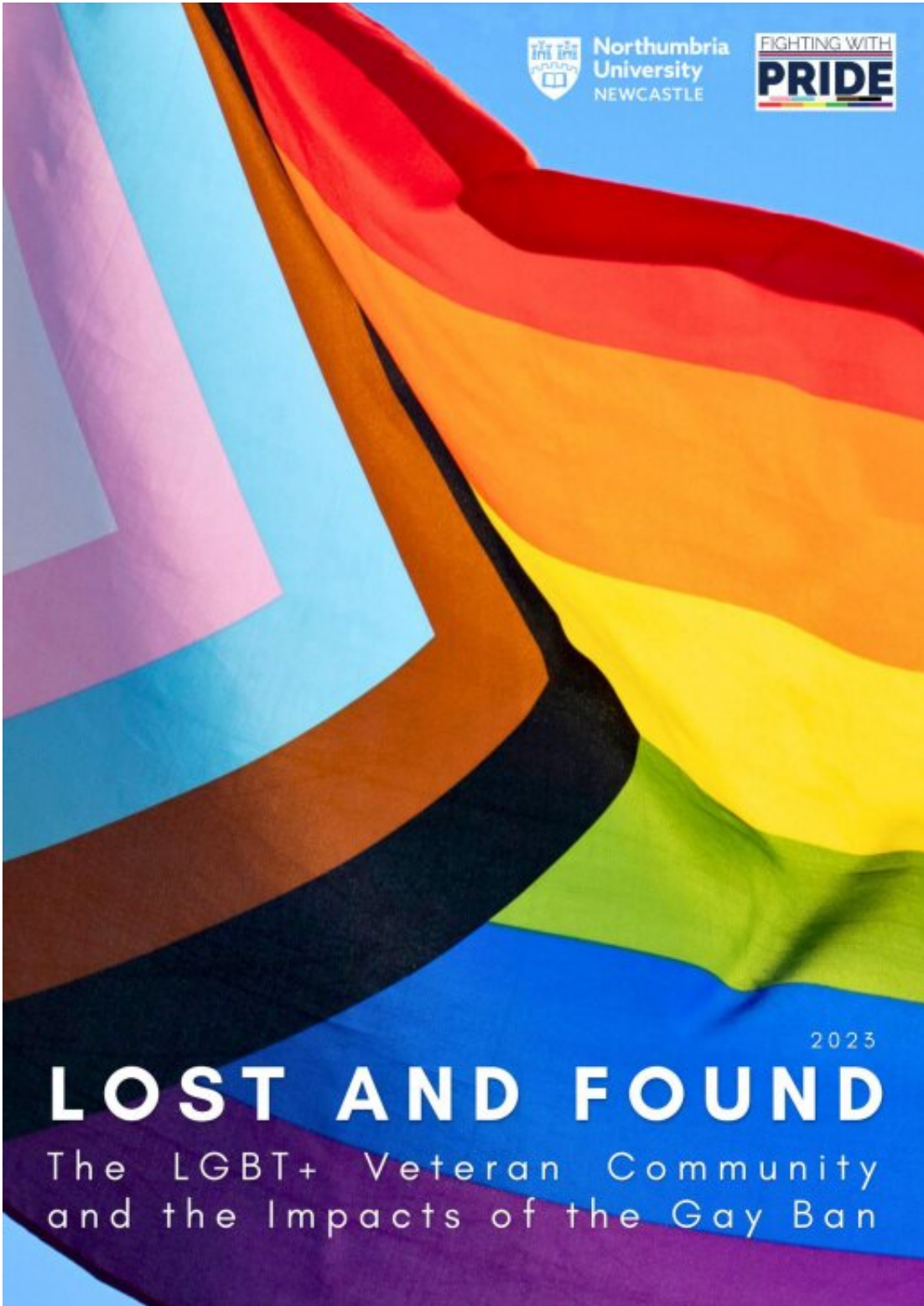


New UK report shows mental health and financial toll of 'gay ban' in the military

June 2 2023



Credit: Northumbria University

A [new report](#) published today (Thursday June 1) shines a light on the lifelong impact of the "gay ban" in the Armed Forces.

The study carried out by Northumbria University on behalf of specialist LGBT+ military charity Fighting with Pride (FWP) has found that thousands of ex-service people are paying the price of the policy both mentally and economically. The ban existed until 2000. Key findings show:

- 86% of LGBT+ veterans felt dismissal for [sexual orientation](#) or gender identity from the Armed Forces affected their [mental health](#)
- 74% of those dismissed said their finances have been affected.

The first academic study of its kind, involved interviews and surveys with over 100 veterans with first-hand experience of the ban- many were dismissed after traumatic military police investigations and some endured highly invasive medical examinations. The report has revealed ongoing poverty; homelessness; poor mental and physical health. An underlying sense of stigma and shame has contributed to loneliness and isolation.

This new research carried out by Northumbria's Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research is published in the lead up to publication of the government-commissioned LGBT Veterans' Independent Review report led by senior judge Lord Etherton. There are fears the Etherton Review could be stalled to avoid parliamentary and public scrutiny.

Other key findings of the two-year study, "Lost and Found":

- 82% of respondents were subjected to intrusive investigations.
72% felt "vilified," "treated like a criminal"

- 65% of LGBT+ veterans surveyed said it affected their employment and careers
- 56 % said it had impacted having a place to live
- 84.4% of survey respondents reported being lonely

For the first time, "forced treatment" in military hospitals has emerged as one of the worst excesses. The dismissal process routinely involved interrogations by the Special Investigations Branch (SIB) of the military police. Men in particular talked of highly invasive medical examinations.

One participant in the research said, "I was investigated by the SIB followed by a thorough medical examination before attending the captain's table to be discharged... Throughout the whole process I was totally alone with no representation and was not told of what or why this was happening. The horror of all this was the unannounced meeting with the SIB in a prison cell."

"They took me to the medical center. He said, right, because we think you're gay, we need to have a medical exam. So I went there, and the medical officer was a reserve officer, lovely lady and she said, look what they want me to do is stick my finger up your bottom to see if there is a reflex, a reflex of your sphincter. So apparently if it does something, she said... She said, it's complete balderdash, but I have to do it and we were both in tears at this point."

Anne Myles who was in the RAF from 1977 to 1984 told researchers: "It took away my career, it took away my pension, it took away my future. It utterly destroyed it and took away a job I know I was good at... it just took away my home, my livelihood, my future, career, pension. It doesn't really get much worse than that, does it?"

FWP estimates that between 2,000 and 5,000 have felt a lifelong impact as a consequence of the "gay ban" policy. While homosexuality was

decriminalized in 1967 in wider society, in the Armed Forces people who were "found out" or identified as gay faced dismissal; loss of pension; criminalization; imprisonment and intrusive investigations.

Today's new study ahead of the government's review publication has triggered renewed calls from campaigners for a remedy to the harm caused by the ban. This means:

- An apology on behalf of the Nation by the Prime Minister
- Wiping criminal records for those criminalized for sexual orientation and other measures to remove the shame experienced by LGBT+ veterans and celebrate their service
- Compensation for serious lifelong harm to LGBT+ veterans in the region of £100,000 per person. This is in line with the Windrush and Tainted Blood schemes
- Payment for loss of pensions is complex and must be assessed and redressed fairly to reflect individual circumstances
- Develop the specialist mental health services to address the trauma experienced by LGBT+ Veterans.

Craig Jones MBE (former Royal Navy officer), Executive Chair and Caroline Paige (former RAF officer), Chief Executive of Fighting With Pride said, "The visceral hurt caused by the illegal and cruel ban is heart-breaking—our report has been two years in the making and shows that veterans continue to live with the devastating impact to this day, over 25 years later. It's wholly unacceptable—warm words aren't enough.

"Veterans have been left without a home or job, many robbed of family by being 'outed.' In the worst cases, those found to be gay were dismissed after harrowing investigations by the Military Police, some were even subjected to forced 'treatments' in military hospitals.

"Support and tailored mental health support is urgently needed to restore

better health and well-being after all the lost years. It's essential the Independent Review is published without delay. It offers a unique opportunity to make right, in line with the Armed Forces Covenant. Proper compensation is a vital part of the remedy for lives and livelihoods lost when all people were doing was serving their country."

Trevor Skingle, who joined the army at 17 years old, said, "I got tired of hiding and, not wanting to serve further without being in a relationship with a guy I brought myself out. Then, after two years in the reserve, I sent a letter from a psychologist confirming I was gay and got a single sentence letter back from the MoD saying, "Your service has been terminated as per the date of this letter."

"I was absolutely furious and utterly devastated that I had been dismissed in such an offhand manner. I'd already attempted suicide while I was [full-time](#) in the Army and being kicked out of the reserves felt like the ultimate rejection. To add insult to injury, I missed qualifying for an army pension by about 50 days."

Dr. Gill McGill, Principal Investigator and Co-Director of the Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research, Northumbria University, said, "Over the last two years, the research team has developed a true insight into the impact of the 'gay ban' on LGBT+ veterans—a humbling experience. We hope that the voices of all participants who gave their time to the research project are loud and clear in the 'Final Report: Lost and Found—The LGBT+ Veteran Community and the Impacts of the Gay Ban.'

"We've taken a peer-led approach from start to finish and hope that our findings will provide an evidence-base to inform future research as well as policy and practice.

"We all owe a huge amount to everyone who took part, we could not do

it with you."

Provided by Northumbria University

Citation: New UK report shows mental health and financial toll of 'gay ban' in the military (2023, June 2) retrieved 11 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-06-uk-mental-health-financial-toll.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.