

# Stop recruiting children, UK Armed Forces urged

February 25 2019

---

One in four UK army recruits is under the age of 18, but there is no justification for this state policy, which is harmful to teen health and should be stopped, argue experts in an editorial in the online journal *BMJ Paediatrics Open*.

The UK is the only country in Europe and the only permanent member of the UN Security Council to recruit children to the Armed Forces, point out Reem Abu-Hayyeh of campaign group Medact, and Dr. Guddi Singh, an integrated child health specialist.

In March 2018 the number of soldiers under 18 totalled 2290 or 21 per cent of all UK army recruits.

This policy ignores the rights of the child, causes specific health harms during what is a critical period of development, and further disadvantages those from underprivileged backgrounds, contend the editorialists.

In the UK, 15 year-olds are allowed to begin the enlistment process, with two years of training, starting at the age of 16.

But campaigners and [health professionals](#) have long argued that teens who are legally unable to vote, or buy alcohol and knives are too young to make such a serious and potentially life changing decision at this age, say the authors.

Research has characterised this period of adolescence as a 'window of vulnerability,' which Armed Forces recruitment tactics capitalise on, they suggest.

Military service during this period has long lasting and complex effects on mental and physical health, with younger recruits more vulnerable to self-harm, suicide, and alcohol misuse, associated with the isolation and culture of military life as well as the trauma of active combat, they say.

And child recruits are more likely than adult recruits to end up in frontline combat, they point out.

The main justification for pressing ahead with this policy is that the British Army has an 8000+ shortfall of recruits.

"Be that as it may..to put recruitment figures above the [health](#) and wellbeing of [children](#) and adolescents seems misguided and counterproductive for both the Ministry of Defence as a governmental body and wider society," they write.

The other justification the Army gives is that many of the recruits, who are often from disadvantaged backgrounds, benefit from the training, discipline, and opportunities to rise up the ranks, military service offers.

But "it is precisely child recruits from disadvantaged backgrounds who are at highest risk of adverse outcomes in the military," say the editorialists, citing figures from 2017 showing that the under 18s made up a quarter of all those who left voluntarily before completing their service.

"As such, the UK should end its practice of recruiting adolescents in the Armed Forces," they declare, adding that clinicians whose views carry weight, can add their voices to the calls for a change in state policy.

**More information:** *BMJ Paediatrics Open*, [DOI: 10.1136/bmjpo-2018-000325](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjpo-2018-000325)

Provided by British Medical Journal

Citation: Stop recruiting children, UK Armed Forces urged (2019, February 25) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-02-children-uk-armed-urged.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.