, the conversation around mental health has become more open, leading to more support and understanding for veterans suffering from mental health issues.
- However, when talking about levels of respect and value in society, a majority of participants say that it is **the government that shows the least respect** for veterans.

*"Younger people these days have no respect for what they have given up and done for our society."
[F, Donates to charity]*

*"I think there is greater awareness now in terms of mental health, so we know more about the challenges in the first place."
[M, Family connection]*

*"I think people hold them in high regard but the government treats them like dirt."
[M, Would consider joining]*

There is an emotional link between self-sacrifice and respect

A majority of participants say that all veterans should be respected. However, some say that their views differ somewhat depending on each veteran's individual experience.

Some participants say their **level of respect differs** for those involved in combat versus those in non-combative roles, rank and file versus officers, those joining through choice versus conscription, and those who are physically/mentally injured versus not; greater perceived difficulty of the experience / the resulting impact elicits more respect.

However, all acknowledge the extremes of circumstance associated with the armed forces and **inherently attach a level of respect** for that reason.



“For me, because people didn’t have a choice then I have more [respect], because I wouldn’t want to be a soldier - I think fair play, they may not have wanted to be fighting or to leave their family.”
[F, 25-34, Newport]

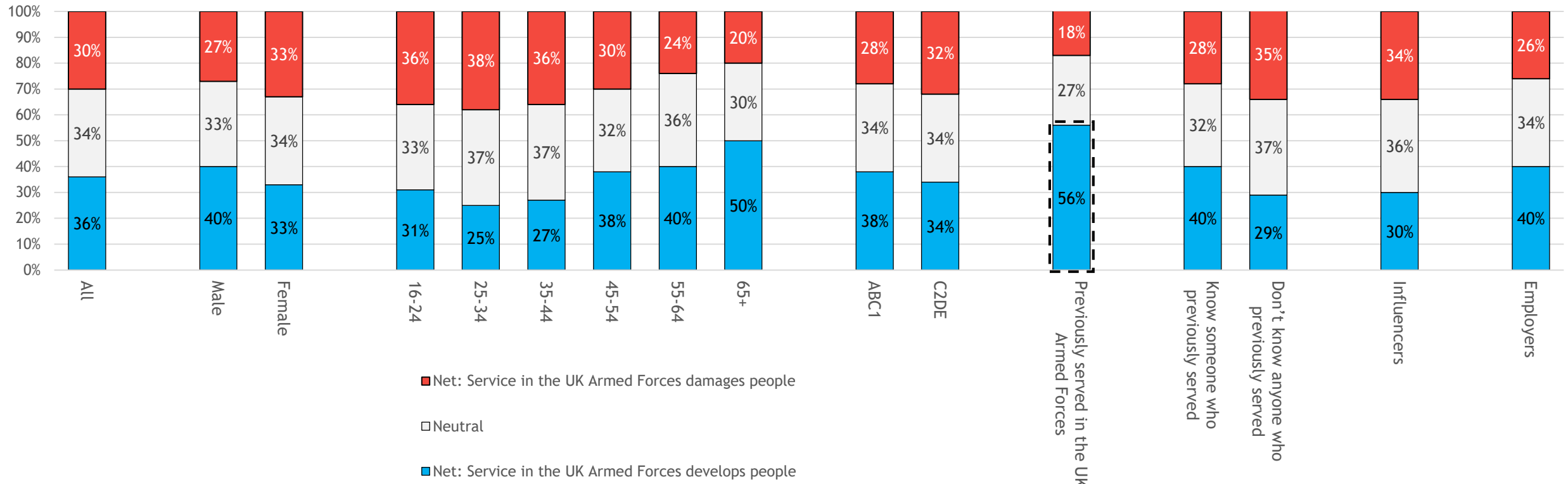


“I would automatically assume - veteran just means retired from the armed forces - I would want to know a bit more about what they’d done and been through...I know someone who had a desk job in the army, but would still be considered a veteran.”
[M, 25-34, Newport]

Damage versus development through serving

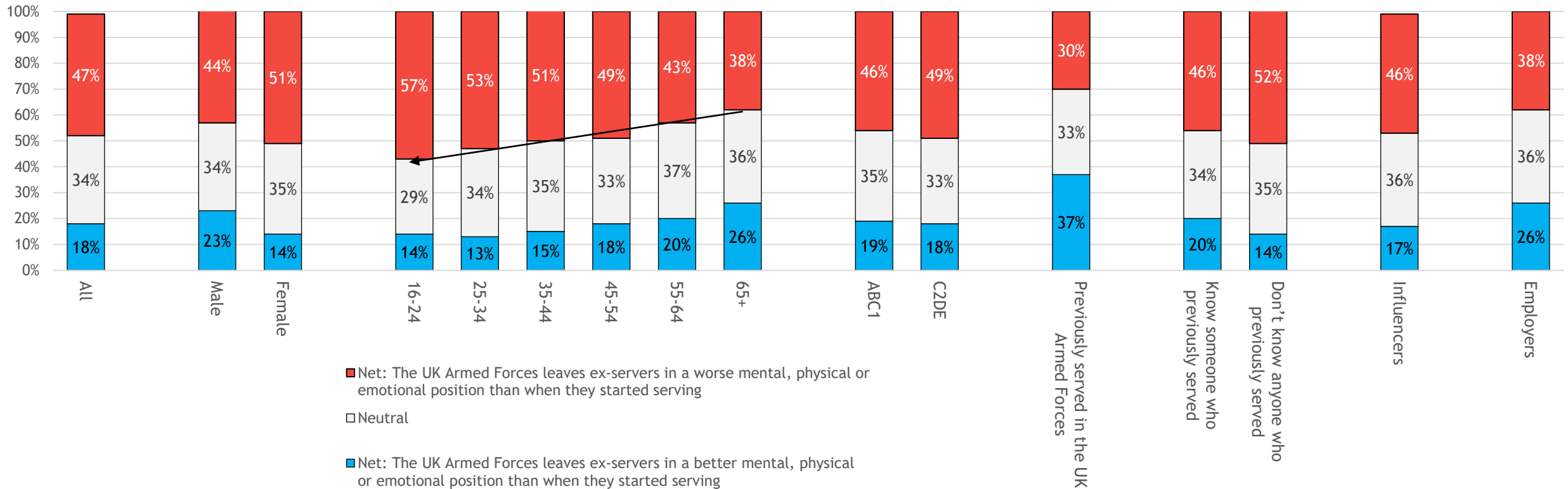
Overall, slightly more people think that service in the UK Armed Forces develops people (36%) rather than damages them (30%). This sentiment is more common among males than females and among older people although it can be noted that the youngest age group is not as negative as those aged between 25 to 44.

Among those who have previously served, opinion is largely skewed towards development rather than damage although among those who know ex-Forces, this feeling is not quite so pronounced.



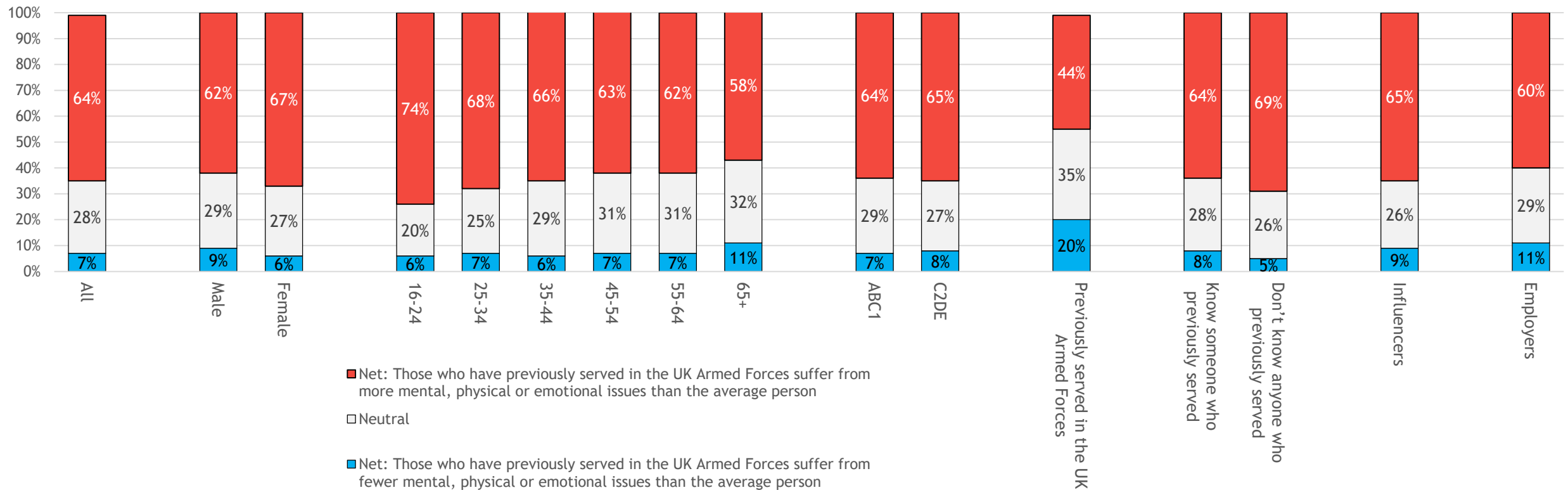
The effect of serving (mental, physical or emotional status)

Just under half of people (47%) think that serving in the UK Armed Forces leaves people in a worse mental, physical or emotional position than when they started serving. This is especially the case among younger people - elsewhere 16-24 year olds tend to be more positive than middle aged people but for this dimension, it is not the case. Even among those who know ex-service members, the largest number think serving has a negative impact in this respect.



The relative impact of serving (mental, physical or emotional status)

There is a strong perception that ex-service personnel suffer more from mental, physical or emotional issues in comparison to the average person (64%). Once again, this is more prevalent among the younger age ranges. Even among those who have previously served themselves, just under half (44%) say that they feel this is the case, a view backed up in greater numbers by those who know someone who has previously served.



Participants identify opportunity to develop in the armed forces, but risk of damage overrides this for many



- Some participants (esp. younger groups) identify armed forces service as an **opportunity to develop professionally**, learning new skills; this is talked about particularly in relation to non-combat roles such as engineering or catering, which are seen as applicable in civilian life.



- Some participants also say that joining the armed forces may be an opportunity to those looking to develop personally - a minority say that new recruits may be looking for structure, a 'way out' of areas that are less affluent, or a chance to be part of a community.



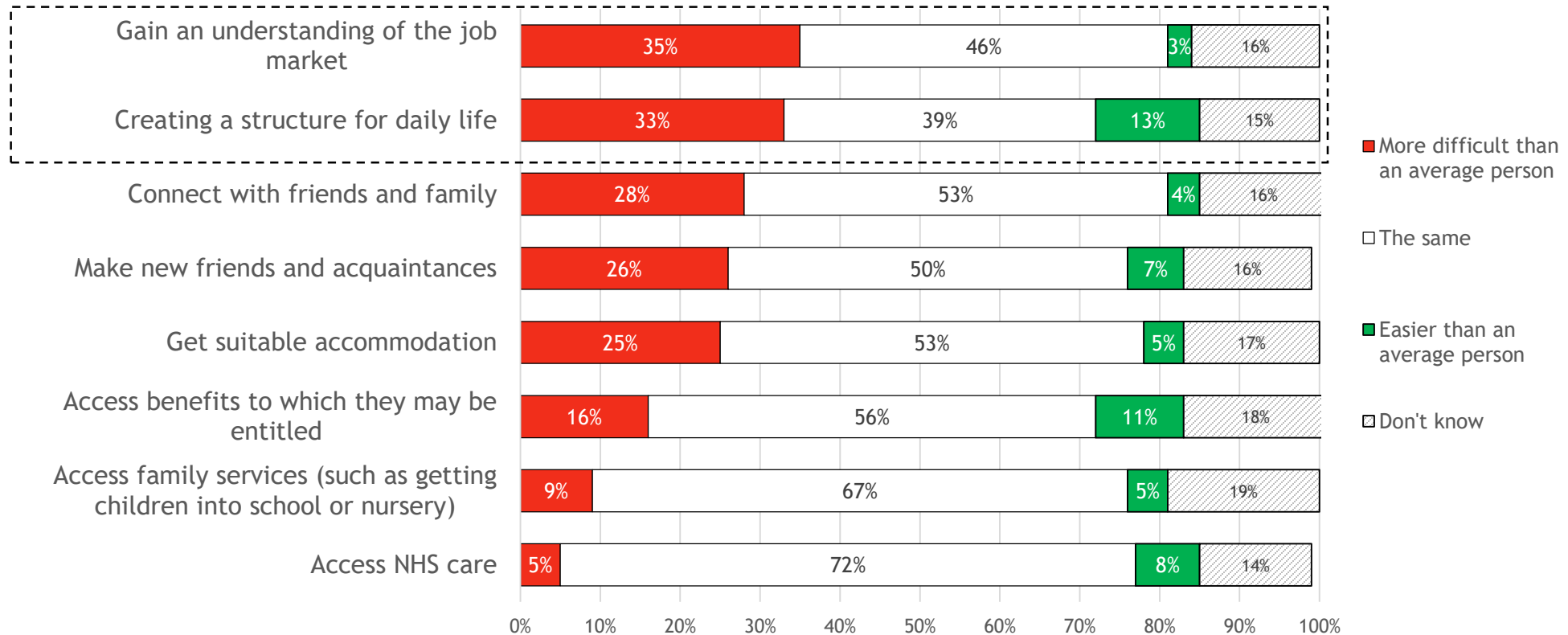
- However, many participants say that they would not wish to join the armed forces - the potential for injury, particularly psychological, is seen to be too great of a risk.

*“Sometimes you get young people who are coming from less stable backgrounds, they might want boundaries...communities...there are positive things for young people.”
[F, 24-25, Newport]*

*“They are doing a job that I may not personally want to do. Putting themselves in dangerous situations for a bigger cause.”
[M, Family connection]*

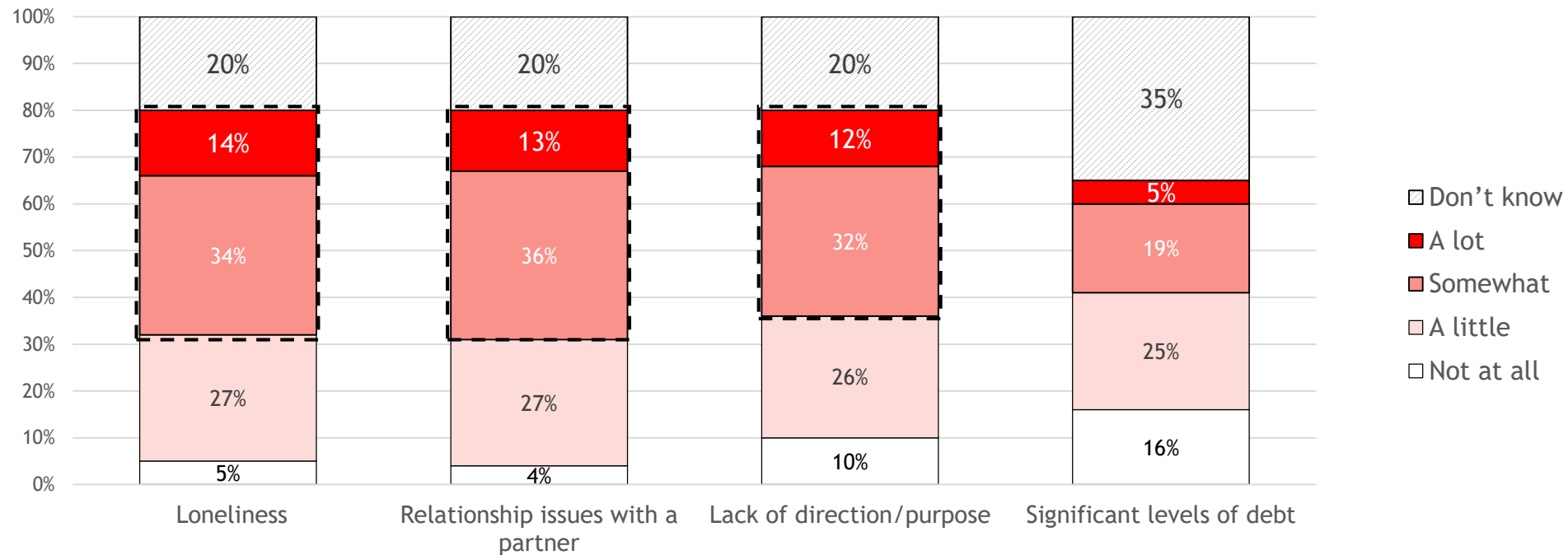
Practicalities of transition to civilian life

Ex-members of the Forces are perceived to find it more difficult in most areas tested in comparison to an average person. The areas in which at least a third of people think they face difficulty are in gaining an understanding of the job market (35%) and creating a structure for daily life (33%).



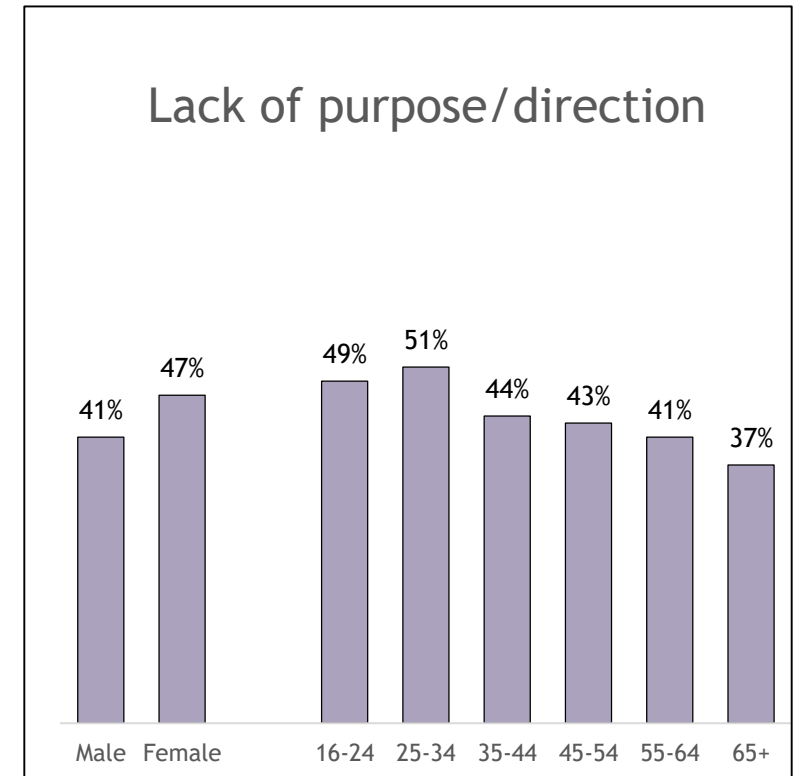
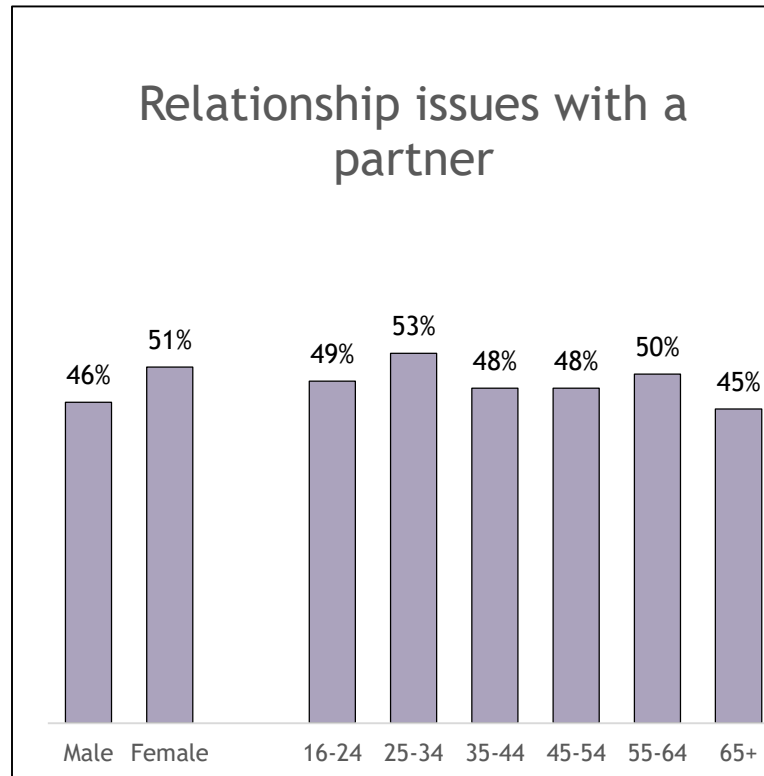
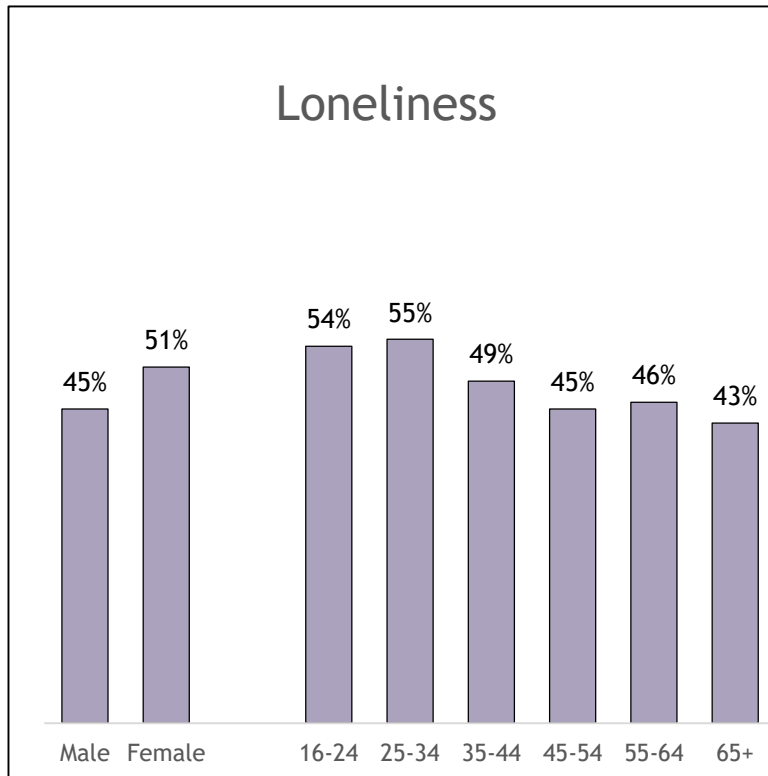
Potential difficulties faced in civilian life [1]

All three of loneliness, relationship issues as well as a lack of direction/purpose are commonly seen as things which affect ex-members of the UK Armed Forces to a relatively significant degree.



Potential difficulties faced in civilian life [2]

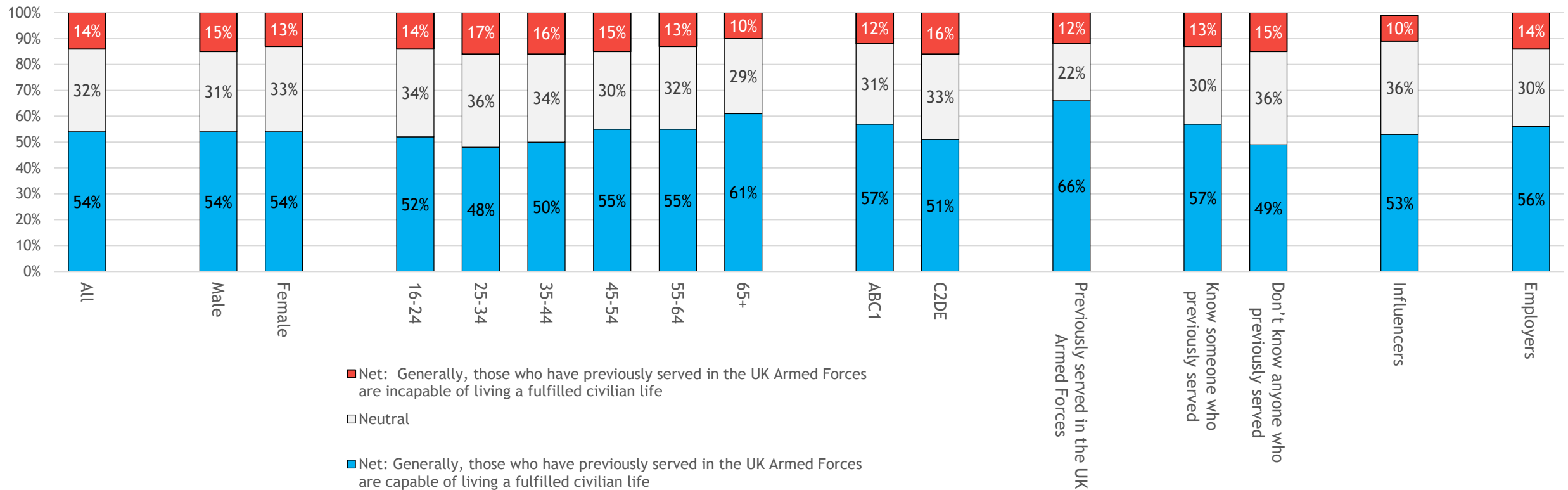
While there recognition of all three areas as being potentially problematic for ex-members of the Armed Forces, females in general are more sympathetic to all three. Younger people are more likely to think that loneliness and lack of purpose /direction could affect ex-service men and women.



■ Net: A lot/somewhat

Living a fulfilled civilian life

Despite the various challenges which many recognise that ex-service men and women face in transitioning out of the military, the majority also think that those who have previously served are capable of living a fulfilled civilian life. A further 32% are relatively neutral on this subject while only 14% say that they do not think this is the case.



Participants see a link between armed forces service and homelessness

- A majority of participants associate veterans with **homelessness** - for many this is due to media coverage, however some have first hand experience.
- There is a feeling amongst some participants that veterans are not adequately prioritised in the housing queue - this is thought to be a particular issue for single men coming out of the armed forces having lower priority than those with children.
- Participants acknowledge stable housing as important for those leaving the armed forces in terms of providing stability and opportunity to adjust back into civilian life; many suggest that the government could do more in this area to support veterans.



“I think government policy is one of the main causes of homelessness in men. There’s literally no support out there, and link that with veterans coming out, with the difficult situation that they’ve been through. When they then come back and go to the council to try and get support for housing, just to try and get their lives back together, in a way, it feels like that’s just being thrown back in their face.”

[M, 25-34, London]

Participants see reliance on alcohol as a by-product of military culture



- Misuse of alcohol and drugs is perceived by some to be more prevalent amongst the veteran population; many attribute this to difficulties coping, isolation, and trying to suppress memories of trauma.

“There is a huge drinking culture in the military...that could easily build up problems for some people, having a drink problem before they come out...it’s a coping mechanism.”
[M, 34-55, Edinburgh]



- Some participants believe that within the armed forces there is a culture which **normalises heavy drinking**, and this can set veterans up to cope poorly once back in civilian life.

“I think it’s the same as anyone, as long as there’s drink and drugs and there’s pain then people will use them to block it out, it doesn’t matter if it’s the armed forces or not.”
[M, 25-34, Newport]



- However, others say that drink and drug use is a wider cultural issue and veterans, like anyone else, must take responsibility for their own choices and actions to an extent.



Media

Participants are informed by mainstream media, but acknowledge this as a biased source

- Many say they hear ‘veteran’ in the media more than in everyday conversation - **mainstream news stories exploit the term** to elicit an emotional response, usually one of sympathy, and images of older veterans are prominent in the lead up to Remembrance Day. Many say veterans receive little exposure on social media but believe more exposure in this way would have a positive impact on young people’s views.

“I think re younger vets, they are in the news more...with the Invictus games, and certain shows doing specials to help them...and also concerning mental health problems and homelessness.”
[F, Family connection]

- Younger participants in particular say that there has been a change in recent years, with publicity from charities such as Help for Heroes and events like the Invictus Games, presenting a more diverse picture of veterans.

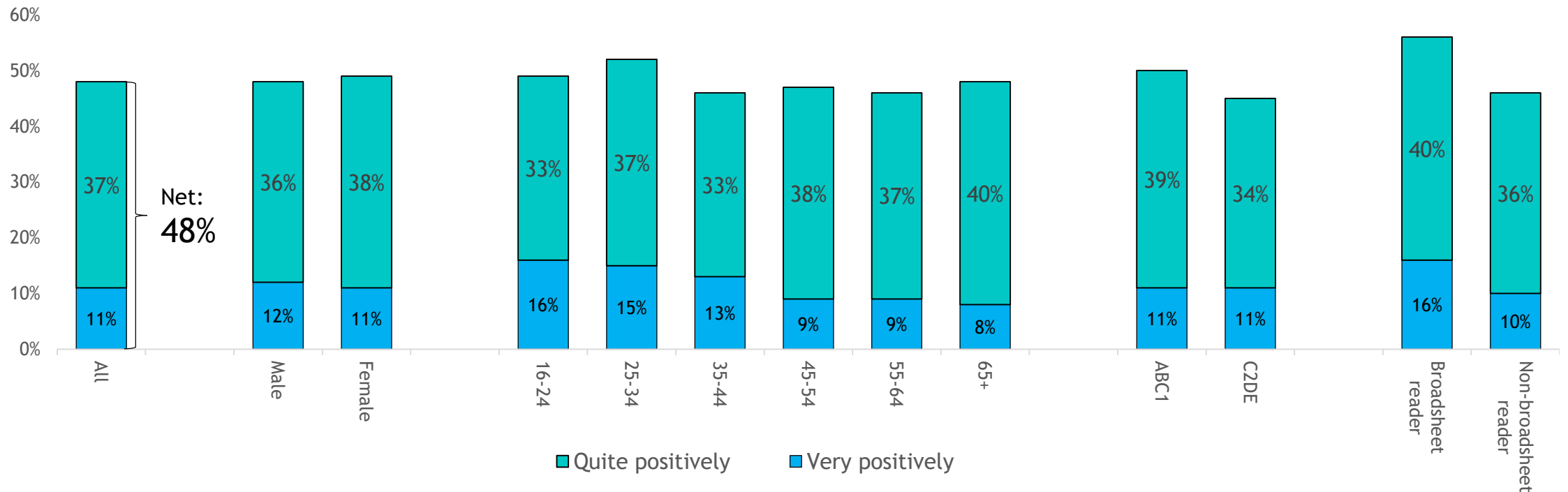
“You’re trying to make them a victim...‘Oh, they’ve served this country for so long and now they’re being mugged’ and it makes you feel more pity, or if it said ‘veteran’ and then they mugged someone, it would be like, ‘Oh, that’s out of character’.”
[F, 25-34, London]



- Participants say they are critical of media coverage, however, they believe that the information they are exposed to does influence their perceptions to some extent - this is particularly evident in participants’ initial reactions and associations’.

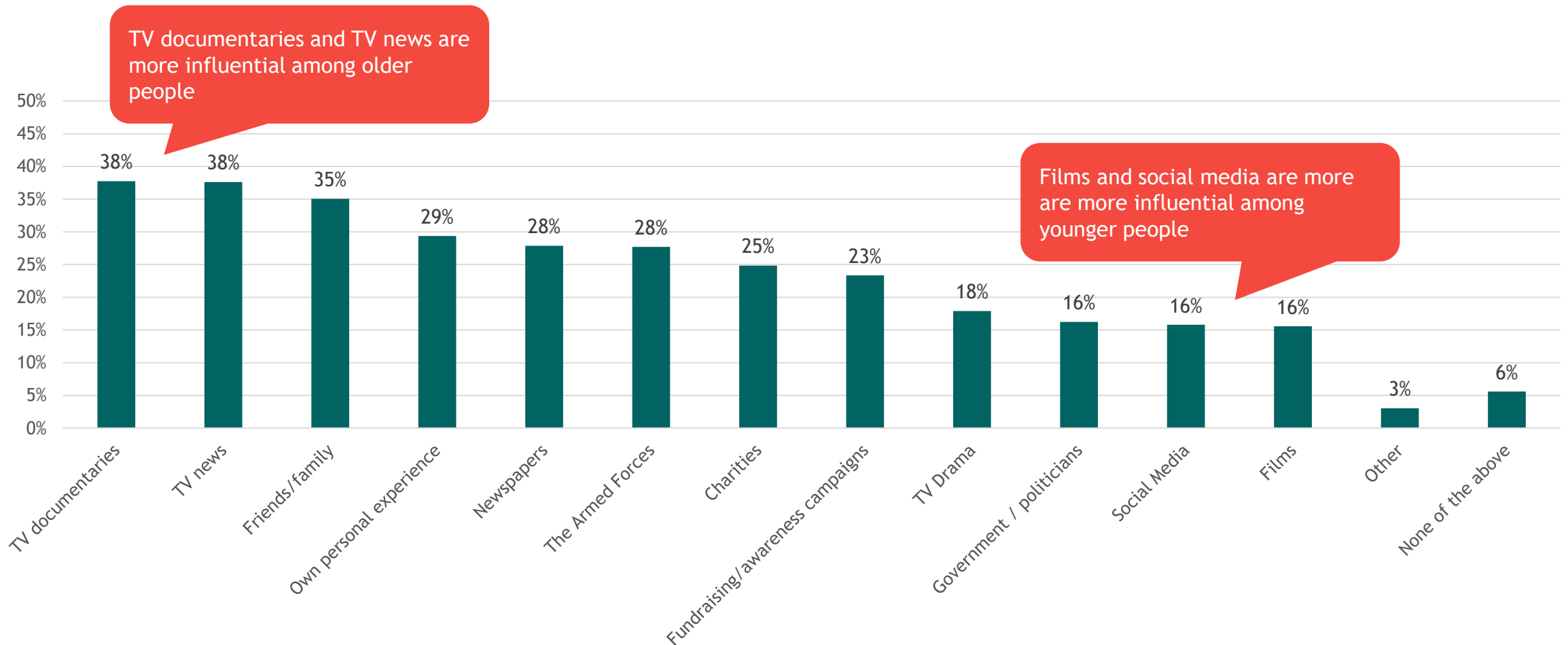
Portrayal of ex-UK Armed Forces in the media

Just under half (48%) think that those who have previously served in the UK Armed Forces are portrayed either very positively or positively. Broadsheet readers as well as younger people tend to be most likely to report positive sentiment.



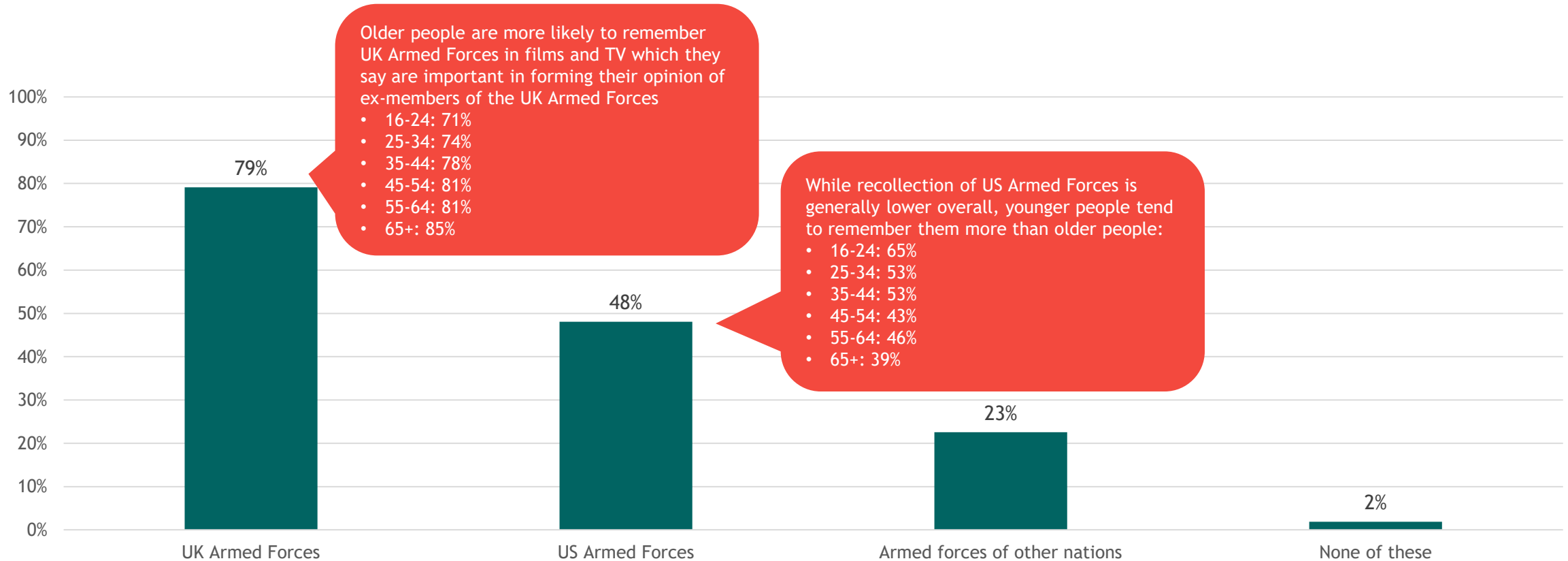
Influencers of opinion

TV documentaries and TV news are the most prevalent media sources in forming opinions regarding ex-members of the UK Armed Forces.



Nationality commonly portrayed in films/TV dramas/TV documentaries

While the UK Armed Forces are the most commonly portrayed on TV and film, the US Armed Forces are also relatively widely featured.

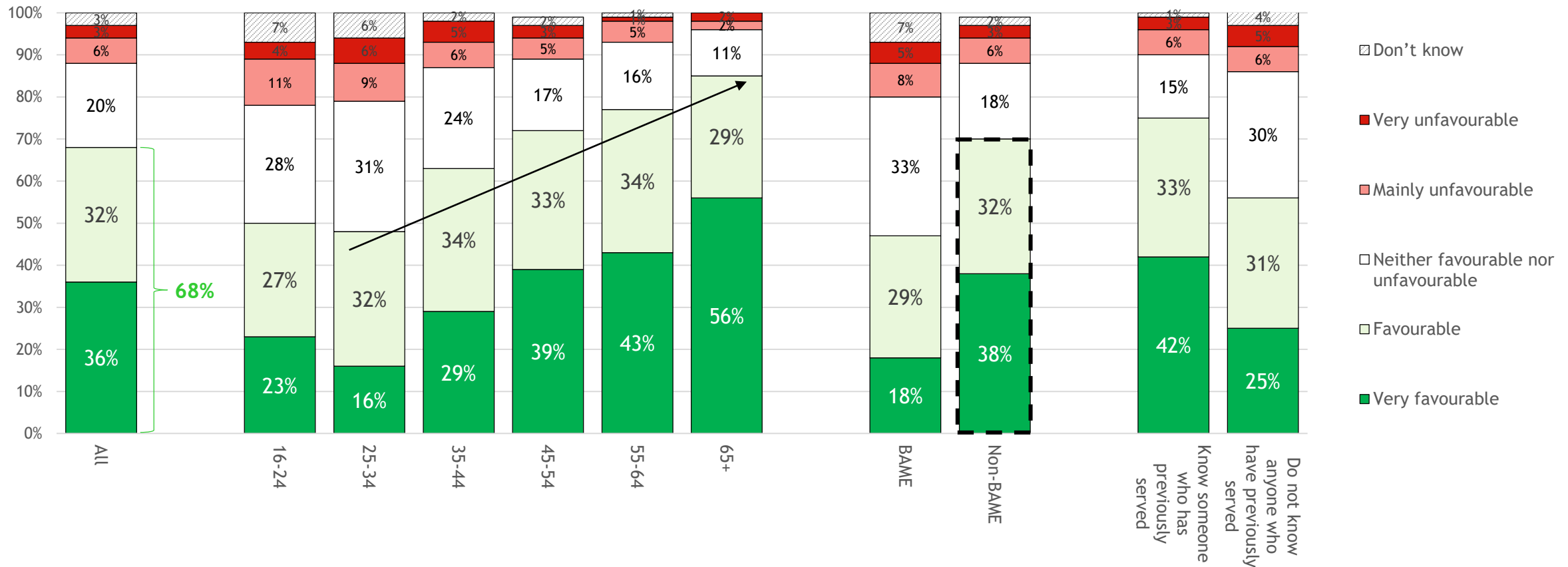




Perceptions of, and favorability towards, the UK Armed Forces

Favourability [1]

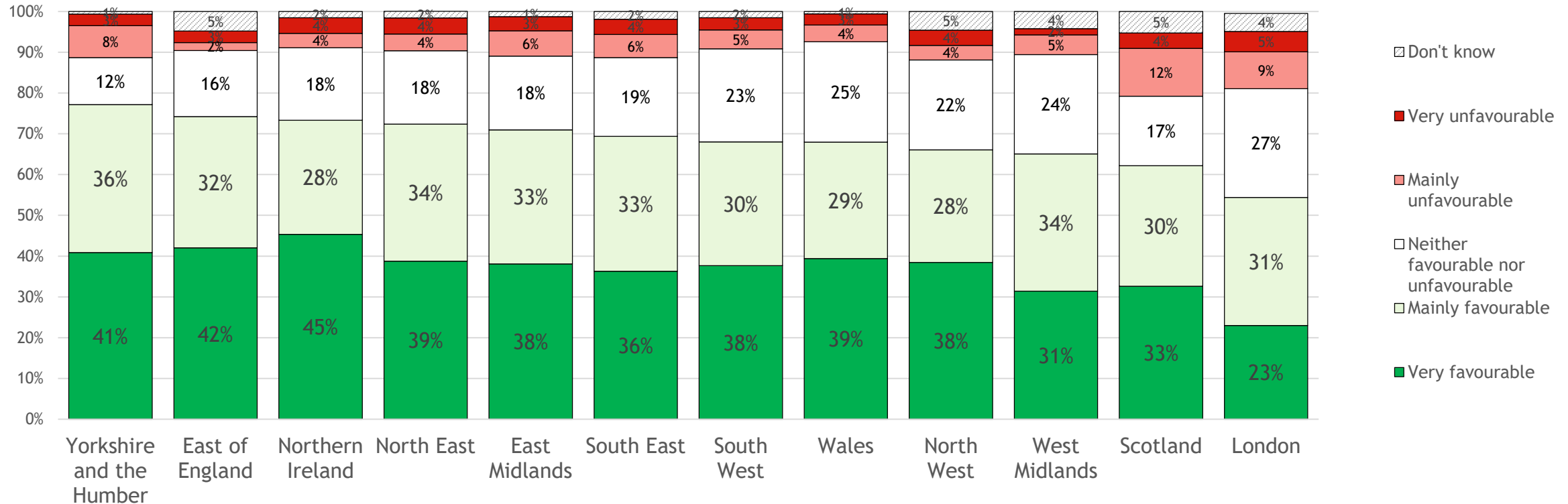
Overall, the large majority have a favourable opinion/impression of the UK Armed forces. This is particularly the case among older people and non-BAME groups as well as among people who know someone who has previously served.



Favourability by region

Favourability towards the UK Armed Forces in general is highest in Yorkshire & Humber followed by the East of England. Northern Ireland also ranks highly and has a the largest number of people who are very favourable towards the Armed Forces. London displays the lowest levels of favourability.

By geographical region



Participants feel positively towards those in service, but some hold contrasting views across branches

- Matching the positive picture in the quantitative research, qualitative participants see the armed forces in a **positive** light - their willingness to put themselves in harm's way and adapt to military life elicits respect; many participants say they would not be willing to put themselves in the same position.
- Some participants tend to distinguish between branches of the armed forces; the army is believed to require **fewer qualifications on entry**, leaving those exiting this branch disadvantaged when seeking civilian employment. Conversely, some see RAF and Navy branches as elite and assume service personnel to be predominantly middle class.
- Some, especially younger participants, tend to view **RAF and Navy branches as somewhat protected from front line combat**, which they most closely associate with the army.

*"In my mind, hero is something that comes up...I compare my job to theirs and I just think that it's completely different...anyone facing life or death scenarios, in my opinion, are to be admired. They're different. You know, not everyone would choose it."
[F, 25-34, London]*

*"It's probably not the case but it always feels like the RAF and the Royal Navy are, sort of, more support for the main military...sometimes they are used purely for logistical purposes."
[M, 25-34, London]*

For participants, involvement in recent conflict often enhances rather than impedes feelings of respect

- Many participants see recent conflicts requiring UK military input (e.g. Iraq and Afghanistan) as unjust, distinguishing such conflict from historic events such as WW1 and WW2.
- Despite anger and frustration at the conflict itself, a majority of participants say **respect for those serving in the armed forces remains intact** - service personnel are simply following orders.
- Participants hold politicians responsible for UK involvement in conflict; anger directed towards politicians often **enhances respect** for service personnel - their job is made even more difficult by the controversy they face.



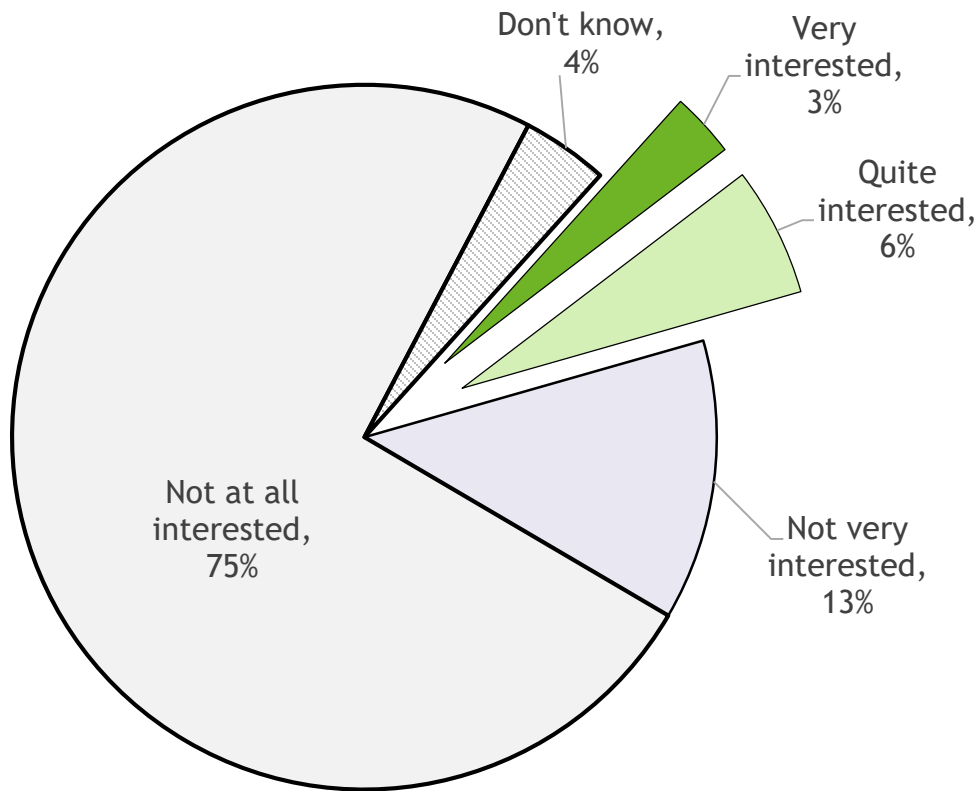
I feel that many veterans (recent) who fought in recent conflicts may not be open about their recent service, given wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were so controversial... but it doesn't affect my views on veterans. They've served, and followed orders (right or wrong) from the government.”
[M, Teacher]



“You can't blame the servicemen and women for where they were sent and for what reason - that was the politicians fault.”
[F, Donates to charity]

Interest in joining the UK Armed Forces

Overall, 9% say they are interested in joining the UK Armed Forces. Among those very interested, twice as many are males (4%) compared to females (2%). Also, 17% of those who previously served are still very interested in serving.



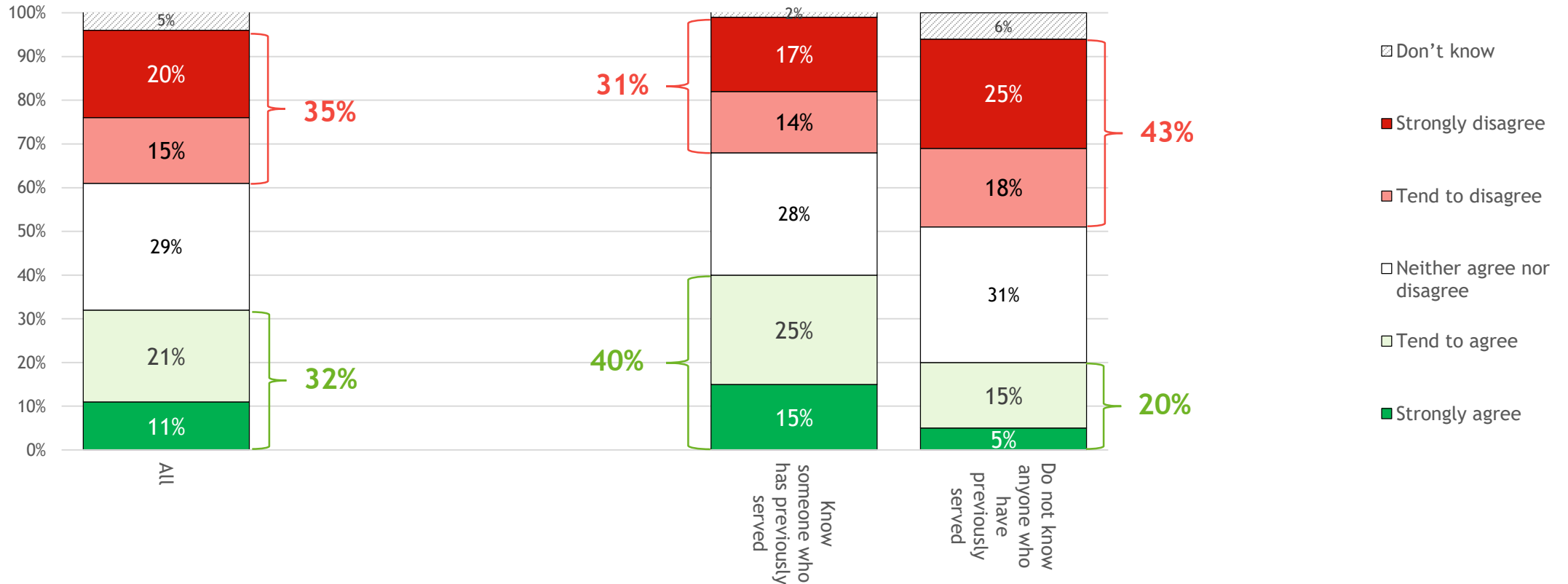
Predictably, those who say that they are interested in joining are significantly higher in the younger age groups:

- 16-24 year olds: Very / quite interested: 15%
- 25-34 year olds: Very / quite interested: 11%
- 35-54 year olds: Very / quite interested: 8%

Support for recruitment

Roughly similar numbers of people say they would encourage a friend or family member to consider a career in the UK Armed Forces as people who would not. 15% of those who know someone who previously served and 39% of those who personally previously served said they *strongly agree* with this sentiment.

"I would encourage a friend or family member to consider a career in the UK Armed Forces"



When it comes to a child or loved one's military service, participants have mixed feelings

Those who are parents say their children's decision to serve in the armed forces would cause worry - risk of physical injury and death is a concern, but **potential impact on mental health** is a larger issue.

A minority of participants say that the causes being fought for may not be worthy of the accompanying risk, and they would be concerned about their child(ren) having to **compromise their moral character or being wrongfully put in harms way.**

*"No. You don't know the agenda. If we did get attacked and we had to be defensive then it's a different situation but the war I've seen in my lifetime has always been about politics."
[M, 25-34, Newport]*

Ultimately, participants say they would support their children, and would be **proud of their bravery** and contribution.

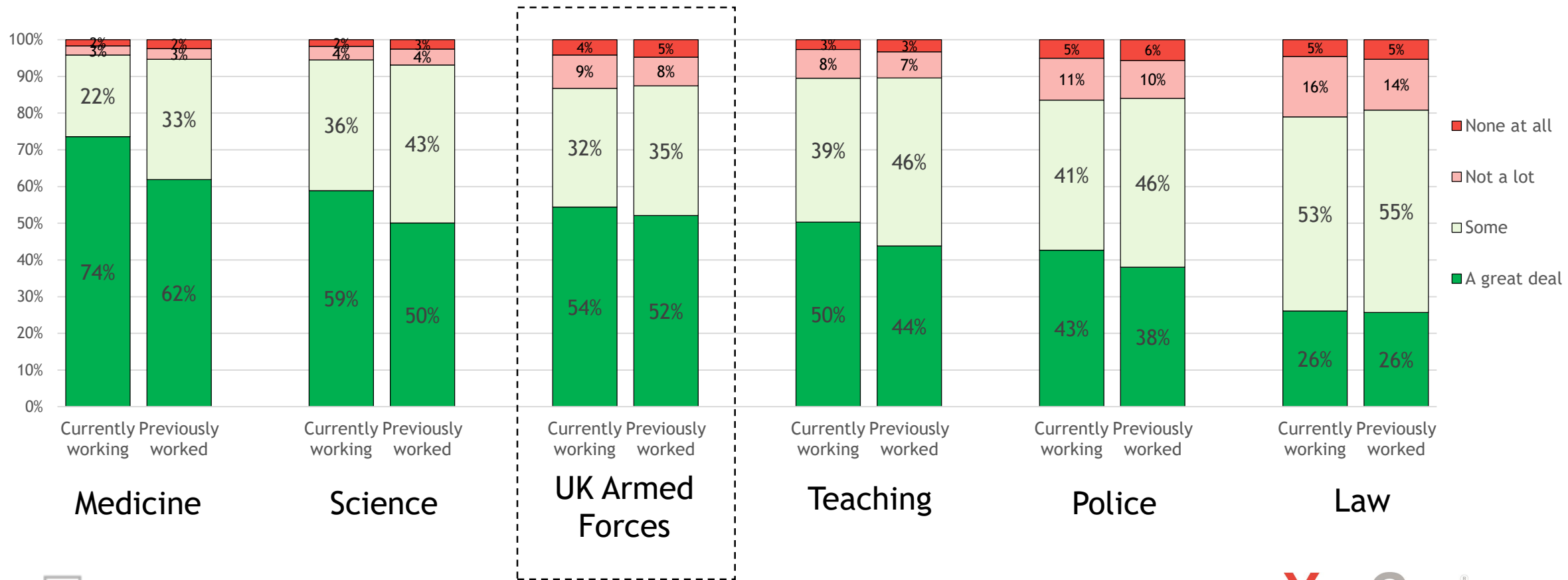
*"[I'd be] worried, but it is up to them what they do as a career. [They] would make me proud though."
[F, Donates to charity]*



Levels of respect for those working in different professions

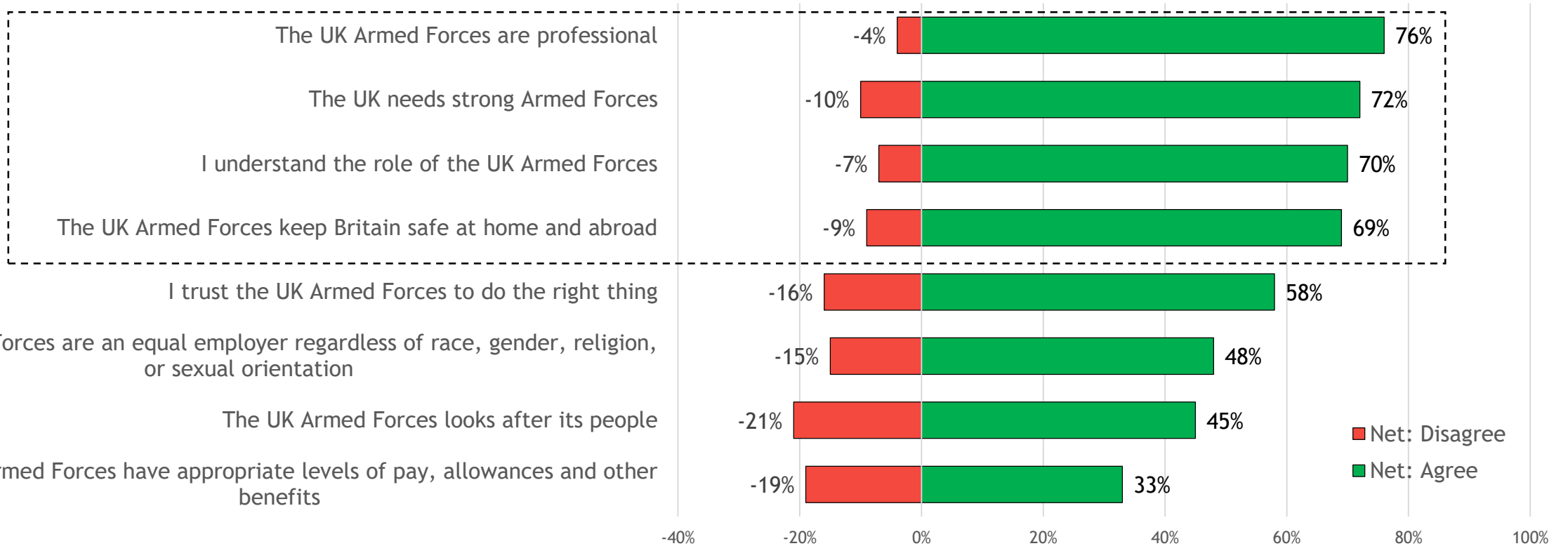
Over half (54%) of people say they have a great deal of respect for those currently serving in the UK Armed Forces. This is very similar (52%) for people who were previously in the Armed Forces.

The number of people who say they have a 'great deal of respect' for ex-members of the Armed Forces is higher than all but those who previously worked in medicine. Additionally, the Armed Forces shows the smallest decline compared to those currently working for all professions except law (which ranks lowest).



Perceptions of the UK Armed Forces

The large majority think the UK Armed Forces are professional, that the UK needs strong Armed Forces, agree that they understand the role of the UK Armed Forces and the UK Armed Forces keep Britain safe at home and abroad. Over half also trust the UK Armed Forces to do the right thing.





Key driver analysis of favourability and recruitment

Four factors

Four ‘factors’ were found within the survey data. A factor is comprised of series of answers which are closely correlated to one another i.e. people are inclined to give similar sets of answers for each. We have named each factor to represent the theme of their commonality.

Factor 1: General perceptions

This is a factor made up of agreement to a number of high level statements which are focused on the UK Armed Forces in general as opposed to being veterans focused.

- The UK Armed Forces keep Britain safe at home and abroad (0.85)
- I trust the UK Armed Forces to do the right thing (0.85)
- The UK needs strong Armed Forces (0.76)
- The UK Armed Forces are professional (0.71)
- The UK Armed Forces are an equal employer regardless of race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation (0.7)
- The UK Armed Forces looks after its people (0.55)
- I understand the role of the UK Armed Forces (0.53)
- The UK Armed Forces have appropriate levels of pay, allowances and other benefits (0.33)

Factor 2: Personal wellbeing (veterans focus)

This factor is comprised of **negative** associations of veterans.

- Mental health problems (0.72)
- Homelessness (0.71)
- Problems adjusting to a civilian environment (0.69)
- Alcohol or substance abuse (0.68)
- Family problems (0.68)
- Physical injuries and disabilities (0.67)
- Difficulty finding a good new job (0.62)

Factor 3: Building skills (veterans focus)

This factor is comprised of **positive** associations of veterans.

- Resilience under pressure (0.78)
- Strong teamwork (0.77)
- Good problem solving skills (0.74)
- Effective leadership (0.71)
- Physical fitness (0.63)
- Practical skills/qualifications for working life (0.62)
- A network of friends for life (0.56)

Factor 4: Potential difficulties outside of the military (veterans focus)

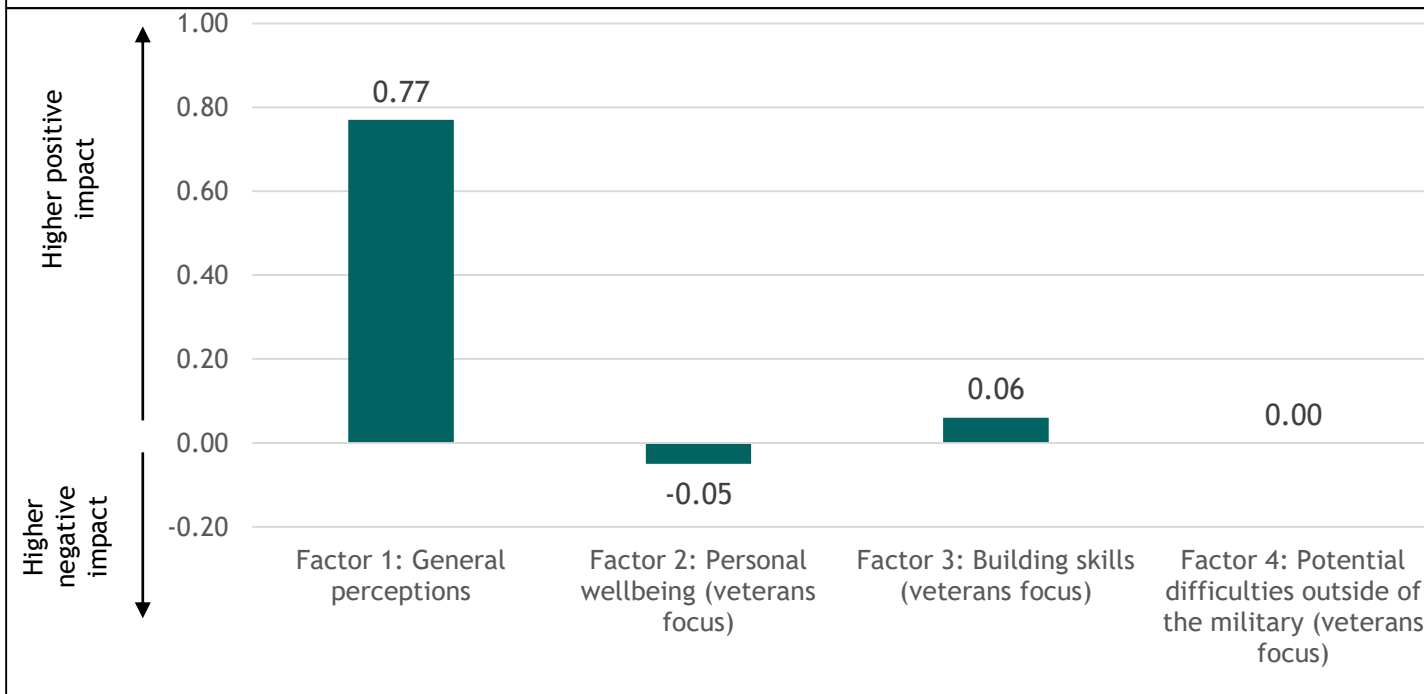
This is a factor made up of a number of potential difficulties which are seen to affect ex-members of Armed Forces.

- Significant levels of debt (0.82)
- Lack of direction/purpose (0.72)
- Loneliness (0.71)
- Relationship issues with a partner (0.6)

How the factors impact upon favourability to the UK Armed Forces

- The general perceptions factor is the dominant element impacting favourability towards the UK Armed Forces
- The two factors on positive/negative perceptions towards veterans feed into favourability but only to a small degree
- Factor 4 has no impact on favourability

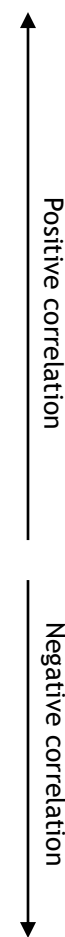
Explained variance=56.48%



Effect of individual attributes on favourability



Attributes	Correlation
I trust the UK Armed Forces to do the right thing	0.73
The UK Armed Forces keep Britain safe at home and abroad	0.69
The UK needs strong Armed Forces	0.69
The UK Armed Forces are professional	0.65
The UK Armed Forces are an equal employer regardless of race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation	0.51
Effective leadership	0.46
Serving in the UK armed Forces has a positive impact when returning to civilian life*	0.45
Good problem solving skills	0.42
I understand the role of the UK Armed Forces	0.40
Strong teamwork	0.40
Resilience under pressure	0.38
The UK Armed Forces looks after its people	0.38
Practical skills/qualifications for working life	0.37
A network of friends for life	0.33
Physical fitness	0.22
The UK Armed Forces have appropriate levels of pay, allowances and other benefits	0.08
Significant levels of debt	-0.06
Difficulty finding a good new job	-0.08
Physical injuries and disabilities	-0.08
Loneliness	-0.13
Homelessness	-0.16
Problems adjusting to a civilian environment	-0.17
Family problems	-0.20
Relationship issues with a partner	-0.21
Lack of direction/purpose	-0.22
Mental health problems	-0.24
Alcohol or substance abuse	-0.26



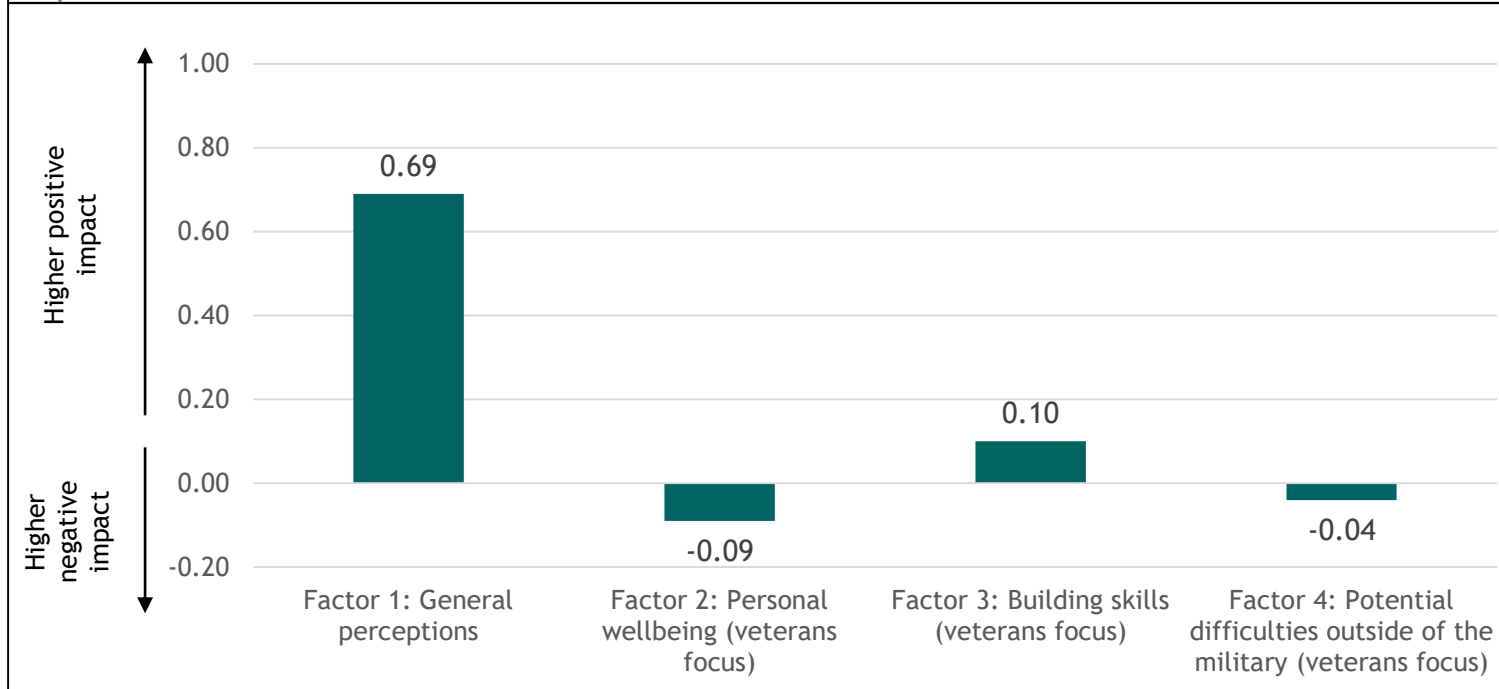
- When looking at the individual attributes, trust that the UK Armed Forces will do the right thing has the highest correlation with overall favourability. Other important attributes include the Armed Forces keeping Britain safe, the need for strong Armed Forces and Armed Forces that are professional.
- The highest veterans focused attribute is the perception that ex-members of the Forces have effective leadership. Good problem solving skills also feeds in positive overall favourability.
- The largest negative correlation with favourability are perceptions that veterans suffer from mental health problems and alcohol / substance abuse. However it should be recognised that the negative effect on favourability is by far outweighed by most positive perceptions of veterans.

* Attribute not part of a factor but included to provide additional context

How the factors impact upon recruitment

- The general perceptions factor also has the strongest impact upon recruitment to the UK Armed Forces. However, the influence of this factor is not quite as large as it has on favourability.
- Equally, the factors focused upon veterans have a slightly higher impact upon recruitment compared to overall favourability with factor 2 and 3 having a relatively similar impact (both positively and negatively).
- Factor 4 which had no effect on overall favourability does contribute slightly towards recruitment. As this factor comprises of difficulties faced outside the military by ex-Forces members, this has a negative effect on recruitment.

Explained variance=37.75%

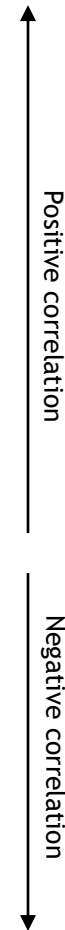


Effect of individual attributes on recruitment



Attributes	Correlations
I trust the UK Armed Forces to do the right thing	0.61
The UK needs strong Armed Forces	0.55
The UK Armed Forces keep Britain safe at home and abroad	0.54
The UK Armed Forces are professional	0.50
Serving in the UK armed Forces has a positive impact when returning to civilian life*	0.48
The UK Armed Forces are an equal employer regardless of race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation	0.43
Effective leadership	0.40
Practical skills/qualifications for working life	0.37
I understand the role of the UK Armed Forces	0.36
Good problem solving skills	0.36
The UK Armed Forces looks after its people	0.34
Resilience under pressure	0.33
Strong teamwork	0.32
A network of friends for life	0.31
Physical fitness	0.16
The UK Armed Forces have appropriate levels of pay, allowances and other benefits	0.11
Significant levels of debt	-0.05
Difficulty finding a good new job	-0.11
Physical injuries and disabilities	-0.13
Homelessness	-0.15
Problems adjusting to a civilian environment	-0.18
Loneliness	-0.18
Family problems	-0.18
Relationship issues with a partner	-0.21
Lack of direction/purpose	-0.23
Alcohol or substance abuse	-0.24
Mental health problems	-0.28

* Attribute not part of a factor but included to provide additional context



- While the same attributes tend to have the biggest effect upon recruitment as they do for favourability, their impact is slightly lower. For example, trust in the UK Armed Forces is still the most important attribute (0.61) but it is not quite as critical as seen for favourability (0.73). This can be seen with many of the General Perceptions (Factor 1) attributes and consequently explains why the impact of this factor is lower for recruitment compared to favourability.
- When looking at the veterans focused attributes, effective leadership still has the highest impact. However practical skills/qualifications (more important than for favourability) as well as good problem solving skills are also important in the mix for recruitment.
- The five attributes which have the most negative effect on recruitment are the same as that for favourability.

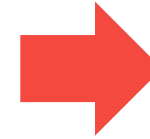
— Image testing

Method

The section began with an introduction page which contained all relevant instructions necessary for completion. Note that this was the first time the word 'veterans' was used within the entire survey.



The image testing section started with two test pages. The purpose of these were so the respondent could get used to the method of response which is slightly different to a normal survey. The two test images were kept constant and are not included in the results.



The main section comprised of 23 randomised pages. Each page showed an image which represented possible associations with 'veterans'. Results are presented as an overall cumulative response for *yes* and *no* selections (termed overall response). The responses are also analysed by selections made between 0.5 to 1.5 seconds (termed IRT timed reaction).

YouGov

You will now see a series of images. We would like you to indicate whether you associate each image with UK Armed Forces veterans. By veterans we mean anyone who has served in Her Majesty's Armed Forces (Regular or Reserve) or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations.

Please put a left finger on the "E" key on your keyboard and press that if you **do** associate the image with UK Armed Forces veterans.

Put a right finger on the "I" key on your keyboard and press that if you **do not** associate the image with UK Armed Forces veterans.

You will have a **maximum** of 10 seconds to respond to each statement.

There are 25 images in total which will be shown to you. After this, the survey will finish.

Press the arrow below when you are ready to start.



YouGov

Do you associate this image with UK Armed Forces veterans?



Yes (E)

No (I)

07



YouGov

Do you associate this image with UK Armed Forces veterans?



Yes (E)

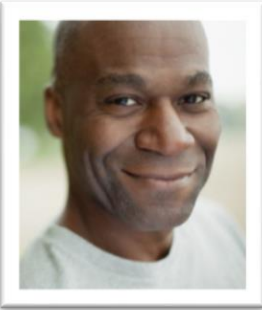
No (I)

04



Image gallery [1]

Male BAME 1



Male BAME 2



Happily holding daughter



Female



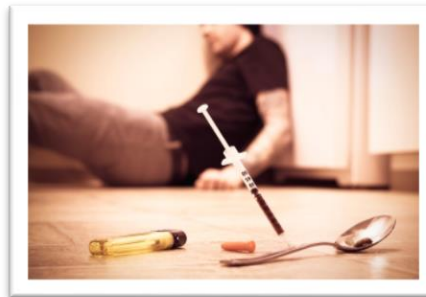
Wheelchair, male, professional



Wheelchair, male, sporting, victory



Drug abuse



Alcohol abuse



Depression, anxiety

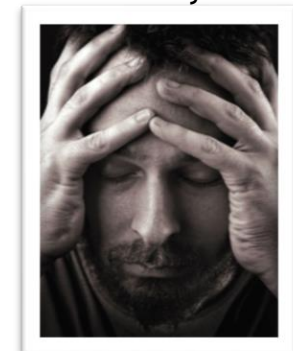


Image gallery [2]

Anger



Prison, crime



Homelessness, sleeping rough



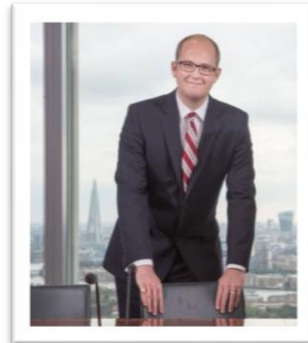
Old male veterans at an event



Teacher, male



Senior businessman



Scientist, female



Cook, male



Image gallery [3]

Loneliness



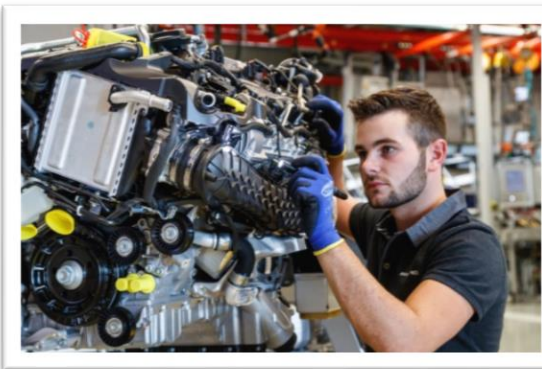
Medical doctor, male



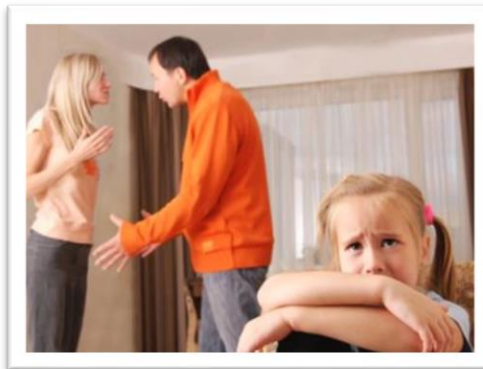
Lorry driver, male



Hi-tech engineer, male



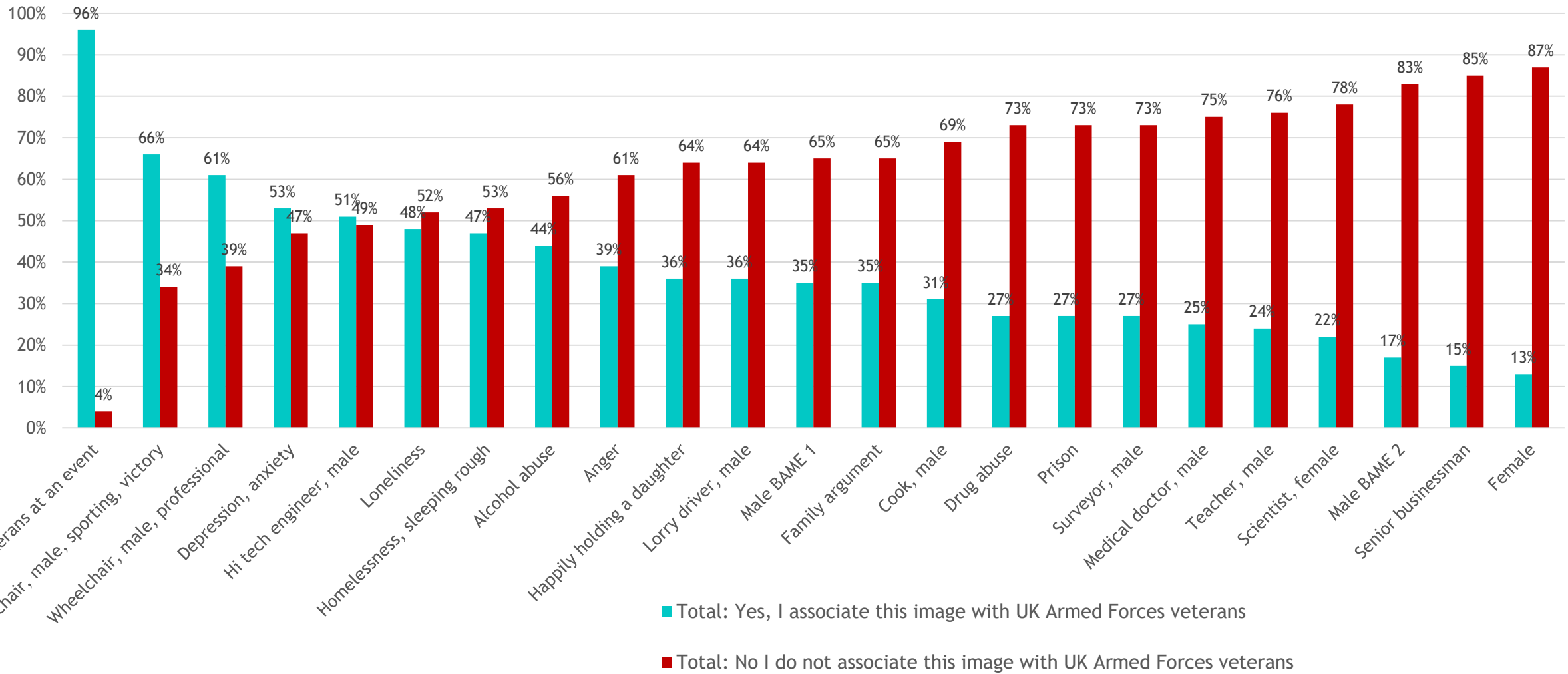
Family argument



Surveyor, male



Overall reaction



Discussion: Overall reaction



Image: Older male veterans at an event. This is the image which is clearly most associated with UK Armed Forces veterans. As this is a very traditional view of those who have previously served, it is relatively unsurprising that the association was made by 96% of respondents.



Images: Wheelchair, male, sporting, victory / Wheelchair, male, professional. These two images were selected second (66%) and third (61%) respectively. They are positioned significantly behind the older male veterans image, but represent a distinct grouping as they in turn, are comfortably ahead of the fourth placed image. This suggests that while the connection is not universal, it is one which resonates with many.

The images themselves are complex. While on one hand they represent achievement and implied levels of success, the subjects each have a clear physical disability. However, it can be argued that as a complete image, their portrayal is relatively positive as each subject could be seen to have ‘overcome’ this disability.

A point of discussion is that these images, which implicitly contain a multi-layered level of interpretation, illustrate the complexity of thinking which go to form perceptions towards veterans.



Discussion: Overall reaction (continued)



Image: Hi tech engineer, male. This image was selected 5th overall by 51% of people. It is the first of the images which represent a profession or type of work. The second most widely selected image which shows employment of some nature is one of a lorry driver which was chosen by only 36%. This suggests that this form of skilled engineering position is by far the most aligned in terms of how people think about veterans and their roles (out of those tested).



Images: Depression, anxiety / loneliness / alcohol abuse / homelessness. This group of images were chosen by very similar numbers - around half of people: depression chosen 4th by 53%, loneliness chosen 6th by 48%, homelessness chosen 7th by 47% and alcohol abuse chosen 8th by 44%. They were split only by the hi-tech engineer image shown above.



A concern with these particular images is the stark, unambiguous nature of what they represent and the numbers in which they were selected by respondents. As such, they form a group of problematic associations with veterans which are relatively widely recognised by the general public.

Discussion: Overall reaction (continued)

Male BAME 1



Male BAME 2



Female



The male BAME 1 image was chosen by 35% of people. This is the most commonly selected of the images chosen to represent a less traditional image of a member of the UK Armed Forces i.e. white / male. Interestingly less BAME respondents associated this image with veterans compared to non-BAME respondents.

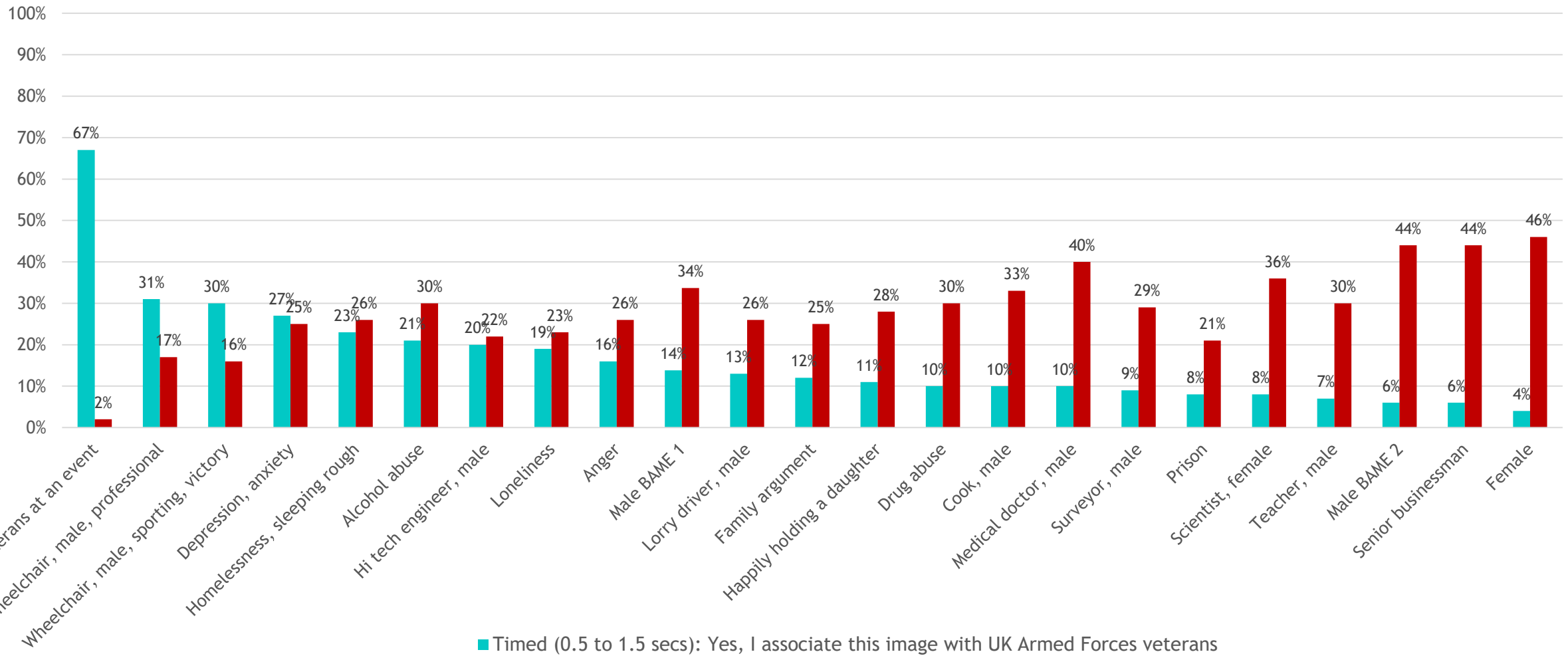
It is noticeable that male BAME 1 was chosen by more than twice as many as the male BAME 2 image. This image was chosen by BAME and non-BAME respondents in roughly equal numbers

The female photograph was chosen least out of all the images tested and was selected by just 13% as an image which they associate with veterans of the UK Armed Forces. This image was chosen by men and women in equal numbers.

Based on these findings, it may be interpreted that gender is most likely to be the differentiator in terms of levels of association with veterans. This is most evidenced by the fact that the female portrait came last out of all images tested.

Interpreting the two male BAME images is arguably even more subjective. While they were purposefully selected to represent individuals of roughly similar ages and with a similar facial demeanour, the impact of their individual ethnicity might not be the primary differentiator. For example one has glasses and is wearing a shirt while the other is in a t-shirt and does not wear glasses. However it is clear that none of these images resonated particularly highly for one, or any number of reasons.

IRT: Timed reaction



■ Timed (0.5 to 1.5 secs): Yes, I associate this image with UK Armed Forces veterans

■ Timed (0.5 to 1.5 secs): No I do not associate this image with UK Armed Forces veterans

Timed reaction vs. total reaction

	Timed reaction rank	Total reaction rank	Difference in rank
Old male veterans at an event	1	1	0
Wheelchair, male, professional	2	3	-1
Wheelchair, male, sporting, victory	3	2	1
Depression, anxiety	4	4	0
Homelessness, sleeping rough	5	7	-2
Alcohol abuse	6	8	-2
Hi tech engineer, male	7	5	2
Loneliness	8	6	2
Anger	9	9	0
Male BAME 1	10	12	-2
Lorry driver, male	11	11	0
Family argument	12	13	-1
Happily holding a daughter	13	10	3
Drug abuse	14	15	-1
Cook, male	15	14	1
Medical doctor, male	16	18	-2
Surveyor, male	17	17	0
Prison	18	16	2
Scientist, female	19	20	-1
Teacher, male	20	19	1
Male BAME 2	21	21	0
Senior businessman	22	22	0
Female	23	23	0

When comparing the rankings for each image for total reaction (all responses included) versus those of the IRT timed reaction group (only responses in the 0.5 to 1.5 second window included), it can be seen that there is very little difference.

The image which resonates most is one which depicts older male veterans at an event which ranks first by a long margin using both methods.

The only image which is seen to vary by more than 2 positions is the one which shows a father happily holding his daughter. However, it can be noted that this is closely grouped with other images for both of the methods which means that only a small change in the number of people choosing it will result in this type of difference in ranking.

Discussion: ITR timed reaction



Image: Older male veterans at an event. In parallel with the overall results, this image is by far the most selected (67%) out of all tested as that which people associate with UK Armed Forces Veterans. In itself this is not a surprise as the image is one which represents an extremely traditional portrayal of veterans in terms of setting, age, ethnicity, gender and clothing. Therefore there is no obvious reason why there might be a fundamental difference in system 1 and system 2 thinking regarding this type of imagery.



Images: Wheelchair, male, sporting, victory / Wheelchair, male, professional. These two images were selected second (31%) and third (30%) respectively in the IRT method and differ only in their sequence compared to the overall reaction ranking. In both methods, the gap between those who said they reflected perceptions of veterans were extremely similar.



As discussed earlier, these images represent a multi-faceted interpretation of UK Armed Forces veterans. Inherent in both are physical hardship / loss as well as elements of success and achievement. The fact that these images were selected both second and third in the IRT version is revealing in that even in a very short space of time, the complicated imagery present in both photographs has been assessed and interpreted, with extremely similar results in comparison to when people had longer to contemplate their decision. Again, this only reinforces the likelihood that there are various layers simultaneously at work in the perception of veterans, even in system 1 thinking.

Discussion: ITR timed reaction



Images: Depression, anxiety / homelessness. As can be seen on [page 62](#), these two images are very similar in terms of ranking across both methods. It is also noticeable that both images have an extremely similar level of people who say each are/are not representative of veterans.

This suggests that these are polarising perceptions of veterans. This is within the context of a fast emotional response as well as a slower considered response. This implies a level of credence that these are potentially fundamental points of perception.

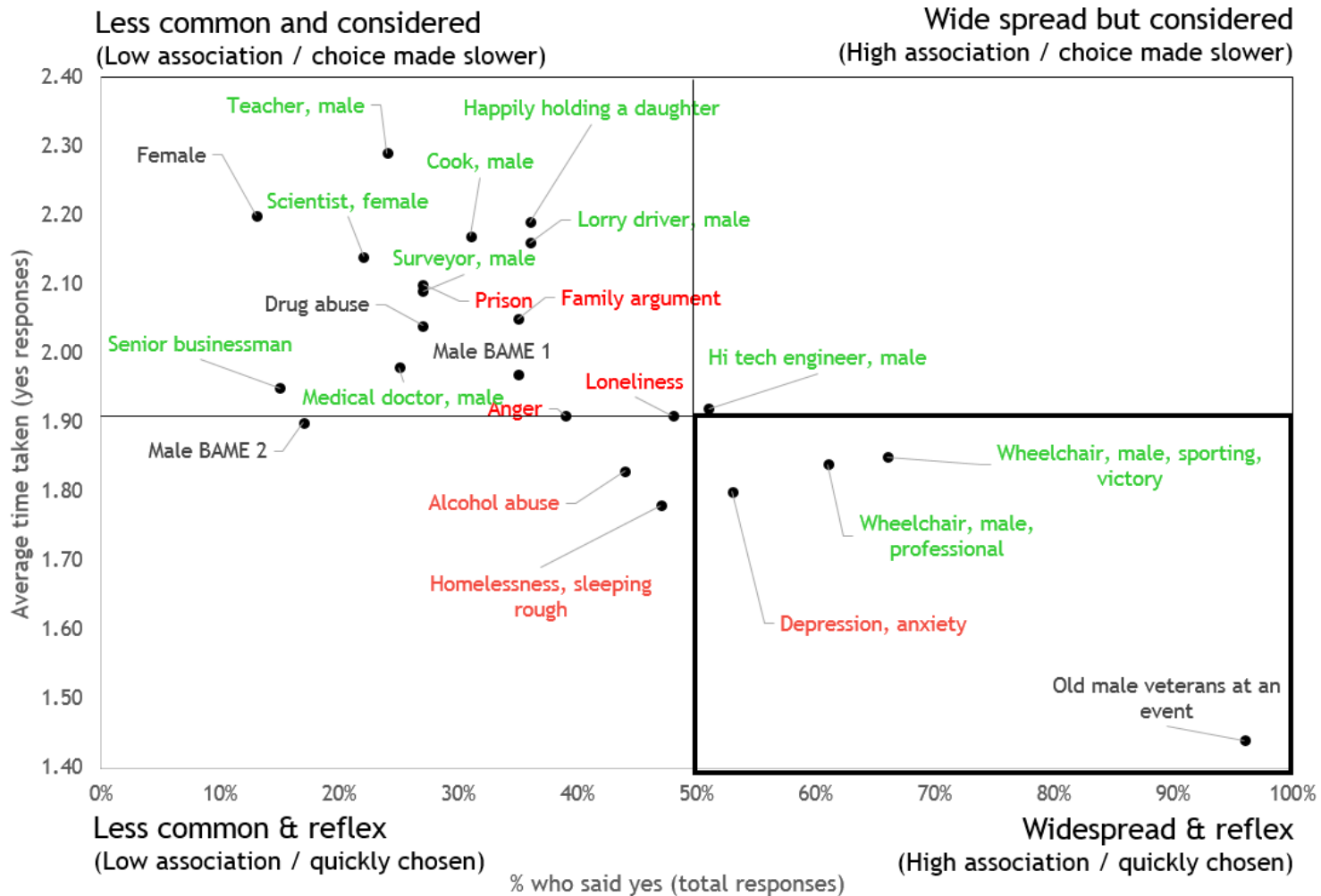
It can be observed that the relative positions of the images are extremely comparable when looked at through the prism of a restricted time period (IRT) compared to where no time restriction (bar the maximum of 10 seconds) is imposed. Additionally there is also a similarly large gap between the image most commonly chosen as representing veterans and the second/third placed images across both methods of analysis.

This strongly suggests that there is little difference between emotionally driven, reactionary perceptions of veterans versus a more considered, more slowly evaluated version of processing the information. The evidence therefore suggests that the perceptions given are as 'truthful' as can be expected with little indication of any hidden or suppressed feelings in how people interpret their own thoughts towards veterans. By extension, while there is obvious societal influence and conformity pressure in the interpretation of any defined social group, it is relatively lacking to a measurable extent in this case.

Average time vs. level of association with veterans

Less common and considered: Most associations are in this quadrant which is indicative of perceptions which are slightly more considered but also only chosen by less than half of people.

Less common & reflex: There are a number of negative associations which are made in a more reflex manner but are only made by less than half of people.



Wide spread but considered: Only contains one (positive) association. This image is recognised by the majority but on average, has taken people slightly longer to arrive at their conclusion.

Widespread & reflex: A critical quadrant representing top of mind associations with veterans made by the majority. These are the images which widely resonate and are at the forefront of peoples' minds in terms of their perceptions of veterans.

— Key takeaways

Initial perceptions

- Top of mind association with ex-Forces members is likely to be positive. 46% choose a positive association compared to only 14% who choose a negative association (38% say they don't know). The most mentioned association is bravery (12%) which covers physical bravery and also bravery for the act of service. This is higher among people interested in joining the Armed Forces (17%).
- The highest negative top of mind association is with PTSD (3%).
- Prompted associations are also mainly positive with the majority of people connecting ex-Forces personnel with having self-discipline (65%) and loyalty (53%).
- The most common negative prompted association is with a sense of institutionalisation (34%), a sentiment slightly stronger among employers (41%).
- Ex-Forces personnel are also widely seen as possessing positive skills such as physical fitness, specialist skills e.g. firearms skills, logistical, engineering and communications skills.
- The term 'Veteran' makes sense in the US, but is less familiar in the context of the UK. 'Veteran' is a loaded and therefore limiting term – alternatives could be less problematic.

Positive/negative associations

- The degree of association with positive attributes is more prevalent than with negative attributes.
- The majority associate the following (positive attributes) at least somewhat with ex-Forces members:
 - Physical fitness
 - Strong teamwork
 - Resilience under pressure
 - Good problem solving skills
 - Practical skills/qualifications for working life
 - A network of friends for life
 - Effective leadership
- However, the majority also associate the following (positive attributes) at least somewhat with ex-Forces members:
 - Problems adjusting to a civilian life
 - Mental health problems
- The most common mental condition associated with ex-Forces personnel is PTSD (83% of people who of people who associate mental health problems with ex-Forces members).
- Both positive and negative factors associated with ex-Forces personnel are seen to have a significant impact on their daily lives following peoples' military careers.

Transition to civilian life [1]

- There is agreement by the majority that ex-Forces members have the skills and experience to cope with working life (59%).
- 71% also say that they make a valuable contribution to society.
- The majority (54%) agree that those who have previously served are capable of living a fulfilled civilian life.
- However, there are also areas in which it is relatively common that ex-Service men and women could face problems.
 - 55% think it is difficult for them to adjust to civilian life. People are aware of, and sympathetic to, the challenges of reintegration.
 - 58% think that the UK Government doesn't look after ex-service personnel. Support is seen as a government responsibility, and currently, it is considered inadequate.
 - 64% think that people who have previously served suffer from more mental, physical and emotional issues than the average person.
 - Just under half also think that those who have previously served might also suffer from loneliness and relationship issues.

Transition to civilian life [2]

There is split opinion on a number of important perceptions of transition to civilian life.

- 26% think it is easier for those who have previously served to get a job than an average person, but 38% think it is more difficult. They are perceived to have transferrable skills but may be limited by a lack of qualifications and civilian experience. People also see employers as open to veterans. Veterans are perceived to have transferrable skills but may be limited by a lack of qualifications and civilian experience.
- 30% think that serving in the UK Armed Forces damages people while slightly more think it develops people (36%). However on balance, just under half say that serving leaves ex-service men and women in a worse physical, mental and emotional state compared to just 18% who think it leaves them better condition. Participants identify opportunity to develop in the armed forces, but risk of damage overrides this for many.
- A third think that it is more difficult for ex-Forces personnel to gain an understanding of the job market and to create a structure for daily life compared to an average person. Leaving the armed forces is a transition – many people say support should start early on in this process.

What people think (is service seen as beneficial or harmful, and why this is)?

- Perceptions on serving are divided. About a third (36%) see service in the UK Armed Forces as developing people but only slightly less (30%) think that it damages people.
- However, just under half (47%) think service leaves people in a worse mental, physical or emotional position than when they started serving compared to just 18% who think it leaves them in a better state.
- And just under two thirds (64%) think service leaves people in a worse mental, physical or emotional position compared to average people as opposed to just 7% who think it leaves them better off compared to an average person.
- Participants identify opportunity to develop in the armed forces, but risk of damage overrides this for many.

How damaging this is towards favourability and recruitment?

- The dominant factor in driving favourability are general perceptions of the Armed Forces as opposed to perceptions of veterans. Those areas which have the biggest impact are trust in the UK Armed Forces to do the right thing, the role of the Armed Forces keeping Britain safe at home and abroad, the need for a strong Armed Forces and Armed Forces which are professional.
- Views of veterans do contribute to a slight degree for overall favourability but to a much lesser degree as the general perceptions of the Armed Forces. As would be expected, positive views of ex-Forces personnel promotes favourability and negative perceptions diminishes it.
- In terms of the impact on recruitment, perceptions on ex-service members have a slightly bigger impact (both positive and negative) although it is still dominated by peoples' more holistic views about the Armed Forces. Among the most impactful areas relating to veterans, those which think ex-Forces members have effective leadership and good problem solving skills are more likely to have a positive view towards recruitment. The two negative perceptions which have the biggest impact are those who associate mental health problems and alcohol / substance abuse with those who have previously served.

Which groups are the most negative?

- In general younger people tend to hold more negative perceptions to service in the UK Armed Forces and its effects compared to older people. For example, 43% of those aged 16-24 think that service has a **negative** effect when returning to civilian life (26% say it has a positive effect). This can be compared to 47% of people aged >65 who say service has a **positive** effect (only 32% say it has a negative effect).
- Younger age groups also associate mental health problems with ex-service people to a greater degree than older people. For example 62% of 16-24 year olds make this association (a lot/somewhat) compared to only 42% of people aged 65+.
- People who know ex-Forces personnel tend to hold a more positive view compared to those who don't. For example, significantly more of those who know ex-service personnel make an association of strong teamwork, reliance under pressure, good problem solving skills, practical skills, and a network of friends for life as attributes with these people.

How we therefore reach these negative audiences

- A different strategy is required for different age groups. The younger age groups while being more negative can also thought of as being more empathetic while older people hold a more traditional view.
- Their greater propensity of younger people to think service will damage people both physically, mentally and emotionally should be addressed by understanding that their views of life in the UK Armed Forces is very different from the older generation.
- A possible means of communication is via testimony from those who have served and those who know people who have served as their perceptions are generally more positive within selected areas.