

UK military 'early leavers' are more likely to have treatable mental health problems than others

December 1 2014, by Jamie Brown

(Medical Xpress)—Each year, some 22,000 personnel leave the UK regular forces. Many leave before completing their service and are classed as 'early leavers'. New research from The University of Manchester shows that early leavers are more likely to have mental health problems than non-early leavers, and that these are likely to respond to specialist psychological treatment services.

The research group, based at The University of Manchester, looked at veterans attending specialist Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services, (such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy – a type of talking [therapy](#)). The study featured 366 veterans who were using the IAPT services in North-West England and had completed at least two courses of therapy. The veterans were selected if they were early leavers, had a physical disability and/or were alcohol or substance misusers. The researchers also compared the characteristics of early leavers with non-early leavers.

The researchers used a number of tools to assess the [mental health](#) and functioning of the veterans. These included a measure of anxiety (the Generalised Anxiety Disorder Scale - GAD-7), a measure of depression (the Patient Health Questionnaire – PHQ-9) and a measure of the impact of [mental health problems](#) on functioning (the Work and Social Adjustment Scale).

The main study finding was that early leavers were more responsive to therapy in IAPT services. After therapy, the early leavers experienced a more marked decline in anxiety and depression symptoms than non-early leavers. The early leavers also experienced a much lower impact of mental health problems on their daily functioning than non-early leavers.

The research team found that early leavers were more likely to be young and single compared to non-early leavers. The researchers suggest that this might be because the early leavers may have been exposed to more traumatic situations and a shorter history of anxiety and depression, however they concluded that more research was needed.

The research was led by Professor David Challis, professor of community care research, director of the Personal Social Services Research Unit (PSSRU) at The University of Manchester, and the associate director at the National Institute for Health Research School of Social Care Research (PSSRU). Professor Challis said: "The research showed the benefits of IAPT services for veterans, and also highlighted some of the difficulties faced by UK military veterans.

"The study highlights the benefit of a better understanding of the characteristics of different UK military veteran groups. It also shows the potential benefits of targeting therapy to [veterans](#) who are vulnerable because of mental [health problems](#) and in the process of reintegrating into society."

More information: "Demographic and clinical characteristics of UK military veterans attending a psychological therapies service." *Psychiatric Bulletin* pb.bp.113.046474; published ahead of print June 5, 2014, [DOI: 10.1192/pb.bp.113.046474](https://doi.org/10.1192/pb.bp.113.046474)

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