

Ex-Service Personnel and the Justice System:

A synthesis of existing research evidence

To help ensure that evidence is at the heart of decision making for the benefit of ex-Service personnel and their families, the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) Research Centre has committed to producing thematic research and policy summaries. These are intended to inform both policy and practice, as well as future research.

This one-page synthesis provides a summary of existing research evidence about United Kingdom (UK) ex-Service personnel's engagement with the justice system (JS). It was produced using a robust methodology, including a narrative literature review of extant academic and grey literature. This summary was also subject to peer-review. Further information about the methodology is provided in the accompanying [full report](#).

Key Findings



The **number of ex-Service personnel involved in the JS across the UK remains unknown**, with considerable conjecture surrounding the size of this group.



Ex-Service personnel may experience the JS in a manner which is distinct from the wider public, especially the prison environment. Notably, they have been found to be more critical about their general safety while in prison as well as being more positive about their relationships with staff and day-to-day life.



Evidence indicates that **ex-Service personnel within the JS are overwhelmingly male, as well as older** on average and more likely to serve longer sentences than the wider population.



There is evidence to suggest that ex-Service personnel involved in the JS are **more likely to experience an anxiety disorder such as PTSD as well as co-occurring mental health conditions** than the wider population.



Sexual and violent crimes have been reported as the most common offence types among ex-Service personnel involved in the JS.



Research notes that **ex-Service personnel may be less likely to access support services in the JS** due to the retention of a military mindset which emphasises the need to excel and display resistance in the face of adversity.



Factors associated with an increased risk of ex-Service personnel coming into contact with the JS have been identified as: **pre-Service anti-social behaviour, adverse childhood experiences, military deployment, military cultures of violence and alcohol consumption, short Service length, and experiencing mental health difficulties** (post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), alcohol misuse) **and aggression**.



There is widespread agreement that ex-Service personnel within the JS are **less likely to report drug misuse** than the general offender population.

Recommendations



Coordinated research is required to **determine the number of ex-Service personnel involved at each juncture of the JS** across the UK and their geographic distribution.



More studies are needed to **examine the delivery of psychological treatment** for military-related trauma within prison settings.



Greater attention must be given to the lived experiences of female, LGBT+, and ethnic minority ex-Service personnel with respect to their engagement with the JS, including their support needs.



Research is required to **examine variations in ex-Service personnel's experiences** of the JS across the UK, especially within Northern Ireland.



There is a need to **examine further how community support initiatives can be leveraged to promote desistance from criminal behaviours** amongst ex-Service personnel.



Renewed evidence on the support needs of ex-Service personnel within the JS is needed, including **those related to alcohol misuse, physical health, finance, and accommodation**.



Additional research is needed to consider **how one's status as an ex-Service person can inform experiences of the JS beyond the prison environment** (e.g., court settings, probation services), as well as how these experiences vary depending on an individual's age, ethnicity, and gender identity.



Further research is required to examine the **impact of ex-Service personnel's engagement with the JS on the socio-economic wellbeing of their family members/dependents**.

This infographic summarises research from *Ex-Service Personnel and the Justice System: Research Summary*, available from <https://fimt-rc.org/downloads/research-summary/full/justice.pdf>



The Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) Research Centre aims to ensure that evidence about the experiences and needs of Serving personnel, ex-Service personnel, and their families is at the heart of decision making so that it can inform and transform policy and practice to enable successful transition to civilian life post-Service. The FiMT Research Centre is run by a consortium of RAND Europe and the King's Centre for Military Health Research at King's College London, under a grant agreement with the Forces in Mind Trust until 2027. For more information: <https://www.fimt-rc.org>.



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