

Study highlights scale of health support needed by military veterans

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Almost one in 11 UK military veterans who served in the regular Armed Forces between 1991 and 2014 will need significant physical or mental health support now or in the years to come, according to a new report by King's College London and Help for Heroes.

The 'Counting the Cost' report, launched yesterday at the Imperial War Museum, identified 757,805 people who served as regulars in the military between 1991 and 2014. Of these people, the report estimates that 66,090 will need health support for service related physical health problems such as limb injuries or [mental health issues](#) such as [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) (PTSD).

Funded by Help for Heroes, researchers at King's sought to better understand the health consequences of military service by establishing the total number of people - including service personnel, veterans and their families - who might require health support following recent conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan or elsewhere since 1991.

The research team, led by Professor Neil Greenberg and Dr Julia Diehle of the King's Centre for Military Health Research at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience (IoPPN), used a number of data sources, including publicly available reports and FOI requests. They revealed that:

- 757,805 people served as regulars in the UK Armed Forces
- 235,187 regulars were deployed on one or more major operation

- including Op Granby, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq
- 36,506 regulars were medically discharged (this figure may include a small number of reservists)

However, it is thought that many personnel develop problems after service and not all of the 66,090 people identified by King's will realise that they might benefit from help on offer by the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the NHS or charities.

Neil Greenberg, Professor of Defence Mental Health at King's College London, said: 'The Counting the Cost study aimed to estimate how many of those who have served in the UK Armed Forces will have significant healthcare needs at some point in their lives. We identified that the [mental health](#) needs of Service Personnel and Veterans are most commonly related to common mental health disorders, alcohol misuse and PTSD in that order.

'However, there is also a good body of evidence suggesting that the majority of those with healthcare needs do not ask for help. Therefore, there is also the pressing question of how best to encourage those who might benefit from support to make use of it. Finding innovative approaches to encourage appropriate help-seeking should now be seen as a key priority of all organisations, governmental or charitable, in order to improve the healthcare status of all those who have served and their families.'

Dr Julia Diehle of King's College London said: 'We hope the results of this study will help state and charity organisations to plan for the likely volume of beneficiaries over the coming years. Further research is required to identify the specific needs of beneficiaries and to find out when beneficiaries are most likely to seek help.'

Help for Heroes' Head of Psychological Wellbeing Dr Vanessa Lewis

said: 'The Counting the Costs study proves that a significant number of those who have served as a regular in the Armed Forces – not to mention reservists and family members – will need some form of mental health support now or in the years to come. Help for Heroes has recognised this need and in response developed its Hidden Wounds service to support all those suffering from common difficulties, such as anxiety, depression, stress, anger and problem drinking. The support is available; what's important now is to ensure those in need know how to access it, which can only be achieved through effective working partnerships between service providers.'

Accompanying the Counting the Cost study, Help for Heroes has launched its Rebuilding Lives campaign, a powerful, visual photographic display taken by Roger Keller of the tattoos of 10 wounded, injured and sick servicemen and women.

More information: Read the full Counting the Costs report online: www.helpforheroes.org.uk/media/353345/Counting%20the%20Costs%20November%202015%20FINAL.pdf

Provided by King's College London

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