

PTSD and harmful drinking in the UK Armed Forces and UK Police Service

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A new paper from the University of Liverpool and King's College London, comparing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and harmful drinking in male members of the UK Armed Forces and the UK Police

Service, has found similar rates of probable PTSD but higher rates of harmful alcohol use in military personnel.

Military personnel and police employees are occupational groups trained to work in [high pressure](#) and potentially traumatic situations, increasing the risk of PTSD and possibly maladaptive coping responses, such as harmful drinking. Both organizations have a culture of drinking, as alcohol has historically been used to increase social bonding or to destress.

The paper, published in the *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, used data from two existing [cohort studies](#), which included measures of PTSD and [alcohol consumption](#): The Health and Wellbeing of the UK Armed Forces cohort study ([military personnel](#)) and the Airwave Health Monitoring Study (police employees). The study sample included 7,399 male serving regular military personnel and 23,826 male serving police employees.

The analysis found 10% of military personnel showed harmful alcohol use (drinking above 50 units per week) compared to 3% of police employees. Similar levels of PTSD were found in military personnel and police employees (4% in both groups). In addition, having co-occurring PTSD and harmful drinking was more common in military personnel.

First author and Ph.D. student Patricia Irizar, University of Liverpool, said: "We found much higher rates of harmful drinking in military personnel than in police employees, possibly due to a more prominent drinking culture in the military and/or unique operational experiences."

Joint first author Dr. Sharon Stevelink, senior lecturer in the Department of Psychological Medicine at King's College London, said: "The similar levels of probable PTSD in military personnel and police employees are comparable to the levels in the general population. This could reflect

efficient trauma support and training, or a sampling bias due to those with mental ill-health leaving service."

Principal Investigator for King's College London, Professor Nicola Fear said: "The higher levels of harmful drinking in military personnel indicate a need for evidence-based alcohol interventions in military occupational settings."

Principal Investigator for University of Liverpool, Dr. Laura Goodwin added: "The higher levels of co-occurring PTSD and harmful drinking in military [personnel](#), highlights the importance of integrating alcohol and mental health support for this group."

More information: Patricia Irizar et al. Probable post-traumatic stress disorder and harmful alcohol use among male members of the British Police Forces and the British Armed Forces: a comparative study, *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/20008198.2021.1891734](#)

Provided by University of Liverpool

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