

Veterans' substance use has devastating impact on family members

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The families of veterans with substance use problems struggle with high levels of isolation and loneliness and experience extreme distress and despair, a new report has revealed.

The report, by researchers at the University of York, also found that the families of veterans with substance use problems are unlikely to seek or be offered help, even if the veteran engages with support.

The study, which was carried out in collaboration with Adfam and funded by Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT), is the first UK study to focus on the experience of families of veterans with substance use problems. It shows the wellbeing of a veteran's loved ones can be significantly affected by their problem substance use, both during and after leaving the Armed Forces.

In response to their findings, the researchers have developed a new support model to improve access to help for veterans' families.

Profoundly affected

Principal investigator Professor Charlie Lloyd, from the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at the University of York, said: "our study has shown how veterans' families can be profoundly affected by their loved ones' drinking and drug problems. Yet they are very unlikely to be offered any help.

"We have used our research findings to develop a new support model, Family Force, which we call on policymakers and charities to implement and which we believe will provide proper support to these neglected families for the first time."

According to the study, alcohol was the primary substance use problem for veterans and was linked with the availability of alcohol and its regular and heavy use within the Armed Forces. Substance use problems were associated with the challenges of integrating back into [civilian life](#) after service, ongoing struggles to cope with service experiences, being unable to break the pattern of excessive drinking and not being able to ask for help.

Culture of silence

A perceived 'culture of silence' within the Armed Forces also illustrated how the experiences of families of veterans with substance use problems may differ from non-veteran families and can influence the decision of whether to seek help.

The presence of other problems such as [mental health issues](#), violence, abuse, criminal behavior, employment and [financial difficulties](#) were identified by respondents as factors which complicate and exacerbate how families are affected.

Provided by University of York

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